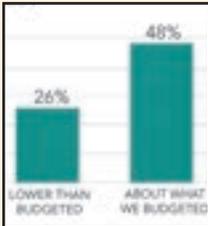




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Remaining faithful

State Baptist paper marks 175 years informing, inspiring, connecting Baptists

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
The Alabama Baptist

From all over the state, friends of *The Alabama Baptist* (TAB) came to Judson College in Marion on Feb. 6 to celebrate the paper's 175 years of ministry. More than 200 in addition to the

students present from Judson attended a morning worship celebration held in the chapel at Jewett Hall, named after Milo P. Jewett, one of the founders of both TAB and Judson.

The founders of the paper were "prophetic people who had a vision for the state," said editor Bob Terry in his opening remarks, later

noting the "critical role" Marion has played in Baptist life.

In honor of the occasion, Terry presented Judson with a framed reproduction of the paper's first front page, published Feb. 4, 1843.

Following music by the Judson Singers, editor-elect Jennifer Davis Rash spoke about faithfulness, recalling how TAB was "cutting edge for its time" at its beginning and has remained faithful to its original mission to share the story of Alabama Baptists.

"Faithfulness matters," Rash said.

"It moves others. It makes a difference."

Rash, who will become the first woman to lead a major state Baptist paper when she takes the helm as TAB's editor, humorously connected her own experience with that of Julia Barron, the only female among the paper's four founders. But Rash also noted the legacy left by Barron, who despite losing all her wealth after the Civil War expressed that she wished she had given more to gospel causes — a challenge as TAB enters (See 'Ministry,' page 13)



Bob Terry (standing, left) presents Judson College in Marion with a framed reproduction of the paper's first front page, published Feb. 4, 1843.

Photo by Maggie Walsh

Full coverage of *The Alabama Baptist's* 175th anniversary will be in the March 15 issue.



COMMENT

Eight 'Rs' of Ministerial Relations

One of the thorniest issues pastors face in the life of their local churches is how to relate to fellow ministers. How should a minister relate to pastors of nearby churches of the same denomination or to pastors of churches of other denominations? How does a pastor relate to former pastors of the church he now serves or to his successor?

And what about a multistaff church? How should ministers in the same church relate to one another?

Legion are the stories of pastors whose ministries have been shackled by the way they did or did not relate to other ministers. Lives have been damaged, congregations divided and ministries lost because of actions by one pastor toward another.

That is why a number of ministers' organizations have done detailed studies of ministerial relations. Generally these groups concluded that hard and fast rules are difficult to articulate. However, several general guidelines have been identified that provide directions about proper ministerial relationships.

Ministerial relations

Considering the following suggestions may be helpful to ministers and churches alike in the area of ministerial relations.

► **Relate** to all ministers as partners in the work of God. Every minister is different. Each has unique abilities and offers unique insights. Each pastor is created in the image of God, loved by God and, ultimately, accountable to God. Respect for each minister should be a minimum.

When possible, ministers should cooperate with one another. That may apply to ministers within the same congregation as well as to ministers of different churches and denominations within a community. An increasingly lost world needs to see that Christ can overcome our differences.

► **Refuse** to treat others as competitors. Sometimes it seems ministers are in competition with one another from their first call to service until their last. Baptists are always comparing and evaluating, whether it be in calling a pastor or assessing a ministry. We evaluate attendance, baptisms, budgets and more. That tendency can turn pastors and churches into competitors with every other pastor and church.

But God's call is not to build up a personal ministry or a personal kingdom. It is to build up His kingdom through faithfulness and obedience. One cannot be partner and competitor at the same time. That is true for those serving on the same church staff or serving in the same community.

► **Refrain** from speaking disparagingly about the work or the person of another ministry. A temptation all face is to try and make one's self look better by tearing down the work of another. That is a path to failure. That kind of message



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

does not attract people to a church. It does not help one get off to a good start in a church. It does not foster unity within a church.

People recognize such an approach for what it is: an arrogant expression of self-importance. The gospel message is a positive message of hope and forgiveness. It does not need to be surrounded by negative observations about others.

Ministers must be especially careful about their comments about the work of their predecessors or the ones who succeed them. Stay positive.

► **Reinforce** the ministry of a successor by not interfering with the church formerly served. Moving from a pastorate is a sign that God has led a minister away from one charge and to another. That does not mean the minister ceases to care for the former congregation. But the best way to demonstrate continuing care is to allow the church to do what the minister has done — move on. The goal is for the former church to continue becoming before God. That means the new minister must be allowed to lead without meddling by a former pastor.

Working together

► **Return** to a former field for professional services only when invited by the resident pastor. Following this guideline requires maturity by both the former and current pastor. In every pastorate, a minister will make lifelong friendships. This may result in requests for a former pastor to perform a wedding or do a funeral. When former pastors received such requests it is wise to ask friends to channel the request through the current pastor. That respects the role of the current pastor.

At the same time the current pastor must be mature enough to recognize that service to the members is the primary goal in funerals and weddings. Requests may be generated by longstand-

ing relationships. Tenure of the new pastor can play a part. There may be other reasons and they are not necessarily negative comments on the current pastor.

Both the former pastor and the current pastor must work together to serve the needs of the family.

► **Respect** a former pastor who returns to the church field. Former pastors may return to visit special friends. They may return to revisit a special time in their ministerial career. They could even be passing through the area and choose to drop in. Always treat the former pastor courteously as you would want to be treated if the situation were reversed. That may include recognizing the former pastor's presence or saying a good word about his service to the church.

At the same time former pastors who are not members of that former church must be careful to give their loyalty to the church where they have placed their membership. Former pastors should not be actively involved in former fields of service.

► **Regard** all retired ministers with respect and in turn retired ministers should support their pastors. Retired ministers deserve respect for their years of faithful service. Retired ministers are full of wisdom and experience which can be valuable to others. Incumbent on retired ministers is to support their pastors. Retired ministers must never threaten current pastors. No one understands the need for

helpful and supportive members like retired pastors. These ministers should model what it means to be a faithful and supportive church member.

► **Recommend** other ministers honestly and kindly. At some point every minister will be asked to recommend a fellow minister for another position or asked by a church for a recommendation for a fellow minister. Here, as always, the minister must "speak the truth in love." This is not the time to "get rid of a problem" by omitting important information. It is not the time to "get even" with someone for a perceived offense. Nor is it the time to oversell a fellow minister because that person is a friend.

Remember, the recommendation may be about someone else but it is a reflection on the honesty and ethics of the one making the recommendation.

There they are: eight "Rs." They are not a complete list by any means but these guidelines provide a place to start when considering ministerial relations. 🙏



"If ye continue in My word, then ... ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."
John 8:31-32

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Olympic opportunity

Global sporting event opens doors to gospel conversations

With all the pageantry and artistry the opening ceremonies are known for, the 2018 Olympics opened in Pyeongchang, South Korea, on Feb. 9.

The events are exciting and the athletes' stories inspiring, but this Olympics, as you watch people compete in events like curling or skiing or shooting, let it be an opportunity to remember who we are, why we're here and the eternity to which we are all heading.

Let it be an opportunity to remember that our world is full of billions of living, breathing souls all striving for similar things — to achieve purpose in life, to make their life count somehow.

And let it be a bridge to reach out.

Many of us have neighbors or colleagues from different countries. Invite them over for a meal and watch the Olympics together. Maybe even ask them to bring a dish from their country and share your cuisines. Talk about what sports are like in their country.

The Olympics are an easy topic around which to unite, talk about what we have in common and build relationships. In some way, the games speak to the hearts of everyone on the planet. Use these Olympic games to ask people about their passion in life and what they're striving for. Ask them what they want their big life achievements to be. Ask them where they find their purpose. Ask them if they've ever been disappointed in that quest. Ask if their accomplishments have fulfilled them like they thought they would.



Photo by David McIntyre/Genesis Photos

US athletes enter Pyeongchang Olympic Stadium in South Korea in the opening ceremony of the 2018 Winter Olympics.

Then after they've shared, tell them your own story — about how you were striving for purpose in worldly things before you met Jesus Christ and He gave you a whole new reason for living. Share how your identity rests in Jesus, not in what you might achieve. Sure, humans can learn to do some amazing things,

but nothing compares to the purpose we will find in Christ. And nothing we achieve here will ever compare to the prize that He offers us in Himself. Our identity as children of the living God gives us a purpose — we're compelled by love to be Christ's ambassadors to the world, imploring them to receive the hope being held out to them in Jesus. (BP)

Super Bowl lesson: Use struggles as opportunity

Lease it to a pastor to find encouragement for churches in a Super Bowl victory speech. And that's exactly what Alan Rudnick does in his Feb. 6 blog post, "Churches, listen to Super Bowl MVP Nick Foles."

But to be fair, Rudnick wasn't just using his pastoral and theological training and experience to read between the lines of the talk Foles gave after leading the Philadelphia Eagles to the NFL championship Feb. 4.

Foles was the team's often-disparaged backup quarterback until late in the 2017 season. Few guessed he had the talent to lead the Eagles to victory in many games, much less a Super Bowl match-up against the New England Patriots.

In a post-game video, Foles urged viewers to be unafraid of failure in life, regardless of how public or painful the setbacks may be. He added that he is aware of his flaws.

"I'm not perfect. I'm not Superman," he said.

But Foles, a Christian who said he has considered leaving football in the past, said he knew he wasn't alone in his personal and gridiron battles.

"That's where my faith comes in. I think when you look at a struggle in your life, just know that it's an opportunity for your character to grow."

And that, Rudnick notes in his blog post, is the message struggling congregations need to hear.

They need to embrace the idea that they can make adjustments — i.e., changes — just as Foles did in his playing career, said Rudnick, executive pastor at DeWitt Community Church in Syracuse, New York.

"Churches face challenges today that they have never or rarely faced before," Rudnick wrote.

"Declining attendance, shrinking membership, fewer donations or shifting attitudes about religion, churches cannot afford to keep

doing what they are doing. It doesn't make sense. Unfortunately, churches are often the last institutions in our culture to make changes.

One of the obstacles for churches is not wanting to fail or appear to fail, Rudnick said. It's natural, since funds and fresh ideas often are hard to either come by or let go of.

That's where Foles' message of progressing through trial and error is so powerful, he said.

'Learning what doesn't work'

"It's not that you are failing," said Rudnick. "You are learning what doesn't work right now. So, try some other things."

The difficulties facing churches are real. The goal for churches isn't to minimize the challenges, but rather to avoid, or cease, being defined by them.

"Be the church instead of meeting a budget," he said.

"But if you do nothing for your church or ministry, that church or ministry will diminish into nothing." (BNG)



RUDNICK

Things are 'looking up'

Churches on solid ground as economy rebounds

Church collection plates were a little bit fuller last fall, according to a LifeWay Research survey of 1,000 pastors of small and large Protestant churches in the U.S.

About 40 percent of the pastors said their churches received more offerings in 2017 than in 2016, and three-quarters said their church met or exceeded its budget.

Only about a third say the economy gave their church trouble.

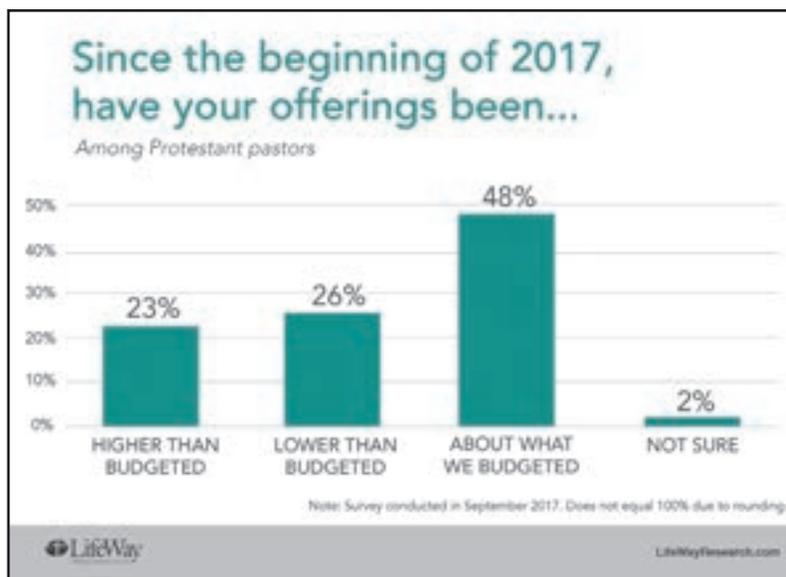
The pastors were surveyed Aug. 30 to Sept. 18, 2017. The report is the latest in an effort that began in 2009 to track the impact of the economy on churches, said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research. McConnell said this is the first time the majority of pastors said the economy isn't troubling their church.

Past 'difficult' decade

"The past decade has been difficult for many church budgets," McConnell said. "But things seem to be looking up."

That observation seems to be true of national giving as well. Contributions to missions and ministries supported by the Cooperative Program (CP) of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) are 4.01 percent above budgeted projections in the first four months of the convention's fiscal year that began in October 2017 (see "Year-to-date SBC CP giving above projection" in Baptist News Briefs column).

At the height of the Great Recession in 2010, LifeWay Re-



search found most pastors (80 percent) said the economy had a negative effect on the church budget. That dropped to 51 percent by March 2016.

In the most recent survey, 35 percent of pastors say the economy has a negative impact on the church. Seventeen percent cite a positive impact and 45 percent say no impact.

African-American pastors (59 percent) and pastors of churches with 50 to 99 attenders (40 percent) are more likely to say the economy is having a negative impact. Pastors of larger churches (with 250 or more attenders) are more likely to say the economy is treating their church well (28 percent).

About half of pastors (48 percent) say their churches are meeting their budget. Twenty-three percent say offerings are higher than budgeted. Twenty-six percent say offerings are lower.

Larger churches — those with average attendance of 250 or more — are more likely to say offerings are higher (30 percent). Pastors of smaller churches — those with fewer than 100 average attenders — are more likely to say offerings are lower (29 percent).

African-American pastors (41 percent) are more likely to say giving is under budget than white pastors (26 percent).

Still, churches seem to be regaining their footing as the economy improves, McConnell said.

Good turnout overall

"Overall, 2017 was a good year for church budgets," he said. "Except for isolated local downturns, the financial struggles of churches not meeting budget likely have nothing to do with the overall economy."

For more information or to view the complete survey report, visit LifeWayResearch.com. (TAB)

IMPACT Conference to be held in Trussville

Training for church and community ministries related to building relationships and ministries across cultural lines will be the focus of the April 20–21 IMPACT Conference.

The purpose of IMPACT — which stands for "intentionally moving people across cultures together" — is to equip leaders "in the Christ-centered practices of sharing our faith among different racial and cultural people groups," said Rick Barnhart, director of the office of associational missions and church planting for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

"The goal is that we develop discipleship programs alongside the community ministry," he said, noting that those community ministries encompass

everything from food banks to job-skills training.

The theme of the event is "celebrating our faith amidst our diversity" and will begin with a solemn assembly and directed prayer time to reflect on your relationship with Christ and relationships with others.

Session topics

Session topics will include modeling community, reconciling relationships, investing in people, displaying unity and having intentional interaction.

The IMPACT Conference will be held at North-Park Baptist Church, Trussville.

For more information, contact Rick Barnhart at rbarnhart@alsbom.org or 334-613-2220. (TAB)

Baptist NEWS BRIEFS

COMPILED FROM WIRE SERVICES

WorldCrafts to aid Baptist foster care work

BIRMINGHAM — WorldCrafts, the global fair trade division of Woman's Missionary Union, has launched an initiative to support the work of the Baptist Coalition for Children and Families, encompassing Baptist children's ministries in 19 states, including the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries.

Through the initiative, churches or individuals can support the estimated 430,000 at-risk children in foster care in the U.S. while also providing life-sustaining work for overseas artisans and their families affiliated with WorldCrafts in 24 countries.

Participating churches or individuals can register to host a one-month online WorldCrafts benefit featuring dozens of artisan-produced products. Twenty percent of all sales generated by the benefit will go directly to the host's selected Baptist children and family ministry.

More information about the initiative, including online registration and a catalog of artisans' products, is available at www.worldcrafts.org. (BP)

Registration open for SBC annual meeting

DALLAS — Registration opened Feb. 1 for the Southern Baptist Convention's 2018 annual meeting June 12–13 at the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center in Dallas. Registration for messengers and invited guests is available at www.sbcannualmeeting.net. Each messenger who registers will receive an eight-digit code to enter into a computer at the SBC registration area. Church-authorized representatives must complete all online messenger registrations.

This year's theme, based on Acts 5:20, is "Testify! Go. Stand. Speak." SBC President Steve Gaines has urged Southern Baptists to attend to hear entity reports, conduct business and "cry out to the Lord" for a "spiritual awakening" for the nation.

Hotel registration continues through May 14 online at sbcanualmeeting.net and by phone from 8 a.m.–4 p.m. Eastern time Monday through Friday at 1-800-967-8852. (BP)

Year-to-date SBC CP giving above projection

NASHVILLE — Year-to-date contributions to Southern Baptist Convention national and international missions and ministries received by the SBC Executive Committee are 4.01 percent above the year-to-date budgeted projection through the first four months of the convention's fiscal year, according to a news release from SBC Executive Committee President and CEO Frank S. Page.

The total is 2.47 percent above contributions received during the same time frame in 2017.

As of Jan. 31, gifts received by the Executive Committee for distribution through the CP Allocation Budget totaled \$66,567,735.86, or 104.01 percent of the \$64,000,000 year-to-date budgeted amount to support SBC ministries globally and across North America. The total is \$1,607,169.24 more than the \$64,960,566.62 received through the end of January 2017. (BP)

Child care registration for SBC events open

DALLAS — Registration opened Feb. 1 for preschool child care, Giant Cow Children's Ministries and Youth on Mission in conjunction with the Southern Baptist Convention Pastors Conference on June 10–11 and the SBC annual meeting June 12–13. Southern Baptist Disaster Relief (SBDRL) child care volunteers will care for preschoolers while Giant Cow Children's Ministries will lead the 5–12 year olds and Woman's Missionary Union will guide the Youth on Mission curricula and activities. All activities for children and youth also will be housed on-site at the convention center. Pre-registration is required and will be handled online at www.sbcannualmeeting.net under the "children/youth" tab. The deadline for registration is May 11 for most programs, or when the space limitation of 125 children is reached. There will be no on-site registration for child care. (BP)

Doing business

State Board approves \$37.5 million CP budget for 2019

Trustees of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) approved a \$37.5 million Cooperative Program (CP) budget goal for 2019 during its Feb. 2 meeting.

It will be allocated at 50–50 percentages between ministries of the Alabama Baptist State Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention.

The recommendation will go to state convention messengers for consideration and approval in November.

The budget recommendation is \$500,000 more than the current year's budget goal and \$2.5 million less than the 2017 goal.

Unofficial CP receipts for 2017 came in at \$37,828,886, or 94.6 percent of the budget. Overall giving totaled \$65,026,460.

Expectations are that Alabama Baptists will meet the 2018 CP budget goal of \$37 million. January receipts came in at \$4,337,000.

"January of this year is the first time we've had a \$4 million month since December 2015,"



Photo by Doug Rogers

Morgan Bailey, chairman of the State Board of Missions and pastor of Canaan Baptist Church, Bessemer, leads the first State Board meeting in the new facility in Prattville on Feb. 2.

said Rick Lance, SBOM executive director.

"Alabama Baptists are among, if not the most, generous in the family called Southern Baptists," he said.

SBOM trustees also approved a goal of \$1.2 million for the

2019 Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering to be allocated to Alabama Woman's Missionary Union (55 percent), disaster relief (20 percent), church planting (10 percent), partnership missions (10 percent) and church revitalization (5 percent). (TAB)

Alabama WMU annual events Renew, Complete happening soon

Two annual events coordinated by Alabama Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) are just around the corner and registration for both ends soon.

Complete, a gathering for teen girls, will be held March 2–3 at Eastern Hills Baptist Church, Montgomery. The two-day event will feature

Bible study led by Chelsea Kellum and worship led by Madeline Caver. This year's theme centers on Colossians 2:10: "So you also are complete through your union with Christ, who is the head over every ruler and authority."

There will be breakout sessions for girls and their leaders, along with mission-

ary testimonies and other relevant topics. Complete begins on Friday at 5 p.m. and concludes on Saturday at 3:30 p.m. Registration is open through Feb. 16 and includes lunch on March 3 and a T-shirt.

Renew, a one-day conference for women, will be held Feb. 24 from 9 a.m. to 3:15 p.m. at Heritage Baptist

Church, Montgomery. Registration is open through Feb. 15 and includes lunch.

Kelly King, women's ministry specialist at LifeWay Christian Resources, will lead Bible study. Recording artist Shelly E. Johnson will lead worship. A WorldCrafts store will be open for participants to purchase goods. (TAB)

For more information or to register, contact Alabama WMU at 1-800-264-1225 or go to AlabamaWMU.org.

Famous Christians from previous centuries

Heroes of the Faith

Former slave David George founded Baptist churches in 3 countries

David George (1743–1810), an African-American Baptist preacher, founded the first black church in the United States. He also founded churches in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone.

He was born in 1743 on a plantation in Essex County, Virginia, to John and Judith. They were the slaves of a man called "Chapel." He was so cruel that George ran away at 19.

His master had a reward out for him for years. George traveled to Savannah and then to South Carolina. Captured by the Creek Indian Chief Blue Salt he worked for him until George's master tried to buy him in exchange for rum, linen and a gun. Blue Salt refused his offer. George escaped and was captured by Natchez Chief King Jack who sold him to George Gaulfin, a plantation owner in Silver Bluff, South Carolina.

Gaulfin's children taught George to read and write using the Bible.

George had a conversion soon after arriving at Silver Bluff. "I saw that I could not be saved by my own doings, but that it must be by God's mercy," he wrote, "that my sins had crucified Christ, and now the Lord took away my distress." He knew the Lord saved him because "I had such pleasure and joy in my soul, that no man could give me." Joshua Palmer, a white Baptist minister, baptized George and his wife, Phyllis, and six other slaves.

Founding a church

Under George's leadership, the Silver Bluff church grew from eight to more than 30. In 1775 he founded what is widely considered the first black church in America — Silver Bluff Baptist Church.

In 1778, when their master left the plantation as British soldiers advanced,

the Silver Bluff group fled to British-controlled Savannah, where they gained their freedom. George worked as a butcher and his wife took in laundry. He continued to preach.

After a few years, the Georges, who had joined the Black Loyalists, traveled to Charleston. In 1782, the British evacuated over 5,000 Loyalists from the city. George and his family were among several free blacks sent on a 22-day voyage to Halifax, Nova Scotia, to start a new life.

George became an itinerant minister and attracted both blacks and whites to his meetings.

He founded the first Baptist church in Shelburne. Unfortunately, some community leaders resented his baptizing white residents. They also insisted that blacks had caused high unemployment rates. In the 1784 Shelburne Race Riot, George was beaten and his church was destroyed. He

and his family fled to Birchtown, where he founded the first Baptist church there. He established seven Baptist churches in Nova Scotia and trained many black preachers.

An exodus

In the next decade he joined other leaders who organized an exodus to Sierra Leone. In March 1792 he and his family arrived in Freetown and founded the first Baptist church in West Africa. Abolitionist William Wilberforce called the work in Freetown "a Christian experiment." It established a place where the slave trade could be attacked and the continent reached for the gospel.

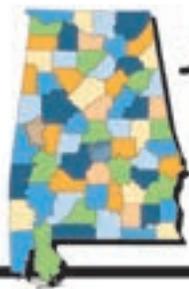
George wrote an account of his life, which is one of the most important early slave narratives.

He died in 1810. Many of his descendants live in Freetown. ✠

By Joanne Sloan

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





Across ALABAMA'S Associations

BALDWIN

► **Styx River Church, Loxley**, will hold its third annual SoapBox Derby on March 17, 10 a.m.–3 p.m. For more information email styxriverbaptistchurch@hotmail.com. Randy Simon is pastor.

LIMESTONE

► **Shane Reyer** is the new pastor of **Mays Memorial Church, Toney**. He previously served as youth pastor for Round Island Church, Athens. Reyer holds certificates in pastoral ministry and Christian education from New Orleans Seminary. He and his wife, Stefanie, have three children.



REYER

COFFEE

► **First Church, New Brockton**, and **Calvary Church, Enterprise**, will hold joint revival services Feb. 25–28. Don Graham, of Clanton, will be the guest evangelist and Chris Diffey, of Lakeside Church, Birmingham, will be the worship leader. Services will be at Calvary Church on Feb. 25, 6 p.m., and Feb. 26, 7 p.m. Services will move to First, New Brockton, on Feb. 27–28, 7 p.m. each night. Kerry Mitchell

is pastor of Calvary. Nathan Sims is pastor of First, New Brockton. ► **County Line Church, Enterprise**, will hold revival services Feb. 25–27. Services will be at 11 a.m. and 5 p.m. Feb. 25 and at 7 p.m. Feb. 26–27. State missionary Larry Hyche will be the guest speaker and Tim Addy, of Purpose Church, Opelika, will be the worship leader. Mark Jones will be the pianist. Danny Wiggins is pastor.

CONECUH

► **Old Town Church, Evergreen**, hosted a youth rally for Conecuh Association on Feb. 3. Fifty people attended the rally. Another youth rally is planned for April. Lorri Ellis is the associational youth coordinator. Adam Gomillion is pastor of Old Town.

MORGAN

► **East Highland Church, Hartselle**, will hold revival services March 11–14. Phil Glisson of Memphis, Tennessee, will be the guest evangelist. Walter Blackman is pastor.

WALKER

► **First Church, Jasper**, will hold the **Walker Association** spring evangelism conference March 4, 6 p.m. Robert Smith Jr., the Charles T. Carter chair of divinity at Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, will be the guest evangelist. All are invited. Lloyd Stillely is pastor of First, Jasper. David Miller is director of missions.✝

Want to see your news in *The Alabama Baptist*?

Email your information to news@thealabamabaptist.org or call 1-800-803-5201. Church announcements should arrive three weeks prior to the event.

My JESUS Story

By Jenni Ingram
First Baptist Church, Gantt

I want to talk to you about how Jesus can restore a hurting heart. When I began thinking about the topic of this column, Valentine's Day was on my mind — specifically people who are lonely.

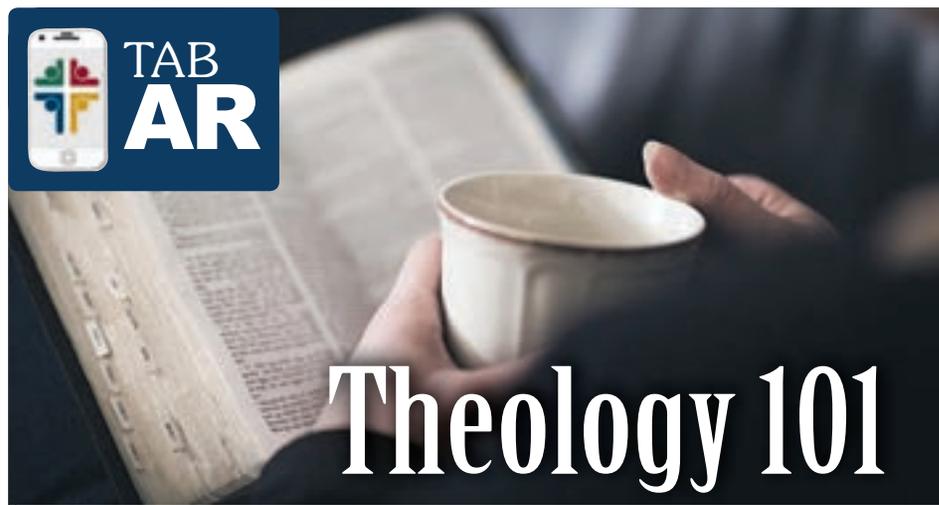
Then tragedy struck in my life and I changed my thinking. I lost three friends in six days. With two of them, I have no idea where they stood with the Lord. The other I know is healed and resting in the arms of our Father.

Although I am grieving for all three, it is the grief for the two friends whose eternity I don't know that hurts the worst. I feel as if I failed them, as if I wasn't a good enough friend to ask them

if they had accepted Jesus.

Death is an eventuality for everyone. I once heard it said that no one gets out of this life alive. This body was created from dust and to dust it will return (Gen. 3:17). The question is — where will you spend your eternity? You will only have two choices, heaven or hell. You will only get to heaven by accepting the free gift of salvation of Jesus. We are told in Acts 4:12, "Salvation is found in no one else (Jesus), for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

I am not a prophet. I am not a doomsday enthusiast. I am, however, a realist. I can see the writing on the wall — Jesus is coming back soon. Regardless of that, we are not guaranteed another second, another breath, another heartbeat. Don't put off telling your friends and family how much you love them. Don't put off taking care of what is important in your life. And most importantly, friends, please don't put off accepting salvation from Jesus.✝



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

What's New?

A New Birth

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
Special to *The Alabama Baptist*

A new covenant, a new memorial meal, a new commandment, a new day of worship and a new name for believers are among the things that are new with God and that Theology 101 has considered in previous weeks. The One who sits on the throne and declares "behold, I make all things new" also makes possible a new birth for repentant sinners (Rev. 21:5).

We commonly refer to the doctrine of regeneration as truth about a new spiritual birth God works in believers by His Holy Spirit. The well-known passage in John 3 is basic to this truth. In that passage Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about the necessity of being "born again" in order to "see the kingdom of God" (v. 3). In His explanation to Nicodemus, Jesus distinguished between physical birth and spiritual birth with the reminder that physical birth results in physical life, while the spiritual birth results in new spiritual life (v. 6).

In elaborating on this new birth, Jesus spoke of it as being "born of the Spirit," which He compared to the invisible and humanly uncontrolled action of wind blowing where the wind wishes (v. 8). Thus, we might think of the new birth as a gracious and sovereign action of the Holy Spirit in which the inner being of a person is reborn within a new relationship with God the Father through faith in God the Son.

'A new creation'

The idea of a new, spiritual birth is given a variety of expressions in the New Testament. In addition to "born again" and "born of the Spirit" in John 3, we read such expressions as "born ... of God" (John 1:13), "a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17), "created in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:10), being "made alive together with Christ" (Eph. 2:5), being "renewed in the spirit of your minds" and putting "on the new self" (Eph. 4:23–24), all of which are elaborations on the prophetic word of Ezekiel 36:26: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you."

It is helpful to think of regeneration or new birth alongside justification. Justification speaks of a change in the repentant sinner's relationship to God, in which the condemnation resulting from sin is replaced with acquittal by God (Rom. 8:1).

New birth, on the other hand, speaks of a change in the sinner's heart or inner nature. Justification is the gospel's answer to the reality of guilt, while regeneration is the gospel's answer to the depravity caused by sin. It also is helpful to distinguish between regeneration and sanctification. The regeneration of new birth points to the beginning point of the new life in Christ, whereas sanctification addresses the lifelong process by which a sinner's inner moral nature is being transformed progressively into Christlikeness.

Using God's Word

It also is helpful to think of new birth as occurring through the personal agency of the Holy Spirit using the means or instrumentality of God's Word. Thus the Bible speaks both of being born of the Spirit (John 3:6, 8) and being begotten or brought forth by the word of truth (James 1:18). It was in this latter sense that new birth was referenced in connection with Corinthian Christians when the Apostle Paul wrote, "In Christ Jesus, I have begotten you through the gospel" (1 Cor. 4:15). In light of the importance and necessity of the new birth we understand the old adage that holds being born is an eternal calamity unless a person also is born again.✝

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.



WorldSong Missions Place in Cook Springs will host coed camps in July after the first-ever Family MAC, a camp for children grades K-6 and their parents or guardians.

‘Capture & cultivate the mission that God has given’



Photo courtesy of WorldSong Missions Place

WorldSong expands camp options, provides opportunities for fellowship, mentorship

By **Carrie Brown McWhorter**
The Alabama Baptist

WorldSong Missions Place in Cook Springs has revamped camp for summer 2018, with more programs, more activities and more fun planned for campers of all ages.

There will still be all the activities campers love and an emphasis on missions, said camp director and Alabama Woman’s Missionary Union (WMU) WorldSong missions strategist Kaley Stephens.

Fan favorites

“We’re bringing back all our fan-favorite camper’s choices and looking at adding some new ones, including fishing,” Ste-

phens said. “And missions will be a focus, with a different missionary every week.”

Just like always, June will be girls-only, with camps for girls grades K-12, beginning with Mom and Me camps for younger girls and Missions Adventure Camp (MAC) for older girls and teens.

July will bring the first-ever Family MAC, for boys and girls in grades K-6 and their parents or guardians. Unlike Mom and Me or Dad and Lad camps, Family MAC is wide open, allowing moms and sons, dads and daughters and even grandparents, aunts, uncles or guardians to join the fun.

The new camp is an opportunity to expand missions education to the entire

family, said Candace McIntosh, executive director of Alabama WMU.

“We’re super excited about the opportunity for families to come together and experience missions together and hopefully expand that vision for the family about what they can do together to live out the Great Commission,” McIntosh said.

Stephens hopes holding Family MAC during a holiday week will make it a convenient and affordable getaway for families too.

“We’ll do some celebrating that morning (July 4) and we’ll dismiss early so everyone will have plenty of time to go to family barbecues and see the fireworks,” she said.

After Family MAC, WorldSong will have coed camps for boys and girls. New to this year’s schedule is also a Mini MAC for teen girls whose summer obligations often prevent them from attending a full week of camp.

Summer finishes with camps just for boys, including a week for boys completing grades 2–6 and a week for teen boys completing grades 7–12.

The summer ends with Lad and Dad camp for boys and their dads.

The changes to the summer schedule come in part after WorldSong had to turn away kids last year, Stephens said.

‘Bursting at the seams’

“The main thing we kept seeing was a growth in our children’s weeks,” Stephens said. “The weeks we had boys and girls, our boys’ cabins were bursting at the seams.”

Last summer, another boys’ week was added to the schedule as an experiment, and Stephens said the need was obvious.

“We didn’t want to have to say no to boys,” she said.

So when Alabama Boys Adventure Camp, coordinated by the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions’ (SBOM) office of global missions, approached Alabama WMU about partnering for camps at WorldSong, moving forward with more boys camps made sense.

Larry Hyche, SBOM associate in the office of global missions, is excited about the partnership because it gives more opportunities to help kids and parents “capture and cultivate the mission that God has given all of us.”

“Our focus with discipleship and men’s ministry is to disciple dads so they’ll disciple their kids, teenagers and boys,” Hyche said. “What we’re hoping as we partner with WorldSong is that our boys are going to be exposed to much more missions — not just how to serve on an occasional trip or missions project but missional living.”

Spiritual role model

Stephens said she also is excited about campers having more opportunities to interact with spiritual role models at camp.

“I believe boys have plenty of opportunities to interact with female role models through Sunday School, but the opportunity to interact with male spiritual role models is becoming harder and harder,” she said. “The staff is really excited about having more time with the boys.”

Spiritual fellowship and mentorship is a huge component of camp, Hyche said.

“Boys will be able to see as they’re trying to live out their faith that they are not alone, that there are other boys also trying to grow in Christ,” Hyche said.

Memories are made at camp too, McIntosh said, and making memories while learning about missions — “that’s a win.”

Early-bird registration for all camps at WorldSong is now open by mail and online. Registration is first-come, first-filled and Stephens expects the camps to fill up quickly. ✝



Photo courtesy of WorldSong Missions Place

SBOM’s Alabama Boys Adventure Camp is partnering with Alabama WMU’s WorldSong Missions Place to host more boys camps this summer.

Is the organ

a viable instrument in today's worship?

Organ not just for traditional music, minister says

By Karen Allen
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Rejoice at the sound of the organ" (Job 21:12).

Forty years ago, that's exactly what many churches did because the organ was their principal instrument for worship.

The organ-piano-choir trio was the typical Sunday morning music stage of the 1980s, but by the 1990s worship took on a different look as it began to "praise him with stringed instruments and organs" (Ps. 150:4).

What happened to the grandeur?

Can the King of Glory still use the king of instruments, or will the organ be turned "into the voice of them that weep" (Job 30:31)?

The answers depend on your viewpoint.

"The organ in today's services are not the principal instrument as in the past and tend to be classical in nature," said Keith Hibbs, director of the office of worship leadership and church music for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

He said that while there is no specific supporting data, the use of organs nationwide has declined drastically. Churches call him hoping to rehome their organs, but he can offer no resolution.

Electric organs

"The decline started approximately 25 years ago and will be more notable in the next couple of years as electronic organs with MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) will need service and replacement," he said.

MIDI allows computers, musical instruments and other hardware to communicate with one another to produce a variety of sounds, such as the sound of a harp, xylophone, falling rain or crashing thunder.

Hibbs said service for these instruments will be hard to come by and could be cost-prohibitive.

"The organ of today is a delicate

hybrid of machinery and artwork," noted Dennis Milnar, founder of Milnar Organ Company in Eagleville, Tennessee. Proper care for these instruments is crucial. His company has installed, restored and serviced numerous organs across the state and beyond.

An electronic organ does not require tuning, but a pipe organ needs tuning or service once or twice a year. The average cost runs \$500 per tuning depending on the size of the organ, which is determined by the number of ranks

or rows of pipes producing the same kind of sound for each note. A typical organ has 61 keys so a single rank will have 61 pipes of graduating lengths. Thus, a 60-rank organ is fairly large while an 18-rank organ is small.

The pipe organ at First Baptist Church, Birmingham, recently underwent \$25,000

worth of repair.

Joseph Hopkins, minister of music at First, Birmingham, and also dean of Samford University's School of the Arts in Birmingham, considers the organ to be "less expensive and more enduring than electronics." Initially, the church was told it would cost \$250,000 to repair the organ so it was pushed against the wall. Hopkins determined the organ could be repaired over time for considerably less and re-introduced it into worship services.

"It's really just about being willing to allow the organ as one of the instruments in our worship," he said.

When asked if the organ should be limited to specific worship styles, Hopkins suggested it could be used in many contemporary applications. David Vaughan, worship pastor at Meadow Brook Baptist Church, Birmingham, agreed.

"That's the beauty of music and the colors we have," he said. The organ at Meadow Brook Baptist aids in congregational singing every Sunday. "The organ has been

the most common and even assuring voice in worship," he said.

Like Hopkins, Vaughan does not believe in limiting the organ to specific music styles and hopes to use it more freely in the future. He senses a slow resurgence of hymnody in churches across the nation, especially in liturgical settings. Hopkins believes the younger generation is turning back to traditional worship forms and because of this trend, he does not foresee a decline in organ use.

Worship at Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills, tends to be more modern.

"Our desire is to keep the melodies and lyric content of classic hymns and worship music while bringing modern instruments and style to that content," said Michael Adler, Shades Mountain worship pastor.

He identified two things that have coincided in the worship community at Shades Mountain: the cost of maintaining the organ through temperature and humidity fluctuations and a shift in musical content and style.

Service costs

Adler noted that at one point an organ technician had to be flown in from Canada twice a year. Even after finding one in the United States, he said the service cost was



Photo by George E. Mizzell

Playing the organ requires both musical skill and physical dexterity, as demonstrated by organist Karen Allen.

"The organ of today is a delicate hybrid of machinery and artwork."

Dennis Milnar, founder of Milnar Organ Company

as high as the cost of purchasing a maintenance-free electronic keyboard. He now reserves the organ for big events.

Russell Williams, pianist and organist at First United Methodist Church, Trussville, has observed hybrid services which combine traditional and contemporary worship styles, using the pipe organ in a support function but not as the principal instrument.

"In a decade or less, only the larger, wealthy and conservative churches which still use a traditional service format will use the pipe organ," Williams predicted.

Membership in the Birmingham Chapter of the American Guild of

Organists (AGO) lends support to Williams' prophetic statement.

"Of the 40 or so churches — medium to large-sized — represented in the Birmingham AGO, the majority follow a traditional service format," said Dan Lawhon, dean of the Birmingham AGO.

Megachurches tend to follow contemporary formats.

From a marketing perspective, Milnar has seen decreased sales over the past 20 years in his company for small to medium-sized organs but increased sales for large organs. He believes there is a strong movement in the country to restore and preserve our American organ history.✝



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Where have all the organists gone?

Gap to replace organists is widening; younger generation favors guitars

By Karen Allen
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Has playing the organ become a dying art like shorthand and tating? What has happened to the organists — the ones who read three staves of music, dance on the pedals, maneuver multiple manuals, pull organ stops, push pistons, manipulate swell and crescendo pedals and follow a director — all at the same time? Is there no one else to sit on the bench where “Aunt Sally” sat for 40 years?

Eric Mathis, director of The Center for Worship and the Arts at Samford University in Birmingham, said, “There is a national trend for fewer students who major in music with an organ emphasis.”

Samford has had only one incoming freshman majoring in organ each of the past two years. Some piano majors are choosing to complement their degrees with organ in order to diversify their abilities and experiences.

“All musicians, not just organists, must possess broad skills to have a viable career in music,” Mathis said.

Even Jubal, the biblical father of music, diversified by playing more than one instrument: “And his brother’s name was Jubal: he was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ” (Gen. 4:21).

Educational requirements are demanding for organ majors. Samford offers an organ performance degree as well as a degree in music and worship or music education with an emphasis in organ. Other Alabama universities, including the University of Alabama, Birmingham Southern and the University of Montevallo, offer similar degrees.

But not all organists have degrees in music. Approximately half of the Birmingham American Guild of Organists (AGO) chapter members, including supporters, do not have music degrees.

Organ programs

Schools with nationally reputable organ programs such as Baylor University in Waco, Texas, and Mercer University in Macon, Georgia, have seen increases in the number of organ majors. Other, lesser-known university organ mu-



Photo by Karen Allen

sic programs have dropped their programs altogether. Dan Lawhon, dean of the Birmingham AGO, admitted we could be “shooting ourselves in the foot” by not having

universities give priority to keeping up a high organ profile. With fewer trained students, the gap to replace organists is widening. Rural churches have even wider gaps. “Aunt Sally,” who is retiring at 70, 80 and even 90 years of age after decades of service, has no one to replace her from the younger generations.

Most organists in the Birmingham AGO are over 40 years old, said Lawhon, noting he has detected more difficulty in filling organist vacancies in the past 10 years.

Keith Hibbs, director of the office of worship leadership and church music for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, has experienced the consequences. It has been seven years since the

organ in his home church, Dalranda Baptist Church, Montgomery, has been played. Church leaders finally gave up after trying to find an organist and removed the organ when the church was renovated.

Hibbs offered two words for those attempting to fill an organist vacancy: “Good luck!”

To accommodate for organ vacancies, some pianists switch to organ but a pianist is not the same as an organist. The music may be the same but the skills, sounds and techniques are not. For example,

the common practice of sustaining is achieved by an organist’s fingers and feet while the piano has a sustain pedal that is pressed.

Lawhon noted that “keyboard studies overall are not as prevalent as in the past.”

This is corroborated by Hibbs who agreed there has been an ongoing pianist shortage for 25 years. Why? One reason is the

level of commitment. Another is the cost for years of lessons, in addition to tuition and private lessons for those seeking degrees. Then there is the cost for the instrument itself as well as its maintenance.

Generational instrument

The guitar has become the instrument of this generation. It’s easier to play, faster to learn, requires less commitment and is significantly less expensive to purchase and maintain.

Mathis noted, “The guitar’s portability has increased the variety of worship practices such as worship around a campfire or in home groups.”

Another strong advantage of the guitar is that it is considerably easier to find a replacement guitarist.

Opportunities for organists are diminishing in direct proportion to the prevalence of the traditional service, said Russell Williams, pianist and organist at First United Methodist Church, Trussville.

“Congregations have to get creative to hire organists,” Mathis said, “and organists have to be flexible and open to more responsibilities.”

Organist positions are typically part-time positions with a wide salary range depending on church size and expectations as well as

the organist’s experience and education. Many churches are choosing to combine the organist position with another role. It is rare to find a full-time organist position at any church of any denomination.

And not every organist is a good fit for every church. Churches have different needs so they must find the right fit in their organist to meet those needs.

What is the response to this widening gap of organist vacancies?

The AGO encourages mentoring of students within the church and community. Every year the AGO hosts a Pipe Organ Encounter Advanced Workshop for auditioning high school students across the U.S. The AGO routinely hosts other nonauditioned events to instill greater organ interest.

Samford also is taking strides to promote more interest in the organ and recently made one of its five-year goals to “increase appreciation of the role of the organ in worship — whether as the primary instrument or as an instrument in the band.”

Samford also added a new scholarship fund provided from a donor specifically for organ students who have significant interest in the role of the organ in congregational song.

Summarizing the organ and organist dilemma, Mathis said, “People assume that because there are fewer organists and churches with organs in worship that the organ is dying. The organ is not dying, nor are the organists.”

State of change

“Church music is in a constant state of change, and with the addition of praise and worship, the worship life of the congregation has changed. ... Many churches have built new sanctuaries, installed multimillion dollar organs and hired organists, while other congregations across our state have built multipurpose buildings that don’t have organs because they cannot attract and/or afford organists. Both have followed their callings from God,” Mathis said.

“The important thing is that the Word of God continues to be heard in worship and that each congregation has found its calling and its voice musically.”

“The organ is not dying, nor are the organists. Church music is in a constant state of change.”

Eric Mathis, director, The Center for Worship and the Arts, Samford University

National, Alabama WMU host Children's Mission Day

National WMU and Alabama WMU will host children from across the state for Children's Missions Day on Feb. 17 at national WMU in Birmingham. Children will hear from missionary speakers, prepare missions projects and have a time of commissioning before going to assigned missions sites to share God's love.

"We have an exciting and meaningful morning planned that is filled with worship, missions testimonies and projects and serving others," said Heather Keller, children's ministry consultant for national WMU.

"Through Children's Missions Day, kids are challenged to realize they can be on mission in their own community, even at their young ages."

Empowering children

"This concerted effort is empowering as the children, and their churches, see their impact for the Kingdom in their own communities," Keller said.

For more than 10 years, children in churches across the country have shared the love of Christ in

their communities through this day of outreach, previously known as Children's Ministry Day.

Keller said the name was recently changed to Children's Missions Day to clearly communicate its focus on missions.

'Provide opportunity'

"The purpose of Children's Missions Day is to provide an opportunity for children across the country to be the hands and feet of Jesus in their own community as they share God's love with people who are potentially unchurched," she said.

Participants will hear missionary speakers Lorna Bius of SEND Relief; Tim Milner, a church planter in Huntsville; and Todd and Susan Lafferty, former International Mission Board field personnel.

Candace McIntosh, executive director of Alabama WMU, said, "I am excited about the opportunity to partner with national WMU for this unique event for children. What a fun day it will be as we engage children in living out the Great Commission."

For more information about Children's Missions Day, visit wmu.com/cmd. (WMU)

Annual prayer breakfast draws more than 3,600

In his second appearance at the annual National Prayer Breakfast, President Donald Trump steered clear of partisan politics and focused on his belief in the country's dependence on God.

"America's a nation of believers and together we are strengthened by the power of prayer," the president said in his 14-minute speech that emphasized connections between religion and government.

The 66th annual event, which drew more than 3,600 people to the Washington Hilton on Feb. 8, was a time for prayer, speeches and networking between religious and political leaders from scores of countries.

Guests included the presidents of Guatemala, Kosovo and Latvia.

A delegation of 55 Russians also attended, according to Konstantin Bendas of the Pentecostal Russian Union of Christians of Evangelical Faith. Trump cited mentions of God

in the Declaration of Independence, the words "In God We Trust" on U.S. currency and the etching of "Praise Be to God" atop the Washington Monument.

"Each year this event reminds us that faith is central to American life and to liberty," he said. "Our rights are not given to us by man. Our rights come from our Creator. No matter what, no earthly force can take those rights away."

'Live by convictions'

Trump also emphasized the importance of Americans' right to express religious views.

"When Americans are able to live by their convictions ... our families thrive, our communities flourish and our nation can achieve anything."

Held annually in early February, the prayer breakfast is sponsored by the Fellowship Foundation and co-hosted by Democratic and Republican members of House and Senate weekly prayer groups. (RNS)



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CHURCH POSITIONS

ASSOCIATE PASTOR FOR WORSHIP & MUSIC

Concord Baptist Church, a vibrant and growing church in Anderson, S.C., is seeking an associate pastor for worship and music. This person must have the calling, gifting, training and heart to lead a large and diverse ministry of worship. We are excited about our future. For a job description and/or to submit a resumé/profile, please contact jjames@concordbaptist.com. Please also visit concordbaptist.com for more information about our congregation.

BIVOCATIONAL WORSHIP MINISTER

New Beginnings, Graysville, is searching for a bivocational worship minister. Ability to lead Red Back Book and contemporary music as well as directing the adult choir required. Send your resumé to: secretary@nbcdbaptist.com.

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Montevallo First Baptist Church,

Montevallo, Alabama, is seeking a part-time minister of music. They will give leadership in planning and leading of our worship services in an energetic blended style of worship. Their primary additional responsibility will be to lead the choir ministry and choir rehearsals. Interested persons should send a resumé to: Montevallo First Baptist Church, P.O. Box 46, Montevallo, AL 35115, or email address: drtstutton@bellsouth.net.

PRESCHOOL & CHILDREN'S PASTOR

The First Baptist Church of Mauldin, S.C., is seeking a full-time preschool and children's pastor. Send resumé to: First Baptist Mauldin, 150 South Main Street, Mauldin, SC 29662 or email: wleonard@fbcmauldin.org. For more information, visit www.fbcmauldin.org to view the job profile and job description.

OTHER POSITIONS

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Bethel Baptist Association is accepting resúmes for director of missions. Please send resúmes

to: Bethel Baptist Association, ATTN: DOM Search Committee, P.O. Box 481088, Linden, AL 36748, or email: bethelassoc@bellsouth.net.

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Arnold Dean Johnson

Alabama Baptist pastor dies at 67

Arnold Dean Johnson, a longtime Alabama Baptist pastor, died Feb. 1. He was 67.

For the past 11 years, Johnson served as pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church, Scottsboro, in Tennessee River Baptist Association. Before that, he also served Matthew's Memorial Baptist Church, Stevenson, and Mount Carmel Baptist Church, Bridgeport, both in Tennessee River Association.

He also planted East Brow Community Church, Flat Rock, in Sand Mountain Association.

Johnson was a graduate of Pisgah High School and had worked at Combustion Engineering, Mutual Savings Insurance and Corner Stone Funeral Chapel. He also had served as a volunteer with Court Appointed Special Advocate programs assisting with wheelchair-access ramps.

He is survived by his wife, Teresa; two children; and four grandchildren. (TAB)

Roy Carlton Griggs

Retired longtime pastor dies at 88

Longtime Alabama Baptist pastor Roy Carlton Griggs died Feb. 1. He was 88.

Griggs spent more than 50 years in pastoral ministry, including at Southside Baptist Church, Alabaster, in Shelby Baptist Association, where he served from 1990 to 2000.

He also served as pastor of Siluria Baptist Church, Alabaster, from 1971 to 1983.

Other churches Griggs served during his ministry include East Tallassee Baptist Church, Tallassee; First Baptist Church, Salem; Pine Grove Baptist Church, Camp Hill; Northside Baptist Church, Opelika; Shiloh Baptist Church, Hartford; South Highland Baptist Church, Bessemer; and First Baptist Church, Uvalda, Georgia.

Griggs is survived by his wife of 68 years, Dell Elizabeth; two children; and six grandchildren. (TAB)



Photo by Michael J. Brooks

Joe Godfrey (right), executive director of Alabama Citizens Action Program (ALCAP), presents the 2018 Dan Ireland 'Salt and Light' Award to former Alabama Rep. Richard Laird, who serves as vice chairman of the ALCAP board. Laird retired from the state Legislature in 2014.

Variety of topics discussed at ALCAP's annual meeting

By Michael J. Brooks
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Opioid overdose, marijuana legalization, home-delivered alcohol and church day cares top the list of issues being monitored by Alabama Citizens Action Program (ALCAP) in the Alabama Legislature, according to reports given at its annual meeting Feb. 6 in Montgomery.

Joe Godfrey, ALCAP executive director, said Gov. Kay Ivey appointed an Opioid Overdose and Addiction Council in August 2017.

"This is a good move but there wasn't a member of the faith community in leadership," he said. "Pastors and other Christian leaders are on the front line of defense against this epidemic so we believed they should be part of the governor's commission."

After making this suggestion to the governor's office, Godfrey said he was asked to chair the council's Community Engagement Subcommittee.

ALCAP is compiling a list of resources for churches in helping those with addictions. This material will be posted on the organization's website.

Godfrey said he's seen some opposition for ALCAP's stance on marijuana legalization.

"We've posted a few articles on our Facebook page highlighting the detrimental effects of marijuana and some critics have accused us of taking money from 'big pharmaceuticals,'" he said. "We've not received any money like this. It's actually 'big marijuana' who is pushing legalization since there's money to be made for them."

In opposition

Godfrey said ALCAP has opposed Senate Bill 243 that would allow alcohol to be shipped directly to homeowners.

"The breweries oppose this too, for other reasons," he said. "Many communities see alcohol as a revenue enhancer but they fail to count the cost of attendant problems."

Godfrey said ALCAP opposes Sunday alcohol sales referendums in Bridgeport, Clio, Louisville and other communities, but it is up to pastors and church-

es in the areas to oppose these local bills.

He said he doesn't foresee gambling "going anywhere" in the current legislative session.

"There's been no lottery bill, nor anything about daily fantasy sports," he said. "The legislature is trying to wrap up by March 26, so they've been busy with appropriations and other pressing matters."

During the meeting, Godfrey asked legal counsel Eric Johnston to speak to House Bill 76, the so-called day care bill. Johnston explained that social media has engendered much misunderstanding about the bill.

'Religious liberty issue'

"We see this as a religious liberty issue," Johnston said. "We've had protections in place for some 38 years so no child should be endangered in church-sponsored day care facilities. Background checks for workers and annual health and fire inspections are already in place. What we see is additional encroachment if DHR imposes additional regulations on our churches. Some churches have accepted federal money so they've also accepted additional federal regulation."

In other business, treasurer Paul Moore of Pelham presented the financial report and the proposed 2018 budget of \$426,300. Nominating chair John Killian of Fayette presented six nominees for board membership: Mike Cox of Forestdale, Scott Davis of Fayette, Kent Pelton of Lanett, Davin Watkins of Pelham, Matt Morrison of Southside and Don Wallace of Tuscaloosa. Joe Bob Mizzell of Montgomery was named an associate member.

Godfrey presented the 2018 Dan Ireland "Salt and Light" Award to former Alabama Rep. Richard Laird, who serves as vice chairman of the ALCAP board. Laird retired from the state Legislature in 2014.

"Our work is missions work," Godfrey said. "I know our churches are missions-minded and this is good. But please let them know that influencing our society is Christian missions and ALCAP is one way to do this. We're dependent on pastors and churches to support what we do."✠



Mississippi WMU Seeking Executive Director

Mississippi WMU is presently receiving resumés for the position of **Executive Director-Treasurer of Woman's Missionary Union and Women's Ministries**. This person must be a college graduate and have 2 to 3 years of seminary training as well as five (5) to ten (10) years of local church or denominational experience.

The **Executive Director-Treasurer of WMU** is responsible for promotion, planning, conducting and evaluating the missions mobilization, missions awareness, missions education, missions support and missions involvement among women, youth, girls, preschoolers and co-ed groups in Mississippi Baptist churches and associations throughout the state.

To be considered for this position, send your current resumé to:

Office of Executive Director,
Attention: Marion Duncan,
Chairman of WMU Search
Committee, P.O. Box 530,
Jackson, MS 39205-0530



FBC Tuscaloosa marks 200 years with anniversary celebration

In 1818, a year before the establishment of the state of Alabama, Nathan Roberts led the first Sunday service of Ebenezer Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa.

Now in a new location under a different name, First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, celebrated its bicentennial Jan. 24. The church commenced its anniversary recognition Jan. 21 with a service honoring previous church staff, choir alumni and local government officials in attendance.

County Commissioner and First, Tuscaloosa, member Mark Nelson presented a resolution acknowledging the church's impact on the community throughout its 200 years, as well as its impact on him personally. Lorette Berg, executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, also presented a resolution honoring the church's faithful service to proclaiming the gospel and congratulated the church on its two centuries of history.



Photo by Barry Fikes Photography
Mark Nelson (right), FBC Tuscaloosa member and county commissioner, presents a resolution from the county to Pastor Gil McKee.

Others who spoke emphasized the church's focus on God's glory through past, present and future congregations, including Pastor Gil McKee and Rick Lance, former pastor and now executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

Kris Sullivan, executive pastor of First, Tuscaloosa, said the church will draw from Paul's words in Acts 28:31 about preaching the gospel unhindered, which McKee introduced to the congregation at the conclu-

sion of the anniversary celebration week.

"It's not really about the church," Sullivan said. "We're not trying to self-aggrandize, 'Look what we've done in 200 years.' We want to build on what the saints before us have done and use that to encourage us to go forward unhindered."

The focus of the church and its bicentennial celebration derive from the first line of Psalm 96:3, "Declaring His glory among the nations." This verse drove the anniversary planning and the year's special offering goal of \$200,000.

McKee added, "Our main goal is to proclaim God's glory today, just like we've been doing for the past 200 years, and just like we will continue to do as long as Jesus tarries."

The anniversary celebration included recognizing missionaries who have been commissioned from First, Tuscaloosa. Also, various church members contributed devotions written specifically for a Monday through Friday devotional for the bicentennial and a display of artifacts were displayed in the fellowship hall during the anniversary week.

Sullivan said other events are planned throughout the year, particularly missions trips focused on the church's unhindered future and declaring God's glory among the nations, both at home and abroad. (Danielle Waddell)

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To register or for more details, visit www.livethedlife.com or contact Bill Wilks at 205-228-0030.



But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 5:44-45

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"I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go." Psalm 32:8

'Ministry of communications'

TAB embraces challenge of telling stories in way next generations will consume them

(continued from page 1)
a new era of media ministry.

"Will we find a way to remember the goal? Will we serve with excellence?" Rash asked.

Following lunch, Elizabeth Wells and Grace Thornton, co-authors of the new book *"The Alabama Baptist: Celebrating 175 Years of Informing, Inspiring and Connecting Baptists"* spoke about the history of the newspaper.

Wells, retired archivist at Samford University in Birmingham, emphasized the value of the state Baptist paper in the early years of Alabama's statehood.

Baptists who subscribed to the paper may not have traveled outside their hometowns, but they knew what was

going on around the world because they received *TAB*, Wells said.

Thornton shared highlights from the paper's last 100 years as an entity of the Alabama Baptist State Convention.

"Long before Facebook, (*The Alabama Baptist*) was the way everybody found out what was going on," she said.

Both Wells and Thornton noted the financial pressures of operating a newspaper in constantly chang-

ing economic times, and in a Q-and-A time following the historical presentations, Terry noted the future will be filled with similar challenges related to financing the work.

Rash added that challenges already exist in how to "serve up" the information.

"We have stories that need to be told," she said. "We are going to be dealing with what all that news media and print (publications) are facing today — to figure out how we tell our story in a way a new generation will consume that news."

Other events during the celebration included tours of historic sites in Marion, including Judson College; Siloam Baptist Church; the original chapel

of Howard College (now Samford University) on the campus of Marion Military Institute; and Reverie, a historic Greek revival mansion

A birthday party complete with cake, singing and book signings ended the day.

"What a wonderful day this was. All of us at *The Alabama Baptist* will forever be grateful to Judson College, Siloam Baptist Church and the more than 200 people from across the state who came to affirm



Photo by Maggie Walsh

TAB editor-elect Jennifer Davis Rash speaks about the importance of faithfulness during the morning chapel service in Judson's Jewett Hall on Feb. 6.

the value of our ministry of communications and to celebrate God's blessing on this ministry for the past 175 years," Terry said. "The story of *The Alabama Baptist* is a story of God's faithfulness and we look forward to serving God and serving Alabama Baptists into the future." ✝



Photo by Maggie Walsh

Elizabeth Wells, co-author of *TAB's* history book, speaks about the value of *TAB* through the years.



Photo by Maggie Walsh

Grace Thornton (right), co-author of *'The Alabama Baptist: Celebrating 175 Years of Informing, Inspiring and Connecting Baptists,'* signs a copy of the book during the Feb. 6 celebration.



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"The story of The Alabama Baptist is a story of God's faithfulness and we look forward to serving God and serving Alabama Baptists into the future."

Bob Terry
editor, *The Alabama Baptist*

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For February 18

Explore the Bible By Jay T. Robertson, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile

Bible Studies for Life By Jim Barnette, Ph.D.
Samford University and Brookwood Baptist Church, Mountain Brook

ANSWERING CRITICS
Acts 26:19-29

Acts is the unfolding story of the people of God, filled with the Spirit of God, engaging in the mission of God. In these verses Paul is again sharing the gospel and intentionally seeking to make disciples. This is the same mission we have as Jesus' followers. Paul tried to persuade King Agrippa to bow before King Jesus. As Paul shared the testimony of his conversion and of his commission to proclaim the gospel, he emphasized two key themes. First he magnified the cross and the resurrection. Second he insisted that this new faith is actually an extension of Judaism.

The Gospel Told (19-23)

Paul explained to King Agrippa how he was faithful to obey the commission Christ gave him. He had preached in Damascus, in Jerusalem, in Judea and to the Gentiles. Paul proclaimed a message of repentance, urging everyone to bear fruit in a way that reflected their new life in Christ. Paul then described that he preaches the Christ written about by Moses and the prophets. He has been faithful to his commission because God enables him with His power and God supplies the message centered on the Christ. Paul's statement about Moses and the prophets is reminiscent of Jesus' teaching on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:44-47).

Paul noted he was simply a preacher of the Jewish promise and hope rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures; it was nothing new. He asserted that he had not made up a new story to proclaim. He had been preaching the fulfillment of this great hope, which culminates in the risen Messiah. Jesus is the Messiah, the light shining in the darkness. It is Jesus who was being proclaimed to both Jews and Gentiles. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Paul was accomplishing Jesus' purpose of being light to the nations.

Objection Rebuffed (24-26)

Festus, the Roman governor of Judea, could not contain himself after hearing Paul's message. He interrupted Paul, declaring him insane for believing such things. Did Paul really think Jesus of Nazareth, a man executed under one of Festus' predecessors as governor, Pilate, was alive and had spoken to him? A belief in the resurrection was a crazy idea to the Romans. Festus' reaction to Paul's message is a reminder that the gospel really is "foolishness" to some people (1 Cor. 1:18). Paul defended himself respectfully, assuring Festus that he was speaking true and rational words.

Invitation Given (27-29)

Paul took advantage of Festus' interruption to focus attention on King Agrippa. Continuing to address Festus, Paul said King Agrippa knows that these things are true. Paul assumed that King Agrippa was familiar with the ministry of Jesus because it did not take place "in a corner." Christianity was not a secret cult. Paul called King Agrippa as a witness to his sanity because the Jews believed in resurrection and the matters of which he spoke (the death of Jesus and the claim that He rose from the dead) were common knowledge in Palestine. By remaining silent, King Agrippa confirmed the truth of what Paul said.

Paul boldly confronted King Agrippa, asking him if he believed the prophets. King Agrippa was stuck in a quandary. Admitting his belief in the prophets meant he had to concede that Jesus was the Messiah. That would make him appear foolish in front of his Roman friends and at the same time outrage his Jewish subjects. Yet a Jewish king could hardly disavow the revered prophets of his people. King Agrippa dodged the question by commenting to Paul, "In a short time would you persuade me to become a Christian?" Paul replied with his desire for everyone to come to belief in Jesus.✠

I AM JUST PASSING THROUGH
1 Peter 2:11-17

Because Christians are God's precious people, their true home is with Him. As such, their conduct in this world is to be that of those who are only passing through it. But in doing so they are to show by their behavior that they are citizens of a better country.

Do good works that point to Christ.
(11-12)

The phrase "resident aliens" refers to the way in which a person may temporarily reside in a different country, as when diplomats are sent to a post for a few years in another part of the world.

They do not take up permanent residence and change their citizenship; they remain loyal to their own country. They will respect the customs and just laws of that foreign country but their true loyalty is with their homeland. The word "strangers" expresses the more transient aspect of their stay, while "aliens" expresses more their status as noncitizens.

The tension between Christian outsiders and pagan insiders is not merely a struggle between two social groups. Pagans long for the things of the flesh; Christians long for the gifts that strengthen the soul. Peter notes later in his letter that the struggle between flesh and spirit is part of the struggle between God and Satan (see 1 Pet. 5:6-11).

The outcome of these battles between flesh and spirit, God and Satan, are really not in doubt. Peter has already assured them with the words of the prophet Isaiah: "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of the Lord endures forever" (1 Pet. 1:24-25; Isa. 40:6-8).

Submit to the authorities over you.
(13-15)

The apostle states that good conduct is to be expressed in a submissive acceptance of the expectations of human institutions. It is striking that Peter, writing probably in the age of Nero, still sees the state as a God-appointed society for the enforcement of moral values. A Christian's righteousness should raise him or her above the slanders and suspicions of the ignorant. Christians must render unto Caesar what is his due; in other passages, however, it is clear that Peter knew when to refuse Caesar when the emperor claimed what is God's (see Acts 4:19, 20; 5:29). Put another way, the emperor and "governors" are to be honored along with all other human beings, but only God is to be feared (see 1 Pet. 1:17).

Use your freedom in Christ to show love and honor to others. (16-17)

Christians do not have the freedom to do wrong. Though free in a greater way than anyone apart from Christ can ever be, Christians are still in another sense "slaves of God." As it should be, for we owe Him our whole lives and entire being. True freedom, true ability to choose and do what one really wants to do comes paradoxically in entire submission as His obedient servants. Therefore, as God's "free servants," Christians should never use their freedom to cover up or hide wrongdoing ("as a cover-up for evil" as the NIV translation says). Freedom must result in the great joy of doing right.

Believers are not only to honor and love God, they also are to "fear" Him, something they should not do toward unbelievers (1 Pet. 3:14) or toward other believers (1 Pet. 1:17). In fearing the One who will lead us to His heavenly home, Peter assures us that we can live in the world as part of the world, not simply as passing strangers.✠

Christian Crossword

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Across

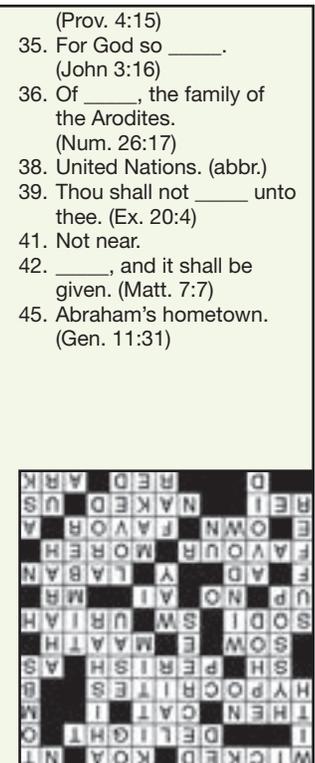
- Filthy conversation of the _____. (2 Pet. 2:7)
- Pekod, and Shoa, and _____. (Ezek. 23:23)
- New Testament. (abbr.)
- His _____ is in the law. (Ps. 1:2)
- _____ have we confidence toward God. (1 John 3:21)
- Feline.
- Be not, as the _____. (Matt. 6:16)
- Hush.
- When the wicked _____. (Prov. 11:10)
- Let _____ many servants. (1 Tim. 6:1)
- _____ not among thorns. (Jer. 4:3)
- The son of _____, which was the son of Mattathias. (Luke 3:26)
- Gaddiel the son of _____. (Num. 13:10)
- Compass direction.
- Bathsheba's first husband. (2 Sam. 11:3)
- Not down.
- Negative.

- Joshua sent men from Jericho to _____. (Josh. 7:2)
- Mister. (abbr.)
- Newspaper want _____. (Gen. 29:10)
- Rachel and Leah's father. (Gen. 29:10)
- Lord, by thy _____. (Ps. 30:7)
- By the hill of _____. (Judg. 7:1)
- And ye are not your _____. (1 Cor. 6:19)
- In _____ with God and men. (Luke 2:52 NAS)
- Nathan ... and Shimei, and _____. (1 Kings 1:8)
- _____, and ye clothed me. (Matt. 25:36)
- You and I.
- Esau's color at birth. (Gen. 25:25)
- Noah's boat.

Down

- Every man _____ his weapons. (2 Chron. 23:7)
- Short for Edwin.
- They delivered them the _____. (Acts 16:4)

- Javan, Elishah, and Tarshish, _____. (Gen. 10:4)
- The kingdom of _____ in Bashan. (Deut. 3:4)
- _____ was over the household. (1 Kings 4:6)
- His dwelling among the _____. (Mark 5:3)
- A lion's den.
- Take a bunch of _____. (Ex. 12:22)
- He made the _____ of gold. (Ex. 39:2)
- Opposite of yes.
- Computer Printer. (abbr.)
- Jacob's brother. (Gen. 25:2-26)
- Benjamin's third child. (1 Chron. 8:1)
- And there sat in a _____. (Acts 20:9)
- Buy _____ and hewed stone. (2 Kings 12:12)
- _____ the little children to come unto me. (Mark 10:14)
- I am the _____. (John 15:6)
- _____ it, pass not by it.





Media reviews

MOVIE

Third 'God's Not Dead' film to spotlight forgiveness, love, hope

By **Michael Foust**
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

The same studio that released the successful apologetics-driven films "God's Not Dead" and "God's Not Dead 2" is working on a third installment in the series — but this one has a twist.

Called "God's Not Dead: A Light In Darkness" and scheduled for release by PureFlix on March 30, it follows the plight of a pastor (played by David A.R. White) after he is arrested for refusing to turn in his sermons to the government. When his church is burned down, he enlists the help of his estranged atheist brother (played by John Corbett) in a legal battle to rebuild it.

Unlike the Christian vs. atheist storyline of the first two films, "A Light In Darkness" will take a different direction when the pastor's belief that God is good "all the time" is put to the test.

"The film is about forgiveness. It's about love," White

told media members in October 2017 on the set in Little Rock, Arkansas. "There's so much fighting, there's so much anger [in America]. You can't watch the news and be happy — more so now than ever. I think this movie is relevant for that, and hopefully both sides of the aisle can go and watch this story about two brothers that really don't like each other, which could be the symbolism of America, and healing and forgiveness and hope and love then follow. [Moviegoers] could walk out being encouraged."

It is Corbett's second faith-based film in less than a year. Known for starring in the mainstream hit movie "My Big Fat Greek Wedding," Corbett played the lead role in the Christian movie "All

Saints" in the summer of 2017. Corbett said he took the roles in the Christian movies simply because he was attracted to the stories.

"A movie like this is not a big-budget movie, which means ev-

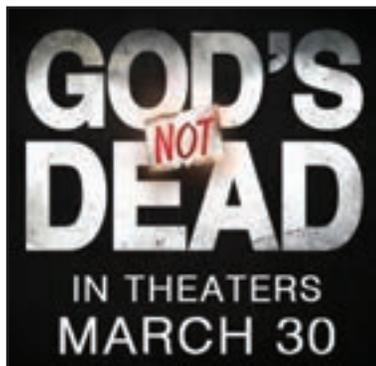


Photo by godsnotdead.com



Photo by Robert Hacman, godsnotdead.com

Above: John Corbett (right) and David A.R. White shoot a scene on the set of the upcoming movie 'God's Not Dead: A Light in Darkness.'



Photo by Robert Hacman, godsnotdead.com

everybody's working because they like it," Corbett said. "I read it and I really, really liked it."

"A Light In Darkness" also will star veteran actor Ted McGinley ("Do You Believe?," "Happy Days," "Pearl Harbor"), Academy Award winner Tatum O'Neal ("The Runaways," "Paper Moon") and Shane Harper ("Good Luck Charlie," "God's Not Dead").

"God's Not Dead" (2014) and "God's Not Dead 2" (2016) each opened strong, with the first one ending its run with a \$60 million gross and the second one \$20 million.

Praying for guidance

"A lot of prayer went into this movie," White said of the third film. "A lot of going back and forth: 'Lord ... what do you want in the next installment? We don't

want to repeat what we've done already because we're just trying fill a void. We want to do what You want us to do.'"

Three writers were employed, and the final screenplay was the result of nine drafts.

The film's government-requesting-sermons angle isn't far-fetched. Three years ago, the city of Houston tried to do just that as part of a lawsuit.

"It's pretty relevant with what is going on," White said.✠

Above: John Corbett (left) and David A.R. White portray brothers Pearce and Dave in the third 'God's Not Dead' film.

Meet the reviewer

Michael Foust covers the intersection of faith and entertainment as a writer and podcast host for Heirloom Audio. He also is the husband of an amazing wife and the father of four small children.

**For more information,
visit GodsNotDead.com.**

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IMB photo

Shay Porter (standing), an IMB journeyman, and IMB missionary Lindsay Mikeska (third from right) talk with students during a coffeehouse music night hosted by one of their partner churches. Regular events like this help IMB missionaries build relationships with students.

Tremendous missions field

IMB missionaries reach millennials in London

Shane Mikeska's original calling and plane ticket didn't land him in London — a tropical illness did.

"It definitely wasn't part of our plan," he assured. "My wife, Lindsay, and I started out in Southeast Asia on an agricultural farm. We loved the people and we loved the language. But long story short, I got sick."

He needed to be in a place with a colder climate, and after much deliberation, it looked like England was the place. So the couple moved and the difference was stark. It wasn't just the climate that was cold; Shane said the people seemed cold toward faith and the pace of life in England's cities felt chaotic and hard to engage.

"I grabbed every book I could find on the people of England and I started going to pubs, campuses, everywhere to try to get to know our neighbors," he said. "God began to stir in us a love for the people here." And He began to open their eyes more and more to the tremendous missions field they had been placed in.

"We have the world at our fingertips," Shane said. "We have an amazing capacity to be senders to the world." London, the city the Mikeskas call home, has 300 spoken languages spread across hundreds of people groups from around the globe. It holds 48 universities, with a quarter of that student population coming from other countries.

"We come in contact here all the time with people who haven't heard of Jesus," Shane says. Because of

the vast opportunity and size of the task, the Mikeskas have teamed up with other IMB missionaries to divide the city up into (strategic) groups.

"Our group is the millennials," Shane states. "London is a young people's haven."

The Mikeskas meet people for coffee, feed them meals and try to create a sense of community for young internationals. And on a regular basis, they experience divine appointments, Lindsay reports.

"We met this guy from Singapore one night and got to talking, and we told him the name of the town we had lived in in Southeast Asia," she said. "He told us he had a friend from the same town." One night he brought his friend to meet the Mikeskas and it turns out they had lived on the same street. She even knew the house they had lived in.

"She recalled, 'I remember when new people moved in and painted it brown,' and we said, 'That was us,'" Lindsay said.

It was confirmation for the Mikeskas that their God is bigger than borders and tropical illnesses and everything else. He's bringing the world to London from everywhere, Shane said, including the city that captured their heart in Southeast Asia. "And He is doing great and amazing things here."

Pray for the Mikeskas to continue to make strategic friendships with internationals in order to impact unreached people groups in their city.

Ask God to put a desire in the hearts of new believers to take the gospel back to their countries. (WMU's *Missions Mosaic*, IMB)

"We have the world at our fingertips. We have an amazing capacity to be senders to the world."

**Shane Mikeska
IMB missionary**

RELIGION in America

Compiled from Wire Services

How would you rate the government's help?

WASHINGTON — A recent national survey by Pew Research Center finds that views on government help for the poor, the middle class, the wealthy and older people have changed little in recent years.

Majorities of Americans say the federal government does not provide enough help for older people (65 percent), poor people (62 percent) and the middle class (61 percent). By contrast, nearly two-thirds (64 percent) say the government provides too much help for wealthy people.

There are partisan differences in views of government support for all groups included in the survey. However, the gap is somewhat narrower in views of government help for older people than for other groups. While 73 percent of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents say the federal government does not do enough for older people, a smaller majority of Republicans (58 percent) say the same.

The partisan divide in views of government aid for the poor is wider than for other groups. Fully 82 percent of Democrats say the federal government does not provide enough help for poor people, compared with just 36 percent of Republicans. About as many Republicans say the government does too much for the poor (33 percent) as say it does too little; 27 percent say the help the government provides is about right.

The national survey was conducted Jan. 10–15 among 1,503 adults. (TAB)

NJ lawsuit alleges Islamic indoctrination

CHATHAM, N.J. — A federal civil rights lawsuit filed Jan. 23 in New Jersey District Court accuses middle school administrators and teachers of forcing students to view Islamic propaganda, including an explicit call to convert to Islam.

The lawsuit alleges several violations of students' First Amendment rights and was filed by the Thomas More Law Center, a nonprofit Christian law firm based in Ann Arbor, Michigan, on behalf of Libby Hilsenrath and her minor son. The lawsuit centers on videos and lessons in a middle school World Cultures and Geography class. One video depicts two cartoon boys talking about the five pillars of Islam and ends with a slide referring viewers to a United Kingdom-based website and email address where they can order an information pack about Islam. Another video presents Islamic beliefs and ends with the prayer "May God help us all find the true faith, Islam. Ameen." The video also contains excerpts from the Quran stating that Islam is "perfected" religion and the only religion for mankind.

Students also were required to complete a fill-in-the-blank version of the Islamic conversion creed and prayer. The worksheet contained a link to a webpage that explains "the ease with which they could convert to become Muslim," the lawsuit says.

The study of Christianity and Judaism, both developed in the Middle East and North Africa, were not covered in the class, the lawsuit says. (TAB)

Wedding cake baker wins Calif. court case

BAKERSFIELD, Calif. — A California trial court has upheld a Christian baker's right to refuse to create a wedding cake for a lesbian couple, but the decision comes as a similar case is already pending in the nation's highest court.

Tastries Bakery owner Cathy Miller's freedom of speech "outweighs" the state of California's interest in ensuring a freely accessible marketplace, Judge David R. Lampe said in his decision in the Superior Court of California in Kern County, one of the state's 58 trial courts.

Standing to set a legal precedent is the case of Colorado baker and Masterpiece Cakeshop owner Jack Phillips, deliberated before the U.S. Supreme Court in December 2017.

A ruling is expected within months in Phillips' fight to limit his creativity as a wedding cake baker to marriages between a man and a woman. (BP)