



WESTERN RECORDER

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FOR THE RECORD

Baptists
Southern Baptist leaders launch creation care initiative. *Page 2.*

Kentucky
State disaster relief crew responds in its own backyard. *Page 3.*

Financial Forum
Create flexibility by giving through endowment funds. *Page 4.*

Guest Editorial
Casino issue marks a key moment of action. *Page 5.*

Kentucky
Northern Kentucky Association "Mistakes" series seeks to affirm pastors. *Page 6.*

Ministry
VBS leaders explore the importance of following up with kids. *Page 8.*

Easter
Churches try out a new spin on telling the Easter story. *Page 9.*

World
2010 Vancouver Olympics present opportunities for evangelism. *Page 10.*

Baptist food relief reaches Zambians affected by floods

Lusaka, Zambia (BP)—About 100 families in an isolated area on Zambia's Lunsemfwa River have received food assistance after heavy rains and flooding wiped out their crops.

Earlier this month, Kevin Rodgers, a Baptist Global Response field partner, said he and others transported bags of cornmeal to a river landing that were then loaded onto a boat and taken up the river.

Mark Hatfield, who leads Baptist Global Response work in sub-Saharan Africa, estimated that moving the 500 pounds of cargo took between 15 and 20 trips over two days to complete. The only other access to the area requires several days of walking, he added.

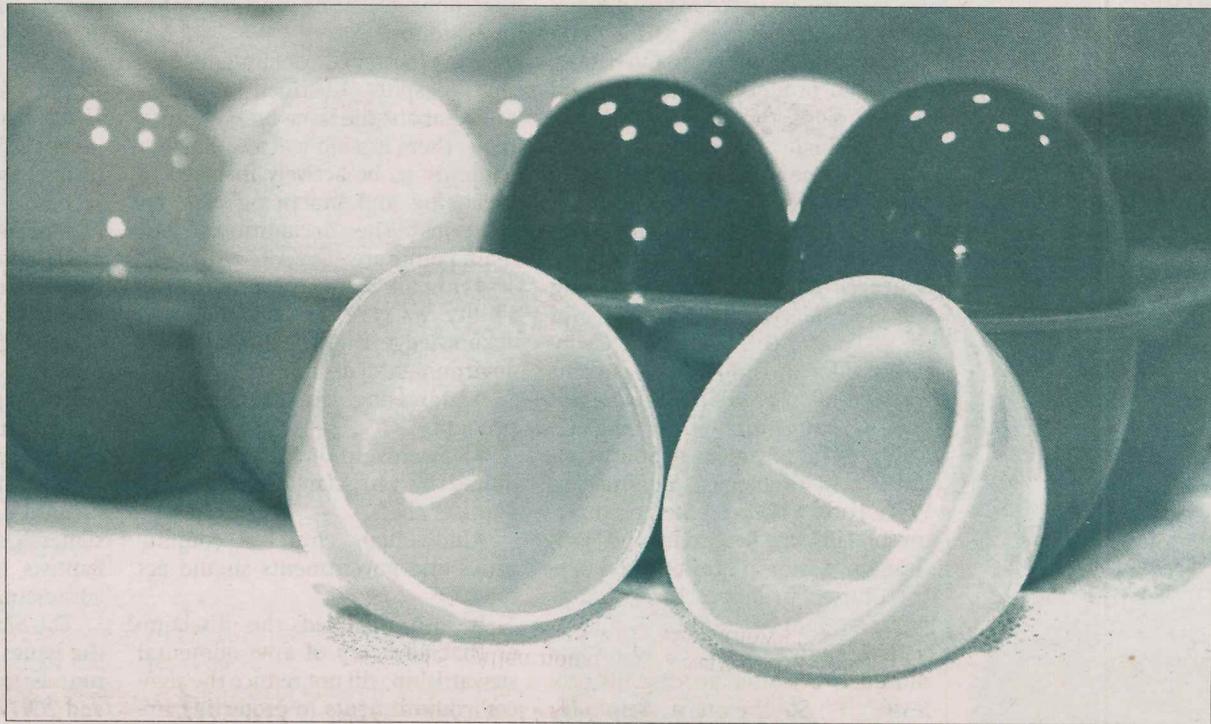
In mid-January, Zambian President Levy Mwanawasa declared a national disaster in the country's flooded districts.

"All our maize stocks have since been washed away," a leader in one of the flooded areas said. "We have remained with completely nothing."

Families in the area will be able to replant maize along the river after waters recede and should see a harvest within a few months, Rodgers noted. A hunger crisis is emerging, however, because fields that were set to mature are now gone. The bags of cornmeal should be enough to sustain families until the new harvest, Rodgers added.

The project is being financed with \$3,200 from the Southern Baptist World Hunger Fund.

'Egg-citing' news



'Resurrection Eggs' can reveal true meaning of Easter

By Dannah Prather
Partnerships Editor

Louisville—As Kentucky Baptists prepare to celebrate the resurrection of Christ many once again will use a popular visual aid to share the ultimate story with the ultimate surprise ending.

Children's ministry leaders say using Resurrection Eggs—a set of 12 plastic eggs with small items representing aspects of Jesus' death, burial and return—helps boys and girls retain the message, and is a good way to introduce the story to children who perhaps don't know the holiday is about anything more than candy, dyed eggs and Easter bunnies.

More than 71 percent of people responding to a recent Kentucky Baptist Convention Web site poll reported that their congregation hosts an Easter egg hunt as a community outreach event. Resurrection Eggs have become a part of many of these events.

First Baptist Church of Kuttawa has hosted a egg hunt for about five years according to Bill Allen, minister of music and children. After boys and girls scour the property for candy-filled plastic eggs, Allen said Pastor Carl Nelson uses the Resurrection Eggs to tell the story of Christ's sacrificial death and return.

"I think it's been very successful,"

Allen noted. "It's a very useful tool for them to retain that knowledge."

Venerable Bede, a seventh century historian, wrote that the celebration coinciding with the vernal equinox is named for Eostre, an Anglo-Saxon goddess associated with fertility. Because of these pagan roots, many Christians no longer refer to the holiday as Easter, instead using the term, "Resurrection Sunday."

Allen said the Kuttawa congregation refers to its annual egg search as a Resurrection Egg Hunt "because we understand that kids want to hunt eggs but we want to get across the real meaning" of the holiday.

□ See "Egg-citing" news ... *Page 3*

Ministry, education can alleviate U.S. prison crisis, experts say

By Erin Roach
Baptist Press

Washington (BP)—More than one in every 100 American adults are in jail or prison, according to a recent study by the Pew Center for the States, which also found that about half of released inmates return there within three years.

Mark Earley, president of Prison Fellowship Ministries, said the report signals a significant social and moral crisis in the country that should be addressed in part by heeding the parable found in Matthew 25.

"Jesus said, 'If you visit a prisoner, you visit Me,'" Earley noted. "So we have a mandate from our Lord to care for, to visit and to seek the transformation of those who are in prison."

John Robson, assistant professor of Christian ministry at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary's ex-

tension at Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola, said the problem can be attributed to an amoral, post-modern society, adding that the solution lies in granting inmates access to a faith-based education.

The Pew study noted that at the beginning of 2008, more than 2.3 million adults were behind bars. In 2007 alone, the prison population rose by more than 25,000 with states spending more than \$49 billion on corrections, compared to \$11 billion 20 years ago. Meanwhile, national recidivism rates remain unchanged.

Bill Glass, founder of the Champions for Life prison ministry, said he believes the nation's crime problem is related directly to the breakdown of the American family.

"There's very little childhood fatherly discipline or love," he noted. "As a result, the child tends to feel disenfranchised (and) disjointed without a father to give him di-

rection. That generally is the cause of crime."

This tragedy, Earley suggested, provides an open door for the church to go into prisons, show Christ's love to inmates and "help those who come out of prison who have been transformed by Christ to really be welcomed into the community and welcomed into churches."

Prison Fellowship, the ministry founded by Charles Colson in 1976, is the world's largest Christian ministry to prisoners and their families. But, Earley explained, the reason the national recidivism rate remains unchanged is because there are no programs on a large scale to help people change their lives.

"The programs that we do show a dramatic reduction in recidivism," Earley noted. "The fact of the matter is nationally, what (the government is) doing is merely warehousing people and not giving them the oppor-

tunity to change their lives, and so they're coming out really more anti-social than when they went in."

Earley said at least one-third of those in prison are nonviolent offenders and are being housed at an incredible cost to taxpayers. The Pew study also pointed out that the number of people behind bars does not necessarily correspond to an increase in crime, but can be attributed to a trend in policy choices that send more lawbreakers to prison through "three strikes" measures.

"We've talked for many years about being tough on crime, and that's important," Earley said. "But I think it's just as important to be smart on crime. Part of being tough on crime and smart on crime means that we don't put people in prison for long periods of time that we're angry at—we put people in prison for long periods of time who are a threat to society."

Southern Baptists leaders launch creation care initiative

Wake Forest, N.C.—A group of Southern Baptist leaders has launched a new initiative on the environment, saying that the denomination's past declarations on the issue have been "too timid."

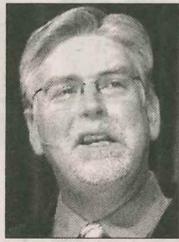
The "Southern Baptist Environment and Climate Initiative" has been spearheaded by Jonathan Merritt, a seminary student and the 25-year-old son of former Southern Baptist Convention President James Merritt.

"We believe our current denominational engagement with these issues have often been too timid, failing to produce a unified moral voice," reads the initiative's statement, which was released March 10. "The time for timidity regarding God's creation is no more."

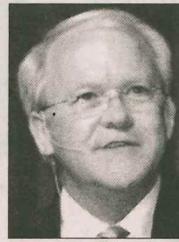
The document carries the signatures of a number of high-profile Southern Baptist leaders including the elder Merritt, who is pastor of Cross Pointe, the Church at Gwinnett Center in Duluth, Ga.; current SBC president Frank Page, pastor of First Baptist Church of Taylors, S.C.; Danny Akin, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.; Ed Stetzer, director of LifeWay Research; and Jack Graham, pastor of Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano, Texas, and a past president of the SBC.

The younger Merritt said he was moved to act after hearing his professor at Southeastern Seminary compare destroying creation to ripping out a page of the Bible.

He insisted that the new statement is not meant to contradict a nonbinding resolution passed at last



Hershael York



Frank Page

year's SBC annual meeting in San Antonio, which questioned findings that global warming is primarily human-induced.

The four-page document says that despite "justified disagreement" about the issue among Christians, there is a biblical mandate for churches to be actively involved in preaching and practicing care for creation." The declaration's four main points are:

- Human beings have a responsibility to care for creation and acknowledge their participation in environmental decline.

- Addressing climate change is prudent.

- Stewardship of the earth is required by Christian and Southern Baptist beliefs.

- Individuals, churches, communities and governments should act now.

It also included the disclaimer that advocacy of environmental stewardship will not reduce the signers' commitments to protecting unborn and other human life or to the biblical view of marriage.

"We will never compromise our convictions, nor attenuate our advocacy on these matters, which

constitute the most pressing moral issues of our day," the statement says. "However, we are not a single-issue body."

Also listed among the document's signatories is Hershael York, pastor of Buck Run Baptist Church in Frankfort and former Kentucky Baptist Convention president. He said that signing on with the initiative is all about being "good stewards of what God has given us."

"I think we ought to be proactive and do what we can to care for creation as God has given it to us," York added.

He described the document as "sound" and one that "doesn't align us with any kind of a theological misrepresentation of environmental care."

Meanwhile, one notable endorsement absent from the initiative is that of the SBC's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission.

During a teleconference, Merritt mentioned that the ERLC had provided helpful input to reshape the statement but in the end, did not endorse the final draft.

In a statement, ERLC President Richard Land took issue with the signers' statement that Southern Baptists have been "too timid" in addressing these issues.

The SBC "has officially addressed the issues of creation care and environmental stewardship in its 2006 and 2007 conventions through resolutions adopted by the convention's duly elected messengers," Land noted. Referring to the 2007 action, he added that it "is as close to an 'official' position as the SBC is capable

of making.

"Consequently, in our convention-assigned role to share faithfully with Washington and other public policy venues where the convention is on an issue, it would be misleading and unethical of the ERLC to promote a position at variance with the convention's expressly stated positions."

In addition, SBC President Page voiced support for the 2007 SBC resolution and earlier resolutions on the topic—but offered a caveat.

"Southern Baptists have long stood for a clear environmental message which takes seriously God's call to guard and keep the earth," Page said. "We have been balanced and responsive in our calls for care.

"However, in a broader sense, many of God's people have been timid about speaking out regarding issues which relate to environmentalism. Perhaps this timidity has been a fear that speaking out would tie us to the very extreme left wing liberal environmental lobby," he added.

York had the same opinion, noting that the politically conservative mindset of Southern Baptists has likely contributed to its tentativeness to promote a stance.

"I think because the left has often driven concern for the environment, it just makes us almost automatically have a knee-jerk reaction against it," he said, adding that he no longer wants Southern Baptists to "react against something without considering it and thinking through it."

Compiled from reporting by Religion News Service, Baptist Press and News Director Drew Nichter

Pastor controversy threatens to divide Fort Worth church

By Samuel Smith
Baptist Press

Fort Worth, Texas (BP)—Members of Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas overwhelmingly voted 499-237 to retain senior pastor Brett Younger in a closed business meeting March 8.

"Regardless of the outcome, we know that people will be hurting and will need reconciliation after this," deacon board chair Kathy Madeja said before the vote. She also mentioned that the Texas church will retain the services of an outside consultant who specializes in church conflict resolution.

The motion to vacate the pulpit was brought before the church by 162 members who were at least in part represented by a group called Friends for the Future of Broadway.

According to published accounts, group spokesman Robert Saul estimated that 300 people either are considering or have decided to leave the church because of the vote.

Broadway has been embroiled in controversy for the last several months as members have struggled with the issue of whether to allow homosexual couples in the church to be photographed and presented in a planned 125th anniversary pictorial directory.

At issue was not whether homosexuals should be able to serve, attend and hold positions of authority in the church, but whether a pictorial directory that included homosexual couples would make it appear as if the church endorsed the homosexual lifestyle. That issue was settled Feb. 24 when the church voted 294-182 to leave family portraits out of the directory in favor of candid photos.

Friends for the Future of Broadway had brought a litany of complaints against Younger in recent months, criticizing his handling of the directory controversy and a decline in church attendance since the beginning of his tenure in 2001.

In late February, the controversy came to a head when the petition to vacate the pulpit was brought to the deacons and a date was set for a church-wide vote on the issue.

Four honored with NAMB church planting awards

Atlanta (BP)—In the past two years alone, Willie Jacobs Jr. has been the primary strategist for developing 18 new African-American church starts through the State Convention of Baptists in Ohio. And he has four more on the drawing board for 2008. Over the course of his ministry career, he has helped plant as many as 50 churches.

That is why Jacobs was one of four missionaries to win church planting awards during the Southern Baptist North American Mission Board's recent annual Church Planting Missionary and National Missionary Forum in Atlanta.

"I was speechless," Jacobs said of winning the award. "What I do, I do for the Lord. It was a blessing to receive it and I give God the praise."

He joined Phil McConnell, church planter strategist in Arizona; Phill Hall, church starting strategist in Arkansas; and Al Fernandez, director of the Florida Baptist Convention's South Florida Urban Impact Center, as NAMB's top church planter award winners.

Jacobs and his wife, Ozzie, have started churches in four Ohio cities—Columbus, Cleveland, Akron and Cincinnati.

The year before McConnell began serving in Arizona, Estrella Baptist Association reported no new church plants. In his first year, he personally started one church and was instrumental in planting a second. Over the next two years, McConnell took the lead in starting six churches. Mc-

Connell and wife, Ann, serve in Tolle-son, Ariz.

Hall serves as a church starting coordinator for the Arkansas Baptist Convention and is the strategist for the eastern part of the state. With a cross-cultural focus, Hall has led the way in planting African-American and Anglo churches in Arkansas and Iowa. He also has led the state convention's church planting team during two interim periods over the past seven years.

As a church planting missionary since 2004, Fernandez has established a church planting multiplication center in South Florida's tri-county area around Miami. Instrumental in launching several multiplying, multi-ethnic churches, he also coaches church planters and pastors.

Jacobs said the forum re-affirmed his church planting practices over the past 15 years—engaging the community, networking for evangelism, starting small groups, identifying leaders and equipping leaders.

Some 350 church planting missionaries and strategists from across the United States and Canada attended the meeting in Atlanta, the theme of which was "Live with Urgency."

Driving home the urgency theme, NAMB President Geoff Hammond told conference participants that every 11 seconds in the United States, someone dies.

"If they don't know Christ, they will be eternally separated from

God," Hammond noted, citing statistics that state out of 332 million people in the United States and Canada, more than 250 million do not have a personal relationship with Christ.

Re-thinking North America

While many Southern Baptists do not think of North America as a mission field, "it's not only a mission field but a growing and changing mission field," Hammond emphasized. "Canada is growing by 250,000 legal immigrants a year. The U.S. now has 303 million people and will have 400 million over the next 35 years."

Hammond said the United States is No. 5 in the world in the number of ethno-linguistic groups. He added that 500 different ethnic language groups are represented in New York City alone.

The North American mission field is not only growing and changing, it is becoming spiritually darker, more secular and more pluralistic, Hammond added. He cited a recent Pew study reporting that Protestant Christians, now at 51 percent of America's religious adherents, are on the verge of becoming a minority.

"We're not going to give up on a spiritual awakening in America," he declared. "We believe this is a crowd who can help get the job done. You are the leaders of church planters and you have the ability to influence the folks who will plant new churches."

'Egg-citing' news

'Resurrection Eggs' can reveal true meaning of Christ-centered holiday

Continued from page 1

Some believers object to the use of Resurrection Eggs because, like the "Easter" label, eggs sometimes are associated with paganism. However, eggs also are used in the Seder, the traditional Passover meal, and many Christians consider the image of a broken, empty egg symbolic of Christ's empty tomb.

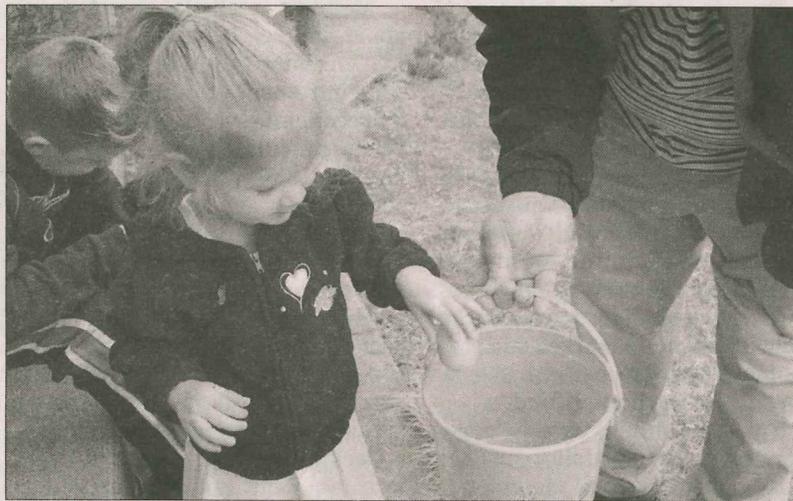
Although some of the items inside the Resurrection Eggs vary, all versions conclude the story with an open, empty egg. A Bible verse commonly used to explain the meaning of the final egg is Luke 24:5-6. The angels ask the women at the tomb, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? ... He has risen."

Immanuel Baptist Church in Elizabethtown also invites the community to an egg hunt followed by a telling of the story using Resurrection Eggs. "I choose to use them because they're small and in-hand ... (and) every year it captivates their attention," said minister of students Michael Coogle. Children "can't wait to see what's in the next egg."

Coogle explained that the presentation provides him a sort of diagnostic tool to evaluate children who attend Immanuel. "They (help you) pick up on where your children are spiritually ... how much they are paying attention in Sunday school."

And for the boys and girls who perhaps never have heard the real Easter story, Resurrection Eggs make the message more memorable, he added. "A lot of kids are more visual learners."

Jana Barnes of Versailles Baptist Church brought Resurrection



EASTER EGG FUN ■ Above: Alexis Aubrey gets a little help from her dad as she drops an Easter egg into her basket at a recent Easter egg hunt held at Good News Homes in LaGrange. ■ Right: Jacob Flener proudly shows off the bagful of eggs he snatched up. The Easter egg hunt was part of an Easter party thrown by Phos Hilaron Church—a church plant serving Oldham and eastern Jefferson Counties—and Good News Homes, a ministry of Oldham-Trimble Baptist Association. (Photos by Drew Nichter)

Eggs into her fourth-grade Sunday school class years ago and said she has watched many of her students develop a deeper understanding of the story.

"I make a six-weeks project out of it," she noted. "The point is for them to learn the story well enough that they can open an egg and tell a little bit of the story."

Each child is asked to bring an empty egg carton and a dozen plastic eggs to class to create their own set of Resurrection Eggs. As the class collects items to place in the eggs, they also make their own booklet of Bible verses that explain each memento. Some are everyday objects; others can be found at craft stores.

Examples:

- Dimes to represent the silver given to Judas to betray Jesus.

- A cup to represent the Last Supper.

- A thorn from a rose bush to represent the crown of thorns placed on Jesus' head.

- A piece of gravel from the driveway to represent the stone that was rolled in front of Christ's tomb.

Commercially produced sets are available online and at most Christian bookstores.

Barnes said on Resurrection Sunday she encourages her students to take their eggs to the family gathering and share the story with a cousin or friend.



"I had a family tell me their child, who is very shy, shared with the whole extended family (at) their Easter get-together," she said. "By opening the egg and seeing the little reminder, it gives them the chance to then be teachers themselves."

Disaster relief crew responds in own backyard

By Keith Todd
State Correspondent

Marion—Since a winter storm last month dumped a quarter-inch of ice on several Western Kentucky counties, the sound of chain saws buzzing in the distance has been a common occurrence.

The city of Marion and much of Crittenden County were hit especially hard. Downed trees and power lines left families without electricity for days and resulted in a mess of mangled tree limbs that required cleaning up. In some places, downed trees even kept people from getting in and out of their homes.

The disaster situation presented a ministry opportunity close to home for a group that is more familiar with having to travel to find such a mess to clean up.

Members of Ohio River Baptist Association's disaster response team got to work helping families remove fallen trees shortly after the storms. Setting up a response center at the Marion Baptist Church Family Life Center, numerous volunteers have been working the last several weeks answering more than 200 requests for assistance. Disaster team coordinator Eddie Osburn said dozens of volunteers answered the call.

"We had upward of 50 volunteers all the way from Louisa near Ashland, Henderson, Owensboro, Mar-



HOMETOWN CLEAN UP Paul Malcom (left) and David Padgett help clear downed tree limbs that were left by ice storms in Crittenden County last month. The two men were volunteers with Ohio River Baptist Association's disaster response team. (Photo courtesy of Ohio River Baptist Association)

shall County, Calhoun, Marion, Salem, and a few others," he noted.

Just before the storms hit, several members of the team had been working near Central City and Greenville in Muhlenberg County assisting tornado victims there. Even that is closer to home than many of the calls for help the group receives.

"We've been to the Gulf Coast to assist victims of Hurricane Katrina several times and responded to a number of other disasters, mainly tornado, flood and hurricane damage," Osburn explained. "We've been to several locations around Kentucky, Illinois, West Virginia,

Virginia, and even El Salvador. But, this is the first time we've had a need to respond this close to home."

The group has its own trailer that carries all the gear that might be required to respond to disaster clean up. There are also 64 trained disaster relief workers with Ohio River Association, which encompasses Livingston and Crittenden Counties. Many of the volunteers who were called upon to help following the ice storm, sustained damage at their own homes as well, but opted to help their neighbors first.

"About all of our association members had some kind of damage, some greater than others," Osburn said. "Some of our volunteers helped work on the homes of others while there were still downed trees in their own yards."

While the relief volunteers helped bless the families they served, Osburn added that the volunteers were rewarded with a spiritual boost of their own.

"We have given about 1,000 man-hours of service to our neighbors here," he noted. "We have distributed over 100 bibles to the families we've served. We're trying to give the people of Crittenden County a cup of cold water. When you have people thanking you with tears in their eyes you know what you're doing has been a blessing to others."

KBC reports strong Feb. for Cooperative Program giving

Louisville—Halfway through the 2007-2008 fiscal year, Cooperative Program giving remains ahead of giving totals over the same period in the previous giving year, but slightly behind budget for the current year.

According to Lowell Ashby, Kentucky Baptist Convention's business services team leader, churches have given a total of \$11,842,040 through February, which leaves total CP receipts \$157,960, or 1.3 percent, behind budget.

"I'm very hopeful that Kentucky Baptists will overcome the 1.3 percent deficit and meet budget this year. It's definitely a reachable goal," said Billy Compton, KBC's executive associate for Cooperative Program and resources.

The annual budget for Cooperative Program in the 2007-2008 fiscal year is \$24 million.

"Even though we're still slightly behind budget, the overall positive trends are very encouraging," Compton noted. "We've just had the strongest back-to-back months of the fiscal year, we're ahead of giving last year and the deficit has been significantly decreased since December."

Ashby said February giving year-to-date of \$11,842,040 was also \$566,657, or 5 percent, above the \$11,275,383 received over the same period in the 2006-2007 fiscal year.

He also noted that \$12,157,960 is needed throughout the remainder of the 2007-2008 fiscal year in order to meet budgeted projections. For that to be achieved, slightly more than \$2 million would need to be received in each of the remaining six months.

"All of these dollars represent the investment Kentucky Baptists are making in connecting people to Jesus Christ," Compton pointed out. "Because of their generosity, we are reaching, developing and mobilizing people for Christ through the missions and ministries of the Cooperative Program."

WESTERN RECORDER

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

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Today's volatile markets require patience

By Roy Hayhurst

Dallas (BP)—During the last few months we have seen significant volatility in the financial markets. Staying the course in a roller coaster market can be a major challenge.

Wise investors do well to remember some very important principles of investing that should be considered in all market environments, including the uncertain conditions we now face:

Always focus on your objectives, not your emotions. Remember the goals that you have established and the time frame that you have to invest. Has anything really changed? Are your retirement goals and time horizon still the same? Goals are established for times like these. They help so that you can stick with a plan and not be swayed by emotion during difficult market environments.

Specifically regarding retirement participants, these assets are to serve needs for a long period of time. Make sure your objectives and actions are consistent with your time horizon. Participants can periodically review their risk tolerance by utilizing GuideStone's Investor Profile Quiz. The profile may be viewed on GuideStone's Web site at www.GuideStone.org. Participants also can request a copy by calling GuideStone (888) 98-GUIDE.

Consider that historically the stock market has been friendly, yielding many more positive returns than negative ones. Industry research firm Ned Davis Research Inc., looked at stock performance over an 80-year period, 1926 through 2006. What it found was 88 percent of the five-year periods and 97 percent of the 10-year periods yielded positive returns. And 100 percent of the 20-year periods yielded a positive return.

Essentially, you could choose any five-year period of time between 1926 and 2006, and almost nine out of 10 of them would show growth in an investor's portfolio.

While past performance is no

guarantee of future performance, the market itself has been resilient through the years.

Avoid making impulsive decisions. Guard against making ad hoc changes in your portfolio. Making changes based on short-term market movements is almost a guarantee for failure as it promotes "buying high and selling low."

The performance of your account moving forward will be determined based on results of the financial markets in the future, not the past. Selling today cannot avoid yesterday's losses in a down market. Likewise, in an up market, you cannot buy yesterday's performance by investing in the hottest fund.

If you absolutely have to make changes in your portfolio, consider making them in small increments. This allows you to dollar cost average and gives you time to more seriously consider your actions.

Getting out of the market during roller-coaster rides is seldom a smart move. What happens if you're out of the market and the market goes up?

Consider an investor who invested in an S&P 500 Index fund from January 1985 until March 2007. An investor who parked his money there for all 5,607 trading days would have an average annualized return of 12.8 percent. That period includes "Black Monday," Oct. 19, 1987, the tech bubble burst of 2001 and the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

Another investor got jittery every time the market pendulum swung from profit to loss. He missed the 10 best days over the course of those 12 years. His average annualized return drops to 10.2 percent. Miss the 30 best days, and his average annualized return is 6.6 percent. If one misses the 50 best days of market performance, the annual average return drops to 3.7 percent—barely above the rate of bank certificates of deposit. (Information gathered from Westwood Holdings Group, Inc.)

Don't count your losses. Tally-

FIRST PERSON

Sharing the resurrection power of Christ

In Philippians 3:10, the Apostle Paul reveals the primary objective of his life: "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection."

It was Paul's desire to know Jesus Christ personally. He wanted to know the power of the resurrection. For Paul, that power operated in the life of the believer. The resurrection of Christ bodily underscores the importance of the body and how we live our lives.

The resurrection of Christ is the guarantee of immortality (Romans 8:11, 1 Corinthians 15:14). His victory is our victory. The resurrection of Christ is the guarantee that the risen Lord is always with us (Matthew 28:20). This same power has enabled us to move from death to life in Jesus Christ.

In Ephesians 3:7-11, Paul refers to the mystery of God's plan that is being revealed by the church according to His eternal purposes. Paul

was grateful that God had given him the privilege to preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. He prays that Christ will dwell in their hearts by faith, and that they will know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge and be filled with all the fullness of God.

Paul has described an incredible experience that is possible because of God's eternal plan through Jesus Christ. It cannot be explained in human terms, but it can be experienced by faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul knew that experience and shared it before rulers, at Mars Hill, in prisons, synagogues and market places, while shipwrecked, etc. He never missed an opportunity to share how God had transformed his life and how others could experience transformation by God.

I have discovered that when my heart is filled with God's love and my mind with the truth of the gos-

ing up how much has been lost in your account serves no purpose. If you want to measure the progress/status of your investment account, focus on the gains realized in the equity (stock) markets over longer periods of time.

Maintain realistic expectations about market behavior. Financial markets move up and down over time in response to social, political and economic events. Further, equity investments are by nature more volatile than other asset classes such as cash and bonds. Equity investors should be able to accept significant short-term fluctuations in the value of their portfolios.

Still confused and want a simplified approach to investing over the long-haul? Many times the demands of ministering to a congregation or preparing three sermons a week leaves you with little time to think about how you are going to invest for your retirement. That's why GuideStone Funds launched a new series of mutual funds, the MyDestination Funds.

These funds are date target or life cycle funds which are diversified "fund-of-funds" that have an asset allocation that gradually becomes more conservative as you approach retirement. You simply choose the fund closest to your retirement date, make appropriate contributions, and the asset allocation is adjusted to become more conservative as you approach that retirement date.

The MyDestination Funds may be a smart choice for an investor who desires a simple investing approach, wants professional management with automatic reallocation and is willing to pay an additional expense in order to receive a more comprehensive level of asset management services.

Hopefully, you will use these principles as you consider what to do with your retirement account. If you would like to talk about your account with a GuideStone representative, please call (888) 98-GUIDE.

Roy Hayhurst is senior marketing communications editor for GuideStone Financial Resources

GIVING

Create flexibility by giving through endowment funds

By Laurie Valentine

Does your church or one of our Kentucky Baptist agencies and institutions have a particular program or ministry that you would like to support on an ongoing basis? Would you

like to provide that support through an endowment fund, but are hesitant to make a single large sum gift in these days of uncertainty in the financial markets? A flexible endowment fund may be the answer.

A flexible endowment fund is an arrangement under which you agree to establish an endowment fund that will, when fully funded, generate sufficient earnings to support the program or ministry. The amount of the principal gift to the endowment will depend on the financial support needed to run the ministry, and how much of that support you wish to provide. A timetable for completing the principal is agreed upon, but there is no schedule of payments—when you make the principal gifts during the funding period is up to you.

In addition to your agreement to make principal gifts, you also agree to provide annual expendable gifts to the program or ministry, so that it will have the funds to operate while you complete the principal funding. The amount of the expendable gifts is the difference between the earnings generated by the partially-funded endowment and the amount needed to fund the program annually. The expendable gifts will continue until you have completed funding the principal.

Here's an example: A Kentucky Baptist college sponsors an annual youth ministry workshop. Currently, the cost to run the workshop is \$3,000 per year. You agree to make principal gifts totaling \$67,000 (the amount needed to produce \$3,000 annually, assuming a 4.5 percent earnings rate) to an endowment fund over the next 10 years. You also agree to make additional gifts directly to the college each year—until the full \$67,000 of principal gifts has been made—in an amount equal to the difference between the endowment fund earnings and the \$3,000 workshop cost.

The result: You've set up a 10-year plan to create a significant endowment fund that will provide perpetual support for this program, while assuring the college has the financial resources it needs to run the workshop until the endowment is fully funded.

Laurie Valentine is trust counsel for the Kentucky Baptist Foundation



Breaking trust of marriage often can require years of healing

Q: Three years ago, I had an affair and my wife found out about it. She was understandably hurt and angry and still says that she will never get over it, regardless of what I do. I love my wife but am frustrated with her attitude. What can I do? Shouldn't she be over this?

Infidelity, or "breaking the trust," is perhaps the most painful marital wound from which to recover. Solomon knew this when he wrote, "Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched? So is he that sleeps with another man's wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished" (Proverbs 6:27-29).

There are several keys to recovering from affairs. Generally, it is easier to recover from a one-night stand (e.g., David and Bathsheba, 2 Samuel 11-12) than from a long-term relationship (e.g., Samson and Delilah, Judges 16) or from affairs with multiple partners (e.g., Eli's sons, 1 Samuel 2:22). Recovery is easier if the affair partner is immediately willing to break off the affair and sever any contact with the other person. It also helps if he or she is remorseful and willing to patiently answer their spouse's questions. The non-affair spouse must specifically address small ways in which trust can be gradually rebuilt (such as monitoring monthly cell phone records or calling if the spouse is going to be home late).

Often, it takes several years for healing to begin to take full effect. If the non-affair spouse is still angry and inquiring after several years, one must ask if the sin of unforgiveness now rivals the sin of adultery. Couples in this situation would do well to contact a skilled Christian counselor or pastor.—*Scott Wigginton*

Q: How can I help my child deal with stress?

Stress affects children just as it does adults. Several factors that can create stress in the life of a child, include:

- Worrying about their parents' death, divorce or separation.
- Being bullied at school.

- Getting a bad report card.
- Hearing parents fight.
- Wetting their pants.
- Moving or changing schools.
- Having an operation.

Symptoms of stress for a child can include:

- Difficulty sleeping or staying awake.
- Poor eating habits.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Back, neck or stomach aches.
- General irritability, nervousness or sadness.
- Nervous habits or incessant giggling.
- Bad dreams.

In his book, "Helping Children Handle Stress," Norman Wright encourages parents to help their children answer the following key questions.

- What do you do when something upsets you or frustrates you?
- How can you refuse to let a problem or situation bother you?
- How do you handle a problem head on?
- What relaxes you?

Helping children deal with stress may mean removing stressors from their lives. Pay particular attention to the ways in which scheduling demands impact your child. Spiritually, teach your children the great truths of John 14:1, Matthew 6:25 and Philippians 4:6-7. Help them understand that worry is a waste of time, in part because many of the things we worry about never even happen. Remind them that when their lives are in God's hands, they can relax no matter what is happening around them—or to them.—*David Garrard*

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Casino issue marks key moment of action

Sometimes important decision points pass by almost unnoticed. Life is busy— hectic even, for most of us—and as we deal with the many details of the day-to-day, it can be difficult to assess the importance of one decision over another and understand the implications for the future. Often, it is only years later when we can look back and see clearly the moment of action or inaction that started "it" all.

I am not a prophet, but I sincerely believe that Kentuckians and Kentucky Baptists are at one of those crucial decision points in the life of our commonwealth, as our legislature struggles over the question of expanded gambling. There's a great battle going on in Frankfort right now, and I believe the result will have far-reaching implications for all of us. On one side are those who say our state needs the revenue that can be gleaned by adding casinos across the commonwealth; that one more form of gambling won't hurt anything; that casinos will save our horse industry and will keep in Kentucky the dollars that are already being spent by Kentuckians at Indiana and Ohio casinos.

Many of us, however, see a looming danger in this proposal. We see that gambling tends to hurt most those who can least afford it and serves as a tax increase that shifts money to the gambling industry which could be more usefully spent in other sectors of the economy. We see that expanded gambling does not create new money for the state; it only siphons it away. We see that the increased social costs of dealing with gambling addictions and squandered paychecks more than offset any benefits. We believe our government should be engaged in activities that strengthen society, not weaken it as gambling does.

We also see the tremendous potential for corruption that comes with giving casino gambling revenue such an important place in our state budget. We've already seen huge amounts of money spent by the gambling industry in our last gubernatorial election and the rough infighting of power politics brought on by

discussion of this issue in our General Assembly. We wonder who will control a future legislature dependent upon the gambling industry for the basic funds needed to provide services for our state—gambling corporations or the people?

I realize that the current state budget situation makes gambling expansion an attractive short-term fix for many problems in some legislators' eyes. And, should expanded gambling ever gain approval, the damage wouldn't be immediately apparent. The initial news reports would be about new construction, new jobs and glamorous grand openings. But as time passed, we would see productive businesses close even as foreclosures, bankruptcies, crime and divorce increased. Our churches would see more and more resources being used to minister to those whose lives were damaged. We would all look back to this time of decision and wonder if we could have done more to prevent the devastation.

You've heard Kentucky Baptist Convention Executive Director Bill Mackey, President Bill Henard, Kentucky Woman's Missionary Union Executive Director Joy Bolton and others call you to action to contact your legislators to express your opinion on this crucial issue. Many of you have. Others of you probably agree that you don't want casinos in Kentucky but have yet to do anything personally.

For all of us, now is the time to act. Please make this a matter of prayer and do your part in contacting your legislators to let them know that they have an obligation to vote on this issue in a manner that will benefit all citizens. Share with them that you are praying for them, that you respect their service and that you will be watching to see how they cast their vote on this issue.

John Chowning is vice president for church and external relations and executive assistant to the president at Campbellsville University. He also serves as chairman of the KBC's Committee on Public Affairs and pastor of Saloma Baptist Church in Campbellsville

GUEST EDITORIAL



John Chowning

Christianity not just about being nice

By Dick Staub

Seattle (RNS)—Where did this idea originate—that Christianity is about being "nice"?

It is an odd outcome and irrational progression from Jesus Christ, whose very arrival on earth threatened to overturn everything: the Roman Empire, the Jewish religious powers and most significantly, the lives of every human on earth.

Essayist Annie Dillard noted the dissonance between "American Christianity" and that of its founder, describing contemporary Christians as "cheerful, brainless tourists on a packaged tour of the Absolute."

"On the whole I do not find Christians, outside the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of the conditions," she wrote. "Does anybody have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it?"

Three recent strands intertwine to bring the problem of "Christian niceness" to mind.

First, there is sociologist Christian Smith's study in which he finds today's young people practicing an aberrant form of Christianity that he calls "moralistic, therapeutic deism"—nice people having their personal needs met by a God who is there in case of emergency, like a parachute on an airplane. This is not Jesus' version of the faith.

Second, there is a conversation I had with a young "Christian film school" professor at the International Arts Movement in New York. He

commented that if he had to make a choice, he would rather his students be the best people than the best filmmakers. This kind of muddled thinking may explain why these filmmakers are making such bad films and asking Christians to support them. After all, shouldn't we support films made by such nice Christians?

It was odd having this conversation at IAM, a gathering that exists specifically to elevate the craftsmanship in art, standing on the shoulders of the Apostle Paul who said, "Whatever you do, do it to the glory of God." The passion for artistic excellence and personal integrity are not mutually exclusive pursuits. Just look at C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien.

Which leads me to a third problem.

In today's commercially driven pop culture, where Christians have become defined as nice people who are not really concerned about intellectual or aesthetic excellence, the result is the sudden proliferation of insipid faith-fueled, family-friendly films produced by and for people who like such stuff.

Most of Hollywood, having witnessed "The Passion of the Christ," did not see the story of Jesus, who died for humanity to transform it; they saw an opportunity to make money. As Andy Warhol said, "Money is more American than thinking."

Having heard Christians complain for years about sexual con-

tent and nudity in their films, and having observed that G-rated family films actually can deliver audience and profits, they embarked on a path to produce films made by and aimed at "nice Christians."

I was recently on the PBS show "Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly" talking about "God and Hollywood" and the low-budget productions made by Fox Faith for the Christian audience. Most of these films never made it to the big screen and so far, the financial results have been disappointing. Here's what I told PBS: Generally, to make a good film, you've got to spend money, and Fox Faith has not spent good money. Therefore, they're not making good films. Therefore, they're not successful.

But the problem with "marketing niceness" has more severe consequences than economic ones. When Pollyannaish storylines like "Facing the Giants" become the definition of the good news offered by Christians, we have lost the essence of the gospel.

We're coming up on the Easter season and Jesus died on a cross. The Christian story has a resurrection, but it also has a lot of messiness in it. If you want to tell the Christian story, it's not just a feel-good story. It's a story that has substantial pain and suffering and sorrow in it, just like our lives do.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is not just about comforting the afflicted; it is also about afflicting the comfortable. Being Christian is not just about being nice.

Dick Staub is author of "The Culturally Savvy Christian" and host of the Kindness Music blog.

Association's 'Mistakes' series seeks to affirm pastors

Northern Kentucky ministers share stories of missteps, how to avoid repeating them

By Ken Walker
State Correspondent

Fort Thomas—Soon after he sensed God calling him into the ministry about 30 years ago, Pastor Dave Simpson was singing a duet with a woman at a Sunday morning worship service. He said he thought they were doing pretty well—until a dog started howling outside the sanctuary door.

"The whole congregation cracked up," recalled the pastor of Highland Avenue Baptist Tabernacle in Fort Thomas. "I'll never forget that as long as I live."

That was one of the lighter moments Simpson has shared in the series, "Mistakes I've Made in Ministry and How I (Tried to) Fixed Them," the topic of a monthly pastors' conference sponsored by Northern Kentucky Baptist Association.

Started last fall, "Mistakes" follows two years of discussions of vital issues faced by pastors in the 70-church association, the third largest in the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

Director of Missions Rick Robbins said using local pastors as speakers has boosted attendance at the monthly meetings. In the past, the association had often booked well-known leaders whose fees cost considerably more than the free lunch it offers speakers these days.

"Guys don't just come for the speaker, they come for fellowship and affirmation," Robbins noted. "Emotions run the gamut."

Simpson's story included more than the amusing tale of howling dogs. He recalled such youthful mistakes as ignoring the value of communication in his first church.

"I failed to listen with my heart to their heart," said Simpson, who is now in his seventh year at Highland Avenue. "A long time ago I heard an old preacher say, 'We should listen twice as much as we talk.' We don't always have to agree, but we should listen."

Another mistake Simpson con-

fessed to was not reading and studying enough, a task made more difficult in his first 27 years as a bivocational pastor with a growing family. Through the years, he said, he has also learned to stop putting so much pressure on himself to deliver a perfect sermon on Sunday mornings.

Once his wife remarked his messages on Sunday and Wednesday evenings were better because he was not trying to measure up to people like Billy Graham or the late Adrian Rogers.

"You can't compete with guys like that," Simpson acknowledged. "You have to be who you are."

Pastors also struggle to achieve a balance between family and ministry, said Ronny Raines, pastor of First Baptist Church of Cold Spring since September of 2006.

"I talked about being intentional in investing in other people in ministry, ultimately so you can pull away from ministry," added Raines, who formerly served as pastor of Northside Baptist Church in Elizabethtown.

Dealing with change

During his presentation at the conference, Raines also addressed the problems he has faced in dealing with change. If a pastor tries to implement change too quickly, he said, it can cause disruption and result in people opposing the pastor's leadership.

Raines noted that he has moved slowly at First Baptist, Cold Spring—where a previous pastor was sent to prison for misappropriating funds—because the congregation had been so hurt.

Still, he persuaded them to move back the starting time of the early worship service, which he said has given them more freedom in both services.

"Any time you start changing people's times it gets personal," Raines said. "We've made some other changes, (such as) getting person-



VALUABLE LESSONS Will Langford (left), pastor of Hickory Grove Baptist Church in Independence; Mark Webb, (center), pastor of First Baptist Church of Highland Heights; and Gary Wolfe, pastor of Flagg Spring Baptist Church in California participate in a recent "Mistakes I've Made in Ministry and How I (Tried to) Fix Them" conference hosted monthly by Northern Kentucky Association. (Photo courtesy of Rick Robbins)

nel policies in place. But most of my ministry has been loving people."

Johnnie Holloway, pastor of Elsmere Baptist Church, warned fellow pastors to "never say never," sharing about how he came out of the Air Force with plans to settle in his hometown.

Not only did God change his mind with a call to ministry at the age of 54, he noted, but the Lord changed his mind about never going back to school. That led him to complete a doctorate in biblical counseling.

"Every time you say 'never' God says, 'We'll see,'" Holloway advised.

Over the years, the Elsmere pastor has also learned to follow God's direction rather than his own impulses.

As a seminary student, he recalled serving a church 65 miles from campus, primarily to provide additional income for his family. He only stayed with that congregation for 16 months.

"It was a good ministry but long term, that wasn't God's perfect will," Holloway noted. "But God blesses our mistakes and lets us learn."

Holloway admitted it was not easy to let his guard down and ad-

mit some of his mistakes, but thinks it helped others to learn—just as he did—from his experiences.

"Sometimes pastors think we're infallible," Holloway said. "If I can share (mistakes) and help others from going in a similar direction, I've done my job."

Raines called it "affirming" for pastors to learn that they face similar problems and can gain insights from others.

"Iron sharpens iron," the Cold Spring pastor said. "As we share weaknesses and mistakes, it helps one another. It was encouraging to talk with pastors about these issues."

According to Simpson, not only does it help pastors to admit their humanness and avoid staying on the pedestal where many church members put them, he said the conference has helped build closer relationships among church leaders.

"I heard a pastor say, 'Pastoring a Baptist church is like changing a tire (at) 60 miles an hour,'" Simpson noted. "People are going in different directions at once and so are you. We're going fast in a speedy world and don't take time for each other."

KBC launches blog designed to tackle discipleship issues

Louisville—Kentucky Baptists who wish to disciple others more effectively, as well as retain members and visitors in their churches can now access expanded online resources through the Kentucky Baptist Convention's newest blog, 28Nineteen.

Written by Steve Rice, director of the KBC's discipleship and assimilation department, the online journal is dedicated to equipping Kentucky Baptists in the areas of discipleship and assimilation. The blog can be found at www.28nineteen.org.

"This is a place where we will discuss all aspects of discipleship and assimilation, especially as it pertains to the local church," Rice noted. "We are committed to equipping Christians for the practical, day-to-day aspects of working toward spiritual maturity in the local church and this is a much-needed extension of that effort."

In his role, Rice said he seeks to help church leaders develop and implement effective strategies for assimilation, discipleship, deacon ministries and bivocational ministries.

"My prayer is that 28Nineteen will be a place where we can journey together toward spiritual growth and speak honestly about these important issues," Rice said, adding that a variety of discipleship topics will be discussed, including strategies, resources and practices. Attention will also be given to related topics such as assimilation, Sunday school, mentoring and preaching.

The blog is also intended to help Kentucky Baptist churches reach the assimilation goal of 80 percent as outlined in the Kentucky Baptist Connect initiative, which stresses the importance of new members becoming active in church life.

Miracle, pastor of Friendship Baptist Church in Irvine, dies

Richmond—Charles Miracle, pastor of Friendship Baptist Church in Irvine, died March 10 at Patty A. Clay Hospital in Richmond. He was 55 years old.

Miracle had led the Irvine church since 1993. He also served as pastor of two Breckinridge County churches, Hites Run Baptist Church in Hardinsburg and Raymond Baptist Church, as well as churches in West Virginia and Tennessee.

According to his daughter-in-law, Miracle had recently been declared free of cancer after an 8-month battle with the disease, but soon after developed a urinary tract infection that spread to his kidneys.

"He had a servant's heart and led by example," said son Chris Miracle, who serves as children's

pastor at Beechwood Baptist Church in Louisville. Another son, Brian, serves as pastor of Dewitt Baptist Church in Knox County.

"He brought the Bible home," Chris Miracle said of his father. "He gave us our own space to work, learn and develop (and) was always there as a resource if we needed him."

Charles Miracle was a 1984 graduate of Clear Creek Baptist Bible College in Pineville.

Funeral services were held March 13 at Friendship Baptist Church with son Brian officiating.

Miracle is survived by his wife, Debbie, two sons and four grandchildren.

The family requests that gifts be made in Miracle's memory to Clear Creek Baptist Bible College.

Judge rules Calif. home schools are unconstitutional

Los Angeles (RNS)—Home schooling advocates, including Focus on the Family founder James Dobson, have decried a recent California court decision that declares most forms of home schooling illegal.

The ruling last month by a California appeals court came in a juvenile court case involving a family that home schooled their children and had them tested occasionally at a Christian school.

"The fact remains that the children are taught at home by a non-credentialed person," Associate Justice H. Walter Croskey wrote in his decision.

The judge ruled that public school enrollment is generally required unless a child is enrolled in a full-time private school or tutored by a credentialed teacher. A lower court did not order such schooling based on a belief that the parents had a constitutional right to home school, but Croskey wrote, "California courts have held that ... parents do not have a constitutional right to home school their children."

Dobson called the decision "an all-out assault on the family" and "an imperious assault on the rights of parents."

"The ruling should have been confined to that one couple, not used to punish an entire class of people, the vast majority of them religious conservatives," he added.

The Home School Legal Defense Association has started a petition to "depublish" the appellate ruling, a move that would mean the case is not binding on any other family.

School struggles with task of consecration

By G. Jeffrey MacDonald
Religion News Service

DeKalb, Ill. (RNS)—Officials at Northern Illinois University have spent the past month comforting students and consoling families in the aftermath of a gunman's Feb. 14 rampage that left five dead.

But the hard part may be just beginning.

Now the campus community is struggling to figure out what it means to "consecrate" the site, as victims' families have requested. It is no easy task, scholars say, for this school—and others scarred by violence—to set apart, as sacred, a space without a religious tradition to inform the process.

"You don't really have any guiding principles, especially in these more recent kind of horrible massacres in places where we don't expect them," noted Gary Laderman, a professor at Emory University in Atlanta and an expert on American death rituals. "It's not clear what the proper public response is supposed to be ... if you're not just going to put a cross up."

The challenge came into sharp relief soon after NIU President John Peters announced plans last month to raze Cole Hall, where the shootings occurred. Critics protested the plan, saying it would imply the shooter had done irreparable damage or left in his wake a community eager to forget. NIU officials have since announced they would reconsider the demolition plan.

Erasing the site of horror would be a step with historical precedent. A non-profit group in 1992 razed the Milwaukee home of serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer, and the 1692 execution site of Salem's accused witches remains unmarked to this day.

But in recent years, schools touched by violence have chosen to renovate rather than raze. Virginia Tech has temporarily blocked off six classrooms in Norris Hall, where a

gunman last year killed 30 people. An atrium was built over the site of the former library at Columbine High School in Colorado, where 15 people died during a 1999 massacre.

In opting for renovations, scholars say, schools acknowledge that these charged spaces have undergone permanent transformations and cannot return to business as usual. The challenge is to balance new, productive uses with a desire for ritual and restraint, in order to give an otherwise troubled structure a special, even holy, status.

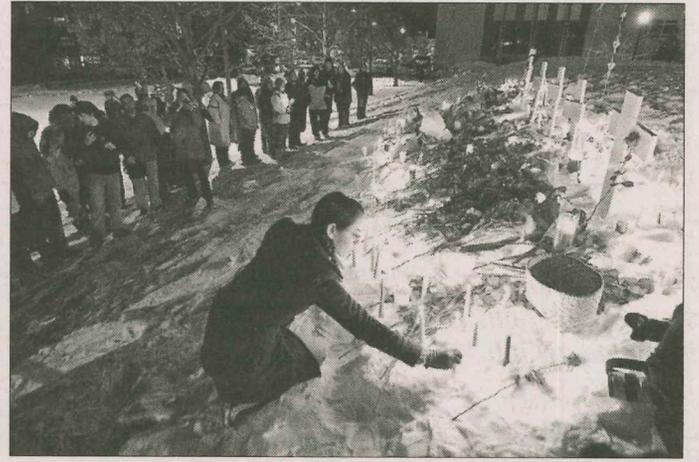
"Sacred spaces mandate a human response to them," said Joan Branham, an art historian at Providence College and an expert on sacred space. She recalled how the divine presence of God in a burning bush compelled Moses to remove his shoes.

Secular vs. sacred

For campus buildings that have been overtaken by violence, Branham noted, "the question is how to continue with a secular space and infuse it with some of these elements that we see as very common to sacred spaces."

She explained that no hard-and-fast rules apply. Instead, colleges have many options as they improvise upon one tradition or another. But, she pointed out, the term "monument" derives from the Latin word "monere," which means not only "to remember," but also "to warn." And in that dual purpose, she noted, today's relics of mass murder find parameters to govern their missions for the future.

At Virginia Tech, a \$1 million investment will eventually convert a now-closed classroom wing into a shared home for an academic department and a new Center for Peace Studies and Violence Prevention. School spokesman Mark Owczarski said the new design will help redeem the space by making it a hub



for community gatherings. The rest of Norris Hall, he added, will remain intact because it houses precious research facilities and is already home to a lofty mission.

Ultimately, scholars agree, communities require years to figure out what feels right in terms of managing their charged sites. Ford's Theater in Washington, D.C., where Abraham Lincoln was assassinated in 1865, remained shuttered for more than a century afterward.

In more recent cases, how a community handles the site of carnage may depend on its understanding of the incident, according to cultural geographer Kenneth Foote. Communities have a greater need for purging when a killer comes from their own ranks, he said, and that desire sometimes takes the form of a razed structure.

Whatever the circumstances, Foote explained, a community beset by violent tragedy will feel compelled to utilize "religious prototypes," such as a structure that resembles a high altar at the Columbine memorial. He said these make people feel comfortable in an otherwise charged atmosphere.

"People will always come back to the site," Foote added. "Even if they remove the building, the presence is still there."

ON SACRED GROUND
Students at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Ill., gather for a campus vigil after a shooting spree at an auditorium left five people dead on Feb. 14. The school is now struggling to decide how to memorialize the shooting. (RNS photo courtesy Scott Walstrom/NIU)

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Report: Most children in U.S. live in two-parent households

Washington (BP)—Overall, 7 in 10 American children live in two-parent homes, about two-thirds live with two married parents, and about 6 in 10 children live with both biological parents, according to a recent analysis of statistics released by the U.S. Census Bureau.

The report, based on data collected in 2004, can be compared to stats from 1970 that found 85 percent of children were living with two parents and 11 percent with the mother only, The New York Times noted. Statistics from 1990 noted that a little more than 70 percent of children lived with two parents and slightly more than 20 percent lived with only the mother. "The figures suggest that the tumultuous shifts in family structure since the late 1960s have leveled off since 1990," according to the newspaper.

Nearly 45 million of the nation's 73 million children younger than 18 years old lived with their biological mother and father in 2004, regardless of the parents' marital status, the Census Bureau noted.

"People realize the value of giving kids a mother and a father," said Glenn Stanton, director of global family formation studies at Focus on the Family. "We need to understand that that is the norm; that it's the overwhelming majority and not the minority. That should give great encouragement to the majority of people out there that are trying to make their marriages work and their parenting relationships work."

The research also showed that cohabitating families are on the rise with 3.7 million children living with one biological parent and an unmarried partner.



Leaders explore importance of following up with VBS kids

By Polly House

LifeWay Christian Resources

Nashville—If you do not plan to follow up with vacation Bible school, you might as well not have it, leaders say.

"The whole point of vacation Bible school is to lead the children, youth and adults who attend to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Bottom line. That's it," declared Jerry Wooley, VBS specialist at LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention.

"The fun, the games and the music are the means to getting the opportunity to talk with the children and their families and share the gospel with them," he added.

At this year's four VBS preview events held at LifeWay's Ridgecrest Conference Center in North Carolina, Glorieta Conference Center in New Mexico, and LifeWay headquarters in Nashville, 2,500 men and women came from churches across the country to hear the importance of having their VBS experience extend beyond the week of fun.

"Last year, 90 percent of the people who turned in evaluation forms from the VBS preview events indicated they needed help with follow up," Wooley noted. "We honestly had no idea the need was that great."

According to Wooley, in 2006—

the most recent figures available—nearly 3 million people were enrolled in VBS. In addition, 212,000 prospects were discovered, for Sunday school and almost 40,000 were enrolled in Sunday school because of VBS, he added.

"It is startling to realize that in vacation Bible school in 2006, we documented 94,980 decisions to accept Christ," he said. "That is 1.1 decision for every one person trained as a VBS worker by our state conventions. That is phenomenal when you consider that statistically—SBC wide—it takes 44 people to win one person to Christ."

Most effective evangelism tool

Past studies have suggested that vacation Bible school is the single most effective evangelism strategy within the Southern Baptist Convention. In 2006, 26 percent of the more than 360,000 baptisms in SBC churches were a direct result of VBS.

"These numbers are just the ones we know about, that we have documentation about," Wooley said. "I can only imagine how many more people are reached when you think about the parents, brothers, sisters, grandparents and friends of these children."

Wooley remarked that he found it heartbreaking that some churches finish their week of VBS, take their enrollment cards, bundle them up and stick them on a shelf to gather dust.

"I actually have had churches that proudly showed me stacks of bundled VBS cards from several years," he recalled. "They don't even seem to realize they are just bundles of missed opportunities."

During this year's VBS preview events, several breakout sessions specifically addressed ideas for following up with children after VBS ends. Other session highlights included volunteer appreciation, crafts, snacks and family night ideas.

VBS specialist offers tips for follow up

Nashville—Vacation Bible school is a huge deal. But just how huge? Almost 1-in-16 children in America ages 5-12 was enrolled in a Southern Baptist VBS, according to figures from 2006.

"The evangelism potential for VBS is unbelievable," said Ken Marler, network partnership specialist with LifeWay Christian Resources, who led a session on the importance of VBS follow up during a preview event held last month in Nashville.

"We enrolled more than 2.9 million people in VBS (in 2006) and about 2 million of those were ages 5 to 12," he noted. "When you realize that there are 32 million children in America who are between ages 5 and 12, it's staggering to think about 1-in-16 children in that age group was enrolled in a LifeWay VBS in a Southern Baptist church."

Looking at those numbers, he added, requires VBS leaders to take the responsibility to keep up with the children following the week's event.

Marler offered the following suggestions:

Set goals. Plan to follow up. Decide quickly to make follow-up visits and determine how many leaders should be involved. Then set up teams and at each visit, have information about the church and Sunday school ready to give to families.

Include adult class leaders and children's department leaders. Before VBS even begins, enlist leaders to visit each child's home after the event. Not only should there be a plan for the children, but bring along adults from an appropriate class to visit with the parents.

Obtain accurate registration information. Fill out an information card on every child who comes to vacation Bible school. Even the children who are regular church participants need to have their information in writing.

Consider designating a VBS follow-up director. The follow-up director should be someone who is not heavily involved in the VBS week activities, so that he or she will be fresh when the week is over. The director needs to select and enlist team members whose job it is to coordinate VBS family visits.

Report VBS follow-up efforts to the congregation. From the pulpit, enthusiastically remind the congregation that VBS was a big success. Tell them how many children participated and how many families benefited from the follow up.

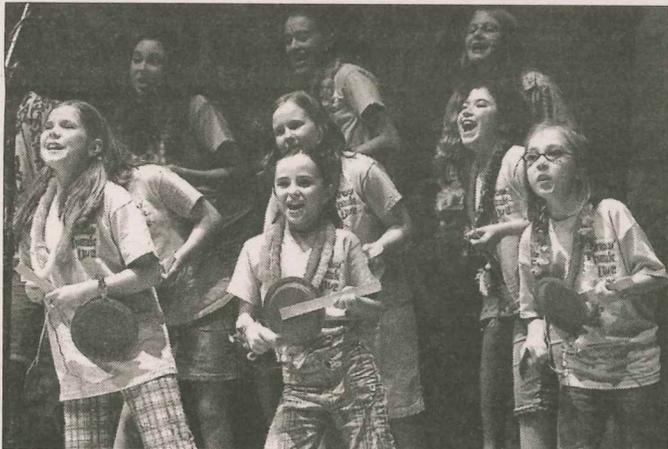
Establish a VBS prayer ministry. This is a ministry that can be active all year long, not just for the month leading up to VBS. Make a prayer calendar and distribute it to the entire church.

Create a "VBS Never Ends" emphasis. Throughout the year, remind the church of the upcoming theme. For example, in January, play a VBS music video. When the VBS director is selected, introduce him or her to the congregation and remind church members of the dates.

Offer testimonies and interviews. Throughout the year, let people who have been touched by vacation Bible school give brief testimonies of how they were changed. When those who received Jesus Christ because of the influence of VBS are baptized, let the congregation know about it.

SUMMER SONG

The children's choir from The People's Church in Franklin, Tenn., perform "Outrigger Island: The Musical," part of the vacation Bible school experience from LifeWay Christian Resources. (LifeWay photo by Kent Harville)



LifeWay's VBS Web resource offers new features for 2008

Nashville—Summer may still be a few months away, but already churches and individuals are deeply involved in vacation Bible school training and planning. To help with that effort, LifeWay Christian Resources is offering an updated and further-enhanced version of its VBS Tools Online resource.

"This is one of the best resources we've come up with to meet a need in the church," said Bethany Webster, Internet producer of LifeWay's childhood ministry publishing area. "It's cost-effective, convenient and extremely helpful."

VBS Tools Online is designed to help churches and volunteers manage the planning, implementation and follow-up processes that go into a successful VBS program.

Since LifeWay first unveiled VBS Tools Online in 2005, Webster said the resource's designers have sought feedback from customers and "really listened" to their requests in order to update and enhance the program each year.

Webster noted that one well-received addition in prior years was the ability to create custom registration forms, which allowed churches to gather information tailored to their individual needs, such as T-shirt sizes and child pick-up authorization.

The 2008 version of VBS Tools Online expands upon that enhancement by allowing churches to now print the customized registration forms. Webster explained that this feature enables individuals registering by paper to fill out the exact same form as those who register online.

For more information about VBS Tools Online, visit www.lifeway.com/vbs.



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HE IS RISEN! The Ascension of Jesus is portrayed by a recent cast from First Baptist Church of Atlanta, which presents a musical production on the two weekends before Easter each year. (RNS photo courtesy of First Baptist Church of Atlanta)

Churches try out new spin on telling the Easter story

By Adelle Banks
Religion News Service

Atlanta (RNS)—This year, when First Baptist Church of Atlanta stages its annual Easter production at the Atlanta Civic Center, Jesus will not raise Lazarus from the dead. But he will heal a paralytic.

"We always have different miracles," explained John Glover, who produces the program beginning the two weekends before Easter. "The raising of Lazarus is one of our most popular ones. We're just not doing that this year."

In the push of tradition and the pull of keeping things fresh, preachers, children's ministers and church staffers like Glover find both excitement and challenges in retelling the Easter story year after year.

There is a lot of material to pick and choose from. Some elements are mainstays, such as flying angels and Handel's "Hallelujah" chorus in Glover's program. Others, including Jesus' various miracles, come and go.

This year's production includes the scene of Jesus calming the seas, back by popular demand. Glover has found that some people get upset when anyone—literally or figuratively—rocks the boat.

"Every once in a while I leave that out, just to see what happens, and every time we get letters and cards," Glover said. "Where's the boat? I brought my friend just to see the boat."

Under pressure

Ministers, especially, can find themselves facing unspoken pressure from larger-than-normal crowds—many of them in church just once a year—who expect the Easter sermon to be the year's best.

"A great deal of planning goes into getting ready for Easter Sunday, recognizing that it's the biggest crowd (and) it's an opportunity to place the gospel in front of people who won't otherwise hear it," noted Michael Duduit, editor of Preaching magazine, who considers the holiday "one of the great preaching days of the year."

"Most churches that I know of take Easter very seriously. They plan well for it," he added. "They want it to be a meaningful worship service and not ... just for the new people

but for the members."

With so many aspects of Jesus' life on display in church pulpits and on fellowship hall stages, some church staff members choose to focus on one aspect of the Easter story, especially when working with children.

For the past two years at First Church of God in Kokomo, Ind., the "Resurrection Angel" has made an appearance in a fellowship hall decorated with white linen tablecloths and twinkling lights.

"I have a man that puts on a white tuxedo and big feathered wings and brings in this megaphone and just absolutely captivates the kids," said Tina Houser, the church's minister of children and author of the new book, "Building Children's Ministry."

"He talks about how the women come" to Jesus' tomb, she added, "and (the angel) gets to tell them, 'He's not here. He's risen.'"

With adults as well as children, church workers bear a heavy responsibility for presenting Easter in a memorable and meaningful way, ministry experts say.

"If we failed on that Sunday, then we might want to go back to the drawing board and figure this out, because this is a very important Sunday in Christendom," said Judy Comstock, executive director of the Colorado-based International Network for Children's Ministry.

"But for children's ministry leaders, it's an exciting day for us because of the opportunity to share, really, the heart of the message that we have."

Efforts to involve adults require just as much thought and preparation.

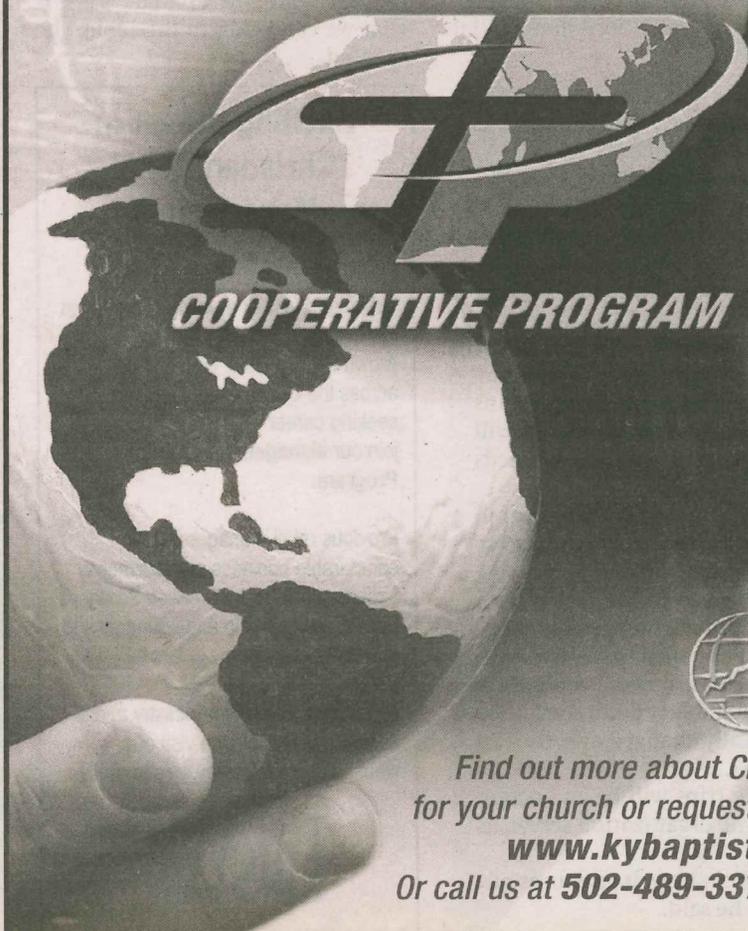
Jin Kim, pastor of Church of All Nations in Minneapolis, said he works to make the holiday personal for each member of his multicultural congregation.

"The culture and ethos of our congregation is that we personally have to testify to how we ourselves have suffered and been tempted and been crucified with Christ," said Kim, whose church is affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (USA). "The question is, what is Good Friday in each of us, in our own lives, and therefore, what is Easter for each of us?"

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Vancouver Olympics present opportunities for evangelism

By Frank Stirk
Canadian Convention of Southern Baptists

Vancouver, British Columbia (BP)—Leaders in Vancouver are planning outreach efforts surrounding the 2010 Winter Olympics that they hope will lead to starting more Southern Baptist churches in the Canadian city.

"We're catching another wave to carry us further," said Alan Au, city director of Vancouver Focus, a church-planting and discipleship initiative sponsored by the Canadian Convention of Southern Baptists. "It is an opportunity to be able to extend our growth into the future so that it does not finish in 2009 with Vancouver Focus."

Au is on the board of the Vancouver Whistler Games Network, a coalition of churches, ministries and individuals that is recognized by the Vancouver Organizing Committee as a partner in staging the February, 2010 games.

The Olympic and Paralympic events combined are projected to attract nearly 7,000 world-class athletes from more than 80 countries, as well as 10,000 journalists and 1.5 million visitors. To meet their needs will require about 40,000 volunteers.

VANOC has invited VWGN to assist them in four official capacities: chaplaincy, lodging for athletes, the use of church parking lots for carpooling to events, and helping the city build a lasting legacy after the games.

VWGN's ultimate desire is to forge a united Christian witness that will continue long after the event and in ways never before seen.

"What we really hope is going to happen is that people are going to start to step outside their (walls) and really start to interact as the body of Christ ... that the whole Olympic thing is our launching pad to a (wall)-less Christian body that's just really working to reach people," Director of Operations Jack O'Halloran noted.

Jeff Wagner, manager of resorts and special ministries for the Southern Baptist North American Mission Board, predicts the unity and momentum generated among Christians during the Olympics in Vancouver will not end when everyone goes home.

"In Atlanta, the churches are much more open to doing community ministries. Salt Lake City is the same way," Wagner said. "I'm already seeing that here. As long as we're serving and lifting up Christ, controversies will just be minor. And so the ship's going to rise."

Even Whistler—a community with only four churches and about 300 regular churchgoers among its 10,000 residents—could experience spiritual transformation as a result, according to VWGN board member and former Whistler municipal council member Kristi Wells.

She pointed out the fact that Whistler attracts thousands of visitors and seasonal workers each year, which means that if their lives can be touched with the love of Christ, "they're going to take it home," she said.

"More than the beautiful mountains or the party lifestyle or their chance to get better at their sport, they're going to say, 'I met an amazing group of people, and I found Jesus.' No other community has that kind of ability," Wells added.

Au noted that Vancouver Focus has "built up a lot of contacts with partners in the U.S. ... We want to build on that and approach those partners to be involved."

Wagner said he expects Southern Baptists from the United States to help in the Vancouver Olympics outreach efforts.

"We don't have a whole lot of churches here, but that's where Southern Baptists in Canada can say, 'We got this army of volunteers (in the U.S.) who are trained and ready to come and are excited.' This is what we can bring to the table," he declared.

Christian persecution in China on increase as Olympics near

Beijing (BP)—Persecution against house churches in China last year was up 30.4 percent from 2006, and the total number of people persecuted was up 18.5 percent, according to a report by China Aid Association.

The Christian rights defense organization noted that nearly 700 Christians were arrested and detained in China last year, and experts believe the increased harassment is related to the Chinese government exercising its authority ahead of the Beijing Olympics in August.

One of the most significant cases of persecution in China is the imprisonment of Zhang Mingxuan, president of the Chinese house church alliance, who has been arrested, beaten and incarcerated 12 times since his conversion to Christianity in 1986, the group noted.

In December, 270 house church leaders were arrested in Shandong Province as they gathered for leadership training. After paying fines and completing detention sentences that lasted from a few days to a few weeks, 249 were released, China Aid reported. Twenty-one senior leaders were sentenced to up to three years in labor camps where they will spend that time being "re-educated" for their involvement in an "evil cult."

Bob Fu, founder of China Aid Association, called on Chinese authorities to release the remaining prisoners and said the inter-

national community "will hold the Chinese government accountable for its reluctance to improve its worsening record on religious freedom before the Beijing Olympics."

Todd Nettleton, a spokesman for Voice of the Martyrs, said that pastor Zhang Rongliang is another high-profile church leader who has been imprisoned in China.

"The charges that they labeled against him were getting a passport illegally and leaving the country illegally," Nettleton explained. "They did not publicly say he's in prison because he's a pastor."

Zhang Rongliang was arrested and sentenced to more than seven years in prison in 2004, having already served 12 years for his faith, according to prisoneralert.com, a Voice of the Martyrs Web site.

"One of the things that we hope will happen this year as we head up to the Olympics is that people will pray for China," Nettleton noted. "Pray for the church there, pray for the persecuted Christians there, and make this a year—as the world is watching, let's make it also the world is praying about the church and about activities in China."

"If there are people who are going, we encourage you to take some Christian literature, have it in your suitcase," he added. "Be ready to give it to your taxi driver or to the person who helps you at the hotel. Be ready to be a messenger of the gospel."



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Missions trips to Kenya resume as country becomes stabilized

Nairobi, Kenya (ABP)—The signing of a peace agreement in Kenya—and reports of stabilization throughout the area—have led Buckner International to announce it will resume sending volunteer mission groups to Kenya this summer.

"This is a result of our U.S. missions staff listening closely to our staff in Kenya," said Ken Hall, president of the Texas-based Baptist charity. "It's an answer to prayer that Kenyans have recognized the need for peace and that our teams will be able to be the hands of Christ to a country that needs healing."

The decision opens the opportunity for local-church missions teams previously scheduled to send volunteers to Kenya through Buckner to resume their trips.

"We've been in constant contact over the last month with our Kenya staff and things are much more stable now," said Randy Daniels, vice president of global initiatives with the organization. "A peace accord was signed ... and all Kenya is celebrating. They anticipate stability (and) continued growth. The climate has dramatically changed over the last few weeks."

Buckner's reinstatement of the trips will be an encouragement to the Kenyan children the organization serves, as well as to its staff, Daniels added.

"When Kenyans see us in their country, it reassures our staff that they have our support," he said.

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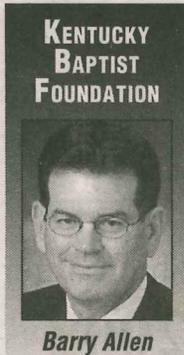
Furthermore, the experience of the feeding of the 5,000 in Mark 6:30-44, illustrates how Jesus is the master of multiplication. So, please do not think you have to be a "high net worth" individual or family to call upon us for assistance in fulfilling what you determine to be God's purpose in the use of whatever level of financial resources He has entrusted to you. We want to be your partner in philanthropy.

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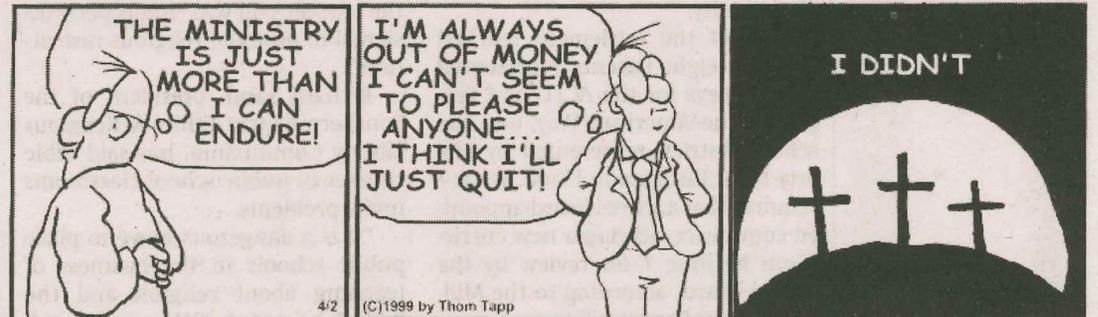
For Heaven's Sake

Mike Morgan



Church of the Covered Dish

Thom Tapp



Bible Crosswords

By Teri Grottke

Across

- 1 Regal
- 6 "Beeroth of the children of _____" (Deuteronomy 10:6)
- 11 Pronoun
- 12 "A workman that _____ not to be ashamed" (2 Timothy 2:15)
- 14 Dir.
- 15 Hot _____
- 17 Old Testament book
- 19 Medical abbr. for delirious state
- 20 Tyre and _____
- 21 Son of Aram (Genesis 10)
- 23 Yes!
- 24 Arsenic (abbr.)
- 26 "As thou goest unto _____ a mount of the east" (Genesis 10:30)
- 30 Another name for Hagar
- 34 Son of Midian (Genesis 25:4)
- 35 _____ wave
- 36 Jesse's third son (1 Chronicles 2)
- 38 Name that means "son of my sorrow"
- 39 Note on diatonic scale
- 40 "Where his tent had been ... between Bethel and _____" (Genesis 13:3)
- 42 Linking verb
- 43 O.T. bk.
- 46 Wheat by-product
- 50 Ignore
- 51 Expiates
- 53 _____ art

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| 58 | | | | | | | | 59 | | | | |

- 54 In nearest proximity
- 56 Pronoun
- 58 What to do with rosebuds?
- 59 Reposed

Down

- 1 Chess piece (abbr.)
- 2 Possessive pronoun
- 3 Insect
- 4 Some tennis serves
- 5 Biblical pronoun
- 6 Warrior in David's army (1 Chronicles 12:6)
- 7 Site of threshing floor where Joseph mourned Jacob (Genesis 50)
- 8 Son of Abinadab (2 Samuel 6:3)
- 9 Furniture tree
- 10 Dir.
- 13 Basketball pass (colloq.)
- 16 Masculine nickname
- 18 Article
- 21 Biblical verb
- 22 Son of Eliphaz (1 Chronicles 1:36)
- 23 Capital of Moab (Numbers 21:15)

- 24 Naaman preferred this river in Damascus to the Jordan (2 Kings 5)
- 25 Near where John the Baptist baptized (John 3:23)
- 27 Greek letter
- 28 Part of a garment
- 29 Band or chair
- 31 Consumed
- 32 Cotton _____
- 33 Fuss
- 37 Sighing sound
- 38 Grievous
- 41 King of Judah, et al.
- 43 Preposition
- 44 So extreme
- 45 Competent
- 47 Tea, for one
- 48 Picnic pests
- 49 The royal _____
- 50 Retreat, for some
- 52 Pronoun used for a country
- 53 King of Bashan (Numbers 21)
- 55 Conjunction
- 57 "Mr. _____" of TV fame

Last week's solution

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| 55 | S | A | L | A | D | 56 | S | H | E | T | H | | |

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School district claims win in settlement over Bible class

Odessa, Texas (BP)—The attorney for a Texas school district has called a settlement with the American Civil Liberties Union “a great victory” involving an elective Bible course curriculum.

Ector County Independent School District in Odessa has agreed to modify the curriculum in settling an ACLU lawsuit that charged the program with unconstitutionally promoting conservative, Protestant Christianity.

Part of the settlement reached between eight parents represented by attorneys for the ACLU and People for the American Way, and the school district—represented by Liberty Legal Institute in Plano, Texas—requires that a school board-appointed committee develop a new curriculum by June 1 for review by the school board, according to the Midland (Texas) Reporter-Telegram.

“This is a great victory for ECISD and the community,” declared Hiram Sasser, Liberty Legal’s director of litigation. “ECISD will continue to offer a Bible course, it will be a curriculum of its own choosing, it may use portions of any existing curriculum as a resource, and the Bible will be the main textbook for the course.”

Meanwhile, Judith Schaeffer, an attorney with People for the American Way, was quoted as saying, “The goal of the lawsuit was achieved in this settlement. This is the relief plaintiffs were asking for in the litigation. We will all be monitoring this.”

A Texas law that took effect in

September allows school districts to offer Bible courses on the Old and New Testaments if at least 15 students request it.

In 2005, the Ector County board commissioned a committee to review available Bible curricula. The committee endorsed one developed by the Virginia-based Bible Literacy Project, but the board chose the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools material, which the lawsuit said was “improperly designed to promote religious instruction.”

Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, has said Bible courses in public school classrooms invite problems.

“It is a dangerous move to place public schools in the business of teaching about religion and the Bible,” he noted. “We need to ask ourselves, ‘Do we really want the state to teach our children the Bible? Do we want the Bible marginalized as simply a fine history and literature text?’ If teachers set out to teach the Bible objectively, how do they teach the resurrection? Inevitably, their methods would offend those who are devout Christians. Yet, if they taught the resurrection from a Christian perspective, it would offend those who are not.”

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A spring break for the record books

Snow creates major challenges in getting students home for vacation

You may know that part of Oneida’s calendar is a series of breaks in the regular academic year so that students may go home. These times are primarily scheduled so our faculty and staff can have a much-needed break from the daily requirements of caring for 300 teenagers. Being responsible for most students 24/7 is a very demanding responsibility. Our folks must get some time to recharge physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Ask any of our students why we have three breaks and they will quickly tell you it is so they can go home for a week or so. It’s OK with us that they think the breaks are primarily for them, but the breaks are really for the sanity of our staff.

Our spring break the first week of March was one for the record books. Normally parents or family members pick up students from campus. Other students travel by bus or fly out of Bluegrass Airport in Lexington. The students travelling by bus either ride the northbound bus or the southbound bus. That’s the way it has always been—until this break.

On Wednesday, March 5, the weather forecast did not look good for Friday and Saturday. Local TV stations were forecasting from three to 12 inches of snow, with the possibility of freezing rain mixed in.

The break was scheduled to begin at 11 a.m., Friday. Several parents asked to pick their children up Thursday after school. By noon Friday, most of our students were gone except those going by plane or bus. A group left that morning headed for the airport. A second group of stu-

dents left for London to catch the southbound bus. Until then, everything was going pretty well.

Things then began to fall apart. First, some of the students at the airport were faced with cancelled flights. Trust me, that is a nightmare. We asked some of our friends in Lexington if they would keep the students overnight and take them back to the airport on Saturday. Three families in the area agreed to care for the students.

Then the other shoe fell. The northbound bus did not show up, so those students had to come back to campus. Remember, this is a break for our faculty and staff too, so most of them already had left campus. Basically, during breaks, our campus is closed. Except for some office staff, everyone is gone. Fortunately, some staff who had not left campus agreed to keep the students Friday night. However, we were told later that the northbound bus would not be running until Sunday afternoon. That meant additional staff would have to keep the students until then.

Most of the airport students were able to leave Saturday, but there were still three or four waiting for a Sunday flight. Then the totally unexpected happened: When our students arrived at the bus station Sunday afternoon, there was no room on the bus for them. We were told if we could get to the Lexington bus station, several passengers would be getting off. So we were off to Lexington. We arrived with less than five minutes to spare before the bus left, this time with our students.

I am sure glad that weekend is over, because it was “one for the record books.”

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

THIS IS ONEIDA



W.F. Underwood

CLEAR CREEK CHRONICLE



Donnie Fox

Damascus Road experience

As a new believer, Garduce prays for college opportunity

Just a few short years ago, Chris Garduce would have never envisioned himself on a Bible college campus preparing for a ministry calling from God. As a matter of fact, he couldn’t envision anything past the four walls of a jail cell.

“My salvation experience actually started with me sitting in that jail cell for about a month,” Chris recalled. “I had a rough life growing up and I let myself get pulled into some really bad things where I eventually wound up in jail.”

Chris said it was during his first week in jail that he told God, “There has to be something more to life than this. If you are real, I want you to show me.”

“I started reading a Bible and talking to God. I wasn’t saved at the time, but I was ... trying to find some answers from God about my life. I was released from jail after a month and I went to visit one of my friends (at) Mars Hill College. One night I was walking around the campus and God just spoke to me and told me to turn to Him,” Chris noted.

“Right then I fell on my face before God and confessed my sins to Him and asked Him to save me. I

know God saved me right there. I had a Damascus Road-type of experience. I felt the Holy Spirit’s presence come into my life right then and knew God had changed me. ... April 25, 2003 is a day that I will never forget. Ever since that day, I have been a new creature in Christ. All I want to do now is live for God.”

Chris said in one of his first prayers as a believer, he asked God to provide a way for him to learn more about Christ in a college setting.

His prayer was answered. Recently, he graduated from Fruitland Baptist Bible Institute in Hendersonville, N.C. with an associate’s degree in religious education and pas-

toral ministry. “Fruitland only offers an associate’s degree and I felt that God wanted me to continue my studies,” Chris said. “I’m thankful for the credit transfer agreement between Fruitland and Clear Creek that enabled me to transfer all my credits from Fruitland toward a bachelor’s degree in pastoral ministry from Clear Creek.”

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.ccbcc.edu; e-mail: dfox@ccbbc.edu

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Passing the plate

Budgets reveal true measure of churches' financial priorities

By Ken Camp

Texas Baptist Standard

Dallas (ABP)—Most observers of congregational life agree: A person can tell a lot about a church by looking at its budget. But exactly which conclusions can be drawn about a church's priorities remains an open question.

"It's a question I've raised with students in my classes for years," said Bill Tillman, who teaches Christian ethics at Hardin-Simmons University's Logsdon Seminary. "The whole matter of economic and financial stewardship is such a vital part of the practice of the Christian life, whether for an individual, a family or a congregation."

A church's budget reflects its priorities. How much a church spends on ministries inside its walls and how much it devotes to ministries beyond itself offers one measure of those priorities, but Tillman warns against rushing to judgment.

"What happens always has to be held in tension and viewed in context," he said. "For instance, we can't say a church never should build a new facility. A new building may be what is needed in a particular community."

At the same time, a church should ask whether its financial decisions are shaped more by biblical teachings or by cultural values, he

stressed.

"The larger culture says we should spend money to make things comfortable for us," Tillman noted.

Churches should ask what lessons are being taught to families as they look at the congregation's budget, he added. And church leaders should not shy away from talking about money.

"That conversation is difficult," Tillman acknowledged. "One of my basic assumptions is that the world of money is one of the last points where conversion and redemption happen."

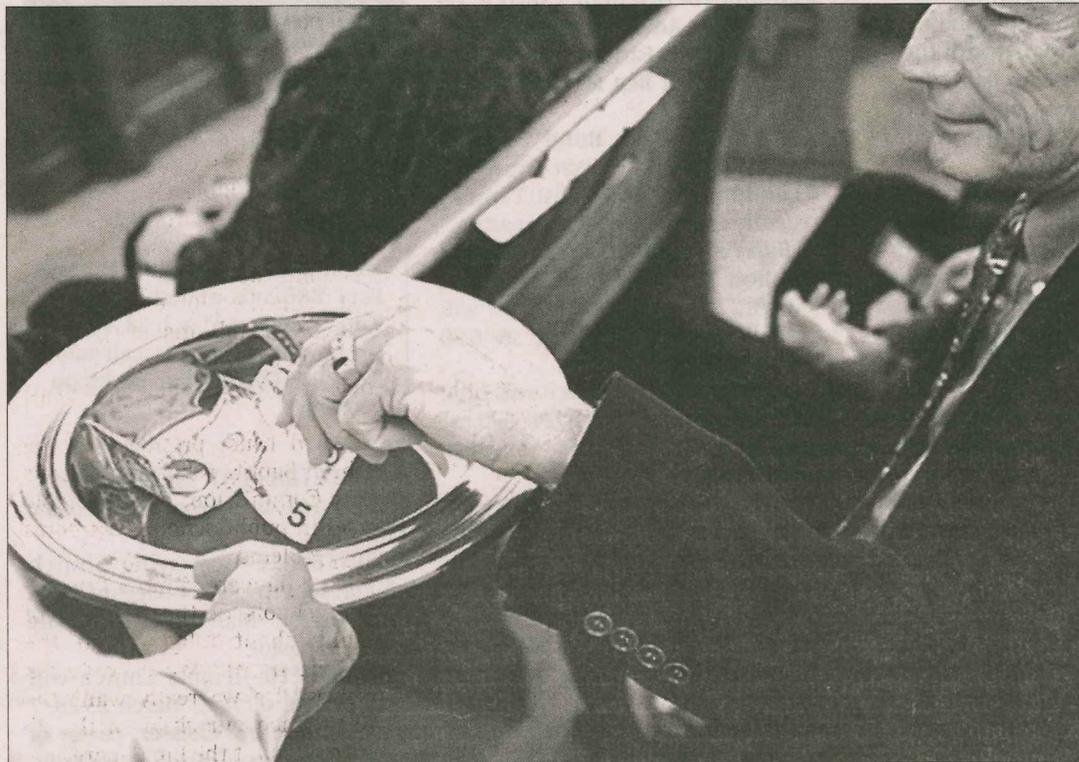
Doing "Kingdom work"

Each church not only needs to keep in mind the legitimate needs of its own members, but also extend its vision to include God's work in the world at large, he insisted.

"It all should be qualified by the question of whether what we are doing is Kingdom work," Tillman said.

Members of Cross Lanes Baptist Church, near Charleston, W. Va., decided five years ago the best way they could do "Kingdom work" was by devoting a larger percentage of undesignated offerings to missions work.

When Seth Polk arrived as pastor, the church was giving 7 percent of



undesignated receipts to the Southern Baptist Convention's Cooperative Program, and 3 percent to its local association. Polk challenged the church to increase its mission-giving incrementally each year.

Now, Cross Lanes gives one-fourth of its undesignated receipts to missions—11 percent to the Cooperative Program, 4 percent to associational missions and 10 percent to other missions causes.

Those causes range from local benevolent ministries and church-planting programs to global initiatives like Children's Emergency Relief International's work in Transnistria and Moldova.

"We believe that as a church becomes more outwardly focused, God will bless that church at home," Polk said.

While the church increased the percentage of offerings it devotes to missions and increased giving to seasonal missions offerings and world-hunger relief, it also entered a \$3.5 million building campaign.

Cross Lanes, which leads the West Virginia Convention of Southern Baptists in total missions giving, has doubled in worship attendance and undesignated giving over the last five years.

"We want to focus on what really matters to God," Polk said.

A clear focus and sense of purpose help a church make wise decisions when it develops its budget—and make adjustments when receipts do not match the budget, said Roger Hall, a retired chief financial officer and treasurer for the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

"A church needs to know its purpose, its goals and what it wants to accomplish. The budget is a plan of action to get there," said Hall, who serves part time as business administrator at First Baptist Church of Waxahachie, Texas.

No one-size-fits-all rules apply for all churches in terms of establishing percentages for different areas of the budget. Just adding a few of the often-cited maximum percentages for various categories—50 per-

cent for personnel, 35 percent for debt service and 25 percent for administration—makes the numbers already exceed 100 percent, he said.

"Take that approach and ministry is often what gets crowded out," he noted. And if ministry and missions are the professed focus of the church, the problem becomes apparent.

Trouble develops when a church fails to define its purpose, deviates from its purpose or neglects to follow proper procedures in making financial decisions, Hall explained.

Budget ownership

A church's budget or finance committee should begin the budgeting process by reviewing historical records for past receipts and expenditures, he suggested. Then, the committee should look at other factors such as anticipated growth or decline as it considers what may be realistic giving goals for the upcoming year.

Next, Hall recommended, the committee should announce its schedule of budget preparation to the church, solicit requests from staff and committee chairs, and set a budget hearing meeting to allow people who are making requests to present their rationale and prioritize their requests.

"The budget should not be a product of just one committee. It should not be the product of just the staff or pastor's recommendations," Hall emphasized. "It needs ownership by the entire congregation."

That sense of ownership grows out of communication each step of the way, not just from an annual vote in a church business meeting. And the congregation's "buy-in" of the budget has both ethical and practical implications, he noted.

"When the budget is understood and owned by the congregation, members have a sense of rightness about it," Hall pointed out. "And if they feel like this is a good plan and they are confident in the processes, they are more apt to support it with their tithes and offerings."

Cash receipts present challenge for churches

Dallas (ABP)—When it comes to church finances, donations in cash form present one of the greatest challenges for churches, experts say.

Roger Hall, a part-time business administrator for First Baptist Church of Waxahachie, Texas, said the biggest risk involves cash before it even hits the books.

When handling cash receipts, churches should remember that there is safety in numbers, Hall suggested. Two or more people should monitor offerings when they are taken from the sanctuary to the church office, two or more should count the cash, and two or more should take locked moneybags to the bank for deposit, he noted.

"Have the counting committee members bonded as money handlers," said Hall, former chief financial officer and treasurer for the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

He also recommended a division of labor in legal and financial matters. Legal officers of the church, like trustees, should sign legal documents on behalf of the congregation. The treasurer should provide financial reports at church business meetings, work with the financial secretary on financial matters, and oversee independent audits.

The financial secretary's handling of money should be limited,

Hall acknowledged. Ideally, the job has only a few specific responsibilities: maintain accounting records; prepare checks for signatures from authorized individuals; prepare financial statements; maintain individual contribution records; handle payroll and reports; and oversee petty cash.

When it comes to cash disbursements, Hall offered several other recommendations:

- Use only church-approved bank accounts.

- Have all checks signed by two approved parties and designate back-up signers for when the principal signers are unavailable.

- Use only pre-numbered checks.

- Do not sign blank checks or make checks payable to "cash."

- Have approved invoices or documents available to review at the time checks are signed.

- Reconcile bank accounts monthly. That task should be performed by a person other than the individual who prepares the checks.

- Make sure checks are made out to approved accounts from which authorized funds are available.

Ultimately, Hall said, churches should keep in mind a clear sense of purpose: "to see that resources are handled properly, ensure accountability, and keep the church family informed."

PRAYER PARTNERS

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

- Pray for the March 29-April 5 vision trip to the country where a new international partnership is set to begin in 2009.
- Pray for partnership missions teams that are preparing to travel to Tanzania in May and to Brazil this summer.
- Pray for volunteers to fill the partnership missions projects in Maryland/Delaware and the evangelism project in Brazil set for June 2-12.
- Pray for Jorio Ferreira and Davi Rodrigues, who are serving as on-site coordinators for the KBC's mission partnership with Brazilian Baptists.

■ Pray for Kentucky Baptist churches to become increasingly aware of the missions opportunities available through the KBC's partnership missions department.

■ Pray for the ongoing search for missions awareness trainers to work throughout Kentucky.

■ For more information about partnership missions opportunities, contact the KBC partnership missions department at (502) 89-3529 or toll-free in Kentucky at (866) 489-529.

MOUNTAINS TO THE MISSISSIPPI

COMPILED BY STAFF

■ **CORBIN**—Bethlehem Church recently called **Aden Pegram** as pastor.

■ **FARMINGTON**—Farmington Church recently called **Ben Stratton** as pastor.

■ **LaCENTER**—**Mark Bond** recently resigned as pastor of First Church.

■ **LONDON**—Pilgrim's Rest Church recently called **Carl Allen** as pastor.

■ **LOUISVILLE**—Green Acres Church will host **The McKameys** in concert March 27, 7 p.m. **Face to Face** will provide pre-concert music at 6:30 p.m. **Dan Powell** is pastor.

New Beginning Church will hold a revival service March 24, 6 p.m., with **Homer Martinez** as evangelist. **Michael Baker** is pastor.

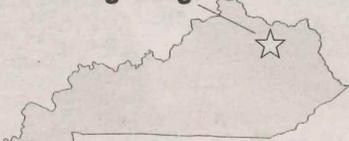
■ **MAYFIELD**—Baltimore Church recently called **Michael Suiter** as pastor.

Trace Creek Church will present the Easter pageant, "The Promise," March 21, 7 p.m.; March 22, 2 and 7 p.m.; and March 23, 6 p.m. **Ronnie Stinson** is pastor.

■ **MILTON**—Milton Church recently called **Tom Starks** as pastor. He previously was pastor of Richland Church in Morgantown.

Spotlight on ...

Flemingsburg



Flemingsburg Church will host Paul Williams and the **Victory Trio** in concert March 28, 7 p.m. For more information, call (606) 845-5121. **Christopher Beckham** is pastor.

■ **PRINCETON**—**Jeff French** recently resigned as pastor of Northside Church.

■ **SCOTTSVILLE**—Scottsville Church will present the Easter pageant, "The Risen Christ," March 21, 7 p.m. **Dale Darley** is pastor.

■ **SPRINGFIELD**—Temple Church will hold revival services March 23-28, 7 p.m., with **Jamie Chesser**, pastor of Mount Freedom Church in Harrodsburg, as evangelist. **John McDaniel** is pastor.

Georgetown annual Pastors' Conference to begin March 31

Georgetown—Two prominent African-American preachers will headline Georgetown College's annual Pastors Conference March 31-April 2, at the school's Thomas & King Leadership & Conference Center.

Stephen Thurston, pastor of New Covenant Missionary Baptist Church in Chicago, and Melvin Wade, pastor of Mount Moriah Baptist Church in Los Angeles, will be the featured speakers at the three-day conference.

The theme of this year's event is "Mentoring the Ministers," the focus of which will be placed on the up-and-coming generation of church leaders, explained H. K. Kingkade, Georgetown's director of church relations.

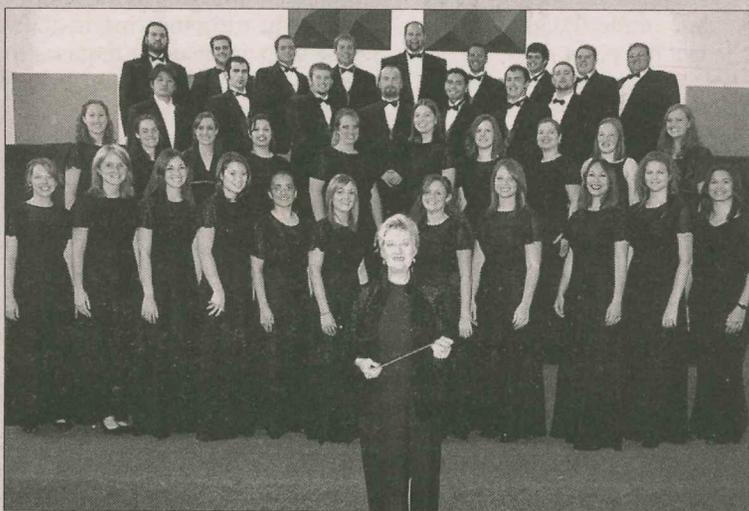
"In recent years, Georgetown

has graduated an unusually large number of young men and women who are preparing to be ministers," he noted. "At any given time, up to 10 percent of our student body self identify as seriously considering vocations in gospel work. This has given us a renewed interest in the younger generation of ministers."

Other conference speakers include Joel Gregory, professor of preaching at George W. Truett Theological Seminary at Baylor University in Waco, Texas; Skip Alexander, pastor of Campbellsville Baptist Church; and James Jackson, pastor of New Beginnings Fellowship Church in Indianapolis.

For more information or to register online, visit www.georgetowncollege.edu/ministry.

Campbellsville ensemble competes



The 30 men and women of the Campbellsville University Chorale are in Europe this week, participating in the Verona Choir Competition in Italy. Under the direction of Frieda Gebert, associate dean of the School of Music, the trip marks the university ensemble's first-ever international competition. The three-day event features 30 choirs from around the world vying for the opportunity to perform at Verona's Roman Arena. The chorale also plans to perform for several schools and concert halls around the country.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

March

- 13-16** Adult Kentucky Changers, Cedarmore Baptist Assembly, Bagdad.
- 13** Assimilation Tour, Flemingsburg Baptist Church.
- 15** Great Commission Prayer Conference, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville.
- 15** RA Congress Region 2, Hyland Baptist Church, Henderson.
- 15** RA Congress Region 6, Boones Creek Baptist Camp, Winchester.
- 22** RA Congress Region 4, Parkland Baptist Church, Louisville.
- 22** RA Congress Region 8, Oakland Avenue Baptist Church, Catlettsburg.
- 25** Comeback Church Conference, First Baptist Church, Bowling Green.
- 28-29** Kentucky Woman's Missionary Union Annual Meeting, Parkway Baptist Church, Bardstown.
- 29** RA Congress Region 7, Elk Spring Valley Baptist Church, Monticello.
- 31** Understanding Other Beliefs, Severns Valley Baptist Church, Elizabethtown.

31-April 1 Welcome to Kentucky Conference, Baptist Building, Louisville.

April

- 1** Assimilation Tour, Walnut Memorial Baptist Church, Owensboro.
- 1** Iron Sharpening Iron, Old Mill restaurant, Russellville.
- 3-4** Drawing the Net, Baptist Building, Louisville.
- 4-5** Collegiate Leadership Training Conference, Cedarmore Conference Center.
- 5** Youth Bible Drill and Speakers Tournament, Northside Baptist Church, Elizabethtown.
- 10** Assimilation Tour, Immanuel Baptist Church, Pikeville.
- 15** Iron Sharpening Iron, Kentucky Lodge, Barkley State Resort Park, Cadiz.
- 17** Assimilation Tour, Central Baptist Church, Corbin.
- 17** Iron Sharpening Iron, My Old Kentucky Home State Park, Bardstown.
- 18-19** 4:GO, First Baptist Church, Shelbyville.

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

CLASSIFIED ADS

SEEKING: Full-time youth minister. If you share a vision to lead teens to faith in Christ and on to spiritual maturity by any and all possible means while maintaining a commitment to the authority of the Word of God, then request a church profile and prospect questionnaire at drsams@cbcheart.com. You also may send a resumé to Calhoun Baptist Church, PO Box 283, Calhoun, KY 42327.

SEEKING: Part-time pianist for Sunday morning services and Wednesday evening rehearsals. Send resumé to Grace Community Baptist Church, 7300 National Turnpike, Louisville 40214; e-mail gcbc7300@peoplepc.com.

SEEKING: Campbellsville University School of Theology seeks applicants for full-time, tenure-track faculty position in educational ministries. Start date: August 1, 2008. Go to www.campbellsville.edu/campbellsville/jobs.asp for details, job application, and job application release forms. John Hurtgen, Dean, School of Theology (270-789-5077; jehurtgen@campbellsville.edu).

SEEKING: Bivocational youth minister for May's Lick Baptist Church, May's Lick, Ky. Seeking a man of God, called of God to work with our youth. Please send resumé to 5103 Main Street, May's Lick, KY 41055. Other info: call (606) 763-6585.

SEEKING: Part-time or full-time youth minister for Fairview Baptist Church. Please send resumé to 6426 Ky. Hwy. 1247, Waynesburg, KY 40489. Phone: (606) 669-8771.

SEEKING: Full-time associate pastor of family discipleship and student ministries for Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Oklahoma City. Teaching ability, leadership, organization and delegation skills required. Send resumé to: Search Committee, Capitol Hill Baptist Church, 304 SW 134th St., Oklahoma City, OK 73170, Attn: James Fullingim; or e-mail to chbc@chbchurch.org.

SEEKING: Pastor for Grant's Lick Baptist Church, a Conservative congregation standing on God's Word with strong growth potential. Looking for an energetic leader with scripture-based messages. Visitation, AWANA, and outreach are vital ministries to bring others to Christ. Send resumé to: Grant's Lick Baptist Church, 941 Clay Ridge Road, Alexandria, KY 41001, Attn: Pastor Search Committee.

SEEKING: Full-time minister of youth at First Baptist Church, Madisonville, Ky. Masters degree with some experience preferred. Send resumé with recent photo to First Baptist Church, 246 North Main St., Madisonville, KY 42431, Attn: SDC.

SEEKING: Full-time pastor for Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, Somerset, Ky. Please mail resumé to Pastor Search Committee, 1685 Hwy. 3091, Somerset, KY 42503.

SEEKING: Full-time church planting missionary for Brookhaven Baptist Church (www.brookhavenbaptist.net) for a Nehemiah project in the Brookhaven community of Atlanta, Ga. Please e-mail resumé to Pastor Don Presley at dpresleysr@presleyenterprises.com.

SEEKING: Worship leader/minister of music. Younger's Creek Baptist Church in Elizabethtown, Ky., is actively seeking a bivocational minister to lead worship and choir ministries. We are an excellent opportunity for someone looking to minister in a truly blended worship setting. If interested, please send resumé to: Search Team, 251 Younger's Creek Road, Elizabethtown, KY 42701.

SEEKING: Full-time director of youth ministries for Gardenside Baptist Church. For information, visit www.gardensidebaptist.com.

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Teeing off on golf ministries

An overall decline of golfers in the U.S. may mean opening doors for outreach

By Mark Kelly
Baptist Press

Nashville (BP)—A nationwide drop in the number of people playing golf raises serious issues for the game—and creates opportunities for churches to minister, according to Southern Baptists deeply invested in both.

A report from the National Golf Foundation reveals the total number of people who play the game has dropped 13.3 percent since 2000 and the number of golfers who play at least 25 times a year fell by one-third between 2000 and 2005.

About 3 million golfers quit playing each year, and the number of new players is not making up the difference.

While many factors are involved in the decline—from an aging player demographic to an overall decline in outdoor sports—the two most significant factors are the time and expense involved in playing golf, noted Scott Flynn, a Southern Baptist who has worked in golf course development and management for 25 years.

“I see time as the No. 1 issue. It is really tough to justify taking five or six hours away from your kids on a Saturday,” said Flynn, one of two golf coaches at Belmont University in Nashville. “But another thing that’s happened is that there was this big boom in developers trying to build the next course bigger, harder and fancier than the last one.”

“Not only did that make it difficult for beginners to have an appropriate place to play and be comfortable doing it, but it drove the cost up. There are an awful lot of places where it costs \$80 or \$90 to play,” he added. “The busiest places in golf today are the \$20 or \$15 municipal golf courses. They aren’t fancy and aren’t in perfect condition all the time, but there’s a whole lot of people out there lined up to get starting times. That might tell us something.”

The emergence of exciting young players like Tiger Woods led a lot of

course developers and equipment manufacturers to anticipate a boom, Flynn said. During a 13-year period beginning in 1990, developers in the United States built more than 3,000 new golf courses.

The boom never materialized, however, and hundreds of those courses have since closed.

“Since Tiger Woods came on the scene, viewership and spectatorship of golf has gone way up. It’s thriving, but that hasn’t really translated into more people playing,” Flynn explained. “A lot of people watch the NFL on Sunday but that doesn’t mean they go out on Monday and strap on a helmet and tackle someone.”

Outreach possibilities

The downturn in golfing, however, creates opportunities for churches to help both the game and the men who play it—or would like to.

“Golf can be a very snobbish game,” said Scott Walsh, who has worked in public relations for industry leaders like Callaway Golf, Nike and Wilson Sporting Goods. “If you are new to the game and go to a public course where you get hooked up with three other guys to round out a foursome, and they have been playing for a long time, when you do things like walk across someone’s putt or talk while somebody’s driving, there’s a reasonably good chance you’re going to be berated and shunned for that. That’s very discouraging.”

One answer is for churches to hold clinics for beginners and sponsor tournaments, Walsh said.

“Tournaments hosted by churches or evangelical organizations usually don’t have the intimidation factor in them,” he pointed out. “Whether you are accepted isn’t based on how well you hit the golf ball.”

Greenridge Baptist Church in Gaithersburg, Md., has developed an effective outreach to men through its annual golf tournament at near-



by Laytonsville Golf Course, church member Rich Huffer noted. Participation has grown from 42 at the first tournament, to more than 100 golfers just five years later. The tournament scheduled for next month will be preceded by a clinic for men who want to learn how to play.

The ministry not only has created opportunities to share the gospel with unchurched men, but it also has given Christian men in the church an avenue for greater involvement, Huffer explained.

“We mix and match,” he said. “There are some guys who come in and by all appearances aren’t saved, and we put them with some guys we know are saved. In four and a half hours on a golf course, we have a lot of opportunities to talk about life and guy things and plant seeds of the gospel.”

Connecting golf to life

Golf not only connects with a man’s love of the outdoors, but it also creates excellent opportunities to discuss spiritual issues, noted Scott Lehman, founder of In His Grip Golf Association, a ministry based in Spring Hill, Tenn., that helps churches organize golf out-

reach events.

“There are great parallels between golf and life,” Lehman said. “We deal with bunkers in our lives—maybe in our marriage, in our finances, in our workplace, but God can help us out of the bunkers and get us back on the fairway.”

“We find we are able to take our faith to the fairways and meet guys where they are at, build a relationship with them out there on the course,” he noted. “It lets us take the gospel outside the four walls of the church in a very non-threatening way.”

Many men show little interest in attending church or working in activities at the church, but they respond eagerly when invited to participate in an outdoor activity they love, Lehman added.

“A member of the church will bring a guest, someone they know from work or the neighborhood,” he said. “They’ve been asking them to go to church and they pass on that, but when they ask them to come be part of a golf tournament they say, ‘I’d love to come.’”

“When we meet them where their interest or passion is, it’s very powerful.”

NBA star sponsors New Orleans homes through Baptist project

By Michael McCormack
Baptist Press

New Orleans (BP)—When the NBA came to New Orleans for the All-Star break last month, thousands of eager recovery volunteers came as well.

One of those volunteers was Miami Heat all-star guard Dwyane Wade, who, in advance of the All-Star game, had heard about the Baptist Crossroads Project in the city’s Upper Ninth Ward and wanted to help.

The Baptist Crossroads Project is an ongoing partnership between the Baptist Crossroads Foundation and New Orleans-area Habitat for Humanity, to build affordable housing in the devastated neighborhood. Crossroads is also targeting the 75-block area around the site for long-term recovery.

Carmen Wilson, a former Miami Heat employee, contacted Baptist

Crossroads Project volunteer coordinator Jared Pryer in January. Wade partners with Wilson’s company, 4 Survival to Go, which distributes survival kits to residents threatened by natural disasters.

“At that point, she just told me there was an NBA player who was going to be in town for the All-Star game,” Pryer recalled. “She asked me what we were doing. I told her about the Baptist Crossroads Project and at that point, she talked to me about passing out hurricane emergency kits to homeowners.”

At a later meeting with an associate of Wade’s, Pryer said he mentioned home sponsorship as a way to help out. Before construction on a new Habitat house can begin, \$20,000 must be raised. That money can come from a single sponsor or from multiple sponsors.

“They called me back a few weeks later and said they’d like to sponsor

three houses,” Pryer recalled.

The day of the NBA All-Star game, Wade took a driving tour of New Orleans that ended at the Baptist Crossroads site. Wade’s interaction with the residents, Pryer noted, marked the experience.

“Dwyane personally went up, knocked on doors, gave the kits to families, talked to parents and their kids for a little bit and took pictures,” Pryer recalled.

Wade “got to meet all the families of the homes he’s co-sponsoring with Baptist Crossroads Project,” Pryer said.

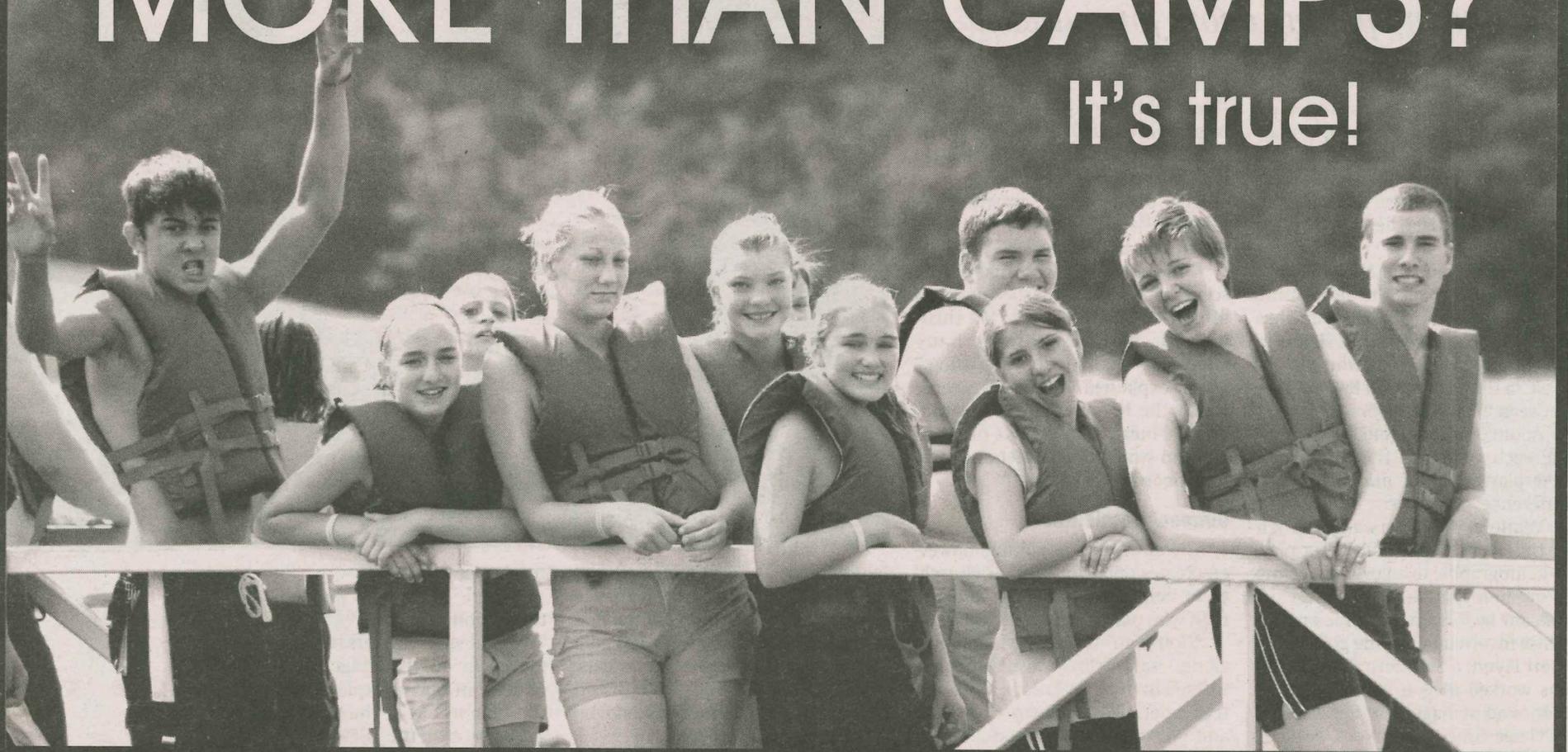
“Once we knew the All-Star game was going to be in New Orleans, we really wanted to find a way to leave something behind,” Wade said in a statement. “Although I’m here to play in the All-Star game, my purpose was to come to New Orleans and be a blessing to as many people as possible, and we’ve done that.”



SPECIAL DELIVERY NBA all-star Dwyane Wade delivers a 4 Survival to Go disaster survival kit to a family at the Baptist Crossroads/Habitat for Humanity site in New Orleans. (BP photo courtesy of 4 Survival to Go)

Crossings is MORE THAN CAMPS?

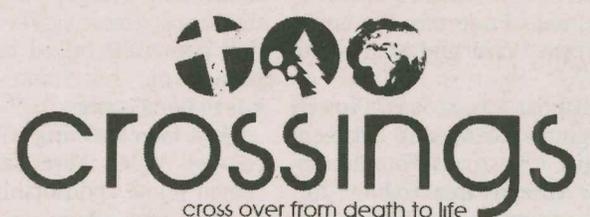
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- **Wednesday Night meals** | Looking for an alternative meal idea for Wednesday night dinners at church? Crossings is looking ahead to provide boxed or prepared meals for churches in their areas.

More information | For more information on planning a retreat, banquet, or event at a Crossings campus, contact our Central Office at 502-491-7000, email info@crossingscamps.org or visit us online.



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