

The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



Photo by Doug Rogers
Students worship
at Pursue on
Feb. 24-25 at
FBC Montgomery.

‘God’s global call’

Pursue focuses on reaching the unreached and how students are a part of that mission

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Ben Edfeldt said when the lights were turned out after Pursue 2023, the stories had only just begun.

“I heard about one student who is pursuing being a Journeyman with the International Mission Board after what God did in her heart at Pursue,” said Edfeldt, director of the office of collegiate and student min-

istries at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. “Others are now thinking of being sent as summer missionaries.”

Growing in faith

Each year, Pursue — an event put on by Edfeldt’s office — aims to help students grow in their faith and grow as disciple makers. But every third year, Pursue focuses specifically on God’s call to reach the un-

reached and how students are a part of that mission.

“We partner with First Baptist Montgomery for that, and it’s been a partnership we’ve really enjoyed,” Edfeldt said.

Because this year’s Pursue — held Feb. 24-25 — ran alongside the church’s Global Missions Celebration, Edfeldt’s team had the opportunity to involve missionaries in conversations with students during

meals. Missionaries also led break-out sessions on topics ranging from discerning God’s call on their life to learning how to share the gospel to dealing with mental health on the missions field.

“It was an opportunity to not only hear about God’s global call to the nations but also to see practitioners of that and be able to engage with them,” Edfeldt said.

(See ‘Natural,’ page 2)



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NATURAL RESPONSE

Edfeldt: Discipleship, missions follow an awakening

(continued from page 1)

About 500 students and leaders were gathered as speaker Jay Sanders, Baptist campus minister at the University of South Florida, challenged students to consider their ambitions and be ambitious toward what God has called them to.

The Friday night main session was organized in partnership with the International Mission Board as part of their REV 7:9 tour, an event geared toward moving students closer to engaging in international missions.

Then on Saturday, Pursue focused on North America and their local campus. Steve Turner, senior director of next gen mobilization for the North American Mission Board, shared about opportunities to serve during school breaks and after graduation.

Speaker Jeff Lewis, an author and global activist, challenged them to see their campus as a missions field.

“He told them that if we say we worship Jesus, a natural response to proper discipleship is a life with a missions component to it,” Edfeldt said. “He challenged students to think deeply and look at the Word.”

Lewis also talked about the awakenings that have been happening recently at Asbury University and on other college campuses and told students that historically every real awakening has been followed by life change. For these revivals to be authentic, they would be followed by that too, he said.

Legitimacy

“He said if discipleship and missions aren’t there, if they don’t follow an awakening, it was just a long meeting, it wasn’t really an awakening,” Edfeldt said.

Chris Mills, SBOM student missions mobilizer, said his team is already seeing fruit from Pursue.

He said the event is always a highlight for both students and leaders, but this year’s focus on mobilization provided a challenge to students to go to their campus and to the world, and they responded.



Photo by Mitchell Bruce
Dewayne Rembert, pastor of Flatline Church at Chisholm, leads a breakout session on urban ministry Feb. 25. During the breakouts, students heard about a variety of topics from leaders and missionaries.

“We’ve had dozens of applications for summer missions come in since the conference and numerous conversations with students about what their place of service is beyond college,” Mills said.

“I’m encouraged by how the Lord is working among Alabama college students to make Him known on their campus and across the globe.”

During Pursue, students also gave more than \$2,800 to support missionaries doing ministry and sharing the gospel in the midst of the war in Ukraine.

For more information, visit pursueal.org.



Photo by Mitchell Bruce
Jay Sanders, Baptist campus minister at the University of South Florida, challenges students at Pursue.



Photo by Doug Rogers
At the end of the Friday night session of Pursue, students came forward to put their “yes” on the table to follow God wherever He called.

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.



RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

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



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@RashionalThts

Who comes to mind as you flip through the pages of each issue?

Do you have family or friends sensing they have nothing left to offer God, the world or their family? Be sure to share Fred Lunsford's story on page 16 with them.

Know of a high school or college-aged student in your life interested in figuring out next steps in his or her faith journey, share the page 1 story with them.

You might also connect students with the collegiate team from the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. Read about the latest addition to the team on page 7.

How about state politics and our state government? Know of someone interested in keeping up with all the movement through the state Legislature?

Be sure to share page 13 as well as details about the team at Alabama Citizens Action Program (alcap.com).

ALCAP president and CEO Greg Davis shared with The Alabama Baptist at press time how the ALCAP team has been and will be in Montgomery ministering, monitoring and advocating on behalf of the churches.

The 2023 regular session of the Alabama Legislature began

March 7, as well as a special session March 8, and ALCAP's team has been at the Statehouse since the opening day.

They plan to be walking the halls of the Statehouse every day legislators are present, Davis shared.

Along with advocating for issues such as religious liberty, sanctity of life and the biblical family, "we will stand against any expansion of destructive addictive behaviors," he said.

"We know that when these type behaviors are further normalized and legalized our churches see the consequences when those harmed show up on the front door of our churches.

"Our churches are certainly there willing and ready to help people put their lives and families back together, but it's heartbreaking to see the destruction that comes from so many unnecessary situations," Davis explained.

"We want to work to prevent the damage from ever being done in the first place."

ALCAP at Statehouse

Individuals and congregations can help the ALCAP team through consistent prayer and staying informed. In fact, the team helped emphasize the need for prayer during the opening week of the Legislature.

"We had a great response to the second annual ALCAP prayer rally on the Statehouse steps March 9," Davis noted.

"This was a powerful time of Scripture and prayer for those who serve us in government.

"Prayer makes a difference," he said. "We had officials from all branches of government represented in the audience.

"We encourage all churches to add their local legislators and other elected officials to their prayer list. Also, plan to join us the first week of February 2024 for the next prayer rally."

For more details or to find your legislator, visit alcap.com.

Pray for our team, share your coverage requests as we prepare to work through issues happening at national level of SBC life

In a quick, less than 10-minute brain dump recently, I listed out 20 topics in Southern Baptist Convention life needing more thorough explanations.

The topics range from financial concerns to understanding more about various leader's decisions to investigations, both through a court of law and the SBC committee structure.

Our goal is to use this list to formulate a plan for careful and methodical research to be able to

provide complete coverage of each area as we approach the June SBC Annual Meeting in New Orleans.

Reliable information

We want you to have access to reliable information that will help as you work through your own interpretation of the issues at hand.

This is not a time for national leaders to spin details or attempt to sway grassroots Southern Baptists toward a preferred angle.

We need truth telling and transpar-

ency from those with access, and we need understanding and grace from those receiving the news.

Many times, how we respond to what we learn conditions the next set of leaders on how and what they choose to share.

Whatever we discover at the national level, let's model how to work together and figure out next steps, similar to how Alabama Baptists have always done in state convention life.

Grateful for you! —JDR

Your Voice



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

3 characteristics of godly leadership

By **Gene Mason**
Leadership Ministries Inc.

From Bible times until today, God has put people in leadership roles in order to accomplish His purposes.

Romans 12:3–7 addresses our various roles in God’s family on earth, including leaders: “For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ... Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.”

The characteristics of humility, function and purpose, servanthood and individual gifts and talents are addressed.

Godly leaders aren’t those who are arrogant and desire to exercise power. Rather they possess sober judgment and a measure of faith.

A godly leader is one who is driven by biblical mandate, using biblical methods and living by biblical character. Three truths you will see as evidence of a godly leader:

Godly leaders are people-centered.

Leadership is foremost about how we influence people in a meaningful way. A godly leader will consider how he or she is leading people toward faith and encouraging them to grow in faith and as a person. There is no higher calling in leadership than to genuinely care for people.

Jesus reminds us in Matthew

20:28: “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” A godly leader sees his role as a way to serve others.

How to be people-centered:

▶ Spend time daily investing in relationships, at work, home and in the community.

▶ Pray regularly for people in your sphere of influence.

▶ Consider work projects and processes as means to meet new people.

▶ Ensure your personal and professional goals include people as a primary component.

Godly leaders are wisdom-focused.

Wisdom is knowledge and experience that can be shared for the benefit of others. We all need wisdom because it helps us make better decisions, manage relationships, handle money, face adversity, find direction and so much more.

A godly leader wants to share insights that will help people lead better lives by doing things God desires and avoiding things He does not.

Ephesians 5:15–17 reminds us, “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time ...” A godly leader is wisely walking through his own life and leading those in his sphere of influence to follow.

How to be wisdom-focused:

▶ Share your experiences with others, so they may repeat your successes and avoid your failures.

▶ Look at challenges and adversi-

ty as opportunities to learn and grow, both in faith and wisdom.

▶ Think carefully about decisions.

▶ Develop a listening ear, ready to take in knowledge and experience from those in your sphere who know things you don’t and have been places you haven’t.

Godly leaders are Spirit-led.

A Christ-follower is filled with the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul says, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal. 5:22–23).

Paul is reminding us these are not characteristics we can simply summon with enough willpower. Rather it will require the Spirit of God to see these elements as a regular facet of our lives.

Notice the fruit is plural — a faith-centered leader won’t exhibit just one of these traits, but all of them, in some way. These traits flow from a person who is putting others first and desiring their best, personally, professionally and spiritually.

How to be Spirit-led:

▶ Focus daily on your own character being a reflection of the character of Christ. What actions and attitudes can you improve on?

▶ Pray regularly for the Spirit of God to influence your interactions with others. Ask God to reveal ways others can see Christ in you.

▶ Read Galatians 5:22–23. Pray about characteristics you can grow more fully in your own life.

I am a real live miracle — at least twice in my life. I am 81. When doctors didn’t think I would make it, God had a plan. The first time I had a brain aneurysm was in 1981. In 2009, I was having a heart cath and had a heart attack.

The doctors that were performing the procedure called my lung doctor for his permission to do open heart surgery. (I have COPD.) He said no, she will not make it — that’s what I was told by the heart doctor.

Jan Harwell
Salem, Ala.

“This is a fundamental truth about endings: You have to be able to face losing some things you might want, in order to be free to do the right thing. If you can’t, you’re stuck.” — Henry Cloud

Andy Frazier
via Facebook

Mark 12:30: “You must love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.” In other words, our response to God involves every facet of our being — all that we are, feel, think, will, and do [the totality of our existence] should be expressions of love for God and revealed in loving-service to others.

Morris Murray Jr.
Jasper, Ala.

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“No one ever regretted obeying God.”

KATIE MCCOY

Director of women's ministry, Baptist General Convention of Texas

If I'm not prioritizing my time spent in prayer, diving into the text and considering the interpretations, implications and applications of that week's passage, then I won't be prepared to support, encourage and learn alongside other believers.

So here's my encouragement to you: Prioritize your study of God's Word. You may not be working through a particular Bible study curriculum, but you can still be intentional to devote a part of your day to being in communion with God.

Jessica Ingram
the-scroll.com
“Prioritize your life”

“I enjoy the beauty of human relationships and what's possible when we meet ... what's possible in that

moment,” said **Suzanne Simmons**, staff chaplain at UAB Hospital, on interacting with patients and their families. “We can learn about each other and how we can experience God in the moments we are relating with one another. I find it to be just a really beautiful experience. I get to do that every time I walk into a patient's room.”

“This one is special,” said **Andy Erwin**, producer of “Jesus Revolution,” based on evangelist Greg Laurie's book about how revival among hippies in 1970s California started a spiritual awakening, landing on the cover of Time magazine.

“Disciple-making is not a program — it's a lifestyle,” said **Bill Wilks**,

founder of D-Life and pastor of NorthPark Baptist Church in Trussville. “We don't need any more new programs. Amen? We've got more programs than we could ever possibly know how to use.”

“God is the God of second chances,” said comedian **Mickey Bell**. “When He talks about redemption, He means it. I am the picture boy of that. ... I'm one of the very few people who will stand on stage and admit their shortcomings every night. [I'm] not afraid to do so.”

While we do not work for our salvation (Eph. 2:8-9); we are to work out our salvation (Phil. 2:12b).

Franklin L. Kirksey
Robertsdale

From the *Twitterverse*

@PastorGregC

Presently, there are three types of churches in America:

1. Compromising churches who cave to the culture about key beliefs.
2. Cocooning churches who want to insulate themselves from the culture & major on their own comfort.
3. Churches who are leveraging their people and resources for gospel witness & fulfilling the Great Commission without spiritual compromise.

Only the #3 churches have a future.

@haines_matt

Leadership isn't really that hard, but it's not for everyone.

@williemclaurin

Before the local church is to be the house of Bible teaching, fellowship, evangelism and missions or anything else, it is to be known as the “house of prayer.”

@howertonjosh

re: pastoral leadership
It's OK to care about the ABCs (attendance, buildings, cash). Your people want you to care they're there, they have a place to worship & that you steward their generosity well. But you better care about the DEF's too (discipleship, evangelism, fellowship).

@kellydking

There is a fresh wind of the Spirit happening in my church. I truly believe a movement of God is taking place in many places.

@SpurgeonBooks

“Do you find it difficult to forgive one who has wronged you? Then you will find it difficult to get to heaven.” —Charles Spurgeon

@DianeLangberg

I don't think we really understand the level of deception that occurs

in people who abuse. We think that if they cry and say they are sorry, that's a good thing. But it doesn't touch the practice of deception that runs their lives and ... organizations.

@DanielDickard

A church has ... forsaken its mission when Roberts Rules of Order are referred to more than Scriptures and business meetings are more important than baptisms.

@DavidCCrowther

Evangelism should include 1) Intercession — praying for God to save a lost person; 2) Information — sharing the good news that Jesus died and rose again to forgive and transform them; 3) Invitation — we must invite individuals to believe the good news.

@jaredcwilson

The grace that saved you will sustain you.

When church leadership is unqualified

By Chris Crain

Birmingham Metro Baptist Association

Churches are meant to be places of worship, community, discipleship and spiritual growth for believers. In addition, churches should shine the light of the gospel beyond the walls. However, conflicts and turnovers in pastoral positions have become increasingly common, and unregenerate or unqualified church members in leadership positions are sometimes a cause.

The church must be careful in selecting all leaders — not just pastors, ministers and church staff.

The Bible is clear that leaders are not to be spiritual novices and the teachers will be held to a high standard.

Still, unregenerate church members — those who have not truly trusted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior — sometimes hold leadership positions in churches.

These individuals, sometimes chosen for their influence or career successes or because the position is vacant and they are willing, may impose values and beliefs which clash with the spiritual direction and scriptural teachings of the church.

Two simple steps

My advice for the church is twofold:

1. Use the Bible as the standard for selecting any leader.
2. Don't get into a rush.

Spiritually immature or unqualified leaders ... can create a toxic environment that is detrimental to the health and growth of the church.

From my experience, I have seen these issues lead to emotional and even physical distress in the lives of pastors and church members.

Much turnover of pastoral positions also can be attributed to unqualified church members in leadership positions.

3 stories you should know



Photo courtesy of the University of Mobile

The University of Mobile invites the public to Spring Spectacular 2023, an outdoor concert that includes a fireworks display. Students from the university's Alabama School of the Arts will showcase their talents March 24 at 7 p.m. If it rains, the event will be held March 25. Ensembles will include Voices of Mobile, University Singers, Ignite, Deliverance, Sofree, Jazz Band, RamCorps and others. Tickets may be purchased at the gate or online at umobile.edu/pas.

Pre-trial work continues in McRaney vs. NAMB

Pre-trial work continues in the Will McRaney case against the North American Mission Board. The original trial date was set for June 5 but has been rescheduled for Aug. 7.

NAMB's legal team requested the extension after McRaney's team produced new witnesses — Bill Barker, a former NAMB missionary in Appalachia, and Joni Hannigan, a veteran Baptist journalist — near the deadline for discovery, March 3.

McRaney filed the lawsuit in 2017, claiming NAMB influenced the decision by the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware to terminate him as executive director as well as harmed his future opportunities.

Some NAMB staff members have been deposed already. Barker and Hannigan provided sworn affidavits but had not been deposed at press time. (The Baptist Paper)

Number of applicants for IMB rebounding

In early March, the International Mission Board counted more than 1,200 candidates in the missionary application process.

While the number remains less than half of the routine 3,000-plus candidates applying annually in the early to mid-1990s, the current number is a significant increase from the 300 in 2019.

IMB's new goal is to always have more than 1,500 applicants in the pipeline, said IMB President Paul Chitwood.

New applicants provide opportunities to replace missionaries who are completing terms of service.

Multiple pathways, lengths of service and a variety of missionary positions are currently open with IMB.

Those interested can visit imb.org/go or email info@imb.org. (The Baptist Paper)

Persecuted **church**

Worship service shut down in front of city hall building in Indonesia

MEDAN, Indonesia — A church in Indonesia on Jan. 8 was prohibited from holding a Sunday service in front of a city hall building, where it had gone after losing its prior worship venue in a mall, Morning Star News reported.

Following opposition to the church's services in a mall in Medan, North Sumatra Province, the head of the Medan Public Order Enforcer (Satpol Pamong Praja, or SPP), Rakhmat Harahap, and his unit banned an Elim Church Indonesia Christian congregation from holding worship near the Medan City Hall.

Harahap said the church lacked permission to worship at city hall, just as officials had said they did not have permission to worship at the mall.

In a video appearing on social media, Harahap

says the site near the city hall was not allocated for religious services and area people opposed it. Harahap on Jan. 14 told online newspaper TribunMedan that the congregation lacked permission to hold a religious service at the site. He added that there is no ban on Christian worship, but that all parties must comply with legislation.



YouTube screenshot courtesy of MS

Additional charges keep pastor in jail for extended time in India

FATEHPUR, India — A pastor in India was granted bail in January, but his jail time has been extended because Hindu extremists have filed additional baseless charges against him,

according to a Morning Star News report.

Pastor Vijay Masih was allegedly arrested April 14, 2022, released on bail three days later and arrested again Oct. 30, 2022.

He was granted bail Jan. 16, but his jail term has been lengthened after more complaints were filed Jan. 23.

Last April, complaints were filed against the pastor and about 49 other Christians, accusing them under the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Act. Other accusations include unfounded charges of forgery, cheating and criminal conspiracy, Morning Star News reported.

Masih has led an Evangelical Church of India congregation for 13 years.

The Hindu extremist entity Vishva Hindu Parishad reportedly accused church members of forcibly converting 90 Hindus to Christianity.

Alabama news

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

▶ **Jonathan Propes** is the new discipleship pastor of **Dawson Church, Birmingham**. Prior to coming to Dawson, he served as church partner with Lifeway Christian Resources consulting with churches in East Tennessee, Southwest Virginia, Eastern North Carolina and North Georgia. He has served as discipleship pastor for churches in Tennessee, Kentucky and Illinois.



PROPE

Propes holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Tennessee-Knoxville and a master of divinity degree from Southern Seminary.

He and his wife, Elaine, have two children.

BLOUNT ASSOCIATION

▶ **Pleasant View Missionary Baptist Church, Holly Pond**, will host a revival April 3–8. Prayer band begins at 6:45 with services at 7. Jack Thomason is the evangelist. Earl Harper is pastor.

CHILTON ASSOCIATION

▶ **Adam Easterling** is the new worship leader of **Thorsby First Baptist Church**.

He has been a contributor to both the adult choir and adult praise team prior to this position.



EASTERLING

CLEBURNE ASSOCIATION

▶ **Scott Jordan** is the new pastor of **Pinetucky Baptist Church, Heflin**. He and his wife, Heather, have two children.



JORDAN

CONECUH ASSOCIATION

▶ **Jack Williamson** retired from **Brooklyn Baptist Church** at the end of January, after 24 years of service. He previously served as pastor of Evergreen Baptist Church, for more than

20 years. He currently serves as the moderator of Conecuh Baptist Association.

ESCAMBIA ASSOCIATION

▶ **Rich Gartman** is the new associate pastor of children and families of **First Baptist Church Flomaton**.

LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN ASSOCIATION

▶ The Hubert Cox Memorial Singing School will be March 27–31 at the **Lookout Mountain Baptist Association** building at 6 p.m. nightly.

Dylan Feezell will be the instructor. There is no charge. All directors, choir groups, special singers and youth groups are invited. DeWitt Cox is associational music director.



DYKES

MOBILE ASSOCIATION

▶ **Caleb Dykes** is the new pastor of worship and students at **Shiloh Baptist Church, Saraland**. Previously he served as worship pastor at First Baptist Church Franklinton, Louisiana. He holds a bachelor of arts degree in music from Leavell College at New Orleans Seminary.

He is married to Jordan.

MONTGOMERY ASSOCIATION

▶ **Lisa Montgomery** is the new director of the Child Development Center of **Eastern Hills Baptist Church, Montgomery**. Most recently, she has been working at the Childcare Development Program of First Baptist Church Wetumpka and substitute teaching in Elmore, Autauga and Orange Beach. She also previously served as the daycare/preschool director of East Memorial Baptist Church, Prattville.



MONTGOMERY

She and her husband, Gary, have two children and two grandchildren.

PLEASANT GROVE ASSOCIATION

▶ **Joshua Sellers** is the new associate pastor of **Evergreen Baptist Church, Vance**.



SELLERS

He and his wife, Lauren, have three children.

RUSSELL ASSOCIATION

▶ **Jarrold Horne** is the new pastor of **Concord Baptist Church, Salem**. He previously was youth and education minister of Stone



HORNE

Ridge Baptist Church, Alexander City, and minister of students and discipleship of Sixth Street Baptist Church, Alexander City.

He holds a bachelor's degree in secondary language arts education from Auburn University and a master of divinity degree with a specialization in preaching and pastoral ministry from Southeastern Seminary.

He is pursuing a doctor of ministry degree in expository preaching.

He and his wife, Amanda, have three children.

ST. CLAIR ASSOCIATION

▶ **Johnny Pruitt** is the new pastor of **McEntyre Baptist Church, Ashville**. He is a retired

remodeling contractor and carpenter. Called to preach in 1978, Pruitt began leading his first church — Brannon Springs Baptist Church, Southside — in 1983. He has previously served as pastor of Ohatchee First Baptist Church; Melrose Baptist, Centre; and Shady Grove Baptist, Leesburg.

In the past few years, he has served as interim pastor of a number of churches in Calhoun, Cherokee and Etowah counties.

He is an alumni of Gadsden Community College and Samford University's extension program. He holds bachelor's, master's and doctorate in theology degrees from Covington Seminary, Ringgold, Georgia, where he taught in a seminary extension for eight years.

He and his wife, Margaret, are guardians to his sister, Melanie.



PRUITT

TUSCALOOSA COUNTY ASSOCIATION

▶ **Michael Guffey** is the new family pastor of **Forest Lake Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa**.

Guffey and his wife, Jaime, have four children.

▶ **Circlewood Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa**, is hosting an evening of encouragement with Fred Luter, former Southern Baptist Convention president and pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, New Orleans.



GUFFEY

The event is Sunday, March 26, 6 p.m. Herb Thomas is pastor.

STATE BOARD OF MISSIONS

▶ **Josh Meadows** is the newest member of the collegiate and student ministries team at the **Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions**.

Meadows, who has served as family life pastor at Spring Valley Baptist Church, Springville, since 2017, started his new role as student ministry strategist March 1.

Meadows has served in ministry for nearly 20 years. During his time at Spring Valley Baptist, he was a key leader for the SBOM office of collegiate and student ministries, coordinating Speak Tour events.

Meadows was a church planter and a student pastor in Georgia.

He earned a bachelor's degree in pastoral ministries from Toccoa Falls College, Toccoa, Georgia, and a master's degree in leadership at Luther Rice University, Lithonia, Georgia.

He and his wife, Jenn, have four children.



MEADOWS

WHO WE ARE

Where Christ Creates Healing for Kids & Families from Hard Places.

Alabama Baptist Children's Homes is the largest faith-based foster care provider in the state. We seek to protect, nurture, and restore Alabama's foster children every day. We serve kids and families in Auburn, Birmingham, Decatur, Dothan, Mobile, Montgomery, Oxford, and Tuscaloosa.

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Alabama Baptist
CHILDREN'S HOMES
& Family Ministries

PROVIDING HOPE

Tuscaloosa County couple seeks to help children through ministry strategy of adoption

By Lori White
The Alabama Baptist

Once the Case family fully understood how their ministry calling would focus on children, they went to work immediately to build Quiver Ranch in north Tuscaloosa County. They had been seeking God's direction for eight years, so when the clarity came, they were ready.

Jared and Selena Case currently have five children but with their ministry strategy of adoption as their means of caring for children needing a home, they made sure to build their ministry home big enough to hold all the children they know God will send their way.

"Quiver Ranch exists to protect children and prepare them until God is ready to launch them out," said Jared, pastor of Journey Church, a new church plant starting services in August in the Northside community of north Tuscaloosa County.

Selena is an elementary school teacher and their children are: Mattie (15), Avery (12), Jeffrey Bryson (8), Ky'mia (4) and JP (17 months).

Ky'mia and JP are the latest additions to the Case family, and JP came to them by way of a young woman originally planning to have an abortion.

It was through "divine providence" that JP's mother crossed paths with Quiver Ranch, Jared said. "If all these years of waiting and all the expense of establishing this ministry were only to save this one child, it was worth it.

"We are wide open for as many children as God sends to us," he added, noting they also are trained



Photo courtesy of Jared Case
Jared and Selena Case currently have five children — Mattie (15), Avery (12), Jeffrey Bryson (8), Ky'mia (4) and JP (17 months). After seeking God's direction for eight years, the couple built Quiver Ranch in north Tuscaloosa County.

and certified to provide foster care for children in Alabama.

Along with adoption and foster care, the Cases also minister to expectant mothers needing support.

So many times, women in unplanned pregnancies believe their only option is abortion, Jared noted. He and Selena work with others in their area as well as across the state to share resources about other options such as adoption.



Photo courtesy of Jared Case
JP was the Case family's first adoptee. He came to them by way of a young woman originally planning to have an abortion.

an expectant mother would stay on property throughout the pregnancy and go through a comprehensive educational and training program while being cared for personally.

search support and a church community are a few of the resources offered.

The message of the gospel also will be shared with each woman.

"I want to do whatever I can to show people hope," Tatum said.

Calls come in consistently and from many different states, Jared said, noting the ministry relies on the support and prayers of those who have, and will, partner with Quiver Ranch.

'No balance due'

For instance, along with resources coming from area churches and service-oriented groups, some of the subcontractors helping build the Quiver Ranch home sent the Cases a "no balance due" bill after discovering how it would be used. Those types of surprise blessings continue to affirm the Cases' calling.

Also, Jared and Selena always include their older children in the discussions about God's callings and direction.

"If God is calling Selena or me to something, then He is calling the whole family," Jared said. So, the older children join their mom and dad in praying for discernment.

"We agree as a family on going forward."

Jared and Selena want other believers who hear their story to know God can use anyone at any time.

"Be open to where God is leading. He can use you," Jared said. "Draw near to God and He will

draw near to you. You don't have to be anything other than surrendered to Jesus to be used mightily by the Lord."

Tatum Buckhannan, director of the mothers program, shares the Cases' vision for equipping mothers who want to care for their children and joined the team after hearing Jared speak about the ministry.

Meeting needs

When an expectant mother or family member contacts Quiver Ranch, Tatum works to figure out how best to meet the mother's needs or find the best resource to help if it's not them. Sometimes it is as simple as providing a bus ticket home, paying a bill, helping with transportation needs or providing meals.

Each expectant mother is met with a proposal outlining what the program can do for them. Education, counseling, financial planning, job

For more information, visit QuiverRanch.com.

"Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth."

Psalm 127:3-4

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OF ALABAMA BAPTIST MISSIONS AND MINISTRIES

Partnerships strengthen missions work at home, abroad

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Jae McKee gets choked up when he talks about partnership — specifically the partnership between the state where he grew up and the state where he lives now.

“I can’t really qualify or quantify how it’s impacted me, because it’s so unbelievable,” he said.

McKee grew up in Rogersville, Alabama, as a “red-dirt farmer,” but while he was in college at the University of North Alabama, God began to work in his heart and draw him toward Alaska. He went there as a short-term missionary and, more than 30 years later, he’s still there.

“I said yes to an opportunity that I felt like God had brought into my life as a college student, and it has turned into a lifetime,” McKee said.

He now serves as director of missions and church planting for the Alaska Baptist Resource Network, and since May 2021, they’ve been in an official partnership with the Alabama Baptist State Convention.

“It has impacted me in so many ways — people, finances, prayers, building the awareness that Alaska is here,” McKee said. “It’s really transformed everything about my life.”

Scotty Goldman, director of the office of global missions for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said that’s the idea behind the missions partnerships that Alabama Baptists have had over the years — to build up and encourage the people who are working to



Photo by Grace Thornton/The Alabama Baptist

(From left) Tori Posey, a member of Thomasville Baptist Church; Jimmy Simpkins, then pastor of Bashan Baptist Church, Thomasville; and translator Julio Perez prayer walk in Guatemala as part of a partnership trip in 2006.

spread the gospel in other contexts.

“If you’re in a location away from family and friends, to have somebody who contacts you on a regular basis for encouragement or sends a team to come and work alongside you is huge,” Goldman said.

Putting feet to Acts 1:8

Reggie Quimby, who was Goldman’s predecessor, said it also impacts those who are on the “home” side of the partnership.

“It helps people get their minds around opportunities they might not be aware of,” he said. “In terms of what the Bible says about being witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the end of the earth, it helps put

feet to the Great Commission and Acts 1:8.”

Quimby said it also helps churches that may not have a missions pastor or a natural inroad to North American or international missions engage with what God is doing in other places.

“It helps enlist new people and in that way helps to call out missionaries as well,” he said.

Quimby said he first became aware of the value of partnerships when he and his wife, Karen, were serving as International Mission Board missionaries in Spain from 1979 until 1989. Oklahoma Baptists established a partnership with them, visiting their city and hosting evangelistic events that bolstered their efforts there.

Partnering sacrificially

At the same time Rick Lance, then pastor of First Baptist Church Tuscaloosa, was experiencing what missions partnerships could look like from the other side.

“Alabama Baptists were involved in geographical partnerships with Nigeria, South Korea, Alaska, Wyoming and Hawaii during the ’80s and early ’90s,” he said. “These partnerships were most effective. Many Alabama Baptists made sacrificial missions trips to these areas.”

He had seen that firsthand — he was personally involved in the South Korea and Wyoming partnerships as he led his church to be a part.

“Getting to know the South Korean people was a delight for certain. I grew to appreciate their culture,” Lance said. “My participation in the Wyoming partnership helped to better understand the Western states far

**“There is a partner out there
for every Alabama Baptist church.”**

Scotty Goldman
director of the office of global missions, SBOM

better. The world is different there. Being a pastor and church leader looks far different there. I am grateful for the privilege to have worked with Wyoming Baptists and the Cheyenne, Wyoming, community.”

New approach

During that time, both Quimby and Lance were growing in their understanding of what partnership could look like and what it could accomplish. In 1989, Quimby returned from the field and joined the staff of the SBOM, and in 1998, Lance joined him and became SBOM executive director.

The two were on the same page about the importance of missions.

“When Reggie arrived on staff, he was an associate and part of his responsibilities were in our geographical partnerships,” Lance said. “Later, I had the privilege of creating the office of global missions, and Reggie became the first director and the team leader for missions mobilization.”

Part of Quimby’s role was helping wrap up Alabama Baptists’ partnership in Spain in 1999 — a full-circle moment for him. From there, the vision only grew for the new office of global missions.

“It was a new direction for Alabama Baptists because it was a dedicated position to concentrate on developing volunteers and working in missions partnerships,” Quimby said.

In that position, he led the state to develop five-year partnerships with Baptists in New England and Venezuela in 2000. After that came partnerships with Ukraine and Guatemala in 2005 and Michigan in 2006 that lasted until 2012.

“During that time as we developed those partnerships, we started helping churches go on their own,” he said.

Over time, the focus shifted from SBOM-led trips to individual churches connecting with missionaries, which helped the partnerships keep going even after the statewide emphasis ended.

“We heard stories about people being impacted in such a way that after we ended the partnerships, certain churches adopted those places they had gone to and continued to go even years after the partnership was officially over,” Quimby said.

So as the last few country and state partnerships wrapped up, he began to lead Alabama Baptists toward a new type of missions partnership. Rather than the whole state focusing on one area of the world for a set amount of time, Alabama Baptist churches would partner with missionaries from Alabama, wherever they might be in the world.

The effort — called Alabama Acts 1:8 Connections — was spearheaded by the office of global missions.

Part of that effort was visiting the IMB’s training center and connecting with Alabamians before they ever deployed to the missions field, Quimby said.

“We tried to do that in the early days of their orientation so we can establish contact with their home churches, their sending churches and the churches where they grew up to help strengthen that relationship between them,” he said. “We have continued to maintain that kind of connection with our new missionaries.”

That strategy has been so fruitful that other states have seen the benefits and started modeling it, said Quimby, who retired in 2016.

Goldman, who joined the office of global missions in 2008, has carried on with that approach during his time as director, and he said he could tell story after story “where the missionary and the church said it’s just been fabulous.”

Changed perspectives

One of those is Lineville Baptist Church’s partnership with Alabama missionaries Wallace and Dee in western Europe.

Pastor Ben Curlee said his church “has come alive with the understanding of lostness in Europe.”

“For those who have been, it has

changed the way they see missions,” he said.

Goldman had connected Lineville Baptist with Wallace and Dee in 2018 after the couple had asked for help recruiting prayer partners.

“We are desperate for people to come here and pray,” Wallace said. “We recognize God working here is tied with prayer.”

He said the partnership with Lineville Baptist has been a perfect fit. The church has sent teams to prayer walk and encourage them, and he feels “they truly are invested here with us.”

Goldman said that’s exactly what he hopes to see happen over and over with Alabama Baptist churches and missionaries all over the nation and world, and in Alaska, which is a little bit of a hybrid between the old style of partnership and the new because of McKee’s work with the Alaska Baptist Convention.

Taking opportunities

“The more we worked with Jae, the more we realized there was a huge need in Alaska,” Goldman said. “Through that relationship, this partnership with the entire state has kind of blossomed. We have several families in Alaska

now who are serving there.”

Alabama Baptists have latched onto the opportunity, he said.

In March 2022, Pastor Chuck Conley of First Baptist Church Grant went on a vision trip to First Baptist Church Sitka, Alaska, and found out on his way home that the pastor there was resigning.

Conley was shocked, but he said God began to focus his thoughts on one thing — “How can we help?” It wasn’t long before he started to realize that the best way they could help was to come alongside the church to provide a pastor through the summer.

So they did, rotating their own staff and laypeople in from early June until mid-September.

“They have really just taken Sitka, Alaska, and they have done a tremendous job,” Goldman said.

He said he encourages churches to get involved with the state’s approximately 400 North American and international missionaries through prayer, giving and going to support their work on the field. Goldman can help provide the connection and offer resources such as safe travel training for missions teams.

“There is a partner out there for every Alabama Baptist church,” he said.

For more information about partnership missions, visit a18c.org.



Photo by Doug Rogers

Jae McKee (left), an Alabama native now living in Alaska, said his missions partnership with Scotty Goldman (right) and other Alabama Baptists has been life changing.



Photo by Doug Rogers

Jay Wolf, pastor emeritus of FBC Montgomery, prays with Ukrainian men on a partnership trip in 2010.



Photo courtesy of Chuck Conley

A team from FBC Grant leads a basketball camp for the community of Sitka, Alaska, in June 2022. After a vision trip a year ago, FBC Grant came alongside FBC Sitka to help encourage their ministry and fill their pulpit for several months. The partnership continues today.

Famous Christians from previous centuries

Heroes of the Faith

2023 marks 525th anniversary of Anabaptist forefather's birth

Conrad Grebel (1498–1526) was co-founder of the Swiss Brethren, a branch of Anabaptists in Zurich. This year marks the 525th anniversary of his birth.

He was born in Grüningen to Jakob and Dorothea Grebel, moving to Zurich with his family around 1513.

Grebel spent six years in three universities but never earned a degree.

In Paris he lived an immoral lifestyle, and when his father cut off his funds, he returned to Zurich.

In 1521, he met with a group led by Ulrich Zwingli, leader of the Reformation in Switzerland, and the two studied Greek, Hebrew and the Latin Bible together.

Grebel's life changed in 1522 when he married a woman below his social class and of whom his family disapproved. He later experienced a Christian conversion and underwent a dramatic lifestyle change, becoming an ardent supporter of Zwingli.

The next year differences between Grebel and Zwingli arose — both men wanted the Catholic Mass to be abolished but when Zurich city councilmen did not favor it, Zwingli relented. Grebel believed the coun-

cilmen had no authority over the church and also didn't think the church had authority over the state.

The revolutionary idea of a separation between church and state was forming.

Grebel believed in the authority of the Bible, and since the Bible did not mention infant baptism, he believed only adults should be baptized. On Jan. 17, 1525, Zwingli called for a public debate on the issue. Felix Manz and George Blaurock joined Grebel on the side of believers' baptism.

City council members and Zwingli disagreed. They ordered Grebel's group to disband and demanded all unbaptized infants be baptized. Grebel's daughter was an infant, but he refused her baptism.



GREBEL

Message of repentance

Soon Grebel met with the exiled radicals and baptized Blaurock. Then Blaurock baptized Grebel, Manz and others present.

Grebel traveled to St. Gall and preached the gospel of repentance and baptism, and more than 500 people responded to his call.

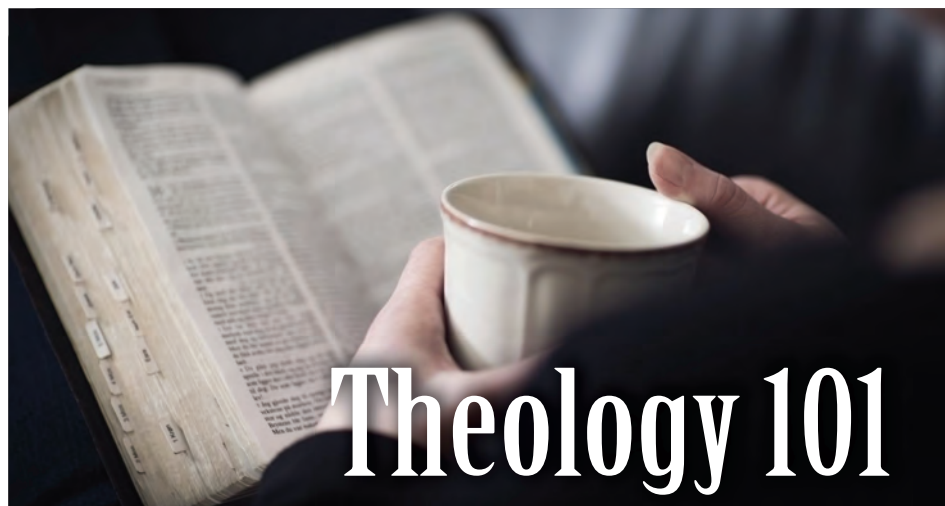
In October 1525, Grebel was arrested. In prison he wrote a defense of adult baptism and escaped in March 1526 to continue preaching. A few months later he died of the plague at the age of 28.

His closest friends were martyrs — Manz was drowned in 1527, and Blaurock was burned at the stake in 1529.

Although his Christian ministry was less than four years and his time as an Anabaptist only a year-and-a-half, Grebel's contributions made him known as "The Father of Anabaptists."

By Joanne Sloan

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



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

The Holy Spirit

Our Need for His Instruction

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
The Alabama Baptist

Last week, we began to think about the Holy Spirit using the first of four Paraclete passages that occur in the Gospel of John. In the first passage, John 14:14–17, Jesus assured His followers the coming of the Holy Spirit would supply them with a Helper who would be with them forever (v. 16). The indwelling of God's Spirit is His provision for our isolation and impotence in this world. Philipians 2:1 speaks of this truth as the "fellowship of the Spirit."

This week we consider the second Paraclete passage found in John 14:25–27.

The Holy Spirit is God's provision for our spiritual ignorance — He dwells in believers to furnish instruction and understanding about spiritual truths. In short, believers are privileged to know God's Spirit as a Divine Enabler who helps us grasp God's truth, apply it to our lives and share it with others.

'Being present'

As Jesus spoke to His followers in this second reference to the Holy Spirit as the Paraclete,

He implied His impending departure when He used the expression "while being present with you" (v. 25). He went on to refer to the Holy Spirit as the One "whom the Father will send in My name" (v. 26).

On an earlier occasion, Jesus had declared, "I have come in My Father's name" (John 5:43). In speaking thus, Jesus came as

the Father's representative. By using the phrase "in My name," Jesus taught that the Holy Spirit would be His representative with His followers after His departure. In other words, the Spirit did not come in His own name.

Teacher

This ongoing mission of the Holy Spirit would have two closely related and complementary assignments. Jesus said, "He will teach you all things," and added, "and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (14:26). The ministry of the Spirit as our Instructor makes it His ministry to fulfill the dual actions of teaching and reminding.

As believers, we need the illuminating ministry of the Spirit. However, given our capacity for forgetting, the Spirit operates also as an indwelling reminder of the truth we have learned.

Some years after Jesus had returned to the Father, the Apostle Paul wrote: "No one knows ... the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches" (1 Cor. 2:11–13).

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.



**ALABAMA
CITIZENS
ACTION
PROGRAM**

PRAYER RALLY

Photos by Doug Rogers

Right: Jarman Leatherwood (at podium), second vice president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention, prays for the legislative branch of state government. Rick Lance (left), executive director of the State Board of Missions, followed with a prayer for the judicial branch.



Above: Greg Davis (left), ALCAP president, greets the crowd gathered in front of the Alabama Statehouse. Jacky Connell (center), pastor of Eden Westside Baptist Church in Pell City, followed with a prayer for the executive branch of state government.



Above: Prayer leaders and rally organizers gather for personal prayer prior to the rally. In the circle are (clockwise from top) Rick Lance (State Board of Missions), Greg Davis (ALCAP), Jacky Connell (Eden Westside Baptist Church), Jarman Leatherwood (state convention officer), Nate Williams (Priority Talk) and Joe Godfrey (ALCAP).



Above: Nearly 200 people gather in the state's capital city March 9 to pray for those who serve through work in government.

Legislative session underway

Along with organizing the March 9 prayer rally at the Statehouse, Alabama Citizens Action Program leaders plan to maintain a presence during the 2023 legislative session.

ALCAP president Greg Davis voiced the opening day prayer for the Senate on March 7 and was scheduled to provide the House prayer on March 14.

"ALCAP is in Montgomery ministering, monitoring and advocating on our churches behalf," Davis said. (The Alabama Baptist)



TO VIEW A GALLERY OF PHOTOS, VISIT TABONLINE.ORG/ALCAP



UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Upcoming Disaster Relief training

When disaster strikes, the yellow shirt army of Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers is ready to go help — and they need more volunteers to join them.

Register for one of the upcoming training sessions, all of which will be held at the ABDR Center, 118 Jesse Samuel Hunt Blvd. in Prattville.

▶ **Admin training**, March 18, 9 a.m.–5 p.m. Learn how to manage volunteers in database and manage deployment information at a disaster command center.

▶ **Communications training**, March 25, 9 a.m.–5 p.m. Learn to use amateur radio to assist with disaster communication.

▶ **Shower and laundry training**, March 25, 9 a.m.–5 p.m. Learn how to set up and operate shower and laundry units in disaster response.

▶ **Cleanup and recovery training**, March 31, 3–6 p.m. Train in chainsaw operations and flood recovery.

▶ **Chainsaw training**,

To register, visit sbd.org/events or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



from March 31, 7 p.m., to April 1, 3 p.m.

Learn how to safely operate a chainsaw and properly and safely clean up afterward. To complete the training, each volunteer must successfully cut a tree according to the standard taught in class.

▶ **Chaplain training**, April 13, 8 a.m., to April 15, 5 p.m. Train in crisis intervention and ministry to people in crisis in the context of Southern Baptist Disaster Relief.

▶ **Mass feeding training**, April 22, 9 a.m.–5 p.m. Learn how to operate a mass feeding kitchen.

Lead your church to greater overall health

In January, the Intentional Leader Series featured the first of the four Ps of leadership — Person. The next conference — Pathfinder — will be held April 18 at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions office facility in Prattville.

State missionaries Ken

Allen and Rob Jackson will share how to strategically lead your church into greater overall health. The series provides an ongoing process to be challenged as a leader.

The \$8 cost for the Pathfinder Conference includes lunch. To register, visit leadercare.org/ils.

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

Place a classified ad below for \$1 per word.

For more information call 205-870-4720, ext. 200, or email ads@thealabamabaptist.org. To place an online classified ad for \$9.99/month, visit thealabamabaptist.org/classifieds.

CHURCH POSITIONS

SENIOR PASTOR

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

SENIOR PASTOR

Taylorville Baptist Church, located in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, is searching for a senior pastor who will love and care for its congregation and in return, be loved and cared for by a special church family. TBC has an active congregation of approximately 200 members. Interested applicants should contact Krista at TBC, 205-758-0868 or kcollins@taylorvillebaptist.org for a comprehensive description of qualifications and application process.

PASTOR

Northside Baptist Church, Selma, Alabama, is seeking a full-time pastor. Please submit resumé to: Northsidebaptist2021@gmail.com.

PASTOR

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

PASTOR

Hamilton Baptist Church in Robertsedale, Alabama, is in search of a bivocational/full-time pastor. Please email resumés to: hamiltonbaptist3037@gmail.com or mail to: HBC 32815 County Road 112, Robertsedale, AL 36567. Resumés must be received by April 30.

PASTOR

Dalraida Baptist Church, Montgomery, Alabama, is accepting resumés for a Kingdom-minded senior pastor with a heart for the lost who is missional, evangelistic and a discipler. Visit DalraidaBaptist.com/pastorsearch for more information. Email resumés to: dalraidapastorsearch@gmail.com.

PASTOR

Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church in Gordo, Alabama, is seeking a pastor. Please send resumés to: mtpleasant@centurytel.net.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Westview Baptist Church, 809 Damascus Hwy, Enterprise, AL 36330, is prayerfully seeking resumés for a bivocational pastor. Please send resumé to:

church address, marked ATTN: Search Committee, or via email at wchurch.enterprise@gmail.com. For additional inquiries, call 334-797-0798.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Central Baptist Church of Opelika, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational pastor to lead our church family on Sundays and Wednesday nights by sharing the love and gospel of Jesus Christ with our community and the world. Please send your resumé to: 922mrw@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Liberty Baptist Church in Morris, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational pastor who will preach God's Word, pray for God's leadership and have a heart for missions. Send resumés to: garrettm2@bellsouth.net.

PART-TIME MINISTER OF MUSIC

Westwood Baptist Church, Birmingham, Alabama, is eagerly seeking a part-time minister of music. Contact Pastor Steve Potts (205-798-3341, email: stevepotts@westwoodbc.net).

BIVOCATIONAL WORSHIP PASTOR

East Side Baptist Church, Cullman, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational worship pastor. This person will direct the choir, praise team and instrumentalists. Some technical/computer skills are required. The pay is \$15K to \$17.5K, based on experience. Send resumé to: ESBCsearchteam@gmail.com.

YOUTH PASTOR

Bethlehem West Baptist Church, a vibrant and growing church in Vinemont, Alabama, is seeking a full-time youth pastor. Please send resumé to: shane Wheeler1210@icloud.com.

PART-TIME YOUTH MINISTER

South Chapel Hill Baptist, Decatur, Alabama. Flexible hours and scheduling. Please email resumé and inquiries to: knhayes2022@gmail.com for details.

OTHER POSITIONS

ASSOCIATIONAL MISSIONS STRATEGIST

The Bethel Baptist Association, located in Linden, Alabama, is seeking an associational missions strategist to serve its 33 churches. You may send a resumé to: bethelba.linden@gmail.com or you may mail one to: Bethel Baptist Association, As-

sociational Missions Strategist Search Committee, P.O. Box 481088, Linden, AL 36748. Resumés will be received through April 30.

ASSOCIATIONAL MISSIONS STRATEGIST

The Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association seeks a full-time associational missions strategist to serve the 76 churches in beautiful northwest Alabama. For more information or to apply, please go to cbaptist.com.

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TAB EXTRAS

TAB DIGITAL

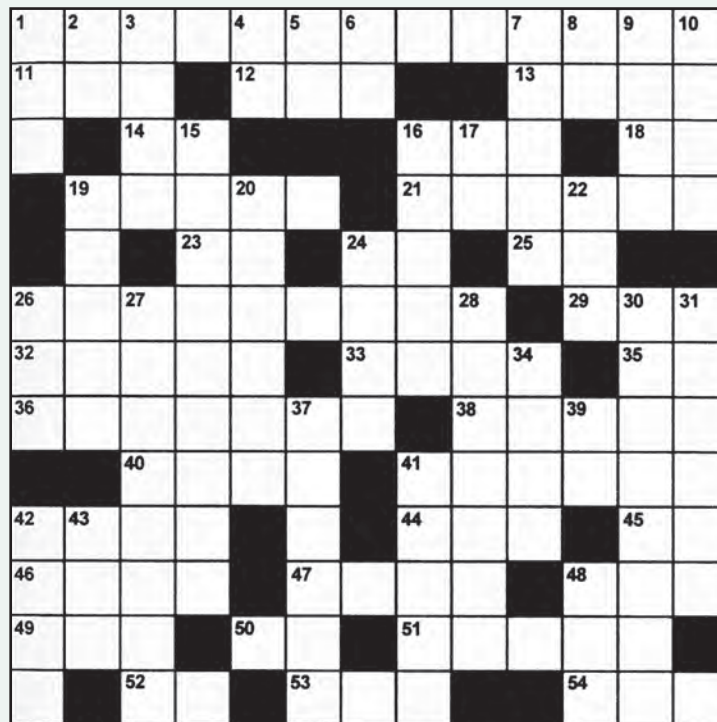
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CHRISTIAN crossword



ACROSS

1. They ... delivered him to _____ the governor. (Matt. 27:2; 2 words)
11. Despise not ____ of these little ones. (Matt. 18:10)
12. Standing Room Only. (abbr.)
13. Unknown writer. (abbr.)
14. Ye shall be ____ gods. (Gen. 3:5)
16. ____ Francisco.
18. Come from God, and went ____ God. (John 13:3)
19. To hold onto something with your hands.
21. Fathers. (Span.)
23. Lower case. (abbr.)
24. Missouri. (abbr.)
25. Thus.
26. For mine eyes have seen thy _____. (Luke 2:30)
29. I will let down the _____. (Luke 5:5)
32. A high standard.
33. His raiment white as _____. (Matt. 28:3)
35. There was ____ strength in him. (1 Sam. 28:20)
36. Cleanest, best arranged.
38. With many other _____ did he testify. (Acts 2:40)
40. Thou didst _____ upon thine horses. (Hab. 3:8)
41. A group of singers or part of a song.
42. ____ Domini.
44. The ... multitude ... _____ him to Pilate. (Luke 23:1)
45. In regard to. (abbr.)
46. He cleaveth my _____ asunder. (Job 16:13)
47. The angel ... rolled back the stone from the _____. (Matt. 28:2)



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48. In between, in the midst of. (Gen. 4:26)
 49. 2,000 pounds.
 50. Let there _____ light. (Gen. 1:3)
 51. _____ order. (2 Chron. 29:35; 2 words)
 52. I _____ to prepare a place for you. (John 14:2)
 53. Fish eggs.
 54. Thine asses that were lost three days _____. (1 Sam. 9:20)
- DOWN**
1. Dad.
 2. Pilate wrote a title, and put it _____ the cross. (John 19:19)
 3. Ye know that summer is _____. (Mark 13:28)
 4. Jesus _____ the Savior.
 5. _____ of the Chaldees. (Gen. 15:7)
 6. _____ Abram departed. (Gen. 12:4)
 7. The fame of David went out into all _____. (1 Chron. 14:17)
 8. Sent _____ angel. (Num. 20:16)
 9. To carry something.
 10. Seth called his son's name _____.
 15. Neither is there _____ in any other. (Acts 4:12)
 16. Knife, fork, _____.
 17. Support group for alcoholics.
 19. A level in school.
 20. Climbed.
 22. Ronald. (nickname)
 24. Went up a _____ from the earth. (Gen. 2:6)
 26. Lay not this _____ to their charge. (Acts 7:60)
 27. A wise man will hear and will increase _____. (Prov. 1:5)
 28. In no specific place.
 30. The fear of the Lord is clean, _____ for ever. (Ps. 19:9)
 31. The ship was now ... _____ with waves. (Matt. 14:24)
 34. Abraham took the _____ ..., and laid it upon Isaac. (Gen. 22:6)
 37. One who sends.
 39. Railroad. (abbr.)
 41. Near.
 42. _____ and crafts.
 43. New. (abbr.)
 48. Missing in Action. (abbr.)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

Learn why church insurance is vital

Church insurance. It might not be your favorite topic, but it is necessary — and it's also helpful.

On May 4, 9 a.m.–noon, join Steven Riggins of GuideStone and Lee Wright, state missionary working with church financial resources at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, as they help you understand insurance beyond just knowing you need to have it.

The conversation will cover these topics — property and casualty, workman's compensation, transportation, liability, safety and security. A major discussion

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will be about the rising costs of insurance.

The event will be held at the SBOM in Prattville.

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Revive conference for senior adults

Ready to spend a morning in fellowship with other senior adults and be encouraged through God's Word and a time of music celebration?

If so, plan to come to Revive on May 8 from 9:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. at FBC Birmingham.

J.J. Washington, national director for personal evan-

gelism with NAMB, and Kevin Hamm, pastor of Gardendale FBC, will speak. Karen Peck and New River will provide music for the morning.

You'll be revived in spirit and motivated to continue serving in God's purpose for your life. Admission is free. Visit evangelizeal.org/revive.



WASHINGTON



HAMM



KAREN PECK AND NEW RIVER

98 year old's call to prayer reaches thousands

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Seven days a week, Terry Long's morning starts with an 8 o'clock phone call to Fred Lunsford, a 98-year-old retired pastor in North Carolina.

Nearly 70 others also call Lunsford each day. They've been doing it for nearly 300 days in a row.

"It has become a part of my life. I look forward to it every day," said Long, director of missions for Choctaw Baptist Association and prayer and spiritual renewal specialist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

The purpose of the call is to pray for God to bring revival. The groundwork for it started in 2018, when Lunsford was at a point where he was ready to die as soon as God would let him.

"I was really heavy hearted," said Lunsford, who was 93 at the time and had lost

his wife four years before.

"I was praying, and I said, 'Lord, I just want to go on home. I'm too old to pastor a church anymore or preach, and nobody wants to hear an old preacher like me anyway. I'm no more good; just take me on home.'"

'Why not yet?'

But in that moment in a prayer garden on the mountain near his home in Marble, North Carolina, he sensed God say these words to his heart — "Not yet."

And Lunsford said back, "Why not yet?"

Silence.

He kept going back to the prayer garden each day and asking the same question. And after a few weeks, he said one day he had an encounter with Jesus that would set the tone for his last years on earth.

"God spoke to my heart and said, 'Son, I've been



Photo courtesy of Terry Long

Fred Lunsford (center) prays with Terry Long (left), prayer and spiritual renewal specialist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, and J.B. Burt, pastor of New Vision Baptist Church in Prattville.

with you 70 years preaching the gospel, I've been with you when the storm was raging, I've been with you when the times were good. But I'm going to tell you why not yet: I want you to pray for spiritual awakening. I've extended your years on earth to do my business."

Lunsford said he wept and

repeated the words of Isaiah — "Here am I, send me."

From there, he planned.

Next steps

He preached a revival at the small church where he was a member.

"We had good services, but nobody was saved," Lunsford said. "And I was dis-

appointed; I thought that's what I was supposed to do."

Then he was asked to speak at a prayer conference and was excited, but before it came time to speak, he was struck with temporary blindness. He attempted to pull out thinking he wouldn't be able to do it, but the conference leader urged him to stick with the plan and "just follow the leadership of the Lord."

So Lunsford did, and he shared about prayer. He inspired pastors that day to pray with him for awakening, and since then, it's just kept spreading.

More than 260,000 people are involved in a new level of prayer. The group of nearly 70 pastors continues their morning routine of praying together, focusing on spiritual awakening in the U.S., 1 million souls saved and 100,000 young people called into ministry and missions.



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A team works on a deck at the pastorium of Cold Bay Community Chapel.



Photo courtesy of Jae McKee

YOU'RE NEEDED

Alaska Baptists offer ministry opportunities for your church this summer

Looking for somewhere you or your church can serve this summer?

Alaska Baptists are in need of help with a range of projects that would encourage their ministry, said Jae McKee, who serves as director of missions and church planting for the Alaska Baptist Resource Network.

“Teams coming up are helpful in encouraging our churches and people to engage in missions locally and globally,” he said.

He noted that Alaska Baptists can feel isolated and that they face challenges in reaching the isolated people in their region.

McKee grew up in Alabama but has served in Alaska for more than 30 years, ever since he went there as a short-term missionary in college.

He shared how the help Alaska Baptists receive through their

partnership with Alabama Baptists means everything.

For example, one church in Craig, Alaska, “was ready to throw their hands up and walk away,” but after Alabama Baptists came to help, the church is “now so excited about the Cooperative Program and partnership,” McKee said.

‘Bigger worldview’

“Setting the example of sacrifice, service and selflessness, teams coming here are catalytic in [helping] Alaskans reach our state for Christ and [exposing] our members to a bigger worldview through cooperation together,” he said.

Current needs include:

▶ A team to replace gutters and some of the roof at Filipino Bible Church in Anchorage. Some painting is also needed there.

▶ Individuals to help with a variety of summer camp-related needs.

▶ A retired couple to invest three to six months in ministry to military bases and an apartment complex near Moose Creek Baptist Church in North Pole.

▶ Teams to help with construction projects at various churches.
▶ An adult team to help with Vacation Bible School at First Baptist Church Valdez. (Grace Thornton)

For more information, visit alaskabrn.com/get-involved/mission-opportunities.



Photo courtesy of Jae McKee

An Alabama team works at Liberty Church in Craig, Alaska. The help Alaska Baptists receive through their partnership with Alabama Baptists means everything, says Jae McKee, who serves as director of missions and church planting for the Alaska Baptist Resource Network.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For March 19

Explore the Bible

By Ben Stubblefield

Visiting assistant professor of Christian studies, University of Mobile



I WILL COME AGAIN John 13:31–14:6

Jesus has now prepared and taken His final meal with His disciples, and He's indicated that Judas is His betrayer. Satan enters the room and then Judas. The eyes of Christ lock with the eyes of ancient evil, and He commands, "Whatever you do, do quickly (13:27). Judas departs, and Jesus begins His final and perhaps most intimate sequence of instructions, what some refer to as the Upper Room Discourse, with His disciples.

Honor Through Love (31–35)

Judas has now set the machinery of Christ's betrayal in motion, and so Jesus indicates "now" is the pending moment of His glorification. D.A. Carson refers to this moment as the "shame of the cross" that is also the Lord's "supreme moment of displayed glory." Jesus glorifies the Father in His faithful trust and obedience, and the Father glorifies the Son through His death, resurrection and exaltation.

Jesus prepares His disciples for His absence (v. 33) by explaining to them how they should conduct themselves while He is away (v. 34). The direction is so simple that a toddler could memorize it, yet so profound that all us adults have a hard time keeping it!

It's not new in the sense that nobody ever told folks to love each other. It's new in the summons to its particular quality of love: "as I have loved you." So remarkable, so extraordinary, so sacrificial is Christ's love, such that when we love each other as He has loved us, the world will have no trouble identifying Christ's people (v. 35).

Honor Through Loyalty (36–38)

Alarmed by Jesus' announced departure, Peter asks a follow-up question irrespective of the new commandment, and more focused on knowing what Jesus is up to. The Master knows what Peter doesn't: that His atoning death cannot be replicated or replaced (v. 36).

Faithful Peter makes a faithful

oath, but it is one made after good food, among pleasant company, and in relative security. Before the rooster crows, the confidence of the apostle will wane in the darkness, among enemies, in reach of danger (vv. 37–38).

Our brother Peter leaves us his example to learn from. Our high ideals are easy to herald in front of applauding listeners. But when we are derided, threatened, tested, Jesus asks us as He asked Peter, "Will you lay down your life for Me?" Our times are not so dissimilar, and, most certainly there is an hour of testing upon us. We would do well to learn the lesson lest we too should fear the rooster crowing.

Honor Through Believing (1–4)

It would be natural to think that Jesus should be troubled, and the disciples should be comforting Him. Instead, His disciples are troubled, and Jesus works to comfort them. In what is a clear claim to His divinity, Jesus invites them to extend their confidence in God to Him (v. 1), and believe that His going away is actually for their greater good (vv. 2–3).

Indeed, He goes to prepare a place for them that they may be forever where He is. Although many singable hymns describe a mansion for each of us when we get to glory, it is not clear that Jesus has this in mind.

He focuses more on His provision of a place for each of His disciples to belong. And what comforting news! Nobody gets left out of the Father's house because there's room enough for all.

"But how do we get there?" Thomas asks. And it's a sensible question, given what Thomas knew at the time. And Jesus responds unforgettably: "I am the way" (v. 6). Our promise of coming glory is guaranteed by the person, Jesus Christ. It's calm for the troubled and balm for the wounded, the truth that Jesus' work didn't stop at Calvary; no, He's just preparing a place for me at His return.

Bible Studies for Life

By James R. Strange

Professor of biblical and religious studies, Samford University



JESUS GAVE ME GRACE AND FORGIVENESS John 8:2–11

As we study this series of powerful encounters with Jesus, may we encounter Him anew.

Today we read of the encounter titled "The Woman Caught in Adultery" in Christian tradition and some Bible headings. The lessons in this encounter apply in any situation where people act unjustly in the name of religious rectitude.

I had broken God's law and deserved punishment. (2–6a)

Some translations indicate the passage appears in different places or not at all in early copies of John, and that it appears in some copies of Luke. "The temple" could refer to the Court of the Gentiles, the largest area of the temple platform, or the Court of Women, which non-Jews could not enter.

If the woman was caught in the act of adultery, we expect someone to ask, "Why are these men threatening and humiliating only the woman? Where is the man?"

The men's claim about the law of Moses betrays their distortion of Scripture (7:19).

Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:23 require both the man and the woman to be punished.

Deuteronomy 22:24–27 excuses a woman who cries for help.

There is no provision for punishing a woman alone.

We have no record of this punishment being carried out, probably because Jewish texts laid out such exacting requirements for evidence and witnesses that it was nearly impossible to reach a guilty verdict.

Additionally, Jews had no authority to carry out capital punishment in Jesus' day.

These men didn't mean to kill the woman. In their desire to charge Jesus with violating the law of Moses, they were willing to permanently stigmatize her.

Ironically and insidiously, it was

they who followed neither Roman law nor Torah and who acted unjustly.

All of us are guilty of sinning against God. (6b–9)

From the beginning, people have wondered what Jesus wrote on the ground.

Some Byzantine copies of John said He was listing the men's sins. The crowd might have recognized that Jesus was enacting Jeremiah's condemnation of those who turn away from God (Jer. 17:13).

Note Jesus' initial silence, which resembled His actions at His own trial (Matt. 26:63, Mark 14:61).

When He stood to answer, His language unmasked their violation of Torah and their abuse of power.

By leaving one by one, they betrayed their true motivations. Sin or no sin, they could have brought the woman's partner and the witnesses and gone on with their trial. This was never their intention.

**"Let him who
is without sin
among you be the
first to throw a
stone at her."**

John 8:7

Jesus showed me grace and forgave me. (10–11)

Jesus didn't ask the woman for a confession. What she had done

seems beyond dispute. Rather, He absolved her of her offense.

The traditional title, "The Woman Caught in Adultery," preserves the memory of a sin Jesus pardoned.

I hope that in Jerusalem, people remembered what she did from that moment forward.

Rather than focusing on the woman's history, John presents an episode in which Jesus acted out the confession of John the Baptist in 1:29.

He is indeed the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

He confronted the men's sin, forgave the woman's sin and admonished her against future sin.

Along the way, He warns us against the sins of injustice, impure intentions and rationalizing both through a misuse of Scripture.

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Tracy Riggs Frontz

The Alabama Baptist

Jinger Duggar Vuolo shares about the Father's care in new book

Jinger Duggar Vuolo, wife, mother and author, grew up with ultraconservative values, but in recent years the TV daughter says she's disentangled her faith while still holding on to her belief in Jesus.

She chronicles this journey in her new book, "Becoming Free Indeed: My Story of Disentangling Faith from Fear."

Vuolo grew up in the spotlight. When she was 10 years old, a documentary, "14 Children and Pregnant Again" was filmed about her family, the Duggars.

Weekly TV shows

This was followed by more specials before the weekly TV show "19 Kids and Counting" began airing in 2008. The show ran for 10 seasons and was followed by "Counting On" about some of the older children, including Vuolo, and their lives after getting married.

Raised in a household that emphasized large families, homeschooling, aversion to debt and other conservative values, Vuolo started asking questions during her 20s. The book explores her spiritual and emotional growth. The book is not a tell-all of the Duggar family — it's purely an account of how



Photo courtesy of Jinger Duggar Vuolo

JINGER DUGGAR VUOLO

she grew in her faith independent from her famous family.

Vuolo said it is painful to go through this process. She noted it is "hard and you think, 'Man, maybe I'm gonna lose friendships ... but realizing ... you come out on the other side stronger with a greater view of who God is, a greater view of His love for His children,'" Vuolo explained.

Though her childhood included a lot of fun activities such as racing unicycles and amazing experiences like traveling to Ireland and Scotland with her large family, she lived in fear. This fear stemmed from trying to live by the rules her family set combined with her intense desire to please God.

Consequences vs. grace

She was constantly worried about the consequences of breaking a rule in a discipline system that em-

phasized consequences rather than grace.

In "Becoming Free Indeed," Vuolo shared how her family played a game called broomball. Though she loved playing the game with her siblings, she was afraid she should be praying and reading the Bible instead.

Judgmental attitude

This also led to a judgmental attitude, both of herself and those around her.

Vuolo remembered, "I would view my friends who decided to do something different in their lives ... and say, 'You're bringing disaster on yourself.' Because my friend started wearing pants, I thought, 'Oh no. ... What's going to happen to her?'"

What changed Vuolo was personal Bible study. "Scripture speaks about modesty, but what is modesty? It's an issue of the heart," she realized.

Vuolo wrote "Becoming Free Indeed" to combat what she came to see as the false teachings she and some of her sisters had encouraged in their earlier book "Growing Up Duggar: It's All About Relationships." She felt a responsibility to speak, she said, to "correct" what she had publicly advocated for as a younger woman.



Through all this disentangling, Vuolo hasn't given up on Christianity or the church. Even in the brokenness and confusion she has experienced, Vuolo is convinced God established the local church.

She admitted, "[Going to church] can be so tough for someone like you, for someone like me. We have to realize, 'OK. People will fail us, even within the church, sadly.' But that does not discount the Word of God. That does not discount the importance of being in a local body of believers who can help us and

encourage us on this journey of faith and through the ups and downs of life."

"Yes, it was challenging. Yes, I walked through these hardships. But where else could I turn? God has all the answers in Scripture. I want to run to Him and not trust in any teacher, in any

man, but to entrust myself fully to my loving heavenly Father's care," Vuolo asserted.

'Because the Bible says so'

"No matter what I want to do, I want to get in the Word of God. Whether I'm doing something or not doing something, it's gonna be because the Bible says so."

"Becoming Free Indeed" is available wherever books are sold.

"God has all the answers in Scripture. I want to run to Him and not trust in any teacher, in any man, but to entrust myself fully to my loving heavenly Father's care."

Jinger Duggar Vuolo
wife, mother and author

EDITOR'S NOTE

Reviews of films, books, music or other media that appear in TAB are intended to help readers evaluate current media for themselves, their children and grandchildren in order to decide whether to watch, read or listen. Reviews are not an endorsement by the writer or TAB Media.

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Seeing lives transformed

By Jayson Larson
Southern Baptist Texan

SBTC gifting portable baptistries to church planters

The Southern Baptists of Texas Convention will provide portable baptistries for church plants that plant through Send Network SBTC, the convention's executive director Nathan Lorick recently announced.

Though this initiative began Jan. 1, 2023, SBTC will also make the opportunity available to any Send Network SBTC church plants that launched in 2022.

The gift of baptistries, which can often be costly, will be a practical and welcome tool for church planters who often operate on tight budgets and with limited resources.

Lorick noted the heart of the effort to provide baptistries is to serve and resource planters as they launch new churches across the state.

Tangible way to help

One of the most tangible ways to do this, he said, is by helping them take the gospel to the people in their community.

"I love church planters. I know they face unique challenges as they work diligently to fulfill the calling God has on their lives," Lorick said.

'Awesome privilege'

"As they see lives transformed," he said, "we also want them to have the opportunity to celebrate as churches by being able to baptize those who have come to Christ. It is an awesome privilege to provide church plants with a tool like this as they seek to reach their communities for Christ."

Send Network SBTC director Julio Arriola said the gift of baptistries "has the potential to make a difference in dozens of churches every year."

"We believe in our church planters, and we know they are doing what they are called to do — engaging their communities with the gospel and making disciples of Jesus," Arriola said.

Send Network SBTC leaders not only understand the limited funds



Photo courtesy of the Southern Baptist Texan

Portable baptistries, similar to the one shown here, have been provided for church plants that plant through Send Network SBTC since Jan. 1, 2023, SBTC Executive Director Nathan Lorick has announced.

planters have, Arriola said, but also the logistical challenges they face when they do not have their own baptistries. Those planters often are forced to find alternative locations or means to baptize the people they reach.

The end of 2022 marked the end of the first full year of the church planting partnership between SBTC and Send Network SBTC.

During that time, Arriola noted,

"We have seen more churches planting churches than we have seen since 2005." The network has started English and Spanish Send Network assessment retreats for Texas planters, and it also has been working on developing church planting residencies, he added.

TO READ MORE STORIES LIKE THIS ABOUT TEXAS BAPTISTS, VISIT TEXANONLINE.NET.

EDITOR'S NOTE

— This story was originally published by the Southern Baptist Texan.

THE GIFT OF BAPTISTRIES

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JULIO ARRIOLA
SEND NETWORK SBTC DIRECTOR



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'Shared gifts'

By Ken Camp
Baptist Standard

Pastor uses Koinonia Karate classes to connect to Texas community

Most Christians familiar with the New Testament Greek word “koinonia” think of it only in terms of fellowship and communion.

But it also can mean shared gifts, and that’s how pastor Matt Richard views the karate classes he teaches two nights a week in the gymnasium of First Baptist Church Llano, Texas.

Richard uses his giftedness in martial arts to connect with his community and teach character-building lessons, particularly — but not exclusively — to children.

“There’s not any preaching or Bible study,” Richard explained, but he does see biblical applications to the discipline he is teaching.

“Students learn self-control, and that’s a fruit of the Spirit. It’s not hard to make the spiritual connections,” he said.

Richard began studying karate as a preschooler in Nederland, Texas. Born prematurely at only 2 pounds, his parents wanted to involve him in an activity that would help him overcome early developmental issues with physical coordination.

‘Obsessed ... for a while’

Instructor Mike Maxwell bent the rules a bit to allow 3-year-old Richard to begin lessons in the 5-and-under class at the Fight Dragons Karate School. At age 11, he earned his black belt in karate.

“I was obsessed with it for a while,” Richard acknowledged, frequently taking part in competitive breaking tournaments.

After he became a Christian at age 15, he began to wonder how he might merge his skills and his newfound commitment to Christ.



Photo courtesy of Baptist Standard

Matt Richard (right), pastor of First Baptist Church Llano, Texas, believes he can incorporate Christian principles such as self-control into martial arts instruction as he teaches a Koinonia Karate class to children in the church gym.

“I thought I might be able to do something evangelistically, but I never did,” he said.

Richard continued to keep his karate skills sharp as a student at East Texas Baptist University. When he pursued studies at Baylor University’s Truett Seminary, he regularly sparred with another student in the recreation center at Columbus Avenue Baptist Church in Waco.

After FBC Llano called him as pastor three years ago, he learned there were no martial arts classes available in town.

He wanted to offer a class for his own son, and he saw an opportunity for outreach.

The church’s missions committee agreed to provide up to \$1,000 to

launch the Koinonia Karate program, charging students a relatively minimal fee.

“We try to keep it accessible and affordable,” Richard explained. “It’s a ministry of the church. It’s not about making money.”

Richard limits lessons to two nights a week to preserve evenings at home with his wife, Michelle, and their two children.

“I’m looking for balance and making time for my family,” he said.

Koinonia Karate takes a more relaxed approach to its classes.

“There’s no pressure. I tell students, ‘Try it out and see if it’s a good fit for you,’” Richard said. In fact, his own son did not choose to continue taking karate.

Koinonia Karate classes for children age 6 and older have proven popular. He also teaches teenage and adult students, who participate in a second class he offers.

Richard recognizes some Christians view the martial arts with suspicion, either because of connections to Eastern religions or because they are seen as promoting violence.

Christian principles

In terms of Buddhist and Taoist influence on karate, Richard teaches only those principles consistent with Christianity, such as respect, humility, perseverance and self-control.

“Koinonia Karate is based on my own ethos” as a follower of Christ, he noted. “It’s about coordinating the body and mind.”

As he teaches karate techniques, Richard emphasizes to students the importance of avoiding physical conflict.

“The goal is to never hurt anybody. It’s only to protect yourself or someone else, and it should only be used as a last measure,” he said.

The classes attract “a healthy mix” of church members and non-members, but the majority of students are from families who are not already part of the church, Richard noted.

The karate classes represent just one way Richard seeks to connect to his community.

“That’s an advantage to being in a place like Llano,” he said.

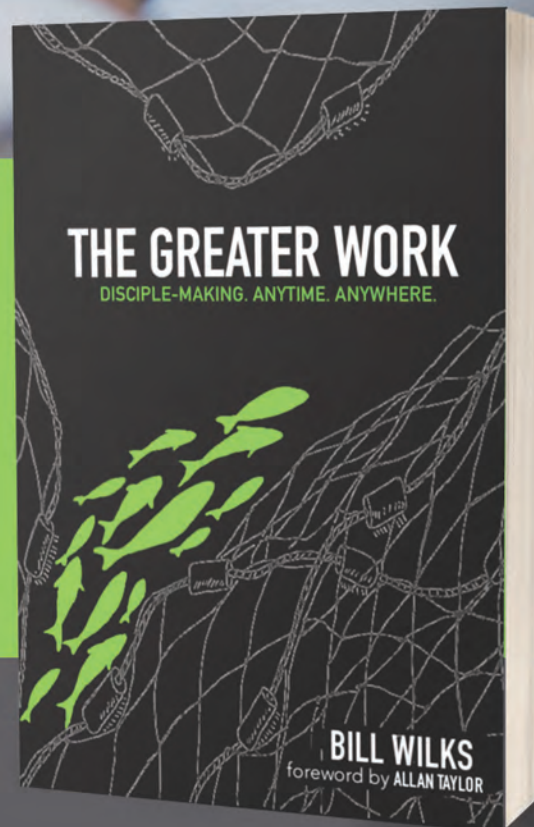
“You’re not just pastor of the church. In time, you get to [serve] a community.”

EDITOR’S NOTE — This story was originally published by Texas Baptist Standard.

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Testimony of God's grace

By Brian Hobbs
Baptist Messenger

She left transgender life, now embraces fresh start

Approximately six years ago, Laura surrendered her life to Christ and then walked away from the transgender life, embracing her God-given female gender.

Laura returned home to her parents, Paul and Francine, who were members of First Baptist Church Bartlesville, Oklahoma.

After years of struggle and ruptured family relationships, God began the healing work.

'I had no hope'

"When I walked away from the transgender life, I honestly thought I would be miserable for the rest of my life," Laura said.

"I knew the Lord was asking me to leave it all, but I had no hope of transformation.

"I didn't understand the healing God could bring."

Since her radical life transformation, Laura has shared her story in several settings, including at churches and Christian events.

She now works with a local ministry called First Stone Ministries that seeks to bring help and hope to families affected by LGBTQ-related issues.

Laura was increasingly content in her role and accepted her singleness.

Meanwhile, Perry Smalts, who currently serves as worship leader and associate pastor at Baptist Temple of Oklahoma



LAURA AND PERRY SMALTS

Photo courtesy of Baptist Messenger

City, also thought he would remain single.

He said that neither he nor Laura had dated for six years.

Through mutual friends, God allowed the couple to meet, and they became friends.

What Laura and Perry did not realize at the time was that the Lord was bringing them together. After months of dating, the two would become husband and wife.

Many twists and turns in life led up to their wedding day in May, a ceremony which was attended by

beloved friends and family who had prayed for Laura for many years.

"This is a testimony to how the

Lord has redeemed her life," Perry said. "Some people ask if I had problems with her past life. No. The person that she once was no longer exists."

He added, "When she asked Christ into her heart, she became a new person. Her old life is gone, and a new life has begun."

Perry marvels at God's grace available to every person.

"Isn't that wonderful that God's grace is greater than our worst sin? I think that sometimes we don't

like people who have a different sin than we have," he said.

"It makes people uncomfortable, but God's grace is for all of us," he noted. "Whether we've sinned big or little. It's just a wonderful testimony that brings God glory."

God has continued to help each of them work through their personal issues.

"I realized that I had to stop looking at him [Perry] through the lens of my past and choose to trust him," Laura said. "God has used him to bring so much healing."

'Reflection of the gospel'

"It's such a reflection of the gospel and how God begins to reveal Himself to us," she said. "We have to stop looking at God through the lies that we believed in the past and start choosing to believe His word. This is very powerful to me."

Today the couple have made their home in Oklahoma City as they seek to share in the ministry together.

They host a couples Bible study in their home and remain active in their local church.

Laura continues to speak and share her testimony.

When asked what advice Laura would give to families affected by LGBTQ issues or other relationship

issues, she said, "Never ever give up on your prayers! I know people were praying for me."

"God may not reveal it for a long time, but God was still working on me the whole time."

A new podcast interview with Laura and Perry Smalts is available now on baptist-messenger.com/podcast.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story was originally published by Baptist Messenger.

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Photo courtesy of Baptist Messenger
After months of dating, Perry and Laura Smalts celebrate their wedding with joy.