

December 14, 1999
Vol. 173, No. 49**FOR THE RECORD****Southern Baptist Convention**SBC President Paige Patterson predicts a formal split. *Page 2.***Financial Forum**Tax break offers good news for good Samaritans. *Page 4.***Editorial**Religious liberty deserves vigilant defense. *Page 5.***Charity**Poll finds four out of 10 Americans don't help the poor. *Page 7.***Missions**Missionaries in Yemen plan changes to take medical care and the gospel to rural communities. *Page 9.***Bethlehem 2000**The city of Jesus' birth prepares for millennium pilgrims. *Page 9.***Wedgwood**Students and others gather to finish a party stopped by a gunman. *Page 11.*

Dated Material — Deliver by Wednesday, Dec. 15

Astronomer: Star of Bethlehem could have been JupiterBy Kelly Turner
Associated Baptist Press

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. (ABP)—It's a question that has intrigued scientists and theologians for centuries: What was the Star of Bethlehem?

Modern astronomers have offered several possible explanations for the celestial event the Bible says heralded Christ's birth.

A new book, however, suggests the answer to the mystery may lie not in the heavens but in beliefs of ancient astrology.

Astronomer Michael Molnar says his theory is bolstered by an ancient coin he bought for his collection at

a coin show in New York for \$50. The coin, originally from Antioch, the ancient capital of Syria, depicts the astrological figure Aries, the Ram, looking back at a star.

In his research, Molnar found that Aries first appeared on coins from Antioch when the Romans annexed Judea, an event mentioned in the Gospel of Luke. At the time of Christ's birth, he says, Aries was a symbol for the Jews. Ancient astrologers also believed that a new king would be born when the moon passed in front of Jupiter, creating an eclipse.

Curious about whether the coin might commemorate an astrological event, Molnar used computer mod-

els to determine that an eclipse of Jupiter in Aries occurred "in the east" on April 17, 6 B.C.—a year that many Bible scholars believe is about the time Jesus was born.

While the event would not have been as spectacular from an astronomical perspective as other theories such as an exploding star, a comet or an alignment of planets, Molnar says it would have been sensational for astrologers in the first century.

The "magi"—people who were regarded in the ancient Near East to be healers, interpreters of omens and dreams and able to predict the future by using astrology—would have viewed the occurrence as por-

tending the birth of a divine king, Molnar says.

Molnar first presented his theory several years ago in "Sky and Telescope" magazine, and now has compiled his research into a book, "The Star of Bethlehem: The Story of the Magi." In it, he discusses how his research coincides with the writings of ancient Roman astrologers about the position of the planets during the time of Christ's birth.

"We can be assured that the extraordinary conditions of April 17, 6 B.C., were as real and dramatic as any blazing comet or exploding supernova," Molnar writes. "Unlike those spectacular but terribly fore-
□ See *Astronomer: Star ...*, page 6**'Tis the season to be giving for state churches**

PADUCAH—Grocers either cringe or see dollar signs when Willis Henson comes through the doors. As pastor of Lone Oak First Baptist Church, Henson regularly buys hundreds of cans of food at a time.

But it's not for a church social or potluck. Every Christmas, Henson turns the church gym into a free grocery store for local low-income residents.

The project is one of the hundreds, if not thousands of projects Kentucky Baptists sponsor each Christmas to take the message of God's special gift beyond their church walls.

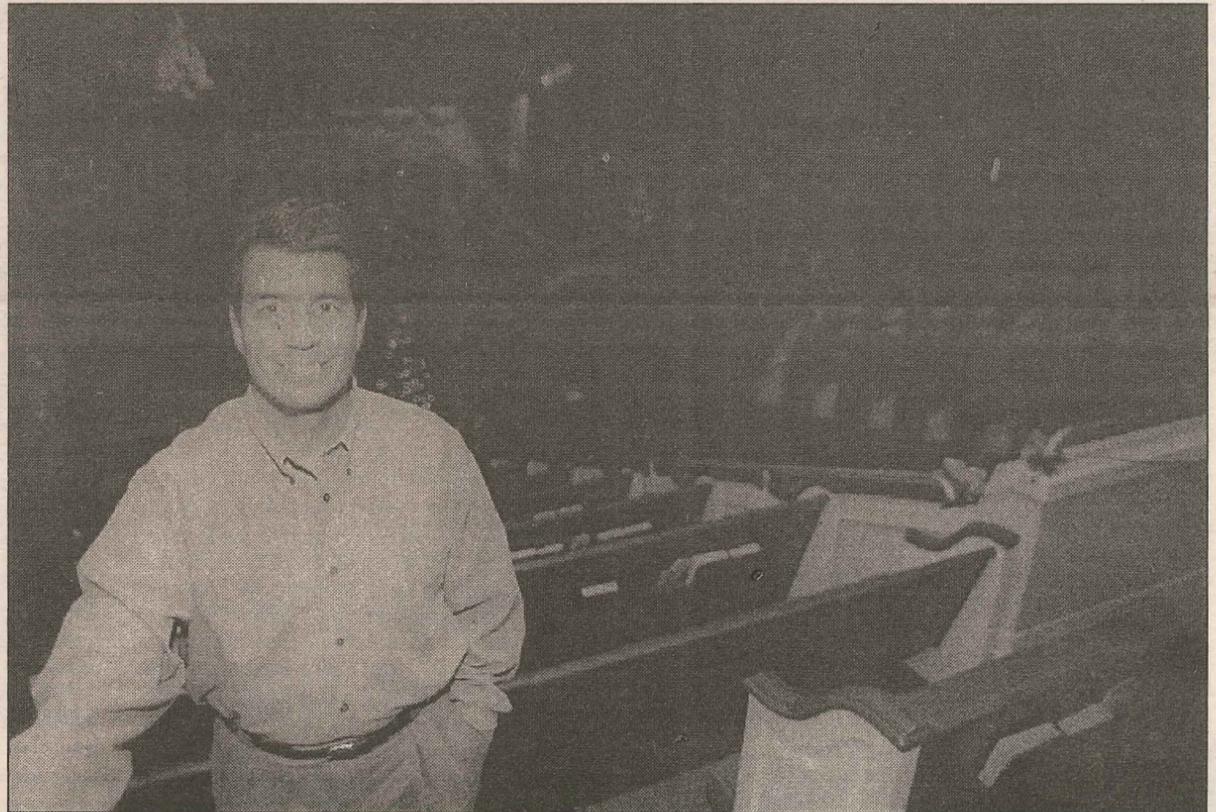
At Lone Oak, the church begins planning in June, when it collects a benevolence fund to help buy the groceries. This year 350 families, recommended by social agencies, are expected to benefit from the program. Residents come to the church and can collect up to two weeks' worth of groceries.

"We have one come every minute from 11 (a.m.) to 3 (p.m.)," said Jenny Denker, the church's administrative assistant. Next week more than 150 church volunteers will help staff the project, she said.

Letters to recipients invited them to the church Christmas singing next Monday. Each box of food will include a church newsletter, a pamphlet about Christianity and a copy of the "Baptist Faith and Message," Denker added.

"It's a very important part of our Christmas," she said. "It's not a wealthy church, but everybody's willing to share."

In Lexington, churches combine forces to share the meaning of Christmas with families that otherwise might not be able to buy toys for their children.

The local Baptist association
□ See *'Tis the season ...*, page 3

BRAD JOHNSON The pastor of Living Hope Baptist Church in Bowling Green stands in the sanctuary he'll be leaving at the end of the month. Johnson is heading to Mission Viejo, Calif., where he'll be a teaching pastor at Saddleback Valley Community Church, one of the largest Southern Baptist churches in the country.

Innovator leaving Kentucky for SaddlebackBy David Winfrey
News Director

BOWLING GREEN—For about 10 years, Brad Johnson has been considered an innovator of new church methods while pastor at Living Hope Baptist Church.

But as he leaves Bowling Green to become a teaching pastor for one of the largest Baptist churches in America, Johnson wants people to pay more attention to Living Hope's focus on purpose rather than its variety of new trends used to attract unchurched people.

Long before it became generally acceptable to use drums, drama or video projectors in a worship service, Living Hope was attracting attention—and controversy—for its move toward contemporary worship and outreach.

Later this month, Johnson will conclude his ministry at Living Hope. Next month he, his wife and two daughters

will move to Orange County, Calif., for his new role with Saddleback Valley Community Church in Mission Viejo. There, he will be one of five teaching pastors with special responsibilities for missions and evangelism. Saddleback is one of the largest churches in the nation with an average weekend attendance of about 15,000 people.

Friends and church growth experts cite Living Hope as a model for many Kentucky Baptist churches wanting to try new ways of reaching baby boomers and others who aren't attracted to traditional worship.

"I think a lot of the pastors in other churches admire and appreciate the kind of focus he has brought," said Vernon Cole, church growth team leader for the Kentucky Baptist Convention. "I'm sure adjoining pastors questioned whether this was the thing to do or whether this was just a fad, but he was so successful in reaching people and

involving people."

Johnson said it was lonely being one of the first churches to incorporate contemporary methods. "We couldn't say to our people, 'Well, look right down the street, and it's working.'"

But to understand Living Hope's methods, Johnson insists that one must first understand its mission.

He says that when he came to Living Hope in 1989, he asked God for two things: One was that he get to stay a long time. With the average Baptist pastor's tenure being five years or less, Johnson said he accomplished that. The other request was that he not "just tread water."

Soon after arriving from Springfield Baptist Church in Washington County, where he had served for 8 1/2 years, Johnson started studying evangelical churches that were leading the most people to become Christians.

□ See *Johnson: Purpose ...*, page 3

BAPTISTS

Paige Patterson predicts formal SBC split

"Inevitably, there will come a divide in what is today known as the Southern Baptist Convention."

SBC President Paige Patterson

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (RNS)—Southern Baptist Convention President Paige Patterson has predicted that some kind of division can be expected for the nation's largest Protestant denomination, but he expects less than a tenth of Southern Baptist churches will actually depart.

"Inevitably, there will come a divide in what is today known as the Southern Baptist Convention," Patterson predicted in an article he wrote for the millennial issue of the Biblical Recorder, the news journal of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina. "No one knows exactly what form that will take."

Patterson said a possible result could be an entity composed of churches affiliated with the moderate Cooperative Baptist Fellowship or "churches desiring greater allowance for diversity in doctrinal and ethical matters and react-

ing in part out of disenchantment with certain conservative leadership."

Despite his declaration that a division is "inevitable," Patterson's estimate of the size of a split is wide-ranging.



Patterson

"That breaking away of churches will take between 600, at the least, and 3,500 at the most, of the denomination's 40,000 churches," he predicted. "Several new entities and relationships will evolve as a result of this action."

His article, titled "The SBC on the Brink of the New Millennium," was submitted after the newspaper requested that he and others forecast the denomination's future for its Jan. 1 issue.

In an interview also published in the newspaper, Patterson expanded on his comments. He said that the 3,500 figure would be likely only if the moderate-led Baptist General Convention of

Texas—the largest state convention in the SBC—leads its churches out of the denomination.

"I don't think it will be that large, but I decided to err on the side of the maximum number I could see," he said.

The Texas convention is moving toward permitting churches from other states to join its organization.

As for his more general prediction of a division, Patterson said in the interview that it might be for the best, given the continuing friction between moderate Baptists and the denomination's conservative leadership, which has been in control since 1979.

"We're much farther apart theologically than some people imagine," said Patterson, one of the architects of the SBC's conservative shift. "Why sit around and cripple what everybody's doing?"

He added that he could not predict when the division might happen.

"I don't have a clue," Patterson said. "I have to believe we're probably on a three- to five-year play-out but I don't know."

Texas Baptist leader defends Baptist Faith & Message action

DALLAS (ABP)—Responding to criticism of Texas Baptists' rejection of an article of faith adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention, the Baptist General Convention of Texas executive director-elect has written the state's 6,000 churches about the action.

Texas Baptist messengers voted last month to affirm the "Baptist Faith and Message" confessional statement as adopted by the SBC in 1963. A similar proposal was defeated last month by Kentucky Baptist messengers.

The Texas vote in effect positioned the state convention in opposition to a family article added by the SBC in 1998. Most debate over the statement has focused on language emphasizing that wives should submit to their husbands.

Southern Baptist Convention leaders immediately decried the BGCT vote. SBC President Paige Patterson said it is now up to churches to decide whether they agree "with a liberal, culturally acceptable view of family and church or with a Christ-honoring, Bible-believing perspective."

Charles Wade, who takes office as the state convention's executive director Feb. 1, said he is concerned about how the "Baptist Faith and Message" is being used in Baptist life. Contrary to a clear disclaimer in its preamble that it is not a creed, Wade said the confession of faith "is now being used as a convenient vehicle to take away Baptist freedom of conscience and the God-given right to an uncoerced faith."

Wade said he believes the debate is not about belief in the Bible but interpretation. "People are put into the position of having to agree with a teaching that they may be able to affirm in its essence but have serious reservations about when stated in certain ways or when important truths are overlooked or de-emphasized."

He said the SBC's newly added article on the family "is not wrong in what it says but is limited because it does not fully say what the Bible says."

"The Bible says we are to submit to one another out of reverence to Christ (Ephesians 5:21). The problem many Baptists have with Article 18 is not that it calls for women to submit to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22) but that it says nothing about the husband's responsibility to follow the admonition of Ephesians 5:21 and submit to his wife," Wade said.

Some say those who disagree with the article adopted by the SBC don't believe the Bible, Wade said. But he said the view of mutual submission "expresses a fuller and more profound biblical position and is a genuine reflection of Christ's attitude toward women."

BAPTIST BITS

■ **Midwestern presidential search under way.** The presidential search committee of the board of trustees for Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary is seeking a nominee with "a heart for the Midwest" and a desire to build bridges throughout that region, according to board chairman Carl Weiser of Lynchburg, Va. Other qualities specified by the committee include an individual who is "warm-hearted with strong pastoral leanings" and has "a heart for people" as well as someone who affirms the conservative direction of the Southern Baptist Convention. The committee will accept resumes through Jan. 15. Recommendations may be sent to Weiser at 347 Crestview Drive, Rustburg, VA 24588.

■ **Seminaries plan Internet option.** Students soon will be able to earn up to 30 hours of credit at a Southern Baptist seminary over the Internet, thanks to recent action by the Southern Baptist Convention's Council of Seminary Presidents. Presidents from the six Southern Baptist seminaries recently adopted a statement "of common purpose and a bold vision for the future," including plans "to develop Internet-based courses designed to offer up to 30 credit hours of the master of divinity degree on-line." A master of divinity degree typically requires about 90 hours of coursework.

■ **College students support missions.** College students from across the country gave \$3.5 million to Baptist mission causes in 1999. "That's new money, money they raised or earned themselves," said Bill Henry, director of the National Student Ministries Department of LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention. "That's not money that moms and dads gave them." Henry presented a check Dec. 6 to LifeWay President James Draper and Morris Chapman, president of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee. Students raised the money by bake sales and car washes, as well as more creative means. One Baptist Student Union group wrapped gifts at a local Wal-Mart store. Wal-Mart made a donation to the BSU for the students' work.

■ **Pierce elected Baptists Today editor.** Baptist journalist John Pierce has been named executive editor of the moderate national newspaper Baptists Today. Pierce, currently managing editor of Georgia Baptists' Christian Index, was elected by the independent paper's board of directors Dec. 3. Pierce, 43, is a former campus minister who has worked for the Georgia Baptist Convention's news journal since 1994. He will start his new job Feb. 1.

Baptist, Jewish leaders reach impasse on proposed dialogue

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)—An impasse has been reached in the offer of Southern Baptist Convention President Paige Patterson to meet with a group of Jewish leaders who charged the SBC with "deception" in evangelistic outreach to Jews, particularly in regard to the SBC's support of the Messianic Jewish movement.

Gedale B. Horowitz, president of the New York-based Jewish Community Relations Council, reiterated in a Dec. 3 letter to Patterson a counterproposal for a "one-on-one" meeting "in a private setting," which Horowitz earlier proposed in a response to a Nov. 10 letter from Patterson. That letter was replying to concerns raised by Horowitz and five other Jewish leaders in an initial Nov. 8 letter.

Horowitz also repeated his charge that "the 'Messianic' movement, with the SBC's imprimatur," is attempting "to blur the distinction between Christianity and Judaism."

Patterson, in a Dec. 7 letter to Horowitz, wrote:

"You have now made it crystal clear that our people cannot sit down with the very people who signed the letter of complaint and look them in the eyes and talk with them as friends. With regret, I accept your refusal of our offer, and there the matter ends."

Patterson said he is left to conclude what he had "feared is true. You are not interested in discussing the matter as friends and coming to a credible understanding. You apparently simply wanted to have the opportunity to bash Southern Baptists in the newspaper."



Johnson: Purpose drives strategy, not vice-versa

Continued from page 1

From among Baptists, he looked at Saddleback and North Phoenix Baptist Church. He also studied Willow Creek Community Church in metro Chicago and Southeast Christian Church in Louisville.

"Those churches from different denominations, different regions of the country, they had more in common than they had that were different," Johnson said. "Their fingerprints are all over the place here."

From Southeast, Living Hope developed a balance of music styles that blend contemporary and traditional tunes. From Willow Creek came the use of drama as a regular visual tool to reinforce the preaching message.

From Saddleback, Living Hope adopted its "purpose-driven" strategy, which Johnson says undergirds every method the church tries.

The church created a vision statement when that was considered something only businesses did. It reads: "We exist to help undevoted people become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ." With a statement to guide the congregation, every idea and aspect of the church now had a measuring stick, Johnson said.

"It helps you make decisions. It helps us allocate budgetary resources. It helps us staff the church," he said. "It also defines what you won't do."

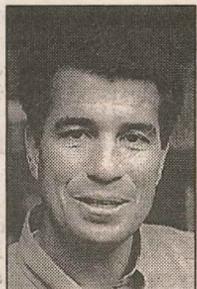
One thing Johnson determined to do was make the worship experience "seeker-sensitive," a phrase often criticized as liberal or watering down the gospel message.

Johnson disagrees. "All seeker-sensitive is, is trying to clearly communicate the message. That's it. If they show up and they haven't heard it, what good have you done?"

Johnson said he defines innovators

as people who seek to effectively connect cultural relevance with doctrinal purity.

"The idea of making culturally relevant methods is not a new idea. It's an idea the church forgot for about 40 years, from about 1950 to about 1990," he said. "Our worship leader and I have said if liturgical chanting with pipe organs blaring became an effective strategy, go for it. But I'm not thinking that's going to happen."



Johnson

In preaching, Johnson often incorporates movie clips so people in a visual society can better understand his message.

In music, songs are chosen based on how clearly they will be understood by non-Christians. Johnson said he and Music Minister Dave

Love recently revised the words of "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" because no one understood what a bulwark is. "Isn't it a waste of time to sing something and not know what it means?"

One might assume Johnson liked all the changes being introduced, but he admitted even he wasn't excited about everything going on.

"It did make the criticism that came more painful. I'd read these letters to me, 'I don't like that,' or 'I wouldn't do that.' And I'd find myself saying, 'Well, me either. Don't you get it?'" he said. "It's not about us. It's about those who aren't here yet."

One of Johnson's best defenses was Living Hope's statistical success. Membership has grown from 817 people when he arrived to about 2,000 participants now.

Elder Stephen Owens said Johnson's energy, attitude and love for people helped many members get outside their comfort zone to be focused on unchurched people. "Church was fun again and people were walking the

Willing to 'back up'

BOWLING GREEN—Almost any pastor is glad to talk about a successful project. Brad Johnson also will talk about things that didn't work out as planned.

He doesn't call them failures, but he admits Living Hope Baptist Church has had to "back up" every once in a while.

And, he added, such projects are case studies in how Living Hope keeps studying everything it does, keeping what's working and pitching something when it's outlived its usefulness.

One such project was the attempt to have a Saturday night worship service. During its 10 months, the church gained new members on nearly every Saturday night. Upon closer study, however, Johnson discovered some things that led to the service's demise. Saturday night worship was started for two reasons: to relieve pressure from two overcrowded Sunday services and to lead people to become Christians.

Instead, current Living Hope members were coming from a less-

crowded third service. And all those new members? "By letter" from another church, Johnson said. "I think we had in 10 months five people come to Christ."

Johnson said people called him crazy for sacking the Saturday night service, but it simply wasn't accomplishing either goal.

Another project that Living Hope has canceled was an annual revival. WinterFest hosted speakers with an intent to attract unchurched professionals in the Bowling Green community.

After initial success, however, Living Hope found it eventually was only attracting church members. "We could feel we were getting sucked into that where you do it because you've always done it," he said.

"If something can't be killed, then you don't have a good opportunity to evaluate it fairly," he said.

Rather than trying to figure out a way to save every project, he said the key is to ask, "Is this getting done what we thought it would?"

aisles making decisions and changing their lives."

While stressing evangelism, Living Hope also encouraged the spiritual growth of members through a strong discipleship program. That kept people from going out the back door of the church as quickly as they were coming in, Johnson said.

While many people credit Johnson's drive and enthusiasm for innovation, Johnson notes two significant factors that made the church open to new ideas.

Previous pastor Billy Compton had set the stage for the church by orienting it toward evangelism, Johnson said. "I

came into an environment where the heart of the people had already been cultivated to look at the world rather than design the church for themselves."

Additionally, the church was relatively young when he arrived. "We did not have as many entrenched traditions to overcome."

Being innovative hasn't always been easy, but Johnson said he knows it's been worthwhile. "My honest prayer is, when it's all said and done and I'm standing in heaven some day, I hope somebody will say, 'Brad, it was easier for us because you guys were first,'" he said. "That would be a blessing."

What now?

As Brad Johnson prepares to leave Bowling Green, some observers wonder about the future of Living Hope Baptist Church.

"The unanswered question of mega-churches is transitional leadership," Johnson admitted. Yet he points to two positive signs.

First, several other key leaders, including six elders and five other staff members remain. Day-to-day organization, outreach and ministry is handled by other people, he said.

"None of that gets hindered or hampered because I'm gone," he said. "I've told the church, 'When I'm gone, you'll realize how little I've done.'"

Also, Living Hope broke an 8-year record for new members joining on the Sunday Johnson announced his departure. Johnson said that as he leaves, he is strongly encouraging long-time visitors to unite with the future of the church and they have been coming forward every Sunday since.

'Tis the season for Kentucky Baptist churches to be giving

Continued from page 1

is hosting five area one-day toy stores for low-income families.

Churches donate the toys, which are then sold for one-tenth their value to the residents, according to Sandra Williams, director of church and community ministries for Elkhorn Baptist Association.

Families can buy up to \$2.50 worth of toys per child at the adjusted rate, she said. "That gives them some dignity and pride." Money raised from the toy sales goes into a benevolence fund that is distributed for food and energy costs throughout the winter, she added.

Midway through the project, at least 35 churches are involved, and the association already has reached its goal of getting \$15,000 worth of toys donated. That will allow the project to provide toys for 600 children, she said.

"We also give them some other things," Williams said, including stocking stuffers, coloring books and candy. Durbin Memorial Baptist Church donated 1,000 New Testaments to give to each family, she said.

In West Kentucky, First Baptist Church of Fulton is hosting "Twin-City

Christmas Outreach."

Youth Minister Bryan Davidson said the project is a continuation from a mission trip the church youth made to Charleston, S.C. "The mission trip wasn't left there. They brought it here to Fulton."

Church teens will bring youth from two low-income housing complexes to the church for crafts, refreshments and story time to share the Christmas story, he said.

"It's a good time to reach out to the community," Davidson said. "In a small town it's easy to get isolated to yourself. . . . But this is a good way to interact with the community, with the children and then the families. And it's a great way to share the gospel."

At the Kentucky State Reformatory in LaGrange, some members of Crestwood Baptist Church, Valley View Baptist Church in South Louisville and others will join with other Christians for a night of caroling Dec. 23.

Organizer Craig Kidwell said carolers will go to the different areas for about an hour before meeting with prisoners at the chapel for a worship service and fellowship.

"You can't lock them out and throw



away the key," said Kidwell, who is involved in a weekly prison ministry on Thursday nights.

Workers stress the equal importance of volunteers regardless of their jobs, he added. "There are women who never go into the prison who bake cookies for us. They're just as important."

In Hopkinsville, Second Baptist Church schedules a variety of events to keep members' focus on others and not

themselves, said Pastor Dan Ferguson.

In addition to distributing 60 food baskets, the church recently was asked by an area Methodist church to help out with some needs for Prison Fellowship, supplying gifts to families of local jail or prison inmates.

By giving to others, Ferguson said, "it reminds us that the true reason of Christmas is that God gave His best gift."



CHRISTMAS GIFTS

Baptist churches throughout Kentucky are reaching out to their communities this Christmas through a variety of ministries. ■ **Left:** Churches in Lexington are selling donated toys to low-income residents for one-tenth their value. ■ **Above:** Volunteers are shown last year arranging canned goods for the annual free food distribution by Lone Oak First Baptist Church.

WESTERN RECORDER

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*Earnestly contend for the
faith which was once for
all delivered to the
saints.—Jude 3*

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Christmas parades, race and Jesus

By Tom Ehrich

DURHAM, N.C. (RNS)—The Christmas parade was an urban medley. High-stepping school bands, ROTC and Young Marine color guards, television personalities, dune buggies, clowns, the mayor, sanitation workers, church floats, enormous city vehicles showing our tax dollars at work and Shriners.

Our 8-year-old son works his way to the front, where he can scoop up candy thrown by passing paraders. I watch him share his candy with a younger child. I watch him start talking with a boy of his age but not of his race.

"He knows no color, does he?" I say to my wife.

If you wanted to make race an issue, you could notice the racial composition of the crowd. You could notice how the predominantly white high school bands are different from the predominantly black, how the TV personalities tend to be one race and the sanitation workers another, how the Shriners are old, male and white while the motorcycle troupe is young, female and black.

You could notice those things and draw conclusions. But on the front line, children are sharing candy.

Maybe, as time goes on, they will learn to count and to notice, maybe to fear and to hate. I hope not. The day has got to come—maybe with this generation of children—when race stops writ-

ing the script for urban life.

Jesus offended the religious leaders of His day by creating a community where oneness mattered more than division, where being human mattered more than being male or female, gentile or Jew, where all were welcomed to the feast.

But after Jesus left, His followers fell apart. They began to quarrel, to joust for position, to notice their differences. Issues of style and ethnicity divided the Christian movement.

The day has got to come—maybe in this new millennium—when we repent of our pride. The day has got to come when we see person to person. For it is only in person—not in race, gender or sect—that we will see the true reflection of God.

Add e-mail addresses

I read the Western Recorder each week and look forward to the articles, the editorial and the opinion page. I can think of only one thing that would improve the opinion page. I wish you would ask everyone to add their e-mail address.

Many times I say "how right" or "how wrong" after reading an article and wish I could convey my opinion to the writer. Some writers really have a good point and need to be encouraged while others need to know how narrow their opinion is.

I usually won't take time to write a formal letter to reply, but if I had an e-mail address, I certainly would.

The Dec. 1 issue is typical of the opinion pages I would have commented on. For instance I could relate to Davis Brown's experiences where he thought God was left out of the procedure of picking a state president. I could relate to that. We took missionary training three years ago at Southern Baptist Convention expense and after hearing about methods and surveys and such, I too began to wonder if God is allowed to take part in leading a person's actions.

To Charles Blair who thought editors shouldn't do research and inform

us on happenings contrary to official Baptist pronouncements, I would like to have sent an e-mail message saying, "You have heard too many sermons and believed them when you should have questioned them."

Also, I would have sent words of encouragement to Dudley Pomeroy. His brief statement hit the nail right on the finger. We need to hear from more knowledgeable people like him.

I have preached and I have been preached at and I realize sometimes there is a better sermon sitting in the congregation than is coming from the pulpit. I enjoy the paper's opinion column. An e-mail address would allow me to participate.

Gene Iglehart
Bowling Green

Editor's Note: Thanks for your suggestion. However, I believe our readers have the right to express their views on the opinion page without having to publish their mailing address (e-mail or otherwise). This encourages the free exchange of ideas in a public forum for the benefit of all Kentucky Baptists.

God blesses SBC

These are the greatest days in the history of our Southern Baptist Convention!

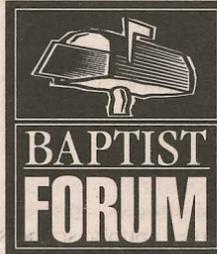
Cooperative Program giving continues to set new records. Enrollment is up at our seminaries, with several experiencing explosive growth. Our missions

around the world continue to expand rapidly. We support nearly 5,000 international missionaries. A total of 20,140 volunteers served last year through the SBC International Mission Board, twice the number who served on short-term assignments five years ago.

Last year 4,251 new churches were established overseas, twice the number that had been started five years before.

We serve an awesome God who continues to incredibly bless His kingdom people. With all the good things happening around the world through this entity known as the Southern Baptist Convention, we are motivated to sing, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow!"

Mike Routt
Ashland



PARTNERS IN THE MISSION

Don't miss Shepherding the Shepherd

"A great revival experience for our marriage and our ministry. Very affordable! We can't wait for next year!"

"I came deflated and left encouraged, refreshed and filled."

"It's the best conference ever put on by our convention and the most needed. All of our churches will benefit from this!"

"Without doubt, the best conference I have ever attended. A 'must' for every couple in ministry."

The above responses from the evaluation forms of last year's Shepherding the Shepherd conference indicate the significance of this event for pastors and spouses. This year's event will be held Jan. 27-29 at the Radisson Plaza Hotel in Lexington. At this writing, only a few slots remain available.

Shepherding the Shepherd is designed to be a time of enrichment and renewal. The weekend will be a time for renewal of God's call and vision for ministry. Pastors will have an opportu-

nity to worship with their spouses free from the responsibility of leading worship. The relaxed atmosphere away from daily tasks also provides time for the couple to grow in their relationship to each other and to God.

Outstanding leaders will provide humor, new insights into ministry, wisdom from biblical truth and testimonies of God at work in their relationships and ministries. Scheduled leaders include Charles Lowery, a renowned humorist, pastor and Christian psychologist; and Jay Wolf, a pastor and dynamic speaker who understands the

challenge of maintaining joy in ministry while leading a modern, traditional church through transition. Archibald and Kathleen Hart, well-known conference leaders on the personal issues and stresses of the pastorate, and Daniel Webster, a leadership development expert, also will lead.

I have experienced meaningful worship in three different conferences with Dave Bullock who will be on hand with

his praise team during the worship times.

Although this event is held in a high quality conference facility and features top-of-the-line presenters, the cost per couple is only \$155. This is because the Kentucky Baptist Convention and Baptist Healthcare System have teamed up to underwrite 80 percent of the costs. Many thanks to Tommy Smith, Baptist Healthcare System CEO, and the presidents of each hospital for their partnership in this important ministry.

When the pastor is renewed in his call and vision, the entire church and community reap the benefits. Church leaders can strengthen ministry by encouraging and supporting their pastors in attending this conference. This would be a wonderful Christmas gift for pastors and their spouses.

For more information about the Shepherding the Shepherd Conference, please contact the KBC leadership development department at (502) 254-4734 or (888) 254-5706 or send e-mail to leadershipdevelopment@richard_adams@kybaptist.org.

Bill Mackey is executive director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention



Bill Mackey

FAMILY

Tax break offers good news for good Samaritans

By Jeremy White

You may not be getting the full tax benefit for how you help various charities.

Most people know they can deduct financial contributions given to charities if they itemize deductions.

Many people know that donating property (used clothing or furniture, stock, land) to charities also can result in a tax deduction for its fair market value.

Few people, however, deduct out-of-pocket expenses used for charitable organizations. Here are the criteria to deduct an out-of-pocket expense:

- It is to further the charitable organization's aims.

- It is unreimbursed.

- It is directly connected with your contribution of services to a charity (thus, not available to employees of charities).

Let's say that Dave, a lawyer, is a deacon at his church. He also serves as a board member for a crisis pregnancy center.

Deductible expenses:

- Books and materials for required training classes for new deacons.

- Travel and lodging as a delegate to a denominational convention. (Uncompensated elected delegate may deduct reasonable travel expenses and meals, but not sightseeing.)

- Mileage for deacon visits and board meetings (standard mileage rate of 14 cents per mile or actual expenses).

- Long-distance phone calls used in crisis pregnancy center fund-raising.

Nondeductible expenses:

- Babysitting for children so Dave and his wife can attend a fund-raiser dinner (a personal expense, not directly for charity).

- Value of time (cost of one's time is not deductible).

- Purchase of a new suit for deacon responsibilities (clothing has a general use and is deemed personal).

- Mileage for taking a neighbor to the hospital (not done for a qualified charity).

One aspect of good stewardship is saving money by paying less income tax. Keep good records of your expenses to remember all your contributions at tax preparation time and provide evidence in case of any audit.

Jeremy L. White is a certified public accountant in Paducah. He provides weekly financial tips and tax articles at his Web site: www.consultcpa.com.



Making memories together is the best Christmas gift of all

Q: What is the best gift for my child this Christmas?

Beyond the money you spend on gifts for your child this year, decide to invest in your child's memories of Christmas. Specific gifts will soon be gone and forgotten as the years roll by, but children will long remember the context in which those gifts were received. Work hard to create a setting for the celebration of Christmas that intentionally centers around Christ and the love and delight He gives to all.

Gifts will be forgotten, but children will remember the music you enjoyed at home and at church, and the time you spent together trimming your tree and decorating your house. They will remember collecting toys or clothes for needy families, dropping a few coins in a Salvation Army bucket and using a special envelope to make a Christmas gift to missions. Children will remember advent candles, special Bible readings at dinner and the nativity scene on the table. They will remember caroling at a nursing home and worshiping by candlelight on Christmas Eve.

Children will remember sitting in a living room littered with presents and wrapping paper on Christmas morning, reading the Christmas story from Luke 2 and singing "Joy to the World." They will remember hearing you voice a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the greatest gift of all.

Give your children these kinds of Christmas experiences and memories and you will have given them a reference point to return to as their understanding of Christmas grows and matures. In the midst of all the trappings, you will have pointed them toward the truth.—David Garrard

Q: Our 15-year-old son wants us to let his best friend move in with us for two weeks or so. We have the space and would be willing. He appears to be a nice boy. The trouble is his parents do not know he plans to leave. They are upset about him being in a "garage band" with our son and want him to quit. The boys figure if he leaves, the parents will give in. What do you think?

While your intentions sound good, this is filled with potential problems. You want to help the boy and support your son's band. However, this does not appear to be the best way to do so.

First, you will be assisting a runaway minor. The parents could report you to the authorities. Your attempt to rescue this boy could lead to big problems for you and him.

Second, you are interfering with another parent's decision. How would you feel and react if the situation was reversed? What if they offered to let your son live with them? Parents need to respect each other and not intrude into such matters.

If you wish to help this predicament, suggest that the boy talk with his parents about their objections to his involvement with the band. Are there any options for him to negotiate? What will it take to get their support? You might even offer to have his parents over to your home to discuss the band. The boys need to solve this issue in some way other than running away. Do not make matters worse by taking him into your home without his parents' permission.—Wade Rowatt

Family Forum writers are David Garrard, minister to children at St. Matthews Baptist Church in Louisville; James Stillwell, minister to singles at Immanuel Baptist Church in Lexington; Susan Howell, assistant professor of psychology at Campbellsville University; Jon Rainbow, a clinical gerontologist and professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; and Wade Rowatt, director of the St. Matthews Pastoral Counseling Center in Louisville. Send questions for Family Forum to Western Recorder, Box 43969, Louisville, KY 40253 or e-mail us at wesrec@ntr.net.



Religious liberty deserves vigilant defense

A local Baptist church stages a live nativity scene on its front lawn for the enjoyment of passersby. A pair of Mormon missionaries knock on your door to share their religious views. A young Jehovah's Witness is allowed to opt out of reciting the Pledge of Allegiance to the American flag in her public school classroom.

What do each of these scenarios have in common? All three activities—and countless others—are a direct result of our nation's historic commitment to religious liberty. The right of every citizen to practice any religion they choose—or none at all—is a cherished principle in American culture.

Religious liberty and its corollary, separation of church and state, also have deep roots in Baptist life. "The Baptist Faith and Message" doctrinal statement clearly emphasizes that "church and state should be separate."

Detailing the rationale for that view, the faith statement declares, "The state owes to every church protection and full freedom in the pursuit of spiritual ends." It adds, however, that "no ecclesiastical group or denomination should be favored by the state more than others."

Why is that important? Because "the church should not resort to the civil power to carry on its work," the statement explains. "The gospel of Christ contemplates spiritual means alone for the pursuit of its ends."

While such beliefs appear quite straightforward, the practical application of religious liberty and church-state separation continues to generate debate. The role of religion in public schools is a particularly hot topic. Well-intentioned people with diverse views are debating such issues as school vouchers, posting the Ten Commandments and school-sanctioned prayer.

The most significant contribution of religious liberty is not merely protecting the freedom of the majority but protecting the freedom of the minority. That must be a constant concern as we strive to preserve religious liberty today and for future generations.

The easier path, of course, is to promote majority religious views with no regard for minority perspectives. The obvious drawback is that such action is neither biblical nor Baptist.

"Religious liberty is rooted in the lordship of Christ," explained Southern Baptist statesman Herschel Hobbs. "Our forefathers paid a great price for religious liberty. We should guard it as one of our most prized treasures."

The current debate over posting copies of the Ten Commandments in Kentucky public schools dates back to the 1980 case of *Stone v. Graham*. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that a state law requiring schools to display the Commandments was a violation of the First Amendment's establishment clause.

More specifically, the court ruled that "the pre-eminent purpose for posting the Ten Commandments on schoolroom walls is plainly religious in nature." The justices reiterated, however, that "the Bible may constitutionally be used in an appropriate study of history, civilization, ethics, comparative religion, or the like."

Where does that leave us today? Those supporting Ten Commandment displays view their action as an affirmation of our nation's religious roots and a positive influence on today's youth. Those opposed to such efforts voice concern over giving Judeo-Christian

views preference over minority religions. They also question delegating religious responsibilities to public schools that God assigned to church and home.

Regardless of one's stand on the issue, Kentucky Baptists should carefully evaluate their views in light of the vital principle of religious liberty. In the meantime, there are a variety of opportunities for Christian influence:

- Equal access laws permit student religious groups to meet on school campuses before and after school.

- See You at the Pole student prayer rallies continue to grow each year.

- The Bible may be used in instructional settings such as history and literature classes.

- First Priority Christian clubs are being established in schools throughout the state.

"A free church in a free state is the Christian ideal," the Baptist Faith and Message affirms. The steadfast defense of religious liberty for all is essential to preserving that ideal.

STRAIGHT FROM THE EDITOR



Trennis Henderson

Will you try the patience of God?

By Steve Thompson

Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also?" (Isaiah 7:13)

Ahaz, the king of Judah, is facing a threat from two neighboring nations—Israel and Syria. The kings of those two nations are trying to force Ahaz into an alliance with them against Assyria. Ahaz, young and frightened, is considering an alliance with Assyria to help curb the threat from his two northern neighbors.

Isaiah comes into the picture as God's spokesman to warn Ahaz of the weakness of these two kings to the north. He encourages Ahaz to "be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid. Do not lose heart" (Isaiah 7:4). God declares the threatened invasion from Syria and Israel "will not take place, it will not happen" (Isaiah 7:7).

In the face of no response from Ahaz, God tells him to ask for a sign,

any sign. Ahaz piously refuses. Perhaps he thought asking for a sign to be beneath him spiritually. He did not want a sign from God, for he already had made up his mind.

Isaiah becomes frustrated and accuses Ahaz of trying the patience of both men and God. That leads to the question we are seeking to answer: "Will you try the patience of God?"

This rather testy exchange between Isaiah (speaking for God) and Ahaz becomes the setting for a very special scripture for Christians. Isaiah announces God's intent to give Ahaz a sign anyway. The sign will be the birth of a male child who is to be pointedly named Emmanuel, meaning "God with us."

Nada Huntley, who just retired as secretary at Green Valley Baptist Association, had a very picturesque description of worrisome people. She says they will give an aspirin a headache. Ahaz was giving God a headache! God was very explicit in seeking to reassure Ahaz with the message that his faith

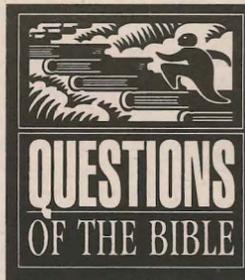
should be placed in Him and not in political alliances.

We all get into pickles in life. God goes to great lengths to reassure us. It is precisely when we refuse to accept God's offer of help and assurance that we try His patience. It seems we do one of two things. We either try to solve our own problems or we are unwilling to wait for God to help us.

A ship was stuck on a reef in San Diego harbor. Every tugboat available was called to assist. They could not get the ship dislodged. All they did was stir up the water. The wise captain told all the tugs to go away. "I'll just be patient and wait," he said. He waited for the natural rescue of high tide to float his ship to freedom.

God often, perhaps most often, delivers us from whatever tight spot we may be in, but not always. The one "always" promise of God to His children is that He will be with us. We try God's patience and break His heart when that is not enough for us. Our actions say we want God's help more than we want Him. Don't be foolish and shortsighted. Accept God's presence of Jesus, who is Emmanuel. He is enough!

Steve Thompson is executive associate for the Kentucky Baptist Convention Executive Board staff



CHRISTMAS

Astronomer: Star of Bethlehem could have been Jupiter

Michael Molnar's book has been well received among Christians who say it supports the Bible with scientific evidence.

Continued from page 1

boding or meaningless apparitions, the portent formed in Aries by Jupiter and other celestial bodies conveyed a joyous, wondrous message about a regal and divine birth in the kingdom of Herod the Great. Now we can look at the star above a creche at Christmas and know that there was indeed a Star of Bethlehem."

While Molnar says he conducted his research and writing in a "religiously neutral" fashion, his conclusions support the account of Christ's birth in Matthew. The Bible's reporting the star being seen "in the east" and that it "went before and stood over" are astrological terms, he notes.

He says his findings do not prove Jesus was born on April 17, 6 B.C., when the star appeared. That is up to Bible scholars to decide, he says.

Ironically, Molnar says the subject was not one that he was initially curious about.

"I was not originally interested in analyzing the Star of Bethlehem," Molnar said in a telephone interview from his home near Piscataway, N. J. "But once I came across the coin and started piecing some of the information together, I felt obligated to pursue it."

Molnar's book has been well received among Christians who say it supports the Bible with scientific evidence. Molnar's conclusions also have drawn enthusiastic support in

academic circles.

Owen Gingerich, an astronomer at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, called Molnar's book "the most original and important contribution of the entire 20th century on the thorny question of how events recorded (in Bethlehem) should be interpreted."

Bradley Schaefer, a professor of astronomy at Yale University, said Molnar's book "finally gives a confident answer to a question that has fascinated all Christians through the ages."

Even experts not familiar with Molnar and his theories say he might be onto something. Bill Adams, a physicist at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, said that if Molnar's research is accurate, it could lend credence to ancient astrologers' writings about the celestial events surrounding Christ's birth.

A planet, Adams said, would have been visible for the many months it took the wise men to travel to Bethlehem. "If (Jupiter) was in the constellation (Aries), it would certainly have been there for some time," Adams said.

Still, others say Molnar's theory is just one in a sea of hypotheses about what took place in the skies the night Christ was born.

Dudley Shapere, professor of philosophy and history of science at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, N.C., said he has heard speculation that Jupiter might have been

present during that time. But he added that many scientists believe the planet was part of a cluster of planets that would have drifted apart after a few days. So that cluster, though probably quite luminous, would not have remained in the sky long enough for the magi to follow it during a journey that lasted many weeks, Shapere said.

Moreover, Shapere said astrologers of the time knew enough about Jupiter that, if it actually was the star of Bethlehem, they would have referred to the planet specifically.

"I'm very skeptical," he said. "If there was anything in the sky at the time and they were really 'wise men,' then they would have known it was Jupiter and they would have known it was a wandering planet."

Molnar doesn't deny that Jupiter might have been part of a cluster. He said Saturn also was present in the constellation. But based on the writings of the ancient astrologers, the celestial conditions on April 17, 6 B.C., he said, forecast "the birth of a king or super-king, a divine and immortal person."

"Now, how many divine and immortal people do you know who were born around that time?" he asked with

a chuckle.

John Killinger, the author of several dozen theological books and a former professor at Vanderbilt Divinity School, said that while Molnar's theory is intriguing, it really shouldn't affect Christians' basic convictions about Christ. While some Christians are comforted by findings that support their beliefs, Killinger said the spirit of Christmas—its origins, traditions and, most importantly, its message—should be enough to withstand any scientific theories.

"If your faith depends on getting some literal evidence somewhere, well then great," said Killinger, a native of Somerset. "But others couldn't care less. It's not going to enhance the beauty of the (Christmas) story one bit."

Molnar maintains his book is not an attempt to prove the divinity of Jesus but rather provides a modern interpretation of events written about more than 2,000 years ago. Still, he doesn't discourage how his research is analyzed.

"I've had hundreds of people who have written me, called me (and) e-mailed me about how this has reaffirmed their faith," he said. "And I'm very gratified that it did."

Crossings at the Creek registration open

By now, many of you have heard about Crossings at the Creek, our new youth camp that kicks off next summer at Jonathan Creek. Our board, our staff and I are excited about this new camp. Ron Tip-ton, our new director at Jonathan Creek, began his work with us last month. Ron comes to us from Life-Way, where he served for years as one of the Centrifuge coordinators. He brings a high standard of excellence and creativity, administrative skills and a great passion to see God work in the lives of students in a camp, conference and retreat setting.

The team of Ron and Jason Ellerbrook, our associate director at Jonathan Creek, is a team long on passion as well as ministry experience. We believe wholeheartedly that God has brought Jason and Ron together at this time at Jonathan Creek. It's not by coincidence or fancy recruiting. It's God at work. With these two men leading the way, we are absolutely convinced that our first year with Crossings at the Creek will be very successful, with huge numbers of youth having life-changing experiences during their camp week.

Many of you saw our video at the annual meeting, but most of you did not. We have sent a copy of this

exciting video to more than 1,100 youth ministers and workers across the state. Every Kentucky Baptist Convention church is receiving our full-color brochure, which outlines our new camp. If you did not receive the video and would like one to show your youth and help you make your camping decisions, call Jonathan Creek at (270) 354-8355 and we'll get one in the mail to you right away.

We are blessed and looking forward in eager anticipation to what God is going to do next summer at Crossings at the Creek. Crossings is a series of six-day, five-night camps that run June 4 through Aug. 4 next summer. We have invested a great deal of financial resources and energy putting this camp together. Campers will be challenged spiritually dur-

ing the week, and they will have a great time on the water and our challenge courses as well as the more conventional camp activities. Our camp pastors and worship leadership are fabulous. Won't you consider supporting this exciting new endeavor by sending your youth to Jonathan Creek next summer? It's gonna be great! You'll be glad you did!

Rusty Ellison is president of Kentucky Baptist Assemblies, Box 37, Bagdad, KY 40003. Call (502) 747-8911

KENTUCKY BAPTIST ASSEMBLIES



Rusty Ellison

I'm a partner.

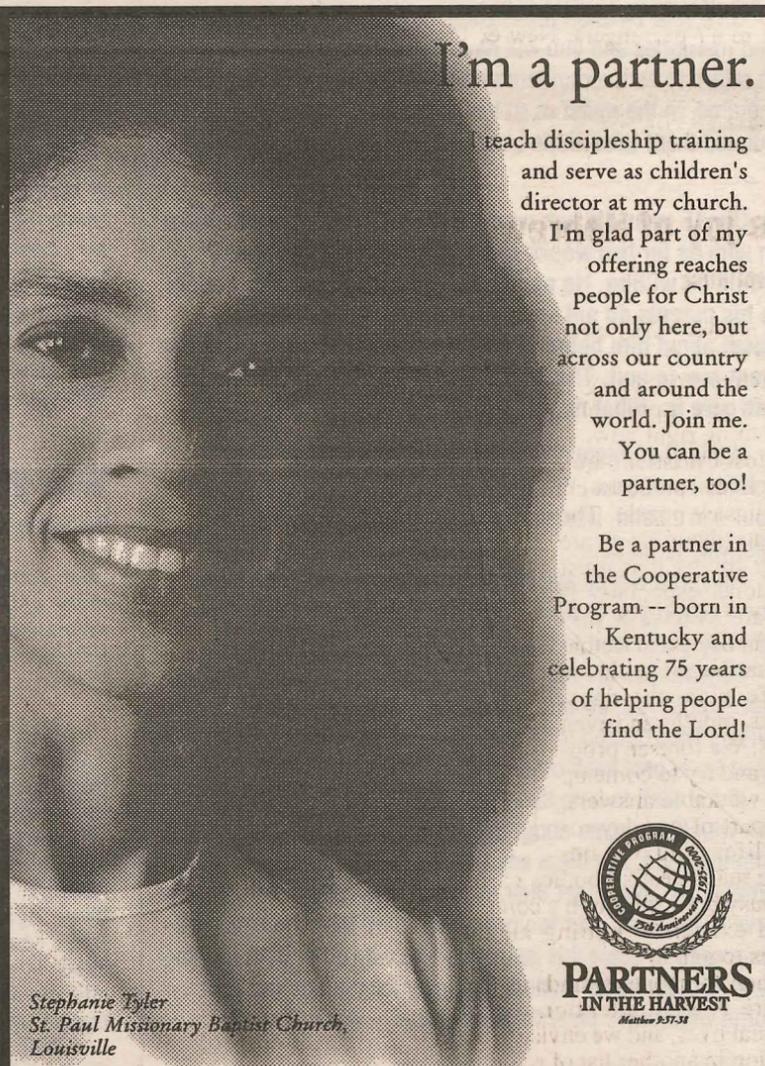
teach discipleship training and serve as children's director at my church.

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Four out of 10 Americans don't help the poor

VENTURA, Calif. (RNS)—Four out of 10 Americans contribute neither money nor time to helping the poor, according to a new survey, even though most Americans claim society has a moral obligation to help the poor.

A survey by Barna Research Group of 1,002 U.S. adults found that more than 70 percent of them agreed society has a moral obligation

to aid those suffering through poverty.

But only 42 percent said they have donated money to nonprofit groups serving the poor in this country or other places in the world. And 33 percent said they volunteered time in the past year to help the poor. Fifty-seven percent said they either volunteer time or donate money to aid the poor, but only 19 percent

said they do both.

The random telephone survey, released last week by Barna, was commissioned by World Vision, an evangelical Christian humanitarian organization based in Federal Way, Wash.

"We wanted to take the pulse of Americans and their attitudes toward the poor," said Robert Odom, an executive with World Vision. "That pulse, we found, is not very strong."

George Barna, president of the Barna Research Group, pointed out that poll respondents also were "soft" about their compassion for the poor.

"Regrettably, many quietly believe the poor have somehow 'asked for it' or 'gotten what they deserve,'" Barna said.

The survey found that 31 percent disagreed strongly with the statement that "most poor people do not work very hard to become self-sufficient."

It also found that 41 percent disagreed strongly that "most people are poor because they have made bad choices."

The rest of those surveyed either agreed or were less certain.

The poll also found that people favor aiding those at home more than those abroad. One in seven said they donate to fight poverty outside the United States.

The survey data has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

African-American clergy urge leaders to address AIDS crisis

BOSTON (RNS)—Eugene Rivers, a prominent Boston minister, and other African-American clergy have issued an open letter to black leaders urging them to address the AIDS crisis in Africa.

"What verdict will our descendants render upon their ancestors who stood silently as a generation of African children were reduced to a biological underclass by this sexual holocaust?" asked the letter, dated Dec. 7.

The letter details the devastation of AIDS, which it calls the "leading cause of death in sub-Saharan Africa." It notes that the United Nations Program on AIDS reports that of the 5.6 million new HIV infections in 1999, 4 million were in Africa. Two-thirds of the world's AIDS cases are in sub-Saharan Africa.

Signatories include Rivers, co-founder of the National TenPoint Leadership Foundation and pastor of Azusa Christian Community in Boston; Bishop Charles Blake, a Church of God in Christ official in Los Angeles; and Clarence Hilliard, chairman of the board of the National Black Evangelical Association.

The writers urged black U.S. leaders to focus on public education, political advocacy and humanitarian assistance. They asked leaders to work on the education of elected officials and the general public about the issue and counter trends, such as the high rate of rape in South Africa, leading to escalating numbers of HIV infections.

"Black leaders must challenge African leadership to be more accountable to the needs of their own women and children," the letter said.

The letter acknowledges that some efforts have been made to address the issue in the United States and in Africa, but calls for more work because "all have been woefully inadequate given the overwhelming scale and magnitude of the crisis confronting us."

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The joy of Hebrews 12:2

By Bret Kuss

It is possible to assemble a jigsaw puzzle face down—well, at least hypothetically. Someone, somewhere is probably doing that very thing right now.

Most Christians are aware that their lives can be as complicated as a jigsaw puzzle. There is a lot to think about. There are many things that must get done, especially if you are to have a successful life. At least that is what we are told.

We plan our days, weeks, months and even years. We foresee problems and try to come up with workable answers. It is part of our day-to-day life. And we become machine-like bodies carrying busy brains through a complicated existence, putting all the pieces together.

Then someone reminds us that we are to give attention to our spiritual lives, and we envision the solution in another list of requirements that will demand more of our limited resources.

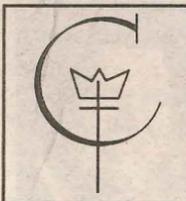
Thankfully, especially around Christmas, we have moments of insight and revelation and see how readily we have turned our perspective upside down. We realize that we haven't looked at the cov-

er of the puzzle box or even seen the "picture side" of the pieces in quite a while.

I like simple solutions. Jesus came to bring a simple solution—a way to eternal life. And while He was here, He provided some helpful suggestions, things like "God is spirit, so those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). That's a reminder that we are to see ourselves first as spiritual beings, the "not upside-down" view. Hebrews 12:2 reminds us to "look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith."

Picture side up. Picture side up. Picture side up. ...

CUMBERLAND COLLEGE



Bret Kuss is professor of biology at Cumberland College, 6000 College Station Dr., Williamsburg, KY 40769. Kuss joined Cumberland's faculty in 1989 and became head of the biology department in 1999. He is involved with students on campus and with his local church in ministering for Christ. He is an excellent role model for our students.

God's millstone love

On a recent visit to our Youth Support Center in London, I told the guys that we were going to Levi Jackson State Park so I could show them how much God loves them.

Matt spoke up and told me that he could show me how much God loves them right there. I said, "Sure, go ahead!" He then began to point out various things in the room like the pillows, carpet and stereo. He said, "You see these things? In providing them to us, God is showing His love for us."

I told Matt that he was exactly right. What insight that young man had about how God uses you and other Southern Baptists in this state to show His love to kids who really need it.

We still traveled the few miles to the state park, if for no other reason than because it was a beautiful day. When we arrived, we parked the van and walked to the collection of millstones on either side of the walkway leading to the old mill house. I sat down on one of the huge stone wheels and pointed to the other stones and said, "You see these millstones? That's how much God loves you!" The guys looked a little puzzled,

which was my intention. I went on to explain that Jesus said if anyone causes a young person to stumble, then it would be better for a millstone to be tied around that person's neck and be thrown into the sea, because God will be very angry with them.

I told the boys that when adults physically, sexually and emotionally abuse children, that makes God especially upset because the abuse can make the children "stumble" with bitterness toward God and a hopelessness about their situation. God loves everybody, but He gets really mad when His kids get abused.

At Christmas, we celebrate God's greatest gift of love to us, Jesus Christ. For Matt, and for many other kids and families, your gifts to Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children remind them of this greatest gift. Don't forget this Christmas season to thank God for His most precious gift, Jesus Christ.

HOMES FOR CHILDREN



Mike Dixon

Mike Dixon is vice president for religious life at Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children, 10801 Shelbyville Road, Middletown, KY 40243. Call (800) 456-1386. KBHC's Internet address is: <http://www.iglou.com/kbhc/>

PEOPLE

Poll: Small churches still the norm and attendance is down

VENTURA, Calif. (RNS)—A new survey of Protestant churches states attendance at worship services during 1999 declined slightly in keeping with the trend of recent years. The survey also found smaller churches continue to dominate the American scene.

The Barna Research Group survey, released last week, found the median adult attendance for worship services at more than 600 churches polled across the United States to be 90 people.

That figure was down five people from the 1998 survey, 10 people from the 1997 average and 12 people from the 1992 figure, according to Barna.

Attendance figures were highest for 1999 among suburban churches (120) and African-American churches (100 people). Rural churches, which have smaller population concentrations to draw from, reported the lowest average attendance (70).

"In spite of the mass media attention devoted to megachurches (those attracting 1,000 or more adults on a typical weekend)," Barna said in a news release, "those congregations remain just 1 percent of the Protestant church landscape."

The survey also found that donations to churches increased slightly during 1999, up 5 percent to an average of \$110,000. That figure is 59 percent above the 1987 average and 34 percent above the 1992 figure.

Pastoral compensation packages remained virtually unchanged during 1999, said Barna, an evangelically oriented research firm. The medium value of such packages—which include salary, housing, an automobile allowance and other benefits—was \$35,195 annually.

The survey has a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percent. The telephone survey was conducted in October and November, and included a variety of Protestant congregations.

Doctors' group wants to change anti-suicide bill

By Mark O'Keefe
Religion News Service

SAN DIEGO (RNS)—The American Medical Association is asking for significant changes in a congressional bill targeting physician-assisted suicides in Oregon while affirming its general support of the legislation.

In a voice vote subject to several interpretations, the AMA's House of Delegates expressed apprehension Dec. 8 about federal investigators interpreting whether deaths are physician-assisted suicides or the unintended result of prescribing large doses of pain relievers.

The delegates approved a resolution calling upon AMA leadership to work with other medical organizations to delete parts of proposed legislation establishing federal regulations for pain management and end-of-life care. But the resolution did not specify how a federal law could be enforced.

The AMA's continued support of the anti-suicide bill is considered critical for it to become law. In June, the AMA's board of trustees enthusiastically endorsed the Pain Relief Promotion Act, which was easily passed by the House of Representatives in October.

Now that the AMA House of Delegates has expressed concerns about the bill, it's unclear how it will fare in the Senate, where the legislation is being championed by Sen. Don Nickles, R-Okla., the assistant majority leader.

Nickles' office did not respond to requests for comment on the AMA action. But the bill's chief opponent, Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., said the AMA is

sending a powerful message to Congress that it views the legislation as flawed.

"Clearly, the rank-and-file of the AMA are concerned about creating a new 'physician police' trained to second-guess doctors," said Wyden in a prepared statement. "The AMA is essentially telling Sen. Nickles to go back to the drawing board."

Richard Kincade, president of the Oregon Medical Association, had a different interpretation. He said the House of Delegates sent a message of concern, but he doubted it would have much practical effect since the delegates rejected a resolution saying the AMA would withdraw support of the bill if

changes aren't made.

The bill does not mention Oregon by name, but it would have the greatest effect in the state with the nation's only law permitting physician-assisted suicide. The legislation does not directly overturn the Oregon law, but amends the federal Controlled Substances Act to say a long list of controlled substances such as morphine and various sedatives cannot be used to assist in suicides.

The bill says physicians who unintentionally cause death in an attempt to relieve pain cannot be punished. But someone has to decide if a death is intentional or unintentional, and physicians are leery of the federal Drug Enforcement Agency.

You are invited to the 26th annual Living Nativity

Dec. 21-23, 7 to 9 p.m. each night

Glen's Creek Baptist Church • Mickey D. Hyder, pastor



Come celebrate a true old-fashioned Christmas in the country. Tour historic Glen's Creek Baptist Church. There will be carolers, refreshments and the wonderful sights and sounds of Christmas. The church is located on Elm Street, 5 miles from Main Street in Versailles. For more details, call (606) 873-4097.

What is so special about Thanksgiving?

One of the most exciting events on our campus each year is the traditional Thanksgiving meal.

Most people expect to spend Thanksgiving with loved ones, but many of our students spend that day with their Oneida family. We believe we are loved ones because we care for each of these young people as if they were our own. One of the things our students recognize most is the fact that Oneida becomes their family.

One of the things we do to make Thanksgiving a special day is to rearrange the tables to make the dining room a more home-like setting. Also, the food is placed on the tables so we may serve family-style instead of taking a tray through the serving line. After the students, faculty, staff and guests had been seated this year, the blessing was offered by our director of missions, Bill Nichols.

A large percentage of the students who spend the Thanksgiving holidays with us are international students. Americans get really excited about turkey, green beans, mashed potatoes and gravy, cranberry sauce and dressing. But our international students do not have such a holiday. They wonder what all the fuss is about. Particularly, what is so special about cranberry sauce?

Many of these students were eating their first Thanksgiving dinner ever. While their friends might have tried to explain why Americans love this holiday, they normally are more than a little confused.

But one thing is sure—it does not take them long to get the hang of things. When the huge platter of turkey is passed, they know what to do with the serving forks.

Before you know it, they kind of like the unusual American holiday. They not only quickly under-

stand about having a delicious meal, they also learn that part of the tradition is to stuff yourself. It is not long before you see students rubbing their stomachs and shaking their heads back and forth, saying they cannot eat another bite.

In addition to our international students, there are other young people who are with us for Thanksgiving. These students either live too far from our campus to make the trip home, or they may have other reasons for spending the holiday with us.

We know that some of our students would not have such a feast if they were eating at home. It is truly a privilege for us to be able to share this wonderful time with so many of our students.

In addition to our students and staff, family members often come to spend the day with us. Sometimes it is better for them to make the trip to Oneida than for their child to travel home for such a short holiday.

One Kuwaiti mother who was with us has an especially sad story. During the Desert Storm conflict in the Persian Gulf, her husband was captured by the Iraqi military. Her son is in our sixth grade.

Last October as our students were getting ready for the fall break, I saw this lad sitting on one of the large stones that grace our campus. Unlike most of the other students who were really excited about going home, this young lad was obviously sad.

As I approached him, I saw that he was crying and had a picture in his hand. It was a photograph of his father, a rather handsome man in his native dress. The boy had not seen his dad for several years. Frankly, he may never see him again.

W.F. Underwood is president of Oneida Baptist Institute, P.O. Box 67, Oneida, KY 40972. www.oneidaschool.org

THIS IS ONEIDA



W.F. Underwood

Turkey man

Thirty years is a long time to work with turkeys, but at Clear Creek I consider that an honor. It began in 1966 when Clear Creek graduate Don Burnett moved to Bowling Green as pastor of Andrew Baptist Mission. The Burnetts rented a home near my student church at Jackson Grove and we became friends. Don remembered student families without adequate resources and some meals without meat. He decided to gather funds to give each student and staff family a Christmas dinner turkey. Our church helped, and I accompanied Don to Pineville in a truck loaded with frozen turkeys. Along the way, we stopped to eat homemade Swiss cheese at Swiss Colony and shot mistletoe from the tree tops with his shotgun.

The Burnett family moved to Prestonsburg in 1969, and Don became Enterprise Association director of missions. The turkeys were ordered and the funds made available to pay the bill for the 1970 project, but Don didn't make it back to Clear Creek. A heart attack took him while on a Thanksgiving Day hunting trip with his sons. The following year, I asked Merrill Aldridge if I could assume direction of Turkey Day. Except for three years we were in the Philippines and once during the

past 12 years, I have been present for Turkey Day. Preaching in chapel and distributing the "gospel birds" have been a highlight of my Christmas since 1971. During those years students, faculty and alumni have drawn me into the Clear Creek family so that I felt at home the day we moved to campus. When the school needed a president, some of the alumni said,

"Get the turkey man." Turkey Day 1999 was Dec. 1, and the response from alumni and friends was so good that each student received a turkey and \$50.

Hardly a week passes without a remembrance of Don Burnett. He was a grand servant of the Lord. Some called him the "mechanical man" from the distinctive sound of his metal crutches heard long before he came into view.

His legs were paralyzed from a World War II navy injury. His example as husband, father, pastor and missionary inspired many. His life taught me many lessons and powerfully demonstrated how God's love flows through a committed Christian to a lost world. May many more like him come from Clear Creek.

Bill Whittaker is president of Clear Creek Baptist Bible College, Pineville, KY 40977

CLEAR CREEK CHRONICLE



Bill Whittaker

Baptists might decentralize Yemen health care ministry

By Mark Kelly
SBC International Mission Board

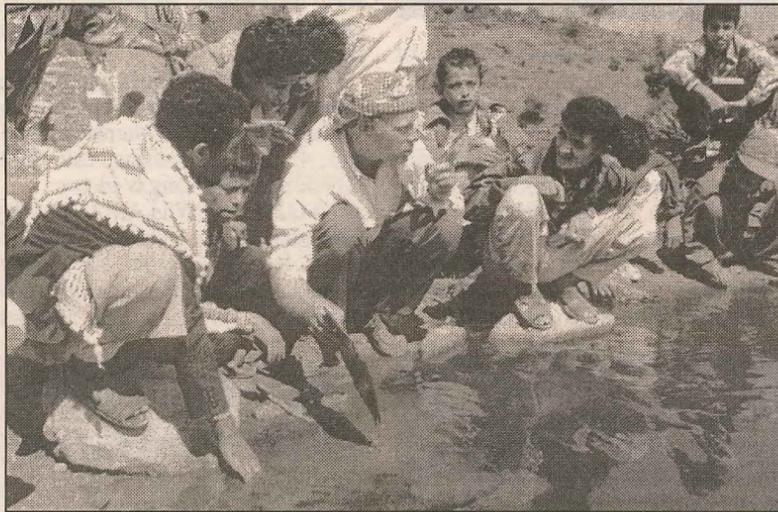
JIBLA, Yemen (BP)—An icon of Southern Baptist mission outreach is transforming itself for a new era of ministry and witness.

Since 1967, the 77-bed Jibla Baptist Hospital in Yemen has ministered to as many as 40,000 people a year at its 22-acre site near the city of Ibb. Founded by Southern Baptists James and June Young, the hospital has helped hundreds of Southern Baptists and other internationals share Christian ministry and witness with the Yemenis.

Now a dramatic step into a new level of ministry is being planned, said Gerry Volkart, an associate director of Southern Baptist International Mission Board work in North Africa and the Middle East.

"The Youngs set a sterling example for all of us when they went to a place where people were not receiving medical help or a clear witness and established a hospital that could share God's love with people in both deed and word," Volkart said. "Now we want to follow that same pattern and transform the work so it multiplies the love of Christ to the peoples of Yemen."

With more than 16 million people living on the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, Yemen is a ruggedly mountainous country bedeviled with conflicts between the government and tribal groups demanding schools, electricity and other ser-



YEMEN STRATEGY Roger Lewis talks with Yemeni villagers about how parasites live in water. Such public health efforts exemplify the kind of projects Southern Baptist International Mission Board strategists hope will take the message of God's love to Yemenis in the country's remote mountainous regions. Jibla Baptist Hospital in Yemen is preparing to refocus its ministry to reach beyond its 22-acre compound in Ibb to villages with little access to health care services. (BP photo by Sandy King.)

vices in poor tribal areas.

Tribesmen frequently resort to kidnapping foreigners to press their demands. With one of the world's highest birth rates, the country's population has exploded in recent years, but endemic poverty and the rugged terrain prevent access to health care—as well as the message of the love of Christ—for most Yemenis.

Volkart said God is stirring the hearts of missions strategists to reevaluate medical ministry in Yemen.

A team recently conducted a sur-

vey of Yemeni towns and villages to assess what townspeople see as their greatest medical needs. They identified an urgent need for health care that can go to the multitudes of people for whom the trip to a hospital is very difficult.

Regional leadership is consulting with individuals and groups in the United States and other countries to interpret data from the survey, Volkart said. A task force will study the data—as well as the findings of other studies conducted in the past two years—and make

recommendations about the future of health care ministries in Yemen.

"Southern Baptist leadership wants to avoid duplicating services provided by other medical facilities, sharpen the focus on multiplying the gospel and be the best stewards of the resources Southern Baptists give them," she said. "Any decision about the future of medical ministries in Yemen will be based on the region's vision for facilitating a church-planting movement among all the people groups of Northern Africa and the Middle East."

Any transition would follow the pattern of the board's "New Directions" strategy, which calls for marshaling the resources necessary to take the message of the love of God to people who have little or no access to it, Volkart added.

"While a decision about the future of the hospital itself has not been finalized," she said, "it seems likely that reaching Yemeni people in remote areas could require decentralizing the medical ministries."

"This is a transition time," she said. "We're beginning a process and we don't quite know where it will take us or how long it will take to get there."

"Southern Baptists continue to fund the ongoing services of the hospital and they need to continue to pray and provide resources through such avenues as the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions," Volkart said. "The medical work in Yemen is just one of many examples of how Southern Baptists are touching the world through prayers and sacrificial commitment to honor Christ among the nations."

WORLD VIEW

■ **Doomsday sect** members who were expelled from Israel earlier this year returned to the United States after being expelled again, this time by Greek authorities. Eighteen members of Concerned Christians were rounded up in Greece and arrived at Kennedy International Airport last week. Greek officials said they were worried the group might be planning a mass suicide or other violence timed to the millennium.

■ **Saudi Arabia** plans to deport non-Muslims who eat, drink or smoke in public during the Islamic fasting month of Ramadan, which began Dec. 9. Of the 6 million expatriates living in Saudi Arabia, 600,000 are non-Muslims. During Ramadan, Muslims abstain from food, drink, smoking and sex during daylight hours as an act of sacrifice and purification. After evening prayer, the fast is broken until the following sunrise.

City of Jesus' birth prepares to host millions of pilgrims in 2000

By Elaine Ruth Fletcher
Religion News Service

BETHLEHEM, Palestinian Authority (RNS)—When Khalil Shokeh attended the recent inauguration of this ancient city's Bethlehem 2000 millennium festivities, he noticed that he was seeing his city in a light that was unfamiliar even to him, a native son.

"Now, for the first time, thanks to all of this cleaning and plastering of buildings, I am seeing the real old town as it might have looked hundreds of years ago," said the director general of the Bethlehem Chamber of Commerce. "It's really a hopeful sign, a sign of peace."

After months of preparations, the Palestinian Authority is beginning to showcase the results of its \$160 million millennium redevelopment project, known as Bethlehem 2000.

Two years in the making, the project has provided the city with a much-needed face lift for the coming year. The hope is it also has laid the groundwork for making Bethlehem a more pilgrimage-friendly destination for years to come.

Manger Square, once a dusty, lackluster parking lot in front of the famous Church of the Nativity where tradition holds that Jesus was born, is now a broad, stone-paved plaza graced with trees and benches. Similarly, the narrow, winding streets that weave from the square through Bethlehem's old city markets have been

restored to handsome pedestrian walkways, with freshly painted blue storefronts. For years, these same storefronts were blocked by traffic and blackened by car fumes.

On Dec. 4, Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat lit up an enormous Christmas tree in Manger Square to mark the formal start of Bethlehem 2000 festivities. Alongside the square, where an Israeli military headquarters once stood, the former Palestinian guerrilla leader also dedicated an attractive, Swedish-funded peace center designed to host conferences and cultural events for the millennium.

"The Palestinian Authority ... worked day and night so that Bethlehem could be ready for this fabulous occasion," said Arafat's top aide, Tayeb Abdel Rahim, speaking on behalf of the Palestinian leader, who sat at a table flanked by Jerusalem's Latin (Roman Catholic) and Greek Orthodox patriarchs.

"We worked under a very difficult situation, a lack of infrastructure, continued (Jewish) settlement activity and the suffocation of this city" under Israeli control.

That's not to say that the work is finished. In the days before and after the kickoff, tourists approaching Bethlehem's holy sites were still forced to dodge an obstacle course of roadworks as new sewage, water and electric lines are laid throughout the city—in some cases for the first time in this century.

Most of the construction work on the key road arteries should be completed by the summer of 2000, promised Mariam Shahin, a spokeswoman for the Palestinian Authority's Bethlehem 2000 project. But elsewhere, she said, the development work will continue for up to five more years.

That time frame, Shahin insisted, is not unreasonable. "The average city in Europe took about seven years to rebuild after World War II," she observed. "Bethlehem wasn't destroyed in a war, but it was a victim of gross neglect for decades."

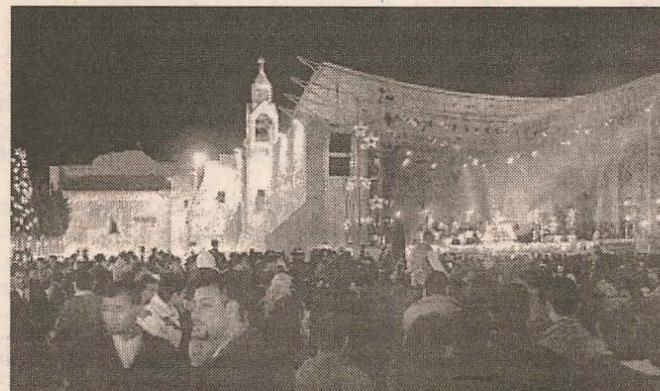
On the outskirts of Bethlehem, new tourism projects are getting under way even now that could draw the benefits of Bethlehem 2000 out to the perimeter of the rapidly growing city of more than 40,000 people.

Along with infrastructure projects, Bethlehem 2000 is promoting a long list of millennial musical and cultural events, as well as new walking and hiking tours in the city and environs to encourage tourists to extend their stay in the district.

Tourists to Bethlehem today typically spend less than an hour in the city before rushing back to their hotels in Jerusalem, Palestinian officials say.

"Our aim is to create circumstances in which they can spend more time here, maybe eat a meal, spend a night and have more human interaction rather than just interaction between people and stone," Shahin said.

Already, tourism appears to be on the upswing as the renewal of the peace



process lures wary travelers back to the Middle East again after years of bus bombings and political standoff.

In 1999, approximately 700,000 tourists visited the city—a 14 percent rise compared to 1998. But that increase is small in comparison to next year's numbers, when 2 million tourists are expected.

BEFORE & AFTER Manger Square, shown on top in a 1996 photo, has been transformed from a dusty, lackluster parking lot to a bustling plaza. (RNS photos)

PRAYER PARTNERS

Please pray for these people and projects, which are part of Kentucky Baptists' partnership with Baptists in Poland, Tanzania and New England:

■ Dorota, who attends a Bible study led by missionaries Mark and Tatiana McNeil in Poland, as she considers becoming a Christian.

■ A new location for First International Baptist Church in Warsaw, Poland.

■ The possibility of beginning a Bible study in a college dorm in Poland.

■ Those people who attend the five Bible studies missionaries Doug and Marcy Shaw lead in Poland.

■ Missionaries Milton and Lara Magalhaes request prayer for new believers in their church in Poland who are learning to share their faith in Christ.

■ Missionary journeyman Janelle Wonders, who teaches at Haven of Peace Academy in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, offers thanks for a third-grade student she teaches who recently became a Christian.

■ A new Vietnamese congregation beginning in Worcester, Mass., and pastor Hieu Chi Ho.

Mountains to the Mississippi

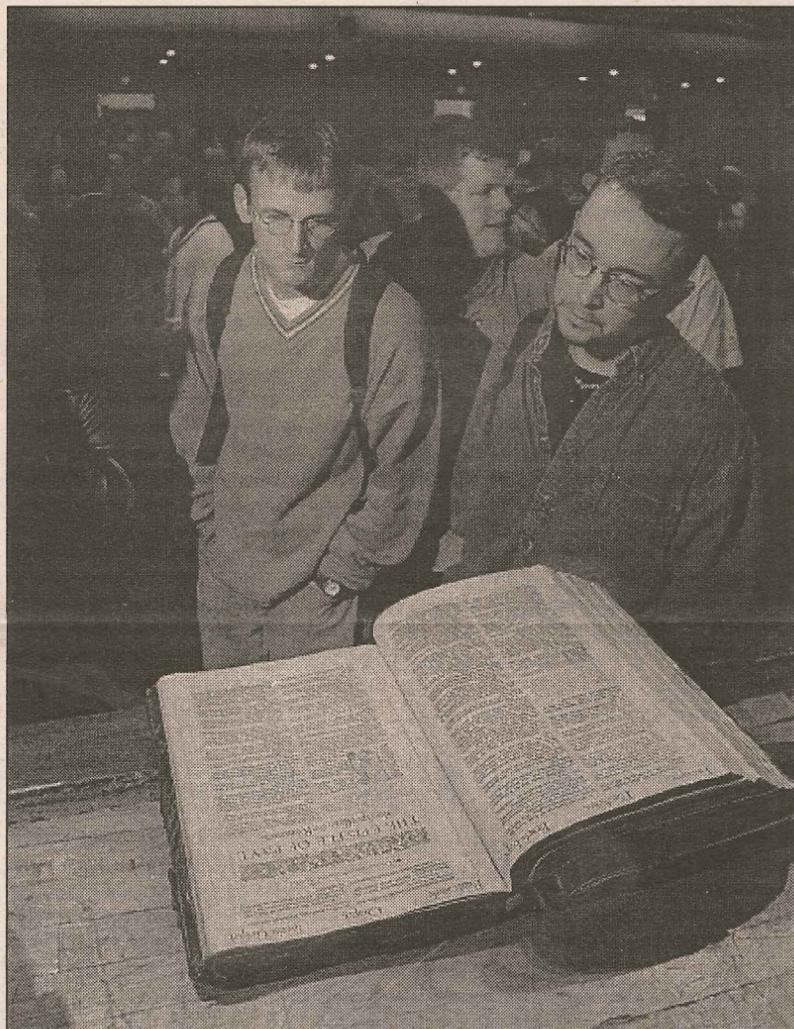
Compiled by Shirley Wooton

■ **BETHLEHEM**—The churches of the Bethlehem community will present a living nativity scene Dec. 22-25, 6:30-9 p.m. For information, call (502) 845-5046.

■ **CAMPBELLSVILLE**—Chaplain **Julian Padgett**, a native of Campbellsville, graduated from the Army's Chaplain Officer Basic Course. He will serve as chaplain in the Kentucky Army Reserves at Boone National Guard Center

in Frankfort and as associate pastor of Graefenburg Church in Waddy.

■ **DRY RIDGE**—Unity Church will present the cantata "His Name Is Jesus" Dec. 19, morning worship; "It All Happened in the Country," musical drama, Dec. 19, 6 p.m.; New Year's Eve service featuring the Billy Graham film, "The Eye of the Storm," and a candle-light service. For information, call (606) 824-0304. **Mitchell Ash** is pastor.



KING JAMES BIBLE Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary students gather around a 1613 edition of the King James version of the Bible. The Bible was donated to the seminary by alumnus Waylon Moore of Florida. The King James version was first printed in 1611. (BP photo by Bryan Murley.)

■ **LOUISVILLE**—Davis Memorial Church called **Glynn Brockway** as minister of music. The choir will perform the cantata "Wonderful Name" Dec. 18, 6 p.m. **Wes Brockway** is pastor.

Walnut Street's Tuesday morning ladies' Bible study will begin a 16-week study of "The Names of God" Jan. 4. For information, call (502) 589-5290. **Bob Long** is pastor.

■ **HOPKINSVILLE**—Casky Church's choir will present "The First Noel," Dec. 19, 11 a.m.; "It All Happened in the Country," children's program, Dec. 19, 6 p.m. **Bob Morgan**

is pastor.

■ **UNIONTOWN**—Calvary Church will host a watch night service, Dec. 31, at 6 p.m. featuring music, food and a message by evangelist **Laverne Butler**. Butler also will preach in both services Jan. 2. **Jim Adams** is pastor.

■ **WINCHESTER**—Central Baptist Church recently had 1,225 people attend its "Harvest Day" event, passing the attendance goal of 1,200. The church also collected a record \$58,258 offering toward debt-reduction on the sanctuary. **Hershael York** is interim pastor.

Grand jury indicts ex-convict in Madalyn Murray O'Hair kidnapping

DALLAS (RNS)—A Texas federal grand jury has indicted an ex-convict on charges he plotted to kidnap atheist leader Madalyn Murray O'Hair, who has been missing for four years.

Gary Karr, 51, was charged Dec. 7 with conspiring with others to plan and carry out the 1995 extortion and kidnappings of O'Hair, her son Jon Garth Murray and adopted daughter Robin Murray O'Hair. Authorities said they believe the three were killed but have not located their bodies.

Karr's indictment "is not the final chapter in this investigation," said Bill Blagg, U.S. attorney for western Texas, Associated Press reported. "We are continuing our thorough effort to make sure that justice is served in this matter."

Karr already was in custody in Detroit when he was indicted. Prosecutors allege he and others stole more than \$500,000 in money, gold coins and jewelry from the O'Hair family. The new indictment does not name other suspects.

Lawyer Thomas Mills Jr., who will represent Karr in Texas, told the San Antonio Express-News he was "shocked" his client was indicted.

At the time O'Hair vanished, she was 77 and ailing. Authorities had wondered whether she and her two adult children were victims of foul play or had taken off with money

from their atheist organization. Others suggested she left public view to die quietly so Christians wouldn't pray over her.

She is most well-known for her role in a case that led to a 1963 Supreme Court decision that, along with a ruling the previous year, struck down organized prayer in public schools as unconstitutional.

Authorities said in May for the first time that the three O'Hair family members were killed, and that the crime was orchestrated by David R. Waters, O'Hair's former office manager, as part of a plot to steal \$600,000.

Waters, a murder convict, once was Karr's cellmate. Karr was convicted of rape, armed robbery and kidnapping after a 1974 crime spree and served more than 20 years.

Waters, 52, has been convicted of skimming \$54,000 from O'Hair's organizations. After authorities discovered 119 rounds of ammunition in his Austin, Texas, apartment in March, Waters pleaded guilty to weapons charges. He is serving 60 years in prison.

Patrick Ganne, Waters' attorney, said his client had no involvement in the disappearance of the O'Hairs. "If they had a case against him, he presumably also would have been indicted. All along they point the finger at him and yet we don't see any charges against Waters."

CLASSIFIED ADS

SEEKING: Full-time pastor. Cypress Baptist Church in Boonville, Ind., is prayerfully seeking a pastor. Please send resumé to: Pastor Search Committee, Cypress Baptist Church, 5166 Highway 62 West, Boonville, IN 47601.

SEEKING: South Side Baptist Church is seeking a child care director. Applicant must be a Christian, preferably a Baptist with experience as director/assistant director. Mail resumé to: South Side Baptist Church, 1501 Holman, Covington, KY 41011, or fax to (606) 431-1314.

SEEKING: Full-time pastor. Please send resumé to: Meta Baptist Church, 8807 Meta Highway, Pikeville, KY 41501, Attn: Pastor Search Committee.

SEEKING: Full-time pastor for Piney Grove Baptist Church, Corbin, Ky. Contact person: Marlon Sams, PO Box 1563, Corbin, KY 40701.

SEEKING: Full-time minister to youth and children for growing Baptist church to develop and plan a full-scale ministry to children birth through 5th grade, and to assume a viable, vigorous and dynamic youth program. Person will plan and implement, with the assistance of preschool, children and youth committees, discipleship, Bible, recreation, outreach and fellowship activities for youth, children and their families. Qualifications and skills include: love of God and love of youth and children, organization, teaching, knowledge of child development and willingness to submit to a background check. Relevant education and experience a plus; history of church involvement a must. Send resumé and letter of interest by Jan. 7 to Rosedale Baptist Church, 411 Westover Ave., Richmond, KY 40475, Attn: Dr. Truett Ricks.

SEEKING: Part-time youth minister. New Harvest Baptist Church, 815 N Main St., Caneyville, Ky. Please send resumé to PO Box 118, Caneyville, KY 40701, or call (270) 897-4020.

SEEKING: Organist and pianist. Services: Sundays, 8:30 a.m. and 7 p.m.; Wednesdays: 6:45 p.m. Wednesday choir practice (pianist only): 7:30 p.m. Please send resumé to: Personnel Committee, Kings Baptist Church, 989 Kings Church Road, Taylorsville, KY 40071.

SEEKING: Part-time, bivocational pastor needed for small, rural church near Whitesville, Ky. Three services per week. Call Ed Hemmersbach for details: (270) 264-1478.

HELP WANTED: Full-time dietary assistant. Rare opening in our personal care home. Benefits include two weeks vacation, insurance. Every other weekend off. Must have a good

work record. Call Parr's Rest at (502) 451-5440—ask for Ginger Niner. EOE.

HELP WANTED: Full-time 2nd-shift nursing, CMT. Rare opening in our personal care home. Benefits include two weeks vacation, insurance. Every other weekend off. Must have a good work record. Call Parr's Rest at (502) 451-5440—ask for Bonnie Stephens. EOE.

FOR SALE: Sixteen 11-foot solid oak pews. Like new; teal. For more information, call (606) 623-5965.

FOR SALE: Six hardwood pews approximately 17 feet long. Beautiful condition. \$300 for all or \$75 each. Summit Academy, 11508 Main St., Middletown, KY 40243. Call: (502) 244-7090.

FOR SALE: Twenty-two 12-foot, three 14-foot and two 4-foot solid oak padded pews with pulpit furniture: \$5,000. Call: (270) 924-5227.

Wedgwood meets to finish event stopped by tragedy

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)— Nearly 900 young people gathered at Wedgwood Baptist Church Dec. 1 to pick up where a youth rally was cut off Sept. 15.

That was the date when seven church members were killed by a deranged gunman, who also injured seven other people before taking his own life.

And once again, the Fort Worth, Texas, church was in the nation's media—giving the youth and other Wedgwood members an opportunity to reiterate a faith rooted in Jesus Christ that can transcend tragedy.

"The young people were excited as Wedgwood Baptist Church filled with live music. The audience swayed, cheered and laughed," according to an Associated Press report.

Tears followed as the Christian band Forty Days began playing the same song, "I Will Call Upon the Lord," that they were playing Sept. 15 when Larry Gene Ashbrook broke into the See You at the Pole rally, wielding two pistols and a pipe bomb.

The church's youth minister, Jay Fannin, read a letter from the family of one of the victims, Susan "Kim" Jones, voicing hope that the Wedgwood tragedy would become "an event that will begin to change the course of history."

"Let Wedgwood be a wake-up call," the family wrote.

In an interview, Wedgwood pastor Al Meredith said it was "important that they finish the concert that they started. ... It was originally intended to praise God and call people

to the Savior. And they completed that assignment last night. It was also important for kids and parents to come back to the scene of the tragedy and praise God through it safely. It was part of the healing process."

Relatives of some of those slain were in attendance and said they needed to be there, Meredith said. "You don't want to minimize people's grief, but you don't want to minimize God's grace," he said.

"Some students can't concentrate. Some still sleep with a night light on. Some parents are still angry. The grief is very palpable with the holiday season. So I don't want to minimize that, but God is giving grace," Meredith said. "And we're still being able to give evidence of God's grace. God has given an open door of witness and

opportunity and we're grateful for it."

Fannin told the Fort Worth Star-Telegram newspaper that Wedgwood's youth programs haven't lost participants, but rather, have grown in attendance.

Prior to the tragedy, he recounted, youth services had topped 100 only once. "Since the shooting, I have had (only) one Sunday where it was under 100," Fannin told the newspaper.

Young people discuss the shooting, but that doesn't dominate their gatherings, he added.

"Every time they come to church they are reminded of that," Fannin said. "They realize that God's presence and God's power are the reasons they are still alive, and because of that they want to tell everybody about God and how He is very real."

Once again, the Fort Worth, Texas, church was in the nation's media—giving the youth and other Wedgwood members an opportunity to reiterate a faith rooted in Jesus Christ that can transcend tragedy.

Church fund raiser had more fights than a business meeting

By Michael McIntyre
Religion News Service

CLEVELAND (RNS)—At Puritas Lutheran Church, a man fell to his knees, pleading for deliverance.

From a headlock. In church, you might expect to hear about the biblical Jacob's wrestling exploits. You might even expect a person to wrestle with his conscience.

What you probably would not expect is neck-biting, chair-bludgeoning wrestling, six bruising matches culminating with "Extreme Superstar" RWB vs. "Big Daddy of Destruction" J-Rocc in the North Coast Wrestling Alliance world heavyweight championship.

This in a church whose members voted "no" recently when presented with a plan to raise money by hosting bingo. "We got shot down on that one real quick: not appropriate," said Tom Coughlin, a church council member.

But the church, whose membership has dwindled during the years from well over a thousand to just a few hundred, is in need of money.

So Coughlin, charged with renting out the church hall/gymnasium for such things as birthday parties and wedding receptions, agreed to allow the nascent Cleveland wrestling league to use the facility Nov. 26 for its \$8-per-adult, \$6-per-child wrestling matches.

But the crowd of 50 people was a money-losing disappointment, promoters said. And, in part because it got entangled in a feud in the local wrestling

community, the event drew unwelcome publicity. The experiment won't be repeated, Coughlin added. "Things just didn't work out the way I thought it was going to work out."

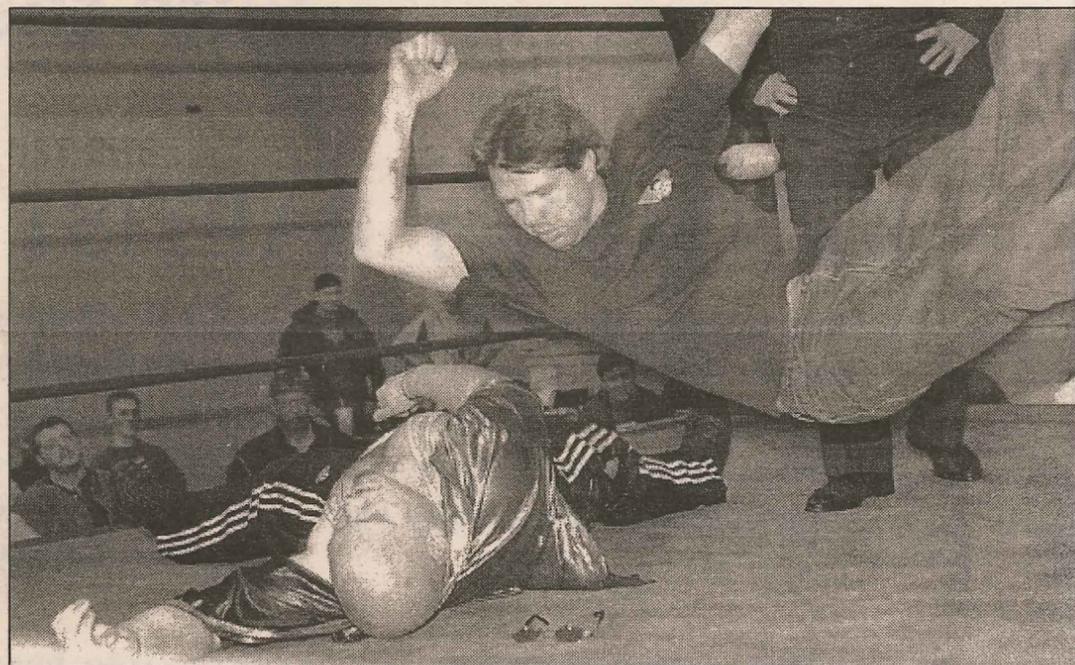
Those who attended seemed to enjoy the antics: intermission music peppered with the coarsest of language; taunting dialogue; a wrestler getting whacked twice, hard, on the head with a metal folding chair; and "Lucifer" (who had a bad back and therefore agreed only to a short bout) biting the throat of a wrestler called "Twitch."

Not on the scheduled program was a confrontation that began when James Haase, a.k.a. T.J. Lightning, who runs a competing league called Cleveland All Pro Wrestling, claimed some of his former students who were on the NCWA card owed him money and demanded they pay. Tempers flared, police were called, and when they arrived Haase was persuaded to leave.

There also was this comical scene: The microphone cord reached barely to the edge of the ring, forcing the tough talkers to lean over the ropes to be heard.

"I wouldn't be surprised if people (from the church) aren't too thrilled with it," said 22-year-old NCWA co-owner Jerry Mires, a.k.a. J-Rocc. Unlike the "hard-core" shows he might put on at VFW halls, Mires said, he "really toned it down" at Puritas Lutheran, ratcheting back the usual furniture breaking, blood and cussing.

A recent addition to the NCWA pro-



motional team is an enthusiastic auto mechanic and wrestling fan, David Dale, whose father-in-law is the interim pastor of Puritas Lutheran.

"My wife wants to kill me," Dale said. She senses negative reaction that could taint her devout dad.

"I want it known—her dad's got nothing to do with anything," Dale said. "I'm not saying the church condones what we're doing. They just rented us a hall at a good price."

Maybe too good. The church

charged \$200, which is less than the usual \$300 to \$500 fee for receptions and similar events.

"He's related to the pastor so I quoted him the hourly rate and he jumped on it. I guess it was too low," Coughlin said.

John Klein, the interim pastor, was firm in saying the wrestling deal was between the church board and his son-in-law. "Personally," Klein said, "I wouldn't have any fund-raising schemes. None at all."

CHURCH FUND RAISER
Wrestler "Johnny Walker" drops an elbow on J-Rocc after ambushing him in a preliminary match of a wrestling event held recently at Puritas Lutheran Church in Cleveland. The event was the first and probably last such fund raiser for the declining church, organizers said. (RNS photo by Roadell Hickman)

Duo's greeting card ministry has a Great Commission message

By Stacey Hamby
Missouri Word & Way

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (BP)— What started three years ago as an offering toward a church building program has grown into a thriving business that helps spread the gospel.

Sandi Miller and Karen Staggs began making Christmas cards in 1996, with the profits devoted to the building fund for Concord Baptist Church in Jefferson City, Mo.

"It became more of a mission, with the Great Commission saying, 'Go ye therefore,' and we realized that although our feet were not going, that through our card ministry, the message was going,"

Miller recalled.

Miller, Staggs and other contributing artists call their cards "Son-shine Selections." They have come a long way since printing the first cards on the church copy machine. For the first time this year, the Christmas cards' text and design were reproduced by a printer.

Previous years' cards—which have included Christmas, Easter and some general occasion—were printed, then colored by hand. One year, the two women and a host of volunteers painstakingly hand-colored 800 Christmas cards.

But that did not deter Miller or Staggs. "I love to do art, and this is a great opportunity to witness," said

Staggs, who has a degree in art and previously designed cards for Dayspring Greeting Cards.

Staggs designed several of the Son-shine Selections cards, including the current one. Each card contains text that shares the gospel and includes a Bible verse. An outline for how to become a Christian is printed on the back, as is the church's phone number.

Last year, Son-shine Selections sold 1,500 cards. This year, 2,000 cards are available.

Concord members Charlie and Marie Brown regularly purchase and send the cards. "The cards have a very to-the-point message ... and they're close to the quality you find on store

shelves," Brown said. "We send them to both Christians and non-Christian friends alike."

Miller said she and Staggs hope the ministry continues to grow. "We'd like other churches to know they can order a quantity of cards and sell them to raise funds for mission projects."

Sometimes she ponders the impact of the card ministry. "There's no telling who these people are sending cards to. ... I like to think that when I get to heaven, I'll meet some people who were led to Christ because of one of these cards," Miller said.

For more information about Son-shine Christmas cards, call Miller at (573) 635-6609.

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1 Timothy 6:17-19

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