

PRactical RESOURCES FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING

WESTERN RECORDER

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FOR THE RECORD

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Study finds that churchgoers have fewer divorces

Ann Arbor, Mich. (RNS)—Husbands and wives who attend religious services together are less likely to divorce, new research from the University of Michigan shows.

The study, conducted by researchers connected to the Institute for Social Research, examined how religion affected the risk of divorce for both black and white couples in the first seven years of marriage.

The data came from 373 couples initially interviewed in 1986, their first year of marriage, as part of the Early Years of Marriage project at the university.

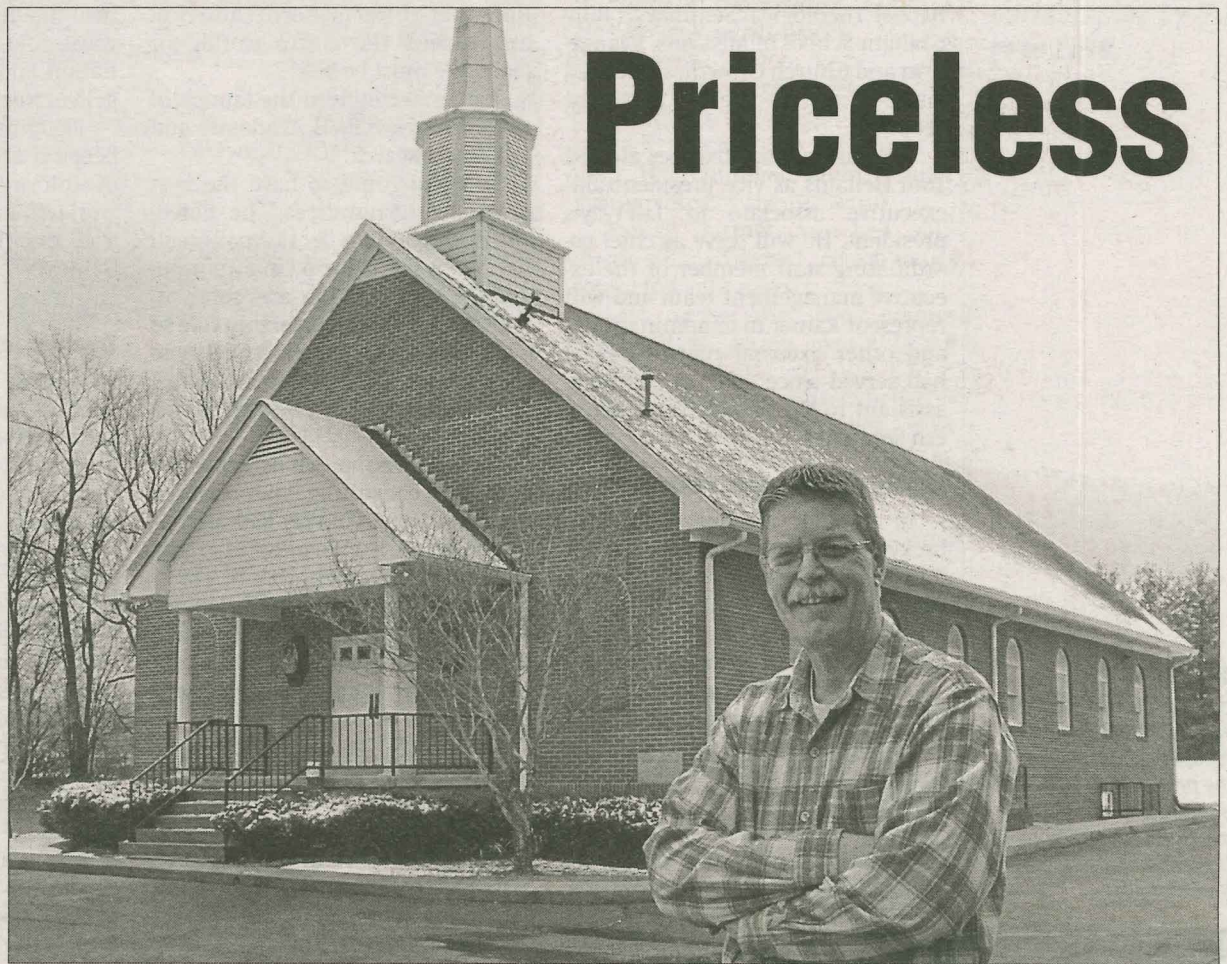
"The findings suggest that the most effective intervention strategies for dealing with marital instability and divorce are those that consider gender and race," said Edna Brown, the paper's lead author.

Black couples are at higher risk of divorce than whites, the study found.

But it also found education a protective factor against divorce for wives, and income a protective factor for husbands. That is, wives with higher education and husbands with higher income were less likely to divorce.

Regardless of race, however, couples who attended religious services together were less likely to divorce.

Other aspects of faith, such as frequency of attendance or importance of faith, didn't influence the risk of divorce.



Priceless

CHURCH PLANTING HQ While Covenant Ministries Baptist Church is excited about its new building, Pastor Larry Bolton said he hopes the facility will serve as a base from which the church will start other churches. (Photo by Sharon Bolton)

Church finds something money can't buy

By **Dannah Prather**
Partnerships Editor

Bowling Green—Pastor Larry Bolton said one thought kept coming back to him as he re-read his letter offering \$0 for a building: "Lord, this is so bizarre, only You could do it."

He wasn't surprised that he and Covenant Ministries Baptist Church, the small congregation he had been leading, felt God calling them to secure a building without borrowing money.

But he said it seemed ridiculous to ask the leadership of a disbanded Christian church simply to give the facility away.

Bolton recalled telling himself: "This is insane. Real estate is the most valuable commodity there is."

He nearly faltered. The deadline to submit bids passed. But upon reading the letter a final time, Bolton said he knew "everything I wrote was true" and that despite the \$0 bid for the building, Covenant

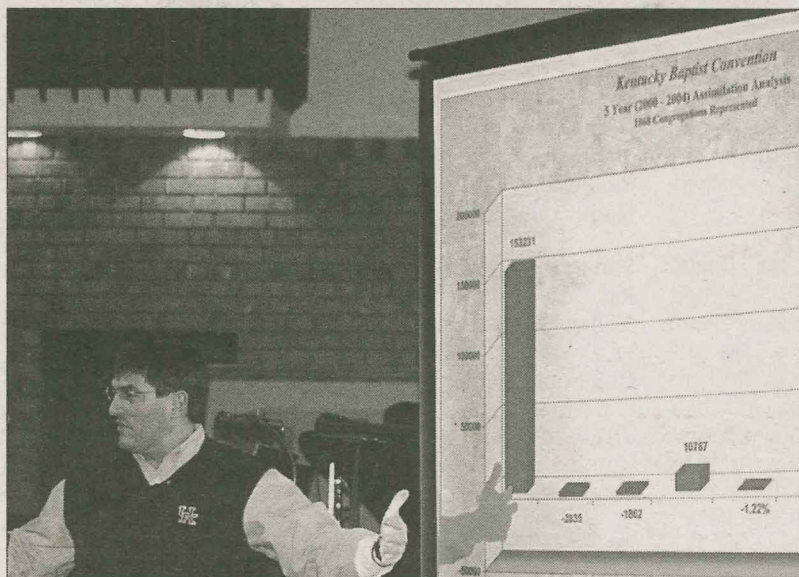
Ministries had included a fair bid for the contents of the facility on Wakefield Drive.

He mailed the letter with no expectations.

Bolton, who also is postmaster for the city of Glasgow, returned home from a business trip weeks later to find a letter on his desk from the Christian church committee. He predicted a brief reply thanking him for his interest.

□ See *Bowling Green church ... Page 3*

KBC workshop offers ideas for churches to retain members



CLOSING THE BACK DOOR Dan Garland, leader of the Kentucky Baptist Convention's church development and evangelism team, told recent workshop attendees that many churches lose new members because they fail to engage them in ministries or small group Bible studies. (Photo by Trennis Henderson)

By **Trennis Henderson**
Editor

Somerset—Warning that Kentucky Baptist churches are in crisis, state convention evangelism leader Dan Garland said congregations throughout the commonwealth "are losing people at a greater rate than we're gaining them."

Garland, leader of the Kentucky Baptist Convention's church development and evangelism team, is seeking to help stem the crisis through a series of 10 workshops across the state designed to help congregations assimilate and retain members.

Citing statistics compiled from the past five years, Garland said more than 1,800 Kentucky Baptist churches reported total additions of more than 153,000 members. During the same time, however, total church membership decreased 2,800 and average Sunday school

attendance dropped 1,800.

"We're in a crisis," Garland declared. "Our back doors are bigger than our front doors."

"Closing the Back Door: Connecting with Guests and New Members" is the focus of the 10-city tour being led by Garland and Darryl Wilson, director of the KBC's adult Sunday school group. The first workshop was held Feb. 7 at Beacon Hill Baptist Church in Somerset.

"Why do our churches need help in assimilating members?" Garland asked conference participants. Citing a 2004 Barna study that found 1.7 million unchurched adults live in Kentucky, Garland said, "Of that number, 81 percent of the unchurched adults in Kentucky are dechurched," meaning "they were at one time active in a church."

"Forty-two percent of the dechurched adults were former Baptists." □ See *KBC leaders offer ideas ... Page 8*

Dated material. Please deliver by Wednesday, February 15

LifeWay's Rainer urges 'biblical fidelity'

Nashville—Pledging “an aggressive leadership role” focused on “fidelity to the inerrant Word of God,” Thom Rainer presented his first report to trustees Feb. 6 as president of LifeWay Christian Resources.

Rainer, former dean of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth, succeeded James Draper as LifeWay president Feb. 1.

In board action, trustees elected Tom Hellams as vice president and executive associate to LifeWay's president. He will serve as chief coordinating staff member of the executive management team and will represent Rainer in denominational and other external roles. Hellams had served since 1997 as executive assistant to the president of Southern Seminary.

Henard named board chairman

In another election with Kentucky Baptist ties, trustees named Bill Henard trustee chairman effective September 2006. Henard is senior pastor of Porter Memorial Baptist Church in Lexington.

Trustees named Draper president emeritus. He will serve in an unpaid leadership role in the agency's current \$29 million major-donor campaign.

In his address to trustees, Rainer challenged trustees and employees to make LifeWay an organization

“that impacts the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Declaring that “we are going to become even more focused on the task of evangelism,” he added, “I pray that my leadership will be one that leads us to become an organization that impacts North America, and indeed the entire world, for Jesus. We must be bold.”

Rainer announced the launch of two initiatives: B&H Academic and LifeWay Research.

“We are going to have the best of academic resources,” he noted. “B&H (Broadman & Holman) will be at the forefront of maintaining doctrinal truths. We are going to take an aggressive leadership role so when the world sees what fidelity to the inerrant Word of God looks like, they will see what LifeWay stands for.”

Rainer, who previously headed a church consulting and research firm, described LifeWay Research as “an entity we are forming in gradual but aggressive steps that listens to churches, that listens to Christians, and that listens to the lost. We will be an authority on what's going on in the world of churches, beliefs and the world of the unchurched.”

Rainer said an intense focus on the local church will be LifeWay's “heartbeat.”

“The local church is our heart and our mission,” he said. “We serve two primary constituencies: individual Christians and churches. Though we have seen great days, we've only seen a glimmer of what God is yet to do with us in these areas.”

During his inaugural address, Rainer said LifeWay stands at a crossroads.

“We can choose to ignore the realities of the changing culture around us, of the post-Christian era we are entering, and of the profound challenge of being the world's largest Christian resource provider,” he said. “Or we can enter this new era with boldness and courage, knowing that our strength is not our own, and that a future in the hands of and total dependence

on Jesus Christ will be a success by any definition.”

Those who remain faithful to Christ will face challenges from an increasingly hostile culture, Rainer warned. LifeWay “must not merely abide within the boundaries of biblical fidelity but be a leader toward greater faithfulness in our denomination and indeed the larger evangelical world,” he added.

Pledging that “LifeWay will become the cutting-edge purveyor of information for the Christian world,” Rainer said, “Our products and our ministries will be first biblically based and then intensely culturally relevant.”

Trustees address SBC motions

During board business sessions, trustees approved LifeWay's response to several motions presented during recent annual meetings of the Southern Baptist Convention, including:

- A commitment to continue evaluating resources for single parents based on the needs of churches, developed on a biblical foundation and the doctrinal guideline of the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message.

- An initiative to create a contract position to research and provide information for effective church-based ministries to homosexuals.

- A commitment to keep churches the top priority for LifeWay resources and to ensure that churches receive the lowest available price on products.

In other action, trustees approved an increase of up to 4.4 percent in the price of Sunday school resources, effective spring 2007, to offset increased production, shipping and processing costs.

Trustees also granted LifeWay the authority to sell 119 acres of land across the interstate from LifeWay Glorieta Conference Center in New Mexico, as well as three small parcels of property at LifeWay Ridgecrest Conference Center in North Carolina.

Compiled from reporting by Baptist Press

INAUGURATION

Retired LifeWay President Jimmy Draper (right) presents Thom Rainer the presidential medallion during Rainer's Feb. 6 inauguration ceremony in Nashville. (BP photo by Kent Harville)



BAPTIST DIGEST

Brunson considers move to Florida. Mac Brunson, pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas since 1999, announced Feb. 12 that he will preach Feb. 19 in view of a call as pastor of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Fla. Brunson's announcement came less than a week after Jerry Vines retired after 23 years as pastor of the Florida congregation. First Baptist, Dallas, one of the Southern Baptist Convention's leading churches of the 20th century under George Truett and W.A. Criswell, has declined to about 10,000 members in recent years. It is about one-third the size of the Jacksonville church which has a membership of 28,000. Brunson, former president of the Southern Baptist Pastors' Conference, is a graduate of Furman University in Greenville, S.C., and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Mission center honors McWhorter. Mildred McWhorter, a longtime home missionary to Houston, will be honored with a new facility at the Gano Mission Center, one of three Baptist mission centers in Houston. McWhorter, who retired in 1992, is the former

director of the Houston Baptist Centers and was known for her effective ministry to inner-city residents and her colorful missions stories. The Mildred McWhorter Missionary Building will provide dorm rooms for short-term and summer volunteers, three private apartments for long-term volunteers, two conference rooms, a kitchen and dining room, five offices and a prayer room. The \$600,000, 7,400-square-foot facility is scheduled for completion in May.

GuideStone offers Ministers Tax Guide. Ministers can find help in preparing their 2005 federal income tax returns from GuideStone Financial Resources. The annual Ministers Tax Guide for 2005 Returns details recent changes to tax laws and their effect on ministers' returns. An overview of the tax change highlights was written by Richard Hammar, a certified public accountant, attorney and author who specializes in legal and tax issues for ministers. The free tax guide is available in an electronic PDF format by visiting the GuideStone Web site at www.GuideStone.org. Copies also are available by calling (888) 984-8433.

Bunce elected New Mexico executive. Messengers to a special meeting of the Baptist Convention of New Mexico unanimously elected Joseph Bunce as state convention executive director Jan. 31. He succeeds Claude Cone who retired in March 2005 after 20 years as executive director. Bunce, state convention president from 1998-2000 and pastor of First Baptist Church of Bloomfield, N.M. since 1993, was the search team's unanimous recommendation.

Sanders named Oklahoma Baptist editor. Ray Sanders, communications team leader for the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, was named editor of the Oklahoma Baptist Messenger by the state convention board of directors Feb. 7. In addition to serving as editor, Sanders will retain his role as leader of the convention's communications team. He succeeds John Yeats who was named director of communications for the Louisiana Baptist Convention. Sanders, 42, has a background in journalism, corporate communications and public affairs. He is a graduate of the University of Oklahoma.

'Manifesto' view misinterpreted, supporters claim

Buies Creek, N.C. (ABP)—The “Baptist Manifesto,” a theological statement that emphasizes the role of community to counterbalance individual freedom, has been misinterpreted by critics, say seven Baptist theologians, including a professor at Campbellsville University.

Countering charges that the document opposes freedom of conscience, the theologians wrote, “We believe with early Baptists and the mainstream Christian tradition that an individual's conscience is inviolable, but not infallible, and therefore we are always under the obligation to see to it that our consciences have been formed by the faithful practices of the church.”

The Jan. 31 statement was prompted by a Jan. 20 speech by Bill Underwood, president-elect of Mercer University in Macon, Ga. Underwood said some ideas in the 1997 manifesto are unbaptistic and a threat to religious freedom.

Freedom of individual conscience “is what Baptists have believed from the beginning,” said Underwood. “It is a part of our earliest heritage: Freedom of individual conscience, respect for the freedom of others who disagree, and individual responsibility. These have been bedrock Baptist principles.”

“These principles are at stake at this moment in Baptist history” from threats from the left and right, Underwood said. He cited both the manifesto, drafted by moderate Baptists, and the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message statement, used by conservative Southern Baptist Convention leaders.

But the seven theologians, including Mark Medley, associate professor of theology at Campbellsville, say Baptists in America have placed too much emphasis on individual interpretation in the last two centuries and weakened or abandoned their earlier commitment to the role of faith communities, particularly the local church.

“We do not wish to silence others or deny them the freedom that is their birthright in Christ,” the seven wrote. “But we have come to believe that while autonomous individualism may seem to offer some protection from authoritarian coercion, in reality it creates a lonely society of moral strangers.”

Steve Harmon, an associate professor at Campbell University Divinity School in Buies Creek, N.C., drafted the theologians' response to Underwood.

“Each one of us is ultimately directly accountable to God,” Harmon wrote, “but we are helped toward being accountable to God by the community that forms us as individuals.”

KBC launches plan linking churches for mentoring

By David Winfrey
News Director

Jamestown—Six months ago, First Baptist Church of Jamestown Pastor Phil Ellis was looking for some answers.

The church's membership was stuck at approximately 125, a common barrier for churches that have one staff member, according to Ellis, who studied church growth in seminary.

Furthermore, research had told him that previous pastors lasted three years, on average, at the Russell County congregation.

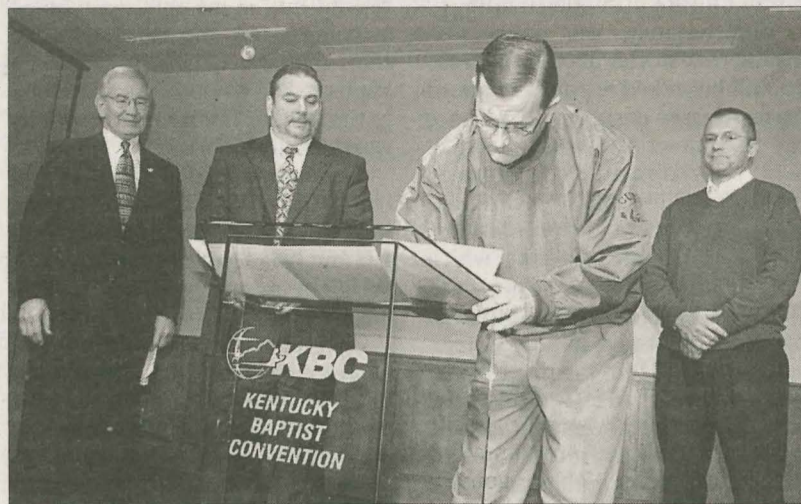
A member playfully floated the idea of visiting another church for a year just to learn some strategies and bring them back to the church.

That's when Ellis got another idea and contacted the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

As a result, KBC regional church development strategist Alan Witham introduced Ellis to Ronny Rains, pastor of Northside Baptist Church in Elizabethtown.

Last week Ellis and Rains became the first pastors to forge a formal partnership as part of the KBC's "Connect" strategy.

At a ceremony at the KBC's office in Louisville, both pastors signed a "Partnering Church Covenant" promising to encourage and equip each other as they seek to grow. They also promised to build relationships between members of both churches and to extend the partner-



COVENANT AGREEMENT Ronny Rains, pastor of Northside Baptist Church in Elizabethtown, signs a partnership agreement while (from left) KBC Executive Director Bill Mackey, First Baptist Church of Jamestown Pastor Phil Ellis and Alan Witham, a KBC regional church consultant, look on. The Kentucky Baptist Convention plans to help 100 churches enter such partnerships by the year 2010.

ship idea by being willing to help other churches in the future.

Witham said Ellis told him he "wanted to connect with a church which has been where they are now but has grown to where they want to grow."

After prayer, Witham said, he thought of Rains, who became the pastor and sole staff member of Northside in 1997. Since then, the church has grown to a weekly attendance of approximately 375. The church now has eight staff and has faced such issues as a building project and converting from traditional

to contemporary worship.

Ellis said he's convinced First Baptist, Jamestown, can reach that same level. "If they were to be mobilized evangelistically, they would double or triple in size."

"Iron sharpens iron"

Rains said the partnership is an extension of the church's vision to model Acts 1:8, sharing the gospel in their community, in the commonwealth, throughout North America and internationally.

"We feel this strategy connects well with our vision to be an on-mis-

sion church," Rains said.

"Iron sharpens iron," he added. "I want to be sharpened by Phil."

KBC Executive Director Bill Mackey called the strategy a way to get "on-time delivery of resources."

"Some of the greatest resources are already in the field," Mackey said.

As part of the Kentucky Baptist Convention's "Connect" long-term strategy, the KBC has set a goal to help 100 churches build similar partnerships by the year 2010.

French Harmon said he's optimistic that regional coordinators can help facilitate even more.

Last week the two pastors discussed an action plan that includes:

- A meeting in March between leaders from both churches, probably in Campbellsville, a midway point between the two congregations.

- A cookout or other casual gathering for both congregations.

- A pulpit exchange later this year.

Ellis said he's excited by the potential of the partnership.

"It was really a peaceful feeling that we aren't out there by ourselves in uncharted waters."

For more information about the "Partnering Church Covenant" program, call the KBC's church development and evangelism team at (502) 489-3571 or call toll-free in Kentucky, (866) 489-3571.

The Kentucky Baptist Convention has set a goal to help 100 churches build similar partnerships by the year 2010.

Bowling Green church finds building priceless

Continued from page 1

Instead, the letter stated the group had accepted the offer that Bolton was nearly too timid to submit.

"I couldn't breathe for a minute," he said. Seconds later he and his family "were dancing and running around the house."

Bolton previously was coordinator of single adult ministries at Living Hope Baptist Church in Bowling Green, and he was eager to tell Executive Pastor Scott Kilgore the good news. Kilgore is "advising elder" for Covenant.

Kilgore calls Bolton's boldness both inspiring and humbling. "That faith just floors me."

According to Rex Eaton, a leader from the former Cornerstone Christian Church, five bids were submitted, but "money was not the deciding factor."

The church's disbanding "was the most difficult thing I've ever had to be part of and I hope I never have to do anything like it again," Eaton said. The committee approached the property sale as the last ministry of their former congregation.

The driving factor in dealing with the property, he said, was answering the question: "Who was going to take over the building and be Bible-based and Bible-centered and do the Great Commission?"

Bolton's letter "kept surfacing," Eaton said.

"Theirs is a strictly outreach ministry that did not focus on one group," he added. "They were going to seek and save the lost, period."

Eaton said he smiled when "I got this breathless phone call (from

Bolton). He was virtually speechless. It made the whole process worth it."

Not only did Covenant Ministries acquire a facility in good condition, but Bolton said the purchased contents included everything needed to begin their ministry in the new neighborhood.

"Computers, sound equipment, furniture, baptismal robes, prayer cards, pens, pencils—even the kitchen was stocked," he said. Bibles already were in the pews.

Church starting strategy

The Covenant Ministries congregation received the new building with gratitude and excitement, but the facility is a means to an end and not the end itself, Bolton said.

"We wanted a building to plant churches out of, not to build onto," he said.

The church intends never to become distracted by its facility, Bolton explained. Some churches "start out doing what's right but then the focus goes into getting a facility and then building onto the facility," he said.

Misdirected priorities create congregations that "preach the church or preach the program more than preach Jesus," Bolton said. "That's doing a disservice to the Lord and the people who are there."

The vision for Covenant Ministries—where approximately 50 people worship each week—is to attract "120 dedicated followers of Christ," he said. "When we hit that number, we want 30 of those people to leave and plant a church.

"The backup plan is, if they won't

leave, then I'll leave and hopefully 30 of them will come with me," the pastor said.

Such a ministry setting—"with not a great deal of comfort"—helps members stay focused on sharing the gospel and starting new churches rather than enjoying the status quo, he added.

Regularly, Covenant's members go door-to-door, asking to share the gospel with neighbors. Eaton said that outreach was what impressed the committee most.

Consistent personal evangelism is expected of Covenant's members, Bolton said. "It doesn't mean you have to go out knocking on doors. Talking to people you work with or to your family is far more effective."

In some ways, Covenant Ministries is "radical" but members are not "church reformers," he said. "Our place is never to point a finger (at other churches) and say: 'You're not doing it right.'"

The congregation's energy and positive spirit are a comfort to Eaton. "I drove by the church the other night and it stirred a great deal of emotion within me," he said. "But it was also a relief. I believe the Lord is happy and that a good work is being carried on."

Kilgore said he shared the news about the new building with great excitement to the staff and members at Living Hope.

"It was a story to edify us," he said, adding that the faith of the Covenant congregation reminded him that all Christians should be "silly enough to believe God's promises are true."

Rumblings of revival reported at Asbury College's chapel service

Wilmore (BP)—A massive movement of prayer on the campus of Asbury College last week led to an extended time of corporate worship that had some students staying in the school's chapel as long as 11 hours.

Students at Asbury College, a Christian liberal arts college with more than 1,200 students, gathered for a regularly scheduled chapel service at 10 a.m. Feb. 6, but some ended up staying for hours, according to a school news release.

"Following the morning chapel the altar was crowded with students seeking the Lord—two and three deep, with people praying in groups around the auditorium," Asbury President Paul Rader said. "Throughout the day there has been a beautiful awareness of the holiness of God. Many students took off their shoes with a sense of standing on holy ground."

"God is answering the passionate and persistent prayers of committed students who have been fasting and praying for weeks for this kind of spiritual breakthrough. We are all rejoicing in it," he said.

Asbury students have individually committed to interceding for their peers and collectively have signed up for more than 40 hours of prayer for their school each week.

Revival broke out at Asbury College in 1970 and again in 1995. News of the extended chapel service spread throughout the surrounding areas, high schools and other local colleges, the school said, and hundreds of students, faculty and staff and members of the community joined in for praise, worship and prayer in the chapel.

When one group of students would tire of leading in worship, another group would move into their place. A local grocery store sent food and water for those who chose to remain in the service for hours.

"I didn't want to leave until I felt the Lord was in me the way He needed to be," freshman Michael Spann said.

The student body at Asbury includes people from 47 states and 11 countries, and the school currently is ranked fourth by U.S. News & World Report among comprehensive colleges in the South.

"When God moves, you have to respond. There's nothing else you can do when you meet your Creator face to face like we did yesterday," sophomore Ben Greenhoe said.

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

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IMB public relations fails to serve Baptists

By Bob Terry

When you read a story in your state Baptist paper about the work of the Southern Baptist International Mission Board, do you expect that story to be a public relations release or a news story? There is a difference—and a change in practice at the IMB makes it vital to recognize the difference.

A public relations press release attempts to present material in a way that is positive to the sponsoring organization. Information is carefully chosen and stories carefully crafted to advance the position of the organization or present the organization in the best possible light.

A news story is supposed to be a straightforward telling of the facts. A news story provides sufficient relevant information to allow readers to know about major developments and decide issues for themselves.

Public relations is a management function. That is why communications officers, whatever their title might be, sit on top-level management teams.

News stories usually come from a source outside the organization. This is supposed to help eliminate built-in bias. The organization being reported on seldom sees the story in advance although individual facts or quotes might be double-checked.

The distinction between a public relations release and a news story was brought to the forefront of public attention in January when it was announced that IMB releases that involve the entity's trustees would be approved by the trustee chairman or his designee before being released to the public.

Sending "the right messages"

The action came after a story released by the IMB gave a different vote count on a policy change made by trustees in their November meeting than the vote count later reported by the chairman. IMB offi-

cialists said the new policy would help prevent future misunderstandings.

Unfortunately, the policy also means that stories about IMB trustees will be viewed as public relations press releases designed to advance the agenda of the trustees or, at least, the chairman of the trustees. Interestingly the IMB's press release about the January trustee meeting, which was when the new practice went into effect, failed to even mention the change in procedure.

Perhaps IMB management thought the change was insignificant. After all, management already signs off on all stories released by the organization's communications office. The IMB is intensely careful that its releases carry what IMB leaders call "the right messages."

One more hoop to jump through

Concern for security or damage to the work or to national believers are other reasons the IMB has regional leaders, as well as top-level management, sign off on stories. Having the chairman of the trustees sign off makes only one more hoop through which a story has to pass before being allowed into the public arena.

The impact of this public relations approach was reflected in the board's release about its January meeting. The story started with a statistical report, followed by a section on IMB finances. On page three of a five-page release were four paragraphs about the trustees' unprecedented decision to seek the removal of one of their own, Oklahoma trustee Wade Bursleson. Two of the four paragraphs were quotes from IMB trustee chairman Tom Hatley. Bursleson was not quoted nor was there a single word about his position.

Many state Baptist papers (including the Western Recorder) turned to other sources for their information. Lead stories were about the Bursleson

incident, not about IMB statistics.

The IMB story might have been a carefully crafted public relations release, but, in my opinion, it failed at being a fair and balanced news story that was helpful to Southern Baptists. For those of us who look to the IMB for information about its work, that is unfortunate.

Denominational entities should trust the people in whose name they serve to the point of providing fair and balanced accounts of issues raised in meetings as well as the meetings themselves.

A recent situation in Louisiana Baptist life illustrates the importance of the distinction between public relations and news and the impact on readers.

At the November 2005 annual meeting, messengers debated an administration-backed plan to change the state Baptist paper's status as a separate entity and make it part of the state executive board. During the debate, a messenger noted that LBC Live, a publication under the direction of convention administration, printed an article only in support of the change.

The messenger compared that action to the state Baptist paper, which ran side-by-side articles about the proposal—one for and one against.

The messenger declared that presenting both sides of a debate is the history and tradition of Baptists. Amen. The messengers wisely defeated the proposal and kept the state Baptist paper free to report both sides of issues.

Baptists are best served when they are given information about an issue and allowed to reach their own conclusions. Trying to manipulate Baptists by furnishing only one side of an issue does not serve Baptists well.

I believe the IMB needs to move quickly to providing more news and less public relations. And, certainly, the chairman of the trustees should not have to sign off on stories about trustee actions.

Bob Terry is editor of the Alabama Baptist

2006 partnership missions opportunities

Last year was an outstanding year in partnership missions for the Kentucky Baptist Convention. There were 44 international mission trips coordinated by the KBC partnership missions department with more than 450 participants.

Ross Bauscher, department director, reported 1,150 professions of faith through the witness and outreach of partnership volunteers. This evangelistic harvest has inspired International Mission Board missionary Scott Pitman to develop discipleship resources for churches to use in training and developing new members.

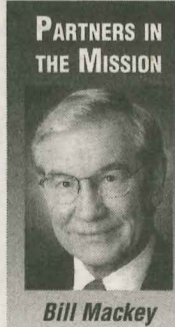
It was an unforgettable experience to be part of one of those teams in Teresina last June. God worked through two team members from Connecticut who are natives of Brazil to reach five members of a teenage gang, including the leader, through soccer outreach. A second team from West Kentucky had great success in a town of about 20,000 people three hours north of Teresina.

Calvin Wilkins, former partnership director, has just returned from the National Brazilian Baptist Convention conducted in Teresina. Calvin and seven volunteers helped the Piaui Convention in hosting the annual meeting.

God is at work in this partnership and I hope Kentucky Baptists will pray to the Lord of the harvest for laborers and that many will respond in obedience to receive the harvest. There are at least 14 mission projects, including evangelism, church planting, medical clinics and discipleship events planned for the Piaui Convention.

The second partnership in Brazil is with Baptists in Brasilia, the capital and Federal District, and the 17 cities around the Federal District. In contrast to Brasilia, these cities are very poor with many needs. The projects include medical clinics, vacation Bible school, evangelistic revival and chapel construction.

The churches in Brazil are praying that Kentucky Baptists will come to help them reach their states



Bill Mackey

GIVING

'Special needs' trust can benefit disabled child

By Laurie Valentine

Creating a plan to benefit a disabled child after your death, without causing the loss of vital government benefits, requires careful planning.



Leaving a share of your estate outright to a disabled child will result in the child losing government benefits he or she currently qualifies for from Medicaid or other sources. The inheritance becomes an "available resource" that must be spent down before the child is eligible to reapply for government benefits.

Likewise, setting up a standard testamentary trust under which the trustee is directed to use income and/or principal for the disabled child's health, support and maintenance also will endanger government benefits. The trust can be subject to the cost of care claims, Medicaid liens and Medicaid estate recovery at the child's death.

A better alternative is a "special needs" or "supplemental needs" trust. Under this type of trust, the trustee has total discretion about whether to expend any of the trust funds for the disabled child's benefit. Also, expenditures are limited to non-necessities and supplemental services such as dental, medical and drug expenses not provided through governmental benefits; physical, speech and occupational therapy; special equipment not provided by other sources; vacation and travel activities; recreational opportunities; and/or training and education activities.

The total discretion granted to the trustee means the beneficiary has no legal right to demand distributions. As a result, the trust assets and income are not "available resources" and, therefore, don't affect the beneficiary's eligibility for governmental benefits.

An alternative to a separately managed special needs trust is a "pooled special needs trust." Such trusts are established and managed by a nonprofit association, which maintains a separate sub-account for each beneficiary while pooling the assets for investment purposes. At the disabled beneficiary's death, the remainder can either remain in the pooled trust to be used for other disabled beneficiaries of the trust, or be set up to distribute to the state an amount equal to the benefits provided by the state during the beneficiary's lifetime. The balance, if any, can be distributed to other family members.

Laurie Valentine is trust counsel for the Kentucky Baptist Foundation

How can parents help teenage daughters build self-esteem?

Q: With all the emphasis on romantic love in the month of February, how can we help our young teenage daughters realize they do not need a boyfriend to enjoy their lives at this point?

Cultural riptides threaten to drown teenage girls in a variety of ways. Lies marketed to our daughters include:

- Your worth is in your physical beauty.
- Having a boyfriend is the ultimate mark of approval.
- Girls should be subordinate to boys.
- Teenagers should separate themselves from their parents and families.

PARENTING

Growing strong daughters requires that parents recognize girls are perfectly created in the image of God, broken in their sin and in need of the redeeming work of Christ, Who is their ultimate Heavenly Bridegroom. As parents help their daughters recognize their need for Christ, it is crucial that we lead them to understand and anchor their identity in Him.

Combating the culture includes mothers not modeling obsessiveness with aging, beauty or weight. Fathers should monitor their reactions to beautiful women portrayed in the media and relate lovingly and appropriately to their wife, daughters and other women. Parents should set careful boundaries around media influence, both at home and in the movie theatre, and use the media as opportunities to discuss a biblical worldview that runs counter to what Hollywood portrays.

Find ways to prioritize family time outside of watching television. Playing games is one great option. Give your girls input into interesting family vacations. Dad might want to establish an occasional date night with each daughter. Challenge your daughters and help them set goals in order to build confidence. Finally, encourage them to draw close to Christ, to godly girlfriends and to pursue interests in which they can excel.—*Scott Wigginton*

Q: My husband and I argue about arguing. We argue about whether we should fight in front of our kids. I don't think we should. I never saw my parents argue. He says fighting is a part of marriage and a part of life, so they should know about it. Is that true, or is it bad for our kids to see us fight?

Conflict is a part of life and relationships. As a couple becomes aware of their differences, conflicts arise. The manner in which you and your husband deal with the differences is what counts.

MARRIAGE

If dealing with conflict is characterized as "fighting" and involves yelling or name-calling, cursing or other abusive language, hitting or throwing objects, then no child or adult should be exposed to that behavior. Such actions are harmful to the mind, heart, spirit and sometimes body.

If dealing with conflict is addressed calmly, demonstrating self-control and talking through differences by sharing thoughts, attitudes, feelings and wishes, then yes, this type of modeling teaches children and adolescents how to deal with conflict. "Empowering Couples" by David and Amy Olson offers some guidelines for dealing with conflict, including:

- Focus on the relevant and current issues.
- Share both positive and negative feelings.
- Rather than placing blame, share the facts of the situation.
- Recognize and own that both people involved in the conflict contribute to the problem.
- Look for ways to change in order to develop new ways of dealing with issues.
- Grow toward using conflict resolution to increase intimacy and trust.

Giving your children the skills to deal with conflict in a healthy and helpful way is a powerful gift. If you do not show them how, who will?—*Valerie Vincent*

Family Forum writers are:

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Send questions for Family Forum to Western Recorder, Box 43969, Louisville, KY 40253 or e-mail wesrec@earthlink.net.



Diverse developments impact Baptist life

Several recent events and actions on the state and national levels in Baptist life deserve Kentucky Baptists' careful attention. Among major news items:

Alabama church fires. At least five more rural Baptist churches in Alabama were burned last week, bringing the total over the past two weeks to 10. While a handful of church fires pales in comparison to the widespread devastation of last year's Gulf Coast hurricanes, reports that the fires were set by arsonists add insult to injury. As tragic as it is to lose a church facility to forces of nature, the sense of loss is multiplied when houses of worship are deliberately torched.

Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Convention, urged prayer as the first response on behalf of the damaged and destroyed churches.

"This crisis illustrates at least two truths," he said. "First, we live in an imperfect world in which we experience tragedy. Second, these tragedies of life present us with ways to respond proactively in sharing God's love by helping others."

Just as Kentucky Baptist congregations are partnering with churches in Mississippi and Louisiana that suffered hurricane damage, perhaps some Kentucky Baptist churches and associations can offer assistance to Alabama Baptist congregations seeking to rebuild from the ashes.

Partnering churches. As the KBC's five-year "Kentucky Baptists Connect" emphasis moves into its second year, a key component is seeking to connect church leaders "for encouragement, coaching and resourcing." One of the networking goals calls for enlisting 100 churches in one-on-one partnerships by the year 2010.

Last week marked the first step toward that goal as the pastors of First Baptist Church of Jamestown and Northside Baptist Church in Elizabethtown signed the first "Partnering Church Covenant," pledging that the two congregations will help encourage and equip each other as they pursue church growth.

As KBC leaders seek to enlist at least 98 more

partnering churches in the next few years, more information is available by calling the KBC church development and evangelism team at (502) 489-3571 or toll-free at (866) 489-3571.

Closing the back door. The primary focus of this year's Connect strategy is "Strengthening Every Church." One key goal is equipping 1,000 pastors for small group/Sunday school development. A related evangelism goal calls for retaining at least 80 percent of new church members as involved participants in the life and ministry of the church.

KBC evangelism leader Dan Garland helped launch that effort last week with the first of 10 "Closing the Back Door" work-

shops across the state. The training events, which will continue through April, are designed to help church leaders discover practical, effective ways to assimilate and retain members.

Kentucky Baptist churches "haven't been very good at making disciples," Garland acknowledged. "We're got to intentionally connect our folks with new members."

Rainer begins LifeWay ministry. Thom Rainer, a former dean at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, was inaugurated last week as president of LifeWay Christian Resources. Rainer is known to many Kentucky Baptists for his research on baptisms, church growth and related issues.

Declaring that LifeWay "will become the cutting-edge purveyor of information for the Christian world," Rainer pledged that "our products and our ministries will be first biblically based and then intensely culturally relevant."

Rainer will be joined by new vice president Tom Hellams, former executive assistant to the president at Southern, and new board chairman Bill Henard, senior pastor of Porter Memorial Baptist Church in Lexington.

Join me in praying that God will bless their ministry efforts at LifeWay for the benefit of Southern Baptists and the work of God's Kingdom.

STRAIGHT FROM THE EDITOR



Trennis Henderson

Why I pray for my patients in surgery

By Bill Frist

Washington (RNS)—I vividly remember a day in 1984 when I thought a woman would bleed to death on my operating table. She had come to the hospital with an enlarged heart and needed immediate surgery.

At first, the operation seemed to go well. But then, she wouldn't stop bleeding; we couldn't sew up her chest cavity. With every moment, she came closer to bleeding to death.

I did everything medical science recommended: I gave her frozen plasma, platelets, and drugs to promote clotting. Nothing worked. So I turned to the last option I had: I prayed for her. Somehow, things got better. The bleeding stopped and her heart started beating again. She later sat up in bed, surrounded by her family. Ten days later, she went home.

I'll never know what role my prayer played in saving that young woman's life, but it's rare that I get through any type of complex surgery without asking the Almighty for help. Most of my colleagues in transplant surgery do the same.

Of course, there are many atheists who are excellent doctors, but I've never met another transplant

surgeon who didn't occasionally pray in the operating room. Even people who never set foot inside a church, synagogue or mosque will offer a few silent, prayerful words at a key moment.

FIRST PERSON

For transplant surgeons, of course, prayer cannot substitute for medical expertise. Through a vast program of scientific research over the past 50 years, we've improved our understanding of every part of the circulatory system, reduced the incidence of cardiovascular disease and improved the length and quality of life for people with damaged and diseased hearts.

Learning to do a heart transplant today requires about 12 years of education, training and internships after college. Although today's medical schools almost always require ethics courses that address questions of faith, nearly all other classes properly focus on the hard factual realities of science.

Still, the very process of heart transplantation has a strong element of mystery. A surgeon removes a worn or damaged heart, takes a new one out of an ice bucket, places it into an empty chest cavity, sews the blood vessels together, and fills the new heart with blood. Then, the

moment of truth arrives. A hush will fall over the operating room, and during a minute or two that seems like an eternity, the surgical team looks down at the flaccid heart, waiting for a sign of life.

It is essentially a spiritual moment: An individual is about to receive a new heart and new life. Seeing that new heart begin to beat is to witness a miracle—a miracle that medical science can describe, but never fully explain.

I cannot speak for all doctors, but for my part, acknowledging the healing power of faith, the limits of our knowledge and the mystery of human life is an essential part of the practice of medicine. It helps us find new cures and treatments, while maintaining the sense of humility needed to treat, in the words of the psalmist, a "fearfully and wonderfully made" person.

Just as importantly, faith lends perspective in the face of the mortal tragedy every doctor faces. Nearly all good surgeons realize this and, in their own ways, nearly all practice it.

My own experiences in transplant surgery have taught me that true atheists are about as common in operating rooms as they are in foxholes.

U.S. Sen. Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) is a heart and lung surgeon and Senate majority leader.

Blind speaker expects God to redeem limitations

KBC Vocational Evangelists Conference

The 2006 Kentucky Baptist Vocational Evangelists Conference will be Feb. 27 from 10 a.m. to 27 from Immanuel Baptist Church in Lexington.

In addition to Travis Freeman, the conference will feature a message by evangelist Dale Rose and testimonies by Wyman Copass, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Franklin; Ron Davis, pastor of Franklin Crossroads Baptist Church in Cecilia; and Adam Dooley, pastor of Red House Baptist Church in Richmond.

Evangelist Don Mathis is president of the Kentucky Baptist Evangelists Fellowship.

By Dannah Prather
Partnerships Editor

Louisville—Human nature often frets about the future and hopes to see clearly what lies around the next corner. But Travis Freeman seems to rest easy in God's passenger seat.

Perhaps that's because, as a blind man, Freeman doesn't know what it's like to try to drive himself.

"This is the path God has chosen to bring me down," Freeman said. "I accepted it from Day One."

"Day One" occurred at the age of 12, when Freeman emerged without his sight from an illness that is almost always fatal.

Rejecting anger and bitterness, he said even as a boy he was confident God would use the disability for His glory. Freeman treats his condition as a springboard to tell others about Jesus. "I look at my blindness as a blessing," he said.

Freeman, a graduate of the University of Kentucky and a student at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, will share his story Feb. 27 at the vocational evangelists' conference, held prior to the annual Kentucky Baptist Evangelism Conference. This year's events will be held at Immanuel Baptist Church in Lexington.

The Corbin native had been a Christian less than a year when he became ill. A 10-day migraine headache turned out to be cavernous sinus thrombosis, an infection of the paranasal sinuses located at the base of the skull.

Doctors then predicted that if Freeman survived, he might be left in a vegetative state. Complete recovery was out of the question.

He also had bacterial meningitis which, in Freeman's case, was a secondary concern to doctors.

"We were just trying to get through a day," Freeman's mother, Mary, recalled.

Relearning everything

Through surgery, doctors drained the infection, but, as expected, damage had already been done. "In less than 48 hours I went from having perfect vision to no vision," Freeman said.

"I was the stable part of my family," he said. "Because of my acceptance, (my parents) had to accept it, too. We were in it together."

Today, Freeman said it is obvious that God used the brief time of his Christian walk before the illness to prepare him for such a blow.

"I was a sixth grader and was having a quiet time every day," Freeman



VISION FOR MINISTRY Travis Freeman hasn't let his lack of sight deter him from sharing the gospel, whether as an evangelist or as a participant on a mission trip to Brazil. (IMB photo)

said. "God was really showing me what it meant to be a Christian. ... That relationship was going to be all I had to depend on."

He spent 17 days in the hospital. "Everything I had known was ripped from me," he said. "I had to learn how to do everything over."

On the recommendation of the hospital, the family spoke with a counselor about how to facilitate education and living skills for Freeman.

"She told my parents, 'There's no way you can raise a blind child in a small town like Corbin,'" he recalled. An only child and self-described "mama's boy," Freeman said he and his parents were devastated, believing their only option was to enroll him in a boarding school.

They visited the Kentucky School for the Blind and received a different assessment. Counselors there told the family that, with assistance, Freeman could remain at home and attend public school.

Orientation and mobility instructors helped Freeman relearn basic skills. Later, they helped him learn how to maneuver the UK and South-

ern Seminary campuses.

"The entire city of Corbin rallied around me," Freeman said. "It was awesome."

Playing football, drawing attention

During his senior year in high school, Freeman said he was "just a kid doing what most kids in Corbin want to do—play football" when he got his first taste of the spotlight.

Center for four years, Freeman played football for the Corbin High School Redhounds. His teammates would help him line up, then he'd snap the ball and block, just like any other lineman.

He told Associated Press, "At times it's confusing, at times it's scary, but most of the time, once I get off the ball and I get my hands on someone, it's just like blocking like I could see."

He wasn't a starter, but he played nearly every game. In addition to Associated Press, Freeman's story was reported by Paul Harvey News, ESPN, NBC's "Today" show, "Dateline NBC" and other media.

Being the "blind football player"

gave Freeman opportunities to talk about God's faithfulness. "I couldn't share my story without talking about God," he said. "Without God, there is no Travis Freeman. There is no blind football player."

At UK, Freeman was an honor student, president of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and student manager for the football Wildcats.

It was on a spring break trip to Florida in 2001 that Freeman said he felt God calling him to full-time ministry service. "I had a plan for my life," Freeman said. "But God said, 'I want everything.'" When he surrendered his plans to God, Freeman said the future became clear.

"I was reading the book of Acts and discovered that I have a heart and passion for the church," he said. "God is calling me to impact churches, especially in the States."

Later that year, he was licensed and ordained into the ministry at Central Baptist Church in Corbin where he had been baptized at 11.

Upon graduating from UK with a degree in business administration, Freeman, now 25, enrolled at Southern Seminary and is on track to receive a master of divinity degree next year. He plans to enroll in the doctoral program and hopes to become a pastor.

A laptop computer allows Freeman to complete his class work and prepare sermons. "Technology is an amazing thing," he said. "My laptop talks to me. It reads Web pages and e-mail. It reads anything I scan into it." He has entire commentary sets and books installed on his computer.

Freeman said when he was 12, he didn't know terms such as "providence" and "sovereignty" but nonetheless demonstrated confidence in those aspects of God's character. "I never believed God. I had my down times, but I never really questioned, 'God, why me?' ... I said, 'God's going to use this.'"

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A strategy for outreach

Scholarships help get unchurched kids to camp

We anticipate that 2006 will be, by far, the largest summer that Crossings Ministries has ever experienced. Among the large number of campers, we hope to help you bring unchurched youth to camp.

Therefore, we have set aside scholarship funds that will allow several hundred youth to attend camp at a 50 percent discount off the normal price. The scholarships can be used at Cedar-more or Jonathan Creek and in accordance with space limitations.

These scholarships are designed to allow unchurched youth to attend camp, but available spaces are limited due to our high registration numbers this year. Also, these scholarships apply to additions above and beyond our current registration numbers. For example, if you already have a group of 15 campers registered and you know of four unchurched youth whom you could invite due to the discounted rate, your new camp total would be 19. Since available space is limited and scholarships will be awarded quickly, do not delay if you can

make use of this opportunity.

Due to anticipated high demand for these scholarships, we have an independent council set up to review and approve all applications. You can log on to our Web site at www.crossingsministries.org to see the details and fill out an application. The application will be sent via e-mail, and you will be contacted within 30 days of submittal.

Our prayer is that many of you will take advantage of this opportunity to reach out to youth beyond your church and see them come to Christ through the camp experience. Our sole ministry focus is to create a setting where guests can come to know Christ or more fully experience Him. Our prayer is that every church will partner with us to use camp as an outreach by inviting youth who are apart from Christ and even apart from the local church. Challenge your kids today to seek out friends at school to come this summer and experience the love of Christ while at camp.

David Melber is president of Kentucky Baptist Assemblies. Contact him at 3043 Beal Road, Hardin, KY 42048; phone (270) 354-8355.

KENTUCKY BAPTIST ASSEMBLIES



David Melber

Expanding Gambling Will Be Bad News for Kentucky!

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The Kentucky General Assembly is currently considering several proposals that would bring casinos to Kentucky. This is bad news because expanded gambling will hurt families, harm our economy and make our state government dependent upon revenue from big gambling corporations.

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Kudzu

Doug Marlette



For Heaven's Sake

Mike Morgan



Bible Crosswords

Evelyn Boyington

Across

- 1 Revolutionary hero Nathan
- 5 Step made by faith
- 9 Age of Methuselah when he had a son: one hundred eighty-____ (Genesis 5:25)
- 10 Aerie dweller
- 12 This may include "or else"
- 13 Most faithful
- 15 "There stood before the river a ____ which had two horns" (Daniel 8:3)
- 16 Treasured, in a way
- 18 Assess
- 19 Herdsman of Tekoia whom God called to be a prophet
- 21 Rod and ____
- 23 Bishopric
- 24 Noted Quaker family, and others
- 26 Chooses
- 28 At odds (abbr.)
- 30 Songdom's "gal"
- 31 "The way of man is ____ and strange" (Proverbs 21:8)
- 35 Is diminished
- 39 "Go, sell the ____, and pay thy debt" (2 Kings 4:7)
- 40 He went searching for his father's lost donkeys
- 42 Neap, for one
- 43 "Incline not my heart to any ____ thing" (Psalm 141:4)
- 45 Sesquicentennial segment
- 47 Mature
- 48 Stern
- 50 Like-____ (kindred spirit)
- 52 "The angels shall ... ____ the wicked from among the just" (Matthew 13:49)
- 53 Ezekiel saw a valley that was full of ____
- 54 Takes no action
- 55 "There shall come forth a rod out of the ____ of Jesse" (Isaiah 11:1)

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			54					55			

- 3 Seep
- 4 Door direction
- 5 Colossians and Philipians, familiarly
- 6 What one lends
- 7 "The words of ____ the son of Jakeh, even the prophecy" (Proverbs 30:1)
- 8 "Do I seek to ____ men?" (Galatians 1:10)
- 9 "Let them be confounded and put to ____" (Psalm 35:4)
- 11 Fragrant compound
- 12 Sand, for one
- 14 Wooden pegs
- 17 Vitality
- 20 Twentieth-century English novelist
- 22 "His ____ also shall not wither" (Psalm 1:3)
- 25 LaCosta, and others
- 27 Apartment
- 29 "He had offered up ____ and supplications with strong crying" (Hebrews 5:7)
- 31 Those opposed
- 32 Splits
- 33 Mount of ____
- 34 ____ date

- 36 "Thou shalt also be ... a royal ____ in the hand of thy God" (Isaiah 62:3)
- 37 "These things, saith he which hath the sharp sword with two ____" (Revelation 2:12)
- 38 ____ money
- 41 "Two ____ of the first year for a sacrifice of peace" (Leviticus 23:19)
- 44 Israel's high priest had to descend from this tribe
- 46 Lose control
- 49 Soak flax
- 51 Compass dir.

Last week's solution

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KBC leaders offer ideas to help churches retain members

Closing the Back Door conferences

Nine more "Closing the Back Door" conferences are scheduled throughout the commonwealth in the next two months.

Locations are:

Williamstown, Feb. 16 at Williamstown Baptist Church.

Mays Lick, Feb. 21 at Mays Lick Baptist Church.

Elizabethtown, Feb. 23 at Severns Valley Baptist Church.

Mayfield, March 6 at Hickory Baptist Church.

Madisonville, March 7 at First Baptist Church.

Bowling Green, March 13 at Greenwood Baptist Church.

Lexington, March 14 at Cornerstone Baptist Church.

Crestwood, April 10 at Crestwood Baptist Church.

Prestonsburg, April 13 at First Baptist Church.

Registration is free and open to all Kentucky Baptist church leaders. For more information, call (866) 489-3340 or visit www.kybaptist.org.

Continued from page 1
tists," he added. "A lot of the folks that are dechurched out there in your communities at one time went to a Baptist church and for one reason or another, they dropped out of church.

"Somehow we're not doing our jobs" as Kentucky Baptist churches, Garland insisted. "We haven't been very good at making disciples."

Detailing research by Thom Rainer, the newly elected president of LifeWay Christian Resources, and Chuck Lawless, who succeeded Rainer as dean of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth, Garland said churches throughout the United States that retain at least 80 percent of new members share four common principles:

- Setting expectations of members.

- Involving members in ministry.

- Building intentional relationships.

- Involving people in small groups.

"This whole tour is based on those four legs of assimilation," Garland explained. "The reason we don't get much out of people sometimes is because we don't expect much out of folks."

Some front-door issues that churches can implement are as basic as beautifying the church property, providing greeters and a welcome center, upgrading childcare facilities and providing clear directions throughout the church facility, Garland noted. He said



CHURCH CONNECTIONS Darryl Wilson, director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention's adult Sunday school group, encourages workshop participants to take practical steps to assimilate church members through involvement in Sunday school. (Photo by Tannis Henderson)

other keys include preaching uplifting biblical messages and providing dynamic worship services.

"It's easy to preach against stuff, there's a long list," he pointed out. "But what are you for? What are some messages of hope? What will give people a lifeline to hold onto that week?"

Garland also urged church leaders to "create events that are non-threatening."

"Do things that get people away from the church building," he suggested, such as a cookout or fellowship at a park or other location.

"We've got to intentionally connect our folks with new members," Garland emphasized. "We don't need to hammer our people; they've

just got to be taught. This stuff is hard. It's not natural; it has to be supernatural. You've just got to keep doing it, loving people and modeling it."

Wilson led a workshop on "Connecting People through Sunday School." Highlighting "participatory teaching methods," he encouraged teachers to divide their classes into discussion groups of four to six people for part of the class time.

Noting that many people who attend Sunday school "come to sit and soak," he said group assignments "can be one way of getting them to participate."

"The more people who are involved" in class discussion, he added, "the more people who will

be connected and get assimilated."

Other steps to assimilating members include establishing friendships, praying for one another, organizing care groups, promoting fellowship and planning class outreach and ministry projects.

"Fellowship helps us develop relationships and trust," Wilson noted. "Trust helps you to go deeper in studying God's Word. ... If we can get to the place where we trust each other, we will be honest with one another."

"God demands our all and our best and He deserves it," he added. "The work we're about has an eternal impact. ... We need to care for the sheep He has entrusted to us."

Darren Gaddis, pastor of Central Baptist Church in Corbin, said the conference provided "good, practical, no-nonsense ideas packaged in a way that will help us do some of these things we've known about for some time."

"I see this as a deliberate response to what we know through the Barna report and Kentucky Baptists Connect," he added. "Closing the back door ... is an excellent phrase about what we need to be doing."

Mike Stacey, pastor of Buena Vista Baptist Church in Somerset, agreed that the two-and-a-half hour event was "very informative."

"It wasn't a pie-in-the-sky kind of approach," he noted. "It was real down-to-earth and practical stuff that I could bring back to my setting. ... My interest was piqued and I wanted to make sure we weren't losing the new people, especially new Christians, who were coming into our church."

Sharing the gospel

Paul's message about sharing gospel has parallels to Oneida's ministry

By Michael Spencer

Oneida Baptist Institute Assistant to the President

"... if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister" (Colossians 1:23, ESV).

In my own Bible study, I always find applications of the message of the Bible to the ministry of Oneida Baptist Institute. Recently, I have been studying and teaching Paul's letter to the Colossians.

Paul wrote that the Colossians had heard the gospel. Our goal is always to make sure that the gospel is heard and explained clearly and understandably. Teachers, coaches, house parents and staff members explain the gospel every day at OBI, in a no-pressure, affirming environment.

At the same time, Paul stated that he wanted Christians to continue in the gospel. This means that they did not simply hear, but they began the journey of following Christ and growing as Christians. Many OBI students are in a position where encouragement to continue in the faith is important, and we provide encouragement to many students who come from home or cultural backgrounds that do not encourage their faith in Jesus.

Paul desired that the faith of these new believers not only continue, but that it have the characteristics of maturity: stability and steadfastness. It is important that we encourage our Christian students to maturity in following

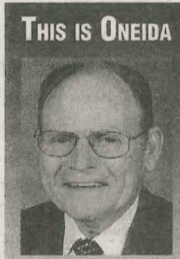
Jesus. We do not approach our students with methods based on manipulation and emotionalism. We hope to see disciples who grow up in Christ, but who also grow as individuals and as persons in relationships. This requires patience, because young Christians might still be immature. It is important that we never judge young people as not belonging to Christ simply because they need to grow up. OBI helps teenagers have the space, place and opportunity to grow up and become useful men and women.

Paul said the gospel had been proclaimed in all creation. I believe Paul was excited by the fact that God was the true evangelist, and ever since the day of Pentecost, the gospel was already spreading through the Roman Empire like yeast in a loaf of bread.

Paul also knew that the gospel was for every person in creation. Jesus came to save every tribe, language, nation and culture. God has gifted OBI with unusual diversity. This is a blessing for those of different backgrounds who hear the gospel, and for believers who gain an appreciation for those different from themselves.

Finally, Paul said he was a minister—or servant—of the gospel. Those who work at OBI are not simply employees; they are servants. They minister in sharing their lives, homes, journeys and wisdom with students who are often overlooked and left behind when school is out. It is a privilege to be a minister, and an even greater privilege to be part of God's great plan that all people should be saved.

W.F. Underwood is president of Oneida Baptist Institute, Box 67, Oneida, KY 40972; www.oneidaschool.org; e-mail: president@oneidaschool.org



W.F. Underwood

A Valentine story

North Carolina couple discovers love isn't blind

The annual Valentine's banquet is always a great evening at Clear Creek. Kenneth and Louise Rape, who came to Clear Creek from North Carolina, won't be with us this year. Kenneth finished his class work in December, and they moved to Southern Seminary where he is pursuing a master's degree.

At the conclusion of last year's banquet, the dean of students asked the couples to stand, hold hands and look each other in the eye. Kenneth took Louise by the hand and said, "Do the best you can." All of us seated nearby erupted in laughter. Kenneth has been blind since childhood.

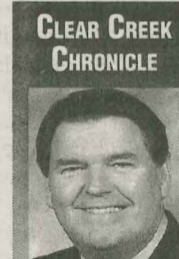
Kenneth regards his blindness as an "inconvenience," not a handicap. Blindness didn't stop them from helping with Katrina recovery efforts in Mississippi. In December they were part of a 30-member team from Harlan Baptist Church, led by Pastor and Bible professor John Ditty. Part of the group removed the mud, carpet and drywall from the home of an elderly couple in Ocean Springs. "Their house was several miles inland, but the storm surge

destroyed the inside," Ken said. "They were about to bulldoze the place until they heard we could help. We really encouraged them." Team members shoveled debris into a wheelbarrow, and Louise guided Ken in the right direction to unload it. Later he used a pry bar to remove drywall.

With two Bobcats, a backhoe and an excavator, other team members removed portions of four houses from a beachfront home in Gautier, Miss. The house was nearer Biloxi, an area of greater storm damage. With a scarcity of available equipment, the Kentucky team was deeply appreciated.

At Clear Creek, Ken has especially enjoyed the Bible classes. His long-term goal is a PhD in Old Testament. With the help of the Lord, Louise and Aspen, his white lab guide dog, he'll only be slowed a little by inconveniences. In this season of chocolates and valentines, I thank God for a devoted couple whose love for Christ empowers them to love in more than word.

Bill Whittaker is president of Clear Creek Baptist Bible College, Pineville, KY 40977; (606) 337-3196



Bill Whittaker

Alabama church fires leave questions, but no answers

By Andy Netzel
Religion News Service

Dancy, Ala. (RNS)—Federal officials investigating a string of 10 Alabama Baptist church burnings within the past month have distributed information to north Alabama churches to help them avoid arson attacks.

Special Agent Eric Kehn of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, urged local congregations to take precautions.

"At this point, considering what is happening, church members should be vigilant," Kehn said.

Five fires occurred Feb. 3, four happened Feb. 7 and a 10th fire Saturday heavily damaged a church in Beaverton.

The federal agency continued its investigation, following more than 200 leads. All 10 fires are believed to be linked, and Kehn confirmed Feb. 9 that one person or one group of people traveling together in a single vehicle could have set them all.

Investigators are searching for

two white men driving a dark sport utility vehicle. Similar, though vague, descriptions of this pair have been reported at or near several of the nine fires that occurred in Bibb, Greene, Pickens and Sumter counties.

The areas where the churches have burned are peppered with tiny, isolated Baptist churches that have no parsonages or neighbors living nearby.

The list federal agents distributed suggests churches take steps to avoid an arson attack, such as illuminating the building with exterior lights, making sure doors and windows are locked, asking neighbors to keep an eye on the building and installing alarms.

Investigators have downplayed any suggestion of racial motivations for the arsons. Five of the churches burned have predominantly black congregations and five have predominantly white congregations. All are Baptist.

Meanwhile, most community

members had far less information to go on. They knew the churches that burned were small and in rural settings.

"I just want to know why"

"You would think there has got to be some kind of message," said Annie Hodges Garner, a member of the congregation from Dancy. "I wish they would use words instead of burning down my church."

Bettye Simmons, another church member, sat beside Garner, quietly shaking her head. She cleared her throat and stared at the shell of her church as she spoke: "I can't figure this out. It is frustrating. I just want to know why."

Other congregations are struggling with the same questions. Why would someone burn their church? What was it about them? Several Baptist churches existed between each of them. Baptist churches are as ubiquitous as hay bales along the back roads of Alabama.

Pastor Glenn Harris of Spring

Valley Baptist Church in Sumter County said using the sanctuaries of the churches as the starting points of the fires made it apparent the arsonists had a beef with the church.

"It seems they're angry at God," he said. "God is the only one Who can save them. And God still loves them."

He arrived at his church Feb. 7 to find 40 of his 300 members outside the burning building. He expected tears.

Instead he saw determination. The only questions he got were those asking when they could get in the building to start cleaning up.

All the ministers vowed to rebuild. James Posey, pastor of the Morning Star Missionary Baptist Church in Boligee, said his faith was unshaken.

"The church is going to continue on," he said. "You are not going to stop it. You can bomb the building, but the church still exists in our hearts."

"It seems they're angry at God. ... God is the only one Who can save them. And God still loves them."

Glenn Harris, pastor of Spring Valley Baptist Church in Sumter County, Ala.

Government helps faith-based groups learn how to get federal dollars

Harrisburg, Pa. (RNS)—With more than \$322 million available for faith-based community organizations, the Bush administration is taking its efforts on the road to show social service providers how to apply for the grants.

More than 700 people from 28 states gathered Feb. 7 in Harrisburg, Pa., to learn how to apply for federal money for programs for the homeless, hungry, at-risk youths, people with HIV/AIDS, welfare families and people with addictions.

The 21st regional gathering was an "opportunity to come together to share experiences and network and meet a lot of interesting people" who can help them, said Jim Towey, director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives.

President Bush, who proposed a 36 percent increase for the program in his budget released last week, said in a video presentation, "We want to help you to better understand the federal grants process so that your organization will have the federal resources needed to magnify your good works."

Referring to faith communities' response to natural disasters, Bush said he saw "the good work of your 'armies of compassion' when you mobilized to come to the relief of fellow citizens who lost their homes and livelihoods."

Towey warned the group, however, "If you receive government money, you can't preach with it." Money cannot be used for evangelizing or to show favoritism for a particular faith or discriminate against a faith.

Warren, other evangelicals back global warming campaign

By Adelle Banks
Religion News Service

Washington (RNS)—Warning of millions of potential deaths worldwide from climate change, a new network of evangelical leaders launched a campaign Feb. 8 for government and grassroots action to reduce global warming.

The network's formation illustrates a growing divide among evangelicals on how—or even whether—to address climate change.

Some evangelical leaders, such as Focus on the Family founder James Dobson, oppose activism on global warming, saying there is neither a scientific nor an evangelical consensus on the topic.

But others, including best-selling author and megachurch pastor Rick Warren, see it as an important Christian issue, and have joined the network.

As leaders representing Christian college and relief organizations took turns at a National Press Club microphone last week decrying global warming, another group of evangelicals that includes Dobson issued a statement declaring objections to the new approach.

The new group, the Evangelical Climate Initiative, issued a document titled "Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action." As of Feb. 8, it was signed by 86 evangelical leaders.

"Climate change is the latest evidence of our failure to exercise proper stewardship and constitutes a critical opportunity for us to do better," the document said.

Jim Ball, executive director of the Washington-based Evangelical Environmental Network, said he and others in the Evangelical Climate Initiative would meet with U.S. senators on both sides of the issue, hold meetings on college campuses and at larger churches and, later in the year, a private meeting with leaders of energy companies.

"What we need is a requirement

that carbon dioxide start to be reduced," Ball said. The "call to action," which expresses special concern for the poor, calls for passage of legislation to achieve that goal "the most important immediate step" for federal officials.

But some evangelicals do not endorse such legislative action.

"Mandatory emission reductions would make energy more expensive," said Calvin Beisner, a founding member of the Interfaith Stewardship Alliance, whose efforts are supported by Dobson and Prison Fellowship founder Chuck Colson.

"Energy is an essential component of economic development and economic development is what the poor desperately need."

Opponents claim no consensus

The alliance released a statement in January, signed by 22 leaders, declaring that evangelicals have not reached a consensus on global warming and asking the National Association of Evangelicals to refrain from taking an official position.

Richard Cizik, NAE's vice president for governmental affairs, attended the launch of the Evangelical Climate Initiative but said in an interview that he withdrew his name from its call to action to prevent confusion about NAE's stance. He said more than 20 NAE board members have signed the statement.

Ron Sider, president of Evangelicals for Social Action, said he and other signatories on the new anti-global warming statement represent the center of the evangelical movement. Signers include Warren, Pentecostal leader Jack Hayford and Christianity Today Editor David Neff.

Though he respects some of those who agree with the Interfaith Stewardship Alliance, Sider said he's saddened by their stance.

"Frankly," he said, "they're going to look really silly in another 10 years."

NATIONAL NOTES

Walgreens sued over "morning-after" pill. The American Center for Law and Justice is suing Walgreens after the company fired four pharmacists who refused to dispense the "morning-after" pill because of religious objections. ACLJ officials said that by firing the four Illinois employees, Walgreens violated the Illinois Health Care Right of Conscience Act, which makes it illegal for any employer "to discriminate against any person in any manner ... because of such person's conscientious refusal ... to participate in any way in any form of health care services contrary to his or her conscience."

Giuliani praises evangelical pastors. In the category of politics creating strange bedfellows, former New York Mayor and possible presidential contender Rudolph Giuliani told evangelical pastors that he appreciates their efforts at "saving people." Giuliani, a Roman Catholic who supports gay rights and abortion rights, was a surprise speaker at a recent gathering of nearly 2,000 evangelical pastors and ministry leaders in Orlando. Speaking on leadership, he told pastors: "I can't tell you how much I appreciate what you are doing, and if any of these lessons help at all in saving people and helping people and bringing them to Jesus and bringing them to God, you've done me a great favor."

More teens dabbling in witchcraft. Three-quarters of America's youth reported participating in at least one kind of psychic or witchcraft-related activity beyond watching a television show about it or reading horoscopes, according to a recent study. The Barna Group found more than one-quarter of teens reported playing a game featuring sorcery or witchcraft elements, one-tenth have participated in a séance and 9 percent of teens have consulted a psychic.

Presbyterians not ready to divest over Israel. A church investments panel said it needs more time before it can recommend whether the Presbyterian Church (USA) should pull assets from companies operating in the Middle East. The church voted in 2004 to pursue "selective divestment" in companies with ties to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But after meeting with leaders of Citigroup and IIT Industries on Feb. 3, an investments committee said it will not recommend divestment to the denomination's General Assembly meeting in June.

Hispanic evangelicals lobby for immigration reform. A new coalition has formed to represent more than 20 million Hispanic evangelicals and to denounce Congress' handling of immigration issues. At an inaugural press conference Feb. 3, the Hispanic Coalition for Comprehensive Immigration Reform called on Congress to create avenues for undocumented immigrants to apply for legal status en route to seeking full citizenship. Speakers criticized a House-passed bill that would make it a crime to provide for the needs of an undocumented immigrant.

PRAYER PARTNERS

Please pray for the following Kentucky Baptist missionaries and ministries:

Victory Baptist Church in Eddyville. New pastor Heath Carlton and members of the church have begun leadership training and reorganization work to revitalize Victory Baptist. Pray that God will guide Carlton and the congregation as they evaluate and seek to strengthen ministries of the church. Needs already identified include: Sunday School teachers, financial help, literature for Sunday school and discipleship, an accompanist, and someone to help with multimedia communications and computers. Please pray that these needs will be met.

Hispanic Missionary Strategist Jesus Pacheco of Louisville. Pacheco serves the central region of Kentucky (including Long Run, Shelby, Henry, Oldham-Trimble, White's Run, Owen, Ten Mile and Franklin associations). He assists with church starts, church development and leadership training. Pacheco faces challenges and opportunities in ministry efforts to Kentucky's growing Hispanic population. Pray that God will provide the needed resources and workers for the new churches being established. Pray also that more congregations are willing to become sponsoring churches.

If you would like Kentucky Baptists to join in praying for a ministry of your church or association, please send the information to Eric Allen at Eric.Allen@kybaptist.org or call (866) 489-3530.

MOUNTAINS TO THE MISSISSIPPI

COMPILED BY STAFF

■ **CAMPBELLSBURG**—Matt Boyd recently resigned as pastor of Pleasant View Church to accept a pastorate in Idaho.

■ **CLINTON**—Mount Moriah Church recently called Michael Suiter as pastor. He previously was pastor of Vice Church in Boaz.

■ **CORINTH**—Corinth Church recently called Ken Felty as associate pastor/minister of Christian education.

■ **CRESTWOOD**—Centerfield Church recently called Phillip Harris as pastor.

■ **ELIZABETHTOWN**—Severns Valley Church will host the Elizabethtown Area Sacred Community Choir Feb. 26, 3 p.m., presenting "Women Hymn Authors & Composers."

■ **KUTTAWA**—First Church recently called Randy Wright as youth director.

■ **LEBANON**—Lebanon Church recently called Bill Jones as interim pastor.

■ **LOUISVILLE**—Lyndon Church will celebrate its 85th anniversary Feb. 26, 10:45 a.m. Jim Holladay is pastor.

St. Matthews Church will host the Christian ballet touring company, Ballet Magnificat!, March 19, 6:30 p.m. For more information, call (502) 896-8882.

■ **MILTON**—Milton Church recently ordained Kenneth Boldery, Robbie Davis, Eddie Gossom and Derrick Hines as deacons.

■ **MURRAY**—Hilltop Church is partnering with Bayou DuLarge Baptist Church in Theriot, La., to help the Louisiana congregation and community recover from hurricane damage. Hilltop will provide monthly financial assistance to Bayou DuLarge for one year. Joe Pat Winchester is pastor

of Hilltop Church.

■ **PRINCETON**—Caldwell Blue Spring Church will hold revival services Feb. 18 at 7 p.m. and Feb. 19 at 10 a.m. and 6:30 p.m.

Emmanuel Church recently called Doug Jones as interim pastor.

Samuel Scott, associate pastor of Shepherd Street Church, died Jan. 10. He was 71. Scott is survived by his wife, Betty Ann, two daughters and one grandchild.

■ **RICHMOND**—Red House Church will host This Hope in concert Feb. 25, 7 p.m.

■ **SANDERS**—Sanders Church recently called Craig Boley as pastor.

■ **WACO**—Waco Church will host The Florida Boys in concert March 2, 7 p.m.

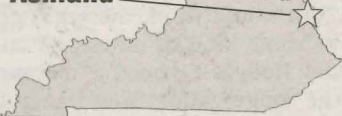
■ **WALTON**—New Banklick Church will host Dallas Holm in concert April 14 at 5 and 7 p.m. Free tickets are available by calling the church at (859) 356-5538.

■ **WESTPORT**—Westport Church recently called Keith Abrams as youth minister.

■ **WILLISBURG**—Mount Olivet Church recently called Damian Phillips as pastor.

Spotlight on ...

Ashland



Rose Hill Church will host a men's wild game supper Feb. 24, 6 p.m., featuring Chuck McAlister, host of "Adventure-Bound Outdoors," as guest speaker. Ronnie Mayes is pastor.

of Hilltop Church.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

February

16 Connecting with Guests and New Members, Williamstown Baptist Church.

20 Retirement Choices Workshop, First Baptist Church, Princeton.

21 Connecting with Guests and New Members, Mays Lick Baptist Church.

21 Retirement Choices Workshop, Baptist Building, Louisville.

22 Retirement Choices Workshop, First Baptist Church, London.

23 Connecting with Guests and New Members, Severns Valley Baptist Church, Elizabethtown.

23 Retirement Choices Workshop, Porter Memorial Baptist Church, Lexington.

25 All-State Youth Choir/Orchestra Auditions and State Youth Choir Festival—East, Central Baptist Church, Winchester.

25 Hispanic Evangelism Conference & Hispanic Women's Meeting, Horse Cave Baptist Church.

25 Love 101, Living Hope Baptist Church, Bowling Green.

25 RA Congress Region 1, First Baptist Church, Mayfield.

27-28 Kentucky Baptist Evangelism Conference, Immanuel Baptist Church, Lexington.

March

3-4 Creative Ministries Festival, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville.

3-4 Handbell Festival, Cave City Convention Center.

4 RA Congress Region 5, Central Baptist Church, Maysville.

4 Vacation Bible School Clinic, Victory Baptist Church, Lexington.

6 Interfaith Witness Training, Northside Baptist Church, Elizabethtown.

7 Interfaith Witness Training, Paintsville.

8-22 Kentucky Changers College Blitz, Morehead.

10-11 Creative Ministries Festival, Hillvue Heights Church, Bowling Green.

11 All-State Youth Choir/Orchestra Auditions, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville.

11 RA Congress Region 3, South Fork Baptist Church, Hodgenville.

11 Vacation Bible School Clinic, First Baptist Church, Madisonville.

18 All-State Youth Choir/Orchestra Auditions and State Youth Choir Festival—West, Beaver Dam Baptist Church.

18 RA Congress Region 2, First Baptist Church, Madisonville; RA Congress Regions 3 & 7 Combo, Hillvue Heights Church, Bowling Green; RA Congress Region 6, Red House Baptist Church, Richmond; RA Congress Region 7, Campbellsville University.

20-21 Basic Training for Church Planters, Baptist Building, Louisville.

20-21 Welcome to Kentucky, Baptist Building, Louisville.

24-25 Youth Bible Drill & Speakers Tournament, Immanuel Baptist Church, Elizabethtown.

25 RA Congress Region 7, Monticello Baptist Church; RA Congress Region 8B, Camp Howard.

25 Regional Keyboard Festival, First Baptist Church, Murray.

25 Regional Keyboard Festival, Calvary Baptist Church, Lexington.

25 Youth Bible Drill & Speakers Tournament, Jonathan Creek.

For more information, call (800) 266-6477 or visit www.kybaptist.org

KBC's 2006 Creative Ministries Festivals set for next month

Louisville—More than 2,000 Kentucky Baptists are expected to act up and clown around at two upcoming ministry events—and that's a good thing.

Creative Ministries Festival 2006, sponsored by the Kentucky Baptist Convention, will be held March 3-4 at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville and March

10-11 at Hillvue Heights Church in Bowling Green.

The festivals, which are geared toward training youth and adults in creative ministries, will start at 5:30 p.m. on Friday. Saturday sessions will begin at 9 a.m. and conclude at 4:30 p.m.

Each festival will include five workshop sessions. Participants can

choose from a variety of workshops highlighting both creative arts and youth missions.

The creative arts workshops will feature training in such areas as puppetry, interpretive movement, mime, clowning and drama. The youth missions workshops will highlight information about planning mission trips, participat-

ing in disaster relief, and making crafts for sharing the gospel with children.

Registration is required for participants to attend. To register online, visit www.kybaptist.org/cmfestival. For more information, contact the Kentucky Baptist Convention creative ministries group at (502) 489-3574 or (866) 489-3574.

CLASSIFIED ADS

AVAILABLE: Magnify Quartet—men's 4-part harmony gospel music—live musicians seek to magnify Jesus. Love offerings requested—never a fee. Call toll-free: (877) 409-3764 or (859) 393-4517. www.magnifyquartet.com.

FOR SALE: Baldwin piano in oak case. Excellent condition, tuned regularly. \$1,500. (270) 542-6995, leave message.

SEEKING: Part-time youth director for Lowell Avenue Baptist Church. If interested, please call (270) 465-7163, or send resumé to 420 Lowell Avenue, Campbellsville, KY 42718.

SEEKING: Minister of music and youth, Marion Baptist Church in Marion, Va. For information, contact Dan Call at calldh1@area-net.com or marionbaptist@earthlink.net.

SEEKING: Full-time pastor for Northern Kentucky area. Send resumé to 13015 Highway 127N, Glencoe, KY 41046.

SEEKING: Conservative Southern Baptist pastor for Bayless Baptist Church, St. Louis, Mo. Send resumé to: Pastor Search Committee, 4045 Toenges, St. Louis, MO 63116, Attn: Pat Cheney.

SEEKING: Full-time minister of music for choral and instrumental programs for all ages in Southern Baptist church. Required: College degree in music plus 5 years experience (additional years of experience may be substituted for college degree). Send resumé postmarked by March 3 to: Music Search Committee, Unity Baptist Church, 2320 29th St., Ashland, KY 41101.

SEEKING: Part-time minister of music for Silver Creek Baptist Church of Berea, Ky. Resumés may be mailed to PO Box 97, Berea, KY 40403, or e-mail silvercreekbaptist@alltel.net.

SEEKING: Full-time pastor for Harmony Baptist Church in West Paducah, Ky. Interested candidates may send resumés and tapes/videos to: Pastor Search Committee, Harmony Baptist Church, 9215 Ogden Landing Road, West Paducah, KY 42086. Deadline for applications will be April 29, 2006.

SEEKING: Full-time minister of youth and children for First Baptist Church, Franklin, Ky. Please send resumé to: Search Committee, First Baptist Church, 303 East Cedar St., Franklin, KY 42134.

SEEKING: Full-time minister of students (youth-college) for First Baptist Church, Pikeville, Ky. Resumés may be mailed to: Pastor Paul Badgett, 126 4th St., Pikeville, KY 41501; or e-mail: pastorbadgett@yahoo.com.

SEEKING: Part-time minister of youth (grades 7 to 12) to continue God-given growth through current AWANA program. Send resumés to Elkhorn City Baptist Church, PO Box 448, Elkhorn City, KY 41522, or call Pastor Shawn at (606) 754-4781.

SERVICES: Trinity Janitorial Services is available to provide janitorial services to churches. Licensed/insured, praiseworthy references with 20 years of experience. If you need cleaning done, please call: (502) 227-4795, 229-3883; or e-mail: jeffcharlotte@earthlink.net.

Christians fear Hamas will limit freedoms in Palestine

By Michele Chabin
Religion News Service

Jerusalem (RNS)—Moderate Muslims and Christians in the West Bank and Gaza say they fear that Hamas, which scored a stunning victory in last month's Palestinian elections, will apply a strict interpretation of Islamic law that will hinder religious freedom.

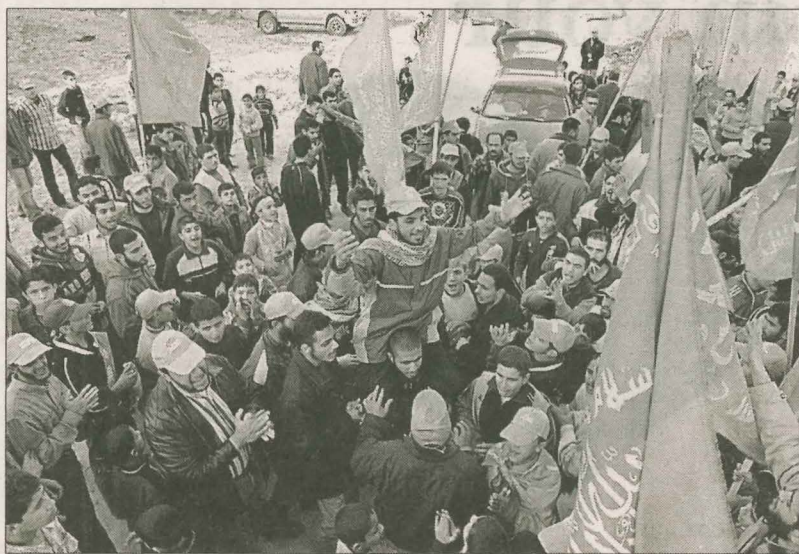
But so far, Hamas has not acted on promises to do so. And political analysts predict Hamas is unlikely to restrict the rights of religious minorities anytime soon, because an international backlash could hurt the movement.

Almost as soon as the Jan. 25 election results were in, Sheikh Mohammed Abu Teir, the No. 2 candidate on the Hamas election list, announced that the movement plans to introduce "Shariah," the religious law of Islam.

"The No. 1 thing we will do is take Shariah as a source for legislation," Abu Teir told *The Globe* and Mail newspaper.

The promise has set off alarms because non-Muslims face varying degrees of discrimination in countries where Shariah is stringently practiced.

As is the case in Saudi Arabia, religious minorities might legally be prohibited from practicing their faith and denied citizenship. Even in Egypt, Jordan and Syria, which are less overtly devout, minorities often are denied the same educa-



HAMAS VICTORY Hamas supporters celebrate the results of the Palestinian election in Gaza Strip last month. Local Christians fear the new government will impose Islamic codes as the rule of law. (RNS/Reuters photo by Ahmed Jadallah)

tional and employment opportunities afforded to Muslims.

Who is Hamas?

Hamas, an acronym for the Islamic Resistance Movement, was founded during the late 1980s, during the first Palestinian intifada, or uprising. The movement, which advocates the destruction of Israel and Islamic domination of the world, is on the U.S. government's list of terror organizations.

Founded on the strictest precepts of Islam, the movement is particularly popular among poorer

Palestinians because it provides a wide range of social, educational and medical services not provided by the Palestinian Authority. Analysts say the election showed that the public widely believes that the secular Fatah, until now the ruling party, misappropriated hundreds of millions of dollars in overseas donations.

Hamas won 76 of the 132 seats in the Palestinian parliament Jan. 25, ushering in a new era in Palestinian political—and perhaps religious—life.

Palestinian law is largely secu-

lar in nature, though it relies on Shariah when it comes to marriage and other issues related to personal status.

By the standards of the conservative Arab world, Palestinian society has a long tradition of religious and political moderation. Alcoholic beverages are available everywhere, for example, and women are encouraged to get a good education, a job and a driver's license. Those who wear head scarves or long robes do so out of choice and local social norms, and not because the law dictates it, said Mohammed Dajani, director of the American Studies Center at Al-Quds University.

For this reason, Dajani said, Hamas will not be able to impose Shariah law. "That would contradict the basic constitution," he said. "If they try, there will be a backlash."

Eileen Kuttab, the director of Women's Studies at Birzeit University, says Hamas will not push Shariah because "it isn't ready to promote a conflict within the society that has given it their vote. They realize that people voted for them to end a dozen years of corruption, not due to their religious agenda."

In the event that Hamas does try to force women to cover their faces with a veil, for example, "civil society will be mobilized against them," Kuttab said. "I don't think this will happen during their first term in office, but of course, we have to closely monitor the situation."

New constitution has some Iraqi women worried

By James Palmer
Religion News Service

Baghdad (RNS)—The changes have come slowly.

For nearly three years, Iraqi women have inched toward greater freedom.

In some cases, it has meant breaking from traditional dress. In others, there have been leaps that once would have been unthinkable: driving, taking a job outside the home, or even entering marriage counseling.

However, these same women face new limitations this month as the Iraqi constitution is enacted.

Under the charter approved in a nationwide referendum last October, Islam will predominantly govern Iraqi law and religious sects will decide issues involving marriage and inheritance. Currently, those issues are resolved in civil courts.

While some women welcome the introduction of Islamic law, others fear it will lead to restrictions on their personal freedom and civil rights similar to the theocracy that rules in neighboring Iran.

What's undeniable is this: As the United States continues the work of liberating Iraq from the regime of Saddam Hussein, women's rights here are in jeopardy.

"Muslim women are going to suffer if the civil courts are completely abolished," said Annam Al-Soltany, a lawyer and a member of the Progressive Women's League, an Iraqi group lobbying for constitutional reforms benefiting women. "The civil law offers women more protection, but Iraq is a very religious society, and many people, including women,



PISTOL PACKING Sondus Kudhum, 35, who owns a stationery shop in the Jadiriya neighborhood of Baghdad, loads the 5 mm pistol she keeps in her store for protection. (RNS photo by James Palmer)

want Islamic laws and Islamic courts."

"Islamic laws are superior"

While it's impossible to know how opinion splits on the issue, it is not difficult to find women who want strict Islamic law and are willing to speak out about it.

"Islamic law will give women far more protection than the civil law," said Boushra Hassan, a 31-year-old who founded Batool Cultural House for Women in the Kadhimiya section of Baghdad.

"Mankind created the civil laws, but God created mankind and the Islamic laws, so it stands to reason that the Islamic laws are superior."

But Mauren Dowed, a 28-year-old Assyrian Christian who runs a su-

permarket in central Baghdad and wears Western-style clothes, says it is difficult for her to walk along the streets of the Iraqi capital without hearing disparaging remarks from men. "They think I have the morals of a prostitute because I don't wear the abaya or hajib," Dowed said.

Al-Soltany, the lawyer with the Progressive Women's League, argues that a verse in the Quran clearly states women are inferior to men, and that alone will make it nearly impossible for women to receive fair treatment before a Muslim judge in an Islamic court.

Sondus Kudhum, 35, who owns a stationery shop, said she will never submit to an Islamic court.

Kudhum, who has never married—a rarity here—keeps a 5 mm pistol in her store, an 8.5 mm pistol in her car and an AK-47 assault rifle in her room at her parents' house.

"The biggest (problem for) women here now is security," Kudhum said as she displayed one of her pistols. "I'll leave the country if they form an Islamic government, but that's not going to happen as long as the U.S. is here."

U.S. officials have conveyed mixed signals about the role of women in Iraqi society. U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad spoke out strongly against any attempts to diminish women's rights as the constitution was forged last year, but some human rights organizations accused him of compromising the future of Iraqi women when he pressured the transitional national assembly to agree on a draft to meet U.S.-imposed deadlines, though it contained provisions for Islamic law.

Report: Governments use 'war on terror' to limit religious freedoms

New York (RNS)—The governments of several countries, including China and Uzbekistan, are branding political opponents as Islamic terrorists and using the "war on terror" as a way to stifle dissent, Human Rights Watch said in its annual global survey of human rights conditions.

The report by the human rights watchdog and advocacy group, covering the year 2005, was issued recently.

It said counterterrorism policies are having a harmful effect on the global defense of human rights.

"Fighting terrorism is central to the human rights cause," said Kenneth Roth, Human Rights Watch's executive director. "But using illegal tactics against alleged terrorists is both wrong and counterproductive."

The report was particularly critical of Bush administration policies it said had condoned torture and made it difficult for the United States to pressure other states to respect international law. It also noted that other countries are using the war on terror to crack down on opponents.

It noted that in 2005, the government of China continued to crack down on the Uighurs, a Turkic-speaking Muslim group in China's Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. Some Uighurs are waging a separatist campaign, and the Chinese government has responded with measures that have included the destruction of mosques, Human Rights Watch said.

China, also criticized in the report for its strict policies of trying to regulate religious practice within the country, has used the war on terrorism, the report said, "to justify its policies, making no distinction between the handful of separatists who condone violence and those who desire genuine autonomy or a separate state."

The survey noted similar policies in the one-time Soviet republic of Uzbekistan, where authorities reportedly killed hundreds of unarmed protesters during a May 13, 2005, demonstration in the eastern part of the country.

Uzbekistan's authoritarian government, the report said, continues a campaign against those whose religious practice falls outside strict government controls. "The government justifies this campaign by referring to the 'war on terror,' failing to distinguish between those who advocate violence and those who peacefully express their religious beliefs," the survey said.



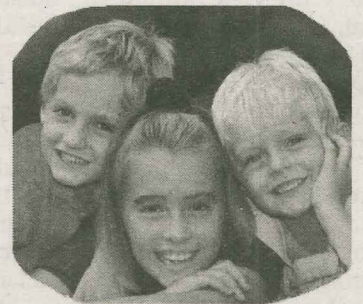
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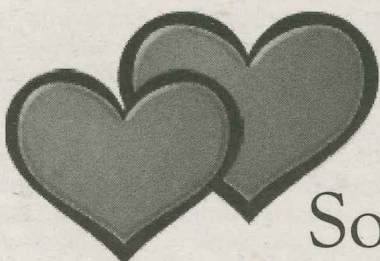


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