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Americans prefer 'Merry Christmas' greeting in stores

Nashville (BP)—"Merry Christmas" or "Happy Holidays"? Some stores may be avoiding it, but an overwhelming majority of Americans still would like to see signs with the traditional greeting of "Merry Christmas" while shopping, according to a Rasmussen Reports poll of 1,000 adults.

The survey asked simply, "Would you prefer stores to show signs saying 'Merry Christmas' or 'Happy Holidays'?" By a 69-23 percent margin, American adults preferred "Merry Christmas." The poll was conducted Nov. 18-19.

Nationwide, stores this year seem to be more inclined to use "Christmas" instead of "holidays" in their greetings, advertising and in-store displays.

Wal-Mart recently announced it would purchase TV ads mentioning Christmas, change the name of its seasonal decorating department back to "The Christmas Shop" instead of "The Holiday Shop" and play Christmas carols throughout its stores. The switch comes after conservative groups protested Wal-Mart's usage of generic holiday greetings last year.

In addition, a host of other stores—including K-Mart, Kohl's, Sears and Target—are using "Christmas" in various ways this year, according to a list compiled by the Christian legal group Liberty Counsel.

The Rasmussen poll also found 59 percent of Americans plan on attending a "Christian church" Christmas Eve or Christmas Day service this year.

Help for the hurting



CARING HANDS Missionary surgeon Danny Crawley makes his early morning rounds visiting patients at the Baptist Medical Centre in Nalerigu, Ghana. (IMB photo)

Baptist hospital struggles to meet medical needs of thousands

By Shawn Hendricks
SBC International Mission Board

Ghana, West Africa—All eyes focus on missionary surgeon Danny Crawley as he navigates an obstacle course of beds and sick children at the Baptist Medical Center in Nalerigu, Ghana.

With only one other doctor, a handful of assistants and volunteers working that day, a "doctor sighting" is a significant moment at people desperate for medical at-

tention. While making his rounds, Crawley tends to as many patients as possible before prepping for surgery. The others will have to wait.

Understaffed and overwhelmed by the daily influx of patients, the hospital struggles to fill an empty position and attract volunteers while meeting the physical and spiritual needs of patients. In 2005, the hos-

pital saw more than 72,000 patients and performed more than 3,500 major and minor surgeries. The staff hopes more Southern Baptists will respond to these needs soon.

"Even if I stop and pray with a patient, I feel like I'm slowing down the process," said Crawley, who sets aside one day a week

□ See Ghana hospital offers ... *Page 6*



LifeWay study examines young adults' views of church, ministry

By Libby Lovelace
SBC LifeWay Christian Resources

Nashville—Young adults are falling away from church and many of them are finding church irrelevant to their lives, according to the latest study by LifeWay Research.

Researchers at LifeWay Research, a department of LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention, sought to discover why that was the case by conducting an eight-month study that included interviews with unchurched adults 18 to 34 years of age, regular church attendees and church leaders from throughout the U.S.

According to researches, the need for churches to reach young adults can be seen by comparing the following statistics: In 1980, more than 100,000 young adults were baptized in Southern Baptist churches. In 2005, slightly more than 60,000

young adults were baptized in Southern Baptist churches.

Whether churchgoers or not, the study results indicate young adults are longing for community and fellowship with peers, looking for ways to reach people in need and circling the church but not always finding a home in it.

Seventy-three percent of church members and 47 percent of non-affiliated young adults indicated that community with other young adults is extremely important in their lives.

The lack of opportunity for connection within the church proves to be a frustration point for some young adults. According to one study participant, "After graduation they give you a pat on the back and say, 'When you start a family, we'll be here for you.'"

Another respondent noted, "Young adults are in the middle; not

married, not old enough, not in high school—in this 'ugh' stage."

"The church's responsibility is to reach every generation with the love of Jesus Christ," said Jim Johnston, director of young adult ministry at LifeWay Christian Resources. "It just so happens that this generation's biggest need is relationship. The church ought to be the author and purveyor of the best, deepest, most loving friendships around."

Respondents said the second most important thing for young adult churchgoers is participation in small-group meetings to discuss life application of Scripture (71 percent). And both churchgoers and those not affiliated said they desired to participate in Bible study that minimizes finding pat answers in the exploration of Scripture.

"The lost and the saved in this age group are looking for just what the

church can provide in biblical community," Johnston said. "They want absolute truth but they embrace the struggle of finding it themselves. They don't want it to be spoon-fed to them."

One respondent indicated it's not always about one person with all the answers, but there is value in the combined knowledge and experiences of others. Another study participant said, "What draws people is a climate of honesty."

The small-group atmosphere also is where this generation can find "advice from individuals with similar experiences," the respondent added. That was cited as one of the top five most important things to both church and unchurched young adults, with 68 percent and 45 percent, respectively, saying it's very important.

□ See LifeWay survey ... *Page 3*

Dated material. Please deliver by Wednesday, December 13.

Gathering tackles prayer language debate

By Hannah Elliott
Associated Baptist Press

Arlington, Texas (ABP)—Pastors and other Baptist leaders at a Dec. 5 roundtable discussion voted to request Southern Baptist Convention officials to reconsider restrictive policies regarding speaking in tongues.

More than 100 pastors and laypeople attended the event at Dwight McKissic's Cornerstone Baptist Church in Arlington, Texas. They also agreed to submit a resolution on "partnership and free religious expression" at the next SBC annual convention, to be held June 12-13 in San Antonio.

McKissic, pastor of one of the SBC's largest predominantly African-American churches, convened the meeting in light of controversy over charismatic worship practices in Southern Baptist life.

Billed as a discussion on "Baptists and the Holy Spirit," much of the discussion focused on some Southern Baptists' use of a "private prayer language," or utterances in personal prayer that are a form of speaking in tongues.

Early Baptist worship traditions

The conference officially was called the "Sandy Creek-Charlestonian Baptist Roundtable," a reference to two early worship traditions that emerged in Baptist life in the American South during the 1700s.

McKissic moderated the discussion along with fellow Arlington pastor Benjamin Cole; Wade Burleson, a pastor in Enid, Okla.; and Art Rogers, a pastor in Tulsa, Okla.

Glossolalia—the biblical term for speaking in tongues—has been a touchy subject for Southern Baptists for many years, in part because it has led to discord within many churches. More recently that concern has shifted to include private prayer languages.

Last year, trustees of the SBC's International Mission Board voted to disqualify missionary candidates

who admit to using a private prayer language.

Burleson, an IMB trustee, opposed the new restriction despite the fact that he does not practice any form of glossolalia. His outspoken opposition to the policy, fueled by his popular weblog, caused a national stir among Southern Baptist leaders.

"We Southern Baptist pastors and leaders have met in Arlington in order to model what it means to put aside our differences on secondary issues for the sake of cooperative gospel ministry," Burleson said. "We desire unity in the essentials, liberty in the non-essentials and charity in all things."

Opponents say the prayer-language restriction goes too far in dictating personal worship practices and excludes qualified Southern Baptists from denominational service.

In the resolution, the group affirmed their "fundamental Baptist distinctive as advocates of religious liberty, especially as it relates to free expression in the public and private worship of followers of Jesus Christ."

"We are opposed to any attempt to narrow the parameters of cooperation among Southern Baptist churches to limit the full recognition, participation and partnership among member churches on account of preference for worship styles or acceptance of spiritual practices consistent with the teaching of Holy Scripture," the document said.

Resolution writers said they deliberately did not mention "tongues" or "private prayer language" in the text in an effort to "get to the root" of the prayer-language debate.

The controversy escalated after McKissic mentioned private prayer language and criticized the IMB policy in an Aug. 29 chapel sermon he delivered at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth.

That day, McKissic noted that he has used a private prayer language since his seminary days at Southwestern in the early 1980s.

After the comments, Southwestern President Paige Patterson decided that an electronic version of McKissic's sermon would not be posted on the seminary's Web site. Patterson said his rationale for the decision was that most Southern Baptists would not agree with McKissic's opinions on ecstatic utterances.

For Burleson and his colleagues,

however, the issue isn't about speaking in tongues—it is about spiritual freedom.

"It's not about the public use of speaking in tongues," Burleson said. "Our concern is that policies about these private prayer languages have been enacted without a clear rationale. It is no secret that if these policies had been in place over 30 years ago, the current president of the International Mission Board, Jerry Rankin, would not be in place. We don't need fewer missionaries like Jerry Rankin. We need more missionaries like Jerry Rankin."

Rankin has said he uses a private prayer language.

Concern over private practices

McKissic said he would not disagree if SBC boards instituted policies opposed to public glossolalia. It's the private practices he is concerned about.

"We're talking about private devotion," he said. "We're talking about private worship. Honestly, I have no problem if the board wants to prohibit public speaking in tongues ... but to forbid private speaking (in tongues) is a problem."

While many Baptists associate the practice of tongues with Pentecostals and other charismatic groups, a Pentecostal church and a charismatic church are two different things, Burleson said. That's one reason why Southern Baptist churches that espouse private prayer languages can and should remain Southern Baptist, he added.

"I think the term 'charismatic' is relative," he said. "The word 'charismatic' means 'grace-gifted.' By that definition, every church in the Southern Baptist Convention is charismatic. ... But none of us sitting at this table are Pentecostal," who believe tongues-speaking should be normative for all Christians.

In other business during the event, pastors voted to request LifeWay Christian Resources to survey Southern Baptists to discover "where Southern Baptists are on the issue of tongues, private prayer languages and the acceptability of their use within our denomination."

According to Cole, 85 to 90 percent of the people who attended McKissic's roundtable are active in Southern Baptist ministry. And while the group has no plans to become an organized body, it includes members who are "affiliated by our common concern for the convention," he added.

IMB and LifeWay partner to expand youth missions

Richmond, Va. (BP)—In an effort to mobilize more youth around the nation for worldwide missions, the Southern Baptist International Mission Board is partnering with LifeWay Christian Resources' camp programs.

Since 1979, Centrifuge camps have ministered to thousands of youth. Through the years, LifeWay has added new camp programs—such as (Mission) M-Fuge and M-Fuge International—that provide students with mission projects, training and opportunities to give to missions.

Now, through a new partnership with the IMB, all "Fuge" campers can track where their mission gifts go—even following them straight to the field.

"We want to go a little deeper," said Joe Palmer, the director of LifeWay's student events department. "They actually go and do ministry in the same place where their money (goes)."

The partnership involves a three- to five-year commitment through which students plug into a specific region and strategy, Palmer said. The partnership likely will involve a people group in Central and Eastern Europe with little access to the gospel, he added.

"The younger generations want to serve," Palmer noted. "They want to be there, to be able to get their hands dirty in ministry. And for a lot of them, it's the first time."

Since the early 1980s, the "Fuge" camps have collected offerings for missions. This past summer, campers gave almost \$500,000 to international missions.

In the past three years, the camps have given more than \$2 million for both domestic and international missions. During that time, more than 250,000 young people attended the camps.

Kelly Davis, an IMB strategist with student mobilization, said the mission board mobilized more than 6,000 young people for volunteer mission work around the globe last year.

Davis and other IMB strategists expect the partnership to boost student missions and increase the number of young people volunteering for overseas missions.

He noted that students who previously have felt limited to giving to missions and watching from a distance now have greater opportunities to personally participate.

Palmer added that no matter where the young people choose to serve, he prays they will have a passion for missions.

"I hope the Lord calls them overseas," he noted. "But wherever they're planted ... (I hope) they will always have that heart that beats missions."

PROPOSED RESOLUTION
Participants at a Dec. 5 roundtable discussion in Dallas voted to adopt a proposed Southern Baptist Convention resolution calling for greater openness to "spiritual practices consistent with the teaching of Holy Scripture." (BP photo by Tammi Ledbetter)



Southern Baptists respond to Philippine typhoon

Manila, Philippines (BP)—Southern Baptist workers are responding to the human suffering caused by Typhoon Durian, which tore through the Philippines Nov. 30.

Relief workers are supplying victims with drinking water, food and tarps for shelter as rescuers continue to search affected areas for the dead. The typhoon struck southeast of Manila, the nation's capital, with 165 mph winds and heavy rains, causing deadly mudslides. The official death toll stands at approximately 400. Hundreds of thousands of people have been left homeless.

"No one knows" how many peo-

ple have died, one Christian worker reported. "Many were washed into the ocean with no trace. The rest were covered by mudslides."

Typhoon Durian is the fourth major storm to batter the Philippines since late September.

Survivors are crammed into makeshift shelters in schools and churches. "Many lost not only their homes but also their livelihoods after fruit trees and rice paddies were destroyed," the worker said.

Another worker asked for prayer as Christians continue to travel throughout the area assessing damage and providing relief. "Pray as

they ... travel through a bad stretch of road that was covered with chest-high mud with only a one-lane ditch cleared for vehicles."

Relief workers ask Southern Baptists to pray for the Filipino people, many of whom live where there is little access to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

"It is one of the most unreached areas in the Philippines—perhaps 1 to 1.5 percent born-again," a worker said of the area most affected by the damage.

For more information about relief efforts, contact the International Mission Board at (800) 999-3113.

Christmas in Kentucky

Soldiers back home from Iraq look forward to family celebrations

By Dannah Prather
Partnerships Editor

Hopkinsville—Sometimes it seems like each year's Christmas celebration is virtually identical to previous years. But for men and women in uniform—and their families—holidays observed during a time of war definitely stand out.

"This Christmas is very special," said Ron Koch, a chief warrant officer with the Sixth Battalion of the 101st Airborne Division based in Fort Campbell. A helicopter pilot, Koch left for Iraq in November 2005 and returned to his family in September. "I wasn't here for Christmas last year," he said.

Being separated by service is nothing new for the Kochs, members of Edgewood Baptist Church in Hopkinsville. He joined the service more than 20 years ago; his wife, Lydia, is a military veteran, and their eldest son, Nik, recently was deployed to Germany with the Air Force.

Transitioning back to "normal" life after serving in a war zone can be difficult for men and women in uniform, but Koch said with faith, family and friends, it is possible.

"The main thing is family and friends," he said. "Getting back into church helps."

When a member of Edgewood Baptist Church returns from military service overseas, Pastor Nicholas Sandefur said he makes a point to contact him or her "within a week or so."

Sometimes it's a quiet lunch, or an hour or two in the pastor's office. "We talk about where they've been, the spiritual battles they've gone through," he said.

As a pilot, Koch regularly flew medical evacuation missions. He knows the high toll war exacts on military and civilian lives. He said he has shared some of his experiences with Sandefur, but "there still are things I can't talk about."

Home sweet home

Edgewood only has a few members in the military, Sandefur said, "so we're really able to stand beside them and love them. ... The first (Sunday) he's back, we acknowledge him in the service. We're a clapping church. That let's them know, 'Hey, I'm back in an element where I'm loved.'"

Now that he has returned home, Koch said the simplest things are a



FAMILY PORTRAIT Before Ron and Lydia Koch's oldest son, Nik, (seated far left) began a tour of duty in Germany with the Air Force, the family posed for a Christmas photo in their Hopkinsville home. Ron Koch (seated center) is a chief warrant officer in the Sixth Battalion of the 101st Airborne Division based in Fort Campbell. In September he returned home after serving 10 months in Iraq. His wife, Lydia, (standing at left) is an Army veteran. Beside Lydia is the couple's daughter, Aranda. Seated at right is their younger son, Trenton.

pleasure—such as the quiet of his Hopkinsville neighborhood compared to the constant roar of aircraft and generators on base.

He also said after months in a desert environment, he is glad to see trees and grass, even in the midst of a Kentucky winter.

"It's just nice being here with the family," he said. In addition to Nik, the Kochs have another son, Trenton, and a daughter, Aranda.

The exact menu for Christmas dinner at the Kochs isn't finalized, but there is one certainty of what will not be served: chicken.

When on duty, flight crews never stray far from their aircraft, Koch explained. Meals usually come from cans and the menu is limited. "No lie," he said, "chicken every day for lunch and dinner. I think I've only been to Kentucky Fried Chicken once since I've been back."

Leslie Wright, a longtime member of Stithton Baptist Church, anticipates a traditional holiday with her parents who also live in Radcliff. Having her husband, Davon, home

after nearly a year in Iraq is an added blessing for her and the couple's daughter, Breonna, 4.

"It was tough considering it was our first deployment," said Wright, whose husband is a sergeant with the 47th Combat Support Hospital based in Fort Lewis, Wash. In the Army for six years, he never served outside the country until last year. When he left, "I cried for days," his wife noted.

Long-distance relationship

E-mail, Web casts and phone calls made the separation easier, she said. A Web cam "made it better for our daughter because she could see him. He could play games like peek-a-boo with Breonna. She enjoyed that."

Located only minutes from Fort Knox, Stithton Baptist historically has ministered to men and women in the service, and their families.

"I definitely could count on my pastor (Gregg Curtis)—to go in his office and just cry my eyes out," Wright said. "There were days when I was totally out of it, depressed and

stressed out."

Finding it difficult to talk to co-workers, she said she knew she could "speak my mind" to members of the church family "without being judged. ... They really pulled together for me."

For Wright, having her husband back home means never having to chauffeur—except when she's by herself. "He just wants to drive all the time," she explained.

Even though Wright's husband, an operating room technician, was sheltered from the front lines, she said he is reluctant to discuss his experiences in detail.

"I really don't know how things were," Wright said. "We don't bring it up too much."

New year brings uncertainty

For men and women in the military, the New Year brings uncertainty as the conflict in Iraq, and the broader war against terrorism, continues.

In 2007 they will serve a commander-in-chief with limited time left in office; they will be led by a new defense secretary; and will be influenced by a Democratically-controlled Congress. Koch said he thinks most media coverage of the war is biased and focused too heavily on the violence in Baghdad. "The rest of Iraq doesn't have a lot of those problems," he noted.

During his deployment, Koch said he traveled around the country north of Baghdad and saw many stable communities. He also found people grateful for the presence of the troops. "Ninety-five percent of the people are so thankful we're there," he said. "Overall, we're doing a lot of good over there."

Many of the troops now home will, once again, be deployed in harm's way in 2007. Wright said if her husband returns overseas, she will know what to expect.

However, "I don't think you ever can be (prepared)," she added. "It's just something you have to deal with and adjust to each and every time it happens."

Koch noted that having a supportive church family for himself and his family will afford him great peace of mind if or when he is redeployed.

"As long as I know people are praying for me and praying for my family, that allows me to do my job better," he said.

"As long as I know people are praying for me and praying for my family, that allows me to do my job better."

Ron Koch, chief warrant officer with the Sixth Battalion of the 101st Airborne Division

LifeWay survey examines young adults' views of church & ministry

Continued from page 1

Another high-ranking priority of today's young adult population is the opportunity to meet the needs of others through social action on a regular basis. Sixty-six percent of churchgoers rated this as extremely important in their lives, as did 47 percent of non-churchgoers.

The study indicated that social action is a major entryway to the church for young adults. In fact, it was cited as the major reason unchurched young adults would consider being part of a church.

"Young adults gravitate to churches that are making an impact," Johnston said. "This age group is embracing service, social action and missions. They will embrace the church with a cause as well."

Valerie Hancock, editor-in-chief of the "Threads" Bible study series for young adults, said social action is especially important to this age group, perhaps because they're able to see the needs of other people more often and more realistically through resources readily available to them.

After seeing several churches that

are effectively reaching the younger generation, Johnston said he believes there is a bright future for young adults in church involvement and ministry.

"I truly believe (this generation) wants to embrace Jesus Christ and His plan for their life," Johnston said. "They want to embrace church, but only the genuine, earth-shaking, Christ-powered New Testament church. For some churches, that's going to mean changing methodology—but not the message of the Bible."

Johnston said the basic formula is simple: Give this generation the unbridled truth of the gospel, without apology, and they will embrace it.

If more churches catch on and seek ways to reach young adults, Johnston said he believes something powerful will happen.

"I firmly believe God is orchestrating a movement of His people in this age group," Johnston said. "This research should give us a great leap forward toward understanding what God is calling us to do to reach this generation."

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

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Reflections of an international crime victim

By David Sills

Louisville (BP)—In one sickening moment, I realized that the thieves had taken my only connection with the outside world. By "the outside world," I mean the English-speaking, police-patrolled comfort zone I had left behind in the United States. By "connection," I mean my quad band, e-mail enabled cell phone.

My wife and I had gone to Latin America for a vacation to celebrate our anniversary. One evening we were taking the Metro to the national fine arts theatre to enjoy an evening of beautiful Mexican culture, music and traditional folk dances. As we boarded the Metro car I sensed, more than felt, my cell phone being taken. As I looked at the empty holster, I felt a sinking feeling that was like a punch in the gut.

I followed the man I thought was the thief when he got off the car, waved over the first security guard I saw and confronted him. Of course, he had already passed the phone to his accomplices. (In fact, it was probably already in service with another phone number by the time the concert started!) I was filled with conflicting emotions. I knew that I needed to turn the other cheek but I also wanted to confront in a revenge-gratifying way. I also knew that I had my wife with me and my first duty was to protect her, not my macho image and ego.

Feeling vulnerable, exposed

I do not want to complain too much. I realize that everyone has been a crime victim at some level somewhere sometime. However, along with all the concomitant feelings of being a victim—outrage, righteous indignation, personal violation, a sinful desire for revenge—that are so common in such moments, being the victim of crime while in another country brings a host of other feelings crashing down

as well. You feel vulnerable and exposed. You suspect all of the nationals and begin to paint them all with the same brush—crooks, liars, opportunists. You begin to fantasize about sting operations to "nail the scum."

FIRST PERSON

I confess that I briefly enjoyed imagining a cell phone feature that allows you to remotely explode the device in case of theft. I was not thinking about anything big—you know, just maybe something like a surgical strike napalm explosion that would only take out the thief. By God's grace, these feelings passed before design and development plans began.

Our family has not suffered too much in our time in various countries overseas. Yet sadly, I have friends who have been killed, or had family members killed, or been robbed at gunpoint, or had their houses repeatedly burglarized, and lived under constant threat of more of the same. Although two thugs once robbed my daughter at knife-point, most of what we have suffered has been mere petty thefts. God has really been good to us considering that U.S. expatriates are wealthy in comparison to the general population and therefore prime targets.

After I had time to pray it through and repent of my initial anger, I began to seek the mind of Christ in the matter. My mind went back to a story I had read of the Puritan Matthew Henry's response to being robbed, and his attitude became my challenge and goal. After considering his situation, he said, "I thank Thee first because I was never robbed before; second, because although they took my purse they did not take my life; third, because although they took my all, it was not much; and fourth because it was I who was robbed, and not I who robbed." Ouch.

The more I sought to embrace and adopt this attitude, the easier I found it to pray for conviction

and salvation for the perpetrators. I remembered that there are over 1 million kids living on the streets in Mexico City. They barely survive day-to-day by stealing, scamming, taking part in prostitution and joining gangs. And the young men who robbed me were the products of the street.

The next thought I had is the one that has stayed with me. God reminded me of the heavy burden He placed on me for the lost souls of Latin America many years ago. I have had a missionary heartbeat for Latinos in the Americas for most of my adult life. Reflecting on that added even more shame to my initial reaction to the theft. People live out what is inside; lost people will always act like lost people. They desperately need the gospel and there is no other hope for them—or their societies. Theft, murder, hatred, lying and a multitude of other sins are evidence of their need to hear the truth and be saved.

Fresh burden for lost souls

I am back in my comfort zone now. I have a new cell phone. My life picked up right where it left off when I departed for Mexico—except for the burden I carry for the lost souls who live in darkness, killing and being killed, stealing to eat and worshipping whatever they think will assist their survival odds. The volume seems to be turned way up on that now.

I am thankful that at the end of my emotional roller coaster I was reminded of my burden to reach and teach people who live and die without Christ. May God grant us all a burden to see the events of our lives through His eyes. As Bob Pierce, founder of the Korean Children's Orphanage, World Vision and Samaritan's Purse, said 50 years ago, "Let my heart be broken with the things that break the heart of God." Amen.

David Sills is associate professor of Christian missions & cultural anthropology and director of the Great Commission Center at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville

Lottie Moon Christmas Offering support

There are many reasons why Kentucky Baptists should support the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions. Let me share just a few that I have gleaned from the Southern Baptist International Mission Board's Web site. (These are the latest available statistics from 2005.)

■ Although there were 459,725 overseas baptisms, there are 6,438 people groups still unreached for Jesus Christ.

■ There are 5,193 IMB missionaries depending on the gifts of Southern Baptists through the offering and the Cooperative Program.

■ Because of the foundational support provided by the Cooperative Program, 100 percent of the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering can be used to support international missionaries. (There were 801 new missionaries appointed in 2005.)

■ There are 6,797 student volunteers who need the logistical support of the IMB.

■ There are 108,713 overseas

churches and 7.3 million overseas church members who are Southern Baptist-related. (There were 17,676 new churches started in 2005.)

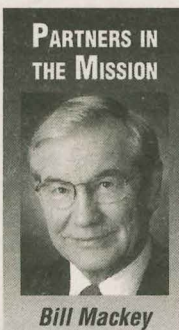
■ The world population is 6.4 billion.

■ Lottie Moon Christmas Offering receipts for Christmas 2004 were \$133.9 million but the goals set for 2005 and 2006 is \$150 million.

■ The total IMB budget need for 2006 is \$282.5 million.

These statistics can be overwhelming, but remember that each number represents or supports efforts to reach an important person loved by God. Each missionary and each international believer is a brother or sister in Jesus Christ.

For me, the statistics became very personal when a close friend in the ministry answered the call to international missions. Within months he and his wife and four young children were in an undisclosed location seeking to learn the language and living in a very small apartment



Bill Mackey

FAMILY

Do you clearly understand your fringe benefits?

By Jeremy White

Whether you work for a large or small organization, employer-provided fringe benefits can be a significant part of your overall financial package. As the end of the year approaches, you often have an opportunity to change or add to your fringe benefit plans.

When I'm gathering information from clients to prepare a financial plan, many people don't know enough about their fringe benefits. Let's consider some common fringe benefits:

Retirement plans. Company-sponsored retirement plans come in several forms: 401(k), 403(b), IRA, profit sharing plan or defined benefit plan. These are excellent ways to conveniently save for the future. They generally allow the employee to contribute before-tax dollars which will grow tax deferred until retirement. When the employer also contributes or matches the employee's contributions, it's that much better.

Medical insurance. Many employers provide group medical insurance. It may cover all or part of an employee or the employee's family. Medical insurance likely is the most important insurance coverage for most families. If both husband and wife have medical insurance available, there is no benefit to both having family coverage.

Group term life insurance. The advantage of group term life insurance is that providers have to insure everyone who applies. If you are not in very good health, buy the group term life. But if you are young and healthy, you often can buy a separate individual policy cheaper.

Disability insurance. Disability insurance makes sure you keep getting a paycheck if you are unable to work. Long-term disability is the type of disability insurance needed by most people. Absences from short-term disabilities, from eight days to 13 weeks, often can be met by your emergency savings.

Cafeteria plans/flexible spending plans. These plans allow you to contribute part of your paycheck on a before-tax basis to spend for child care, health care co-payments, deductibles, etc. Be careful not to put too much money in because you will lose any unspent money at the end of the year.

For more information, see your employee manual, human resource staff member or company Web site.

Jeremy White, a certified public accountant, is a partner with Blythe, White & Associates in Paducah



Building Christmas traditions can strengthen family ties

Q: My new husband and I are blending a family with teenagers on both sides. Neither one of us has great memories of Christmas. We keep hearing about the importance of holiday rituals or traditions, but are not sure why they are important or how to go about starting them. Any ideas?

Rituals and traditions have been described as the glue that helps hold families together. They seem to provide a sense of security, consistency and comfort since they are predictable and repetitive, get everyone involved and connected, and carry a meaning beyond themselves.

Hold a family meeting to talk about past rituals and traditions that have been meaningful to family members. Everyone should have a voice and be heard. Rituals and traditions that are created together will carry more significance than ones that you force on older children.

Remember that family rituals take time to develop. Be patient. Studies indicate it often takes three to five years for a new stepfamily to adjust to one another. Here are some areas around which you might consider developing rituals and traditions:

- How and when the home is decorated.
- The selection, placement and decoration of a Christmas tree.
- Holiday music choices.
- Observing Advent as a family.
- Holiday food and preparing special meals together.
- Christmas Eve and Christmas Day activities.
- Gift giving and volunteer work during the holidays.
- Attending church together and participating in special Christmas events.
- Sending Christmas cards and letters to family and friends.

While it takes several years to establish a ritual or tradition, family members should re-evaluate from time to time to make sure the tradition still has meaning. When a tradition loses its meaning, it can be dropped and something else chosen to take its place.—*Scott Wigginton*

Q: How can I use the gifts of the wise men to help deepen my child's understanding of Christmas?

Matthew's account of the birth of Jesus describes the visit of the Magi, or the wise men as we have come to know them (Matthew 2:1-12). Their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh can shape the gifts you give your child this Christmas while increasing their understanding of the Christmas story.

Gold was even more valuable in those days than now. Gold signified Jesus' position as a king. Some sources suggest the gold might also have been used to help Mary and Joseph escape from Bethlehem. The "gold gift" you give your children can be the expensive present they receive, or their "big" present. It might be the bicycle they have been wanting, electronics, jewelry or some other gift of great monetary value.

Frankincense was known for its medicinal qualities, and may have been one of the world's first "cure-alls." The Old Testament tells us that frankincense also was a sacred substance used in the temple where the people came to meet God (Exodus 30:34-37). Your child's "frankincense gift" should be a gift that encourages them spiritually, such as a new Bible, a journal or a Christian CD or DVD.

Myrrh was an expensive, richly scented substance used in the embalming process. Today you still can find myrrh in some soaps, lotions and oils. The "myrrh gift" for your child can be a personal hygiene item—special soaps, body wash, lotions, shampoos, bubble bath or perhaps even a light perfume or cologne for older girls and boys.

Talk with your children about the significance of the gifts of the magi, and about what each one teaches us about Jesus—King of Kings, Emmanuel and Savior.—*David Garrard*

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Kentucky League faces challenging days

The Kentucky League on Alcohol and Gambling Problems has been hit with a series of major challenges in recent days.

In a Sept. 26 article in the Western Recorder, Kentucky League Executive Director Howard Beauman acknowledged that the league is in the midst of significant financial concerns.

The Kentucky League, founded in 1914 as the Anti-Saloon League, was renamed The Temperance League in 1954. In an effort to reflect the organization's expanded role, the name was changed to the Kentucky League on Alcohol and Gambling Problems in 2001. A tax-exempt sister organization, the Kentucky Ethics League, was established last year.

Beauman noted that "the bottom fell out" of the league's annual fund-raising efforts last year, with special gifts totaling less than a third of the previous year's total.

"Everything's in limbo," Beauman pointed out. "If the support is not there, we can't do the work."

Two months later, Kentucky League Board President Don Cole told messengers to the Kentucky Baptist Convention annual meeting that Beauman had retired as executive director. Cole added, however, that the league remains on the job, ready to assist churches and individuals interested in combating legislation related to alcohol and gambling expansion.

Amid concerns about the organization's financial woes and no full-time staff member, a motion was introduced at the KBC annual meeting calling for state convention leaders to explore ways to strengthen the convention's relationship with the Kentucky League. Unfortunately, a lack of a quorum during the convention's final session prevented KBC messengers from taking official action on the proposed motion.

On the positive side, John Chowning, who was serving at the time as chairman of the KBC's Committee on Public Affairs, assured messengers that the committee already had been discussing the issue and would continue to explore options to strengthen the KBC's relationship with the Kentucky League.

As a result, during a meeting last week, members of the Committee on Public Affairs voted to send a letter of affirmation and support to Kentucky League officials. The letter also will request additional dialogue with league officials to explore possibilities for an ongoing relationship between the KBC and the Kentucky League.

The Committee on Public Affairs also approved a proposal to renew an annual contract for the Kentucky League to report its lobbying efforts to the committee so that committee members can keep abreast of current issues in the Kentucky General Assembly of interest to Kentucky Baptists. The measure is in keeping with the KBC committee's guidelines that call for the group to work in cooperation with various organizations, including the Kentucky League, "to pursue common interests."

As the league seeks to address the immediate needs of financial stability and staff leadership, committee members emphasized it is up to league officials to determine the organization's long-term goals and direction.

While the Kentucky League is "still in business and planning on staying in business," Cole said, "We're going to take a little time to regroup." He added that the league has contracted with former state Sen. Gene Huff to provide lobbying services during the next legislative session.

"We're still in the black as far as operating with everything paid up to date," Cole noted. But the league needs "financial support to be able to hire another director and keep things moving."

"To meet our budget of \$125,000 to \$130,000, if each Kentucky Baptist church would just send us \$50, we would more than meet budget," Cole pointed out. "That's how little it would take to operate our budget year-round."

In the meantime, the Kentucky League continues to face challenging days as it seeks to maintain its historic voice on the moral issues of alcohol and gambling expansion.

STRAIGHT FROM THE EDITOR



Trennis Henderson

Smaller world, bigger task

By Roy Fish

Alpharetta, Ga.—When I was a boy growing up in Arkansas, the world seemed so much bigger than it is today.

That was before we took for granted the ability to step onto a plane in the morning and arrive across country or across the ocean in a matter of a few hours. It also pre-dated satellite and Internet communications that today give us the means instantly to transfer video, voice and just about any other kind of data in which we may be interested.

Another change is the amazing transformation taking place in the people landscape of North America. We no longer need to travel far at all to encounter significant numbers of people from Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe and a host of other countries and cultures. They have relocated to our shores, now calling North America home, or staying for extended periods for work or education.

These realities make it truer today than ever before that what we do in North America has a direct impact on the international mission field. We need to look at the new faces and cultures around us and see the potential for influence that lies far beyond our continent.

I'm concerned about stories I hear of international students who arrive in the United States with a suitcase full of gifts to give to American hosts they expect will invite them to their homes only to return home four or five years later never having the opportunity to give their gifts to anyone.

And it goes far beyond students. There are an estimated 36 million foreign-born citizens living in the United States today. Have you befriended any of them? Is your church reaching out to them? If the answer is "no," then you're not only missing out on opportunities to share the gospel and forge friendships, you're adding to what I fear might be a growing impression among ethnics and foreign-born immigrants that Americans just don't care about other people.

The news is by no means all bad. Of the 1,725 churches Southern Baptists started in 2005, 48 percent were either African-American or ethnic congregations. We are a denomination committed to reaching across racial, ethnic and cultural lines with the gospel. Our recent giving record testifies to this commitment.

But the way we treat our newest citizens and visitors will have a direct impact on how our brothers

and sisters at the Southern Baptist International Mission Board are welcomed around the world when they endeavor to begin new works in communities in need of the gospel.

Imagine the difference if an international visitor returns home after time in North America having been welcomed by Christians, loved by them and even led to faith in Christ. That visitor will go home excited about the opportunity to work with Christians who want to bring Christ to his or her homeland.

Of course, those foreign-born immigrants who remain here stay closely connected with friends and family back in their homeland.

Imagine if one is loved and accepted by a local Southern Baptist church. Don't you think they'd have a much more positive reaction if they heard about a new Southern Baptist mission taking shape near loved ones back in their homeland? You bet they would.

So the next time you or your church family hosts an outreach event or evangelistic endeavor, look for opportunities to reach the newest members of your community who bring with them a door to another part of the world. You'll change lives in your hometown, and you just might change some across the globe.

Roy Fish is interim president of the Southern Baptist North American Mission Board

Ghana hospital offers light in midst of desperate world



HEART FOR PATIENTS
General practitioner Dr. George Faile, a missionary with the Southern Baptist International Mission Board, tends to a tiny patient in a Baptist-funded hospital in Ghana, West Africa. The facility is short-handed and needs skilled volunteers willing to serve on a short- or long-term basis.

Continued from page 1

with his wife, Mary Jane, to share Bible stories in area villages. "But, if we're not letting them know that we're helping them in the name of Christ, what is the point of it?"

Without four doctors on staff, the hospital is unable to maintain a consistent ministry presence among the villages in the area. It hasn't always been this way for the hospital that each year attracts thousands of people from four different countries.

Nearly three years ago, everything seemed to be falling into place for the hospital staff.

A promising 47-year-old doctor, Janette Shackles, had come on board to reduce the demanding workload of the hospital's three doctors. The addition boosted the morale of a worn-out staff.

"She had a wonderful ministry, and she related so well to the patients," said former hospital administrator Patricia Friesen. "Our doctors were making the work schedules more manageable. They were even having time to do outside evangelistic ministries, which they each have a desire to do."

But tragedy changed all of that when Shackles died in a traffic accident June 9, 2003. She was on her way back to the hospital with medical supplies when an oncoming vehicle hit her truck.

"Devastating" loss

"It was devastating," Friesen said. The personal loss of losing a colleague was coupled by the loss of a vital member of the medical staff.

Today, with the three remaining doctors, some on staff wonder if the gap left by Shackles ever will be filled. The long hours and daily stress continue to take their toll on everyone involved.

"It's always been hard with long hours and hard work," said George Faile, who has been a physician at the hospital for 17 years. "(But) this is the first time in a couple years that I've wondered if maybe God had something else for me."

Strong words from a man whose father, the late George Faile, started the hospital nearly 50 years ago. Faile refers to his father as a "big inspiration" in his life. He said he still desires to finish the work to which God has called him.

"I feel like I have a lot invested here," he said. Hospital administrators said they realize doctors need more time off for themselves and for ministry opportunities in the villages. But turning a patient away isn't an option.

"Do we tell them, 'You came too far, go back to where you came from?'" asks Friesen, hospital administrator for the past five years. "Where will (they) go?"

On a typical clinic day, hundreds of people travel to the hospital. In the crowd, people are afflicted with malaria, snake bites, various skin diseases, heart problems, AIDS and just about everything else. Some lie on the ground, some sit slumped on benches, while others stand for hours. None of them will be sent away before someone on the medi-

cal staff sees them.

Volunteers such as Doug and Alice Parkin from Casa Grande, Ariz., help make this possible. The Parkins often take a few months each year from their own medical work to assist the hospital through malaria season.

"The physicians are just so exhausted," said Parkin, a doctor in group practice and a member of Grace Baptist Church in Casa Grande.

"When you come as a volunteer, the doctors are able to deal with more serious problems, and you can help with the more mundane things like malaria, (tuberculosis) and

diarrhea.

"This hospital is a light in a pretty desperate part of the world," Parkin added.

Doctors and hospital administrators need full-time physicians who have gone through the two-year appointment process with the IMB that provides language training and other vital preparation. However, short-term volunteers such as the Parkins are needed and welcomed with open arms.

"An answer to prayer"

"I almost cried when I found out (a fifth-year surgical resident) was coming," said Crawley, who has worked at the hospital nearly 10 years. "She was an answer to prayer." Without more volunteers and another full-time doctor, Crawley fears the hospital will be unable to sustain its care many more years. "Opportunities are coming to us," he said. "We just need to be able to follow up with them."

For more information about how to volunteer or serve as a full-time physician at the Baptist Medical Centre in Ghana, call the SBC International Mission Board at (800) 999-3113.

2006 LOTTIE MOON CHRISTMAS OFFERING



That all peoples may know Him



STANDING ROOM ONLY The waiting area of a Baptist-funded hospital in Ghana, West Africa, is filled with people in need. The IMB doctors and medical staff who serve there won't leave for the day until each patient has been seen. In 2005, more than 72,000 people come to the clinic for treatment; doctors performed more than 3,500 surgeries. (IMB photos)



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We're not yet home

As we thank our volunteers, our true focus is on eternity

As I write this week's column, we are preparing for our Campers on Mission Christmas party. This year we are gathering at Cedarmore for an evening of good food and reflection on the past year and all that has transpired at Cedarmore and Jonathan Creek.

Our records indicate that since January we have logged in excess of 14,000 hours of volunteer service. What does 14,500 hours look like? It would be like seven people working 40 hours per week for an entire year without vacation days, or two people working nonstop 24/7 for the last 302 days straight.

Either way you view the time, we have been given a great deal of valuable service by hundreds of faithful volunteers.

To all who have given their time, thanks from all of our staff and our guests who have benefited from your service and a special thanks to Ed and Wanda Lyons for their coordination efforts this year.

Since we have been the recipients of such a gift from a vast group, it is fitting to honor them during the Christmas season.

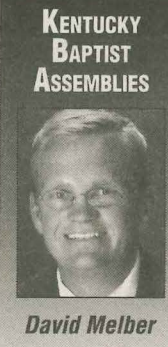
As you prepare for Christmas, remember that the greatest gift was Christ on earth and His purposes of redemption to glorify the Father. Our greatest obstacle on this earth is to become blinded by what the world has to offer and forget that all of what we see will pass away.

If we can learn to live a total life based on the reality that we are not yet home, the worldly offerings that look so desirable will fade away. Then we as believers would increasingly reflect the heart of Christ to people.

As our lives stand in contrast to worldly standards, people will see that we truly live as if we are not yet home.

During December, avoid the trap of being consumed by the "season of gifts." While giving certainly is good, the basis for giving should be a correct understanding of how we live because of our true citizenship. In doing so, our whole perspective in life will change and others will be drawn to why we look toward our future life with Christ.

David Melber is president of Kentucky Baptist Assemblies. Contact him at Box 99918, Louisville, KY 42069-0918; phone (502) 491-7000.

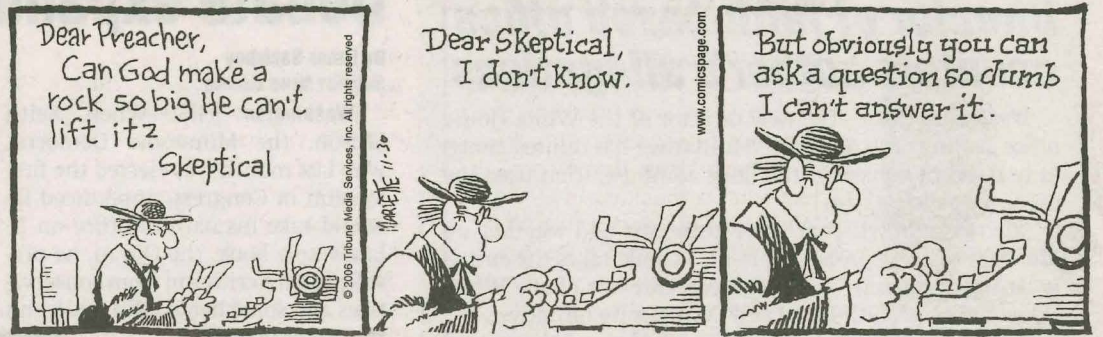


KENTUCKY BAPTIST ASSEMBLIES

David Melber

Kudzu

Doug Marlette



For Heaven's Sake

Mike Morgan



Bible Crosswords

Cheryl Keiser

Across

1. Division of opposing parties
5. "___ thy way unto the Lord" (Psalms 37:5)
8. Exclamation
9. Small amount
10. "___ my Father's house are many mansions" (John 14:2)
11. "Jesus saith unto them, Come and ___" (John 21:12)
12. Nativity set
15. Indianapolis's state, abbr.
16. Where Goliath was from (2 Samuel 21:22)
17. Social equal
19. Overdose, abbr.
20. New Testament book that follows Galatians, abbr.
21. Isaiah's father (Isaiah 1:1)
23. Exclamation of satisfaction
25. Sound used to attract attention
27. Rachel's handmaid given to Jacob to bear a son (Genesis 30:3)
29. "___ is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6)
30. "___ ye therefore, and teach all nations" (Matthew 28:19)
31. Lower limb
33. Legendary bird of prey
36. Line, abbr.
37. Time past
38. Office of Technology Assessment
39. Cow's noise
40. Dover's state, abbr.
41. "Thy word have I ___ in mine heart" (Psalms 119:11)

1	2			3	4		5			6	7	
8				9						10		
11							12		13			14
15				16					17			
			18		19			20				
21			22		23	24			25	26		
			27				28		29			
30						31		32		33	34	35
			36			37					38	
39				40				41	42			
			43	44				45			46	
47	48							49			50	
51					52							

43. "There shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh ___" (Revelation 21:27)
47. "Why beholdest thou the ___ that is in thy brother's eye?" (Luke 6:41)
49. Where Job lived (Job 1:1)
50. High ranking Turkish official
51. "He planteth an ___, and the rain doth nourish it" (Isaiah 44:14)
52. Man who died after he had deceived the apostles (Acts 5:1-5)

13. Hebrew unit of measure (Exodus 16:36)
14. More, suffix
16. Leave
18. Steal
21. Solomon planted these trees in terraces up to the temple (2 Chronicles 9:11)
22. City of David (2 Chronicles 5:2)
24. Circle of light
26. Herod's wife and sister-in-law (Luke 3:19)
28. Not him
32. Elisha's servant (2 Kings 4:12)
34. Begins with Genesis and ends with Malachi, abbr.

Last week's solution

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50
51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60

Down

1. Father of Israelite spy (Numbers 13:10)
2. Lower part of the face
3. Yes, Sp.
4. Land that lies ten miles east of Beer-sheba (Nehemiah 11:26)
5. Hidden store
6. The Philistines put five golden ___ in the Ark of the Covenant as a trespass offering when they returned it (1 Samuel 6:4)
7. To stick, adhere

35. Pertaining to the body
36. Unwilling
37. Arab country
40. "My meat is to ___ the will of him that sent me" (John 4:34)
42. Pronoun for a thing
44. "___ still, and know that I am God" (Psalms 46:10)
45. Joshua's father (Joshua 1:1)
46. King of Bashan (1 Kings 4:19)
47. Mother
48. Old style, abbr.

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Director of faith-based office counters author's allegations

Washington (RNS)—The new director of the White House office dealing with faith-based initiatives has refuted charges in a recent book that the Bush administration used the office for political gain.

"Criticism of whether we're authentic and whether we did what we were promising to do, I think, takes the entirety wrong argument," said Jay Hein, director of the White House Office of Faith-based and Community Initiatives.

Hein, who took the job in August, addressed the annual conference of the nonpartisan Roundtable on Religion and Social Welfare Policy, which researches faith-based groups.

Author David Kuo, former deputy director of the faith-based office, wrote in "Tempting Faith: An Inside Story of Political Seduction" that the office had "run a sad charade, to provide political cover to a White House that needed compassion and religion as political tools." He said the office has not implemented much of President Bush's "pro-poor" proposals that were highlighted in his campaign for the presidency.

Hein cited the \$2.1 billion in funding received by faith-based organizations in fiscal year 2005 and "hundreds of millions" of dollars related to efforts such as prisoner re-entry and substance abuse recovery.

"I don't think there's much weight behind the argument that dollars haven't been increased and attached to a lot of new players," he said.

Hein, who succeeded Jim Towey to become the office's third director, said he will work with state officials to further expand the work of his office on the state level. He said 33 states now have offices or liaisons that work with faith-based and community groups.

Speaking Dec. 5, a few days after the U.S. Supreme Court agreed to take a case on whether taxpayers can challenge aspects of his office, Hein said he expects the legal deliberations to be closely watched. The complaint, filed by the Wisconsin-based Freedom from Religion Foundation, is the first to reach the high court that relates to the faith-based office.

"The enormity of how this is observed, I think, is hard to overstate," he said. But he noted that the question facing the Supreme Court deals with a "technical legal dimension"—whether the plaintiffs have standing to bring the case—rather than the overall constitutionality of the office.

Debate expands over Muslim's oath of office

By Omar Sacirbey
Religion News Service

Washington (RNS)—When Keith Ellison, the Minnesota Democrat who last month was elected the first Muslim in Congress, announced he would take his oath of office on Islam's holy book, the Quran, he provoked sharp criticism from conservatives and some heated discussion on the blogosphere.

The ensuing discussion has revived the debate about whether America's values and legal system are shaped only by Judeo-Christian heritage or if there is room for Islamic and other traditions.

"America is interested in only one book, the Bible. If you are incapable of taking an oath on that book, don't serve in Congress," Dennis Prager, a conservative talk radio host in Los Angeles, wrote in a Nov. 28 TownHall.com editorial. Prager, who is Jewish and serves on the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, argued that Ellison should "not be allowed" to take his oath on the Quran.

In a subsequent interview, Prager said his objections were not to Ellison's use of the Quran, but to him not using a Bible.

"This has nothing to do with the Quran," Prager said. "It has to do with the first break of the tradition of having a Bible present at a ceremony of installation of a public official since George Washington inaugurated the tradition."

Prager added that he would accept Ellison using a Quran if he also used a Bible.

But Ellison would not be the first member of Congress to forgo using a

Bible. Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz, D-Fla., took her oath in 2005 on a Tanakh, the Hebrew Bible.

"Each of us has every right to lay our hand on the Bible that we were raised with; that's what America is all about—diversity, understanding and tolerance," said Wasserman Schultz.

Other politicians have departed from the Bible as well. Hawaii Gov. Linda Lingle used the Tanakh when she took her oath in 2002, while Madeleine Kunin placed her hand on Jewish prayer books when she was sworn in as the first female governor of Vermont in 1985.

"The books had belonged to my mother, my grandparents and my great-grandfather," Kunin said. "I wanted to place my hand on the weight of Jewish history and connect with the generations of men and women who helped bring me to this moment."

In 1825, John Quincy Adams took the presidential oath using a law volume instead of a Bible, and in 1853, Franklin Pierce affirmed the oath rather than swearing it. Herbert Hoover, citing his Quaker beliefs, also affirmed his oath in 1929 but did use a Bible, according to the Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies. Theodore Roosevelt used no Bible in taking his first oath of office in 1901, but did in 1905.

Still, some conservative Christians have taken Prager's editorial as a clarion call. The American Family Association in Tupelo, Miss., sent out an "action alert" to its 3.4 million members urging them to write their

congressmen "to pass a law making the Bible the book used in the swearing-in ceremony of Representatives and Senators."

Swearing in officeholders on Islam's holy book "represents a change in our society, our culture, if we hold up the Quran as equivalent to the Holy Bible," said AFA President Tim Wildmon. "If calling the Bible superior to the Quran in American tradition and culture is intolerant, then I'm guilty."

The Anti-Defamation League, a leading anti-Semitism watchdog group, issued a statement calling Prager's views "intolerant, misinformed and downright un-American."

Prager said the ADL statement was a result of a personal feud with the group's president, Abe Foxman.

"I am a very big supporter and believer that conservative Christians are the backbone of this society," Prager noted. He said Foxman "thinks that the religious right is the greatest enemy of American democracy, and he's very angry at a prominent Jew who defends them."

In blogs and elsewhere on the Internet, some people fretted that Islam was taking over America. "Mr. Ellison choosing (and being allowed) to take his oath of office on the Koran is that first step toward the Islamification of America," warned one writer on the conservative blog RiehWorldView.com.

Many observers say prohibiting Ellison from taking his oath on the Quran would violate the constitutional provision that "no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States."



Keith Ellison

On the wall across from my desk

'Anyone can count the seeds in an apple; only God can count the apples in a seed'

Anyone who comes into my office is soon aware of two things. First, my office is very small. Second, my desk is a mess! I cannot do much about the size of my office. I would like to have more room, but there simply isn't any additional space available.

Now, about that mess on my desk, I am sure some people have wondered how in the world I can find anything. I would like to say that I know exactly where everything is and can find anything in a few seconds. But the truth is, it takes minutes, and, to be totally honest, sometimes I can't find it at all.

I don't think there is any tradition in what I am about to say, but for the past 30-plus years, neither my predecessor nor I have had a secretary on a regular basis. I can't tell you why Dr. Moore didn't have a secretary, but I don't have an assistant simply because we usually have a greater need for support staff in other places.

I always can come back and finish up some work in the evenings, at night or on the weekends. So if I get a little behind, usually I can get caught up, freeing the person who could be my secretary to help someone else.

There is something else about my office that I am sure most people do not see. It is a very special cross-stitched wall hanging across from my desk. It was given to me several years ago by a co-worker here at Oneida.

When I saw it hanging in her office, I was intrigued by the words cross-stitched on the cloth. It reminded me of so many of the students I have worked with here at Oneida. She noticed my in-

terest in the cross-stitch and to my surprise it was placed on my desk a few days later.

Here is what it says: "Anyone can count the seeds in an apple, but only God can count the apples in a seed."

This may be a quote that has been around for years, or perhaps was spoken first by a famous person, but it was the first time I had ever read it. I proudly placed it on the wall directly across from my desk. I read those words consciously or unconsciously several times a day.

Often I wonder how God views our work. Some of our students are smart, they have good athletic or fine arts skills, they are respectful, they come from good homes and have many other qualities we look for in a well-rounded person.

But what about the others? Often they are among our weakest students academically, they offer little or no athletic or fine arts skills, frequently they come from broken and underprivileged homes. In short, they do not seem to hold much promise for the future. Many have not experienced any real success up to this point in their lives, and by outward appearances they show little promise of any in the future.

Only God can see us as we really are, on the inside. God is the only One who knows the full potential of a person. Time and space do not permit me to list some of our most outstanding graduates who, at first, did not show much promise but found success while at Oneida.

"Lord, please never let me forget that only You can count the apples in a seed!"

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

'Someone really loves us'

Louisville pastor recounts Clear Creek Christmas story

Ray Hayes, pastor of Maple Grove Baptist Church in Louisville, shares this memory. His parents, Waynes and Edna Hayes, graduated in 1963.

I will never forget that snowy day in early December. My father quit his lucrative welding job in the Baltimore shipyards to attend a "Mountain Preacher's School" in Pineville named Clear Creek Baptist School. Dad interpreted his call to ministry as a call to prepare. With only an eighth-grade education from the mountains of West Virginia, he began work in the coal mines at age 13 to help support 10 siblings.

In 1948, he was drafted into the U.S. Army during the Korean War; the Army trained him to be a welder. After his discharge, he acquired a job in the shipyards. After marrying, he and my mother had three children in their first four years of marriage. Dad experienced salvation at Water's Edge Baptist Church, a new church start, and God changed his life, his marriage and our family. Within two years, we moved to Kentucky.

In 1960, Dad made only \$75 a month. Food always was at a premium. I recall eating potatoes—

fried, baked and mashed, for every meal for an entire week that December. Mother prayed at one meal: "Father, you know that these are the last of the potatoes. We don't have any money to buy anything more. Whatever we get for the rest of the month will be from You. Thank you for what we have this morning. Amen."

God provided—like He always does. That evening, while we were at church, members from a nearby congregation, who heard about our need, placed three boxes of food on the kitchen table. We came in the back door because it was snowing. I pulled out that yellow box of Cream

of Wheat, my favorite hot cereal, thrust it into my brother's face and said, "Danny, Look! Look! Someone really loves us to give us 'the very best.'"

My parents let us take everything out of the boxes and put the cans and packages on the table. Dad had us all sit down at the table; as we held hands, each of us prayed a prayer of thanksgiving.

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



Bill Whittaker

Summit calls global church to bring justice to AIDS crisis

By Hannah Elliott
Associated Baptist Press

Lake Forest, Calif. (ABP)—When 5,500 people die of AIDS every day, the need is not for charity but for justice, declared Bono, and the church must do something about it.

"That's a lot of our brothers and sisters to be losing for no good reason," the activist and front man for megaband U2 told the crowd at the 2006 Global Summit on AIDS and the Church.

"One thing we can probably agree on is that God is where the poor live," he said via video. "God is in the slums and the cardboard boxes. ... God is in the cries heard under the rumble of war. God is with us if we are with them, which is to say God expects us to treat everyone as equal. Equal in the eyes of God—that's really what these issues are about."

Virtually every speaker at the two-day event at Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, Calif., spoke to the enormous potential Christians have in confronting HIV/AIDS. Their message? The global church has both an opportunity and an obligation not only to reduce HIV/AIDS but to eradicate it.

The second annual Saddleback event is the loudest voice yet in rallying evangelicals against the ravages of AIDS. For their part, Saddleback pastor Rick Warren and his wife, Kay, assured reporters the AIDS cause isn't the "trend of the week" for them.

Event attracts 2,000 participants

More than 2,000 people from 39 states and 18 countries attended the event, which included speeches from Episcopalians, Catholics, government officials, U.N. leaders, medical doctors and social activists.

Eugene Rivers, the fiery orator from Azusa Christian Community in Boston, told listeners the Christian church is on the "cutting edge" of a revolutionary movement to proclaim the love of God by ending AIDS.

"Throughout the course of history, tragedy has served as an opportunity for the church to serve as a resource," he said. "We must stand in the gap. We must be the watchmen on the wall. We can speak prophetically to the secular world, and we must have the courage and the boldness to declare the truth of God."

Warren addressed the global church's AIDS-fighting potential in each of his six messages during the event. Nothing comes close to the resources, history, tradition or scope of the church, he said.

"The church is the largest network in the world," he said. "The church is bigger than China. The church is bigger than India. ... That is an army of compassion you cannot ignore."

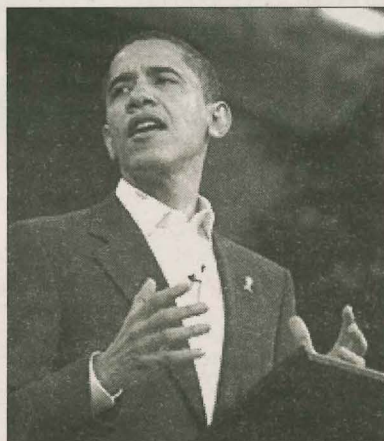
While the number of people infected with HIV is growing at the rate of 14,000 infections a day, he said the global church is growing in the world at the rate of 60,000 converts a day.

If Christians leave the AIDS work to medical and government professionals, "the job won't get done," Warren said. Every church has an "enormous, untapped pool of talent and brains and energy and relationships. We cannot do it without mobilizing this group. It's going to have to be done by ordinary people."

And while government organizations and businesses have done much good work in the prevention and treatment of AIDS, speakers said, it hasn't been nearly enough to radically affect the disease.

Sen. Sam Brownback (R-Kan.) recognized that void. He said the HIV/AIDS crisis should not be a political issue but one that requires love, growth and understanding. "To whom much is given, much is required," he noted. "We've been given much, and we've got to meet that task. No single branch will do this alone."

Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.), whose presence at the conference was opposed by some conservatives because



GLOBAL BATTLE The global battle against AIDS must be an "all hands on deck" effort, Sen. Barack Obama told participants at the 2006 Global Summit on AIDS and the Church. (ABP photo by Allison Cox)

of his pro-choice stand on abortion, joined Brownback in taking an HIV/AIDS test during the event to set an example for others.

"My Bible tells me that when God sent His only Son to earth, it was to heal the sick and comfort the weary; to feed the hungry and clothe the naked; to befriend the outcast and redeem those who strayed from righteousness," Obama said. "It is a way of life that can not only light our way as people of faith, but guide us to a new and better politics as Americans."

Christian love essential

Kent Hill, director of the Bureau for Global Health, said he thinks Christians have missed their calling so far, or at least lacked in their application of it. Christian love can be expressed in a positive message about sex and abstinence, he said.

"The religious perspective sees that sex is ... not just biological. It is part of who we are as spiritual human beings made in the image of God," he said. "I'm not saying that's the only argument that should be used for sexual prevention, but these are certainly arguments that

should be heard."

Hill also presented some "incontrovertible" facts about the disease: The rate of people getting treatment is far outstripped by the number of people getting infected. The main way HIV spreads is through sexual transmission. Concurrent multiple-partner sexual relationships drive the disease. And "the use of condoms will not be nearly enough to address this disease."

From those findings, Hill, and others like him, agreed that changes in sexual behavior must also occur.

"There are those who claim sexual-behavior change is simply not possible ... but when (AIDS rates) go down, they go down because there has been significant behavior change," he said, citing Zimbabwe, Uganda and New Guinea as examples.

That claim contrasted with the view taken by Obama, who said he "respectfully but unequivocally" disagrees with those who oppose condom distribution.

"I also believe that we cannot ignore that abstinence and fidelity may too often be the ideal and not the reality—that we are dealing with flesh and blood men and women and not abstractions," Obama said.

Still, many of the speakers emphasized what they called the positive message of Christian sexuality. Hill urged Christians to "give people a higher view of what it means to engage sexuality." Negative views alone will not work, he said.

Warren emphasized that risk-reduction methods for fighting AIDS only slow the process.

Stopping the scourge, he said, takes something radically different: saving sex for marriage, teaching men to respect women and children, offering HIV treatment through churches, and pledging to one partner for life.

"I can tell you from logic that if those four things happened, it would stop the pandemic," Warren said.

Mt. Soledad supporters win appeals court ruling

San Diego (BP)—A California state appeals court handed a victory to supporters of the Mt. Soledad cross war memorial in San Diego, ruling Nov. 30 that a 2005 voter-approved proposition transferring the property from the city to the federal government was constitutional.

The unanimous ruling by the three-judge panel overturned a decision by a trial court judge, who last year struck down the initiative, which was known as Proposition A and passed by 76 percent of San Diego voters.

"However one characterizes the cross on Mount Soledad, as secular, sectarian or a combination thereof, its presence is an historical reality," Associate Justice Patricia Benke wrote for the court. "It has been in place for over 50 years, since 1954. Its construction predates the first challenge to its presence by some 35 years. ... The transfer does not constitute a government preference for religion or discrimination against religion."

The memorial, officially known as the Mount Soledad Veterans Me-

morial, was dedicated in 1954 as a memorial to veterans of the Korean War, although it now honors veterans of all U.S. wars.

The cross has been at the center of a legal battle since 1989 when Phil Paulson, an atheist and veteran, filed suit seeking to remove the cross by arguing, among other things, that it violated the U.S. Constitution's and California constitution's prohibition on government-established religion.

Throughout the process, supporters of the cross—including San Diego Mayor Jerry Sanders—have fought to find a way to keep the monument in place.

Earlier this year President Bush signed into a law a bill transferring the property to the federal government and placing it under the authority of the Department of Defense. But that also is facing a legal challenge and currently is before a circuit judge in the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

If the law Bush signed is upheld, then the latest ruling by the California appeals court will be moot, and the land will move to the De-

partment of Defense. But if the law is overturned, then the victory by Mt. Soledad supporters will become even more significant.

In her ruling Benke said Proposition A—which would have transferred the property to the National Park Service—passed the so-called "Lemon test," a reference to a 1971 U.S. Supreme Court case. Under Lemon, for a challenged law to be constitutional it must have a secular purpose, not promote or inhibit religion and not entangle government excessively with religion. The court, Benke argued, cannot "discern the motives" of voters.

"We cannot tell whether in casting a vote in favor of Proposition A an individual voter did so for a religious reason, a secular desire the cross remain as part of a veterans memorial or simply a neutral desire to transfer to another venue the issue of the cross' presence at the site," she wrote.

Benke also noted that nothing in Proposition A says the cross must stay on the property once the federal government takes over.

House majority falls short on effort to adopt fetal pain bill

Washington—The U.S. House of Representatives failed Dec. 6 to reach the two-thirds majority needed to pass legislation requiring women to be informed of the pain an unborn child might experience if they have a late-term abortion.

The House voted 250-162 for the Unborn Child Pain Awareness Act but fell 25 votes short of the two-thirds majority needed for approval.

The vote likely will be the last one related to abortion before Republicans surrender control of both houses of Congress to Democrats in January.

Democratic leaders have signaled they will put much less emphasis on abortion-related bills when the new Congress convenes in January. Conservative groups had hoped to use the bill to signal that abortion should remain a high priority.

Rep. Chris Smith, R-N.J., chief sponsor of the bill, said the vote demonstrates "there is indeed an overwhelming concern for the suffering of the unborn during an abortion."

"It's no small thing that 60 percent of the House endorsed requiring abortionists to inform women that late abortion may be very painful to the unborn child," said Douglas Johnson, legislative director for the National Right to Life Committee.

Compiled from reporting by Baptist Press and Religion News Service

PRAYER PARTNERS

Please pray for the following Kentucky Baptist ministries and missionaries:

REVIVE Ministry of Ohio River Baptist Association in Salem.

Several churches have joined together to make a spiritual impact among students in Livingston and Crittenden counties. Through Bible studies and ongoing prayerwalks by hundreds of people, participants are petitioning God for spiritual transformation in their schools. Pray that Christian students will be unified with boldness to share Christ. Pray that non-Christian teens will encounter Christ and be freed from sexual immorality, drugs and alcohol, foul language and disrespect for authority. Pray that churches in other communities will begin similar ministries and seek to revive their schools through prayer. For more information, visit www.reviveprayerwalk.com.

Mission Service Corps Missionaries George and Kathy Goeddey of Oneida.

The Goeddeys minister on the campus of Oneida Baptist Institute. Goeddey serves as the coordinator of volunteers and Mrs. Goeddey serves as "go-fer chauffeur," transporting students and staff members to appointments or the airport. Pray that they will be effective Christian witnesses as they transport, run errands and coordinate the work of hundreds of volunteers each year. Pray that students will come to know Christ as Savior and Lord.

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

■ **BARDSTOWN**—Parkway Church's worship choir and band will present "Sing Glory," Dec. 16-17, 6 p.m. **Eddie Benton** is pastor.

■ **BASKETT**—**Jerry Percy** recently resigned as pastor of Advance Church.

■ **BURLINGTON**—Bellevue Church recently called **Frank Merrill** as pastor.

■ **HARDINBURG**—Hardinsburg Church will present its 21st annual Living Christmas Tree Dec. 14, 15 and 17. **Doug Miller** is pastor.

■ **HAWESVILLE**—**Elizabeth Bevil** died Nov. 25 at age 68. Her husband, **Mason Bevil**, has been pastor of several Kentucky Baptist churches. In addition to her husband, she is survived by three sons and six grandchildren.

■ **LaGRANGE**—Buckner Church ordained youth minister **Micah Patterson** to the gospel ministry Nov. 26.

■ **MORGANFIELD**—First Church's Sonshine Company will present "Christmas in Reverse" Dec. 17 at 8 a.m., 10:45 a.m. and 5 p.m.

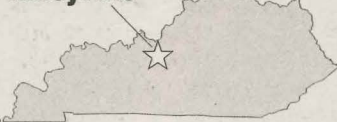
■ **MURRAY**—Locust Grove Church recently called **Ryker Wilson** as pastor.

■ **OLIVE HILL**—First Church recently called **Mark Lilly** as pastor. The church will present the Christmas pageant, "A Carter County Christmas," Dec. 17, 6 p.m., and Dec. 18, 7 p.m., and will host a Christmas Eve Candlelight Service Dec. 24, 6 p.m.

■ **PENDLETON**—**Tommy Rucker** re-

Spotlight on ...

Rineyville



Rineyville Church's Christmas Choir will present "A Rineyville Christmas" Dec. 16-17, 7 p.m. For more information, call (270) 737-7361. **Mitch Ash** is pastor.

cently resigned as pastor of Covington Church to become pastor of First Church of Dunkerton, Iowa.

■ **PRINCETON**—Lebanon Church recently called **James Peters** as pastor.

Northside Church's choir will present "The Christmas Diary," Dec. 15-17, 7 p.m. Free reservations are available by contacting (270) 365-6062 or www.northsidebaptist.net. **Jeff French** is pastor.

Pleasant Hill Church will hold its third annual Live Nativity, Dec. 19-21, 6 to 9 p.m. **Robin Redd** is pastor.

■ **STANFORD**—Blue Lick Church ordained **Stephen Bryant**, **Richard Floyd II**, **John Robert Hasty III**, **Rodney Miracle** and **Greg Smith** as deacons Dec. 3. **Wayne Stephens** is pastor.

Community project helps boost Nada's hope for transformation

Nada—The groundbreaking for a community sewer project in the Kentucky community of Nada was a sign of hope for the small, isolated mountain community, according to project officials.

First Baptist Church of Winchester, the Kentucky Baptist Fellowship and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship partnered in Nada as part of Together for Hope, the Fellowship's rural poverty initiative in 20 of the poorest counties throughout the United States.

The recent groundbreaking ceremony marked the launch of a much-needed sewer project.

"Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain," read John Owen, pastor of First Baptist Church of Winchester and Nada Baptist Mission. "Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain," he continued from Psalm 127.

Using the steps of the Nada Mission as his platform, Owen read Scripture and led the invocation for

a gathering of local residents and county officials as well as staff from the offices of U.S. representatives and Gov. Ernie Fletcher.

Nada served as the springboard for the Fellowship's work in Eastern Kentucky because of the presence of the mission church there.

The sewer line is the beginning of a much larger community development project. Bryan Kirby of the Community Economic Development Association is spearheading an effort to procure a Community Development Block Grant, which will help transform the quality of housing in the small community.

Partnered with CEDA for this project are the Federation of Appalachian Housing Enterprises of Berea, Community Housing of Winchester and KBF. KBF officials will recruit volunteer teams to tackle some of the housing repair projects, which will help stretch the grant money to affect more families.

"It's nice to think we had a small part in this," Owen noted.

Johns, retired Kentucky pastor, dies

Columbus, Ohio—Retired Kentucky Baptist pastor Henry Johns died Nov. 29 in Columbus, Ohio. He was 81.

Johns, a native of Kentucky, was pastor of several Kentucky Baptist churches including Summersville Baptist Church, Mount Pisgah Baptist Church in Bremen and Oakland Avenue Baptist Church in Catlettsburg. He retired in 1988 after serving 16 years as pastor of Versailles Baptist Church.

Johns was a former member of the Kentucky Baptist Convention Mission Board. He also served on the

KBC executive director search committee that recommended former executive director Bill Marshall and served on a study committee in the 1970s that recommended the process of allocating Cooperative Program funds for Kentucky Baptist-related schools and colleges.

A graduate of Georgetown College and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, he is survived by his wife, two adult children and four stepchildren. His funeral service was held Dec. 2 at First Baptist Church of Westerville, Ohio.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

January

18-20 Shepherding the Shepherd Conference, Radisson Hotel, Lexington.

23 Pastor/Staff Forum, Severns Valley Baptist Church, Elizabethtown.

25-26 Quarterly Prayer Meeting for Spiritual Awakening, Northside Baptist Church, Mount Vernon.

26-27 Preschool/Children's Ministry Meeting, Lakeside Baptist Church, Louisville.

26-27 Woman's Missionary Union Regional Retreat, Laurel Lake Baptist Camp, Corbin.

February

1-3 Youth Leaders Conclave, Chattanooga, Tenn.

2-3 Deacon/Pastor/Spouse Retreat, Holiday Inn University Plaza, Bowling Green.

17 Special Needs Ministry Conference, Baptist Building, Louisville.

19 Financial Support Issues for Ministers and Church Employees Conference, Lone Oak First Baptist Church, Paducah.

20 Financial Support Issues for Ministers and Church Employees Conference, Daviess-McLean Baptist Association, Owensboro.

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

CLASSIFIED ADS

SEEKING: Full-time, experienced church planter for Oakland, Tenn. Send resumé to: First Baptist Church, 12685 South Main St., Somerville, TN 38068. Telephone: (901) 465-3528 or 827-6036.

SEEKING: Full-time minister to children for First Baptist Church, Owensboro, Ky., to lead our ministry to birth through 5th grade. Individual must have the gift of administration, enthusiasm to generate creative ideas, patience to be an educator and the dedication to oversee children's spiritual growth. Previous leadership experience in children's ministry and motivating teams preferred. Send resumé and references to: First Baptist Church, PO Box 904, Owensboro, KY 42302, Attn: Children's Search Committee; or psarahan@fbcowb.org.

SEEKING: Clear Creek Baptist Bible College Board of Trustees seeks letters of interest and inquiry from individuals led and called to apply to serve as president of Clear Creek Baptist Bible College. Please send letters of interest or resumé to: Timothy A. Langford, chairman of the board of trustees, PO Box 167, Hickman, KY 42050 prior to Jan. 4, 2007.

SEEKING: Full-time staff member with a focus on outreach and ministry to children, youth and families. We are a new church start that has an existing committed core group and adequate resources. The position occasionally will require filling in for the senior pastor. Seminary degree and experience required. If interested, please send resumé and cover letter to: Journey Search Committee, PO Box 22137, Lexington, KY 40522-2137.

SEEKING: Payroll accountant (immediate need) for Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. This position is responsible for the accurate and timely preparation of all seminary payrolls, resolution of payroll-related problems and questions, and the organization and maintenance of payroll records. This position requires an associate degree in accounting, at least two years of accounting experience and at least one year of payroll experience. The seminary offers a fast-paced, multi-tasking work environment, plus a competitive salary and benefits package. Qualified candidates should e-mail their resumé with cover letters and salary histories to: humanresources@sbts.edu.

SEEKING: Full-time minister to children, youth and families at Deer Park Baptist Church, Louisville, a moderate church with 100 years of service. Opportunity to guide children, families and volunteers toward a comprehensive children and youth ministry. Advanced degree and some previous experience required. Visit our Web site for job description and application details: www.deerparkbaptist.org.

SEEKING: Part-time ministry assistant (20-30 hours/week) to senior pastor. Ideal candidate should be proficient in Microsoft Office Professional and ACS church membership software. Will function as part of a multi-staff team and be responsible for scheduling, correspondence, desktop publishing and filing. Strong organizational abilities, outstanding people skills, excellent communication skills and professionalism are absolute requirements. Benefits negotiable based on hours. Submit resumé to Pastor's Office, Shively Baptist Church, 1599 Sadie Lane, Louisville, KY 40216; or via e-mail to bruce@shivelybaptist.com.

SEEKING: Part-time minister of youth and children for Buffalo Baptist Church. Responsibilities include: planning and implementing programs of discipleship, missions and activities for middle and high school students. Also lead in monthly recreational activities for grades 1-6. Salary to be determined based on experience. Send resumé to Buffalo Baptist Church, 2530 Greensburg Road, Buffalo, KY 42716, Attn: Mike Ovesen.

SEEKING: Minister of music (part-time or full-time). Position includes directing music for all worship services (Sunday morning and evening; Wednesday evening), weekly adult choir practice with approximately 40 dedicated and talented choristers, and supervision of organist and pianist. Regular attendance: approximately 400 and growing. Love for traditional and contemporary music in praise and worship. Seeking someone to grow with us through music ministry for all ages. Full job description available upon request. Mail resumé to Central Baptist Church, 829 High St., Paris, KY 40361, Attn: Music Search Committee; or e-mail to suecbs@bellsouth.net. (859) 987-3951. Questions: Chris Jones, chair; chris@qx.net.

Meal ministry brings homeless couple together

By Barbara Bedrick
Associated Baptist Press

Dallas (ABP)—Two formerly homeless individuals found food and shelter through a Baptist church—and much more. They found each other, a new life together in Christ, and now have a way to bless others less fortunate.

Last year, Deidra Stribling and Carl Wafer were homeless, in search of a warm meal and shelter. They each happened upon a Thanksgiving dinner organized by Cornerstone Baptist Church of Oak Cliff in Dallas.

"I had nowhere to go," Stribling said. "My mom was in a nursing home and my father had passed away. I came to Cornerstone and they gave me dinner, a blanket and a coat."

That serving of turkey and dressing became a spiritual turning point for the couple.

"I was raised in the church," Stribling explained, "but after graduating from high school, I began turning to the wrong things, like spending time with the wrong crowd. I was in jail a couple of times."

Wafer was a truck driver who saw Cornerstone's outreach meal and decided to stop that day because it looked like a "nice crowd." After meeting each other at the meal, Wafer and Stribling soon started dating, joined Cornerstone and became Christians. They now sing in the choir.

Stribling credits Cornerstone and Wafer with playing significant roles in her faith journey—from living in the streets to living for God. Others have noticed the change as well.

"Amongst the hundreds of volunteers (we have), the two who really touch my heart are Carl and Deidra," said Chris Simmons, pastor of Cornerstone Baptist Church. He said he was shocked when he found out they met last Thanksgiving during Cornerstone's meal for the homeless.

"In less than a year, God did an amazing work, and this couple that was served last year was serving this year," Simmons said. "They made a commitment to follow Christ."

Wafer now drives Stribling to church every Sunday, where they are active Sunday school participants. But their true passion emerges in community outreach work. Not surprisingly, it holds a special place in their lives.

On Thanksgiving Day 2006, Wafer and Stribling helped feed 1,200 people and gave blankets and coats to homeless people living under bridges in South Dallas.

On Christmas, the couple plans to help serve another holiday meal to the homeless and share the story of Jesus' birth.

Homeless choir records Christmas CD

By Marcia Davis-Seale
Religion News Service

Dallas (RNS)—It's Wednesday morning at the Austin Street Centre, and the gates are open at the faith-based fortress at the foot of the downtown skyline. The bell in the tower clatters harshly against the cold wind, beckoning those on the streets for a word of encouragement or perhaps an impromptu Communion service.

Up in the low-ceilinged chapel loft, Chris Snidow is shifting gears from psychiatric nurse to choir-master as his protégés straggle in for a midweek worship service. Sun streams through a beveled cut-glass window, splashing stains of color against the smooth white walls.

From the front row, Rufus Barnes clears his throat. He's missing the other half of his duo, so he'll go solo today. Other key vocalists are no-shows, so the previous day's carefully planned repertoire is abandoned as if it had never been rehearsed.

Barnes grew up singing in church, then spent years singing the blues in smoky night clubs, jive joints and now, on the streets. Diabetes took part of his foot and any prospects of steady work. He lost his family, his home, and eventually, most of his belongings.

He's written a million lyrics before tearing them up. He never thought—homeless and older than 50—he would fulfill his lifelong dream of actually recording a song he'd written himself. "Just something to talk about," he said.

But that's just what's happening at the 400-bed shelter. Rising above the sour notes of hardship, the voices of the shelter's transient homeless choir have found a permanent home on a professionally recorded CD of spiritual songs labeled "The Seasons of Austin Street."

"Seasons" includes a few Christ-

mas songs and a poem, "Homelessness," written by a former shelter dweller no one has seen for a while. Snidow hopes she's still alive. He has "sent word out on the street to tell her to come in," he said.

A small portion of the proceeds from the \$20 CD will cover recording costs. Most of the money, Snidow said, goes to operate the shelter. The 120 church groups that support the shelter are snapping up the discs.

Attendance at rehearsals always was unpredictable, so Snidow decided that scheduling a group recording session was out of the question. Instead, he escorted the members of his choir, one by one, to his cramped and cluttered home sound studio to record their parts. A few friends chimed in to round out the sound.

Laying down each voice separately, adding music, track by track, it took him 18 months to synthesize painstakingly a cohesive group presence and performance, and send the finished CD to be reproduced.

"Spiritual reconnection"

"This choir has given many a spiritual reconnection, and helped their self-esteem," he said.

Which is not to say that pulling together a homeless choir is a simple feat. There's Stephanie Cook, a 21-year-old with a sultry country croon and a bipolar pendulum that keeps her choir singing—and very existence—erratic. The number of foster, institutional and temporary homes she's passed through surpasses the number of years she's lived.

Then there's Harold Baker, who sits, resting his gray beard on his chest, nodding off during the service. Baker, 59, has called Austin Street home for 17 years. He's the choir's silent voice—no one has yet to hear him sing—but also the most conscientious in promptness and attendance.

Austin Street opened in 1983. What started as a drafty soup kitchen has grown into a well-ventilated, security-minded shelter that includes a chapel for worship, funerals and weddings; transitional housing; thrift shop; day program for the mentally ill; and drug and alcohol support groups—all backed by a professional staff.

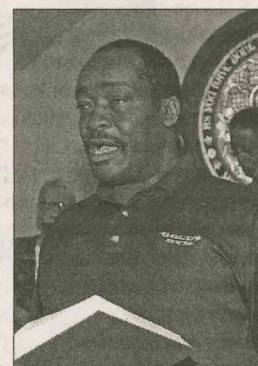
"A lot of psychiatric programs don't want to recognize the spiritual, and if they get government money, they can't," said Snidow, 57. "But no one can receive long-term deep healing unless the spiritual foundation is laid down. ... You can find God, sense His presence, even more so, in a shelter."

Snidow would like to find time to rehearse Christmas music. But the daily rhythm of shelter life—anger management classes, job interviews, and doctor's appointments—always seem to get in the way.

Ron Byrd takes off his coat and settles in at the piano. "You can't practice on the streets. Someone is going to have a complaint," he said.

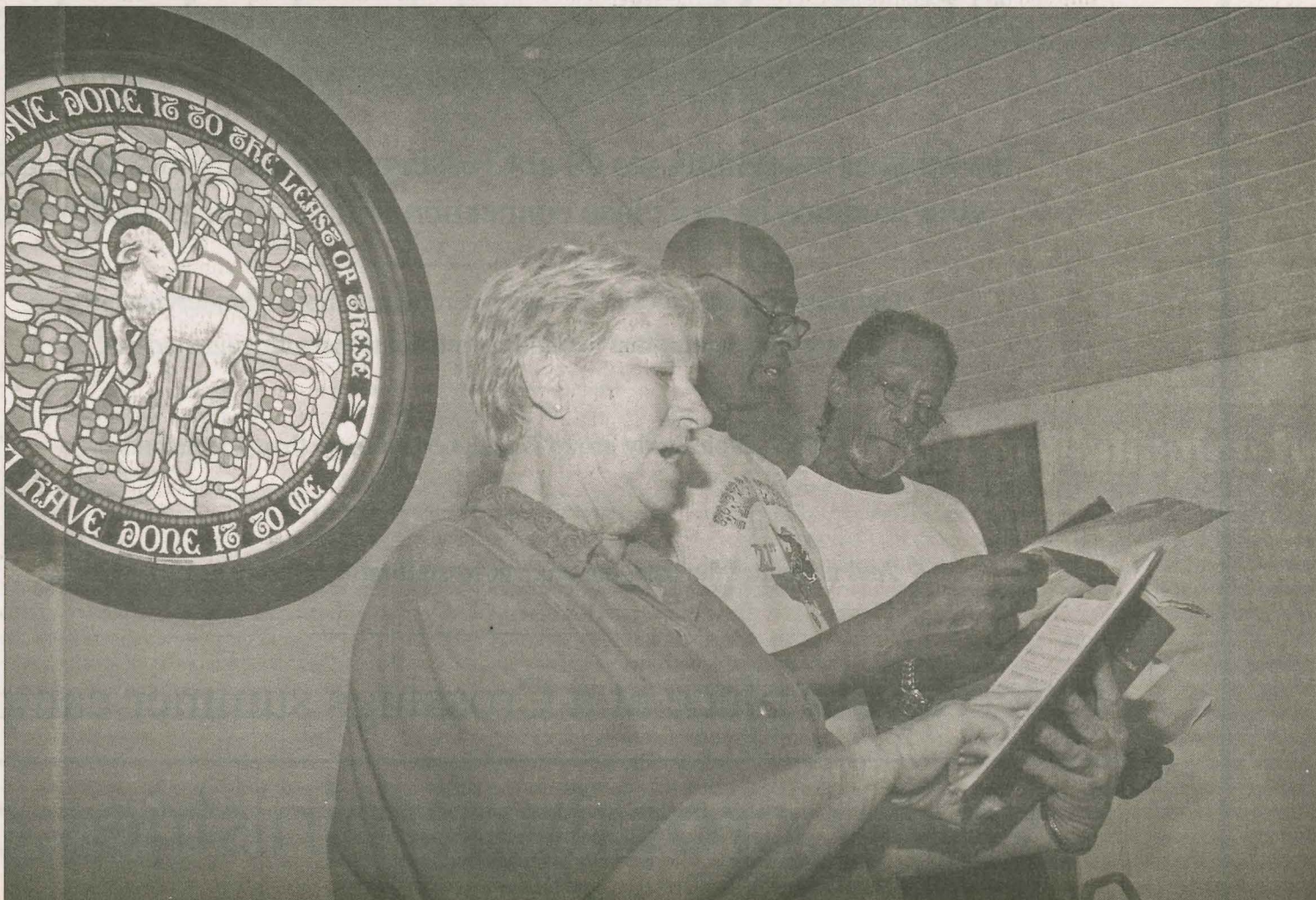
Between the cigarette smoke and the barrel fires lit for warmth, the relentless damp and cold, and the constant need to speak loudly just to be heard above the cacophony of street noise—all that takes a toll on the homeless singer.

Debbie Whiddon is petite and blond, with fair skin and freckles. Somewhere in her 50s, her eyes reflect the pain of a shattered life tentatively glued back together and holding for now. "I started out as a client," she said, "and now I work here and have a future." She said she draws comfort from the lyrics of a song on the CD. "'Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God' ... That one song means so much to me. It's what my life's about now. ... I hope it will mean as much to others—struggling—who hear it on the CD."



GRATEFUL VOICE Rufus Barnes is a member of the homeless choir at the Austin Street Centre in Dallas. (RNS photos by Marcia Davis-Seale)

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT Choir members (left to right) Debbie Whiddon, George Alexander and Ronald Butler sing in the homeless choir at the Austin Street Centre in Dallas.





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