

# The Alabama Baptist

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The Puppets Praising Christ ministry of FBC Troy performs a show during a missions trip to Tennessee last year.

Facebook photo

## Utilizing gifts

### Creative arts ministry sparks participation of children, youth

By Erin Roach  
The Alabama Baptist

All it took was a simple narration of the Christmas story to draw children and youth to Mount Zion Baptist Church in New Brockton, where a creative arts ministry now is in full swing for the glory of God.

Mount Zion is mainly a congregation of senior adults, but when several grandchil-

dren began attending, leaders scrambled to train them. What emerged was a group of students repeating after a narrator to dramatically present the story of Jesus' birth and later His death and resurrection.

"Everybody loves a story. They read through a script, and I think it gets them involved on a deeper level," said Claudette Whitmore, a theater major and artistic director of the creative arts ministry at Mount Zion. "They're not just listening to a story. They're actively engaged. They're playing a role."

Creative arts — which can encompass music, dance, theater, audio and visual arts, poetry and storytelling — are

gaining traction in churches, noted Andrew Goodwin, assistant professor of music and creative director at the University of Mobile's Alabama School of the Arts.

#### 'Vision and oversight'

"What is becoming more and more common in churches today is having someone fill the role of creative arts pastor," he said. "This typically is someone who provides vision and oversight for all creative/artistic endeavors or ministries at the church."

Often worship teams, including singers, musicians and audio and visual engineers, will fall under the umbrella of creative arts and the leadership

of a creative arts pastor, Goodwin said.

At Mount Zion, when the children presented the Christmas story, they didn't have elaborate costumes.

"We found some old pieces of fabric and cut holes in it and put it all together, and they loved it," Whitmore recalled.

For Easter, someone made a donation and the church bought costumes and had a decorated set.

In August, Mount Zion hosted a two-day drama workshop for students, who then presented another play for the congregation. Most Sundays children sing a song such as "I'll Fly Away" or recite Scripture (See 'Students,' page 17)



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# RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

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



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@RashionalThts

## Alaska Baptists 'blessed' by partnership with Alabama Baptists

Partnering with Alabama Baptists “is making a big difference,” Randy Covington shared during the business session of the Alaska Baptist Resource Network (state convention) annual meeting held Sept. 26–28 in Juneau.

“We are one year into our official partnership and a lot of churches have been blessed by the partnership,” said Covington, ABRN executive director. “We are very excited about that.”

Mike Shumock (left), who has served in missions and ministry roles in Alaska, Louisiana and Mississippi, is ready for the Sept. 27 southern-style breakfast prepared and served by the Carolina Cook Team, four from North Carolina and six from South Carolina.

“Also, Rick Lance (executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions) and Scotty Goldman (director of the SBOM office of global missions) are committed to this and are excited to see what God is going to do.”

Along with the official partnership, countless informal connections also exist between Alabama Baptists and Alaska Baptists.

For instance, Autauga, Elmore and Chilton associations are helping Liberty Baptist Church in Craig, Alaska.

Elmore director of missions Ray McKenzie and his wife, Sandra, decided to attend the annual meeting since they were



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Baptist Paper

planning to be in the state already. Neither of us knew the other would be there, so it was a fun surprise to run into them.

The same thing happened with Chuck Conley, pastor of Grant First Baptist Church.

He and volunteers from the church have been working on projects in Alaska this year, so he wanted to be present to support the work.

Alabama native and executive director of the South Carolina Baptist Convention Gary Hollingsworth came as part of the Carolina Cook Team, which prepared and served all the meals for those attending the annual meeting. He also delivered an inspirational message on “The Things” we face in life.

ABRN Executive Director Randy Covington (left) interviews IMB representatives (from left) Gordon Fort, Nate Parrow and Josh (first name only for security reasons) about their personal experiences as well as their perspectives on the missions effort overall.

Gary and I discovered we had been on the same flight from Atlanta to Seattle as we boarded the plane in Seattle for the final leg of our journey.

Within an hour of landing Sept. 26, we were settled in at Glacier Valley Baptist Church in Juneau for the opening event — Impact Alaska, which focused on associational missions and church planting.

Impact Alaska is overseen by another Alabama native, Jae McKee, who serves as ABRN’s



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Baptist Paper

OPINION

director of missions and church planting.

ABRN's evangelism and church development director Jimmy Stewart also has strong ties to Alabama. His children serve here and are graduates of the University of Mobile.

In fact, the UM tie is how Stewart discovered Luke Jones, a worship leadership graduate from UM who is pastor of First Baptist Church Wasilla, Alaska.

Another former Alabama Baptist, Rendell Day, serves as pastor of Montana Creek Baptist Church in Talkeetna, Alaska. He previously served as a house parent with the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries.

Of course, Jamie Baldwin became the face of the Alabama-Alaska partnership, spending six months in Craig, Alaska, after retiring from the SBOM in early 2021.

Also, Ric Camp, associational mission strategist for Shelby Baptist Association, had been in Anchorage on a missions trip in recent weeks and reached out to several of us while we were in Juneau.

I could go on and on with the connections, and now that I've attended an annual meeting in Alaska, I'm blessed to have many more new friends. Everyone was so extremely warm and welcoming.

Along with new friends from University Baptist Church in Anchorage and New Birth Christian Church in Fairbanks, the administrative staff of ABRN — Sylvia Rylander, Heather Mount, Donna Fluery and Debra Long — already seem like family.

Robin Covington, Randy's wife, and I also chatted about her visit to Birmingham a few years back and our mutual admiration for their son Adam's photography skills.

Oh, and that Carolina Cook Team — I would follow them anywhere. They bring a jovial, sweet spirit with them and overflow with heartwarming stories about their ministry efforts.

The same is true for Alaska Baptists. Report after report showcased how God is working.

"God is at work and He's working through our missions organizations ... pastors, planters and members," McKee said. "Faithfulness is multiplied and magnified when God shows up."



**Left:** Gary Hollingsworth, executive director of South Carolina Baptist Convention, shares a message on "The Things" in life from Philippians 1:12 and 2 Corinthians 11:23-28.



Photo by Heather Mount/Alaska Baptist Resource Network

**Above:** During the Sept. 27 evening session, Pastor Talakai Finau is accompanied by fellow Alaska Baptists to sing "How Great Thou Art" in both English and Samoan.



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Baptist Paper

Alaska Baptists working in associational missions/church planting gather Sept. 26 for fellowship, worship and encouragement the night before the Alaska Baptist Resource Network annual meeting. Both events were held at Glacier Valley Baptist Church in Juneau.

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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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 15.

# Your Voice



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

## Baptist associations: An amazing secret hiding in plain sight

By **George Bullard**

Retired associational mission strategist, author and founder of ForthTelling Innovation

Recently I toured the Bunker at the Greenbrier Hotel in West Virginia. It was once the secret location where the U.S. Congress would have moved in case of an attack on Washington.

From 1962 until 1992, it was hiding in plain sight as conference rooms for the hotel with public lodging rooms above it.

### An ecosystem

Contained within the Bunker were rooms where the House of Representatives and the Senate could meet in session while in exile. Meeting, sleeping and eating were all handled in the Bunker, which functioned as an ecosystem with its own life support features. Concrete fortifications encapsulated the Bunker. Thick metal doors could seal the area when needed.

The Bunker was a safe place in waiting, but it also functioned as a conference center and exhibit hall for public gatherings. Unseen was how this area could quickly transform into a safe haven for our federal legislative bodies.

The Bunker was hiding in plain sight. The people attending events at the Greenbrier did not know they were in an emergency shelter.

In our Baptist denomination, we have an amazing secret hiding

in plain sight. It is Baptist life in its purest form. Its value is one of the best kept secrets in our Baptist tradition. Congregations are in the midst of it all the time, yet few see and understand its beauty.

The Baptist association is this amazing secret.



**BULLARD**

The first Baptist association in the South, Charleston Baptist Association, formed among four Baptist churches in the lowcountry of South Carolina in 1751.

In 1821, the first state convention, the South Carolina Baptist Convention, came into being, and the Southern Baptist Convention formed 24 years later in 1845.

Missions and education characterized the founding of Charleston Association. Similar stories can be told about Baptist associations throughout North America.

### Important qualities

Associations have qualities churches often do not realize. Here is one quality. The character and nature of associations are significantly different than those of state conventions and Southern Baptist Convention national entities and groups.

Associations are organisms. They are living, breathing, moving and changing. Associations are the relationships continually emerging from the fellowship of churches spiritually engaged in Kingdom endeavors.

State conventions and national SBC entities are organizations. They have a more programmatic focus on visible projects and the fulfillment of organizational goals.

### Unique roles

Their goals involve promoting action, devoting resources and preparing people to fulfill the Great Commission. They, like associations, have a unique and significant role in our denominational family.

One of the heroes of Baptist associations during the last 60 years was Russell Bennett. His doctoral dissertation was on associations.

His associational service included the Associational Missions Division of the Home Mission Board, SBC (now the North American Mission Board) and serving as executive director of Long Run Baptist Association in Louisville, Kentucky.

Bennett spoke during a meeting of associations just prior to the 1978 SBC Annual Meeting in Atlanta.

During his speech he sought to clarify that an association is not a building, a meeting, a staff or an occasional moment or encounter. He also made a distinction between associations and other organizations in SBC life.

His assertion was that associations are about fellowship and a commitment to God's mission among member churches.

Associations, state conventions and national entities — through communication, cooperation and collaboration with one another — each help congregations reach their full Kingdom potential.

An association should never try to be like a state convention. Doing so will cause it to lose its very nature as an organism characterized by deep relationships among congregations.

A national entity also is part of what congregations need, but not everything they need.

Southern Baptists need associations to be vital and vibrant for the denomination to be strong and effective.

My personal mission is to champion the cause of Baptist associations as an autonomous part of our overall denominational system.

**EDITOR'S NOTE** — George Bullard spent 45 years in denomina-

tional ministry, serving on the staff of several associations and with the former Home Mission Board of the SBC. Bullard now serves as a strategic thinking mentor for Christian leaders through his ForthTelling Innovation ministry. This article is adapted from a series originally published at *The Baptist Paper*, [tbponline.org](http://tbponline.org). Contact Bullard at [BullardJournal@gmail.com](mailto:BullardJournal@gmail.com).



Photo courtesy of George Bullard

Russell Bennett is one of the heroes of Baptist associations during the last 60 years. His doctoral dissertation was on associations.

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“Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God.”

HEBREWS 13:7

Congregations, take a moment to openly and publicly recognize your minister(s) this month. Let them know they are loved and appreciated.

**Roger Willmore**  
Director of missions  
Calhoun Baptist Association

If you think about it, there doesn't need to be a set month to show appreciation for your pastor as we should be showing how much we appreciate him at all times.

Pastors do so much. They assist us in so many ways, from transportation to our medical appointments to ... meeting us to help us with a crisis we are having. But most of all they are there as God's

vessel to bring His message to us. Your pastor is there to help you in every way, so please remember to let him know how much you appreciate all he does.

**Joyce Phillips**  
Loudon, Tenn.

One Sunday I used a silly illustration about trying to grow a Snickers tree as a child.

On Monday morning, I found a tiny Christmas tree with Snickers bars attached to it on my desk. On the tree was a note that read, "Sometimes our dreams do come true."

Little things like these have made me feel appreciated far beyond what I deserve.

**Anonymous pastor**

Churches, I encourage you to not keep your pastor guessing whether or not you're going to express your appreciation to him this month. Please do it. I also encourage you to go the extra mile and appreciate all of your staff this month. It's the right thing to do.

**Craig Carlisle**  
Director of missions  
Etowah Baptist Association

Minister appreciation month is here. Your prayers are the best support to your pastor.

Encouraging words, cards and tangible gifts are a blessing too.

**Chris Crain**  
Executive director  
Birmingham Metro Baptist Association

## From the *Twitterverse*

### @DrLoritts

Not having hard conversations hurts relationships more than having hard conversations.

### @DustinBenge

Moses: "I can't speak."  
Job: "I have no peace."  
David: "I am a worm."  
Isaiah: "I am a man of unclean lips."  
Elijah: "I have had enough, Lord."

Paul: "I am the chief of sinners."  
In our inadequacy, God is always adequate!

### @smcconn

When pastors think of their people, they see their congregation's potential.

### @LysaTerKeurst

Whenever we get lost in what feels too hard and our thoughts start to veer off into an unhealthy

place, we can remember God is unchanging, always true and never fails to follow through on His promises to us.

### @RevKevDeYoung

Jesus has no interest in an inclusion that includes false teaching, or a diversity that allows for diverse views on idolatry and sexual immorality.

It is possible to be too open and affirming. (Rev. 2:20)

### @shane\_pruitt78

If you're worshipping a god who never offends you, it's most likely because you're worshipping a fake god shaped by your preferences.

### @Quill4hire

Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. —Proverbs 4

### @andrewtwalk

This biblical ethic of love stands

as the impetus for the church's missionary service and for her cultural concern over a doomed world.

— Carl F.H. Henry

### @jennrothschild

If you're overwhelmed today, hang on because you'll be "overjoyed when His glory is revealed" (1 Peter 4:13).

Lord, thank you for this day. Show us Your glory in our everyday moments, and may we be overwhelmed by Your presence. Amen.

### @claysmith79

Every Sunday is someone's first Sunday at your church. So much is at stake: Let's pray they hear the gospel and discover true life change through Jesus.

### @MuellerMathew

I just heard someone say "Jesus isn't life enhancement, Jesus is life." Come on ain't that the truth!

## Honoring your pastor

*Lift up God's servants as they love the Lord.*

► Pray regularly for your ministers and staff and their families.

► Form a covenant group that is committed to praying daily for them: seven members praying one day a week.

*Lift up God's servants as they love their spouses.*

► Provide a more than adequate, even generous salary, insurance and retirement compensation.

► Give a gift card to a favorite restaurant for the ministry couple's date night.

*Lift up God's servants as they love their children and family.*

► Allow the children of your minister and staff members to "just be kids." Support them as the family discerns which activities are best for each child.

► Give unused sports or concert tickets to their families. They make great gifts!

*Lift up God's servants as they love neighbors through "doing life" with other Jesus followers.*

► Provide appropriate time off and finances for conventions, seminars, conferences and continuing education that are separate from vacations.

► Encourage and support involvement in men and women's activities, without pressure to lead them.

*Lift up God's servants as they lovingly witness through imparting their very lives and the gospel.*

► Encourage your pastor and staff's involvement in activities, hobbies, sports and events that provide opportunities for outreach.

► Celebrate and affirm them when they share the gospel in the "traffic patterns" of life.

[nashvillebaptists.com/pastor-appreciation](http://nashvillebaptists.com/pastor-appreciation)

# 3 stories you should know



Photo courtesy of Cottage Hill Baptist Church

A van equipped with a portable ultrasound machine is the newest arsenal in the battle to protect the unborn in Mobile County. The van was donated by Cottage Hill Baptist Church in Mobile. It will be used by Women's Resource Center, a faith-based ministry that provides medically accurate information about pregnancy, fetal development and other related services. The donation is part of Cottage Hill's NEXT campaign, said pastor Alan Floyd. (TAB)

## Alabama high court rules against casinos

The Alabama Supreme Court ruled Sept. 30 that electronic bingo machines in two counties are illegal and must be shut down.

The unanimous decision in *State v. Epic Tech* called the facilities a "public nuisance." The ruling calls for local officials to issue injunctions for White Hall Entertainment and Southern Star Entertainment, both in Lowndes County, and VictoryLand Casino in Macon County, to cease using electronic bingo machines in their facilities.

Officials in the two counties had previously refused to take action against the facilities, prompting Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall to file suit.

In a Sept. 30 statement, Marshall praised the ruling, the latest in an ongoing battle between the state and gambling interests. (TAB)

## National CP giving tops \$200 million

In the midst of ongoing U.S. and global economic challenges, Southern Baptists have given more than \$200 million through the national Cooperative Program Allocation Budget.

Giving for the 2021–22 fiscal year totaled \$200,452,607.68, the first time since 2008 that CP giving topped the \$200 million mark. The 2008 total was \$204,385,592.63.

SBC president Bart Barber celebrated the milestone.

"The generosity of our churches this year demonstrates that this model of cooperation still enjoys the confidence and favor of our churches," Barber said.

SBC Executive Committee interim president Willie McLaurin said "every gift is a testimony to the strong cooperative spirit of every church in the SBC." (BP)

## Persecuted church

### Bible smuggler, Open Doors founder 'Brother Andrew' dies at 94

HARDERWIJK, Netherlands — Anne van der Bijl, an advocate for persecuted Christians around the globe, died Sept. 27. He was 94.

Known as "Brother Andrew," van der Bijl was born in the Netherlands in 1928. He smuggled Bibles and Christian literature into communist Eastern Europe in the 1960s and coordinated the delivery of a million Bibles into China via a tugboat manned by 20 missionaries in the 1980s.

In 1955, he founded Open Doors, an organiza-



Open Doors photo

tion that advocates on behalf of persecuted Christians around the world, and continued efforts to get God's word into countries where persecution is high.

His book, "God's Smuggler," first published in 1967, shares many stories of his efforts. The book has sold more than 10 million copies.

### Five Christians in Uganda drown after being thrown overboard

KAMPALA, Uganda — Five church planters were thrown off a boat to their deaths for telling Muslim passengers about Jesus Christ.

Morning Star News reported the five evangelists were on a commercial transport vessel on central Uganda's Lake Kyoga heading to plant a church in Aduku in Uganda's Apac District.

Amos Kyakulaga, a Christian guide who was spared, said 10 Muslim extremists and the five

evangelists were arguing over whether Jesus is the Son of God.

The Muslims warned the Christians to stop proclaiming Jesus or suffer the consequences.



Wikimedia Commons photo

The Christians continued to do so, and the Muslims pushed them into the lake, where they drowned.

The Muslims did not push Kyakulaga overboard after he said he was not a member of the group.

Uganda's constitution and laws allow for freedom of religion — including converting from one faith to another — but Christians increasingly have received threats of violence.

# Alabama news

## OBITUARIES

▶ **Anthony Patterson**, 75, died Oct. 4 in Guntersville. He was a minister for Gum Springs Baptist Church, Hartselle, for many years prior to retiring.



PATTERSON

He is survived by two children and three grandchildren.

## ALABAMA-CRENSHAW ASSOCIATION

▶ **Justin Jacobs** is the new pastor of **South Luverne Baptist Church**. He was installed Sept. 18 and preached his first sermon at the church Oct. 2.

A native of Athens, he is the son and grandson of Southern Baptist music ministers. His first church staff position was at Joquin Baptist Church, Goshen, where he served four years before being called as pastor of First Baptist Church Rutledge. He served as South Luverne Baptist's youth minister before being called as pastor.

He and his wife, Andi, have two children.

## CALHOUN ASSOCIATION

▶ **Tim Lynch** is the new pastor of **Meadowbrook Baptist Church, Oxford**.



LYNCH

The son of a Southern Baptist pastor, Lynch realized when he was 21 that he was a religious lost person. After his conversion, he felt God calling him into ministry. He served several churches as a youth minister before answering the call to pastoral ministry. He is pursuing a master's of divinity at Southeastern Seminary and has served as pastor at several churches in Alabama and North Carolina.

He and his wife, Christi, have three children.

▶ **Bynum Baptist Church, Eastaboga**, celebrated its 75th anniversary Sept. 18.

Pastor Benjie Miller (right) shared his perspective on the anniversary. Roger Willmore, director of missions for Calhoun Baptist Association, and Bridgett Junkin (left) of the Ala-



Photo courtesy of Kathy Burns

bama Baptist Historical Commission presented certificates.

Proclamations were presented by Col. Eric McCoy, Anniston Army Depot, and by Oxford Mayor Alton Craft. K. L. Brown, state representative for the 40th district, presented a flag to the church that flew over the Alabama Capitol on Sept. 14, the official date of the church's organization.

Special music was provided by Benjie and Robbin Miller, Amber Taylor, Randy O'Brien and Nathan Green. Congregational singing was led by former ministers of music Bill Barker and Tomma Padgett. Tim Burns also led congregational singing and sang a solo. Former pianist Shirley Carr Towne and former organist Judy Stephens Carter served as guest instrumentalists. A history walk was set up around the outside perimeter of the church.

## CHILTON ASSOCIATION

▶ **Oak Grove Baptist Church, Jemison**, celebrated its 100th anniversary Sept. 18. David Hand, pastor, gave the message with special music by Courtney Cupp. Congregational music was led by Michael Brasher. Shirley Emfinger presented the history of the church focusing on the founder, W.H. Homer Faulkner. Ralph Foster of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission presented a certificate.

"It is important to celebrate," Emfinger said. "We need to celebrate. It was a blessing to see people interested during the presentation of the church history."



Photo courtesy of Oak Grove Baptist Church

## COFFEE ASSOCIATION

▶ **Teddy Ward** is the new senior adult pastor

of **Hillcrest Baptist Church, Enterprise**. He began preaching at 14 years old, only a year after being saved.

He is a graduate of the University of Mobile and New Orleans Seminary. He led his first church while in seminary: New Hinson Baptist Church, Slocomb. He served with the North American Mission Board as a church planter and pastor in New York City.

He was also pastor of several other churches: First Baptist Church Abbeville; Calvary Baptist Church, Abbeville; and Maple Avenue Baptist Church, Geneva, where he retired in June 2021.

He and his wife, Charlotte, have three children and five grandchildren.

## MORGAN ASSOCIATION

▶ **Morgan Baptist Association** will hold its annual meeting Oct. 17 at East Highland Baptist Church, Hartselle. Registration begins at 5:30 p.m. The meeting begins at 6 p.m. Special music will be provided by the East Highland Praise Team and David Sharp. Displays will be provided by area churches, state organizations and missions teams. The speaker for this event will be Todd Lafferty, executive vice president and chief operating officer of the International Mission Board. Lafferty and his family have served in Thailand, Indonesia, Pakistan, Singapore, India and Malaysia.



LAFFERTY

## WINSTON ASSOCIATION

▶ **New Hope #2 Baptist Church, Haleyville**, will celebrate its 125th anniversary Oct. 16. Worship begins at 11 a.m. followed by lunch.

## Tarrant FBC gifts building

Tarrant First Baptist Church on Sept. 18 passed the torch of ministry — and its campus — to Victory City Church, a church plant in the Jefferson County suburb north of Birmingham.

Chris Crain, executive director of the Birmingham Metro Baptist Association, and Josh Cook, BMBA church revitalization specialist, helped Derek Gentle, interim pastor of Tarrant FBC, and Brandon

Knight, pastor of Victory City Church, navigate the process of church planting, one of the four pathways to church revitalization (see story, page 11).

Cook said members of Tarrant FBC are investing the church's legacy and resources in a completely new work with the hope that Victory City will take up the mantle and continue the mission FBC began 100 years ago. (TAB)



Facebook photo

# MEETING NEEDS

## Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers at work in Florida, ‘inundated’ with requests

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

**A**rcadia, Florida, was Candace McIntosh’s home for nine years after college, the place where she experienced her first sense of community as an adult and where she felt the call to ministry.

So it’s especially hard for her to see the community under water since Hurricane Ian made landfall in Florida on Sept. 28 and made the Peace River overflow its banks.

“I still have many dear friends in this area,” McIntosh, executive director of Alabama Woman’s Missionary Union, wrote in a Facebook post. “They are resilient, but it is tough. I appreciate you praying with me for them.”

### Hard at work

As many Alabama Baptists pray and send help in the form of financial assistance, around 87 Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers are hard at work in Arcadia.

David Hendon, the white hat leader on site, said he’s “never seen a response like this” from residents in need of help.

“We have been inundated with requests,” said Hendon, a member of Northside Baptist Church in Jasper. “We’ve received 308 requests already, and four teams of assessors are working hard to determine if they are jobs we can do.”

The teams assembled in Arcadia — which include

volunteers from Tennessee, Alaska and South Carolina in addition to Alabama — are doing chainsaw, cleanup and roof tarping work. One area just two miles from the operations center requires either an hourlong drive or a boat ride to access.

“The admin crew is working around the clock it seems to keep everything going to meet needs,” Hendon said.

Alabama Baptist shower units are also in place, and a large number of volunteers are preparing meals at the state’s mass feeding kitchen, which is set up at Calvary Baptist Church in Arcadia.

On Oct. 5–6, they prepared 5,000 meals each day and were hoping to ramp that number up soon to 15,000 meals served daily as more trucks with supplies come in, Hendon said.

He noted their host churches — Calvary Baptist and First Baptist Church of Arcadia — are “doing all they can to help us.”



Photo courtesy of David Hendon

Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers set up the state’s mass feeding unit at Calvary Baptist Church in Arcadia, Florida. They plan to prepare thousands of meals daily for those affected by Hurricane Ian.



Photo by Scott Whittington  
Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers Celene Hearn (left) of Dothan and Thelma Goolsby of Tuscaloosa answer questions while also distributing food and water in Arcadia, Florida, on Oct. 4 following Hurricane Ian.

“The locals here are telling us that right now we are the only ones they know of doing any kind of work like this,” Hendon said. “There are amazing stories of how God is at work, of Him putting the ideal person in place to help these people. We’re establishing relationships and making contacts and have been able to pray with people and talk with them about the Lord.”

As of Oct. 4, Ian’s death toll in the U.S. had risen to 109 people, with 105 of those in Florida and the other four in North Carolina after the hurricane made another landfall there.

Southern Baptist Disaster

Relief teams are currently spread out over Florida to help meet needs.

**For more information or to give to Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief efforts in Florida, visit [sbd.org/hurricane-relief](http://sbd.org/hurricane-relief).**

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### FEATURED SPEAKERS



Ken Adams



Mark Clifton



Dr. Jeff Iorg



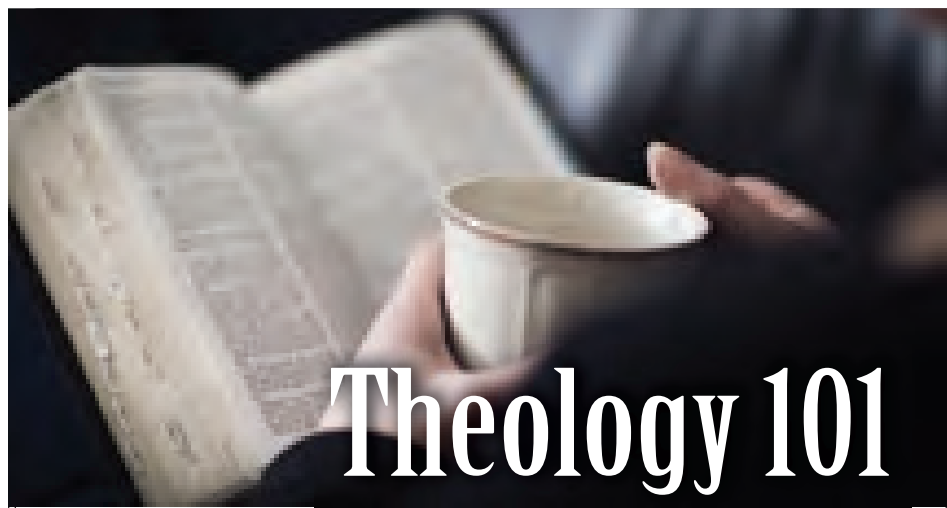
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# Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

## The Holy Spirit

# The Spirit of Holiness

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.  
The Alabama Baptist

Last week our attention focused on the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth. This week our focus is on Him as the Spirit of holiness.

Romans 1:4 reminds us Jesus was “declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”

This description has resulted in the common name by which we most often refer to Him, namely as the Holy Spirit.

We might say He is the Spirit of holiness in a double sense, one of which relates to His being and the other to His ministry.

As to His being, God’s Spirit is holy. Holiness is part of the very essence of the Third Person of the Trinity. In His three Persons, God possesses moral perfection, being entirely free of evil. Father, Son and Spirit have always been holy and will forever be holy, both in character and conduct.

### Always holy

What the Holy Spirit is in His essence, He also is when He indwells forgiven sinners. We do not contaminate the Spirit by our imperfections. We may resist Him, grieve Him or dishonor Him, but His holiness remains intact.

As to His ministry, God’s Spirit seeks to make us persons of holiness. Hebrews 12:14 exhorts us to “pursue peace with all people and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.”

The inherent holiness that characterizes God’s Spirit is the

source and agency of holiness in God’s children.

We often term progress in holiness as sanctification. When a sinner is saved, that believer is sanctified in the sense of being counted holy positionally, that is in God’s sight. Thus the designation “saints” applies to imperfect-yet-forgiven sinners.

### Ever at work

First Corinthians 1:2 addresses its original readers as “those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints.” But when we read the rest of the book, we learn the Corinthian Christians were far from perfect. They had numerous faults that still needed correction, yet they were addressed as saints.

Positional sanctification is only the beginning. As imperfect believers, we are being sanctified experientially as we walk in the Spirit and grow more and more into the likeness of God.

We will be sanctified ultimately when we reach full conformity to Christ in future glorification. Meanwhile, the Spirit of holiness is at work in our lives for the progression of what will reach completion in our heavenly future.

*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.*



# Churches unite for worship event at Alabama Theatre

By Tracy Riggs  
The Alabama Baptist

A 200-voice choir and a 40-piece orchestra composed of members from 12 Birmingham-area Baptist churches performed “All Nature Sings: A Night of Sacred Music” Sept. 25 at the Alabama Theatre.

John Woods, music and worship pastor at Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, said organizers wanted the event “to feel like it belonged to everybody.”

“In that spirit, we also wanted not to be a night just for church people who love church music but for the larger Birmingham community to come and enjoy great music.”

The idea for the event began with the composer of “All Nature Sings,” Phillip Keveren, who wanted to use great hymns of faith in a fresh and new way, he said.

### Majesty of creation

Keveren has a long history of writing both instrumental and vocal music for churches and for Christian artists such as Steve Green, Sandi Patty and Jeremy Camp. After the isolation of the pandemic, Keveren said Psalm 96 and Romans 1:20 inspired him to “set the particular hymns that celebrate the majesty of God’s creation to new music,” resulting in this oratorio. Keveren also sang along as part of the choir’s tenor section, Woods said.

The evening started with Brent Reeves improvising classic hymns on the Alabama Theatre’s Mighty Wurlitzer Theatre Organ (“Big Bertha”), followed by congregational singing led by Jeremy Jackson.

The evening concluded with the choir and orchestra performance.

### Volunteer effort

The vocalists and musicians in the production were all volunteers from the participating Baptist churches: Brookwood, Dawson, First Birmingham, Lakeside, Meadow Brook, Mountain Brook, Raleigh Avenue, Shades Crest, Shades Mountain, Sixth Avenue, Valleydale and Vestavia Hills.

The volunteers started working months ago, learning the music by practicing at home. Joint rehearsals were held as the event date drew closer, Woods said.

Several worship pastors were among the musicians and support team for the production, he added, praising the collaborative effort.

“It is absolutely humbling and inspiring to see these people do their thing at such a high level,” Woods said. “It’s almost overwhelming. It just makes me proud to be a part of this community of Baptist friends.”

“Anytime we can find an excuse to bring people together — to sing together or play music together — we should celebrate that and find a reason to do it again.”



Photo by Michel Lé

Twelve Birmingham-area Baptist churches join to perform “All Nature Sings: A Night of Sacred Music” on Sept. 25 at the Alabama Theatre. The evening of community worship included a 200-voice choir and a 40-piece orchestra.

# ‘Seeking the movement of God’

## Week of Prayer for Baptist Associations focuses on church revitalization

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

Justin Nelson said he’s not sure exactly how long it went on, but for a while a group of women met regularly in the church nursery at Camden Baptist Church. They would get on their knees in the empty room and pray for God to fill it with babies again.

“And the Lord has done that,” affirmed Nelson, the current pastor. “We went from literally no children to going, ‘Hey, we’ve got to have help in the nursery.’”

“It’s been really good just seeing how the Lord has brought some families back, people who grew up in the community and now have come back.”

That gave them a base to reach other families in the community, Nelson added.

“So that’s been a really good journey, seeing that excitement and that growth of our millennial age group, the late 20s and 30s.”

### Common need

The need for revitalization is common to churches throughout the Southern Baptist Convention, noted Rick Barnhart, director of the office of associational missions and church planting for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

He said he gets at least one call a month from an associational mission strategist who has been asked by a church to guide them through the process of closing its doors.

“If we don’t revitalize the churches that we have, then we’re on a path to self-destruction,” Barnhart lamented.

That’s why one of the most important works of an associational missionary isn’t closing a church, even though that does happen — it’s helping it figure out how to stay open.

Rob Jackson, director of the



Photo courtesy of Camden Baptist Church  
Members of Camden Baptist Church pray together seeking the movement of God. The congregation has begun walking through the revitalization process to reestablish the health of the church.

SBOM office of church health, said associational missionaries are “boots on the ground” for a local church during a revitalization journey.

“As each of these associational mission strategists are working with the churches, their leadership and their laypeople, they’re keeping them focused on the truth of God’s word, His power and the possibility that God can bring about something in and through them that can only be done in His power,” Jackson related.

Pastor Nelson said Steve Dunn, associational mission strategist for Bethlehem and Pine Barren Baptist Associations, has been a big help to Camden Baptist as the church walks through its revitalization process. Dunn has simultaneously been working with Monroeville’s Southside Baptist Church in Bethlehem Association as they’ve taken a similar journey.

“They’re both benefiting from

the process. They’re seeing results,” Dunn affirmed.

As Jackson guides them, Dunn also is learning to become a qualified revitalization coach so he can take what he’s learning at

Camden Baptist and Southside and use it as a blueprint to help other churches.

Dunn noted other associational mission strategists in his region have been talking about how churches in their area face some of the same issues and need revitalization.

### ‘Critical component’

The associations are doing what they can to support the churches, and it starts with prayer, Dunn asserted.

“Prayer is a big part of it; we pray together a lot,” he noted. “It’s the focus of our efforts. We pray for the lost. We pray for each other. We pray for the work.”

SBOM’s Jackson said he’s seeing associations and their churches focusing on prayer more and

more, asking God to touch their churches and their lives.

“We’re plugging into the critical component of revitalization — prayer and seeking the movement of God.”

Fittingly, this year’s Week of Prayer for Baptist Associations set for Oct. 23–29 will focus on church revitalization, said Johnny Rumbough, director of missions for Lexington Baptist Association in South Carolina.

### Resources available

“As we were planning the 2022 Week of Prayer materials, one of the things we realized is that a lot of our associations are helping our churches go through revitalization or replanting,” noted Rumbough, who works with the North American Mission Board and the Southern Baptist Conference of Associational Leaders each year to produce prayer guides for the week.

He and his team have produced seven guides of varying lengths which can be used during the week of prayer or anytime. They all focus on revitalization, with one written specifically for the days right after a church votes to start the process.

The prayer guides can be used individually or together for a longer season of prayer for revitalization.

Ray Gentry, SBCAL president, said he’s grateful this time of prayer for associational missions is included on the Southern Baptist Convention calendar.

“This is when most associations have their annual meetings in the fall, so we think October is a good time to emphasize associations and the importance of associations in the SBC ecosystem,” he noted, adding that associations promote and support missions and ministry in their area in a variety of ways, including church revitalization.

To download resources for the week of prayer, visit [ameresources.org](http://ameresources.org).

# SBCAL leader considers associations in renaissance

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

Ray Gentry says he's excited to be in the midst of what he considers "the renaissance of associationalism" in the Southern Baptist Convention.

Gentry, president of the Southern Baptist Conference of Associational Leaders, said associations "are important to the overall work of God's kingdom." An association is "churches coming together on mission in their setting to advance the gospel."

There's a long history of that kind of cooperation, Gentry added.

"Baptist churches in America have realized that they can do more together

than they can separately since 1707 when the Philadelphia Baptist Association was formed," he explained. "No church can fulfill the Great Commission in their community and local missions field on its own. We need each other."

In cooperating, Gentry said Southern Baptists are following the example of Paul, who led the churches of the New Testament to collect offerings for the church in Jerusalem.

## Better together

"Our churches do better when they collaborate together as an association for missions, evangelism, leadership development, church planting and church revitalization," Gentry asserted.

He feels cooperation has gotten stronger in recent days, not only inside associations but among them.

SBC has more than 1,100 associations, and nearly half are now members of SBCAL, the largest percentage in the organization's 62-year history, Gentry noted.

"And we're adding new guys all the time."

Right now he is the organization's president in addition to his role as associational mission

strategist for Southside Baptist Network in McDonough, Georgia. But starting July 1, 2023, Gentry will serve with SBCAL full time, a move voted on at the group's annual meeting in Anaheim in June.

Gentry said the goal is for him to focus more on resourcing and equipping associational mission strategists across the U.S.

## Offering training

"What I have found through the years is that a lot of guys come into this role and they don't know what to do, or they don't know the extent of the work. It's similar to pastoring, but it's different," he noted. "One of the things I envision doing is leading cohorts of associational mission strategists, especially new guys, and help them learn from each other and learn from experienced people."

Gentry said he's grateful to see how God has used a book he edited, "The Baptist Association: Assisting Churches, Advancing the Gospel."

"Guys who are considering going into associational leadership are finding it and telling me it's helpful," Gentry affirmed. "God is using that resource as well as connections and networking to help us keep raising the bar for what

is an effective associational leader; to help us be more effective at what we do in helping churches collaborate in missions and ministry in their Jerusalem."

SBCAL also has a representative from every SBC seminary and entity on its board, which Gentry said means they "consider associations an important part of the SBC ecosystem."

"I'm excited about where we are, and the direction we're going," he said. "And we're excited to get positive feedback along the way."



GENTRY

For more information, visit [sbc.org](http://sbc.org).



Photo courtesy of Mud Creek Baptist Association

Union Hill Baptist Church in Rock Creek has begun a fostering relationship with Mud Creek Baptist Church in Adger to aid in the church's revitalization effort.

# Alabama Baptist churches adopt future focus

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

Is there any hope here?" That's the question members of Mud Creek Baptist Church in Adger asked recently, along with David Hobson and other Baptist leaders in their area.

"This church is our history," said Hobson, director of missions for Mud Creek Baptist Association, which was founded at the church about 150 years ago in partnership with other local congregations.

When the church started the association, it knew it wanted to be part of a mission bigger than itself, Hobson said.

Now he and the association are returning the favor and helping get something started again at the little church that has dwindled to around six people with no church staff.

On Oct. 2, Union Hill Baptist Church in Rock Creek began a fostering relationship with Mud Creek Baptist for three months. Pastor Mike Stevens or associate pastor Justin Salter will preach there at 8:30 a.m. before the 10:30 service at Union Hill, and someone from the church will lead music. Hobson will fill in gaps with preaching when needed and serve as an adviser.

"Our prayer is that God would revitalize this church," Stevens said.

Stevens, Salter and Hobson started the process by consulting with Josh Cook, church revitalization specialist for Birmingham Metro Baptist Association, and Brian Harper, lead church planting strategist for the Al-

abama Baptist State Board of Missions. They did demographic studies of the area and met with the congregation to talk about possibilities.

Both congregations agreed to a three-month trial period.

"Our goal is to help them grow ... to a healthy 20 or 30 who can stand on their own to where we can say, 'We're now going to help you find a pastor, and we're going to turn this back over to you,'" Hobson said.

## Four pathways

According to Cook, fostering is one of four pathways to revitalization. Another is adoption, where one church comes alongside another to help refresh and relaunch a declining congregation, adopt it as a satellite campus or bring it into a network of support. A third option is re-visioning, which helps a church make a new plan to reach its changing community. And a fourth is replanting — starting a new church in the same location.

That's what happened recently with two Birmingham churches, Tarrant First Baptist Church and Victory City Church. In September, Tarrant FBC gifted its campus to Victory City (see story, page 7).

"Our role in this process was to identify a partner church for Tarrant FBC and connect them, and we found Victory City," Cook said.

One of the bonuses of replanting is that members from the declining church get to see God working through the new congregation, Cook noted.

# 2023 SBC Pastors Conference announces scheduled speakers

Leaders of the SBC Pastors Conference have announced the scheduled speakers for the June 11–12, 2023, event to be held in New Orleans.

“While distinct in their personalities, our preachers share a common belief that expository preaching is a theological outgrowth based on a high view of Scripture,” said Daniel Dickard, pastor of Friendly Avenue Baptist Church in Greensboro, North Carolina, and SBC Pastors Conference president.

“This year’s conference is unique in that we are introducing several new preachers to the Pastors Conference lineup,” Dickard said. “All of the selected preachers and speakers have an unwavering stance on the inerrancy of Scripture and a rock-ribbed commitment to the authority and sufficiency of the Bible.

“[The speakers] will encourage and challenge attendees that character matters in ministry, as the life of Christ, as revealed in the Scriptures, is lived in and through the life of the pastor.”

## Conference theme

The theme of the conference is “Character Matters in Ministry: Beatitudes of a Pastor,” and eight selected speakers will preach through the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12.



Photo by Brandon Porter/Baptist Press  
Daniel Dickard previews the 2023 SBC Pastors Conference at an event at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Dickard is pastor of Friendly Avenue Baptist Church in Greensboro, North Carolina, and SBC Pastors Conference president.

Those speakers will be H.B. Charles, David Allen, D.J. Horton, Phil Waldrep, Chip Luter, Bartholomew Orr, Andrew Hébert and Jim Shaddix.

Additionally, nine more speakers will provide pastoral talks on the subject “Character Matters in Ministry.” Each will focus on a different aspect of the fruit of the spirit from Galatians 5:22.

Those speakers will be Wayne Bray, Michael Cloer, Roc Collins, Gilberto Correda, Jimmy Draper, Phil Newton, Herb Reavis, Jarrett Stephens and Ken Whitten.

The music portion of the conference will be led by Travis Cottrell and his band, alongside several special

guests such as Nate Jernigan, assistant professor of music and worship at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and the William Carey University choir, band and orchestra.

## Endowment plans

Dickard and his fellow officers also announced plans to establish an endowment to finance future conferences via a partnership with the Southern Baptist Foundation.

“The creation and constitution of a Pastors Conference Endowment would provide a consistent revenue stream for future officers and, when fully funded, the conference would pay for itself through interest earnings pulled from the endowment’s corpus,” Dickard said.

The endowment will be constituted once donations total a minimum of \$2 million. Future officers would operate under a designated percentage of fund earnings.

Complete information about the speakers for the 2023 SBC Pastors Conference, the planned endowment and other details about the event can be found at the new SBC Pastors Conference website, sbpc.net. (BP)

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Church located in Mobile County, Alabama, seeking a full-time pastor or possible bivocational pastor. Prior pastoral service desired. Submit resumé to: Pastor Search Committee, First Baptist Church of St. Elmo, P.O. Box 159, St. Elmo, AL 36568.

#### PASTOR

Prayerfully, Hillview Baptist Church is seeking a part-time pastor. Resumés may be sent to: Pastor Search Committee, 800 Heflin Avenue E, Birmingham, AL 35214.

#### PASTOR

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

#### BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Dunns Creek Baptist Church in Echola, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a bivocational pastor. Please send resumé to: jaanderson@live.com.

#### MUSIC MINISTER

Pine Grove Baptist Church, Heflin, Alabama, is a small congregation prayerfully seeking a part-time music minister. Please email resumé to: pinegroveheflinal@gmail.com.

#### MUSIC DIRECTOR

East Gadsden Baptist Church is prayerfully seeking a part-time music director. Please send resumé and/or experience to: eastgadsdenbaptist@gmail.com.

#### MINISTER OF MUSIC

Faith Baptist Church Midway, located in Lawrence County, Alabama, is currently searching for a bivocational minister of music. This individual will be responsible for leading worship for the congregation as well as rehearsing and directing the choir. The minister of music must be willing to present a well-blended program of music that will promote worship and exalt our Savior. Please submit resumé by email to: secretary@fbcma.com.

#### SONG LEADER

Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, 6057 County Road 50 in

Moundville, Alabama, is searching for a song leader to lead congregational singing on Sunday morning only. Please send resumé to: jbsshaw@mound.net or call 205-454-0035.

### OTHER POSITIONS

#### PIANIST

First Baptist Church Vincent is seeking a part-time pianist. This position would include playing for the Sunday morning worship service and Wednesday night choir practice. If interested, please call Pastor Robbie Weems, 205-617-1277, or the church at 205-672-2512.

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# 4 ways church branding will evangelize the community

By Mark MacDonald

Church branding strategist and consultant

Church branding can help evangelize the community if done properly. As Christ-followers, we're commanded to go into the world and make disciples, but many drop the ball.

How can church branding help evangelism? An effective church branding process leads members to start the right conversation by focusing on community needs, concerns or goals.

It then identifies solutions that may bring someone to church or help a church member begin a conversation that can lead to more important spiritual discussions.

The problem? Community members have stopped listening to the church because they don't feel it is relevant or needed. So if we invite people to simply come to

church, many quickly say "no."

What's worse is they won't discover that Jesus is the ultimate answer to all of their problems.

## Sharing solutions

Branding can help church members better understand their community and give them the words to share solutions. It may start by inviting them to a church that's known for solutions, or it may open an opportunity for a gospel conversation.

Consider the way Jesus engaged with the woman at the well by talking first about her relevant need: water. Then He made the eternal connection by asking if she would be interested in water that would cure her thirst forever.

Effective church branding will help evangelize by starting an engagement that leads to the gospel.



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Here are 4 ways church branding will help evangelize:

**1. Good church branding focuses members on the community.** John 13:35 says we're to be known for love. Church branding centers on why God placed you in your community and how to love the people there — temporally first (to get their attention), then eternally with a gospel connection.

**2. It makes the community look up.** A conversation must start so community members will notice the church again. A great church brand does this by training members to talk about solutions to needs, concerns or goals. Speaking about their pain will always get people's attention. This will usually lead to talking about solutions.

**3. Benefits are often**

*easier to discuss.* Many believers don't share about Jesus because they find it challenging to talk to friends about spiritual things. An effective church brand connects to immediate concerns (i.e., family, marriage, safety, finances) that can be easier to discuss. As a result, the conversation feels like love. An invitation to church can follow.

**4. A church "brand thread" connects to Jesus.** What you're known for (a beneficial thread) will get attention. But that isn't enough for the church. We need to use the engagement to introduce people to Jesus.

So in conclusion, a church should become known for a needed solution (church brand). Once the community is paying attention, those engagements can introduce people to ministry, which ultimately points them to the gospel.

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# ‘Trust the Lord with all your heart’

## USA wheelchair rugby coach’s injury, disappointment grow faith

By Tracy Riggs  
The Alabama Baptist

It’s somewhat ironic that a sport whose participants must have a disability affecting the arms and legs is nicknamed “murderball.” But for Joe Delagrave, interim head coach of the USA wheelchair rugby national team, the label pales in comparison to what he has experienced getting to the team — and what that journey has done for his faith.

Delagrave played basketball, football and baseball in high school and Division 2 football in college. Then his world turned upside down.

“When you go through something that’s so tragic like a spinal cord injury and breaking your neck, you don’t understand why,” he admitted. “A lot of times we want to understand why ... and how and where and what, and what’s the endgame gonna look like.”

For Delagrave, the endgame has included becoming part of a multiple gold medal-winning team, finding others who also wrestle with questions, developing leadership skills and growing closer to the Lord.

But it wasn’t easy to get there.

### Finding a community

“I started playing [wheelchair rugby] in 2006, about two years after my accident,” he said. “I really wanted to compete again, and I really wanted to get back in shape and be healthy. That’s what led me to this sport.”

Delagrave loved the physical workouts, social interaction and sense of belonging — a “support group on wheels” — so he kept going back to practice.

“It’s a community that I think has a lot of questions about faith,” he acknowledged. “I think that’s the same for anyone who has gone through something so tragic. It’s the old adage of, ‘Why do bad things happen to good people?’

“And there are a lot of things that have happened in our community.”



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist  
Joe Delagrave (right), interim head coach of the USA wheelchair rugby national team, discusses game strategies during the Tri-Nations Invitational in Birmingham earlier this summer. Delagrave strives “to lead with a servant’s heart.”

When Delagrave first made the team in 2008, he found allies in faith, as well as some still in the “why?” stage. Though not shy about sharing his faith, Delagrave works hard to allow space for his teammates to discuss the whys.

Delagrave was team captain from 2013 to 2015 and later recognized he was sometimes an immature leader. When he didn’t make the 2016 Rio Paralympics team, he knew he needed to work on more than rugby skills.

“I thought for sure I should have made the team,” he recalled. “The decision was their decision; it was something I couldn’t control. But going through that heartbreak and heartache ... I was going to validate all I was with going to Rio and winning the gold medal. That would validate me as a leader, validate me as a father, validate me as an athlete,

validate me as a man with a disability. As a Paralympic rugby player, I mean something to someone.”

During that devastating time, Delagrave said his attitude changed. He

learned he wants “to lead with a servant’s heart. The Bible says a lot about checking your heart and understanding your heart to make sure it’s aligned, along with your head.”

Delagrave’s typical morning routine is to make a cup of coffee and get into the Word. He also participates in regular Bible study with friends but when working with the

team, he said he’s “pulled in 100 different directions” and has to make a concerted effort to maintain those disciplines.

### Three pillars

“There’s three pillars there — physical self-care, mental self-care and spiritual self-care,” Delagrave

asserted. “All three of those need to be dialed in to be successful. That’s something I strive to do and set out to do and fail at it at times.

“I set the bar at 15 minutes — what can five minutes praying, five minutes reading and five minutes worshipping do? That’s not a lot of time, but at the same time hopefully I can build on that. An hour a day spent in prayer, reading and worship is 5% of the day.”

### ‘Valuable and needed’

“An hour seems like a lot [but] 5% seems like a little,” Delagrave said. “It’s kind of a trick for your mind, and you go, ‘Wait a second. This isn’t a lot of time and this is valuable and needed.’”

From 2017 to 2021, Delagrave was again team captain, then in 2022 he became interim head coach. The journey has helped him realize Whose he is.

“My life verse since my accident has been Proverbs 3:5–6. It’s on my email signature. I have it on my USA shoes. It’s something the Lord has given me throughout my life,” Delagrave noted. “It just says, ‘Trust in the Lord with all your heart.’”

That one line is powerful, he said, adding more of the verse: “And then, ‘lean not on your own understanding.’”

“Men wrap our identities into who we are rather than Whose we are,” Delagrave acknowledged. “For me, it was wrapped up in this identity of, ‘I’m a Paralympic rugby player,’ which isn’t necessarily bad.

“But when it becomes your idol, and it becomes what you are focused on, it can be detrimental to you, especially when it gets ripped away.

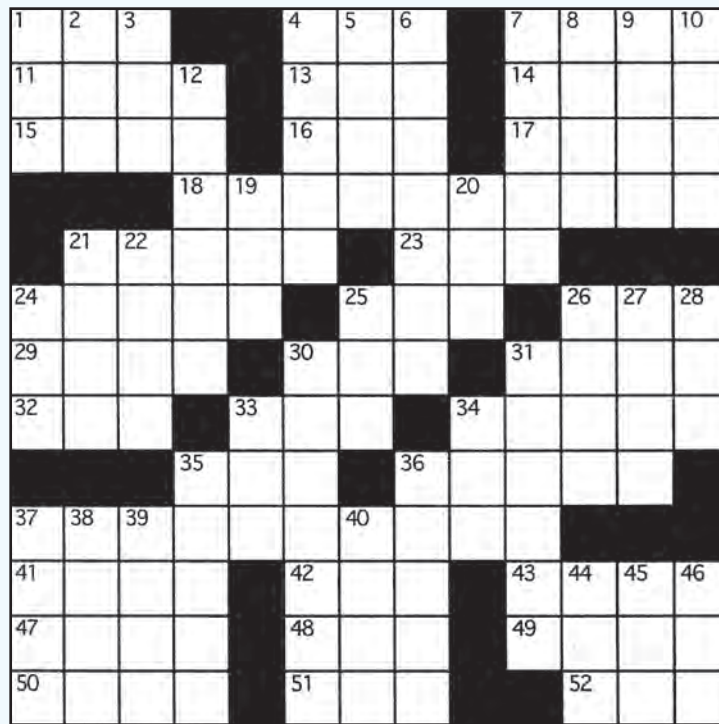
“I don’t need to be a rugby player,” Delagrave declared. “I love it, and I desire it ... It’s God-given for me to be an athlete, and I love being able to get good at the sport. But I don’t need it. It’s not my identity. It’s not where I receive my validation from.”

*To learn more about the U.S. Paralympic Wheelchair Rugby team, visit USA Wheelchair Rugby on Facebook. To watch their most recent tournament — the Tri-Nations Invitational, held at Lakeshore Foundation in Birmingham July 20–23 — visit About Lakeshore Foundation on YouTube.*

# CHRISTIAN CROSSWORD

## ACROSS

1. Linking verb.
4. About a quart in the Old Testament.
7. Son of Seth.
11. “\_\_\_ fast that which is good.” (1 Thess. 5:21)
13. Lyric poem.
14. Hawaiian goose.
15. Father of Asa. (Matt. 1:7)
16. Belonging to the city that was the destination of Joshua’s spies. (Josh. 7)
17. Ten. (prefix)
18. “And seeing the \_\_\_, He went up into a mountain.” (Matt. 5:1)
21. Brother of Miriam.
23. Night before.
24. “And the beginning of [Nimrod’s] kingdom was \_\_\_.” (Gen. 10:10)
25. Military officer in Ottoman Empire.
26. Arabic robe.
29. Saltwater lake east of Caspian Sea.
30. 66 is one. (abbr.)
31. “Forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in \_\_\_.” (Acts 16:6)
32. Father.
33. “\_\_\_ your affection on things above.” (Col. 3:2)
34. The son of Nun. (Num. 13:8)
35. Goal.
36. “Well done ... \_\_\_ thou into the joy of thy lord.” (Matt. 25:21)
37. “For unto \_\_\_ much is given, of him shall be much required.” (Luke 12:48)
41. Spanish greeting.
42. Seven, in Rome.
43. Egyptian dancing girl.
47. Minor prophet.



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48. Circle segment.
  49. “I will not drive them out from before thee in one \_\_\_.” (Ex. 23:29)
  50. One trillion. (comb. form)
  51. Tennis call.
  52. “Go to the \_\_\_, thou sluggard.” (Prov. 6:6)
- ## DOWN
1. Exclamation of discovery.
  2. Embezzle.
  3. “Now the sons of \_\_\_ were sons of Belial.” (1 Sam. 2:12)
  4. “Thou shalt heap \_\_\_ of fire on his head.” (Rom. 12:20)
  5. Mine entrance.
  6. “And Saul called the people ... to \_\_\_ David.” (1 Sam. 23:8)
  7. To provide with.
  8. “To abound and to suffer \_\_\_.” (Phil. 4:12)
  9. “Or shall a nation be born at \_\_\_?” (Isa. 66:8)
  10. “For He hath founded it upon the \_\_\_.” (Ps. 24:2)
  12. “The \_\_\_ is not dead but sleepeth.” (Mark 5:39)
  19. A son of Bani. (Ezra 10:34)
  20. Federal corp. org. in 1933.
  21. “Call me not Naomi, call me \_\_\_.” (Ruth 1:20)
  22. O.T. book. (abbr.)
  24. Take the good with the \_\_\_.
  25. Comm. conglomer.
  26. Tennis great from Richmond, Virginia.
  27. Coffin stand.
  28. Club for a jump or a tow. (abbr.)
  30. Dismissal.
  31. “In the greatness of his folly, he shall go \_\_\_.” (Prov. 5:23)
  33. Family member.
  34. United.
  35. The son of Jether, captain of the host of Judah. (1 Kings 2:32)
  36. Oust.
  37. So \_\_\_?
  38. \_\_\_ Office. (British government dept.)
  39. Swan genus.
  40. Ireland.
  44. Cows congregate here.
  45. Isle of \_\_\_.
  46. Jackie’s TV sidekick.

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

# Scripture memory a good place to start

By Julie Donavan  
The Alabama Baptist

Belinda Stroud introduced several children’s outreach options during Pinnacle Alabama at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center.

Stroud, who is responsible for Bible Drill for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, presented Bible Drills and Skills, Families in the Word and Bible Drill in a Box.

## Drills and Skills

Bible Drills and Skills encourages young children through youth to memorize 25 verses and 10 key passages each year, along with the order of the books of the Bible.

Bible Drills gives children an opportunity to participate in a tournament, while Bible Skills has the same premise without a tournament. Families in the Word follows the same schedule with the idea of family participation. Each week the family will answer questions that go along with the memory verse or key passage. It includes videos, songs and activities to help.

## Games

Bible Drill in a Box is another fun option for families to use for practicing memory verses at home.

Stroud provided Pinna-

cle participants with bags full of Bible skill games, activities and crafts, and teachers were able to practice the games beforehand. Here are a few:

### 1. Spoon it Together

Supplies: white plastic spoons and permanent markers

Write the books of the Bible on spoons, toss them on the floor and have drillers put the books in order.

### 2. Egg Toss

Supplies: plastic egg tray, adhesive labels, permanent markers and pom-poms.

Print the books of the Bible on small labels and put one on each egg holder. Invite children to throw a pompom in the air and catch it in an egg holder, then name the books before and after the book on the label.

### 3. What Book Am I?

Supplies: clothespins and extra-fine permanent markers

Write the books of the Bible on the clothespins and clip a clothespin to each driller’s back.

Challenge drillers to ask “yes” and “no” questions to discover which book has been pinned to their back.

For more resources from SBOM, visit [kidzlinkal.org/bible-drill](http://kidzlinkal.org/bible-drill) or [kidzlinkal.org/childhood-discipleship](http://kidzlinkal.org/childhood-discipleship).



# Celebrate

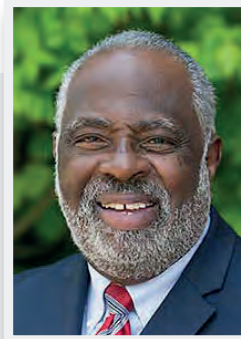
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## ANNUAL MEETING OF THE ALABAMA BAPTIST STATE CONVENTION NOVEMBER 15-16, 2022 SHADES MOUNTAIN BAPTIST CHURCH / BIRMINGHAM

Join us for this family reunion as we kick off a year-long commemoration of the Alabama Baptist State Convention's **200th** anniversary!

SPEAKERS INCLUDE **Robert Smith**, professor of Christian preaching and Charles T. Carter Baptist Chair of Divinity, Beeson Divinity School (Tuesday evening); **Buddy Champion**, pastor, First Baptist Church, Trussville (Tuesday morning); **Willie McLaurin**, interim president/CEO, SBC Executive Committee (Tuesday afternoon) and **Joel Carwile**, pastor, First Baptist Church, Athens (Wednesday morning).



**Robert Smith**



**Buddy Champion**



**Willie McLaurin**



**Joel Carwile**

*For a complete schedule and hotel information, visit [alsbom.org/convention](http://alsbom.org/convention).*

And don't miss the **Pastors Conference** also at Shades Mountain on Monday, November 14! Visit [albaptistpc.com](http://albaptistpc.com) for details.

Interpretation for the Deaf will be provided for each session of the Pastors Conference and the Annual Meeting.

# Students learn public speaking skills in creative arts

(continued from page 1) during the worship service.

The senior adults at Mount Zion have responded warmly to the students' participation, Whitmore noted. Some of them sew and pitch in on costumes, and they make sure their grandchildren are present for rehearsals and presentations.

## Breaking barriers

"They are very attentive when the kids get up there.

"The performing arts have the ability to break down barriers," she asserted. "One of the barriers that was the most difficult to break down was with the kids themselves because they were scared to put themselves out there. A lot of people aren't comfortable with getting up in front of others."

Whitmore encouraged the students to consider doing something difficult to share God's word, and they

responded well. She teaches them, "Get on your knees and pray. Then get on your feet and work."

"There's so much noise that goes on in the world today, and I want these young people to learn to be still and listen and let God speak to them," she continued. "Many of them are new in their faith, so when it comes to talking to friends who may not be accepting, they're timid.

"But when you're just telling a story, the ones that are resistant tend to get caught up in it because it's not personal."

The students also are learning public speaking skills, Whitmore noted, and they'll be better equipped to share biblical truth one-on-one because of their involvement in telling stories through theater.

Goodwin noted creative arts are valuable because



Photo courtesy of Claudette Whitmore

A two-day drama workshop helps students explore their creative gifts. Mount Zion Baptist Church in New Brockton uses its creative arts ministry to involve students in worship services.

they give artistic people outlets to use their gifts within the walls of a church.

## 'Claiming a space'

"For musicians, this has been somewhat easier, since music is a large part of the corporate worship gathering," he said. "However, someone who is passionate

about theater or creative writing may not as easily have a place where they can use their giftings for the church.

"A church naming and claiming a space for this is very valuable," Goodwin added. "It's important to clarify 'use their giftings for the church' doesn't always

mean on the platform during a worship service."

Communication is something every church has to tackle, he asserted, including print, digital, video, graphics, etc.

"Having someone in a creative leadership position who can maintain a level of excellence in this area is something that is more and more common in churches."

Congregations can use creative arts to engage youth, much like Mount Zion, by providing a space for those things to take place, Goodwin said.

"Does it seem like there are a lot of young people who have an interest in theater? Give them a space to participate in something within the church. Maybe the 'creative ministry' is simply a one-on-one piano lesson with a young person who has taken an interest."

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# SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For October 16

## Explore the Bible

By Robert Olsen, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



### THE UNFAITHFUL BRIDE Hosea 1:2–9, 3:1–5

#### Obedience demonstrated (1:2–7)

Hosea was a prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel in the 8th century B.C., and the book named for him is one of the more interesting books in the Bible because of what God commands the prophet to do: marry an adulterous, unfaithful woman. This is not to be understood as Hosea misunderstanding God.

Some people try to justify this action as Hosea not really hearing God correctly, but the Bible is clear — God is the One who commands Hosea to do this, and Hosea is diligent to obey.

The purpose behind this command becomes clear later in the book.

Hosea's wife, Gomer, gave birth to a son, and God told Hosea to name him Jezreel.

The name Jezreel had a very foreboding meaning to Israel. This is the place where Jehu had ended the reign of Ahab and his awful wife Jezebel. The name was a warning to the people: God was going to bring judgment upon Israel just as He did through Jehu years before in the Valley of Jezreel.

Later, Gomer gave birth to a daughter, and God told Hosea to name her Lo-Ruhamah, which means not loved. God was using this name to show He was going to take His love away from Israel. The daughter's name would be an indicator of what God was going to do to Israel.

#### Unfaithfulness seen (8–9)

Gomer then had another son, and God said to name this one Lo-Ammi, which means not my people, because God saw the northern tribes as illegitimate, just as Lo-Ammi was an illegitimate child.

This child's name, along with the other three incidents — Hosea's marriage to an unfaithful wife and the names of the other two children — were to be a sign to the people of Israel that they had committed spiritual adultery by turning to foreign gods.

Because of this, God was going to bring judgment upon the country. However, God was going to show

love to the people of Judah because they had not been unfaithful to Him.

This message would have been shocking to the Israelites because they hated Judah. The kingdom of Judah was a rival to the northern tribes, and the suggestion that God was going to bless Judah and punish Israel would have been a cause of great consternation.

#### Restoration sought (3:1–5)

At some point after Chapter 1, Gomer left Hosea and was bound to another man.

God instructed Hosea to go and be restored to his wife by purchasing her back.

This was a demonstration of how God was going to be restored to the Israelites after their eventual exile. The northern kingdom was about to be taken into captivity by the Assyrians in 722 B.C., but God's plan involves restoration.

God will punish sin. The entire kingdom of Israel was going to be punished because of the people's spiritual adultery.

They had turned away from God and had mixed their religion with the religions of the Canaanites. They actually thought they were religious and not in violation of God's commands, which is why God sent prophets to get them back on track.

This is the same for us today. God desires our obedience. While we do not mix our worship of God with Canaanite fertility rites, we are guilty of turning from God every time we sin. Sinning is disobedience to God and is a form of idolatry because we choose to obey our desires.

However, just as God planned to restore His people of the Old Testament ultimately through Christ, we are redeemed in the same way. God's plan for all people is for us to be reconciled to Him by believing in Christ and trusting in Him as payment for our disobedience.

God is long-suffering and loving, and He loves us enough to not leave us in our sins. He often disciplines us in order to get us to focus on Him. God shows us grace by forgiving our sins because of Christ's sacrifice.

## Bible Studies for Life

By Rony Kozman, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies, Samford University



### WHY WE NEED GOD'S WORD 2 Timothy 3:1–5, 13–17

#### Sin abounds in our culture. (1–5)

In 2 Timothy, Paul is instructing and exhorting Timothy concerning his ministry of the gospel. Paul warns Timothy about what is happening in "the last days" and how Timothy should prepare and respond.

These last days are not days that are coming in the future for Timothy (or for us). The death and resurrection of Christ has inaugurated the last days. With Timothy, we live in the last days.

Paul points out an important feature of the last days, so we can be well prepared to live appropriately. He points out the abundance of sin. Especially noteworthy are the things that people in the last days love and hate.

They love themselves, money and pleasure.

They do not love God, and they hate that which is good.

Paul warns Timothy to avoid such people, for they pose a threat and danger if they enter the church. Such people will lead those in the church astray by appealing to passions and desires, and they will draw those who are vulnerable into the vices that Paul warns against.

#### Avoiding sin requires the wisdom of God's word. (13–15)

In contrast to the unholy ones who Timothy is to avoid, Paul enjoins Timothy to persevere in Paul's teaching, love and faith. Paul himself suffered and endured, and he reminds Timothy suffering comes part and parcel with living a "godly life in Christ."

Timothy is to persist in the gospel and the godliness that the gospel requires.

This contrasts the godless who are characterized by vices and who deny the truth of the gospel.

Paul instructs Timothy that the way he can endure in truth and piety is by enduring in Scripture. For Paul, the gospel of Jesus Christ and Israel's sacred writings go hand-in-hand.

Whereas the godless will receive God's judgment, those who persist in the teaching of Scripture, those who trust in Christ, will ultimately be rescued, even if they are currently persecuted.

#### God's word comes straight from God to mature and equip us. (16–17)

Paul presses Timothy to hold fast to Scripture, because of where it is from and what it does. All of Israel's Scripture is from God, or "God-breathed." What is the significance of this term?

Whenever we speak, we inevitably breathe. Every word we utter is accompanied by the air that comes from our mouths.

Each word we say is animated and propelled by the air from our chest and lips.

So our own words can be said to be breathed out from us. With this image in mind, we can understand Scripture is God's speech.

It is how He communicates to us. It is His personal address to us. We not only see where Scripture is from, but we also see what it does. God's scriptural words teach us, correct us and train us to be righteous and godly.

This person who is trained in righteousness stands in sharp contrast to the ungodly who love their passions and desires.

In contrast to those who hate the good, Scripture trains and equips the person of God to do every good work.

Since Scripture is God's means of training us to do the good that God requires of us, Paul charges Timothy to proclaim the gospel and what Scripture teaches to those in his charge.



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# MEDIA REVIEWS

By Tracy Riggs  
The Alabama Baptist

## Flipped art exhibit inspires author's book on hope, cynicism

**W**hen author Danielle Strickland visited a “flipped art” exhibit a few years ago, the concept sparked an idea — an idea that she developed into her new book, “The Other Side of Hope.”

A flipped art exhibit is one in which the backs of the artwork are displayed instead of the fronts.

Viewing the exhibit, Strickland recognized that people usually want hope to be the beautiful picture displayed in the front, when in reality hope is often behind the scenes holding the picture in place. The realization led Strickland to ask some questions that led to her book.

“What framework is required? What background makes the kind of life where hope is seen and can show up?” Strickland asked. “I wanted to do a dive into what kind of framework and what kind of background is required for hope to be displayed in my life.”

### How it works

“The Other Side of Hope” was the result. The book mirrors the flipped art concept.

Half is written in story form, with portrayals of people all over



Photo courtesy of Sara Freitag

DANIELLE STRICKLAND

the world who overcame through hope. The other half includes biblical principles and theories about hope. One half is oriented to read from the front like any other book. To read the rest, the book has to be flipped over.

How a reader starts the book is a matter of personal preference. Strickland calls herself a “story person” and admits a personal fondness for the portion of the book that includes stories.

Each story helps drive home a point without being pedantic, she said, much the way Jesus used storytelling throughout His ministry.

### Inability to trust

But the other half of the book has a lot to say too. In it, Strickland seeks to combat the despair and cynicism that dominate today’s culture, especially among young adults. Many don’t think

this world will ever change and have lost all trust in institutions, she said. This cynicism can turn inward, resulting in the inability to trust anyone, even one’s self.

But Christians are called to be people of hope and need to address these issues, Strickland said.

### Source of hope

“Hope is honest, not happy,” she said. “We’ve been sold a happy hope. As a result, we’ve believed wrongly that sorrow is despair. So we do everything we can to avoid anything sorrowful so we can stay hopeful.”

“Hope is not a thing to acquire; it’s a Person to know,” she added.

Hope is also eternal (1 Cor. 13:13), and because God is the source of hope, it has a divine quality, Strickland said. When Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit because they will find God,” it was because hope can be a by-product of mourning.

Recovery groups are a good example, she said.

In recovery, individuals often find hope through openness and honesty, she explained. They share their worst experiences, dark things that are hard to share.

And as they share those hard experiences, they often discover what they thought was an end was instead a beginning.

Strickland has worked with women escaping sex trafficking, and she almost lost hope because she saw the women going back to that lifestyle. She often wondered if her work made a difference.

Spending time with God cultivated her hope, she said. In a

prayer room, God helped her see the challenges the trafficked women faced in breaking free.

“I started to pay attention to what was actually happening — the details. I realized what looked like a cycle that wasn’t breaking was actually an untangling of the oppression that they had been living in for a long time,” she remembered.

“I started participating with them and God in the untangling of their oppression,” Strickland said, which led her to look at situations differently.

She began to ask questions: “What is God doing? How is God showing up? How is oppression loosening off of our lives? How do we begin to celebrate with that?”

Hope began to shine through in the answers, Strickland said.

### Helping others

Now, part of Strickland’s mission is to help others find hope amid depression, addiction or

other difficult circumstances, though she realizes hope in the darkness is not something that can be glibly talked about or preached at a person.

The best way to help those who have lost hope is by “sharing authentically about our own darkness and de-

spair and truth,” she said. “You live hope. That matters a lot more than trying to tell people what hope should look like in their lives. Show them. Tell the truth. That’s what gives you hope — seeing the change. Hope is alive because He’s alive.”



### 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.

## TAB MEDIA GROUP: HOME OF SEVEN BAPTIST COMMUNICATORS ASSOCIATION

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- ▶ TAB editorial staff, 2012

**TAB**  
MEDIA GROUP



# Limiting speech

By Hamilton Richardson  
The Baptist Paper

## New ‘Russian-style restrictions’ in Ukraine hamper Christian media

For Christian radio station New Life Radio, which serves audiences across Russia and Ukraine, Russian bombing attacks have posed a constant threat to ongoing operations. Now NLR faces an additional threat from a new Ukrainian law that diminishes freedom of the press and religion.

Despite difficulties and setbacks, NLR has worked for years to spread the gospel and to provide biblical teaching to its Russian and Ukrainian audience.

Daniel Johnson, president of Christian Radio for Russia, formed NLR in 1993 to address the need for domestic Christian radio services.

### ‘Content controls’

“Russia was a land dominated by state-sponsored atheism by the Soviets,” Johnson explained. “For 70 years everything was done by man to destroy the church, even though God retained His remnant. By 1991, it was clear God had determined the end of this godless nation, and He opened a door for us, like in every generation since the time of the apostles, to carry out the order of Acts 1:8.

“So He gave us the vision, and despite how difficult it was to pull it off, the Lord gave us success.”

Now, in the midst of ministry within a war-torn country, Johnson said that in June a Ukrainian bill introduced restrictions on Russian music and language broadcast by Ukrainian radio and television stations.

“After consideration and hearing discussion by national leaders both pro and con for the legislation,” Johnson noted, “President Volody-

myr Zelenskyy signed off on the bill.”

Johnson said there are some significant implications of the new legislation.

“Such laws are reminiscent of Soviet-era content controls over the media, and is a basic mistake of the Ukrainian government in showing their lack of commitment to the most basic democratic ideals for freedom of speech, freedom of the press and freedom of religion,” he said.

Johnson noted Ukraine’s enforcement of “Russian-style restrictions” will make it more difficult for Ukraine to raise material support from the West in its fight against dictatorial Russia.

Johnson said NLR’s facility mi-

raculously escaped damage in the bombing of Odesa.

He noted they “continue to operate a remote station in Lasi, Romania, that shares the broadcast day with the Odesa studio.”

“NLR recently brought on two new seminary-trained radio missionaries to complete our Russian staff, and NLR is beginning the process to start up a new Ukrainian language radio service,” Johnson remarked. “It will take some months to compile enough Bible

teaching, Christian music and general programming resources to support a 24/7 operation.”

NLR moved to Ukraine in 2019 from Russia because of government restrictions.

FOR UPDATES ON HOW THE NEW LIFE RADIO TEAM IS DOING IN UKRAINE AND TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE MINISTRY, VISIT [CRFR.ORG](http://CRFR.ORG) OR [NLRADIO.NET](http://NLRADIO.NET).



Photo courtesy of New Life Radio  
New Life Radio’s latest staff in Odesa consists of Yura, Artem and Kirill. Daniel Johnson, president of Christian Radio for Russia, formed NLR in 1993 to address the need for domestic Christian radio services.

The station recently registered in Hungary and secured a facility in Budapest. A full-time, satellite transmission of NLR’s Russian service began Sept. 12. The location will legally allow them to broadcast into Russia and Ukraine.

Johnson indicated this is his fourth move to escape restrictions that have threatened free speech and his ministry. He said it was unlikely that NLR would be able to “attempt to set up studios in nearby Poland, Moldova or Czech Republic, because of the extreme difficulties of getting Russian-speaking missionary staff ... to obtain permission to live and work there long-term.”

Johnson said they need help and partnership with Christians in the West.

“Odesa [has been] under continuous attack by the Russians,” Johnson said, noting that, should the NLR building be hit or taken out of operation, the station will be forced to relocate to some remote spot in western Ukraine.

### Seeking U.S. support

Johnson asks Christians in America to consider sponsoring new missionary staff, along with funding for a satellite channel that will make possible the development of a new network of radio affiliates.

NLR established the first Christian FM station in Magadan, Russia, in 1996. A branch was opened in Moscow in 2000 that reached throughout the country, Ukraine and other republics of the former Soviet Union.

“It’s just another chapter in our long story of working to broadcast the gospel, so we don’t worry about anything and trust God to get us through the troubles yet again,” Johnson said in a Christian Network Europe article.

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# Welcoming weary hikers

By David Moore  
Florida Baptist Witness

## Ministry meets physical, spiritual needs along Florida Trail

It all started when hikers trekking the Florida National Scenic Trail asked permission to pitch a tent on the property of Hillcrest Baptist Church in Altha, Florida.

Located just south of Marianna in the Florida Panhandle, the church's answer was to launch a hiker ministry that offers two small cabins with a kitchen, bathroom, hot shower and a laundry room. Weary hikers welcome the accommodations.

Hillcrest Baptist is one of several Florida Baptist churches who see their proximity to the trail as an opportunity to minister to hikers through hospitality.

That's what Wilton Quattlebaum has done for the past seven years at Hillcrest, where he serves as associate pastor.

But that's not all. The affable and talkative Quattlebaum, who also is team leader for evangelism and discipleship for Apalachee Baptist Association, extends the hospitality even further by preparing hot meals for hikers who stay the night. A hot meal at day's end, a hot breakfast to fuel the next leg of a hike and the kind and friendly host make this church a popular stop.

### 'Wilton Hilton'

Hikers call it the "Wilton Hilton" and rave about it online and in hiker groups on social media. One hiker posted online, "You feel the love, and you want to extend it to others."

Quattlebaum makes sure, not only that the hikers' physical needs are met during each visit, but also that they learn about their spiritual need for Christ through his unabashedly evangelical conversations.

"I will share the gospel with anyone," he said. "I don't mind sitting



Photo courtesy of Florida Baptist Convention

Wilton Quattlebaum (right), associate pastor for Hillcrest Baptist Church in Altha, Florida, reaches out to hikers along Florida National Scenic Trail. The hiker ministry offers accommodations to welcome weary hikers.

down with someone who's a secular humanist or agnostic or atheist. When they realize you care, you can have respectful discourse with them, and they will open up about what they believe and why."

Hikers have plenty of questions. Most of the hikers who pass through are not Christian, he said, and most are highly educated. Quattlebaum estimates about 75% have at least an advanced degree. Some come from other countries. This gives him an opportunity to answer their questions and destroy stereotypes they may have about the gospel and Christianity.

"They have a lot of time to think out on the trail," he said.

That's why his discussions with

hikers can be so important. Some wake up with more follow-up questions about what was discussed the previous night. Some ask if they can continue the conversation on their return trip. Some reach out to him months or even years later.

"This year I got a call from an Australian hiker who came through three years ago. He called to thank me for sharing the gospel with him," he said.

The hiking season on the Florida Trail typically runs from November through the first of May. It's a 1,000-mile hiking trail that weaves its way across Florida from Big Cypress National Preserve in the south to Gulf Islands National Seashore in the western end of Florida's Panhandle.

As he prepares for the coming season, Quattlebaum estimates he hosted about 200 hikers last season. The numbers can vary nightly, from four or five to as many as 17.

"You never know who you're going to be ministering to that night," he said. "From secular humanists to Jehovah's Witnesses to Muslims. Some nights you get some Christian hikers, and you have some really good fellowship."

### Funding the ministry

The main expense for the ministry is the food, but support is plentiful. Funding comes from various sources, including church members, area and state churches and the Apalachee Baptist Association.

But the bulk of donations actually come from Christian hikers who have experienced the hospitality firsthand. Already, Quattlebaum estimates he's received enough funds to cover next year's expenses. He noted he doesn't accept donations from non-Christian hikers.

Despite the success of this work, Quattlebaum, 53, says he's the last person he would pick for a hiker ministry. "I'm just an old, crippled guy," he said, referring to a lingering back injury that has him walking hunched over a bit.

But he is passionate about Scripture and the love of Christ, calling himself "a layman that studies a lot."

Because of the ministry's success in the Panhandle, other Baptist churches in Florida who are adjacent to the trail, like Fort Christmas Baptist Church in Christmas, have begun ministering to hikers in other parts of the state.

"I care because my Lord cares," he said.

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goodnight,  
sweetheart.

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Love never ends." 1 Corinthians 13:7-8*

BY ALAN JOHNSTON

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"Goodnight, Sweetheart" tells the story of how Alan Johnston dealt with the 16-year illness and eventual death from Alzheimer's of his beloved wife, Judy.

*Johnston says, "... none of the negative thoughts and emotions improved our situation, nor did they solve any problems. Perhaps the best advice is that which comes from the Apostle Paul "... stand firm in your faith."*

*Chapters include, "When a Man Loves a Woman," "The Twilight Zone," "Bad Things Happen to Good People," "Man of Sorrow," "Paradise Found," "Those That Mourn," "Joy Comes in the Morning" ... and more.*



**Alan Johnston** is a retired pastor living in Chattanooga, Tenn. During his 54 years of ministry, he pastored churches in Alabama and Tennessee, and during 34 of those years he was also a certified financial planner. He is founder of Path2Truth Ministry and spends much of his time teaching and writing.

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WHEN DID I SENSE OUR CHURCH WAS IN CONFLICT? WELL, IT MAY HAVE BEEN THE NIGHT OUR POTLUCK DINNER MORPHED INTO A FOOD FIGHT.

