



WESTERN RECORDER

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British hotel chain offers 'room in the inn' to all named Mary and Joseph

London (RNS)—Hotel chain Travelodge, determined to help make amends for that "no room in the inn" business back in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago, is offering free Christmas accommodations to married British couples named Mary and Joseph.

Travelodge, which owns 322 hotels in the United Kingdom, said that beginning Christmas Eve and lasting until Jan. 5, couples matching its criteria will get a one-night stay free of charge at its hotels in Great Britain, Ireland and Spain.

Alluding to the account of the first Christmas in Luke 2 which notes that Mary "brought forth her firstborn son ... and laid Him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn," Travelodge's operations director Jason Cotta noted, "The phrase 'no room in the inn' is something that resonates with us in the hotel business. Therefore, this year we have decided to evoke the true spirit of Christmas and invite Mary and Joseph couples as our guests."

A hotel chain spokesperson did specify that all couples would be required to provide proof of marriage and identity to take advantage of the deal.

Sandy Leckie, manager of Travelodge's inn at Covent Garden in London, noted there may not be any gold, frankincense or myrrh in the rooms, but "it's definitely more comfortable than a stable."

God's love transcends their ears

Deaf believers in Moscow experience gospel's message

By Erich Bridges
SBC International Mission Board

Moscow (BP)—For years, Valera Zhadan searched for someone to share his dream: a church for the deaf in Moscow.

His search ended the day he met Southern Baptist missionaries Kris and Frances Courson. Today, Zhadan stands as the third ordained deaf pastor in all of Russia, his church born in the crowded living room of the Coursons' Moscow apartment.

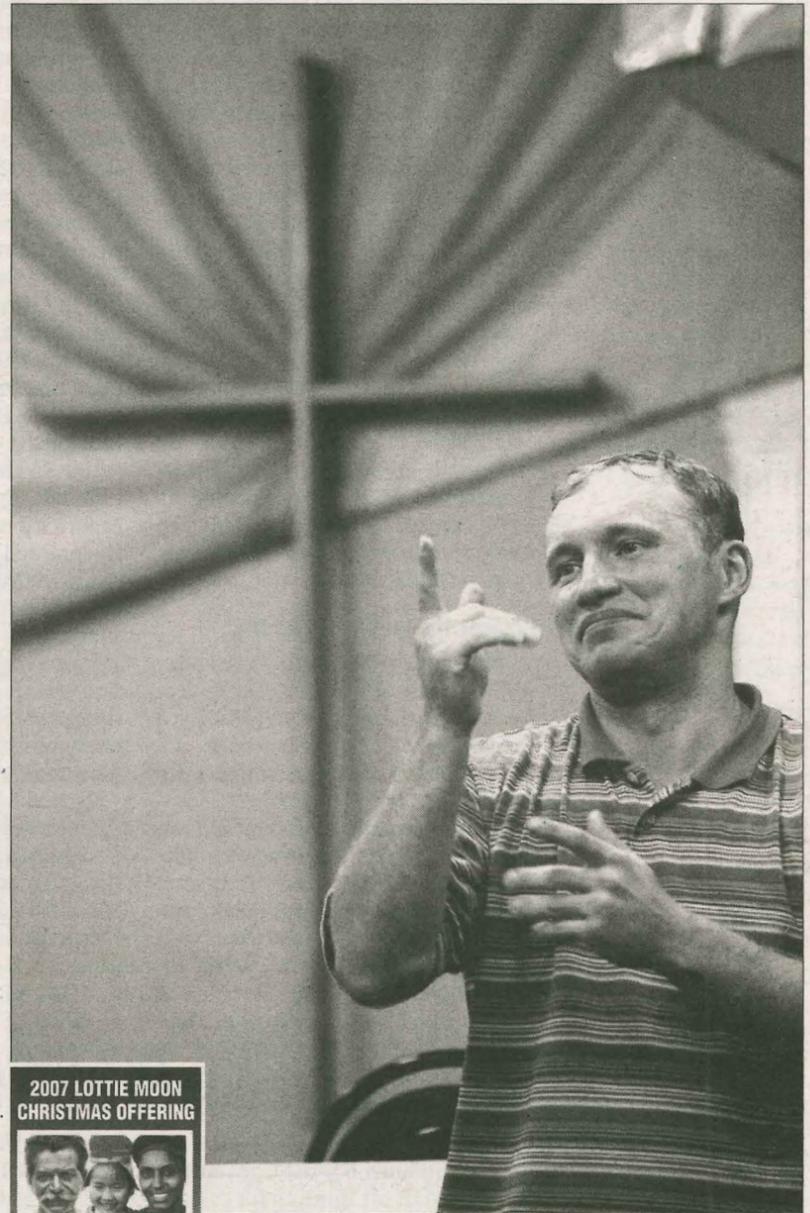
Deaf since childhood, Zhadan experienced all the frustrations of a group that has long suffered second-class status in Russia—and in the church. The deaf number about 42,000 in Moscow and some 800,000 nationwide, yet only a handful are evangelical believers. Little wonder, since few deaf Russians have an opportunity to "hear" the gospel in a form they can understand.

Attending hearing churches, "we felt there were two sets of rules: one for the hearing and one for the deaf," Zhadan explained.

"The deaf had to be passive participants in worship and the whole church experience. They would be falling asleep in the service because they might not understand. Music meant nothing to the deaf, and then there was three hours of preaching."

Nor were they allowed to teach or become leaders. Many deaf, hampered by a Russian educational system designed for the hearing, also struggle with reading. The Bible, in its classical Russian translation, presents a daunting challenge.

□ See Moscow's deaf ministry ... *Page 9*



SENSE OF BELONGING Now that he can be part of a deaf congregation in Moscow, this Russian believer said he now enjoys worship and fellowship. There are 42,000 deaf people in Moscow, which are among the many cultural groups that need to be reached for Jesus Christ in the Russian capital. (BP photo)

Oldham-Trimble Baptists make 'home for the holiday' possible

By Dannah Prather
Partnerships Editor

Crestwood—The house is the gift.

That was the message Eddie and Amy Buck conveyed to their five children in preparation for Christmas 2007. After nearly two years in a transitional housing program in Oldham County, the first-time homeowners moved into a spacious split-level house in Crestwood last spring—complete with mortgage payments.

The new arrangement does not permit many Christmas gifts, the couple said.

"We told them, 'It'll be slim,'" Mrs. Buck said, "but we'll be in the house." That's the icing on the cake."

After a series of challenges, the Bucks said Good News Homes, an organization initiated about 10 years ago by Baptists in Oldham and Trim-

ble counties, helped get them on firmer financial footing. Good News Homes assists families evicted because of financial hardship.

"We didn't have a disaster. It shouldn't have happened, but it did," Mrs. Buck said. "We got behind on rent, hoping that we would catch up at tax (refund) time but tax time didn't come."

Injured on the job, Buck was off work nine months. Workman's compensation was the family's only source of income. He fell behind in child support payments for his eldest daughters. When Buck returned to work, he tried to make up the deficit but the Internal Revenue Service garnished his tax refund for two consecutive years. Adding to the stress, the rent on their house increased.

Mrs. Buck remembers telling a friend, "We don't have money to

do anything. We can't pay our bills. We can't pay our rent." The friend, a caseworker for a school-based family assistance program, began making phone calls, searching for a way to help the Bucks.

Good News Homes provides transitional housing through 10 Baptist-built, three-bedroom apartments in LaGrange and Bedford.

Director Rose Boyd said most clients are single mothers who are out of work or are employed in low-income jobs. Many have left abusive husbands or boyfriends. Most clients stay in Good News Homes nine to 18 months, Boyd said. Rent is calculated on a family's ability to pay.

The apartments, case management, budgeting classes and other services provide families the opportunity to "clean up their credit, pay off debts, increase their earnings or

□ See A home for the holiday ... *Page 6*



WELCOME HOME Eddie and Amy Buck are celebrating their first Christmas as homeowners. With help from Good News Homes in Oldham County, they qualified for a mortgage through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Housing Service. (Photo by Dannah Prather)

Dated material. Please deliver by Wednesday, Dec. 19.

"This is not your father's North America."

North American Mission Board President Geoff Hammond

Leaders strategize to impact North America

By Mike Ebert
Baptist Press

Nashville (BP)—More than 700 Baptist leaders from 41 state conventions, LifeWay Christian Resources and the North American Mission Board met Dec. 3-6 in Nashville with the goal of finding more effective ways to partner in the effort to reach North America for Christ.

Leaders from the state conventions and SBC entities acknowledged the urgency Southern Baptists face as North America drifts toward a more secular mindset and becomes more spiritually diverse.

"This is not your father's North America," NAMB President Geoff Hammond told participants at the 2007 SBC State Conventions' Summit. "What used to be a melting pot has become a mixing pot. Cities like New York have 500 people groups represented. As Southern Baptists, having engaged only 35 of those groups is not enough."

Hammond called the meeting "historic," saying Southern Baptist forefathers would have expected today's Baptists to work together, even in the midst of different ministry responsibilities.

"Lower the walls a little bit"

"Every partnership has some walls," he said. "My prayer is that we'll lower the walls a little bit" as a result of the four-day gathering.

Hammond reiterated NAMB's primary focuses of sharing Christ, starting churches and sending missionaries, and he called on Southern Baptists to give added priority to the vast number of people groups now represented across North America as well as the ever-growing trend toward urbanization.

"We need more worldview stud-

ies, not just to do research, but to understand how these people think and how we can more effectively cross cultures," Hammond said.

LifeWay President Thom Rainer pledged his entity's support to the Great Commission task as well as serving Southern Baptists by producing resources with biblical depth and relevancy. "Relevancy presumes we are operating from a biblical foundation," he said. "We will not compromise the Bible in order to be relevant."

In multiple breakout sessions during the meeting, missionaries, state convention staff and those from the two SBC entities gathered in small groups to discuss challenges and brainstorm new ideas for how Southern Baptists can be more effective in evangelism, church planting, church health and leadership development. Those ideas were then compiled and presented to the leaders of NAMB, LifeWay and the state conventions.

Ed Stetzer, LifeWay's director of research, shared insights into North America's unchurched population. He painted a picture of a culture ready to discuss spiritual topics and tolerant of Christians who want to share their faith. While people are leery of organized religion, Stetzer said most are open to conversations about God and even agree with many of Christianity's fundamental doctrines.

Other topics at the meeting included reaching Muslims, sports evangelism, cross-cultural ministry, speaking and thinking missionally, and utilizing social media such as Facebook and MySpace for evangelism efforts.

"This may be the beginning of a Great Commission resurgence

among Southern Baptists," said Anthony Jordan, executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma. "Wouldn't that be an awesome thing? It is time."

Dennis Dawson, associate executive director overseeing missions for the Illinois Baptist State Association, said the week was "a really serious effort to do something we've wanted to do for a long time—have our NAMB folks, LifeWay folks and all of our state conventions working together for a common purpose. I'm taking back a new resolve to work better together in our state, with no silos and no barriers."

Rainer highlights "megatrends"

Rainer, in addressing the group, listed several "Megatrends in Church Health," including:

- The disappearance of the 18- to 24-year-old in church. Rainer said LifeWay Research has documented the dropout trends of this age group, and while the church has always seen a drop as young people transition from school to the workforce, "there are solutions emerging."

- The growth in the multi-venue and multi-campus church.

- The desire for deeper biblical doctrinal studies. "Those in our churches are asking for preaching with biblical depth in addition to life application," Rainer said.

- The slowdown in the growth rate of megachurches. "Not a decrease in the number of megachurches," Rainer clarified, "but a slowing in the rate of growth."

- The shortage of pastors. Seminary graduates "don't see themselves in rural, white collar or traditional churches," Rainer noted. "Some states are already seeing a crisis" among traditional churches.

Missouri leaders halt funding to Acts 29 Network

Jefferson City, Mo. (ABP)—A decision by Missouri Baptist Convention leaders to cut off funding for certain new church starts has set off a firestorm of protest and further widened a rift among conservative Baptists in the state.

MBC Executive Board members approved a measure at their Dec. 10 meeting to withdraw funding and other assistance to MBC church plants that are affiliated with the Acts 29 Network.

The motion directed convention staff members to stop working with, supporting or endorsing the church-planting network "in any manner at any time," effective Jan. 1. An amendment added the provision to direct "the (MBC) church planting department and other ministry departments to not provide Cooperative Program dollars toward those affiliated with the Acts 29 Network." The amended motion passed by a 28-10 vote.

The network has generated controversy since last year, when some conservatives accused an Acts 29-affiliated church start in St. Louis of endorsing alcohol consumption by holding a Bible study night in a local pub. They later accused the network of being riddled with similar churches. Acts 29 is a non-denominational association of so-called "new paradigm" congregations.

Micah Fries, pastor of Frederick Boulevard Baptist Church in St. Joseph, Mo., said he was "very upset" by the board's decision. "This is further evidence that our lip service given to church planting is just that, lip service, and not representative of a significant commitment to the act of planting new congregations and pushing back lostness," he wrote in his online blog.

"We're not talking about a liberal/conservative argument, either," he added. "This is a matter of differing opinions between theological conservatives. ... This decision is more evidence that we, as a convention, are moving from simply being biblical and conservative to being legalistic and exclusionary over non-essential issues."

Fries and other bloggers pointed out that several Southern Baptist leaders participate in the Acts 29 Network, including Ed Stetzer, senior director of the North American Mission Board's Center for Missional Research. Stetzer is a former Acts 29 Network board member.

MBC President Gerald Davidson said in a phone interview after the meeting, "Just to be real truthful, I don't know much about Acts 29. Alcohol was made to be the issue. ... That was one of the big issues, but I don't know if that was the real issue."

A report by a theological study committee appointed by the convention may have played into the board's decision as well, Davidson noted. He emphasized the board did not vote to adopt that report, but simply to "receive" it.

The study committee labeled the Acts 29 Network part of the emergent church movement. But network participants disagree with that characterization.

The report charges the emergent movement with de-emphasizing "systematic Christian doctrine and biblical theology," "intentional reluctance" to deal with "social, moral, ethical and political issues," "distrust of traditional values" and "levels of immaturity and even rebellion," among several other accusations.

Acts 29 Network director Scott Thomas, who attributed the MBC decision primarily to the issue of alcohol, emphasized the network is conservative and holds conservative views.

The organization's website emphasizes the network's evangelical identity and lists its basic beliefs. It notes that planted churches are asked to follow the guidelines set by their sponsoring denominational groups. If a denomination requires a pledge to abstain from alcohol, the church is asked to sign a pledge.

Alabama church rebuilds with new facility, new art

By Greg Garrison
Religion News Service

Centreville, Ala. (RNS)—The painting above the baptistery at Pleasant Sabine Baptist Church in Bibb County, Ala., gleams in the light as artist Sally Legg studies it.

"We are really proud," said Spurgeon Boddie, the senior deacon at Pleasant Sabine Baptist, admiring the painting.

The congregation struggled after arsonists burned the building to the ground last year, one of five rural churches torched the same night.

"People had started falling away, and now they're coming back," Boddie said. "If you don't have something steady, people stray away."

But since late summer, about 25 Pleasant Sabine members have worshipped together in their new sanctuary, looking straight toward Legg's artwork during every service.

"I've never done anything like this," said Legg, who has been painting professionally for 25 years. "They wanted John the Baptist baptizing Jesus with a dove descending."

Legg created the painting as part of Cathedral Church of the Advent's effort to help the church in its rebuilding effort. In addition to the artwork, Advent members contributed the metal roof, windows, water heater, a piano, an organ, paint, office supplies and \$25,000 cash, said Advent outreach assistant Carol Williams.

"They've done a beautiful job decorating," Williams said as she walked through Pleasant Sabine's new sanctuary. "This has been a long process."

While a few details remain, the rebuilding effort is essentially complete, Boddie said. But the church is in the process of calling a new pastor, so it has delayed any celebration ceremonies.

"This church has been here ever since 1881," said Boddie. "This is one of the little country churches. There used to be a pretty good settlement here."

On the night of Feb. 3, 2006, three college students from Birmingham set the church on fire. They are now serving prison sentences.

"I can forgive, but they still have to pay for their wrongdoing," Boddie said. "If they had just burned one church, that would have been bad enough."

In all, the three college students set fire to nine rural Alabama churches. Pleasant Sabine was the first congregation to build and move back in, with help from hundreds of volunteers and donors.

"These people here were hurting," Legg said. "It's made me more aware of the importance of these country churches."

Billy Compton named KBC's executive associate for CP

By Trennis Henderson
Editor

Louisville—Billy Compton, pastor of Severns Valley Baptist Church in Elizabethtown since 1996, has been named the Kentucky Baptist Convention's executive associate for Cooperative Program and resources effective Jan. 1.

Compton, who served as KBC president in 1994-1995, also was associate director of the KBC evangelism office in 1989-1992. He has chaired the KBC's committee on committees and committee on nominations and served as a trustee of Campbellsville University as well as a member of the Southern Baptist Convention committee on committees.

In his new position, Compton will be responsible for "leading Kentucky Baptists in developing a renewed commitment to understand and support Great Commission missions and ministries through the Cooperative Program, a passion for biblical stewardship and the development of other resources," according to the position description.

Severns Valley Church, which celebrated its 225th anniversary last year, is the KBC's highest cumulative contributor through the Cooperative Program, giving more than \$9 million since CP was established in 1925.

Mackey affirms Compton's skills

KBC Executive Director Bill Mackey told members of the KBC Mission Board's administrative committee that Compton "has the experience, respect, call of God, knowledge of KBC missions and ministries, and relational and communication skills that are ideal for this unique ministry."

"We're grateful for his commit-

ment," Mackey told board members. "We look forward to what God is going to do through His ministry."

Prior to the Mission Board's Dec. 10 vote to elect him to the new position, Compton said, "I am honored and privileged by the invitation of Dr. Bill Mackey to serve in this role."

Describing himself as "a product of Kentucky Baptists," Compton added, "I'm humbled to stand before you today to receive a new assignment that I have a passion for and that I have a vision to complete for all of us to realize that together everyone can achieve more."

By "joining our hands and hearts together" as Kentucky Baptists, Compton said, "we can continue to impact the world in a way that makes eternal differences."

Mackey noted that the groundwork for the new position began with the KBC Mission Study Committee's 2003 report which included a recommendation to "significantly increase the level of education and promotion in order to communicate with every new believer and church" about the role of biblical stewardship and the Cooperative Program in reaching people with the gospel of Christ.

Compton chaired a special Cooperative Program study committee which presented a four-point proposal approved by the Mission Board in May 2006. Among the recommendations was to "employ a CP strategist and ministry assistant during the 2007-2008 fiscal year," with the strategist's job description to also include responsibilities in stewardship and legacy giving.

The proposal resulted in establishing the position of executive as-

sociate for Cooperative Program and resources.

Compton will begin his new role at a time when the percentage of undesignated receipts Kentucky Baptist churches are giving through the Cooperative Program has dropped from more than 10 percent a decade ago to 7.24 percent last year. While 2006-2007 CP gifts set a giving record, the fiscal year total fell slightly below budget.

In addition to serving as pastor of Severns Valley Church, Compton previously was pastor of First Baptist Church of Mount Washington, Living Hope Baptist Church in Bowling Green, Calvary Baptist Church in Glasgow, Pleasant Valley Baptist Church in Horse Cave, Antioch Baptist Church in Center and Hardyville Baptist Church. He is a graduate of Campbellsville University, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Fuller Theological Seminary.

His wife, Sue Ann, is a faculty member at the University of Louisville.

Partnerships, Crossover funding

In other business, Mission Board members:

- Established two new board-designated funds—one to fund projects for the KBC's three-year missions partnership with Baptists in Maryland/Delaware beginning in January and the other to help plan, promote and conduct Crossover Louisville evangelistic projects in conjunction with the SBC annual meeting in Louisville in June 2009.

- Approved the distribution of more than \$800,000 in year-end funds from unspent budget funds



Billy Compton

Hulette, pastor of Woodhaven Baptist Church, dies at 74

Burlington—W.D. Hulette, pastor of Woodhaven Baptist Church in Burlington, died Dec. 10. He was 74.

Hulette served as pastor of several Kentucky Baptist churches during his 55 years in the ministry. He had been pastor of Woodhaven Baptist Church since 1983.

Hulette also served at First Twelve Mile Baptist Church in California and Bullittsburg Baptist Church in Petersburg, according to a release from Northern Kentucky Baptist Association.

"Church had been his life," Hulette's wife of 53 years, Elizabeth, told the Kentucky Post. "He enjoyed his career in the church."

Hulette is survived by his wife, two daughters and three grandchildren. His funeral service was held Dec. 15 in Burlington.

Appalachian Regional Ministry director Barker shifts to NAMB

By Drew Nichter
News Director

Louisville—Bill Barker, director of Appalachian Regional Ministry, will leave the Kentucky Baptist Convention staff and join the Southern Baptist North American Mission Board staff in the same role effective Jan. 1.

Barker, who has directed ARM since 2001, joined the KBC in 2005 when the 10-state ministry partnership shifted its headquarters from West Virginia to Kentucky.

ARM works in areas of Appalachia spanning 10 states from Pennsylvania to Georgia. The ministry also serves the Appalachian regions of Tennessee, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Ohio and Maryland.

Since 2005, one-third of ARM's funding has come from the KBC. The other two-thirds has been supplied by NAMB and the 11 partnership conventions within the 10 states, including both Virginia Baptist conventions.

Beginning Jan. 1, NAMB will fund 100 percent of Barker's salary and travel outside of the Appalachian region. The 11 partnering conventions, including Kentucky, will supply program money to fund Barker's work and travel within Appalachia.

Barker noted that the change in funding will result in a reduction

of available ministry funds by about one-third.

"So we're going to have to run a leaner, meaner operation," he added.

Despite the cutback, ARM's director said he expects the ministry to continue its success in working among the Appalachian population.

He added that the affiliation with NAMB on the national level will bring a "new level of credibility" to ARM's work in the region.

ARM "has now been recognized on a national level by Southern Baptists, which will open up more doors for me in the mountains," he explained.

Randy Jones, leader of the KBC's missions growth team, has served as Barker's supervisor since 2005. Jones noted that he and other missions leaders have been working with NAMB for the past several years to establish this arrangement, which Jones described as "outside the box."

He applauded Barker's work in the mountains, noting that he has done "a whole lot with evangelism in the small mountain church."

"He simplifies it, makes it understandable and puts it in mountain talk," Jones added.

Barker returned the affirmation, noting that the support of Kentucky Baptists "freed me up to do what I

needed to do."

He estimated that since 2005, ARM has "mobilized directly or indirectly" more than 160,000 volunteers. That is half of the total number of volunteers the ministry has assembled in its first nine years of operation, Barker pointed out.

He also said approximately 40 percent of all volunteers who have come through ARM did work in Eastern Kentucky, adding that most projects are being picked up even before the organization can post them.

Through the surge in volunteerism, Barker noted that more than a dozen church buildings have been constructed. In 2007 alone, five ministry centers have been opened in the Appalachian region, including three in Kentucky.

Outside of the state, Barker said he is excited about ministry efforts in Pennsylvania, calling it an area of "primary focus."

ARM recently established a partnership between the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina and an area of 31 counties in east central Pennsylvania. The North Carolina convention will soon begin work on several ministry projects in that region.

"Three years ago, we had very few volunteers going in there," Barker noted. The partnership "has been like water after a long drought."



Jones, who was part of the team that helped form ARM in 1999, said Barker's tireless work in Appalachia has grown the ministry "bigger than we ever imagined."

Barker "has had the personality, the commitment, the motivation ... to put a face on missions in the mountains," Jones added.

Barker predicted that the support of NAMB and recognition of Southern Baptists will help sustain the trust he has developed in the last six years. But he added that his work might never have been possible if not for the support of Kentucky Baptists.

"I'm personally indebted to (KBC Executive Director) Bill Mackey for his vision and passion to keep Appalachian Regional Ministry alive," Barker declared. "Kentucky has opened doors for us to do ministry that were not open before."

PRAYERFUL SEND-OFF

Kentucky Baptist Convention President Bill Henard (right) prays for Appalachian Regional Ministry director Bill Barker (second from right) during last week's KBC Mission Board meeting. Joining them in prayer are (from left) KBC Executive Director Bill Mackey and KBC missions growth team leader Randy Jones. (KBC photo by Brenda Smith)

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

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Celebrate a debt-free Christmas

By Howard Dayton

Gainesville, Ga. (BP)—From Oct. 31 onward it's impossible to forget that Christmas is coming. Before Thanksgiving, the red-coated man with the white beard and bag of toys is seen in stores and by mid-December, most homes are decorated, inside and out, with Christmas trees and lights.

However, the real Christmas story is found in the opening chapters of Matthew and Luke. It is about the earthly birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, He lived and ministered on earth, and then died and arose again—the promised Messiah. Jesus came as the Savior of all, and identifies Himself with every racial group, every culture and every society.

Until a couple of centuries ago, in countries where it was observed, Christmas was a noncommercial religious holiday. Gifts may have been exchanged on New Year's Day, but most gifts associated with Christmas were limited to feeding the poor or special gifts to help pastors, teachers and missionaries.

During the 1800s Christmas in America was primarily a time for feasting, going to church and giving to the poor and needy. Giving small gifts to children was occasionally included in the celebration, but it was considered of secondary importance.

Then, in the prosperity of the 1950s, expensive gifts, giving more than one gift per person, giving gifts to adults as well as to children, and a month-long shopping season became prevalent.

Stress detracts from season

Today, the hurry and scurry of shopping, spending and worrying is typical of a November and December for most Americans. Christmas should be a time of family togetherness, sharing in the needs of others—not an occasion for anxiety

and stress.

Christmas today is a far cry from the tranquil manger scene that welcomed Christ into the world some 2,000 years ago. Consider the contrasts of:

COMMENTARY

■ The solitude of the manager vs. today's Christmas rush.

■ God's mercy in sending His Son vs. the rude selfishness of holiday shoppers.

■ The free gift of salvation vs. the forced giving of commercialization.

■ Adoration of the newborn King vs. commitments that distract us from worship.

■ The joyful anticipation of the shepherds vs. the dread of the holiday hoopla.

Certainly, no Christian intentionally seeks to lose the significance of the Christmas season, but the excesses of gift-giving and the rushing about seem to drain Christians of their joy. This is especially true when trying to combine added obligations of the season with being gracious, sensitive, creative, compassionate and caring—and trying to have enough money left after Christmas to be able to buy groceries in January.

Unfortunately, for many people in today's society, this holy season has become a gift-buying marathon. Some Christians go into debt to buy costly gifts they can't afford and their families don't need. Often, families spend hundreds of dollars more than they spent the previous year—resulting in debt, stress and worry.

We need to shift our emphasis from the shopping cart back to the manger as the reason for the season. Christmas isn't the time to throw caution to the wind and allow a well-meaning generous spirit to dictate spending. Instead, it's the time to honor the One whose birthday we celebrate and be good financial stewards of all He has entrusted to us.

Exchanging meaningful, well-planned presents with friends and relatives can be an important part of

Christmas; but we should never let ourselves feel pressured into buying gifts we can't afford under the guise of showing love for others.

Gather your family together and pray about the amount of money that should be spent for Christmas. Personalize a holiday spending budget that fits your family's finances, keep track of all purchases and be committed to spend no more than the amount budgeted.

Mail all out-of-town gifts well in advance to avoid rush delivery charges. Have a family service project and purchase food or toys for needy families. Commit to give at least a tithe from the amount you've budgeted for Christmas to needy causes and for the spread of the gospel (see Matthew 25:34-40).

Encourage practical gifts

Ask grandparents for practical gifts for the children instead of more toys. That could mean money for music lessons, athletic uniforms, tutoring or bank CDs for future educational needs.

The best gift parents can give children is love and time. But too often after the holidays have passed, parents have to work overtime, taking time away from their children, just to pay for accumulated Christmas debt.

With this year's Christmas season in full swing, remember that Christmas gift purchases and gift giving are totally under your control. You choose to buy or not to buy, to go into debt or not.

There's nothing wrong with giving gifts at Christmas. Just be careful not to indulge, and don't divert your attention from Christ to material things. Stamp out Christmas credit, because as bad as commercialized Christmas is, commercialized Christmas on credit is even worse.

Plan ahead and set a realistic budget, stick to it, and have a Christmas focused on Christ and not on a financial crisis.

Howard Dayton is co-founder of Crown Financial Ministries and host of Crown's radio program, "Money Matters"

Rejoice in the Lord this Christmas season

Because of the birth, life, atoning death on the cross and resurrection of Jesus, we can know the joy of His salvation and of service in His name. We can join with the Apostle Paul in thanksgiving for partnerships in Christ's work, for God's faithfulness and for the opportunity of experiencing His peace (Philippians 4:4-7).

In Philippians, Paul commended Christians to rejoice despite circumstances (he was in prison), problems in the church, religious persecution and other obstacles. He said joy is possible because we rejoice in the Lord and not in our circumstances.

We rejoice through salvation in Jesus Christ. The Philippian jailer (Acts 16:34) was filled with joy because he and his whole family had come to believe in God. Paul calls those who have come to faith his "joy and crown" (Philippians 4:1). Luke 15:7 records that there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner

who repents than over 99 just persons who need no repentance.

Joy also comes because of the coming of the Savior. The Christmas announcement was all about great joy. "And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11).

Serving Christ also brings joy. In Philippians 1:18, Paul rejoiced because the gospel was spreading. In chapter 2, verse 17, he rejoiced because he had the honor to pour out his life in sacrifice to the Lord. During this Christmas season, I am especially reminded of our international missionaries who are pouring out their lives far away from their families.

In addition to expressing these truths about joy, Paul also expressed thanks for friendship in Christ (Philippians 1:3), for fellowship in

GIVING

Valuable window of opportunity about to close

By Laurie Valentine

The Pension Protection Act federal tax law changes enacted in August 2006 included the ability to use potentially taxable Individual Retirement Account funds to make charitable gifts. Eligible IRA owners had a very short window of time to take advantage of this potentially valuable opportunity—from Aug. 17, 2006, through Dec. 31, 2007.

Generally, IRA owners must report distributions out of the IRA as income. A donation of an IRA distribution to charity does entitle the IRA owner to a charitable income tax deduction (if deductions are itemized). However, the increase in income and restrictions on the amount of charitable gifts that may be deducted in a given year may result in the IRA withdrawal followed by a charitable gift not being a "wash" for federal income tax purposes.

The PPA tax law change permits a person who is at least age 70 and a half to make tax-free gifts in any amount up to a total of \$100,000 from a traditional or Roth IRA to qualified charities. The IRA owner is not entitled to a charitable income tax deduction for the qualified charitable distributions, but such distributions are not included in the IRA owner's income.

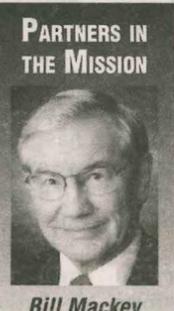
The distributions must be made directly from the IRA trustee to the qualified charitable organization. Distributions from 401(k), 403(b) or other types of retirement accounts are not eligible for this special treatment.

Your church and our KBC and SBC agencies and institutions are "qualified charitable organizations." Private foundations and donor-advised funds are not.

While qualified charitable IRA distributions are not included in the donor's income for income tax purposes, they are treated as part of the donor's required minimum distributions. Therefore, those over age 70 and a half who must take required minimum distributions from an IRA and plan to make contributions to charity should strongly consider taking advantage of the ability to use their IRA as the source of making those gifts this year.

For those age 70 and a half with IRA assets, make sure you take a look out the "window of opportunity" provided by the PPA before it closes on Dec. 31, 2007.

Laurie Valentine is trust counsel for the Kentucky Baptist Foundation



Bill Mackey

Christ's work (Philippians 1:5), and for God's faithfulness in our lives (Philippians 1:6).

I am grateful for the partnership in the gospel that Kentucky Baptists, Kentucky Baptist Convention staff and KBC ministries experience together and with association and Southern Baptist Convention missions and ministries. I rejoice and praise God for a partnership that enables the churches to do more together than they could ever do separately.

God promises peace that passes understanding. "Be careful (anxious) for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God," Paul tells the Philippians. "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7).

May the joy of God's salvation and peace fill your thoughts, words and actions during this Christmas season!

Bill Mackey is executive director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention

Managing holiday stress can add joy to Christmas season

Q: How can I better manage the inevitable stress of the holiday season? I get so tired of all the activity that I hardly enjoy myself.

A primary vulnerability around the holidays is doing too much. Along with normal routines and responsibilities, we add more, often without considering eliminating any of our regular activities.

CHRISTMAS Such expectations can be unreasonable. To help manage your stress, create balance for yourself. Set some personal limits and stick to them. You likely will enjoy more of those events and activities you choose to do.

Balance can be created by suspending certain routine activities until after the holidays. Rather than participating in activities every night of the week or every weekend, block out evenings and portions of weekends to rest and recharge. Make exercise a priority as if it is a prescribed medication you must take. The physiological benefits are essential since stress can have harmful effects on your body such as headaches, back pain, muscle tension, illness and difficulty sleeping.

Here are a few additional ways to manage holiday stress:

- Keep a prayer journal to process your experience. Reflection helps you focus and slow down.
- Talk in positive ways to yourself and to others.
- Eat regular meals. Your body needs healthy fuel to meet the extra demands.
- Rest. Get the sleep your body needs.
- Take breaks, even short ones. Slow your breathing, think positively, listen to soothing music and relax your body.

If you read this and say, "I don't have time to do that," then pause and think again. Christ provided an excellent model for stress management. He spent time with small groups of close friends and large gatherings. He spent time alone and time with His Father. Pay attention and seek balance for yourself this Christmas season.—Valerie Vincent

Q: How can I help my children deal with things that distract from the real meaning of Christmas?

Here's a fun idea for helping your children (and perhaps your entire family) deal with the distractions that surround the Christmas season.

PARENTING You will need to enlist a helper. Provide him or her with a variety of things that make sudden, loud noises: a balloon that can be popped; pots and pans that can be banged together; a whistle, etc. Hide your helper and props in a separate room.

Gather your children and tell them that you are going to read a familiar story from the Bible. Warn them that while you are reading, some strange things may happen. Tell them that their job is to see if they can keep their eyes on you and keep listening to the story no matter what else happens. Open your Bible and read the Christmas story from Luke 2:1-11. As you read, have your helper sound off!

When you have finished, ask if it was hard to hear the story with all of the distractions. Explain that during the Christmas season, there are lots of things that will try to distract us from the real meaning of Christmas and make it hard to hear and pay attention to the story of Jesus. Ask if they can think what some of these things might be. A list could include parties, shopping, music, decorations food and travel.

Decide that as a family you are not going to be distracted. As the holidays unfold, make a game out of noticing the difference between things that distract from the meaning of Christmas and those that get it right.—David Garrard

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'Twas the day after Christmas

'Twas the day after Christmas;
Oh my, how time flies!
Harried clerks heard folks shouting:
"Wrong color!" "Wrong size!"
The stockings and gift bags were strewn
everywhere.
Oh! Santa was long gone—at least for this
year.
The children were grumpy; how their
tummies did ache
From sugarplums, pecan pie and red
velvet cake.
With Mom on the couch and me in the
recliner
Surely a quick nap would help us feel
finer.

Amid my nap-dream, there arose a commotion.
My brain started spinning with yuletide emotion.
I saw a small stable where cattle were bedded.
I wondered just where this dream sequence was
headed.
When what to my sleep-laden eyes should appear
But a vision of the Christ Child drawing near.
He grew strong and tall as He strode past the manger
Toward rejection by man and death as a stranger.
He was baptized by John, then recruited 12 guys
Whom He urged to be faithful and not
compromise.
Pete, John, Jim and Andy; Phil, Tom, Bart and
Matthew;
James, Thad, Judas, Simon—in this dream—were
His crew.
He worked many miracles—too many to count.
Those once deaf, blind and lame found a
life-healing fount.
Next came Gethsemane and Calvary's cross;
His perfect blood was spilled to save us from loss.

My dream flew fast-forward to the first Easter morn
When my Savior arose and man's hope was reborn.

When we turn in repentance and trust
Jesus' name,
The reward that we gain outshines
earth's wealth or fame.
The babe in the manger—the true King
of Kings
Now calls us to focus on eternal things.
The life that He offers is truly abundant;
It's great, grand, glorious—and that's not
redundant.
He calls us to witness, to worship, to pray.
Oh, what a dream I dreamed on that
post-Christmas day.

As I watched and listened, Christ rose out of sight
With a promise to return some day or some night.
"I go to prepare a place for you," my Lord said.
"Make certain that others are taught,
led and fed."
I yawned and I stretched as my dream came to a close
Then a strange shiver flew from my head to
my toes.
I gazed at the remnants of our holiday fun,
Reminded of the season's real reason—God's Son.
For it's not in the gifts, decorations or food
That we truly discover a Christmas-y mood.
The answer is found in the Gift we receive
When we bow at the foot of the cross and believe
That the tiny Christ Child born in old Bethlehem
Is the Alpha, Omega—eternal I AM.
It's the day after Christmas; what will you do?
Accept Him, reject Him or just fill a pew?
I pray you discover the true Christmas Light
Who offers eternal peace, joy and delight.

Reprinted from Dec. 26, 2000, issue of the Western Recorder

STRAIGHT
FROM THE
EDITOR



Trennis Henderson

The ghosts of atheism past, present & future

By Dick Staub

Seattle (RNS)—And lo, I awakened from a dream during this most blessed Christmas season.

Three Wise Men named Richard Dawkins ("The God Delusion"), Sam Harris ("The End of Faith") and Christopher Hitchens ("God Is Not Great") traveled from afar to announce their tidings of great joy—there is no God, no king to rule over us, there is only us.

And suddenly, there was a bright light from the East, telling a tale from the wintry north, announcing this same good news to children. There is a world beyond this one, a world where free will reigns and everyone does what is right in his or her own eyes. There is no dark, sinister authoritarian Magisterium to dictate belief, nor are we ruled by parents or religious zealots.

In this magic place, we trust our fates to an inanimate golden object, a compass called an alethiometer. It does not engage our logic but miraculously reveals the truth through the alignment of a few icons on its watch-like face. The compass is particularly useful if you are the child prophesied by the witches long ago. Such a child will throw off the rule of authority and submit only to what is revealed by the magic Golden Compass.

Such miracles in a godless world, thought I.

And then I heard the voice of Philip Pullman, the man who created the universe of "The Golden Compass." He spoke of his anger at C.S.

Lewis for using the "Chronicles of Narnia" to smuggle belief into fantasy literature. I heard him say he would do for children's disbelief what Lewis did for their belief. I recalled his saying things in my waking hours: "I am all for the death of

God," and "My books are about killing God." He wasn't finished. "I am of the devil's party and I know it," and "I'm trying to undermine the basis of Christian belief." Is this authoritarian adult trying to control children's thinking? I wondered. Is he the new Magisterium?

I wondered at the passion of these men—Dawkins, Harris, Hitchens and Pullman. I marveled at their creative, imaginative leaps of faith, at their skilled writing and at the workings of their minds. I wondered, as did G.K. Chesterton, if the worst moment for these atheists is when they are really thankful and have nobody to thank.

And then I heard a voice—could it be the voice of reason?—crying out. "Fear not!" the voice said. "Nothing in the 'new atheism' is that new, novel or different from the old atheism."

My mind wandered back to my senior year of high school, in 1966, when Time magazine asked: "Is God Dead?" It caused a great furor and then faded away.

I remembered reading Nietzsche, who announced with a flourish that "God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him." I remembered the graffiti on a brick wall at Cal Berkeley—"God is dead, Ni-

etzsche," followed by "Nietzsche is dead, God."

And then in my dream I heard another voice—a British philosopher from Oxford named Anthony Flew. After years of advocating atheism, he concluded there must be a God, and wrote about it in "There is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind."

I remembered hearing Flew two years ago in Oxford, when he was asked if he had ever met C.S. Lewis, who in 1930 made the journey from atheist to theist to Christian.

Flew shared that as an Oxford student, he and his friends would go for drinks at the "Bird and Baby" pub in Oxford, and would sit as close as they could to the "inklings"—Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, Hugo Dyson and other literary types who were also Christian. Flew was taken by their cheerful disputation, their witty repartee, their willingness to take on any idea and consider it from every angle. In short, he was awed by their intelligence, their comprehensive knowledge and fearlessness in the face of argumentation.

These men of good will had sought the truth and found it, and the truth had set them free. They found this truth—not by placing blind faith in an alethiometer, nor in an authoritarian religious bureaucracy—but in a Child who was a Savior and King, born in a manger in Bethlehem.

And then I heard a voice in my dream say: "Wise men still seek Him."

Dick Staub is the author of "The Culturally Savvy Christian"

A home for the holiday

Good News Homes provides families a place to prepare for healthy financial future

"Often (society) waits to give assistance to people when they are drowning. Why not go back up river and keep them from falling in?"

Rick Lucas, director of missions for Oldham-Trimble Baptist Association

Continued from page 1

get a better job," Boyd said. "Whatever they need to do to get into permanent housing."

The Bucks emphasize that their situation was less dire than most because Buck was employed full-time in a good-paying job. Good News Homes was a port in their financial storm, giving them time to pay their debts and develop skills to better prepare for the future.

Rick Lucas, director of missions for Oldham-Trimble Baptist Association, said because families such as the Bucks have an income and ready transportation they might not qualify for government assistance. He said Good News Homes helps people who might otherwise fall through the cracks.

"Often (society) waits to give assistance to people when they are drowning," Lucas said. "Why not go back up river and keep them from falling in?"

In the mid-1990s, Lucas and other leaders of the association sought out community leaders, some from government agencies and social service organizations, and asked them their impressions about the work of Baptists in the Oldham-Trimble area.

"Many of those leaders did not see the direct impact of the association and its churches on their area of service," Lucas said. As the association continued its strategic planning, leaders identified several needs they thought Baptists could help meet. "One of those was the housing ministry," Lucas said.

Locals often are surprised to learn there are homeless people in Oldham and Trimble counties, Boyd said.

Rural homeless people "generally are not on the street," she said. "They move from place to place, staying with relatives, even sleeping in their cars."

Initially the association established a shelter, Lucas said. A few



A HOME FOR CHRISTMAS Instead of a spacious home in Crestwood, last year the Buck family Christmas tree was in a three-bedroom, one-bathroom apartment in LaGrange provided by Good News Homes. Seated in front from left: Kelsie, 12; Austin, 7; Miranda, 6; and Jenna, 5. Behind them from left: Brittany, 13; Eddie and Amy. (Photo by Dannah Prather)

years later, they broke ground on the first apartment structure. "There's no telling how many hundreds of hours our Baptist Builders put in ... building those quadraplexes."

As Boyd developed relationships with other government and social service agencies, Good News Homes began offering assistance to families in crisis, even when the apartments were filled. This year about 40 people have been assisted through case management services and referrals

to other programs.

Oldham-Trimble Baptists continue to support Good News Homes in a variety of ways, as chaplains and mentors to apartment residents, small-group leaders, class facilitators and sponsors for holidays and clients' birthdays. Local Baptists also support a food pantry and infant resource program.

With meticulous detail, Buck talked with creditors, made payments and took other steps to clean

up their credit history. He said many people believe that home ownership is out of their reach but if they investigate lending options and ask for help, it might be possible. "I think it would make a lot of difference for a lot of people," he said.

Mrs. Buck said she is thankful she decided to ask for assistance, and that Good News Homes was there. "I believed that if I asked for help, somebody, somewhere was going to help us."

Cumberlands' Mountain Outreach holds annual Holiday Gift Day

Emlyn—The University of the Cumberlands' Mountain Outreach ministry flung open its warehouse doors Dec. 8 for the program's annual Holiday Gift Day in Whitley County.

Not only were the building's doors opened, but so were the hearts of the 150 volunteers who

worked long hours and the individuals and organizations that contributed thousands of dollars in donations.

Through their generosity, more than 1,000 people from the community poured into the warehouse throughout the day choosing from a

wide range of toys, clothing, household items and food.

Volunteers included students and faculty from University of the Cumberlands, as well as volunteers from several churches around the state and from Georgia.

"The volunteers brought toys, clothes, Bibles and money with them," said Marc Hensley, director of Mountain Outreach. "They are not just here to work."

"Mountain Outreach is so blessed to have such an outpouring of help and assistance from all over the southeastern United States," Hensley added, "but what is more important is that the community has responded fantastically with both physical labor and financial support for this ministry; this is evident here today."

Thanks to a donation of eight tons of food, representatives from the Christian organization Feed the Children were able to provide a box of food to each family to go along with their gifts. Jerry Thomas with the organization also assist-

ed Mountain Outreach station workers in handling the hundreds of people served.

In order to pinpoint more precise demographics, a new system of pre-registration was implemented at this year's Holiday Gift Day. Each family provided proof of income and number and ages of children, so the dollars spent on toys and clothes were better economized.

Another first for the event was the participation of Cumberlands' student volunteers from the Kentucky Education Association Student Program, who occupied the children with reading, writing and games, leaving parents free to peruse the merchandise.

In addition to the annual Holiday Gift Day, the Mountain Outreach ministry builds and repairs homes for underprivileged families in southeastern Kentucky.

Since it began in 1982, Mountain Outreach has constructed and repaired more than 125 homes for members of the surrounding communities.



SEASON OF GIVING A Mountain Outreach volunteer hands out toys during the program's annual Holiday Gift Day in Emlyn Dec. 8. As many as 150 volunteers, most from University of the Cumberlands, participated in the event. (Photo by Nancy Phelps)

Pastor realizes 'vision' for helping families

Hanson transforms Winchester factory into needed Family Development Center

By Ken Walker
State Correspondent

Winchester—Christmas came early this year for the former Kentucky Baptist pastor who is devoted to making the Family Development Center in Winchester a regional ministry hub.

The multi-faceted operation held its grand opening Dec. 1, marking the end of a long renovation process after director Dale Hanson discovered the former clothing factory was available for ministry purposes.

"I've had a heart and a vision for the project since it started," said Hanson, who resigned as pastor of Ephesus Baptist Church nearly three months ago to spend all of his working hours on center business.

"We will have receiving and distribution space like nobody else is going to have," he added. "There's not that many 92,000-square-foot buildings sitting around."

"It's causing quite a bit of excitement in Clark County," said Jim Smith, director of missions for Boones Creek Baptist Association. "I'm looking forward to the many ministries that can be accomplished there."

"Dale Hanson's done a wonderful thing," added Tom Goebel, a member of Central Baptist Church and co-owner of the building. "His vision to keep that thing going has been the driving force. This is a major shot in the arm for Winchester."

Serving many needs

Currently operating at the center are a 3,500-square-foot thrift store, a fitness center, Angel Food Ministries (a low-cost food distribution effort), a 72-seat chapel and a day care center.

The latter will move from the first floor to the second after its completion and add services for adults with Alzheimer's disease or other medical problems.

In addition, a non-profit commu-



SAY CHEESE Children attending the Family Development Center's day care program line the hallway after finishing lunch. The children's day care center currently is housed in the building's administrative offices. Once construction is completed, the day care program will move to its permanent home on the facility's second floor. It will also be expanded to include adult day care facilities. (Photos by Drew Nichter)

nity agency recently completed its first "Financial Peace University" at the center. The classes are based on materials by financial author Dave Ramsey, with the next session starting in mid-January.

Also planned for the second floor are a 24-station computer lab, a banquet hall and kitchen, and nine classrooms for Bible studies, parenting and other classes.

"Anything you can imagine that will help develop families is what we want to use the classrooms for," Hanson noted.

Since the facility is partially finished, the Winchester Covenant Church is meeting on the second floor after spending a few weeks in the first-floor chapel.

Hanson said he hopes to see another congregation meet in the chapel, although he scrapped plans for an Hispanic mission there after Central Baptist organized one.

"We're not trying to reinvent what somebody else is doing," the director explained.

The first floor of the spacious building includes the Bobby Castle Memorial Hall, named for an Assemblies of God pastor who helped design many of the center's ministries. Castle died last spring after contracting an illness the previous summer.

Most recently a suit factory, the

facility sat empty for several years until Hanson and the ministry he leads—People Helping People—moved into the space in February of 2005.

Slowly renovating the building while acting as an informal distribution point, last year the center gave away more than \$100,000 of new furniture donated by various companies.

Hanson said it dispensed an equivalent amount of used furniture and appliances and items donated by individuals.

Kentucky Baptist connection

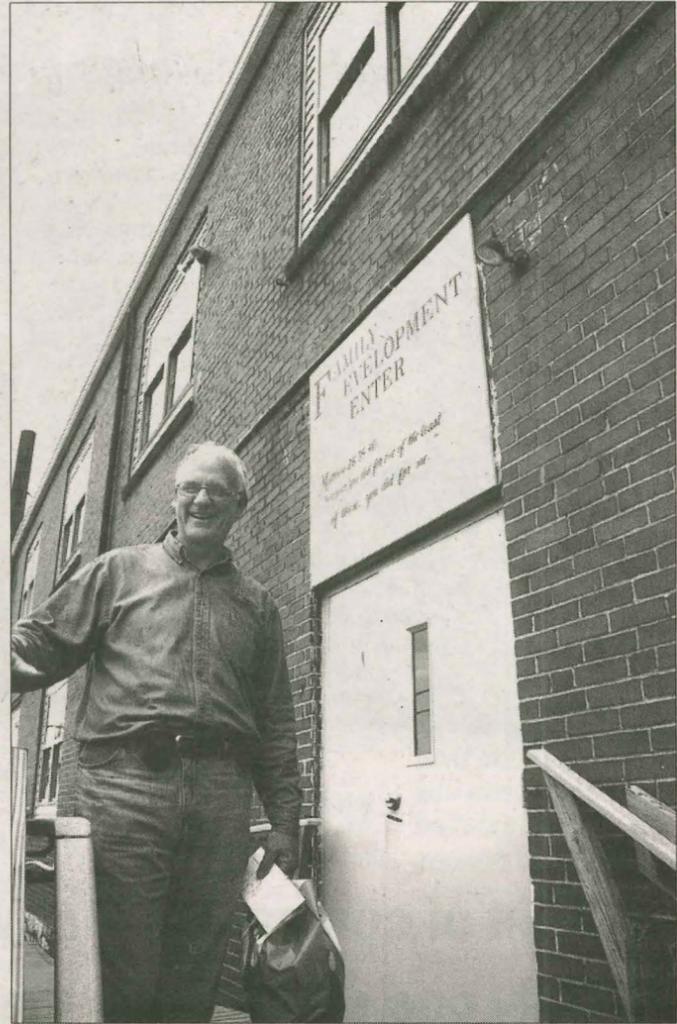
While People Helping People is inter-denominational, the center has strong Kentucky Baptist ties.

"We've got a lot of Baptist folks involved," Hanson noted. "One father-and-son team have been at every work day and saved us thousands of dollars on electrical work."

Hanson estimated 22 of the 30 churches in Boones Creek Association have sent members to various workdays.

Last year Kentucky's Baptist Men on Mission secured the center a 24-foot walk-in freezer, which uses include storing food boxes for needy families.

Baptist Men have also provided a forklift, a truck and a trailer to help



volunteers with distribution of food, clothing, furniture and other goods.

Nearly 4,000 mattresses have found their way to Eastern Kentucky residents, thanks to the facility's storage capabilities and networking with other ministries in the region.

Effective operation

Among the 10 most active Kentucky Baptist ministry centers in the state, the Winchester operation receives high marks from KBC Baptist Men's Director Randy Foster.

"It's the most businesslike and best organized one in its scope," Foster said.

Another Kentucky Baptist involved in the center is Os Hollon of Erlanger, in the center is Os Hollon of Erlanger, a member of First Baptist Church of Fort Thomas. "I can envision, as Dale has for a long while, what the Lord will do with this."

Since Winchester is less than 20 miles east of Lexington, Hanson noted many people have wondered what kind of needs can exist in a suburban bedroom community.

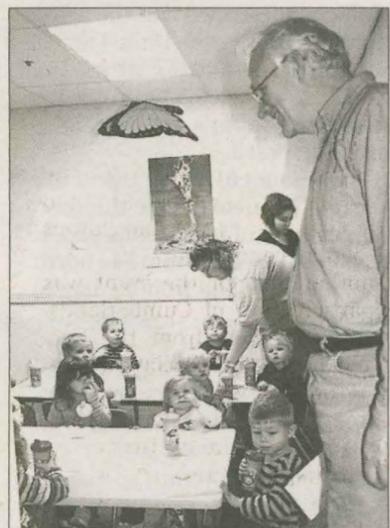
However, he explained that is a misconception, as shown by the local social service agency providing food, clothing and rent assistance to more than 1,300 families a month.

"The needs are definitely here," Hanson emphasized. "Winchester is in the furthest western county in the eastern Kentucky region. As such, we have all the problems you have in Appalachia. We have one of the highest (high school) drop-out rates, teen pregnancy rates and unemployment."

Fortunately, it also has a man like Dale Hanson with the vision to start the Family Development Center.

WHAT'S OLD IS NEW

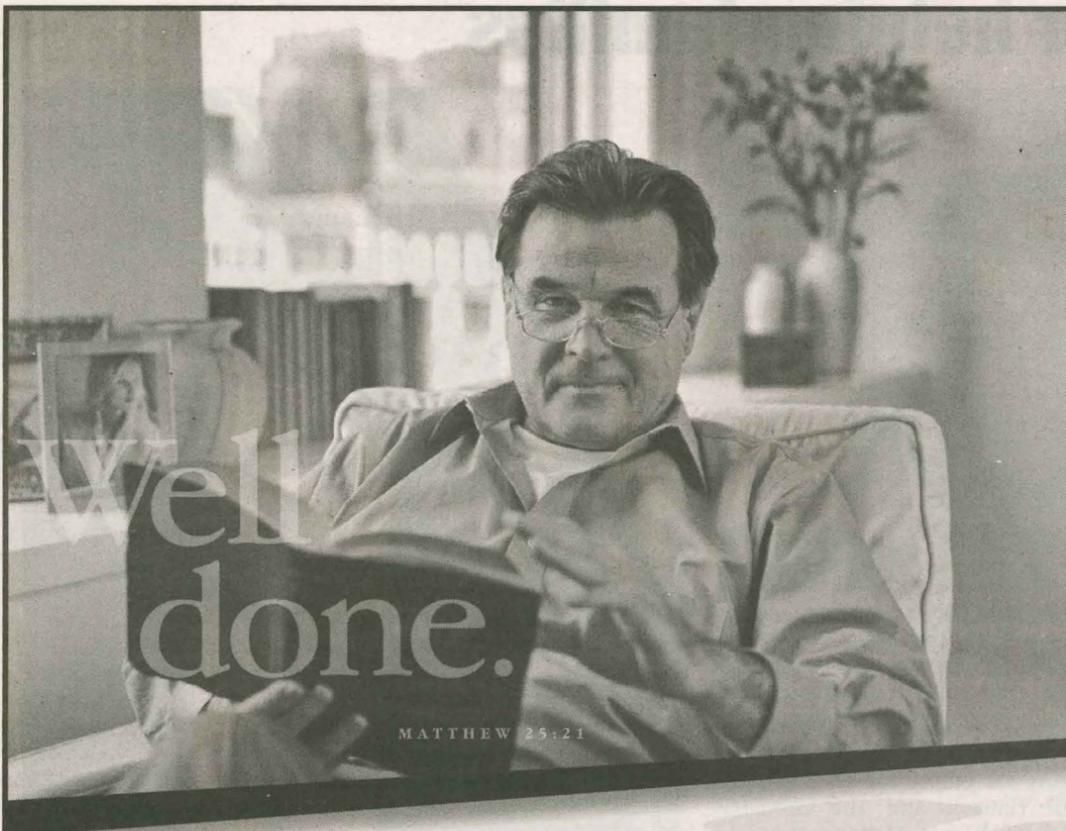
Dale Hanson stands outside the 92,000-square-foot former clothing manufacturing factory in Winchester that is now home to the Family Development Center. The facility currently includes a thrift store, fitness center, food distribution center and day care center.



DROPPING BY Hanson, or Pastor Dale as he's known around the center, checks in on children at the day care center during lunchtime. Dozens of kids from around Winchester and Clark County attend day care at the Family Development Center each day.



CLOSE EXAMINATION Jennifer Neal, an employee at the center's thrift store inspects a donated pair of pants. The 3,500-square-foot store sells everything from clothes to toys to furniture, much of which is "scratch-and-dent" and donated by big-name retailers and manufacturers. The Family Distribution Center also serves as a distribution point for furniture and appliance donations to the region. According to Dale Hanson, the center gave away more than \$100,000 worth of furniture last year, all of which was donated to the center.



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Disaster relief teams rally in wake of Midwest ice storms

Russellville, Mo. (BP)—The dual ice storms that hit the Midwest starting Dec. 9 have been too much for trees and power lines in much of the region, leaving millions of people from Oklahoma to Wisconsin in the dark and cold.

Oklahoma, Kansas, and Missouri have been declared federal disaster areas and at least 26 people have died as a result of the storms, most due to weather-related traffic accidents.

Even as the sleet and freezing was still falling, Southern Baptist disaster relief workers from Missouri and other states were gearing up to remove fallen trees and feed the hungry.

"It's a massive workload," acknowledged Danny Decker, disaster relief coordinator for the Missouri Baptist Convention.

Chainsaw teams are pulling limbs off houses and power lines and clearing sidewalks across the state, he said. The hardest hit areas are around Joplin near the Oklahoma line, five counties surrounding Jefferson City in central Missouri and 13 counties around St. Joseph in the northwest corner of the state.

A mass care feeding unit from the Missouri Baptist Convention has been sent to St. Joseph. Although much of the state's power has been restored, as of last week some 30,000 people remained without power in the St. Joseph area; roughly 10,000 around Joplin; and more than 5,000 in central Missouri.

In Oklahoma, some 400,000 homes remained without electricity—down from 600,000, which accounted for about one-third of Oklahoma's population.

Sam Porter, disaster relief director for the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, has established command centers in Oklahoma City and Tulsa for some 30 chainsaw teams.

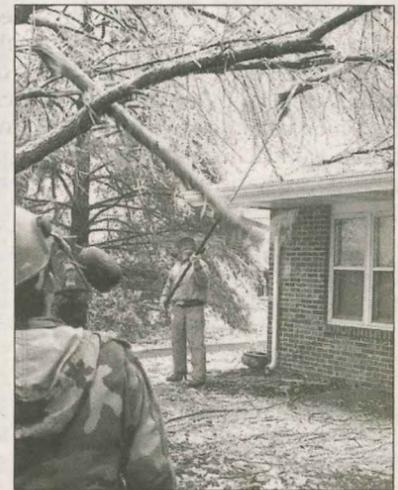
"We have 10 chainsaw teams already on the ground," Porter noted. "We've asked for 20 more crews, and the other state associations are really rallying to help us. We already have seven crews coming from Texas, one from Virginia, six from Tennessee and one from Louisiana."

Tree removal is top priority

Porter said his objective is to finish priority work by Christmas. Such work includes downed-tree relief for the elderly and disabled, and trees removed from houses, driveways, walkways and cars.

Southern Baptist feeding units are serving 18 shelters in Oklahoma City and Tulsa, the two major metro areas affected by the ice storms. A feeding unit at Ridgeway Baptist Church in Sapulpa is serving shelters in west Tulsa, while a unit at Arrow Heights Baptist Church in Broken Arrow is providing meals to those in east Tulsa.

Missouri Gov. Matt Blunt, a member of Second Baptist Church in Springfield, has mobilized the National Guard to St. Joseph to help identify residents in need. Churches in those hard-hit areas have opened their doors as shelters to those with-



DAMAGE PREVENTION Dwayne Snead, a member of First Baptist Church in Ewing, Mo., sidesteps a falling tree limb as he works to keep ice-laden trees from damaging the roof of a nursing home. (BP photo by Brian Koonce/Missouri Pathway)

out power and to disaster relief workers.

By last Thursday, crews had completed 13 chainsaw jobs, served 139 meals, provided 31 showers and presented the gospel eight times in Missouri. Decker said six Missouri chainsaw teams are now at work, bringing the total to 54 disaster relief volunteers in the state. That number will soon rise as chainsaw crews from Baptist conventions in Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Mississippi and Ohio arrive in Missouri.

David Wells, who normally leads the Jefferson Baptist Association shower unit based south of St. Louis, grabbed a chainsaw last week and headed for the tiny town of Russellville, about 20 minutes west of Jefferson City.

"The power companies have done a lot, but there are still entire trees on houses around here," he said as his crew cleared the sidewalk and porch ramp of an elderly woman in a wheelchair. "Things look pretty rough."

Decker, Wells and the other disaster relief volunteers are no strangers to ice storms. They cleared debris last January around Springfield for six weeks. At the time, disaster relief officials described it as the worst natural disaster in the United States since Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast in 2005. According to Decker, this storm's devastation is more widespread.

"The amount of ice per tree is not as heavy," he noted, "but the overall magnitude of it is just as bad. It has covered the state from I-44 north to the Iowa line and from Kansas to Illinois."

Decker added that he is unsure how long the disaster relief workers will be on the job.

"It's still up in the air," he said. "It really depends on the weather."

The National Weather Service predicted last week three inches of snow in central Missouri over this past weekend. Hard-hit St. Joseph was expecting just one inch of snow and Joplin four to six inches. While the snow may slow current cleanup efforts, it was not expected to cause more power outages or take down more trees.

Lottie Moon giving opens new doors in former Soviet Union

By Erich Bridges
SBC International Mission Board

Richmond, Va. (BP)—When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989 and the Soviet Union collapsed two years later, the world changed. Southern Baptists responded rapidly, sending hundreds of missionaries and thousands of volunteers to spread the good news and help local Baptists.

Hundreds of millions in the former Soviet Union still search for God but are ignorant of His love and mercy. Their hearts have been brutalized, first by communism and later by the free-for-all greed that swept post-Soviet Russia.

Fifteen years after its fall, many doors remain open. But they could close at any moment. Some doors already are shutting as governments in the region restrict ministries, deny visas and send foreign workers home.

The time to pray passionately, to give sacrificially, to act boldly is now. Southern Baptist missionaries in the 15 nations of the former Soviet Union rely on your giving through the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions (2007 goal: \$165 million).

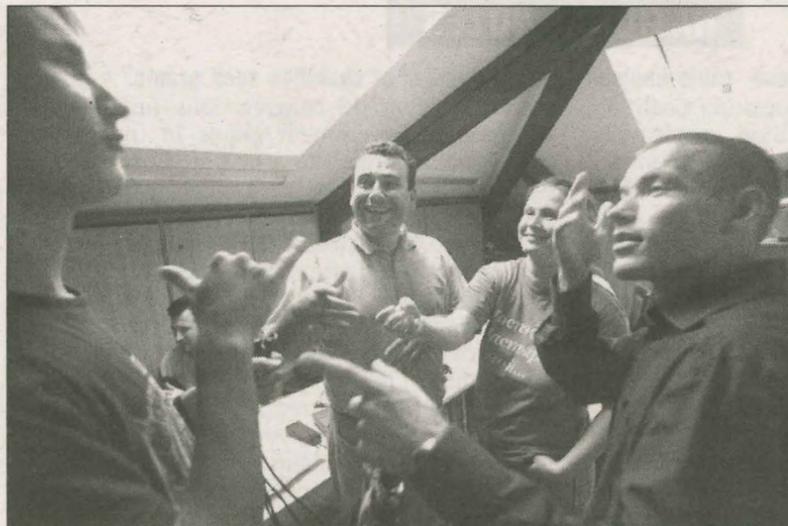
IMB workers in the former Soviet Union ask for hundreds of new missionaries, thousands of volun-

teers and many local churches—like yours—to work side by side with them in telling the story of Jesus. They vitally need your growing financial support through the Lottie Moon offering to continue and expand the work.

The former Soviet Union is a volatile and sometimes chaotic region. Harsh regimes are returning in some nations. Secularism and hollow religious traditions dominate some areas; Islam is making a comeback in others. Telling the story of Jesus there will not be easy in the coming days, but has it ever been easy?

Southern Baptist missionaries and their partners are seeing amazing breakthroughs. Last year, they ministered among 1,170 people groups worldwide and engaged more than 100 peoples with a combined population of nearly 100 million—for the first time. They started more than 23,000 churches and baptized nearly half a million new believers.

The Great Commission task is far from finished. And no great task is accomplished without sacrifice. Telling the story of Jesus to the world requires the participation, the passion and the sacrifice of all Southern Baptist believers and churches.



SPEAKING A DIFFERENT LANGUAGE Deaf believers interact during a seminar at Moscow's only deaf Baptist church. Up to 800,000 deaf people live in Russia, but few have had the opportunity to "hear" the gospel. (BP photo)

Moscow's deaf ministry fills great area of need in Russia

Continued from page 1

The deepest problem is a Russian society—including Christians—that sees the deaf as invalids rather than what they are: a people group with their own culture, language, needs and gifts.

The Coursos, however, arrived in Moscow in 2002 with a very different mindset. Both are hearing, yet sensed a call as young people to minister among the deaf. They met while serving as summer missionaries in the United States doing just that. Later, they served together as Mission Service Corps workers among the deaf and later, as ministry staff members of deaf churches.

Already fluent in American Sign Language, they tackled both Russian and Russian Sign Language (very different from its American counterpart) as new missionaries. They are still learning, but they wasted little time getting started on their ministry of encouraging deaf believers—and they were quickly embraced.

The deaf worship service that began in their apartment quickly outgrew the space and now meets in a Moscow Baptist church led by a supportive hearing pastor. It attracts 80 or more people each week, many of whom are non-Christian seekers.

"This has been deaf-led from day one," Kris Courson pointed out. "We were just there to encourage, to help, to provide whatever training we could. They just needed some-

one to come in and say, 'Yes, you can do this. We're going to help you do what God has called you to do.'"

On the joyful day Zhadan was ordained by the sponsoring Russian Baptist church, he baptized six deaf believers in a river.

That is just the beginning. Zhadan and the Coursos are working together to videotape 150 key Bible stories in Russian Sign Language to spread the Word to deaf seekers across Russia—and beyond.

"We're looking for at least 10 churches in the city of Moscow," Courson said. "But we believe every church needs to reproduce itself. With 42,000 deaf people, there will never be a building large enough to hold all the (potential) believers in Moscow. We hope these churches will begin home groups, meet in local McDonald's restaurants, even in metro stations.

"With the video translation project, we have a target audience of 800,000 in Russia," he continued, "but also deaf people in Belarus, where the signing is very similar, in Ukraine and in the 'Stans' (formerly Soviet Central Asia). We're looking at over 1 million people with no access to the gospel in their own language."

Zhadan, who knows what it's like to get around major barriers, agreed.

"With the help of God," he promised, "we'll be able to do it."

"With 42,000 deaf people, there will never be a building large enough to hold all the (potential) believers in Moscow."

Southern Baptist missionary Kris Courson

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NATIONAL NOTES

Some Christian groups oppose 'cable choice.'

The Faith and Family Broadcasting Coalition, a league of religious television broadcasters, said they oppose an a la carte business model, allowing families to choose which cable channels they receive because it would have a devastating effect on their efforts. "A per-channel charge would dramatically limit, if not kill, the availability of religious-based programming on cable," said Colby May, senior counsel and director of the Washington office of the American Center for Law and Justice. The ACLJ filed official comments with the FCC opposing the a la carte system when it was first proposed in 2005. Pro-family groups have welcomed the opportunity for parents to choose which cable channels are appropriate for their homes, and they see an a la carte option as another tool in protecting children from inappropriate programming.

Congress drops hate crimes from bill. Congress recently announced it will not vote to expand hate crimes protections to homosexuals and transgendered individuals as part of a military authorization bill for next year. House leaders estimated the bill would have been about 40 votes short of passage, Congressional Quarterly reported. The House had approved the hate crimes expansion in May as a stand-alone bill, and the Senate had passed it in September as part of the Defense measure. A conference committee of senators and representatives worked on a version to report to both chambers for passage, but Senate conferees chose to drop the hate crimes language when it became clear the House would not approve it. The White House had indicated President Bush would veto the hate crimes expansion, even if it were part of the Defense legislation.

Small number of churches seek grants. A distinct minority of U.S. congregations—just 7 percent—sought government grants in the past four years, according to a new study released earlier this month at the annual conference of the Roundtable on Religion and Social Welfare Policy. "Government grant activity is not tremendously important for congregations ... even though they're engaged in social services in a wide variety of areas," said John Green, a political science expert at the University of Akron and author of the study. More than two-thirds (68.5 percent) of congregations surveyed said they offered marriage counseling. More than 50 percent of respondents said they provided a food pantry (63.5 percent), family counseling (58.8 percent) and senior citizen services (58.3 percent). Most congregations were not familiar with "charitable choice," a provision of the welfare reform law that increased governmental funding of faith-based social services. The study pointed out that congregations tended to get most of their revenue from individual contributions or special fund-raising efforts.

Civil union opponents sue in Oregon. Opponents of domestic partnerships for homosexuals have filed a federal lawsuit seeking to revive a failed petition drive that would have forced a state-wide vote on the partnership law. The suit accuses elections officials of illegally disqualifying signatures that would have qualified the proposal as a referendum for the November 2008 ballot. State lawmakers earlier this year approved a law that grants domestic partnerships, also known as civil unions, to homosexuals with the state benefits of marriage. The suit claims that elections officials excluded valid signatures, including those of registered voters.

Senator: No hearings planned for TV ministry investigation

Washington (RNS)—Sen. Chuck Grassley, the Iowa Republican who is investigating the finances of six prominent evangelical ministries, said recently he does not plan to hold hearings on any individual ministry and hopes he will not have to subpoena any of them.

In response to critics who wonder if his investigation into alleged lavish spending is too broad, Grassley added that he simply expects tax-exempt ministries to follow the law.

"I think their fear is that we're going to get involved in doctrine, in the internal teachings of the church," noted Grassley, the top-ranking Republican on the Senate Finance Committee. "That's none of my business. But churches have to realize that they aren't any different from any other nonprofit organization. They have to abide by the tax laws."

Grassley had set a deadline of Dec. 6 for the ministries to respond to his requests for detailed financial information.

As of that date, five of the six ministries had made at least some contact, according to the senator.

One of those five, Atlanta-based Creflo Dollar Ministries, has refused to voluntarily provide any information, while the sixth, Bishop Eddie Long of Atlanta, has made no formal contact but has said publicly his ministry would cooperate.

"As long as they're cooperating, we obviously will be flexible because we want information," Grassley acknowledged.

As for Dollar's ministry, which appears to have no plans to comply, Grassley said he hopes it will not come to the point where he needs to consider a subpoena.

He added that many of the nonprofit organizations he has investigated have voluntarily made changes in their operations after probes demonstrated inadequacies.

"We didn't have to force anything down their throat," he said. "We've only made very little change in law. I would hope that the ministries would be self-correcting."

The senator could not predict how long the investigation would last. He also said it is unclear whether other ministries will be investigated.

Rusty Leonard, the CEO of MinistryWatch.com, said he wasn't surprised that all of the ministries have not fully responded. His Charlotte, N.C.-based organization, a fiscal watchdog group, has welcomed Grassley's investigation.

"In large measure, four of the six are dodging and weaving," he remarked. "One of my worries is that they won't comply because they are fearful that they have done things wrong."

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Legacy giving ideas

Variety of options available to perpetuate one's witness

Have you ever prayerfully considered perpetuating your Christian witness beyond your lifetime through a legacy giving plan? I urge you prayerfully to consider such an idea and to call upon Laurie Valentine and me to assist you in your consideration. Here are three simple legacy giving ideas to get you started in your consideration:

Make you tithe last forever. Establish during your lifetime, or at death, a permanent endowment fund and let the Foundation distribute the earnings to the causes you designate. The original principal of the fund will never be distributed, only the earnings. Generally it takes 20 times your current annual tithe to create an endowment sufficient enough to generate the earnings to replace your tithe. For example, if your tithe is \$2,500, it would take a \$50,000 fund to generate that much in earnings. You could start now with a more modest amount, add to it over your lifetime, then include a bequest in your will, or a beneficiary designation in a life insurance policy or retirement account for the

balance.

Income for life. A charitable gift annuity is a simple gift plan that first provides you, and up to one other person, fixed income payments for life. Upon the death of the latter to die, the remainder can be used to provide financial support for your favorite charitable causes, either outright or through a permanent endowment fund. The older you are, the higher the payout rate. The age 75 rate is 7.1 percent.

Have it come back to you or be passed on. A charitable lead trust will provide your favorite cause or causes a designated stream of income for a predetermined term of years; at the end of the trust term, the remaining assets can be returned to you or passed on to other family members. It's a great way to fund a pledge for a capital campaign while assuring a portion to be returned to you or passed on to heirs.

Call Laurie Valentine or me toll-free for assistance.

Barry Allen is president of the Kentucky Baptist Foundation, PO Box 436389, Louisville, KY 40253; toll-free (866) 489-3533; www.kybaptistfoundation.org

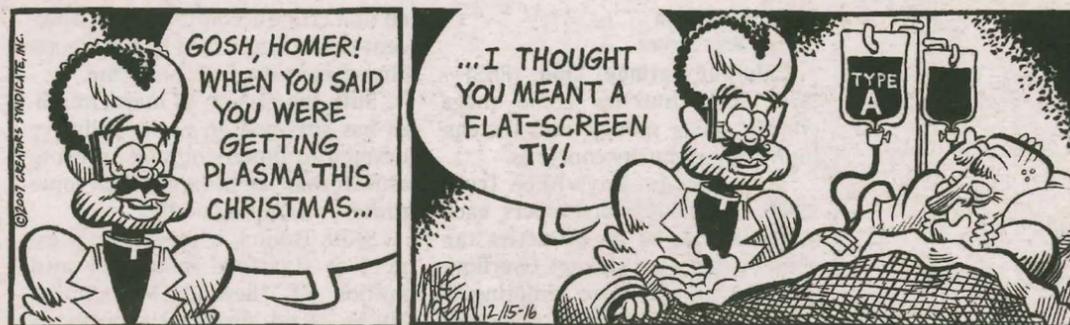
KENTUCKY BAPTIST FOUNDATION



Barry Allen

For Heaven's Sake

Mike Morgan



Church of the Covered Dish

Thom Tapp



Bible Crosswords

By Janet Kennedy

Across

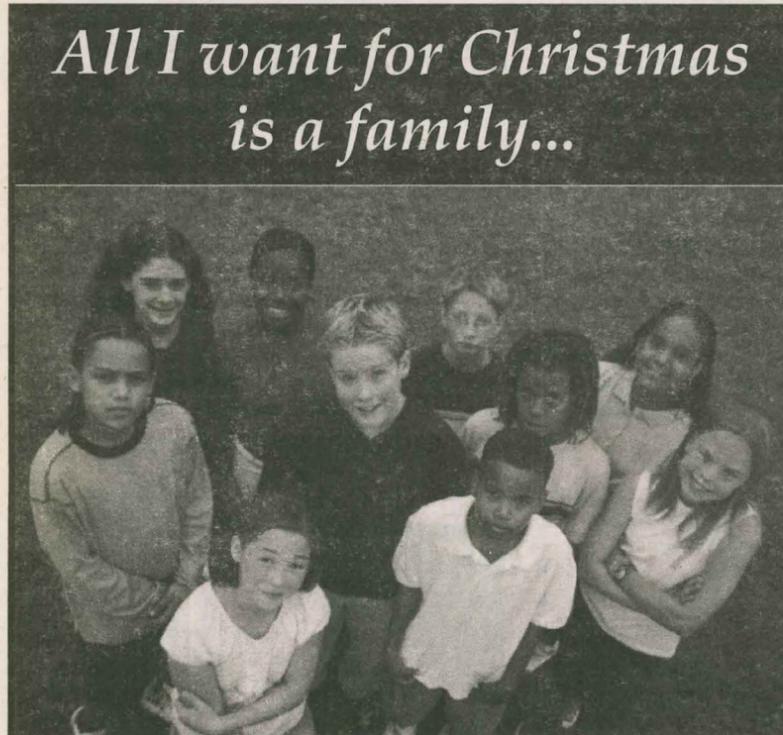
- 1 "In the ____ God created the heaven and earth" (Genesis 1:1)
- 8 "And on the seventh ____ God ended his work" (Genesis 2:2)
- 11 "Generations of Esau, who is ____" (Genesis 36:1)
- 12 "The word of the ____ came unto Abram in a vision" (Genesis 15:1)
- 13 Prefix: again, anew, once more
- 14 Germanium, chem. symbol
- 15 "And Cain talked with ____ his brother" (Genesis 4:8)
- 18 Kiloliter, abbr.
- 19 Inches, abbr.
- 20 Jelly
- 21 Eager
- 23 "And I will put ____ between thee and the woman" (Genesis 3:15)
- 25 "Why make ye this ____, and weep? The damsel is not dead" (Mark 5:39)
- 27 "Cain went ... and dwelt in the land of ____" (Genesis 4:16)
- 29 Address abbreviation
- 30 Declare
- 31 Surrounded by
- 32 Once more
- 34 Contraction for I am
- 35 "I was afraid, because I was ____; and I hid myself" (Genesis 3:10)
- 37 A part of a curved line
- 38 Not bright
- 40 Car manufacturer, abbr.
- 41 6, Romans num.
- 42 Common era, abbr.
- 44 Compass point, abbr.
- 45 "And she (Eve) bare a son ... called ... ____ another seed instead of Abel" (Genesis 4:25)
- 47 Not a liquid or a gas
- 49 Sound of a sheep
- 51 Hebrews, abbr.
- 53 The sun, Sp.

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			59						60		

- 54. A young seed
- 56. Edge of a roof
- 58. Northeastern U.S., abbr.
- 59. "Shew you a ____ upper room furnished and prepared" (Mark 14:15)
- 60. Snakelike fish
- 22 "Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of ____" (Ruth 4:17)
- 24 "And Abraham called ... his son ... whom Sarah bare to him, ____" (Genesis 21:3)
- 26 Kingdom
- 28 One of Shobal's children (Genesis 36:23)
- 32 Confused, nervous
- 33 Virginia's neighbor, abbr.
- 36 "And Adam called his wife's name ____" (Genesis 3:20)
- 39 A group of songs combined to make one song
- 43 "____, everyone that thirsteth" (Isaiah 55:1)
- 45 "Then ____, (who also is called Paul)," (Acts 13:9)
- 46 "____ leadeth me beside the still waters" (Psalm 23:2)
- 47 "One lawgiver, who is able to ____ and to destroy" (James 4:12)
- 48 Library Science, abbr.
- 49 "And God said, ... I do set my ____ in the cloud, ... a token of a covenant" (Genesis 9:12-13)
- 50 Avenue, abbr.
- 52 A honey maker
- 55 Fa, so, ____, ti
- 57 Electrical Engineer, abbr.

Last week's solution

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44	M	A	L	A	C	H	I		51	H	E	A	R	T	
48	A	R	L	E	L	A		52	G	M	O				



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Shootings reflect big threats at big churches

By Kevin Eckstrom
Religion News Service

Colorado Springs, Colo. (RNS)—With megachurches come mega crowds, mega money, and increasingly, mega security concerns.

The crowds—anywhere from 2,000 to 20,000 worshippers each weekend—can be an attractive target for a deranged shooter. Overflowing offering plates are tempting to thieves, and well-known preachers can become high-profile targets.

The Dec. 9 shootings at New Life Church in Colorado Springs and a missionary training facility in Arvada, Colo.—which left five people dead, including the gunman—reflect the security nightmares facing some of the country's largest churches. Many of those churches now employ armed guards to protect human, financial and physical "assets."

Brady Boyd, the senior pastor at New Life Church, said an armed guard "probably saved over 100 lives" when she shot 24-year-old Matthew Murray just inside the doors of the Colorado church just before Murray took his own life.

"That's the reality of our world," he told reporters. "I don't think any of us grew up in churches where that was a reality, but today it is."

Boyd pointed out that the volunteer guard was put in position after the church heard about the shootings in Arvada. The church has about 15 or 20 guards, some armed, and the guard who shot the gunman used her personal weapon.

Violent crimes remain extremely rare at U.S. churches. Eric Spacek, a senior church risk manager for the GuideOne Center for Risk Management in West Des Moines, Iowa, not-

ed that crime accounts for just 5 percent of all claims filed by the 40,000 churches insured by GuideOne.

Still, the growth of megachurches has spawned an entire industry devoted to protecting and securing crowds that can be larger than some towns or shopping malls.

Scott Thuma, a megachurch expert at Hartford Seminary and author of "Beyond Megachurch Myths," said financial security is just one concern at a typical megachurch, where offerings can reach an annual average of \$6 million.

"Think about it," he explained. "That's \$115,000 a week in income. Are you going to trust moving that much money around to folks without guns?"

"Practical" responses

At the Potter's House in Dallas, where Bishop T.D. Jakes draws an average 15,000 worshippers on Sundays, the church employs plainclothes and uniformed security guards, according to Sean Smith, director of Classic Security, which contracts with the church.

"We're not trying to get an army of men out there armed with guns," Smith noted, "but we want to take practical and measured responses for any threats that may come to our doorstep."

Some church crime is relatively routine—thefts, vandalism and unfortunately, child abuse. Sometimes, warring parents will take their domestic dispute to church playgrounds, or thieves eye parked cars for break-ins.

Some churches try to take it in stride. Rick Warren, the California megachurch pastor and "Purpose

Driven Life" author, has an all-volunteer security team headed by a former Secret Service agent.

"We don't worry about that," he declared. "We do have security volunteers in our church. We don't have any paid (security), but every one of them are off-duty law enforcement."

In the case of most random shootings—a deranged gunman looking to make a statement—some observers said there is only so much churches can do. Dave Travis, the managing director of Leadership Network, a Dallas-based megachurch think tank, recalled that the mother of Martin Luther King Jr. was shot and killed in 1974 as she sat at the church organ.

"The security threat of a crazed person—there's just no way to totally prepare for that," he noted.

The celebrity status of some megachurch pastors is another concern.

"Some of these top pastors have become celebrities, and they carry with them the same crazy people who would attack Madonna or the Beatles, and religion is one of the things to which unstable people are attracted," Thuma explained.

Still, churches' open-door atmospheres frown on the use of some precautions, such as metal detectors or pat-downs. People seek churches for comfort and healing, not to undergo a background check, said Dale Annis, director of Church Security Services, a consulting firm in Bakersfield, Calif.

"If you're trying to win converts," he added, "you don't want it to be so fortified that you're going into Fort Apache."

Reports say Colo. gunman grew up in Christian family

Colorado Springs, Colo. (BP)—Matthew Murray, 24, was identified as the gunman who killed two staff members at a mission training facility near Denver before killing two others Dec. 9 at New Life Church in Colorado Springs.

The Associated Press reported that Murray was enrolled at Youth With a Mission in 2002 but dropped out when staff members' concerns about his health kept him from going on an overseas mission trip.

In recent weeks, Murray posted messages on a Web site for people who have left evangelical religious groups, according to AP.

"You Christians brought this on yourselves," Murray wrote. "All I want to do is kill and injure as many of you ... as I can especially Christians who are to blame for most of the problems in the world."

A neighbor of Murray's said the gunman and his brother were homeschooled, and described the Murray family as "very, very religious."

Phil Abeyta, Murray's uncle and pastor of His Love Fellowship church in Denver, read a statement from the family, asking for forgiveness.

"We cannot understand why this has happened," Abeyta said. "We ask for prayer for the victims and their families during this time of grief."

Merry Christmas from OBI



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'Unto the uttermost parts of the world'

Overseas missions provides students valuable experience

Clear Creek faculty members Dan and Elli Gillum traveled with a team of students all the way to Turkey this past summer to literally hand out copies of the Bible to the Muslim people.

"When we decided to go on this trip I did not really know what to expect when we got there," Elli said. "I wondered how we would be received in Turkey as Christians. I knew we would be going into a Muslim country."

"We were blessed to have a tour guide who has been in Turkey for years and speaks the language very well. He does tours ... to the areas of the seven churches of the book of Revelation."

The team noted they were surprised to find the Muslim people eager to learn more about the gospel. "Our tour guide keeps his van filled with Bibles and the 'Jesus' film" on DVD, Elli said.

"Most people in Turkey have never seen a copy of the Bible," she added. "As we would travel through the country, we would stop at roadside stands, restaurants and villages. We would start a conversation with them and then ask them if they would accept a gift from us. The

gift we offered them was a copy of the Bible.

"In the eight days we were there, we gave out over 100 Bibles and 'Jesus' DVDs," Elli said. "Not a single person refused the gifts we offered. Sometimes people would literally come up to us and ask us if we had a copy of the Bible. One woman saw a copy of the New Testament in our vehicle and literally climbed into the van through the window to ask for a copy."

The team did not expect to see immediate results from their efforts. They made the trip out of obedience to God and a desire to share His word with others. Nevertheless, they had very encouraging experiences.

"We sat in one lady's home and she told us that after reading the first seven chapters of the book of John, that she had felt a great light come into her heart," Elli said. "It was a blessing to know that this lady who had been a police officer and a Muslim all her life—and had found no hope and peace in her religion—had already found peace in just reading the book of John."

Donnie Fox is president of Clear Creek Baptist Bible College, 300 Clear Creek Road, Pineville, KY 40977; toll-free: (866) 340-3196; Web site: www.ccbbc.edu; e-mail: dfox@ccbbc.edu



Donnie Fox

Bottenfield transitions from baseball to Christian music

By Lee Warren
Baptist Press

Franklin, Tenn. (BP)—How does a person go from pitching in the All-Star game in 1999 to becoming a contemporary Christian music artist just a few short years later?

In Kent Bottenfield's case, the itch to play music was present during much of his nine-year major league career, during which he played for the Montreal Expos, Colorado Rockies, San Francisco Giants, Chicago Cubs, St. Louis Cardinals, Anaheim Angels, Philadelphia Phillies and Houston Astros. At one point, during the 1996 season, Bottenfield even began to take his keyboard on the road with him.

"Whenever baseball was not going so good, I couldn't wait to get back to my room to start playing and I started thinking that maybe I could do music someday," Bottenfield recalled. "But I felt like God was telling me, 'You know what Kent? I have given you baseball right now. You need to set that music aside.' So I quit music completely and that's really when my career started taking off."

And take off it did.

In 1999, while pitching for the Cardinals, he won 18 games with a 3.97 ERA, which earned him an All-Star game appearance. In 2001, at the age of 32, his career was cut short because of a shoulder injury, but not before amassing solid career numbers that included a 4.54 ERA.

"Living a dream"

"I felt blessed that I got a chance to live out my dream," said Bottenfield, who caught the eye of a coach at the age of 8, who catapulted him into the spotlight and eventually a chance to play professionally.

"I got to play for 16 years professionally—nine seasons in the major leagues," Bottenfield noted. "Not many people get to do that."

"So, I felt totally blessed. I never took it for granted. Never thought it made me any more special than anybody else. I was just a kid living a dream."

Bottenfield grew up in Portland, Ore., in a family that was in church every time the doors were open. He heard the gospel repeatedly, but said he "never made it my own." After being drafted by the Montreal Expos in 1986 at the age of 17, he slipped into a pew one night in a church in West Palm Beach, Fla.—where the team had sent him to play in the instructional leagues—and he heard the gospel again.

This time it hit home.

"God brought me into a desert," Bottenfield recalled. "I was away from my family, my friends, my church and all the people I counted on. And He brought me to that place to tell me that it doesn't matter who I thought I might be or how well I thought that little white ball. Those things had nothing to do with eternity. They



HOME RUN Kent Bottenfield's second CD, "Back in the Game," was recently released. The former Major League Baseball pitcher played for eight teams during his nine-year career, being named an All-Star in 1999.

had nothing to do with what He created me for.

"And it was that moment in my life when I realized I had not made that commitment myself and I received Christ that evening."

As he grew in his faith, Bottenfield said he wanted his teammates to know he loved them. He didn't want to view them as just being a notch in his spiritual belt. He stressed that he was not always successful in doing so, but he gets choked up when thinking about one teammate and his wife who invited Bottenfield and his wife, Pamela, out to dinner.

The couple asked questions about faith and about salvation in particular. Bottenfield said he does not know if they became believers after that, but his compassion for the couple clearly struck a chord with them.

In December of 2004, at the age of 36, Bottenfield had a life-threatening heart condition. He said surviving that incident turned out to be life-changing.

While in the hospital, his doctor, a fellow believer, closed the door to his room one day and encouraged him to get serious about his music career. His wife also reminded him of what God revealed in 1996 regarding Bottenfield's music—that it was not the time for it then, but maybe now it was.

Bottenfield's first CD, "Take Me Back" was released that same year and he said he had an increased passion for reaching people.

In September of this year, his second release, "Back in the Game," hit stores. It hammers upon a theme often found on his first CD—reconciliation.

"I feel that if we are honest with ourselves then 95-99 percent of life should be spent reconciling with God," Bottenfield noted. "We mess up. We mess up even sometimes when we don't know we're messing up. We do things out of habit and don't think twice about it. We strain relationships."

"I believe that's why Scripture tells us to pray without ceasing," he continued. "I think that's a real instruction for us, because we need to. And I think a lot of that prayer (should be centered around) getting back into a right relationship with a holy God."

Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why. Bart D. Ehrman. Harper San Francisco, 2005. 242 pages. \$14.95 paperback. ♦♦♦♦

There are times when I hear of a book being published and make a mental note that I have to get the

book and read it. This is one such book, but it has taken two years for it to make it to the top of my reading list. I am sorry it took so long—especially since I taught a class earlier this year on how to study the Bible and spent five weeks dealing with the exact subject of this book. This is an excellent book to read in order to understand why we have the Bible text that we do and, as a consequence, the version of the Bible that is used.

The title of the book is sure to raise some eyebrows among people in the pew, but that is what Bart Ehrman, who chairs the department of religious studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, usually does with his subject matter. Ehrman is out to bust the belief many people have that when they read the New Testament they are reading an exact copy of Jesus' words or the Apostle Paul's writings.

Ehrman takes the reader through what New Testament scholarship has long acknowledged—that no original text of the New Testament exists. The original text is spread out over many different manuscripts. The best we can do is perform some fascinating investigative work and work back to the text that we feel the most confident with, acknowledging that we can never be 100 percent sure. Even so, Ehrman is still willing to talk about the possibility of recovering an "original text," but it will be reconstructed from many different sources.

Ehrman has produced a first-rate book on textual criticism as a popular read. Ehrman begins with a very personal account of how he wrestled with competing textual readings in the Bible and how that affected his expression of Christianity. He not only explains the various ways different readings came to be, but he also takes the next step to show how those readings have supported or contradicted orthodox Christian belief. The subject matter, no doubt, will be unsettling to some people. But that does not mean that we should fail to face the Scriptures with complete honesty and understanding. Exploring how we got the Bible that we pick up and read daily is an important pursuit toward an honest approach to our faith. *Wayne Hager*

Fresh Ideas: 1,000 Ways to Grow a Thriving and Energetic Church. Diana Davis. B&H Publishing, 2007. 213 pages. ♦♦♦♦

Southern Baptists respect tradition. We are impressed, and rightly so, when we hear of a missionary, pastor or church reaching a ministry milestone.

There is danger, however, if Christians confuse sameness for consistency. Churches or ministries that fail to make that distinction may wake up one day to find the pews

empty. But how do we live out—in new, unique ways—foundational truths of a faith centuries old? How many different ways can we celebrate baptisms, conduct revivals, disciple new believers and approach people with the gospel?

Author Diana Davis has come up with 1,000 in her book, "Fresh Ideas." Staleness doesn't stand a chance against her enthusiasm. Davis' ideas range from the ambitious—adding Sunday school classes, hosting community events and planning mission trips—to the "it's so simple; how could we have missed it?"—such as converting an unused classroom or closet into a prayer chapel.

Her essays are concise; her advice is practical. Not every idea will work for every church, but for each topic she explores, there's at least one idea that any church could implement, no matter its size or budget constraints.

For church staff and lay leaders worried that their heads will explode if they have to come up with one more theme, one more event, one more initiative, one more promotion—I encourage you to let Diana Davis, through her book, help you with the brainstorming. You already have enough to do. *Dannah Prather*

Parenting from Your Strengths: Understanding Strengths and Valuing Differences in Your Home. John Trent, Rodney Cox and Eric Tooker. Broadman and Holman Publishing, 2006. 108 pages. \$14.99. ♦♦♦♦

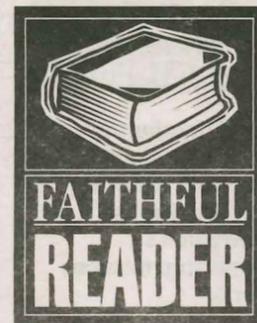
Parenting! This word strikes fear in the hearts of many of the bravest and strongest people in the world today. It is the thought of a grown man and woman taking a small, defenseless creature into their home and being responsible for raising that child into an adult that scares people beyond description.

The team of John Trent, Rodney Cox and Eric Tooker have taken many of the fears of parenting and given

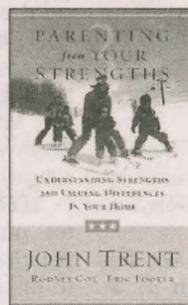
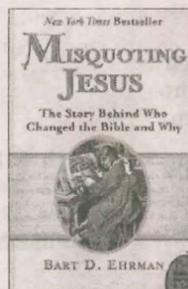
insights on how to get through them. The authors take an imaginary family through a family ski trip and use the idea of a global positioning system and create what they call the GPS, Global Parenting System, for guidance. The book addresses how to triangulate a family's current

emotional position by getting clearer pictures from three known positions: God's unchanging Word, each parent's own child-raising strengths and the way in which each child is fearfully and wonderfully made. When parents pull from these three factors, they can draw closer to each other and in doing so will become more effective in raising their own children.

This book is one of the best I have read in a long time in the life application of practical approaches one can use in parenting children and teens. Pastors, youth ministers and children's ministry leaders should take a look at this book. It can be used as a resource to foster a parenting ministry in a local church setting and it can be a great outreach tool for individuals who want to become better parents. *Steve Coleman*



By Steve Coleman, pastor of education and youth at New Work Fellowship in Hopkinsville; Wayne Hager, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Mt. Airy, N.C.; and Dannah Prather, partnership editions editor for the Western Recorder. They welcome feedback or suggestions for book reviews. Contact them via e-mail at: risen4me@hotmail.com; whager@adelphia.net; dannah.prather@kybaptist.org



PRAYER PARTNERS

Please pray for the following requests associated with the Kentucky Baptist Convention's partnership missions efforts:

■ Pray for Kentucky Baptists' 2008 partnership mission projects with Baptists in Brazil.

■ Pray for the ministry of Baptist Convention of Tanzania leaders Moses Mboya, Richard Mwachuti and Ernest Sumisumi as well as Southern Baptist international missionary to Tanzania Bill Eardensohn.

■ Continue to pray for Scott Pittman, the KBC's new partnership missions director, and his family as he begins his ministry in Kentucky Jan. 16.

For more information about partnership mission opportunities, contact the KBC partnership missions department at (502) 489-3529 or toll-free in Kentucky at (866) 489-3529.

MOUNTAINS TO THE MISSISSIPPI

COMPILED BY STAFF

■ **BAGDAD**—Micah Childs recently resigned as pastor of Indian Fork Church. Ray Cummins has been called as interim pastor.

■ **BENTON**—Lakeview Church recently called Terry Jones as pastor.

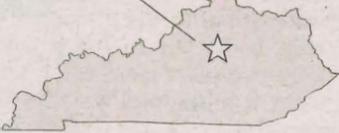
■ **CAMPBELLSVILLE**—Saloma Church will host a Christmas candlelight communion service Dec. 23, 6 p.m. John Chowning is pastor.

■ **CECILIA**—Cecilia Church recently called Erdie Carter as pastor. He previously was youth minister at Severns Valley Church in Elizabethtown.

■ **HODGENVILLE**—South Fork Church recently called Dewayne Gibson as youth minister. Norm Brock is pastor.

Spotlight on ...

Lexington



South Elkhorn Church will host a "5th Saturday Singing" on Dec. 29, 6 p.m., featuring the Sons of Liberty from Stanton.

■ **MILTON**—Ferrill Davis recently resigned as pastor of Milton Church due to health reasons.

Campbellsville assistant coach dies

Campbellsville (ABP)—Doris Wefwafwa, a student-assistant volleyball coach at Campbellsville University and former volleyball All-American, died unexpectedly Dec. 10. Wefwafwa, a resident of Kenya, was 34.

Wefwafwa died at Hardin Memorial Hospital in Elizabethtown after a brief illness. She had been scheduled to graduate Dec. 14.

In 1998, while playing volleyball in Kenya, Wefwafwa was recognized by local volleyball polls as one of the best "attackers" in the world. She played for the Kenyan volleyball team in the 2000 Summer Olympics.

Wefwafwa transferred to Campbellsville in 2006 after attending Co-

lumbia (Mo.) College. She led Campbellsville to a 10-0 conference championship in 2006 and was ranked second nationally in kills per game in the NAIA last season, averaging 5.63 per game. She was also the 2006 Mid-South Conference Volleyball Player of the Year.

Randy LeBleu, Campbellsville's head volleyball coach described Wefwafwa "an amazing person."

"In her short time with us at Campbellsville, she touched many people," he said. "Even if your day was not going very well, she could make you smile or comfort you with a hug. ... I am just deeply saddened by her leaving us so soon."



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

January

17-19 Shepherding the Shepherd, Radisson Plaza Hotel, Lexington.

24 Pastor/Staff Forum, Porter Memorial Baptist Church, Lexington.

24-25 Quarterly Prayer Meeting for Spiritual Awakening, Hartford Baptist Church.

25-26 Preschool/Children's Ministry Meeting, Baptist Building, Louisville.

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

Kentuckians earn Southern degrees

Louisville—Southern Baptist Theological Seminary held its 200th graduation commencement Dec. 7 with 204 graduates.

Graduates with Kentucky ties include:

Heather Baggett, Frankfort, master of divinity.

John Blair, Lexington, master of arts in worship.

Cynthia Bridges, Henderson, master of arts in missiology.

Aaron Brown, Princeton, master of divinity.

Darrell Burriss, Brandenburg, master of divinity.

Joseph Cecil, Owensboro, master of divinity.

Emily Chambers, Louisville, master of arts in biblical counseling.

Shannon Daley, Louisville, master of divinity in Christian education.

Charles Dixon, Morton's Gap, master of arts in theological studies.

Millie Dixon, Caneyville, master of divinity.

John Finney, Jackson, doctor of musical arts.

Rebecca Klausing, Crestwood, master of arts in Christian education.

Eric Martin, Bowling Green, master of divinity.

Kevin McKinney, Louisville, master of divinity.

Edgar Morales, Covington, master of divinity.

Adam Neel, Owensboro, master of divinity.

Dustin Neeley, Louisville, master of divinity.

James Noss, Versailles, doctor of ministry.

James Rairick, Louisville, master of divinity.

Tyler Shedd, Louisville, master of divinity.

James Simpson, Bowling Green, master of divinity.

Kyle Watkins, Owensboro, master of divinity.

Jarvis Williams, Red Fox, doctor of philosophy.

CLASSIFIED ADS

FOR RENT: Family reunion or wedding parties. Highway 30A, beachside, 75 yards from the ocean; more than 5,000 square feet, eight bedrooms including five masters; full game room; large dining area; private heated pool. Call Suzannah at (800) 397-2708; www.reunionhouse.org.

FOR SALE: New CD: "Christmas Harp Carols from the Hills," by harpest Jan Hill. Send \$12 check to Jan at 449 Skyview Lane, Lexington, KY 40511.

SEEKING: Pastor for First Baptist Church, Providence, Ky. Resumé to Ray Gobin, 214 Benjamin Terrace, Providence, KY 42450.

SEEKING: Minister of music for a growing congregation in Hodgenville, Ky. Duties include leading a comprehensive music program, choir and blended worship services. Please send resumé, references and a DVD if available to: Music Minister Search Committee, South Fork Baptist Church, 4915 New Jackson Hwy., Hodgenville, KY 42748.

SEEKING: Full-time associate pastor to children for Crescent Hill Baptist Church, an ABC/CBF-affiliate. Develop and implement a ministry to children and direct the church's after-school and summer childcare programs. Requires 2 years experience working with children and must meet Kentucky state requirements for childcare director. MDiv preferred. Submit resumé to CHBC Children's Minister Search Team, 2800 Frankfort Ave., Louisville, KY 40206; or crescenthillbapt@bell-south.net.

SEEKING: Full-time pastor—one who is willing to go into the community to help build up our church again. We have a successful van ministry, but urgently need to reach ages 20 to 50. Contact Loren Wilson, College Heights Baptist Church, 2321 Illinois Ave., Eldorado, IL 62930.

SEEKING: Part-time minister to children and families at Kings Baptist Church, Mt. Washington, Ky. Housing provided. Submit resumé to Kings Baptist Church, PO Box 380, Mt. Washington, KY 40047, Attn: Corey Abney; or send via e-mail to cabney@kingsbaptist.net.

SEEKING: Full-time senior pastor for non-traditional, Spirit-led Baptist church. Looking for a shepherd to disciple a diverse community in a deeper walk with God, and to increase His Kingdom in the Greater Cincinnati-Northern Kentucky area. Will need to work with elders to develop a staff and rebuild our church family. Preferred requirements: master of divinity degree and five to 10 years experience. Send resumé to Highland Hills Baptist Church, 132 South Grand Ave., Fort Thomas, KY 41075. Accepting resúmes through Jan. 31, 2008.

SEEKING: Part-time worship/choir leader for two morning worship hours for outreach-driven church. Blended worship, early worship band, late worship choir/ensemble, seasonal cantata. Diverse congregation, long-tenured staff. Interested individuals forward resúmes to First Baptist Church, PO Box 296, Carrollton, KY 41008. Phone: (502) 732-4396.

SEEKING: Part-time youth and children's minister. Please send resumé to Palomar Baptist Church, 2190 Ft. Harrods Drive, Lexington, KY 40515, Attn: Youth Search Committee. For details, call Kimberly Goard at (859) 963-1400.

SEEKING: Pastor for Friendship Baptist Church, Oakland, Ky. Please send resumé to Roger Snook, 2387 Carl Jordan Road, Oakland, KY 42159.

SEEKING: Pastor for Burlington Baptist Church, located near Cincinnati in Boone County, one of Kentucky's fastest growing areas. Contemporary and traditional worship services. Preferred is at least 5 years senior-pastor experience and a seminary degree. Send resumé to Pastor Search Committee, Burlington Baptist Church, PO Box 48, Burlington, KY 41005; or lkmc9@insightbb.com by Jan. 31, 2008.

SEEKING: Full-time pastor for First Baptist Church of Flatwoods, Ky. Please send resumé to: FBC of Flatwoods, PO Box 1005, Flatwoods, KY 41139, Attn: Pulpit Committee; or e-mail resumé to ffbcmccarty@hotmail.com.

SEEKING: Full-time senior pastor for Piner Baptist Church in northern Kentucky. Our Southern Baptist congregation provides many ministries locally and internationally. Average attendance for Sunday services is 400. For more information, go to www.pinerbaptist.org. Resúmes may be sent to Wayne Diehl, pastor of administration, 15044 Madison Pike, Morning View, KY 41063. Deadline for resúmes: Jan. 15, 2008.

SEEKING: Part-time minister to youth and children. Send resumé to Pigeon Fork Baptist Church, 5090 Hickory Ridge Road, Waddy, KY 40076, Attn: Youth Search Committee.

SEEKING: Full-time GL, AP bookkeeper for KBC accounting services department. Position requires 3 to 5 years related experience; offers competitive salary and benefit package. For more information, please submit resumé to the administrative services department through www.kybaptist.org/administrative by 12-21-07.

SEEKING: Pastor for First Baptist Church, a small Southern Baptist congregation nearing its 200th anniversary. Located in the heart of Newport, Ky. (near Cincinnati), FBC seeks a pastor to lead the church in growth as we continue to be an essential part of our changing community. Applicants should send resúmes to: Pastor Search Committee, c/o Michael Turner, 141 Ridge Hill Drive, Highland Heights, KY 41076.

SEEKING: Part-time children's minister (preschool-6th grade). Send resúmes to Locust Grove Baptist Church, 73 Locust Grove Church Road, Cadiz, KY 42211.

SERVICES: Broadcast your worship services each week for as little as \$100/month. www.Meetings-24-7.com. (864) 487-0344.

YOUTH SKI RETREAT: \$89/weekend—includes skis, lift, two nights on-site lodging, five meals and lesson. Wild and Wonderful West Virginia: (800) 392-0152. Ask for Christmas week special.

Heisman hero

University of Florida's Heisman winner Tim Tebow has his priorities in order

By Joni Hannigan
Florida Baptist Witness

New York (BP)—Football rates a mere fourth on his list of priorities behind God, family and academics. Even so, in New York City Dec. 8, Tim Tebow became the first college sophomore to win the famed Heisman Trophy in the 70-plus years of the award.

The University of Florida quarterback was a finalist along with Arkansas running back Darren McFadden, Hawaii quarterback Colt Brennan and Missouri quarterback Chase Daniel. The trophy is one of the most prestigious individual awards in all of sports.

"I'd just like to first start off by thanking my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who gave me the ability to play football and gave me a great family and a support group and great coaches and everything around me," a breathless Tebow said at the ceremony, moments after the award was announced.

Going on to thank teammates, high school coaches, his parents and siblings, Tebow repeated thanks to Jesus Christ and drew laughter when pledging his love for his chosen school a third time.

"I love the University of Florida, I love being a Gator. I love Gator Nation," Tebow declared.

"Miracle" child

Tebow helped Florida win a national title last season as the Gators' backup quarterback. He is the first major college player to run for at least 20 touchdowns and throw 20 TD passes in the same season. This year's 22 rushing TDs are tied for the league record for rushing TDs in a season by a quarterback.

Tebow, affectionately known as "Timmy" to his family, is the youngest child of Bob and Pam Tebow, missionaries to the Philippines through Bob Tebow Evangelistic Ministries,

which is supported by First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Fla.

In a profile aired on ESPN during the Heisman award ceremony, Tebow said his priorities are: "No. 1, my faith in God; number two, my family and my relationships with my family; number three, academics; and number four is football."

His mother, Pam, in the profile, said she declined the advice of a doctor to get an abortion after she became seriously ill and dehydrated when pregnant with Tim, her fifth child while living overseas. Bob Tebow added his son is a "miracle baby and so we have reminded him that hundreds of times." He was homeschooled but played high school football at Nease High School in Ponte Vedra Beach, thanks to a Florida law.

Tebow said in the profile he wants to be a standout both on and off the field.

"Through everything that I do in football, in school, in living, I want people to see that in me," he noted. "I don't want to be just another guy who's walking down the street. I want when people see me they say, 'Hey, there's something different about this guy, and that's because he has a relationship with Jesus Christ.'"

Crediting his family with teaching him priorities, Tebow said his dad taught him about character and his mom taught him to memorize Scripture verses. Brothers and sisters created a path for him by which he is able to "just follow in their footsteps," he added.

"God gave me the ability to play football and I'm just trying to go out there and honor Him with it and just be as passionate and enthusiastic about it as I can," Tebow reiterated. "It's a game that I love and you've got to remember that He gave me the ability and the opportunity to play and it can be gone at



MAKING HISTORY Florida quarterback Tim Tebow, a member of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Fla., made history Dec. 8 when he became the first freshman or sophomore to win the Heisman Trophy. When accepting the award, he first thanked Jesus Christ. (BP photo by John Angelillo/UPI)

any moment."

After receiving the Heisman, Tebow was thorough in his thanks and praise of those who have shaped and taught him, inside and out.

"I am fortunate for a lot of things. God has truly blessed me and I am blessed with so much stuff," Tebow declared. "I'm just thankful and this is such an honor and I am so happy to be here."

Family influence

His pastor at First Baptist, Jacksonville, Mac Brunson, said he knew of the Tebow family's reputation when he was pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas before going to Jacksonville nearly 18 months ago. Brunson also knew the youngest Tebow was being highly recruited as a high school senior and had an excellent Christian testimony.

His reputation was so sterling, Brunson almost landed Tebow as a youth speaker in Dallas but scheduling conflicts with the University of Florida prevented that from taking place.

"We knew of his testimony, we knew what a great athlete he was," Brunson noted.

Moving on to the ministry at First Baptist, Jacksonville, Brunson said he met Tebow's parents and gained even more insight into the family dynamic.

"I think who he is is a great tribute to his mom and his dad, in fact the whole family," Brunson said. "It's a family that's incredibly dedicated to the Lord, dedicated to missions. They walk the walk. They just don't talk about it; they really walk the walk. It's a close family, and you have to admire the family, not just Tim, but the entire family as well for their commitment to the Lord and the Lord's work."

"They are really an example of what a family can be under Christ

because all of them are so gifted in so many different ways," Brunson noted. "He's got a brother who is an incredible athlete. He has a sister who is an incredible teacher. His mother speaks, his dad preaches and has this mission effort in the Philippines. They're all just talented, gifted. They're close. They're a great example of what a family can be when Christ is Lord of everyone's life."

Brunson said he believes Tebow has had a "phenomenal" sophomore year statistically, but even better are the postgame interviews and the ongoing Christian witness that are quickly becoming his trademark.

"He's just a great witness. He recognizes that his ability is a God-given gift," Brunson added. "Tim Tebow is the All-American athletic hero. He is clean cut, he comes from a solid family, he has great athletic ability, he's humble with it, (and) it's not gone to his head."

Calling Tebow a "real leader," Brunson said the young athlete understands leading by example as an athlete and as a Christian.

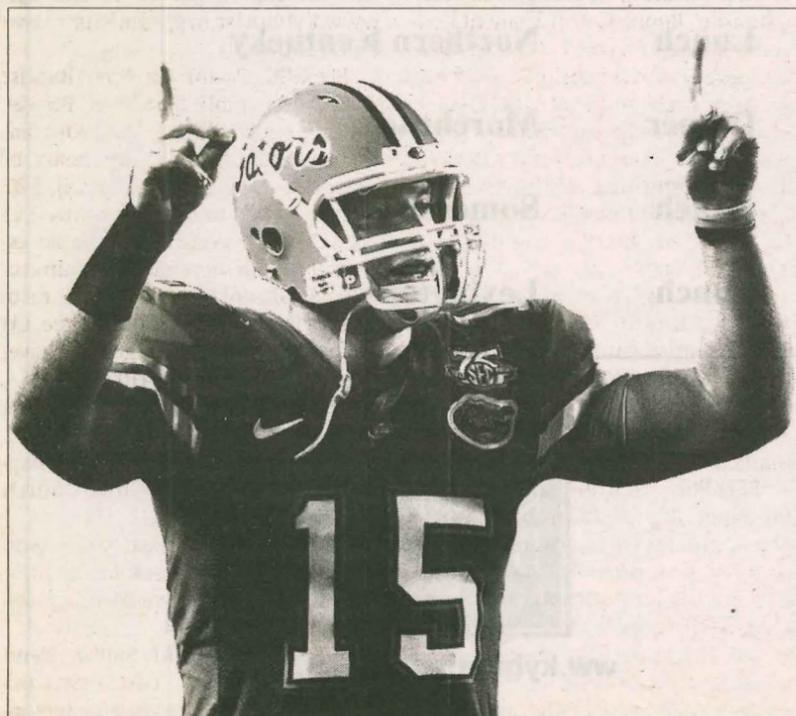
"I'm happy for him. I really do what Paul says, I'm rejoicing with my brother in not only what God has done in his life, but in what God is doing in his life. I think this is so good for those of us who are Christians that the world gets to see a young man that is so stable and secure and founded in his walk with the Lord."

Tebow is not the only major college quarterback who is a member of First Baptist, Jacksonville. Florida Atlantic QB Rusty Smith, whose team is playing in the New Orleans Bowl Dec. 21, also is a member.

"We are probably the only church in the country that has two starting QBs at 1-A schools and both of them are going to be in bowls," Brunson noted. "We're just turning out QBs down here."

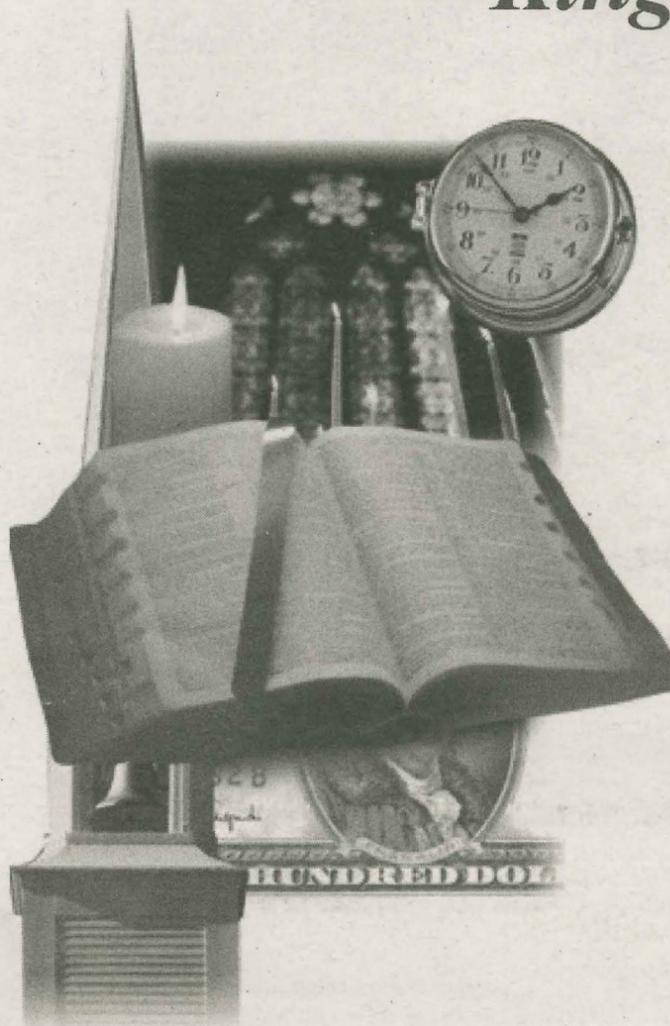
"God gave me the ability to play football and I'm just trying to go out there and honor Him with it."

Heisman Trophy winner Tim Tebow



RECORD BREAKER Tim Tebow set several records this year, including becoming the first major college QB to run for 20 touchdowns and throw for 20 TDs in the same season. He will lead the Florida Gators against the Michigan Wolverines in the Capital One Bowl in Orlando on New Year's Day. (BP photo by Marc Serota/Getty Images)

Equipping Your Church To Cultivate Kingdom-Minded Stewards



New, Innovative, Simple, Proven,
Cost Effective Approach

Upcoming 2008 Preview Events of this Approach:

Tues., February 12	12:00 - 2:00 p.m. CST	Lunch	Paducah
Tues., February 12	6:00 - 8:00 p.m. CST	Dinner	Owensboro
Wed., February 13	12:00 - 2:00 p.m. EST	Lunch	Elizabethtown
Thurs., February 14	12:00 - 2:00 p.m. CST	Lunch	Bowling Green
Tues., March 11	12:00 - 2:00 p.m. EST	Lunch	Northern Kentucky
Tues., March 11	6:00 - 8:00 p.m. EST	Dinner	Morehead
Wed., March 12	12:00 - 2:00 p.m. EST	Lunch	Somerset
Thurs., March 13	12:00 - 2:00 p.m. EST	Lunch	Lexington

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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866.489.3533 (Toll-free, KY Only) or 502-489-3533



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