

The Alabama Baptist

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March 23, 2023

Vol. 188, No. 12
Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



Children play games at a block party hosted by Iglesia Cristiana Biblica Fe as part of Serve Tour Montgomery.

Photo by Doug Rogers

Building community

More than 900 volunteers converge on Montgomery area for Serve Tour

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

I know God sent you to me today.” Those were the words spoken by one Montgomery-area school administrator to Candace McIntosh and her Serve Tour team March 10.

“At two of the three schools, as we were praying over the administrators, there were tears shed,” said McIntosh, executive director

of Alabama Woman’s Missionary Union. “It was a vivid reminder that these people are on the front line with these students, and they have a hard job. We need to come alongside them and love them and encourage them in any way we can.”

Dozens of projects

Visiting, supporting and helping out at local schools was one component of Serve Tour Montgomery,

held March 10–11. Serve Tour is a missional experience organized by Send Relief, the compassion ministries arm of the Southern Baptist Convention, in cooperation with state and local Baptist leaders and volunteers from across the country.

During the two-day event, more than 900 volunteers spread out over four counties in the River Region — Montgomery, Elmore, Autauga and Lowndes — to help with build-

ing projects, assist local churches in outreach, serve in hunger-related ministry and meet other needs.

Overall, those volunteers — who came from 79 churches across 12 states — completed 50 projects and served nearly 3,000 people, not including the 10 schools and eight churches where they worked.

Projects ranged from serving an appreciation dinner for nurses to (See ‘Meeting,’ page 10)

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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 15.



Canva photo

Join security experts from the Center for Personal Protection and Safety and Counter Threat Group on April 27 for the seminar Church Safety: A Holistic Approach. The seminar will be held at Samford University in Birmingham.

TAB Media Group to co-sponsor church safety seminar in April

By Jessica Ingram

The Alabama Baptist

Usually considered safe havens, houses of worship have increasingly come under attack in recent years. Every church, no matter its size, location or denomination, should have procedures in place to protect congregants.

A few strategic steps church leaders can take are to implement safety policies, train teams and teach congregants.

Church security begins with threat assessment.

Learning situational awareness and being able to spot threatening behaviors are key.

But developing and implementing these procedures can feel overwhelming. Questions to consider include (but are not limited to):

- ▶ How do we make policies?
- ▶ Who will make up the security team and how do we train members?
- ▶ What does church safety look like practically on days when the

doors are open for worship?

Join experts from the Center for Personal Protection and Safety and Counter Threat Group for an April 27 seminar that will help answer those questions and more.

Church Safety: A Holistic Approach will offer practical tips as well as preview CPPS' new Safe Church Program.

Dan Graeber, vice president of faith-based initiatives for CPPS, will lead the seminar.

Graeber has more than 30 years in training and management and has held positions as a pastoral support team leader and men's outreach coordinator, among others. He also is a licensed security consultant and member of FBI Infragard and Homeland Security Information Network.

To learn more about CPPS and its resources for churches, visit cpps.com/houses-of-worship-overview.

Visit Counter Threat Group's website at counterthreatgrp.com.

The seminar is sponsored by CPPS, CTG, Samford University's Ministry Training Institute and TAB Media Group. It will be held in Birmingham at Samford's Sullivan-Cooney Field House from 8:15 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. Lunch will not be provided, but coffee and light snacks will be available. The cost to attend is \$20 per person.

To register, visit tabonline.org/church-safety-seminar.

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

(ISSN 0738-7741; USPS 011-080)
© The Alabama Baptist, Inc.

is published weekly except for one week in July and December by The Alabama Baptist, Inc., at 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209. Phone: 205-870-4720. Statewide phone: 800-803-5201. Website: www.thealabamabaptist.org Email: news@thealabamabaptist.org or subscribe@thealabamabaptist.org Periodicals postage paid at Hattiesburg, Miss.

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RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

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



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Stronger beacons of hope, stability needed in this chaotic world

News headlines hovered over a variety of billion-dollar transactions last week.

The Alabama Legislature and Gov. Kay Ivey agreed in the recent Special Session on how to spend the \$1.06 billion available to the state by the pandemic-induced American Rescue Plan.

It only took a few days to finalize how to designate the money. A group that spends much of its time debating — and many times arguing — worked together toward a common good for the state.

Around that same time, 11 of the nation's largest banks came together to rescue First Republic Bank with a \$30-billion infusion, which not only helped that bank's customers but also the broader public by slowing the falling stock market.

I saw a demonstration of competitors looking out for the whole rather than clinching selfish gains.

In Arizona, the city of Glendale stood to rake in close to a billion dollars with Taylor Swift's Eras tour launching March 17, the day after the No. 2 seed University of Arizona Wildcats had their NCAA Tournament journey squashed in the first round by the No. 15 Princeton Tigers 59–55.

Positive economic boost within the state, even as Arizona sports fans grieved the March Madness

loss. And who doesn't love a Cinderella story? We know the Princeton and Furman fans do.

All of this was taking place while the U.S. military searched for its multiple million-dollar drone downed in the Black Sea near Crimea, reminding us of the billions of dollars needed to help Ukrainians continue to protect their borders and assist with the humanitarian crisis.

Another humanitarian crisis continues in Somalia with more than 8 million people needing aid. The crisis stems from a 30-year civil war, political instability and severe drought conditions.

It's hard to find a silver lining within the humanitarian crises, but

we can be hopeful in the work being done by people of faith to help. It also reminds us to pray.

Helpful reminders

In fact, we all need reminders from time to time that while we are tempted to spend time fretting over minor issues or trying to prove ourselves right about various topics, a large percentage of the world's nearly 8 billion people are in true life-and-death situations right now.

Similar to how the financial experts keep saying "stay the course" — that remaining steady and trusting the system is the best course of action — we should also keep our focus on who and whose we are as Christians. We should trust the

Lord and stay the course and prevent creating self-fulfilling prophecies through fear.

The March 17 Eternal Perspective section from The Pour Over e-newsletter said, "Even if things only get worse God will still be God, and He will remain in control. Our eternity is secure, even in the midst of uncertainty on Earth."

If Christians need this reminder from time to time, then how much more do unbelievers need to know about the Hope and security found in Christ?

What are ways we can share that Hope each day? How can our churches become stronger beacons of light and stability amid the chaos swirling around us?

Simple way to learn more about Baptist beliefs, BF&M

With the current need for all of us to fully understand the constitution of the Southern Baptist Convention and the latest version of the Baptist Faith and Message, we've been thinking about ways to help.

We'll be sharing various historical pieces, information directly from both documents and other research between now and the SBC Annual Meeting in June.

The Alabama Baptist also partners with Samford University's Ministry Training Institute to offer classes on-site at our office

in Homewood (with a Zoom option included) and the next class focuses on exactly what we need to study.

Check out the Spring B term of Baptist Doctrines (ZMTI 114) and consider registering.

8-week course

The term runs March 28 through May 16, each Tuesday evening starting at 6.

Bill McCall, pastor of The Baptist Church at McAdory, will be the instructor.

The class description states: "Using The Baptist Faith and Message

as a guide, students will deepen their knowledge of historic Baptist beliefs and their relevance to the Church today. Students will also learn more about the uniqueness of Baptist polity among the landscape of denominationalism."

Registration is open through April 25. A minimal fee is charged for the class but scholarships are available.

Contact Dedra Phillips at dgreene@samford.edu for more information.

To register, visit tabonline.org/baptist-doctrines.

Your Voice



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

3 lessons from Ephesians for the 'new you'

By Franklin L. Kirksey
Robertsdale, Ala.

Do you ever feel like you need an extreme makeover? Here is one everyone needs.

Second Corinthians 5:17 reads, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

Major W. Ian Thomas said, "There are those who have a life they never live. They have come to Christ and thanked Him for what He did, but they do not live in the power of who He is."

Ephesians 4:17–24 offers several things believers need to do.

1. Believers need to be challenged

to renounce pagan practices. Ephesians 4:17–19 begins, "This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk ..."

Someone describes these pagans as follows: "They are trying to assemble a great jigsaw puzzle — the 'puzzle' that reveals the answers to life — in the dark." In Romans 1:21, we read of those without Christ, those who "became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened."

When your life is dominated by the pagan practices of sin and selfishness, it is indeed a wasted life.

2. Believers need to be charged to remember perfect precepts.

Jesus

said, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matt. 11:29).

Are you paired up with Jesus Christ in a personal relationship? Walking with Him means self-denial (Luke 9:23–26).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer warns, "Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ."

Vance Havner laments, "The church is not witnessing miracles today because of contention, belligerency, lack of love; by flippancy that makes light of holy things; by self-satisfaction, surfeited and gorged by too much of everything except what we need most."

3. Believers need to be changed to reflect pure principles.

Ephesians 4:22–24 reads, "that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness." The pure principles are "true righteousness and holiness."

We must pursue both (2 Tim. 2:22, Heb. 12:14). However, we must remember the change is not behavior modification; it is biblical transformation (Rom. 12:2).

While we do not work for our salvation (Eph. 2:8–9), we are to work out our salvation (Phil. 2:12b). Remember this, dear believer, as you think about the new you!

Sometimes we just need to wipe the weariness and worry from our eyes so we can see God more clearly. Life's heartaches and stress can blur our vision of who God is and who we are. Today, ask God to open your eyes so you can see Him, His plan and His purposes.

Everything else will come into focus.

Lord, give me a right view of You. When I see You clearly, everything in my life will come into focus. Open the eyes of my heart, Lord. Amen.

Jennifer Rothschild
via Facebook

When words hinder the gospel

Ephesians 4:29 states, "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear."

A biblical principle I have regrettably learned the hard way is the importance of staying under the authority of God when it comes to the use of my tongue.

I always wanted to state my cause, my opinion and my dislike toward the situation I was facing.

Yet instead of helping, I repeatedly became a hindrance to the gospel message.

I often hurt others with my words, as well as my Heavenly Father with my disobedience.

We must seek to honor God in what we say and how we handle situations.

May we allow God's Word to be the guiding force of our communication with others, instead of our emotions.

May we always seek His glory above our own flesh in how we deal with brothers and sisters in Christ.

O'Shea Lowery
Entrusted Hope Ministries
Dallas, Texas

I love this verse: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). I think it's time we as Alabama Baptists turn our lights on "high beam!"

Wayne Honeycutt
Chelsea, Ala.

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
Author, "Becoming Free Indeed: My Story of Disentangling Faith from Fear"

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“Baptism Sunday [April 16] is a good reminder for all of us to keep the main thing the main thing.”

TIM DOWDY

Vice president of evangelism, North American Mission Board

“These days, we hear a lot about transparency. Your local newspapers play an important role in making sure relevant information citizens need to make informed decisions is disclosed,” said **Felicia Mason**, executive director of the Alabama Press Association, and **Darrell Sandlin**, APA president.

“When someone entrusts us with their story, I hope we are equipped to be the refuge God has called His church to be,” said **Brad Hambrick**, general editor of the Southern Baptist curriculum “Becoming a Church that Cares Well for the Abused.”

“I think most Christians today recognize that all people need the-

ology because there’s so much unhealthy and unbiblical theology out there. And a lot of women are discipling other people — their kids and whoever else is in their lives,” said **Phylcia Masonheimer**, author of “Every Woman a Theologian.”

God is faithful. There are lifetimes witnessing to His faithfulness before me, there will be lifetimes telling of His faithfulness after me, and His sovereign hand will be faithful throughout my lifetime as well.

Jessica Ingram

the-scroll.com

“A lifetime of faithfulness”

Time is a man-made thing. God created days; man created hours. “In the beginning, the evening and

the morning were the first day” and so on and so forth for seven days. Time does not bother God as it does us. He is eternal and doesn’t have any watches, clocks or calendars in heaven. One day, we won’t have any either.

Bill King

Opelika, Ala.

Take time and pray for someone you know who is lost. Take time today and think through how you can engage others with the gospel.

I encourage you to pray for a renewed sense of urgency to share the gospel every chance you get.

Nathan Lorick

Executive director

Southern Baptists of Texas

Convention

From the *Twitterverse*

@drtonyevans

To love God means to passionately pursue His glory.

@davidprince

The only thing more costly than following Christ is not following Him.

@johnmarkclifton

In a declining/dying church, the remaining members are not an obstacle to your ministry. They are your ministry. —Henry Blackaby

@ethicist

If you refuse to use your spiritual gift apart from recognition, a title and a paycheck, then you are not serving God but yourself.

@jon_wilke

For a Christian, the end never justifies the means. A project, work or effort must have godly integrity

at every step. God knows our intentions and cares for our character.

@DanielRitchie

A pastor must seek to be a servant before and above seeking to be a leader.

@andrewhebert86

“Christian faith is hope resting on fact — namely, the fact that Jesus rose bodily from the grave.” —JI Packer

@PastorCroft

Pastors, it’s OK to go to bed and let go of all that happened today. Jesus has it.

@revandyfrazier

No matter what people (even those calling themselves Christians) do to you, don’t forget what Christ has done for you. “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world

you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” John 16:33

@greglaurie

The church is the only organization that Jesus started. Jesus said He would build the church ‘and all the powers of hell will not conquer it’ (Matt. 16:18 NLT). Every believer needs to be an active part of the church because it is where we learn about God together.”

@BillyGraham

“Jesus Christ was not just a great teacher or a holy religious leader. He was God Himself in human flesh — fully God and fully man.”

@DBradWhitt

Charles Spurgeon on getting ready to preach — “Kill yourself with work and then pray yourself alive again.”

Are you a ‘just because’ Christian?

Janie, 11, an aspiring soccer star, walked into her bedroom. A gift-wrapped box rested on her bed. She ripped it open.

“A new soccer ball!” Janie shrieked.

“But it’s not Christmas or my birthday,” Janie puzzled.

Mom explained, “I did it just because I love you!”

Jesus’ last four beatitudes teach how to relate with people. The first of those reveals a “just because” present to give and receive — mercy.

It’s more than feeling sorry for someone. Mercy demands actions that forgive, support and relieve pain. Mercy runs to help where it’s needed.

Count mercy among one of God’s main characteristics. You can’t earn it.

You need mercy because of the disaster you’ve made of your life. His forgiveness motivates believers to grant mercy to others. Not because they deserve it. But “just because” you’ve received it.

A Jesus story illustrates mercy given and mercy abused (Matt. 18:23–38).

A king forgave a servant’s massive debt.

The relieved man found a co-worker and demanded repayment of a small debt.

Unable to repay, the co-worker was consigned to debtor’s prison.

Hearing of the forgiven man’s unmerciful actions, the king withdrew mercy.

Failure to practice mercy and forgiveness exposes a lack of openness to God’s mercy.

Are you a “just because” kind of Christian?

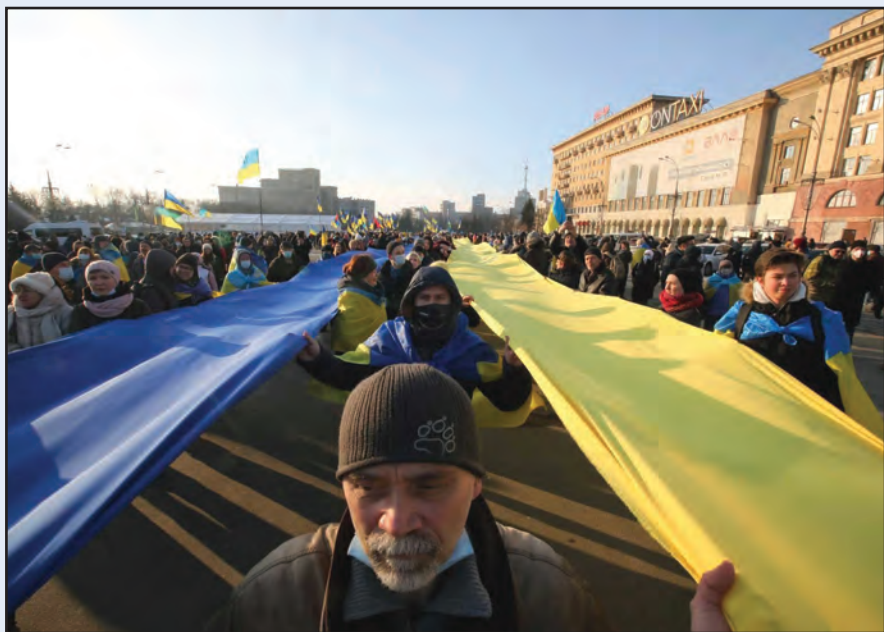
Who are you having trouble forgiving?

Pray for the Lord to heal your unmerciful heart.

Darryl Wood

From “Liberty Living”
Liberty Baptist Church
Chelsea, Ala.

3 stories you should know



Send Relief photo

Russia has amplified its persecution of Christians, Muslims and Jews in its war on Ukraine, participants in a U.S. government hearing said March 15. Panelists said churches have been destroyed and pastors have been murdered, tortured and imprisoned. The hearing, "Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: Implications for Religious Freedom," was hosted by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. Read more at tabonline.org/latest-news. (BP)

The Big Invite helps churches reach out

Congregations in Georgia are turning to The Big Invite to pack out sanctuaries on Easter, but churches in other states are invited to take part in the effort too.

The Big Invite initiative is a way to let people know they are welcome and wanted at Easter services, said Scott Smith, communications director for the Georgia Baptist Mission Board and architect of The Big Invite.

Church leaders can access the resources by setting up an account at thebiginvite.com. The materials include pre-written social media posts and a customized website landing page churches.

"Easter Sunday [is] the best Sunday to preach the gospel to the unchurched if we do a good job of inviting them," Smith said. (The Christian Index)

Correction related to UM Spring Spectacular

The information shared on this page in the March 16 issue about the University of Mobile's upcoming Spring Spectacular noted the event was free, but that was incorrect.

Tickets are \$10 each and may be purchased at the gate or online at umobile.edu/pas.

Spring Spectacular will take place March 24 at 7 p.m. on the Great Commission Lawn.

The evening will showcase the talents of student from UM's Alabama School of the Arts. Ensembles include Voices of Mobile, University Singers, Ignite, Deliverance, Sofree, Jazz Band, RamCorps and more.

A fireworks display will follow the performances.

In case of rain, the event will take place March 25. (UM)

Persecuted church

Church blast in Democratic Republic of Congo kills as many as 16, injures 63

KASINDI, Democratic Republic of Congo — As many as 16 people were killed and possibly 63 others were injured when a bomb exploded Jan. 15 during a baptism service at a Protestant church.

Allied Democratic Forces — a rebel group affiliated with Islamic State — is suspected in the bombing of the Church of Christ of the Congo in Kasindi, Democratic Republic of Congo, reported Morning Star News.

Paluka Kivugha, a church elder, told Morning Star that a bag two men placed inside the church building exploded.

Kivugha and other church members said the explosion propelled bodies into the air and some survivors were missing limbs.

More than 120 armed groups operate in eastern DRC. ADF is among the most lethal of the groups. Though ADF originally was based in western Uganda, it has operated in the North Kivu Province of DRC since the 1990s, states Morning Star.



Photo courtesy of Morning Star News

Two Christian women in Pakistan attacked, threatened

KARACHI, Pakistan — Reports out of Pakistan say two Christian women have been victims of recent attacks and threats.

Sunita Masih, 19, a Pakistani Christian, suffered burns and disfigurement when a Muslim

man threw acid on her because she rejected his marriage proposal. The Feb. 1 attack occurred in Karachi, as Masih exited a bus. The man had been pressuring Masih to renounce Christianity, become Muslim and marry him, a source said. Police took him into custody.

In a separate incident, Pakistani widow Samina Mushtaq was threatened with a false charge of blasphemy by a Muslim colleague after she refused his demand that she violate workplace rules, Morning Star News reported.

On Jan. 7, the supervisor demanded that Mushtaq, a security official with Pakistan's Civil Aviation Authority, allow an unauthorized vehicle into a certain area at Jinnah International Airport in Karachi. When Mushtaq refused, Salim threatened to accuse her of blasphemy. After Mushtaq posted a video to social media, he was temporarily suspended from work.

Alabama news

AUTAUGA ASSOCIATION

► **Calvary Baptist Church, Prattville**, is hosting an Easter Egg Hunt on Saturday, April 8, 10 a.m.–12 p.m.

BETHEL ASSOCIATION

► **Nanafalia Baptist Church** is hosting homecoming April 9, 11 a.m., followed by lunch in the fellowship hall. An offering will be taken to support the cemetery fund.

Tommy Campbell is pastor.

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

► **Michael Adler**, longtime worship pastor of **Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills**, retired March 5.

A Wisconsin native, Adler was part of Truth, a contemporary group made up of touring musicians and singers that existed from 1971 through 2001, before starting in church music ministry.

He previously served Castle Hills Baptist Church, San Antonio, Texas, and Bell Shoals Baptist Church, Brandon, Florida.

For Adler's final service after 22 years of ministry at Shades Mountain, he was joined by several worship leaders who served with him over the years: Logan Creasy, associate pastor of worship arts & communication, First Baptist Church Douglasville, Georgia; Jake Adler, worship arts director, The Ridge Church, Ankeny, Iowa; Bobby Smith, executive pastor of worship & arts, Johnson Ferry Baptist Church, Marietta, Georgia; Chuck Hooten, GC Project, Knoxville, Tennessee; Preston Michael Lovinggood, singer/songwriter, Nashville, Tennessee; Paxton Brittle, worship pastor, Double Oak Community Church, Chelsea; and Abbey Plant, Samford University's promotion, community engagement and resource coordinator for the Center for Worship and the Arts. Members and guests also joined a churchwide reception to celebrate Adler and his ministry.

He and his wife, Linda, have four children and four grandchildren. They own The Barn at Shady Lane, a wedding and event venue in Birmingham.

► The Evelyn S. Hardy Men of Distinction, a male chorus based out of Sixth Avenue Baptist Church, Birmingham, and the Warblers Club, a male chorus based out of Woodlawn High School's Warblers Club which existed from 1929 to 1977, are combining forces April 29–30 to raise support for Discovery Clubs, which are



Photo courtesy of Eleanor Stenner

after-school Bible clubs for first through fourth graders throughout the area. Sponsored by the **Birmingham Metro Baptist Association**, the combined choirs will perform April 29, 5 p.m., and April 30, 3 p.m., at Sixth Avenue Baptist.

"We believe it will have historic impact," said Michael Ethridge, BMBA director of operations.

There is a limit of 800 tickets per show. For Saturday tickets, visit tabonline.org/saturday. For Sunday tickets, go to tabonline.org/sunday.

COOSA RIVER ASSOCIATION

► **Casey Mitchell** is the new student pastor of **First Baptist Church Talladega**. He is bivocational and works in sales with Alabama Specialty Products.

Previously, he served as volunteer student minister of Stockdale Baptist Church, Munford, and as part of Talladega Creek Baptist Church's praise team. While at Talladega Creek, Mitchell was licensed as a minister of the gospel. He completed FBC's pastoral intern program in May 2022.

He attended Central Alabama Community College and has received several diplomas through Samford University's Ministry



MITCHELL

Training Institute. Mitchell is currently enrolled at Leavell College, the undergraduate program of New Orleans Seminary.

He is married to Courtney.

SHELBY ASSOCIATION

► **Southcrest Baptist Church, Bessemer**, will host southern gospel group Trusting Grace on April 7, 7 p.m. Supper is at 6.

Scott Bush is pastor.

OTHER

► **Kyle Johnson** is the new discipleship pastor and student minister of **Lake Ellen Baptist Church, Crawfordville, Florida**, the church where Johnson was called into ministry, licensed, ordained and sent out.

He previously served as pastor of Union Hill Baptist Church, Cottonwood, Southeast Alabama Baptist Association, for 12 years.

He and his wife, Amy, have four children and are expecting a fifth.



JOHNSON

Submissions should be sent to news@thealabamabaptist.org.

The Discipleship Network of Alabama presents awards



Photo courtesy of Steve Layton

The Discipleship Network of Alabama recently presented its three annual awards. The Andrew Smith Legacy Leader Award was awarded to the late Bill Reed, who served as minister of education for 24 years at Shades Mountain Baptist Church, and was presented to Lisa Davis (center), Shades' discipleship minister, who accepted the award on behalf of Reed's widow, Marlene. The Daniel Edmonds Disciple Making Leader Award — named in honor of Edmonds (left), who serves as

director of the office of Sunday School & discipleship at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions — was presented to Spencer Knight (second from left), minister of ministries at Hunter Street Baptist Church in Hoover. And the Topper Reid Emerging Leader Award was presented to Justin Law (second from right), associate pastor for discipleship at FBC Montgomery. Steve Layton (right) is an associate in the SBOM office of Sunday School & discipleship.

Driving Hope meets needs by providing cars

In 2018, Jimmie Hale Mission — which aims to help people out of homelessness, poverty and addiction — got a call from Roger Brown, a master mechanic with a burden.

“He came to us and said he was interested in helping people get cars,” said Scotty Colson, community relations co-ordinator for Jimmie Hale Mission. “He had it on his heart to make it a ministry.”

It wasn’t long before Driving Hope Ministries was born, a ministry where Brown accepts donated cars and works on them to make them dependable.

Gift of a vehicle

Brown then gives the fixed-up cars to clients at Jimmie Hale Mission and

its three other facilities.

Brown said he’s “passionate about it because it gives me an opportunity to use the gifts that God has given me to be a blessing to others.”

Work transportation

So far, 15 people have received vehicles, with the latest four presented March 4.

Colson said Rayshaun Bradley, one of the clients who received a car that day, went to two job interviews the following Monday and was able to get a good job offer as a diesel repairman at a trucking company.

In the years since the ministry started, the cars have often made it to the recipients at the perfect time, Colson said.



Photo courtesy of Jimmie Hale Mission

Roger Brown (center), executive director of Driving Hope Ministries, gifts cars to Jimmie Hale Mission clients Corey Bass (left) and Rayshaun Bradley. Reliable transportation is often the main thing standing between an individual and steady employment.

One woman who received a vehicle at an earlier giveaway was able to get a minivan she could use for

a catering business she had started.

Driving Hope Ministries “has been a blessing for all

involved,” Colson said.

For more information, visit drivinghopeministries.org.

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'TIME OF FRUIT'

Tuscaloosa church planting story leads to 'hundreds' of students 'fixated on the mission'

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

When Britton Latham was serving as a youth pastor in Huntsville, he kept hearing a story repeated over and over.

"We would graduate high school students and send them out all over the place to college," he said. "When they would come back, a lot had been gone four years and had never really found community, never really been leveraged for ministry. They had been encouraged but not used, and a lot struggled and dried up spiritually during their years in college."

But then someone came home with a different story.

"One of my students had gone to the University of North Alabama and came back and said, 'I found this church that is making disciples and building real community,'" Latham said.

That church — The Well Church Florence — was a church plant of Highland Baptist Church. Allen Tate, who serves as its pastor and now also as executive director of The Well Network, planted the church in 2016 from Highland Baptist's weekly student worship service, called The Well.

The idea behind the church, and now the network, was to help college students become disciple-makers who build the Kingdom through the local church.

Tate shared all that with Latham when the two met for coffee in 2019. Latham had initiated that meeting because he wanted to express appreciation to Tate for what they were doing and learn more about it.

But something unexpected happened.

Tate said they felt that "the Lord kind of knit us together before we knew each other."



Photo courtesy of Church at the Oaks

In January 2021, Church at the Oaks held its launch service at a Tuscaloosa hotel. In August 2021, the church moved to the Bryant Conference Center on the University of Alabama campus, and they've been meeting there ever since.

"His heart burden was the same thing we were attempting to do," he said.

Latham loved his church in Huntsville, but he soon felt God calling him to start another church as part of The Well Network — Church at the Oaks in Tuscaloosa, which is home to the University of Alabama. After a few months in residence at TWC Florence, he and his wife, Jessica, moved to Tuscaloosa in January 2020.

"We started a launch team that would be interested in planting a disciple-making driven church in Tuscaloosa that would have a focus on both the city and the campus," Latham said.

'Press on and press in'

They started with six or seven people meeting in their living room, but soon after, the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

"We were confident in the Lord's calling, so there was nothing else

to do but press on and press in," he said.

With some support from the State Board of Missions, they started with discipleship groups called huddles, then added community groups called tribes. In January 2021, Church at the Oaks held its launch service at a hotel in downtown Tuscaloosa.

"The community groups continued to grow, and the discipleship groups started to multiply," Latham said.

Then in August 2021, the church moved to the Bryant Conference Center on the campus of the University of Alabama, and they've been meeting there ever since.

"God just continued to bless," Latham said. "It's just been an incredible time of fruit."

This semester, nearly 100 people are leading either a discipleship

group, a community group or both, he said. "We started with four people who were ready to lead a discipleship group, and we've gone from four people to 100 who are actively engaged in building community and making disciples."

Leading by example

Latham said when he meets with those leaders, "almost all have someone they're reading the Bible with weekly who isn't a believer."

He said he is thankful for that and for the fact that no matter where they go after graduation, they will have learned how to lead in that way and can continue to do it in the future.

"We will have hundreds of people graduating with a passion for church planting and who know how to do the work," Latham said. "We're really fixated on the mission and engaged in it. There's a collective effort toward building the Kingdom, and God's doing the work."

The church also has 11 student interns this semester, all of whom have said they feel a call to missions or ministry of some kind.

"We spend a lot of our time investing in them,

training them and trying to help them engage in experiences that will sharpen them," Latham said.

He said his time in Tuscaloosa has been "a really exciting, fast couple of years."

"It's been the hardest thing I've ever done, but by far the most fruitful thing I've ever been a part of for the Kingdom," Latham said. "It's just a story of God's faithfulness — we're

not doing anything

special, not inventing some incredible strategy. Every story has been a story of God's faithfulness, His power and His provision."



Facebook photo

Students worship during a recent service at Church at the Oaks at the Bryant Conference Center in Tuscaloosa.

Meeting needs in the River Region

Volunteers from 79 churches across 12 states complete projects that will impact 3,000+ people

(continued from page 1)
running a medical and dental clinic to building a privacy fence at a men's shelter. During the weekend, 13 people also made decisions to follow Jesus.

Neal Hughes, director of missions for Montgomery Baptist Association, said it was an "amazing" event.

"It was about Jesus and about the local church engaging their communities with the gospel, and the Send Relief family handled the big picture so well. They just wanted to be a blessing," he said. "If you want to see a picture of the cooperation of

Southern Baptists, this past weekend was it." Davey Lyon, pastor of Imago Dei Church at the 45 in Lowndes County, said the weekend bolstered the church's relationship with area schools.

Local schools

"We do a lot of work with the local schools, and so when we heard about Send Relief and how they were offering to send volunteers and projects, we wanted to pick projects that strengthen our relationships with the community and especially the schools," he said.

His church hosted five projects, including installing a playground for a local elementary school and helping build out some rooms at a local high school's field house.

The volunteers who came in "really blessed us in what we're already doing in a way we couldn't have done without their help," Lyon said. "If you have a consistent presence of loving on the community and serving the students and teachers and staff in the schools, God will open doors."

He said one student volunteer from Tennessee told him that serving in Lowndes County had encouraged him to think about his own local area differently.

"He was inspired to look for him and his church to be involved in similar ways when they got back home," Lyon said.

Kristy Kennedy, church and community ministries strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said she was encouraged by a team from Florida who came to help a widow who needed major work done on her home.

The woman's roof was leaking,

her floor was starting to cave in and she needed a ramp built outside her home because of her mobility issues, just to name a few.

"Within three days of posting the project description on the website, a group from Immanuel Baptist Church in Pace, Florida, had filled up all the spots," Kennedy said.

When she and a man from her church who knew the widow in need reached out to the team to make sure they had the skills needed for all the projects, they found out quickly that they did.

"That was a shock and a huge answer to prayer that we had a team with the skills to do what needed to be done," Kennedy said. "We got to talk to her about her faith and hope to continue that conversation more in the future. It was a great experience."

Other events

Four more Serve Tour events are set this year for the U.S. in New Orleans, Chicago, Philadelphia and Owensboro, Kentucky, as well as three international locations — Bangkok, Thailand; Nairobi, Kenya; and Athens, Greece.

For more information about Serve Tour, visit sendrelief.org/serve-tour.



Photo by Reid Foster

Above: Two young volunteers, Karis and Thomas, help clean the weight room at Lee High School in Montgomery, where members of Flatline Church at Chisholm often minister to students. **Right:** Serve Tour volunteers organize toiletries and food items at Friendship Mission's shelter for women and children.



Photo by Doug Rogers



Photo by Reid Foster

Right: A missions team from Immanuel Baptist Church in Pace, Florida, constructs a ramp at the home of a widow who has mobility issues. Volunteers also spoke with the woman about her faith.



Photo by Kristy Kennedy



Photo by Doug Rogers

Above: Serve Tour volunteer Lori Rogers of Montgomery scrapes paint from an exterior wall of Love Loud Montgomery's Matthew 25 Client Choice Food Pantry. Volunteers prepped surfaces and painted the building March 10-11.



Photo by Doug Rogers

Above: Val Nakamura, a Serve Tour volunteer from Virginia, trims grass in the yard of a retired pastor. **Left:** Rick Lance, Alabama Baptist SBOM executive director, speaks at FBC Montgomery during the March 10 Serve Tour evening rally.



Photo by Doug Rogers

Above: Dental volunteers Renee Gilliland (left) and Taylor Noah, both of Montgomery, serve at the Mixtec medical clinic held at Highland Gardens Baptist Church.

TO VIEW A GALLERY OF PHOTOS, VISIT TABONLINE.ORG/SERVE-TOUR

Someone You Should Know

ANNIE KATE REVERT

By Leigh Pritchett
The Alabama Baptist

As a child, Annie Kate Revert's goal was to play piano at her church. In 10th grade, she achieved that and devoted the next 65 years to playing piano or organ for her church's worship services, choir practices and other occasions. During many of those years, she played a grand piano purchased in memory of her son Roy Martin.

In addition to her musical contributions, Revert taught Sunday School, Vacation Bible School and Bible Drill. At 60, she took her first job outside the home, serving 13 years as a senior center director. For that work, she was named to the Alabama Senior Citizens Hall of Fame. Revert is 81.

Q: Describe one of the most influential people in your faith life.

A: I have had a lot of people who have been an influence on my spiritual life, but my daddy was the most influential. My daddy was a farmer. Even though he was very tired during the week, he was very faithful to be at church and make sure his children were there. His faithfulness made an impression on me that I wanted to emulate.

Q: Tell about a turning point in your life and how God was involved.

A: I was a child when I accepted Christ as my personal Savior, and I always tried to do all that I could in serving the Lord.

In 1986, our middle son (Roy Martin) passed away, and this was a difficult time for our family. He was almost 24 years old and had felt called into the ministry and was so excited about serving the Lord.

We almost lost him at childbirth, and his dad and I had always felt that he was spared for some special reason. Now he was almost 24 and was such a great witness. While he was in the hospital, I believed with all my heart he was going to be all right. But after two and a half weeks, the Lord took him home.

MINISTRY:

"To serve others in any way that is available — it changes with age."



CHURCH

NAME: Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, Enterprise, in Coffee Baptist Association

LIFE VERSE: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart: and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." (Prov. 3:5-6)

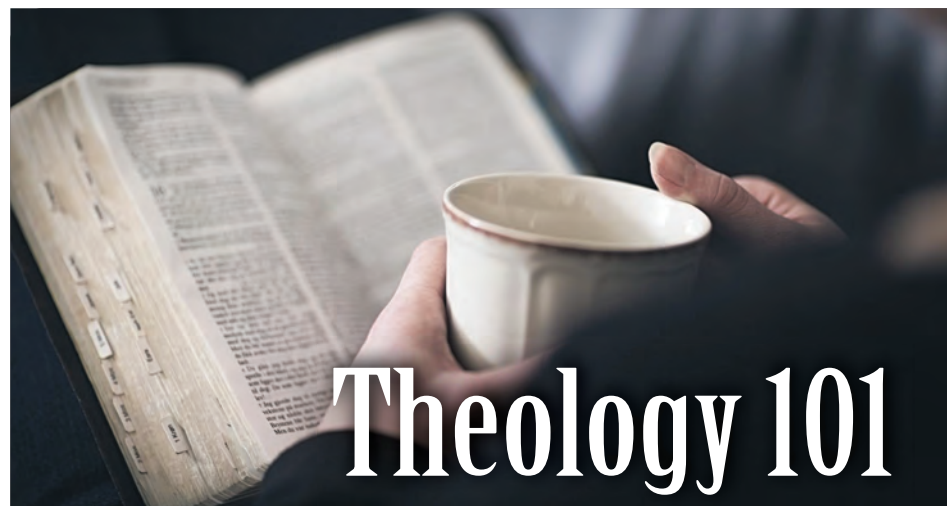
I then realized that for whatever reason he was spared at birth, that plan had been accomplished through his life or even perhaps through his death. This made me very conscious of the fact that we don't know how long our time here on earth is going to be, and we need to be sharing the gospel every day. Since then, I have shared my testimony much more freely than I did before his death.

Q: What has God been teaching you lately?

A: It makes no difference how old you are: There are places of service for you in God's house. We need to be in prayer. We also need to find ways we can be a witness outside the church doors doing something for someone — a card, a phone call, a visit, a plate of cookies — anything that enables you to share what God has done for you.

Q: What special traditions at your church mean a lot to you?

A: At Easter, we have sunrise services at our church with breakfast afterward. This has been going on since I was a child. After all, it's at Easter that we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord. We should never forget the sacrifice that was made for us.



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

The Holy Spirit

Our Need for His Witness

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
The Alabama Baptist

In response to the disciples' troubled hearts over Christ's announced departure, He promised an ongoing divine presence through the indwelling Spirit. He also announced the provision the Spirit would make in the future by leading them into all truth. Jesus then turned to the matter of the disciples being His witnesses.

Effective witnessing for Christ is a partnership between the Holy Spirit and believers. Clearly, Jesus expected His early followers to be His witnesses. Equally clear is the fact that He expects His current followers to be His witnesses.

What He knew we must know: Christian witnessing is indeed a divine-human partnership. This is the central focus of the third Paraclete passage, which we find in John 15:26-27.

We are witnesses

From the moment of our conversion and public identification with Christ, we are witnesses. The only option is what kind of witnesses we are: poor, inconsistent, impotent and inaccurate — or authentic, powerful, winsome and believable. Our witness consists of the persons we are as well as the words we speak.

Knowing that being an effective witness involves both our verbal witness and our manner of life, we dare not offer a verbal witness while our own manner of life declares to others: "Come to Christ and be miserable like me, or cranky like me, or sour like me,

or joyless like me, or impatient like me, or arrogant like me, or sharp-tongued like me, or quarrelsome like me or spiteful like me."

Divine partner

The point of the third Paraclete passage is that we are not alone in the assignment of being Christ's witnesses. Our divine partner is the Spirit of truth who through us also testifies of Christ (John 15:26).

When those early disciples of Christ moved out into public places as His witnesses, people marveled at them and realized that they had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13). They had a story to tell because they had been with the One who was the main character in and author of the story.

Those early witnesses were keenly aware of the divine partnership they enjoyed, declaring on one occasion, "We are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him" (Acts 5:32).

Like the hymn declares, "We've a story to tell to the nations." We have a witness to live out daily, and we must do it in partnership with the indwelling Spirit of God.

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.



Church branding: 5 tips for an effective logo

By **Mark MacDonald**
BeKnownforSomething.com

Do you really need a church logo? Yes. Need ideas to help you create an attention-grabbing church logo? Read on.

We need logos because we live in a visual world. That's why a controlled visual wrapper is ideal to help consumers and community members identify an organization, product, service, etc.

If you're successful with your church logo, your congregation will recognize it even if your church's name isn't attached.

Stand out

Here are five free church logo ideas to help your church in the branding process:

1. The logo must visually represent what you're known for.

The test? Your congregation should love wearing

something with your logo on it. If they don't, it's time to change either what you're known for or what your church logo looks like.

In a sense, the logo represents the congregation, not just the church. Use your thread or tagline with your logo when possible so the visual connects with what you're known for.

2. Be unique and simple.

Today, logos need to be recognized at very small sizes and formats, especially on digital channels. Therefore, simple is best. Resist illustrations and photos. Another idea is to make your logo unique in order to singularly represent your unique church brand.

3. Have hierarchy and balance.

With any design, ensure there's balance in the symbol. Be careful of hierarchy when adding your name and tagline near the symbol. Ask



TAB graphic

yourself these questions: Do all words need to be the same size? Do you even need the word "church" if your denomination is in your name?

Symbol or words?

Fault to simplicity by creating a well-balanced logo that looks professionally designed. Decide if the symbol should have more presence than the words or if the

words should be dominant. It's up to you — just don't have them battling for attention. A well-designed logo should last at least 15 years.

4. Limit versions; control extensions.

Church logos should have horizontal and vertical versions so you have a logo for multiple uses. When extending your church logo into individual ministry logos, be careful not to have too many

symbol or font variations. It's always safest and best to use your main church symbol with one font layout for all ministries, resembling your main church logo. Don't let your ministries compete with your church as separate brands or silos.

5. Use religious symbols cautiously.

The purpose of your church logo is to uniquely represent your ministries. Many churches use prominent religious symbols, so a prominent religious symbol (a cross, a dove, etc.) in your logo creates a challenge when you are trying to make the logo unique.

Your church probably has a religious word in its name, so most will understand your logo is for a religious organization. If you do want to have a religious symbol, try to make it secondary or subtle. Be creative and unique!



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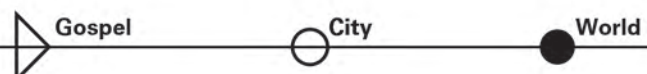
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UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Disciple-Making Conference

Looking for a community of people who are passionate about disciple-making? Need tools to start a disciple-making culture at your church? You can find all that at the Alabama Disciple-Making Conference, set for April 24–25 at Fultondale First Baptist Church.

The conference is an experience that will expose you to the principles of disciple-making, provide you with practical tools and give you an opportunity to hear from experienced conference leaders.

All the way around, the event is designed to impact

For more information or to register, visit ALDMconference.com or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



both the seasoned leader and those just beginning their ministry. It will run Monday, April 24 from 1:30 to 8:30 p.m. and Tuesday, April 25 from 8:30 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Preparing for Another Jesus Revolution

Want to experience a movement of God? Two events on April 3 — one in Birmingham and one in Montgomery — can help you learn how to prepare for revival.

Tim Beougher, guest speaker for both events, wrote his seminary thesis on the 1970 Asbury revival and was a professor at Wheaton College when revival broke out there in 1995.

From his studies and experience, Beougher will teach on revivals and share what we can do to prepare for a movement of God.

He currently serves as

the Billy Graham Professor of Evangelism and Church Growth at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Both events are free, though registration is required for the included meals.

► **First Baptist Church Birmingham**, April 3, 10 a.m.–12 p.m. To register for lunch, contact Cyndy

James at cjames@fbcbh.com or 205-870-3888.

► **Montgomery Baptist Association building**, April 3, 4–6 p.m. To register for dinner, contact Neal Hughes at nhughes@mgmbaptist.org or call 334-271-6227.



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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 resumé to: jcrosslin89@gmail.com.

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 resumé to: pastorsearchcommittee@westlawnbaptist.org.

PASTOR

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

PASTOR

Dalraida Baptist Church, Montgomery, Alabama, is accepting resumé 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 resumé to: dalraidapastorsearch@gmail.com.

PASTOR

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

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Westview Baptist Church, 809 Damascus Hwy, Enterprise, AL 36330, is prayerfully seeking resumé for a bivocational pastor. Please send resumé to: church address, marked ATTN: Search Committee, or via email at wbchurch.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 resumé 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: shanewheeler1210@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

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Sav-A-Life Calhoun County is seeking a confident and passionately pro-life individual to serve as our executive director, overseeing two locations. This person must be a competent leader with management experience and willing to oversee donor relations. For information: savalifetoday@gmail.com.

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

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TAB EXTRAS

TAB DIGITAL

In addition to the print edition, The Alabama Baptist also releases a weekly digital edition of the newspaper to every subscriber's email. The digital edition comes in PDF form as well as part of an app and is included with all subscriptions. It has exclusive content for the digital edition only, and can be accessed anytime as long as you have internet. To update your email address, contact subscribe@thealabamabaptist.org.

TAB HIGHLIGHTS

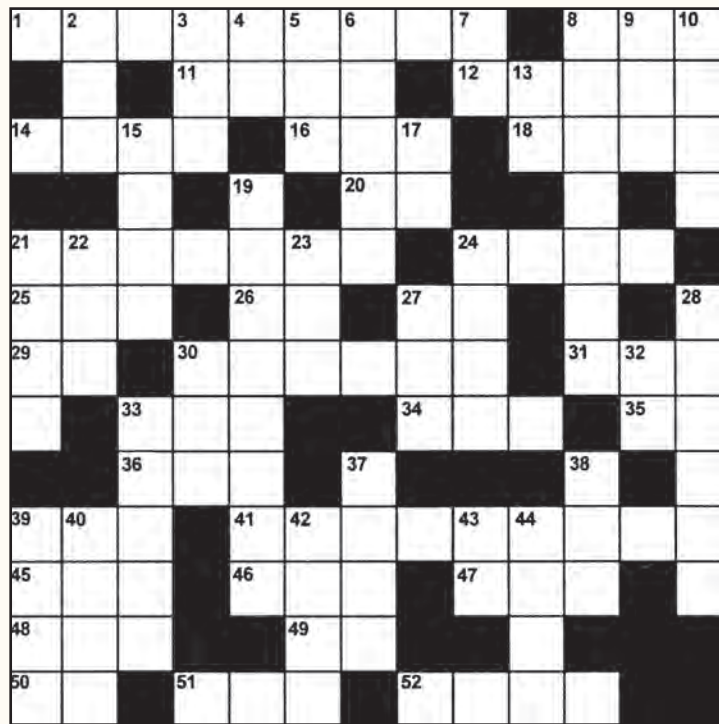
TAB Highlights is an email newsletter delivered every Monday–Wednesday–Friday with the day's top stories from the world of faith-based news. Headlines come from international, national and Southern Baptist coverage as well as one story that has been trending during the week. To sign up, email news@thealabamabaptist.org.

CHRISTIAN crossword



ACROSS

- 1. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of _____. (Prov. 1:7)
- 8. _____ the kine to the cart. (1 Sam. 6:7)
- 11. _____ Domini.
- 12. To use oars. (2 words)
- 14. I shall be a _____ for ever. (Isa. 47:7)
- 16. In all the region of _____. (1 Kings 4:11)
- 18. Tasted the water that was made _____. (John 2:9)
- 20. Registered Nurse. (abbr.)
- 21. Pierced themselves through with many _____. (1 Tim. 6:10)
- 24. Keepers at _____. (Titus 2:5)
- 25. (David) did _____ the shew bread. (Matt. 12:4)
- 26. Los Angeles. (abbr.)
- 27. The end is not _____ and by. (Luke 21:9)
- 29. "Entertainment Tonight's" popular name.
- 30. The mouth of the righteous speaketh _____. (Ps. 37:30)
- 31. Shem, _____, and Japeth. (Gen. 5:32)
- 33. To forbid something.
- 34. He will hate the _____, and love the other. (Matt. 6:24)
- 35. Exclamation of satisfaction.
- 36. And _____ not his sisters here with us? (Mark 6:3)
- 39. Charged particle.
- 41. Did all eat the same _____ meat. (1 Cor. 10:3)
- 45. Gathered the good ... but cast the _____ away. (Matt. 13:48)
- 46. He was _____ at that saying ... (Mark 10:22)
- 47. 2,000 pounds.



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- 48. Tax department. (abbr.) (1 Cor. 1:22)
- 49. Neither _____ there any rock like our God. (1 Sam. 2:2)
- 50. Detached Service. (abbr.)
- 51. This is my beloved _____. (Matt. 3:17)
- 52. Universally. (prefix)

DOWN

- 2. Sportsmen's group. (abbr.)
- 3. The Lord ... will ... prosper thy _____. (Gen. 24:40)
- 4. _____, M, _____. (2 words)
- 5. In the _____ of this world. (Matt. 13:40)
- 6. Opened the prison _____. (Acts 5:19)
- 7. Eastern time. (abbr.)
- 8. Shout unto God with the voice of _____. (Ps. 47:1)
- 9. Charged particle.
- 10. He chose David ... from following the _____. (Ps. 78:70, 71)
- 13. Expression of pain.
- 15. Thrust through with a _____. (Heb. 12:20)
- 17. Symbol for radon.
- 19. Continue in faith ... and _____. (1 Tim. 2:15)
- 21. The Greeks _____ after wisdom.
- 22. A grain.
- 23. Of whom the world _____ not worthy. (Heb. 11:38)
- 24. When they had sung an _____. (Matt. 26:30)
- 27. What a ghost says.
- 28. A Pharisee might say: "I _____." (2 words)
- 30. The beast ... shall make _____ against them. (Rev. 11:7)
- 32. Alcoholics Anonymous. (abbr.)
- 33. (The centurion) loosed (Paul) from his _____. (Acts 22:30)
- 37. Offers to buy at auction.
- 38. Joshua the son of _____. (Josh. 1:1)
- 39. Ibidem. (abbr.)
- 40. Wherein shall go no gallery with _____. (Isa. 33:21)
- 42. Look upon mine affliction and my _____. (Ps. 25:18)
- 43. Impersonal pronoun.
- 44. The unclean spirit had _____ him. (Mark 1:26)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

Transitional Pastor Training

Almost every church is in need of revitalization.

That's what Ken Allen, director of the office of LeaderCare at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said, and that's why he believes the upcoming Transitional Pastor Training is important.

A transitional pastor is trained to assist a church during an interim time "toward renewal around the basic biblical functions of the church: evangelism, disciple-making, fellowship, ministry and worship," Allen said.

Transitional Pastor Training, set for April 10-11, will feature two special guests — Henry Webb, who retired in 2005 after 28 years of service at Lifeway in the areas of pastoral ministries, discipleship and

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

deacon ministry; and Dan Garland, who was director of pastoral ministries for Lifeway from 2007 to 2015.

The event will run Monday from 1 to 7:30 p.m. and Tuesday from 8:30 a.m. to 5:15 p.m.

The cost is \$25 and includes dinner Monday and lunch Tuesday.

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There has been an overwhelming response from Alabama Baptists to the needs of our friends in

Alaska. Dozens of Alabama churches and associations are partnering with churches in Alaska, and they are doing numerous projects this spring, summer and fall.



Facebook photo

Even with the projects that have already been adopted, there are still many other needs that we can fill this spring and summer.

To learn more, visit alaskabrn.org and click on "Get Involved," then choose "Mission Opportunities."



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SPECIAL MUSIC

Karen Peck and New River



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JEREMY MORTON



Preaching Evangelistically

Widow turns husband's shirts into dresses for orphans

By Carolyn Tomlin
The Alabama Baptist

Sue Woods has found a creative way to create new memories out of old ones.

Woods, a retired home economics teacher from Jacksonville, is using men's shirts to make dresses for little girls in orphanages in Honduras.

When Woods' husband died in March 2021, she couldn't bring herself to clean out his closet. May came — then June — and the clothes still remained.

"I was so lonely and needed someone to minister to," recalled Woods. "It was like the Lord spoke to me and said, 'You can make little girls' dresses from his shirts.'"

"Since 2021, a group of six women from my Sunday School class at First Baptist Church Jacksonville and I have made 50 dresses from

my husband's shirts. He had so many — some still had the tags on and [had] never been worn."

Willing to help

Some of the women don't sew, but they cut out the dresses. They begin by removing the collar and cutting the shirts apart at the seams.

One shirt makes a dress. Buttons and buttonholes remain in place, with some dresses opening in front and others in the back. Garments are made in girls sizes 2, 4 and 6.

To create interest in the project, Woods took one finished dress to her Sunday School class. "They couldn't believe the dress was made from a shirt!" she said. "We have so much fun decorating the garments."

Finding rickrack and eye-

let lace on a website, she bought enough to decorate many dresses.

As her late husband was a pharmacist, most of the shirts had black marks where he would return his felt-tip pen to the pocket. First, Woods tried to remove the stitching from the pocket,

but she realized it was double-stitched. Now the women embroider over the black marks, which adds a decorative touch and makes each dress unique.

The group meets at Woods' home where she organizes

everything needed for the dresses in plastic boxes. Being organized saves time and makes everything run better, she said.

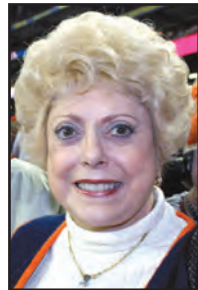
Woods admits this ministry was a learning process. She and her friends could sew and make the dresses, but they didn't know how they would ship the finished products to the orphanages.

"The Lord had a plan, but I didn't know it at first," Woods said. "I attended a family dinner and was seated next to someone who knew a missionary. Woods found out she could deliver the boxes of dresses to the missionary in Fairhope.

"This missionary was on furlough, and she could send them, which would take care of shipping," Woods said. "You can't mail clothing directly to an orphanage."

As FBC Jacksonville had been involved in missions work in Honduras, others at the church wanted to help. Those going on the missions trips had to ride six hours on a bus to get to the village where they ministered.

Woods recalled pictures of children wearing worn-out hand-me-downs and shoes that didn't quite fit. When she saw a photo of a little girl wearing a dress she and her friends had made, it brought great joy.



WOODS



Photo courtesy of Sue Woods

Girls from orphanages in Honduras show off their new dresses made by a sewing group at FBC Jacksonville.

"[The little girl] had the biggest smile. She was so happy."

Creating smiles

Someone had written on the back of the picture, "Today is my birthday, and I'm so happy that I have a new dress."

"It's good to know I made a little girl happy for one day!" Woods said.

Thinking back to how the Lord works in mysterious ways, Woods recalled her retirement from teaching in 2001.

"I got an extra paycheck and spent the entire check on fabric, trims and sewing needs. Now I know why!"

FBC Jacksonville has been very supportive of the ministry. Since the initial effort, the sewing group has

stopped taking shirts and now uses new fabric. People have bought sacks of new fabric and decorative trim.

Friendships have grown as the women share their love of Christ and work together on a common project.

The ministry could be easily replicated in other churches. "You just have to be able to cut or sew and be willing to work," says Woods.

The retired teacher says she found a new purpose in sewing the dresses.

"This ministry has changed my life," she said. "This is my mission. I was

so lonely. I prayed about going back to work, but I didn't really want to do that. When you're sewing, you are not alone. And as long as I'm able, I will make these dresses!"

"It's good to know I made a little girl happy for one day!"

**Sue Woods
FBC Jacksonville**

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For March 26

Explore the Bible

By Ben Stubblefield

Visiting assistant professor of Christian studies, University of Mobile



PEACE I LEAVE John 14:16–29

While our passage focuses on the role of the Holy Spirit, it is important to note from context why He has this role.

What is the context? Jesus has just announced His imminent departure (13:33), and His disciples are understandably troubled.

What follows in chapter 14 are words from Jesus designed to encourage faithfulness, comfort and peace to a group of nervous, anxious and worried disciples.

The Counselor (16–21)

Jesus promises He will solicit from the Father another Counselor for the disciples. This Counselor is identified more clearly as the Holy Spirit in verse 26.

“Paraclete” is a complex Greek word to interpret into English, though it is often translated as Counselor. But no one English word can capture all the functions of the Holy Spirit stated in the rest of the passage.

The Spirit will help, remain with, lead, abide in, teach and remind us of truth. The word “Counselor” is generic enough, but it is too vague to communicate all of His works.

Adding to the challenge of giving the term a simple, one-word-for-one-word translation is the fact that the Spirit is, Jesus says, “another Counselor.”

This implies that Jesus understands Himself to be “Paraclete.” Therefore, in whatever ways Jesus served as Counselor to the disciples on earth, the Holy Spirit will continue after His ascension. What one-word moniker can we give for that?

Furthermore, there seems to be a sequence of cause and effect through verses 16–21. Love from God yields love for God. And the one who loves God also knows

Him, like Moses, in the intimacy of friendship. To those people, Jesus says, “I will show Myself to them.” The request of Moses, his one great ambition, was to see the glory of the Lord (Ex. 33:18).

Here and now, Jesus says, “My glory is available to anyone who has the love of God abiding in them.”

The Teacher (22–26)

Jesus promises earlier in 14:3 that He goes to prepare a dwelling place for His disciples, but He also promises He will make His dwelling place within His disciples. It’s a stunning promise, and one that further incentivizes obedience to the instruction of Christ.

Often, though not always, it is common to see consistent obedience from children to parents in homes where love abounds. Healthy relationships tend to engender good responses from children to parental instruction.

Ours is a love relationship with the Lord. He promises, abides, remains, comforts and helps. And as a natural effect of that love, His children trust and obey.

The Peace (27–29)

Peace, “shalom,” was the hope of Israel throughout the Old Testament.

One scholar even suggests the whole goal of redemption is to restore the peace of God in the world.

So when Jesus promises to leave “My peace” with His disciples, He’s not awarding them some steady nerves for some bad days. He’s telling them that a sign of His Kingdom is here and upon them.

This is not a peace that comes from this world, but a now-inaugurated reality of the Kingdom of heaven.

“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever.”

John 14:16

Bible Studies for Life

By James R. Strange

Professor of biblical and religious studies, Samford University



JESUS OPENED MY EYES TO THE TRUTH John 9:1–7, 32–33, 35–38

Today we read the second story of a healing on a Sabbath. The present miracle violated the Sabbath because making mud was analogous to working with clay, but both healings led to the weightier issues of Jesus’ identity and people’s faith in Him. This is a frequent, even constant theme in John.

Many regard this healing as the fifth of seven signs in the Gospel of John.

John calls Jesus’ deeds of power “signs” because they are meant to reveal who Jesus is, and hence to confront people with two questions: Do you believe Jesus is the Son of God who reveals God? Will you join in doing God’s work?

Jesus brought glory to God by what He did for me. (1–7)

As He is for much of the Gospel of John, Jesus is in Jerusalem. The Siloam pool of Jesus’ day, which served as a collection basin for water brought inside Jerusalem’s walls, was excavated south of the Temple Mount in 2004.

The disciples may have asked the question in verse 2 because of what Jesus said to the man healed by the pool of Bethesda in John 5:14.

Many translations supply a clause in verse 3 that isn’t in the Greek: The CSB says, “this came about,” and the NIV says, “but this happened.” An alternative that is more faithful to the Greek reads, “Neither he nor his parents sinned, but we must do the works of the One who sent Me while it is day so that the works of God might be revealed in him.” Notice Jesus’ use of “we” — the disciples are also to reveal God’s works through their deeds.

By calling Himself the Light of the World (8:12), Jesus echoes John 1:4–9. He equates Himself with the light that God spoke into being on the first day (Gen. 1:3–5) before creating the sun, moon and stars on the fourth day (Gen. 1:14–19). Therefore, this first light — Jesus Christ, the Word — is not mere il-

lumination but a radiance that reveals who God is (theology) and what God is doing in the world (ecology).

I could see that God was at work through Jesus. (32–33)

In verses 8–32, a series of investigations reveal it was Jesus who restored the man’s sight. The man gives compelling testimony in verse 25. Note that despite his ignorance about Jesus, what Jesus had done was enough to bring about his faith. Others, however, can’t get past what they do not know (v. 30).

In John, faith is not knowledge. Whereas those questioning the man want knowledge before they will believe, the man is willing to begin with faith.

Biblical stories like these probably lay behind Augustine of Hippo’s teaching, “Believe that you may understand,” and Anselm of Canterbury’s phrase, “faith seeking understanding.”

Jesus opened my eyes to see the truth about Him. (35–38)

Like the Samaritan woman (4:19) and the woman whom Jesus forgave (8:11), this man inadvertently calls Jesus “Lord” before confessing his faith (“Sir” in v. 36).

The imagery in verses 39–41 becomes confusing, but it is clear that Jesus wants the people He encounters, and John wants his readers, to move from blindness to sight, from ignorance to understanding.

Faith provides the motion. John talks about two avenues to understanding. One is by our own encounters with Jesus, so we join the man in saying, “One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” Another is through the testimony of others whom Jesus has touched and healed and a willingness to see God at work in their lives.

Both avenues move us toward full understanding, reached on that day when we will not need to ask Him anything and our hearts will rejoice (16:22–23).

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Karen L. Willoughby

The Alabama Baptist

Christopherson illustrates churches' 7 temptations in new novel

Several people have written about the factors derailing the mission of Christ in North America, but these efforts don't "seem to be moving the needle," says Jeff Christopherson.

So he wrote a novel.

"I wanted something that would roll around in peoples' hearts and minds and maybe cause a different response," Christopherson said about why he wrote "Once You See: Seven Temptations of the Western Church."

"If leaders could see and feel the staggering difference, then maybe change would be easier," he asserted.

Published in December 2022, "Once You See" is his third major book, following "Kingdom Matrix: Designing a Church for the Kingdom of God" in 2012 and "Kingdom First: Starting Churches that Shape Movements" in 2015.

'Giving themselves away'

"When a church exists to serve the Kingdom of God, it is powerful," Christopherson said. "When a church exists to serve itself, it becomes idolatrous and powerless."

The idea for all his books, Christopherson said, came from the men who guided his spiritual journey as



JEFF CHRISTOPHERSON

Photo courtesy of Jeff Christopherson

a teen in Saskatchewan, Canada. "It started with Jack [Conner] and Henry [Blackaby] — seeing how they gave themselves away for the sake of the Kingdom. They weren't saving themselves. They were giving themselves away."

Christopherson was a pastor and church planter for 20 years and is now the executive director of both the Canadian National Baptist Convention and Church Planting Canada, a collaboration of more than 25 evangelical denominations and church planting networks within Canada.

Previously he served as vice president of the North American Mission Board for the Send Network, and he co-founded the Church Multiplication Institute.

He said he sees some of his own struggles in the pastorate being repeated in various contexts, cultures and generations.

"We all seem to struggle at the same place, the temptation to 'seek

first our kingdoms,'" Christopherson said. "And that is having a corrosive effect on our gospel witness.

"But I've seen something else as well," he continued. "I've experienced incredible power in ministry when my hands were opened wide and everything was yielded to the mission of Christ."

"Once You See" opens with Luca Lewis mourning the recent death of his father, the pastor of a struggling inner-city church. Luca resents the church that "killed" his father, yet he has a compelling inclination to experience something different, something truer.

Need to change

Next, Jimmy Norris enters the story. Norris is the pastor of a waning Atlanta megachurch whose best years occurred 20 years ago. Norris knows the church needs to change, but how?

Norris and Lewis then cross paths

with a Yemeni refugee whose family betrayed him for his newfound Christian faith.

The story unfolds as these men's lives and ministries intersect, illustrating the seven temptations of the western church:

▶ Philosophicalism — "We are a Bible-believing people."

▶ Professionalism — "We have a gifted pastoral team."

▶ Presentationalism — "Our worship is inspiring, and our preaching is strong."

▶ Passivism — "Everybody is welcome."

▶ Pragmatism — "We are one of the fastest-growing churches."

▶ Partisanism — "We love our country."

▶ Paternalism — "We train pastors around the world."

"Once You See" offers the Kingdom correctives to the temptations.

Christopherson said he understands that change isn't easy.

"Unlearning, repentance and relearning are the steps needed to change, and that's not always easy. Biblical repentance, 'metanoia,' is a new mind, a changed mind. But when God blows our minds with His ideas, we want to exchange our pathetic ways. So once you see, it's spiritually natural to let go and follow His headship."

Pastors need encouragement from their brothers in the fight, he said. The ending of his book is designed with spiritual leaders in mind, for peer mentoring and for conversation.

"I think courage is transferred that way," Christopherson said. "The whole book is about helping people see and feel the difference between which side of those temptations we fall. They're life and death. My hope is that people will say, 'Shoot, I really want the other thing,' and 'How do I get there?'"



EDITOR'S NOTE

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December 8, 2022

INSIDE



Missionary couple recognized for decades of service
→ Page 9



Pastors working as Santas bring joy, extend ministry to others during holidays
→ Page 11



'Something

Ice cream truck dreams turn into ministry

By Grace Thornton
Michelle Norwood says on a much smaller scale, she might know what South felt like. For her it wasn't an ark — it was an ice cream truck. "I had seen one for maybe three minutes in my life," she recalled. "I was visiting my sister in Memphis one summer. We walked out, and I bought the kids an ice cream." But in 2017, Norwood said she woke up night after night at 2 a.m., and God started to speak to her about how to build one. "I'd wake up, and little by little there would be another idea of what I needed to research or figure out," she related. "I made notes and started making connections." It was a new thought, but the purpose behind it had been in Norwood's mind and heart.



Tips for growing small groups, making most of time
→ Page 13

The Alabama Baptist

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February 16, 2023

Vol. 188, No. 7
Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



Volunteers unload boxes of frozen chicken at the ministry house of FBC Alabaster. The church has run a food ministry for 20 years.

Food insecurity

Alabama Baptist churches help put food on the table for people in their communities

By Grace Thornton

Michelle Weaver said people used to associate hunger with homelessness, but from where she sits, she feels that just isn't the case anymore. As community ministry director at First Baptist Church Alabaster, Weaver sees people from all walks of life wait in line every second and

fourth Monday to get food from their drive-thru food pantry. "In this day and in this economy, there are families we have met who are nurses, bankers, teachers and college students," she said. "It's a diverse population right now needing food assistance because groceries have gone sky high, medical bills aren't being covered, or they can't afford medical insurance or their hours are being cut at work."

And not only are the lines full of a broad spectrum of people, they're also getting longer, Weaver said. Their ministry has tripled in the last three years and takes between 30 and 40 volunteers to run.

Growing ministry

"We used to start out with 15 to 20 cars in our drive-thru and can get 100 cars now, some with multiple families in the car," she said. "We

feed between 500 and 600 people every Monday we do our food ministry." FBC Alabaster's food pantry started 20 years ago with boxes of food stored in a closet and has grown over the years and adapted to meet people where they are. In years past, people could come to the ministry, talk to the volunteers about their financial need and then receive food. (See 'Hunger,' page 13)

SPOTLIGHT SPONSOR ...

Unforsaken Ministry — Walking with those in addiction and their families through the journey of recovery.

The Alabama Baptist

February 23, 2023

Vol. 188, No. 8
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Pastor and church planter Justin McKay (center) leads prayer before a service at The Local Church in Arvada, Colorado.

College students focus of Feb. 23 prayer emphasis

By Carrie B. McWhorter
An annual day of prayer for college students is coming at a pivotal time in the spiritual lives of students throughout the nation and across Alabama. The Collegiate Day of Prayer, which falls this year on Feb. 23, has garnered renewed attention as news reports chronicle the revival happening at Ashbury University in Wilmore, Kentucky.

Livestream

This year's 200th anniversary prayer service will be livestreamed from Ashbury on Feb. 23 from 7 to 9 p.m. Central time. On Feb. 24-25, hundreds of college students from across Alabama will gather at First Baptist Church Montgomery and student ministries for Pursue, an annual missions and discipleship conference. Ben Edfield, director of collegiate and student ministries for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said he is excited to see how God will use the convergence of the day of prayer, Pursue and the Ashbury revival. "I hope that our Alabama Baptist churches will join the office of collegiate and student ministries on Feb. 23 in asking God to move in an unmistakable way — calling students to repentance, inviting students

sus'

In Alabama there are churches everywhere. That started the couple on a journey toward realizing God was calling them to plant a church there. They started a church planting residency in early 2020, were affirmed in the summer and started growing their launch teams in 2021. "We launched The Local Church officially in February 2022," McKay said. "We started in one location, meeting on Sunday afternoons at 4 p.m." (See 'Ministry,' page 10)

LIGHT SPONSOR ...

Training Institute at Samford University — Equipping students to be leaders in their churches and communities through education and practical ministry training.

Equipped

By Bonnie Shaw
Texas Baptists

Facebook group sparks apologetics partnership from Texas to Philippines

In 2020, Eric Hernandez, apologetics leader and millennial specialist for Baptist General Convention of Texas, received a message on Facebook from a group of Filipino believers.

They had started an online group dedicated to apologetics, and they wanted to know if Hernandez would be their first international debate guest against a local atheist. Hernandez agreed, but he also wanted to make a more lasting impact.

“Even if I did a great job with this debate, I’d be gone in a few hours,” he said. “What would make a bigger impact is if I trained them in apologetics and equipped them to share that with other believers who want to discuss it.”

Hernandez talked with Zuriel, a young man in his 20s who had helped start the Facebook group. Zuriel explained there had been a rise in atheism in the Philippines, and the group started to learn more about defending their faith as they were being challenged by their nonreligious peers.

Shared passion

The group includes Filipinos from across the country, many of whom have never met each other.



Unsplash.com

Still, they built a camaraderie through their shared passion for apologetics and often invited guest speakers to hold virtual workshops and debates.

Hernandez offered to start a virtual class with a small group of 10–15 people from the online group. They began meeting every other week for a total of 15 sessions.

Everyone who took the course was given a certificate of completion by Hernandez, which was also signed by Leighton Flowers, director of evangelism and apologetics

for Texas Baptists, and Phil Miller, director of the Center for Church Health.

Over a year later, Hernandez has stayed in touch with Zuriel and a few other class members.

They have all used the classes Hernandez taught to design apologetics courses for churches and believers in their areas.

One became a pastor and has been teaching apologetics to his congregation. Another is doing youth group training sessions around his city. They have started two more online apologetics groups to reach even more people.

Building a foundation

Since the class, Zuriel has begun going to college, where he is studying apologetics. Next year he will begin teaching classes on philosophy and other related subjects at the college.

Zuriel was invited to be a break-out speaker at the National Conference for Christian Apologetics and has also created Bible studies about apologetics.

Paving a path

Hernandez hopes the same passion for apologetics will be felt in the United States. Apologetics is important, Hernandez explained, because it gives a factual way to defend the faith and can pave a path toward gospel conversations.

“Having this knowledge can make the church relevant again in the public sphere of ideas and influence,” he said.

People who have doubts or are skeptical want to know Christians are firm in their foundations and know what they believe. Skeptics want to discuss topics they are wrestling with.

By being informed about how the Bible responds to different situations and questions, Christians can present a solid case for why they believe what they believe.

“As much as we need to love them, we also need to be ready to have these difficult discussions with them,” Hernandez said.

In order to equip Texans, Hernandez and his team host [un]Apologetic conferences across Texas.

They bring in renowned speakers who are deeply knowledgeable about topics such as the soul, why God allows evil and how science and faith can work together.

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

“WE ... NEED TO BE READY TO HAVE THESE DIFFICULT DISCUSSIONS ...”

ERIC HERNANDEZ
TEXAS BAPTISTS APOLOGETICS LEADER
AND MILLENNIAL SPECIALIST

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MAKE DISCIPLES

He was family

By Tessa Sanchez
International Mission Board

North African guard remembered for ushering gospel to the lost

The watchman. He was the grandfather who loved spy novels, Manchester United and coffee.

Dawit was Matt and Gretchen Clay's door to communities with no gospel presence. He made introductions for the International Mission Board missionaries and translated from the trade language to the regional language. Dawit helped the Clays begin their ministry in the area by translating for their community development projects.

"He ushered us in," Gretchen said.

When the Clays moved to their first city of service, they didn't know anyone. They met Dawit, a North African man with exceptionally good English and a caring heart. Dawit began working as a guard, or watchman, as they are called in the area, for another IMB family and later began working for other IMB families, including the Clays.

Eyes and ears

It's expected that people in this culture will employ a watchman to not only guard the property but be eyes and ears in the community.

Over a 13-year period, Dawit helped eight IMB families and 16 single, short-term missionaries. He showed every new missionary around town, ferrying them on a three-wheeled vehicle, to places like the market, where he showed them how to buy vegetables and the best places to eat and buy local souvenirs.

Dawit could tear through Jason Bourne-style spy novels. In the 1970s, the country had a change in government, and Dawit was imprisoned for his political beliefs. He had a surplus of free time in prison, so he read. And read. His love for read-



IMB photo
Dawit worked as a guard, or watchman, as they are called in the area, for IMB families. He was an avid coffee drinker and had a favorite mug he always used.

ing blossomed, as did his English proficiency. Another IMB family bought him an electronic reading device, and every month, Gretchen added 12 books. He'd finish all 12 books in a month.

With his high level of English, he was overqualified for the security job, but he saw serving as a watchman as a way to serve and give back to his community.

His translation for their community development projects and his presence brought validity to their ministry.

"He was our liaison or a conduit into the community," Gretchen said.

He was also family.

Missionary kids grow up thousands of miles from grandparents, and Matt and Gretchen's children called Dawit "Grandfather," and the Clays and other IMB adults called him "Father." An avid coffee lover, Gretchen remembers sharing many cups of coffee with him.

He poured his life and heart into helping, serving and being a friend and family member.

The Clays appreciate Southern Baptists' generosity in giving to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering because it allowed them to pay Dawit's salary, which supported not only him but his four children.

'People around us'

"It's not just us that Lottie helps to keep over here. It's the people around us who are helping us stay here. To be honest, without him helping us, we wouldn't have been able to thrive as much as we've thrived over here on the field."

When the Clays felt the Lord calling them to move deeper into the region where their people group lived, they told Dawit he was welcome to move with them, but they weren't requiring it.

The people in the region were of a different ethnicity and religion

than Dawit. Gretchen said it can be difficult for people to move into an area where they are not the ethnic majority.

Like family

The Clays asked if Dawit would help them move some of their things to their new house. On the trip, Dawit told the Clay's oldest daughter, "When I move here, I'm coming back with all of my stuff."

"If you're going, I'm coming," he told Matt and Gretchen.

He lived with the Clays for the past few years in a standalone room next to their house and was a daily part of their lives.

While the Clays were in the U.S. last year, Dawit unexpectedly passed away from a heart attack.

Gretchen didn't go into his room at first — the grief was still too raw. When she did go in, she found a note that brought needed answers.

"I've been working with a family for many years, this American family, I've really loved my work with them. They are good people. ... They believe in the one, true God, in Jesus Christ, me too," the note read.

Gretchen said it confirmed he had indeed committed his life to Christ.

"He was so special to us, but to know that we were special to him, but more importantly that he believed in Jesus, and we know where he is today because of that [note]," Gretchen said.

Dawit came from an Orthodox background, and through his relationship with the Clays, he understood what it meant to have a relationship with Jesus and to give his life to Him.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story was originally published by the International Mission Board.

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‘If we have it, we provide it’

By Grace Thornton
The Baptist Paper

Care Center in northwest Mississippi supports prospective mothers

For the past 16 years, Claudia Niebanck has positioned herself to be a helper to every woman who walks through the doors of Care Center in Southaven, Mississippi.

And when one young woman came in recently, Niebanck had the opportunity to make good on that offer again.

“She was getting evicted, and she was around 32 or 34 weeks pregnant, very far along,” said Niebanck, who serves as Care Center’s executive director.

The woman didn’t feel like she had any other options but to drive to another state for a late-term abortion. But when a center volunteer showed her the ultrasound of her unborn baby, the baby was waving — at her, the mother felt.

“The woman was crying, and she said, ‘OK, I’m going to have the baby, but will you help me?’ We talked to her and said, ‘Of course. Children are a gift from God, and He’s not going to abandon you. He’s flowing through us to help you, because that’s how special you are to Him,’” Niebanck said.

Helpful resources

From there, Care Center set in motion all the help it had to offer, from prenatal vitamins to helping with Medicaid applications to providing clothes, diapers, parenting classes and Bibles.



Facebook photo
Gifts for a baby shower are given by LaBelle Haven Baptist Church in Olive Branch, Mississippi, to meet needs for local women.

Those resources are important in an area with much poverty and a high rate of premature deliveries and infant mortality, Niebanck said.

“We feel these women are the most disregarded section of the community,” she said. “How could we possibly leave them alone and unassisted? We do feel it’s a big responsibility, and we want to offer a full spectrum of services to them.”

She said it’s entirely the Lord’s provision. The center operates on a

tight budget, but somehow it continues to meet needs.

“Everything is free for the women,” Niebanck said. “If we have it, we provide it.”

LaBelle Haven Baptist Church in Olive Branch is one of the area churches that comes alongside Care Center to support the ministry.

Renea Beene, the church’s children’s director, said it sends empty baby bottles home with church members each year on Mother’s

Day and asks them to bring the bottles back on Father’s Day with a donation inside, whether that’s change, bills or checks.

The church also holds events where it collects baby items that can be given to expectant mothers who come to Care Center.

Important ministry

“The center’s ministry is something that we feel is important in our area, and we want to do all we can to support them since they function on donations,” Beene said.

Care Center is one of more than 2,500 pro-life pregnancy resource centers across the U.S. focused on helping mothers have the information and practical support they need to deliver and parent their children.

In 2022, Care Center provided more than 1,300 pregnancy tests and more than 900 ultrasounds. Volunteers also provided more than 2,400 sessions of counseling and 1,805 benevolence gifts.

“There are women who walk out of our doors, and we think they’ve decided to have abortions, but they come back in later with the baby in the stroller,” Niebanck said.

One teenage mother decided to keep her baby, and with support she was able to graduate high school as valedictorian. Her baby boy was present for her speech.

“We’re very grateful for what God has done,” Niebanck said.

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