

November 25, 2008
Vol. 182, No. 47**FOR THE RECORD****Baptists**Georgia Baptists reject gifts from church with female pastor. *Page 2.***Kentucky**2008 Pastors' Conference focuses on 'running to win' in ministry. *Page 3.***Financial Forum**Biblical wisdom is always right, relevant and unchanging. *Page 4.***Guest Editorial**Church staff service, is it a job or is it a calling? *Page 5.***Issues**Gay-rights activists arrested at Tennessee Baptist college campus. *Page 8.***Nation**Former presidential candidate says neglected 'values voters' are key to GOP's future. *Page 9.***Light comes to 'edge of darkness'****IMB workers equip local believers to share Christ with indigenous tribes**By Don Graham
SBC International Mission Board**Bogotá, Colombia (BP)**—Sweat dripped from Dut's short, slender body as she hollowed out a grave in the floor of the Colombian rain forest.

Only minutes earlier the Nu* Indian woman had given birth to her ninth child, a boy, but didn't like what she saw. The baby's head was misshapen, pointed—a temporary defect doctors would recognize as the result of an intense labor.

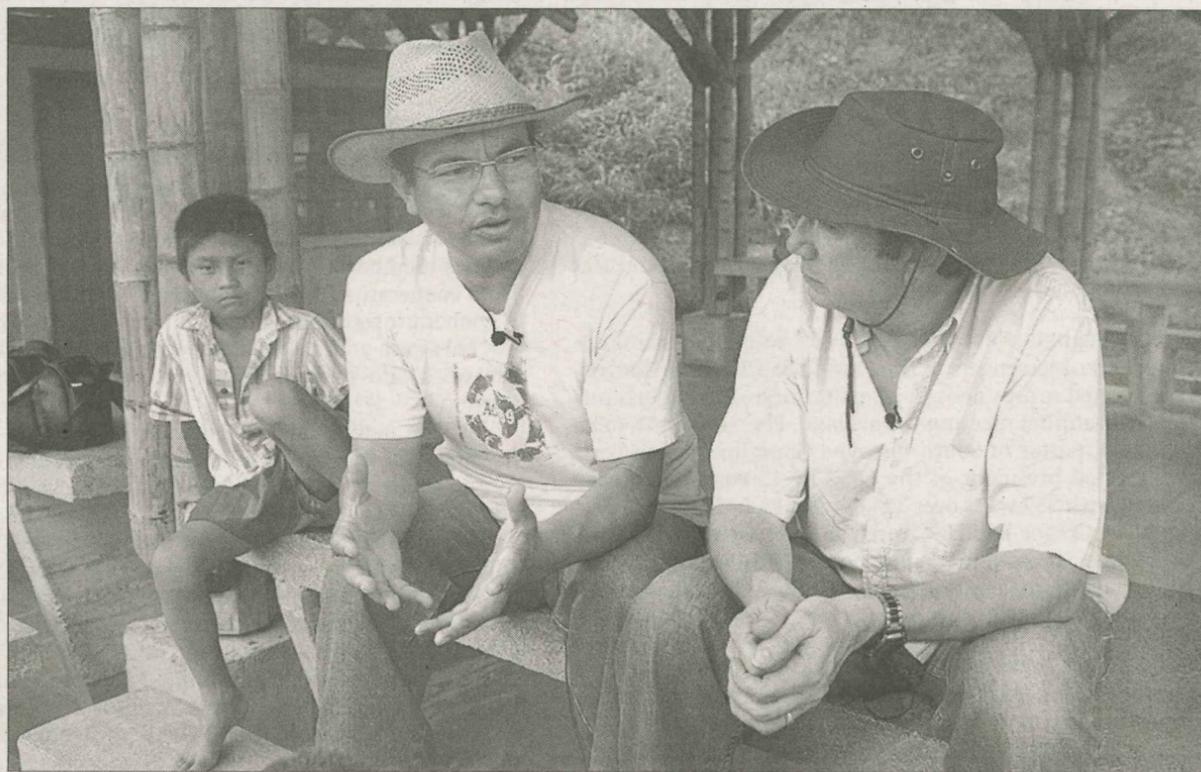
But there were no doctors here. Dut was ignorant and alone, except for several of her children who had tagged along with their mother as she ventured into the bush that day.

They watched as Dut laid their brother's tiny body in a shallow hole and began to cover him with dirt. The newborn shrieked in protest, his arms and legs struggling against the handfuls of cool, damp soil that pressed against his skin.

His cries weakened as a wave of earth washed across his face, followed by another and another. Abruptly, the jungle fell silent. Without pause Dut stood, brushed the caked blood and grime from her hands and turned toward home.

Christ unknown to many tribes

Lee Rojas* felt sick to her stomach. Watching her own 2-year-old daughter playing with friends in the Nu village, the Colombian Baptist missionary struggled to comprehend the cruelty described in Dut's macabre confession. Even worse, she learned that Dut had buried four other children alive—one simply because it was a twin (the Nu believe the smaller twin is possessed by evil spirits).

**PROGRESS REPORT** Fernando Larzabal (right), talks with Colombian missionary José Miguel López about the process of sharing the gospel in a specific village in Colombia. López is among a handful of national missionaries with whom the Larzabals partner in order to bring the gospel to the country's indigenous tribes.

What Rojas didn't know was that the Lord would use these brutal sins to transform Dut's life. Through Rojas' witness, Dut would be one of the first Nu to begin a relationship with Jesus Christ. The resulting

change in her life is a glimpse of the way God is making His Son's name known among Colombia's indigenous, a group of more than 100 Indian tribes scattered across a nation nearly twice the size of Texas.

Spearheading that effort are Southern Baptist missionaries Fernando and Brenda Larzabal. Born in Argentina, Fernando began his ministry career as a missionary pilot. He met Brenda, a teacher from Saranac, Mich., on a mission trip to Belize. They have been married 22 years

and have four sons.

The couple is charged with helping mobilize the Colombian church to take the gospel to every Indian tribe. Rojas and her husband, John*, are among a growing number of Colombian missionaries who have accepted that call. It's a big job, and there's no one-size-fits-all strategy. Whether Betoye, Ticuna or Wayuu, each tribe is as unique as its name, with a distinct language, culture and worldview.

□ See *Light comes ... Page 6***Study examines challenges found within small churches**By Mark Kelly
Baptist Press**Nashville (BP)**—Most pastors of smaller-membership Southern Baptist churches see what God is calling their congregations to be and do and have laid the groundwork for accomplishing the mission, but their efforts to lead are frustrated by "turf" battles and a failure to clarify and evaluate plans.According to a new study by LifeWay Research published in the November/December issue of *Facts & Trends* magazine, those pastors could see their congregations make progress by evaluating church ministries, organizing to reach their goals and planning for the future.

"The effectiveness of local church ministry often is jeopardized by poor organization," noted Scott McConnell, associate director of LifeWay Research. "Understanding God's calling and the context of the church is important, but leadership requires knowing where you

are, knowing where you need to go and knowing how to get there. Most small church pastors actively pursue the first two but many struggle with the third."

The study, which surveyed 350 pastors of congregations that average fewer than 100 in primary worship attendance, was conducted last March. It found, among other things, that 67 percent of small church pastors are frustrated with how slowly progress is made at their churches.

The inertia, however, is not for lack of trying. According to the study:

- Most pastors of small churches have assessed their church's cultural context, while three-fourths have studied their communities. Ninety percent have examined trends in their congregations and 71 percent say they try to be actively involved in their community.

- Most pastors of small churches see what God is calling their church

to be and do. Ninety-four percent say they clearly see the needs, hurts and problems God is calling their church to address. Eight out of 10 have shared with the congregation a clear, compelling picture of what God is calling their church to look like several years from now.

The obstacles to missional progress, however, are familiar to every pastor. While two-thirds of the pastors surveyed indicated their church makes regular changes to improve effectiveness, 49 percent said lay leaders in the congregation often resist change to protect their areas of responsibility. A full one-third of them said their church had experienced disruptive conflict in the past year.

"No doubt spiritual failures hold churches back more than leadership or administrative shortcomings," McConnell said. "Discouraging baptism and membership trends in the Southern Baptist Convention show us that change is needed in many lo-

cal congregations.

Many pastors of small churches candidly admitted they do not know how to lead their churches where they need to go, he noted.

Leading a church requires both vision and administrative ability, he pointed out. Many pastors, however, are much stronger in one area than the other.

"The apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:28 taught that God places teachers in the church and also gives the gift of managing," McConnell added. "But he never promised both those gifts would be in the same person."

"Pastors who candidly assess their own strengths and weaknesses can surround themselves with leaders who have the talents that they lack," he said. "Each local church should seek out and utilize members gifted in organizing people and processes while still encouraging each other to desire the greater gifts of faith, hope and love."

BAPTIST DIGEST

North Carolina Baptists end CBF gifts. North Carolina Baptist churches soon will not be able to support the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship through the state convention, messengers decided at their annual meeting Nov. 12. The Baptist State Convention of North Carolina voted to kill that option in a new giving plan that becomes effective in 2010. The proposal would have allowed churches to designate 10 percent of their gifts to ministries of the breakaway moderate group. North Carolina adopted a multi-track giving plan in the 1990s. It allowed churches not supportive of the conservative leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention to shift a portion of their mission gifts to mission and ministry programs of the CBF.

Oklahoma elects first Native American president. Emerson Falls, pastor of Glorieta Baptist Church in Oklahoma City and a member of the Sac and Fox and Choctaw tribes, was elected as the first Native American president of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma Nov. 11. Messengers affirmed Falls in a close race with Doug Melton, pastor of Southern Hills Baptist Church in Oklahoma City. The final results of a ballot vote showed 243 ballots for Falls and 203 ballots for Melton.

Florida Baptists elect president by 12 votes. In a rare contested race, messengers to the Florida Baptist State Convention elected a president by the slimmest of margins during their annual meeting in Lakeland, Fla., Nov. 10-11. John Cross, 45, pastor of South Biscayne Church in North Port, was elected president of the FBSC by 12 votes. Cross was elected with 357 votes over 345 cast for Richard Powell, pastor of McGregor Baptist Church in Fort Myers, who until Nov. 9 was expected to be unopposed. The election marked the first contested election for president in the state convention since 1999.

BGCT defers name-change proposal. The Baptist General Convention of Texas deferred action on a proposed name change at its most sparsely attended annual meeting in nearly 60 years. The Nov. 10-11 meeting drew 1,891 registered messengers from 550 churches, the lowest number since 1949. Meanwhile, members of the BGCT Future Focus Committee introduced a motion that the articles of incorporation and constitution be amended to change the organization's name from "Baptist General Convention of Texas" to "Texas Baptist Convention." The committee on convention business recommended that the proposed name change be referred to the BGCT Executive Board for further study and deliberation.

SBTC celebrates 10th anniversary. Hosted by Houston's First Baptist Church, the annual meeting of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention returned, Nov. 10-11, to the city where the convention was launched 10 years ago. "We come today to celebrate our heritage with praise to God after a decade of sovereign blessings and divine direction," noted SBTC President Bob Pearle. "We celebrate God's goodness to us knowing we stand today not because of human ingenuity but because of the multitudinous blessings of Almighty God on our convention."

West Virginia Baptists support marriage amendment. The West Virginia Convention of Southern Baptists passed a resolution Nov. 7 calling on church members to support an amendment to the state constitution to ban gay marriage. The resolution called on members to "avail ourselves of the opportunity to affirm the historic, legal, and reasonable definition of marriage by supporting and promoting an amendment to the state constitution." The resolution said changing the definition of marriage has "devastating moral, spiritual, economic and social effects on the whole society."

Tennessee Baptists approve Africa mission. Messengers to the 134th annual meeting of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, held Nov. 11-12 at First Baptist Church of Hendersonville, Tenn., approved a new missions partnership with West Africa. TBC Executive Director James Porch presented West Africa as a new missions partnership region for Tennessee Baptists. The convention recently ended a 10-year partnership with Baptists in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and currently has an ongoing partnership in Malta. Roger Haun, IMB's associate regional leader for West Africa, invited Tennessee Baptists to "return to the place where you pioneered partnership missions 25 years ago," referring to the project adopted by the TBC with Burkina Faso (now Upper Volta), the first missions partnership between a state convention and an overseas area.

Georgia Baptists reject woman-led church

By Bob Allen
Associated Baptist Press

Jonesboro, Ga. (ABP)—The Georgia Baptist Convention has decided to refuse gifts from a historic member church that last year called a woman as pastor.

Messengers to the Nov. 9-11 annual meeting approved a policy change authorizing convention leaders to decline funds from churches "not in cooperation and harmony with the approved work and purpose" of the convention.

A report of an administrative committee recommending the change said it was proposed "as a result of questions raised regarding First Baptist Church of Decatur, who has a woman as senior pastor."

The Georgia Baptist Convention defines membership as "messengers from cooperating Baptist churches." A cooperating church is one that is in "harmony and cooperation with the work and purpose of the convention."

But the new financial policy for the first time appears to tie "harmony and cooperation" with whether a church agrees with the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message. The revision of the Southern Baptist Convention's confessional document includes the statement, "While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture."

"Our main mission at FBC Decatur is to love God and to connect as many men, women, teenagers and children as possible with God's love

for them in Christ," said Julie Pennington-Russell, who took over as pastor of the church in 2007. "I guess the Georgia Baptist Convention will need to decide whether or not this is in harmony with their own mission."

Pennington-Russell noted the church has been connected with the Georgia Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention for 146 years. The last two decades it has affiliated primarily with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, but a number of members—many of them senior adults—remain connected to the SBC and describe themselves as Southern Baptists.

Pennington-Russell said it never felt important to the church to "draw a line in the sand" over the issue of affiliation.

She said the main impact on the church would be that "some members of our church who have faithfully supported Southern Baptist ministries and missionaries through the years—often with money given from their monthly Social Security checks—will have to be told that the Georgia Baptist Convention doesn't welcome their support any longer."

Prior to moving to the Decatur church, Pennington-Russell was pastor at Calvary Baptist Church in Waco, Texas, and Nineteenth Avenue Baptist Church in San Francisco. She is a graduate of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary and earned a doctor of ministry degree at Baylor University's George W. Truett Baptist Theological Seminary.

First Baptist Church of Decatur reportedly gave about \$10,000 in 2007 through the Cooperative Program.

Pennington-Russell said she heard a couple of months ago that something was in the works about withdrawing fellowship from the church, and she was surprised that no one from the Georgia Baptist Convention contacted her about it.

"First Baptist Church of Decatur has been affiliated with the GBC since our beginnings in 1862," she stated. "Pastors and lay leaders of our church have played significant leadership roles along the way, and FBC Decatur has given several million dollars to Southern Baptist efforts through the years. I assumed that a 146-year relationship was worth, at very least, a personal conversation."

The new Georgia Baptist policy also addresses concerns over acceptance of funds and property that raise the risk of liability, involve donor restrictions not in line with convention priorities or reasons "not otherwise in the best interest of the convention."

Robert White, executive director of the Georgia Baptist Convention, told the Atlanta Journal-Constitution the policy would not be enforced against churches that call women as deacons or members of their ministerial staff other than pastor, but would give convention leaders discretion to refuse gifts from questionable sources, like alcohol distributors.

IMB trustees report cautionary financial news

Houston (BP)—While celebrating the largest number of missionaries under appointment in recent years, trustees of the Southern Baptist International Mission Board also heard some cautionary finance reports during their Nov. 10-11 meeting in Houston.

The potential effects of investment losses, a weakened dollar and flattened giving to the Cooperative Program and Lottie Moon Christmas Offering could have a significant impact on the board's work next year.

These economic pressures forced board members to approve a budget for 2009 that includes no room to exceed the total number of missionaries currently under appointment. Attrition in the missionary force creates the need to appoint new missionaries each year, but IMB President Jerry Rankin said the ability to expand the missionary force beyond current levels rests in the hands of Southern Baptists.

"God has always proved His faithfulness through the giving of His people that His mission might be carried out around the world," Rankin declared. "Even in these austere economic times we must press forward in our vision to reach a lost world and be obedient to our Great Commission task."

"God continues to call missionaries from Southern Baptist churches, and we pray Southern Baptists will not be deterred from providing the support needed in spite of the personal sacrifice that might entail."

The \$319.8 million budget approved by trustees marks a \$15 mil-



GLOBAL IMPACT Joyce Stevens of Illinois joins other Southern Baptist International Mission Board trustees as they sign their names on a large globe during their Nov. 10-11 meeting in Houston. (IMB photo)

lion increase over 2008 expenditures, \$10 million of which will be used to offset the rising cost of support for missionaries already on the field.

Southern Baptists gave a record \$150.4 million to the Lottie Moon offering in 2007; the goal for 2008 is \$170 million—about a 16 percent increase.

Despite a gloomy economic forecast, there was good news. The percentage of the budget used for state-side administration and promotion dropped nearly 1 percent, from 15.44 to 14.56 percent.

The dollar also is making a recovery in the world marketplace, gaining as much as 20 percent over some foreign currencies in the past four

months.

Trustee chairman Paul Chitwood, pastor of First Baptist Church of Mount Washington, called on trustees to make Southern Baptist churches aware of the need to give and challenged them to "dig deeply" into their own pockets for the Lottie Moon offering.

"I know these are challenging days—they're challenging days in my church. They're challenging days for all Southern Baptist churches," he said. "But by God's grace, and through our sacrifice, if we give beyond what we're able to give, I trust God will honor that by both meeting the needs in our homes and churches and meeting the needs on the mission field."

Pastors' Conference focuses on 'running to win' in ministry

Lexington—Just as Paul encouraged the Corinthians to “run in such a way as to get the prize,” Kentucky Baptist pastors were challenged to “run to win” in their ministries.

The Kentucky Baptist Pastors' Conference was held Nov. 10 at Immanuel Baptist Church in Lexington, prior to this year's Kentucky Baptist Convention annual meeting.

Highlighting the theme “Running to Win,” Pastors' Conference President Corey Abney, pastor of Louisville's Highview Baptist Church East campus, said the gathering was designed to “challenge pastors to run in such a way that they obtain the prize the Lord has for them.”

Among other speakers during the one-day conference:

John Mark Toby, pastor of Beacon Hill Baptist Church in Somerset, opened the conference using Exodus 15:22-27 to encourage pastors to avoid getting sidetracked by complaints about their leadership. He pointed out that the fresh springs at Elim were only five miles from Marah, where bitter water sparked complaints against Moses.

“The people didn't have what they expected and they didn't trust God to provide it,” Toby said. “They weren't running to win. They were only five miles from plenty, but they took their eyes off the Pillar.”

Noting pastors can do the same by wishing they had a bigger church, which often means bigger problems, he asked, “Why not thank God for where you're at? The grass isn't greener on the other side of the fence.”

When facing complaints, Toby suggested pastors cry out to God and pray, reminding them that God still is on the throne. That means other people's opinions of them do not matter, because they know what God thinks, he added.

Jeff Iorg, president of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif., exhorted Kentucky Baptist pastors to engage the culture, relating his experiences umpiring baseball games and serving as chaplain for Major League Baseball's San Francisco Giants.

Saying God has given him a passion for this task, Iorg said many church members want to do Christian ministry because they can make the rules and retain control. Engaging the culture requires believers to go where the world is and unbelievers remain in control, he explained.

However, Iorg warned against having the wrong motives, recalling



TIME OF PRAISE ■ Left: The Boyce College Chorale, led by director Nathan Platt (center), lead a time of praise and worship during the Nov. 10 Kentucky Baptist Pastors' Conference. ■ Right: Virginia based singer/songwriter Mark Ivey provides special music during the Pastors' Conference. (Photos by Drew Nichter)



“Fellow pastors, it really doesn't matter what your peers think about your ministry. The only thing that matters is what God thinks about your ministry.”

James Merritt, pastor of Cross Pointe Church in Duluth, Ga.

his condescending attitude when he moved to the Northwest in 1989, a trait quickly pointed out by a woman there. “If your attitude is anything but deep love for people they will sniff it out in a second,” Iorg said.

The seminary president noted that engaging the culture means going where unbelievers are, enjoying being with them and overcoming barriers. In the 20 years he has dedicated himself to engaging the culture, 99 percent of his opposition has come from religious leaders: “The problem with engaging culture is not the culture as much as it is us.”

James Merritt, pastor of Cross Pointe Church in Duluth, Ga., pointed out Paul's advice to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4 as counsel all pastors should heed in their ministries.

Merritt noted that God is going to judge what, why and how pastors preach, and that is all ministers should be concerned about.

“Fellow pastors, it really doesn't matter what your peers think about your ministry,” he said. “The only thing that matters is what God thinks about your ministry.”

Merritt pointed out three lessons from Paul's teachings to Timothy: Pastors must “remember the charge to be faithful,” they must “realize the choice to be doubtful,” and “receive the challenge to be watchful.”

Jimmy Scroggins, pastor of First Baptist Church of West Palm Beach, Fla., noted that pastors must get out of the “Baptist bubble” if they are to share the gospel effectively and set a good example for church members.

Too often Christians try to “extri-

cate” new believers “from their lost friends and environment,” he noted. “It doesn't take long before you get engulfed in the Baptist bubble (and) you barely know anybody who's not a Christian.”

Just as Jesus deliberately chose to associate with “the dregs of society,” believers must not isolate themselves from people in desperate need of the gospel, Scroggins urged.

Christians, especially pastors, must go “where you're going to get into a whole new network of people,” such as through the local Kiwanis club or bowling league.

Hershael York, pastor of Buck Run Baptist Church in Frankfort, said that too often, pastors give their churches priority over their families. “In my home ... we put the Lord first,” he noted, but “the Lord and the church are not the same thing.”

Citing the story of Jacob and Esau, York emphasized that “no one can take away your birthright.” The two sons were dysfunctional because they saw it in their parents' relationship, he noted.

He encouraged pastors to “teach your children and grandchildren the value of their birthright. York said he wants his sons to know “growing up in my home is a blessing.”

He also said that “selling off” relationships at home in favor of the church is detrimental to the family. “At church they'll pat us on the back ... while at home they're languishing for dad.”

Hayes Wicker, pastor of First Baptist Church of Naples, Fla., told pastors that the Christian race is expected to be extreme because it is a long-distance race.

“It's difficult to run that race,” he suggested “We cannot do it without the power of the Lord. We have power, but we have to stick to our love. You don't have to outrun another Christian, just the roaring lion.”

Wicker said the “cloud of witnesses” mentioned in Hebrews is exhorting God's children to go the distance. Recalling the first time he heard himself preach he wanted to leave the ministry, but Wicker said he kept going anyway. Likewise, he noted God's people need the toughness to keep running.

That is possible when people look to Jesus, who shows His children where to run while providing them faith, love and power to keep going, he explained.

“Are you in the Spirit? Are you holier?” he asked. “That's when God moves into the life of the church. But what we need is a fresh anointing.”

In other business, pastors elected Tom James, pastor of Eastwood Baptist Church in Bowling Green, as Pastors' Conference president. He will preside over the 2009 event, replacing Delton Beall who was voted president-elect at last year's conference. Beall resigned in September as pastor of Southside Baptist Church in Princeton to become state director of missions for the West Virginia Baptist Convention.

Kevin Smith, pastor of Watson Memorial Baptist Church in Louisville, was chosen as president-elect. He will preside over the 2010 Pastors' Conference. Micah Carter, pastor of Mackville Baptist Church, was voted secretary/treasurer.

Compiled from reporting by Western Recorder staff and KBC communications department



CONFERENCE OFFICERS Kentucky Baptist Pastors' Conference officers are (from left) immediate past president Corey Abney of Louisville, President Tom James of Bowling Green and President-Elect Kevin Smith of Louisville. (KBC photo by Kristie Randolph)

October giving narrows CP budget deficit

Louisville—Kentucky Baptist churches are giving to missions through the Cooperative Program at a pace ahead of last year's and have narrowed the budget deficit two months into the fiscal year.

According to Lowell Ashby, Kentucky Baptist Convention's business services team leader, churches gave \$1,853,052 through Oct. 31, bringing totals for the current fiscal year to \$3,568,850. The amount was more than \$74,000 (2.1 percent) over the total received during the same period last year.

Ashby said October's giving narrowed the budget deficit to \$431,150 (10.78 percent). At the close of September, total receipts were 14.21 percent behind budget.

The 2008-09 CP budget is \$24 million, which means the convention needs to average \$2 million each month in receipts to reach its goal.

Billy Compton, KBC's executive associate for Cooperative Program and resources, said he is encouraged by the increased pace in giving.

“Experience is showing us again that Kentucky Baptists, even in a stressed economy, are giving as much as they are able, and even beyond their ability, ‘as the Macedonians did for the believers in Jerusalem,’” Compton said, quoting from 2 Corinthians 8:3. “We are grateful for the investments our churches are making through CP because thousands of lives are being transformed and connected to Christ every day.”

WESTERN RECORDER

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Louisville, KY 40253
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Earnestly contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.—Jude 3

Western Recorder is published weekly by Western Recorder Inc., an agency of the Kentucky Baptist Convention, Box 43969, Louisville, KY 40253, except for one week in July and December. For general information, call (502) 489-3535. Periodicals postage paid at Louisville, Ky.

To subscribe: Send \$12.50 for a one-year, individual subscription. Group subscriptions on the church budget plan are \$10 per year. An additional church newsletter service is available for churches of all sizes. All subscriptions are payable in advance, except church accounts, which require a tax exemption number.

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Generosity in today's economy

By Steve McSwain

Louisville—We are in an economic crisis. If I were to ask you to identify the most important thing you would hope your child would learn from this and carry into adulthood, what would it be?

For me, I would want my child to learn that happiness and security have little to do with career choice, how much money she might make and salt away, or even what she might accomplish. Instead, it has everything to do with knowing for herself what her purpose is on earth. Knowing why she's here will enable her to survive anything—an economic meltdown, notwithstanding.

The greatest spiritual teacher once said, "He who would save his life will lose it, but he who gives his life away, will find it."

Strange words, are they not?

They fly in the face of what our culture says will bring you permanent happiness and security. Most mistakenly think happiness is found in the amount of money they earn, how much they manage to save for retirement, and the titles and recognition they receive in life.

This mistaken notion has been around a long time. But, it is faulty thinking like that which surrounds the principal cause behind the present economic crisis on Wall Street—a crisis which has dominated the news and generated much anxiety on Main Street.

It's not just corporate big shots, however, who are to blame for the failure in our financial markets. Granted, many of them have watched their companies close while they've safely floated away in "multi-million dollar parachutes."

But, there are many ordinary people who are to blame, too. The majority of people in our culture have, in the words of Will Rogers, "borrowed money they don't have, to buy things they don't need, to keep up with people they don't even like."

It's nothing more than unbri-dled greed, motivated by the mistak-

en notion that we are what we own, we are what we accomplish and our security is in how much we've saved for the future.

It's all a myth.

I'm aware nobody wants to hear this in economic times like these, unless, of course, you are one of the few who has learned this important life lesson already—and, if so, then something in you resonates with the truth of it.

In the end, it doesn't matter if my child is the CEO of a Fortune 500 company or a counter clerk at a coffee shop. What matters is her happiness and security. If she earns a lot of money, so be it. She'll just have more to give away, since that is the purpose that motivates her to get out of bed every morning.

If she makes a name for herself, well, that's fine, too. But, since her real joy is in giving, the popularity or fame she's earned will just provide a larger and more influential stage upon which to perform or demonstrate her grander purpose for life and living—the sharing of herself and her wealth with the world.

If she saves enough to fill the vaults of Fort Knox with her vast earnings, then good for her. She'll have a lot to give away through a charitable foundation as she lives out her final years fulfilling the real purpose of her life—giving. This she will do as a mature adult, instead of what most mindless wealthy people do—leave their wealth to a selfish, unappreciative family who end up squabbling over it in probate courts, sometimes for years.

But then, if the economy were to unexpectedly collapse and she loses it all—well, if that were to happen, she'll just live out her days like the vast majority of the rest of us, retired and broke. But, I suspect there would be a difference with her. She'll be

COMMENTARY

Giving thanks for Kentucky Baptists

"I give thanks to my God for every remembrance of you, always praying with joy for all of you in my every prayer, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. I am sure of this, that He who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:3-6).

I am so grateful for the Kentucky Baptist Convention's Baptist Campus Ministry and its faithful service to our Lord Jesus Christ. This area of our ministry experienced a terrible tragedy Nov. 8 when two University of Kentucky BCM students died in a traffic accident on Interstate 75 near Berea.

Bradley Hall of Rockfield and Tom May of Louisville were returning from a BCM retreat at Laurel Lake along with their friend Ben Cooley of Harrodsburg when the accident occurred. Ben was seriously injured in the accident but is recovering.

The hours and days immediately following the deaths were marked both by grief and celebration as family and friends remembered the tremendous Christian testimonies presented by the lives of these young men. Students from the BCM at UK held their own memorial service at Calvary Baptist Church in Lexington, and were present at the visitations and funerals to share stories and encouragement with the two families.

I had the privilege of visiting with the May family at the funeral home and to attend the funeral of Bradley Hall at Clear Fork Baptist Church in Rockfield near Bowling Green. Bradley was very active in Kentucky Changers and leaders from that group were present, as was Keith Inman, KBC's director of collegiate and young adult ministries.

Bob Baker, pastor of Calvary Baptist, where all three young men attended while at school, shared

broke like everyone else, but happy nonetheless, because, just like the proverbial widow whom Jesus introduced to the world long ago, even in her poverty, she, too, will be giving her last two pennies to someone in greater need.

All of this has something to do, again, with this grander purpose of her life. It's that which gives her life meaning, joy and a real sense of security.

Isn't this the sort of thing you would want your child to grow up knowing? Here's how I would suggest you get started:

First, live this purpose yourself. Most of what children know they've not been taught in a classroom, but they've "caught" through observation. As a parent, when you give yourself away and generously share your resources with others, you are modeling an understanding of real happiness that your child will quickly learn. Be generous, especially in tough economic times, and you'll more likely raise a generous child who doesn't look for her fulfillment in titles or things, but in the sharing of her life and resources with others.

Second, don't fret over the money markets, especially in front of the kids. Even if you and I were to lose everything—which isn't likely—we still have our lives, our families and each other. What kind of message does your child hear if most of your conversations these days are about the horrible financial crisis. Not only that, but what if your conversation is drenched with anxiety and worry?

The market is what it is. Stay focused on your grander purpose for living and stop the incessant worrying. Jesus said, "Seek first the Kingdom—that world within where God is, and peace, joy and real security—and the rest will be provided."

Steve McSwain is senior vice president for the church division of Cargill Associates

What are you thinking?

The Western Recorder considers letters on any subject for publication, provided they don't make a personal attack. The maximum length for a letter is 300 words. Submit by mail to Box 43969, Louisville, KY 40253; fax, (502) 489-3565; or e-mail, wesrec@earthlink.net.

about Bradley's faithfulness and encouraged the family. Clear Fork Pastor David Daugherty and Joel Prickett, the youth director of Grace Baptist Church in Bowling Green, also shared at that funeral.

Daniel Berry, the campus minister for the UK BCM, was one of the speakers at Thomas May's funeral in Louisville, which was attended by a large number of BCM students.

Please continue to pray for these families and for the students as they process their grief. Pray as well for Ben as he continues to recover.

I also am grateful for KBC churches and associations, and their partnership in the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ. I recently had the privilege of being with Mount Pleasant Baptist Church in Nicholasville, Sinking Fork Baptist Church in Hopkinsville, and Stanton Baptist Church. I praise God for all KBC churches as we trust God together to enable us to move forward in overcoming all barriers to sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Bill Mackey is executive director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention

STEWARDSHIP

Biblical wisdom is always relevant, right, unchanging

By Jeremy White

Amid the dominant headlines of the day, the Bible helps provide us with proper perspective. It tells us that wealth and the economy is uncertain. Consider this wisdom Paul reminded Timothy:

"Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment" (1 Timothy 6:17).

Do you see the first absolute in this verse? Simply stated, wealth is uncertain. Your retirement plan, your money in the bank, your job, the value of your real estate—all of your wealth, it's uncertain.

Don't be shocked into a frenzied panic when the market goes up and down. Volatility should be no surprise because your wealth is uncertain. Don't borrow continually assuming your wealth is certain; it's not.

Paul is building toward an important contrast—wealth is uncertain. Don't put your hope in that, put your hope in God. He provides what we need. Paul is pointing toward God's certainty.

The psalmist has the same theme of God's certainty and stability. When the financial crises hit and it looks like no institution can be trusted, I like to be reminded of this passage:

"Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him.

"He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken.

"My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge.

"Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge" (Psalm 62:5-8).

I do not like the fact that uncertainty exists. I've added a few gray hairs to my collection as I've tried to advise clients of their best course of action. But I'm so thankful that God is my hope, my rock, my fortress and my certainty.

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



There are different ways to teach children to be thankful

Q: How can I help my child learn to give thanks?

Author John Updike recently wrote that “the impressions we gather in the first 12 years (of life) are enormous and vivid” and come laden with meaning in a way that later experiences do not. Christian parents want one of those early impressions to be the importance of being thankful.

Samuel Patrick Smith understands the importance of being thankful. “Having a thankful attitude affects everything we do. It puts us in a better frame of mind. And if we remember that the greatest blessings we experience are a result of grace and not our own ingenuity, it keeps us humble.”

So, as we head into a special season of thanksgiving, how can we encourage such an attitude of humility and gratefulness in our children? The answer may be as simple as just making a list. We make lists for many things—shopping, work, school, etc. Why not make a list of things for which we are thankful.

Put a notebook on the kitchen table or mount a dry erase board in an accessible spot. Then get in the habit of jotting down things for which you are thankful each day. Big things, little things, just write them down. Reference your list when it comes time to pray.

Impressing children with the importance of being thankful will shape their lives in significant ways. As Smith notes, “Poverty is not merely the lack of money; it’s the absence of appreciation. That little habit of making a thankful list is one way to keep things in perspective.”

“And be thankful” (Colossians 3:15).—David Garrard

Q: My husband and I have only been married two years. We have an eight month old and I’m already struggling to feel connected to my husband with the constant demands of work, home and baby. The routine is exhausting. How am I supposed to manage it all?

A challenge for many couples today is they have no Sabbath. Sabbath allows for rest and reflection and remembering God’s presence in one’s daily life. God knows we need a break. He knows we need to set aside time that is different from the rest of the week. Yet each week we push ahead with work, chores, errands and activities, and we neglect to hold Sabbath time.

Worship is part of it, but two hours at church is not a Sabbath. It also is about family. By over-scheduling, we do not create meaningful family time. We need time to be in the presence of each other and focus on one another—not be distracted by homework, football games or shopping. We need to learn to see, hear and connect with one another.

God knows we need a time of restoration. “For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it” (Genesis 2:2-3).

God’s instruction is not for ancient times, it is for today, and perhaps is more needed today with the pace of the American culture. Sabbath is a time of healing; it is a time of preparation. Of course we are overwhelmed because we neglect the time to allow our bodies, minds and spirits to recover from the week before and prepare for the week ahead.

Crowds of people followed Jesus to hear his teachings and be healed. He knew time away for rest, reflection and restoration with God was essential. He spent time in meaningful relationship with His Father.

Yes, life is demanding. There is a lot to do for a family. So, remember Sabbath time and set it aside for your health and wellbeing. It is more than a rule to follow, it is God’s provision and care for our health.—Valerie Vincent

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Church staff service, is it a job or calling?

Years earlier, as the mother of two small girls, I relished being home with my daughters and providing for my husband who owned a successful business. As a small businessman, he could not obtain reasonably-priced health insurance for the family. That traumatized me. We decided that I needed to work outside the home to obtain this coverage and asked God to provide employment for me so that my family would benefit.

My church, Severns Valley Baptist Church in Elizabethtown, soon advertised in its Sunday bulletin the search for a pastor’s secretary. This was definitely God’s answer to my prayers, I concluded. For 29 years now, I have worked as a church staff member in various positions as the scope of my responsibilities has increased. God regularly reassures me that He called me into this job.

Travis Collins writes in his book, “Directionally Challenged,” that there are four kinds of call:

- Call into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. The example is Jesus’ calling of the disciples to follow Him. He calls us into relationship with Him through faith in Jesus Christ (Matthew 4:18-22).

- Call to a new way of life, including lifestyle and vocation. (1 Corinthians 1:1).

- Call to specific acts. Paul, “compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem” (Acts 20:22).

- Corporate call. The Holy Spirit spoke to Antioch Christians to set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work to which God had called them (Acts 13).

Collins further explains that call is the ongoing prompting of God’s Spirit, confirmed through Scripture, the faith community, intellect and experience, which communicates: “These are your roles in My mission.”

God called me to a new way of life as a church staff

member. Beyond all doubt, my experience in these years has repeatedly reminded me that God set me apart for a unique work and a unique opportunity.

Rusty Ellison, pastor of Walnut Street Baptist Church in Louisville, gives a vivid account of his call. While the owner of a large and successful retail business in the Southeast, Ellison’s call to ministry was so strong that he could have no peace until submitting to following it. He gave up a comfortable life and a work he had built and loved to accede to God’s claim on his life.

The pastoral staff members with whom I work each offered a consistent word when I asked them to relate their calls to minis-

try. That word was “peace.” All of them said their callings were realized in the sense of personal peace they knew once they surrendered to God; doors opened to appropriate opportunities as they accepted the call to ministry and relied on His direction for the focus of their lives’ work.

Is it a job or a calling for church staff members? I submit it is both—and more. In practical language, it is both a job and a mission; it is both sustenance for families who serve Him and an abiding sense of peace that comes from submitting to His will and following “wherever He leads.” Personal fulfillment and assurance are affirming blessings that come from ministering.

I’ve leaned on the Lord for guidance and wisdom. He has directed me and sustained me and given me renewed energy and enthusiasm for my work. When I trusted Him to answer my prayers many years ago, I knew not what lay ahead. I thank the Father daily for answering that prayer. The blessings that come from serving Him and His church abound.

Linda Polley is director of administration at Severns Valley Baptist Church in Elizabethtown

GUEST EDITORIAL



Linda Polley

Georgia Baptists isolate themselves

By David Gushee

Atlanta (ABP)—On Nov. 12, in a front-page story, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution broke the news that the Georgia Baptist Convention had approved a new policy giving GBC executives the freedom to refuse donations from churches it finds to be out of step with Southern Baptist beliefs. The policy move is aimed (for now) at First Baptist Church of Decatur, Ga., because it called a woman, Julie Pennington-Russell, to serve as pastor.

It happens that this is my congregation, and Julie is my pastor.

And so I would like to begin this unofficial, unauthorized response by saying that the daily Christian ministry offered by my wonderful church will not be at all affected by this decision. The preaching of the gospel, prayer, benevolence ministries, after-school programs for children, youth ministry, global missions, counseling ministry, women’s ministry, care for homeless and abused women and children—all of these will go on just as before.

The decision does apparently mean that the GBC would prefer not to receive the thousands of dollars that we otherwise would have chosen to send them, as we have done for 145 years. In a time of economic recession, with money tight all over, the GBC will choose to reject our financial support for their activities. This must be an unusual organization, sufficiently flush with funds that it can refuse money—in this economy—based on differences over a disputed doctrinal matter. Would someone else like our money?

This action gets the relationship between church and denomination entirely wrong. In a religious tradition that believes in

FIRST PERSON

congregational polity, state and national conventions exist as a result of the free decisions of congregations to work together on common projects. They pool their funds to do together what none of them can do as well on their own. State and national conventions exist to serve congregations, and congregations are the ones who get to decide whether the entities they created to help them advance their mission are still worth supporting. But here, the situation is reversed. That’s just wrong.

Baptists used to believe that God’s plan is for congregations to order their own affairs, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in obedience to Christ.

First Baptist, Decatur, undertook a slow communal process of discernment in the months before calling Pennington-Russell as pastor. This 145-year-old congregation with 2,700 members did their biblical and theological homework, they prayed earnestly, and they finally emerged with the decision that they did.

It is more than a little insulting for other Georgia Baptists, and the GBC itself, to decide that this autonomous congregation made such a bad decision that our missions money now is tainted. This puts First Baptist, Decatur, in company with—as Journal-Constitution reporter Christopher Quinn reported after a conversation with GBC Executive Director Robert White—other “gifts

from questionable sources, such as alcohol distributors.”

Most Baptist churches are in a situation of flat or declining membership. Many are in serious trouble, fighting for their very survival.

But First Baptist, Decatur, is doing well. Many are coming to faith in Christ for the first time. Our innovative early worship service is booming, with many new visitors each week. We actually are reaching our community, and our congregation’s increasing racial and ethnic diversity clearly attests to this happy fact.

At the heart of it all is Julie Pennington-Russell herself. The sober-minded search committee that called Julie saw in her what we have all now experienced.

She is a pastor, called of God. She has all the requisite gifts of preaching, teaching, leadership and care for souls. She exemplifies the fruit of the Spirit. She loves people, and people respond accordingly. But by calling her, we apparently joined the morally questionable ranks populated by alcohol distributors.

Daily readers of the Atlanta newspaper know that religion news rarely makes the front page. But on Nov. 12 it did, under this title: “Baptist change isolates church.” Baptists made the newspaper—not for loving people or serving the poor, but for a decision to reject one of their oldest, most significant churches.

“Baptist change isolates church?” Not really. The headline should read: “Baptist change isolates Georgia Baptist Convention.” Our congregation will be just fine.

David Gushee is distinguished university professor of Christian ethics at Mercer University in Atlanta

GO TELL

the story of Jesus

Light comes to 'edge of darkness' in Colombia

Continued from page 1

What they have in common is their need for Christ. Of the 100-plus Indian tribes, only nine are considered "evangelized." More than 60 others are without any gospel witness. That means no known believers and no evangelical churches. Instead, most tribes are animists—spirit-worshippers who live in fear of failing to appease gods they neither know nor love.

"This is the very edge of darkness," Fernando said. "The overwhelming need of these people is to be delivered from the fear of Satan. ... Without God, there is slavery. Without Christ, there is fear, and that's what they breathe day in and day out."

The Rojas family know firsthand what that kind of fear can do. They've lived among the Nu for nearly 10 years and often have watched Nu families go hungry, sometimes for days, because they were too afraid of evil spirits to go hunting in the jungle.

"It's like a different world," Lee Rojas said.

Gospel work "a bit dangerous"

There's no electricity or running water in the villages. Until recently, the Nu didn't wear clothes. They sleep in hammocks hung from open huts topped with palm fronds. The jungle is their only source of food. Poison-tipped darts fired from blow guns snare birds or monkeys; wild plantains, insects and honey are

gathered by hand.

This primal existence is due to the Nu's limited contact with the outside world; they are considered isolated even among other Indian tribes. There are no roads that lead to Nu villages. To reach them, the Rojas family must hop a two-hour flight aboard a small plane to an unmarked landing strip carved into the jungle. From there it's a four-hour walk with their two young girls in tow.

But distance isn't the only barrier between the Indians and the gospel—there's the threat posed by anti-government insurgents and illegal paramilitary outfits. Clashes with the army have forced these groups into remote areas of the Colombian countryside, the same areas where indigenous tribes make their homes.

The insurgent problem is so widespread that nearly every unevangelized tribe, including the Nu, falls within their territory. Ransom kidnappings are practically guaranteed for foreigners who try to reach them.

While Americans would be conspicuous in these areas, Colombians blend in—which makes them ideal missionaries to indigenous communities. There's still some risk; but for the sake of the gospel, it's risk that missionaries such as the Rojas family are willing to take.

"It's true where we live is a bit dangerous and sometimes isn't very comfortable," Lee Rojas said. "But

God tells us that the day of salvation is today. Christ died for the Nu and He sent us to tell them. We know our lives are in His hands. If we die, so be it, because Jesus will be there waiting for us."

That sense of urgency was burned into the Rojas family hearts the day Cho died. Counted among the family's dearest Nu friends, he was there from the very beginning of their ministry. Cho had helped John and Lee on countless occasions, spending hours patiently teaching them the Nu language or sharing fish he had caught for dinner. Their girls, Grace and Joy, even called him "grandpa."

But despite all Cho had given them, the Rojas family were not able to give Cho the gift he needed most. At the time, they were trying to perfect their language skills and hadn't yet been able to share the gospel with any of the Nu—not even Cho.

One day Cho became very sick. He was taken to a doctor in the city, but he died the next morning.

"My heart broke," Lee recalled. "I told God, 'He didn't have a chance to believe because he wasn't able to hear about You.'"

That night the Rojas family poured out their hearts in prayer, pleading with the Father on behalf of the Nu.

"We asked God that we never again bury a man or woman of this tribe without having the opportunity to tell them about Jesus," she noted.

Stories are more than fairy tales

Filled with regret and doubt, they turned to the Larzabals for help. Fernando and Brenda reassured them and offered their guidance and friendship. They connected John and Lee with a local Colombian church that agreed to support the couple's ministry. More importantly, the Larzabals helped them develop a new strategy for reaching the Nu, one that allowed them to begin sharing the gospel right away.

Within just a few months the Rojas family were back on the field, witnessing to the Nu for the first time using chronological Bible stories. This is an evangelism tool that involves sharing and discussing a series of key stories from the Bible, usually from creation to Christ. Story sets often are tailored to address specific issues relevant to a particular people group.

"We prayed that the stories would be more to the Nu people than just another fable or fairy tale," Lee said. "Specifically, we asked that the is-

sue of sin would be confronted and understood because the Nu did not take blame for anything they did."

"I am on the burner"

Dut was among the first to listen to the stories and was captivated by what she heard. The Rojas family quickly recognized the Holy Spirit at work, bringing Dut closer to confronting her sin.

"She had already learned from the story of Cain and Abel that God knows and sees everything," Lee noted. "When we went over God's law of 'Thou shall not kill,' Dut knew she was cornered and that day she confessed."

"I buried these kids alive and now I am on the burner," Dut told Lee. "What will God do with me?"

Then came the story of Jonah and Nineveh's repentance.

"I have to do like the people of Nineveh," Dut said. To the Rojas family's surprise, she immediately knelt in the dirt and asked for God's forgiveness.

"That was a moment of rejoicing for us," Lee recalled. "We knew this was the beginning of God's Word arriving with power among the Nu people."

They still hadn't gotten to the story of Christ. When they did, Lee said Dut was overjoyed to learn that Jesus had died for her sins, even the sins that seemed unforgivable—including murdering five of her children.

"No, I am not going to hell because Christ paid for that, too," Dut declared.

She soon brought her entire family to listen to the Bible stories. Dut's sister was next to receive the Lord. Within a year, the Rojas family had shared the gospel with all 120 Nu in the village. More than 60 accepted Christ and 20 were baptized.

Today, John Rojas said God's presence continues to transform the village. Nu believers no longer worship spirits or visit witch doctors. Adultery, theft and other problems have dropped dramatically. What's more, Nu families aren't going hungry for fear of evil spirits.

"In the past I used to be afraid of death and would not hunt in the jungle," one Nu villager told John. "But now I know that if I die I will go to heaven because God sent a Savior for my sins. ... Now I feel free."

**Names changed: Nov. 30-Dec. 7 is the Week of Prayer for International Missions; 100 percent of gifts to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions help more than 5,300 missionaries around the world.*

EMMISARIES Fernando and Brenda Larzabal (left) pose for a photo with Colombian missionary partners Hugo and Diana Solorza. The Solorzas run a center for indigenous students in Bogotá that serves as a doorway for introducing the gospel.



Gay-rights activists arrested on Union University campus

Jackson, Tenn. (ABP)—Three Christian gay-rights activists were arrested Nov. 10 on the campus of Union University in Jackson, Tenn.

The arrests occurred during a stop on the 2008 Equality Ride, a bus tour of 15 religious schools across the South by Soulforce Q. The organization is the young-adult division of a group that fights discrimination against gays with nonviolent protest.

Police arrested 21-year-old Zak Rittenhouse of Frankfort, Ohio; 22-year-old Manny Lampon of New York; and 22-year-old Jarrett Lucas of Minneapolis, Minn., a co-director of the 2008 Equality Ride, on trespassing charges. The arrests came after campus security warned them to leave an area declared off limits.

University officials offered to let the activists into Luther Hall, a building located across a public street from the main campus, and told students, faculty and staff interested in dialogue about their presence. Instead, the riders chose to stand vigil inside one of three entrances to the campus.

After meeting only three students, the marchers chose to march toward a higher-traffic area of campus. They were stopped and told to turn back or face prosecution. Three refused to retreat. They were handcuffed and driven away in a police car.

"Although Union University cannot affirm this group's message, the university leadership made an attempt to offer dialogue and Christian hospitality to Equality Riders," Union officials said in a statement. "It is regrettable that the leadership

of Soulforce responded by rejecting these offers."

Katie Higgins, the other Equality Ride co-director, said the goal of the effort is to communicate with as many students as possible, and the university's limiting their access made it necessary for them to move to parts of the campus offering more interaction.

One of the activists, Rachel Watson, is a Union University graduate. "It was heartbreaking to have my alma mater turn me away from campus," she noted. "I wanted to talk to students about my life and the pain I experienced as a lesbian on Union University's campus, but instead I was locked out of my own school."

Group founded by minister

Soulforce was founded by Mel White, a formerly well-connected evangelical minister who ghostwrote books for religious figures including Billy Graham, Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell. The group noted more than 200 colleges and universities in the United States have explicit policies that discriminate against students who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender.

Now in its third year, the Equality Ride has visited more than 50 of those schools, where riders say even students often are unaware of such policies. Union University, for example, has a policy prohibiting "sexual impropriety," which is defined as "engaging in premarital sex, extramarital sex, homosexuality, homosexual activities or cohabitation on campus or off campus."

Arrests are nothing new for those participating in this year's Equality

Ride. Four of the riders were arrested Nov. 3 attempting to talk to students at Central Baptist College in Conway, Ark. Two were arrested at Mississippi College Oct. 20. Three were jailed Oct. 17 at Heritage Christian University in Florence, Ala. Six were arrested for trying to enter the chapel at Palm Beach Atlantic University, a Christian school with ties to the Florida Baptist Convention.

Some campuses, however, were more hospitable. At Louisville's Baptist-affiliated Simmons College Nov. 13, the final stop on the gay-rights group's tour, activists had a "spirited discussion" with Simmons president Kevin Cosby, according to the Louisville Courier-Journal.

Soulforce members held a sidewalk vigil outside the school displaying photos of prominent gay African-Americans, the newspaper reported, then spoke with individuals at nearby St. Stephen Church, a Kentucky Baptist congregation where Cosby is pastor.

Cosby told a Courier-Journal reporter that he did not mind the group's lifestyle choices, but that there are other issues that need to be promoted among the African-American community.

"It does not reflect the myriad of problems the urban community is facing," he told the newspaper. "I believe in equal opportunity and

that gays and lesbians should not be discriminated against in any form. However, we're not talking about the public square and society, we're talking about the right local churches and private schools have to set policy."

At Liberty University in Lynchburg, Va.—the location where 20 people were arrested on the first Equality Ride in 2006—five riders were allowed to enter campus to deliver books affirming LGBT people to the library.

Dallas Baptist University allowed dialogue termed "unprecedented" Oct. 24, engaging students, faculty and administration. Blair Blackburn, executive vice president at DBU, said at a press conference that while the school's "established beliefs may not coincide with the viewpoints of Soulforce on these issues, we understand anyone's right to disagree and their desire for an opportunity to discuss."

The following week Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, organized what Soulforce Q termed "a limited and formal exchange of ideas" with students, faculty, staff and administrators hand-picked by the seminary to represent a cross section of the campus community.

With additional reporting by News Director Drew Nichter

Oneida's four-fold ministry, part 3

OBI's co-curricular program involves all students in variety of sports & activities

Nearly everyone remembers a time when he or she was in school and there was an occasion to choose sides. I clearly recall that some students always were among the first to be chosen. And then there were others, like me, who were nearly never chosen until the pickings got pretty slim. I remember what it was like wondering if—or when—someone would finally choose me.

Many students come to Oneida with low self-esteem for a variety of reasons. Low grades, getting into trouble, not being liked by peers, not being able to meet the expectations of others, and being the last one chosen for the team are just some things that can hinder a student struggling with low self-esteem. Many of them often wanted to try out for a particular team or activity but didn't because of the fear of being cut. The decision to cut a student often has little to do with how much the student enjoys a particular activity; it primarily is a result of not measuring up to the standards required to be a part of the team.

We all understand the need to have a winning team, and Oneida, like other schools, always seeks to put the best we have on the field or court. One thing that separates us from other schools, however, is the fact that we do not cut because of a lack of ability. On the first day of school, our students are told they can be a part of any activity we offer. There are no try-outs. In fact, every student is encouraged to be a part of as many activities as possible. Of course students cannot be in two places at one time. But as long as they can manage their time and meet team requirements,

they are welcome to be involved.

That policy does have its difficulties. When a 300-pound student joins the cross country team, it presents some challenges. When a girl wants to be a cheerleader but does not have exactly the typical cheerleader shape, or a student joins the choir but cannot carry a tune, there are challenges. Yet few experiences are more rewarding than seeing a student who has never been a part of a team find happiness and success for the first time.

I am not suggesting every student becomes a star athlete or is outstanding in some co-curricular activity, though that often happens. I am not even suggesting that all of those students become success stories. What I am saying is that a large part of our successes over the years has been the result of making sure every student understands that "everybody is somebody" in God's eyes. I will tell you that many times the student who has been overly intimidated by the thought of being cut at other schools has become one of our exceptional students.

I have seen remarkable changes take place in a student's life when he or she has found success in the opportunities OBI offers. Students even have told me they know they are not very good in their activity, but for the first time, they feel welcomed by peers in spite of their modest skills.

We all are created in God's image and He did not make any mistakes. Being able to find success in a variety of areas of one's life is a key to being a happy and productive citizen. By the way, a great way for a 300-pound boy to lose 100 pounds is to join the cross country team.

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W.F. Underwood



Donnie Fox

'I don't want to do this anymore'

Smith is thankful for God's calming presence in his life

First-year student James Smith, from Somerset, can relate to the words of the Psalmist who talked of how God lifted him "out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock" (Psalm 40:2).

"I did not grow up in a Christian home," Smith said. "From my early childhood I only remember hearing that I was not going to make anything of myself. ... Needless to say, I got into some trouble growing up. By the time I ... got married, I was addicted to drugs and alcohol. I remember times in my life where I thought everyone hated me because of who I was.

"Fortunately, I met a woman where I worked and she invited me to church in Somerset at The Potters Place Ministries. I started attending there some and finally accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior," Smith recalled. "Unfortunately, after that I started listening to some people tell me that I couldn't be a Christian because of the old person that I once was, and I allowed Satan to get a foothold back in my life.

"I remember sitting at my house really depressed because of the way I felt," he noted. "I told God I didn't

want to do this anymore. I got down on my knees and asked God to take all those feelings away."

Life for Smith has changed dramatically since that night.

"I answered the call from God to youth ministry in March," Smith said. "I began to work with the youth at Potters Place Ministries. I kept hearing about Clear Creek from my pastor and other people, but I wanted to come here because it was what God wanted me to do. So I asked God to give me confirmation.

"One Wednesday night ... I noticed my wife talking to our pastor's wife and they both were crying," Smith recalled. "My pastor's wife told me if we were led to go to

Clear Creek that the church would support us financially. That was my confirmation from God.

James doesn't know what the future holds, "but I would like to take some additional training in drug and alcohol counseling," he said. "I would like to be able to counsel other people who are going through what I went through."

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Use of the word 'Christmas' again being scrutinized

Atlanta (BP)—As another Christmas season rolls around, so does the debate over whether to mention the word "Christmas" or opt for the generic "holiday" in retail stores and public events.

The Home Depot has notified the American Family Association that they will give Christmas a more prominent place in their promotions by including the word in advertising, store banners and displays near items such as Christmas trees.

"We also use the word 'holiday' in our outreach to customers, as many of our store displays and other marketing efforts cover more than one holiday from Thanksgiving to New Year's and stay in place throughout the entire holiday season from November through January," Home Depot spokesman Ron DeFeo wrote in a statement to AFA.

In Long Island, N.Y., the renowned Grucci fireworks company has pulled out of a local boat parade because "Christmas" was dropped from the event's name. Grucci, famous for providing fireworks displays at major national celebrations, is based in Brookhaven, N.Y., not far from Patchogue, home of the Patchogue Holiday Boat Parade.

Last year, the event featuring decorated yachts was called the Patchogue Christmas Boat Parade, and Grucci donated \$5,000 worth of fireworks, according to the Associated Press. Local officials said the Christian holiday was dropped from the name this year after complaints that it seemed to make the parade less inclusive.

As a method of navigating the politically correct waters surrounding Dec. 25, the American Family Association is sponsoring Project Merry Christmas, an effort aimed at getting people to loosen up and say "Merry Christmas."

"Christians can take a stand and proclaim to our communities that Christmas is not just a winter holiday focused on materialism but a 'holy day' when we celebrate the birth of our Savior," AFA said in a news release. "We can do it in a gentle and effective way by wearing the 'It's OK to say Merry Christmas' button."

AFA is offering the buttons as well as glossy stickers for purchase at its Web site, www.afa.net. The group is encouraging supporters to wear them throughout the Christmas season.

"Some might think simply wearing a button or displaying a glossy sticker is a small thing, but God can use small things to make a big point and to create opportunities to share the Good News," the AFA news release noted.

Huckabee: 'Value voters' key to GOP future

By Adelle Banks
Religion News Service

Washington (RNS)—Former presidential candidate Mike Huckabee, often mentioned as someone who could shepherd the GOP out of the political wilderness, said Republicans neglected religious conservatives this year and need to maintain their support as the party regroup.

"They were welcomed to the family table two days a year, and that was the primary and Election Day," the former Arkansas governor said at a Nov. 19 press conference. "I think there's a point of frustration and exasperation where people are saying, 'You know what? If you don't want us, just say so.'"

Out with a new book, "Do the Right Thing: Inside the Movement That's Bringing Common Sense Back to America," Huckabee spoke about the past and future of the Republican Party.

"There should not be the disconnect between value voters and those who consider themselves the fiscal conservatives," he noted. "The truth is, most value voters are fiscal conservatives, but not all fiscal conser-

vatives are value voters."

Huckabee said he has no immediate plans for a second White House run or for any other office, and that the GOP would be "insane" if they tried to move away from issues like abortion or marriage that are key to religious conservatives.



Mike Huckabee

"It's been an important part of our overall message, which is that traditional values still reach many people in this country," he said of the marriage issue. "And I think the sanctity of life issue is still an issue that draws people to the Republican Party who otherwise might not necessarily feel that much of a loyalty. It's not that it's the only issue, but it's an issue that we have to be faithful to."

But Huckabee also was critical of conservative religious leaders including Texas megachurch pastor John Hagee, religious broadcaster Pat Robertson, Bob Jones University Chancellor Bob Jones III and former GOP presidential candidate Gary Bauer, who passed over the former governor and endorsed other GOP candidates.

"I came to the conclusion that political expediency and prag-

matism had supplanted prophetic principles among those who aspired to influence the process but unwittingly had become influenced by the process and, in fact, were held captive by it," Huckabee wrote in his new book.

Bauer, chairman of the Campaign for Working Families, issued a statement last week saying he was disappointed in Huckabee's book.

"It is unfortunate ... at a time when the GOP needs to close ranks and seek unity, that Governor Huckabee in his new book has aimed his fire at his fellow Republicans," Bauer said.

Huckabee acknowledged that he expected his words would anger some readers. "I'm telling the honest facts of the story," he added. "I don't think I'm unfair or unkind, but I'm honest."

Huckabee said he thinks former GOP vice presidential nominee Sarah Palin has "a great future ahead of her" after rallying the Republican base, but he was noncommittal about his own political outlook.

"I'm not ruling anything out for the future but I'm not making any specific plans to do something in the future politically," he explained.

Calif. Supreme Court to hear Proposition 8 challenge

Los Angeles (RNS)—California's Supreme Court Nov. 19 agreed to hear challenges to a voter-approved ban on same-sex marriage, and will decide next year if the controversial ballot measure was just an amendment or a broader revision to the state constitution.

Proposition 8 passed Nov. 4 with 52 percent of California voters approving a ban on same-sex marriage, effectively overturning the state Supreme Court's landmark ruling last May that allowed gay and lesbian couples to marry.

Last week, the court agreed to hear legal challenges but refused to impose a temporary stay that would

allow same-sex couples to continue to obtain marriage licenses.

Lawyers representing same-sex couples contend that the measure was not a simple amendment but a much broader revision of the constitution, which under state law can be revised by the legislature or a constitutional convention but not by a ballot measure.

The Anti-Defamation League said in a letter supporting the challenges that, "permitting Proposition 8's supporters to forego the revision process would jeopardize the freedom of all Californian minority groups—not just gay and lesbian people."

Filing motions in support of Prop 8 were the American Center for Law and Justice and the Alliance Defense Fund, with the ACLJ saying the measure is a "validly enacted amendment to a single provision of the California Constitution."

Also filing a challenge was the California Council of Churches, which was joined by the Episcopal bishops of San Francisco and Los Angeles, the United Church of Christ, Unitarian Universalist Association and the Progressive Jewish Alliance.

The state court set a Dec. 19th deadline for submission of further briefs.

Suspects arrested in shooting at Ouachita Baptist

Arkadelphia, Ark. (ABP)—A shooting incident Nov. 19 on the perimeter of the Ouachita Baptist University campus did not involve any students and ended with no injuries and three suspects quickly arrested, according to authorities.

The alleged assailants fired from a parking lot owned by the Arkansas Baptist State Convention-affiliated school, but apparently targeted a student at neighboring Henderson State University. The student was walking across the lot, which borders both campuses, while returning to a dormitory.

Police in the town of Arkadelphia, where the schools are located, said none of three "people of interest" held after the shooting attended either school.

Ouachita Baptist President Rex Horne said that while no one was injured and the incident involved no Ouachita students, at least one gunshot reportedly was fired. He said campus safety would provide an increased presence in the area for the next several days and urged prayer for everyone involved in the situation.

NATIONAL NOTES

Obama asked to investigate military religion.

A national atheist lobbying group is calling on President-elect Barack Obama to overhaul military policies in an effort to reduce what it sees as religious discrimination in the armed forces. In a letter sent Nov. 10, the Secular Coalition for America asked Obama to scrutinize new appointees to ensure fairness to atheist soldiers, to survey the military on current religious conditions, and to establish a commission on "religious accommodation" within the Defense Department. One-fifth of military personnel identify themselves as atheists or having no religion, the Secular Coalition said.

Atheists to launch bus ads in D.C.

A new holiday ad from the American Humanist Association declaring "Why believe in a god? Just be good for goodness' sake" are now being featured on buses in Washington. The \$40,000 ad campaign is not necessarily targeting religious people or challenging their beliefs, officials said, but rather is an attempt to reach existing atheists and agnostics to let them know they are not alone. Other organizations have been running similar campaigns in other cities. Jan Meshon, president and founder of FreeThoughtAc-

tion, has helped launch billboard ads in New York City, Philadelphia, Los Angeles and Kansas City, Mo., with several on the way in Denver and Colorado Springs, Colo.

Hagan drops lawsuit over 'godless' ad.

Senator-elect Kay Hagan, the North Carolina Democrat who ousted Republican Sen. Elizabeth Dole, has withdrawn a defamation suit over a Dole ad that linked Hagan with a 'godless' group. Hagan filed suit Oct. 30, saying Dole inaccurately accused her of having ties to an atheist political action committee. Hagan filed a motion to dismiss the suit Nov. 14. In the suit, Hagan charged that Dole and her campaign maligned her reputation with an ad that "falsely implies that (Hagan) shares the views of an entity that calls itself the Godless Americans PAC." A spokesperson for the Dole campaign could not be reached for comment.

Focus on the Family cuts 200 jobs.

The Colorado-based Focus on the Family will reduce its staff by about 200 positions, citing economic conditions. The staff reductions, which will decrease the number of employees from about 1,150 to about 950, include 149 people whose positions will be eliminat-

ed, and 53 vacant positions that will be cut. The ministry founded by religious broadcaster James Dobson also will stop publishing four of its eight magazines. The Colorado Springs, Colo.-based ministry encountered a \$5 million shortfall on its \$151 million budget in the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30. Donations provide 95 percent of the ministry's income.

Feds say hunger rose in 2007.

Food insecurity in America continued to rise last year, and participation in the food stamp program is approaching record highs, according to data released last week by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In 2007, 11.1 percent of U.S. households reported food insecurity—what used to be labeled as "hunger"—up from 10.9 percent in 2006. About 4 percent of households were severely food insecure, meaning one or more adults had to adjust their eating habits because the household lacked resources for food. The food stamp program now has more than 30 million people enrolled, an increase of 9.5 percent from 2006, and half of all babies receive supplemental nutrition from the Women, Infants and Children program, according to the report.

PRAYER PARTNERS

Please pray for the following Kentucky Baptist missionaries and ministries:

Pathway of Hope pregnancy resource center in Greenville.

Diana Anderson of Second Baptist Church of Greenville directs this multi-church ministry that offers pregnancy tests, material support, prayer, counseling and other items to individuals who find themselves in unplanned or unwanted pregnancies. Pray for the staff to be bold and confident in their witness to clients and family members. Pray that the women they minister to will be receptive to the gospel of Jesus. Pray that they will be effective in teaching young women abstinence until marriage.

MSC missionaries Mike and Michelle Gross of Fisherville.

The Grosses serve as church strengtheners at Parkland Hills Baptist Church in Fisherville, where they are responsible for community surveys, evangelistic visitation, children's ministries, administration and outreach. They are a tremendous support and help to this restarted congregation. Pray that God will grant wisdom, guidance and additional volunteers as the couple seeks to make an impact on families through relationship development and outreach. Pray that people will respond positively to the gospel as a result of their witness and ministry.

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

MOUNTAINS TO THE MISSISSIPPI

COMPILED BY STAFF

■ **BUFFALO**—Buffalo Church recently called **Michael Birkhead** as minister of youth. **Rodney Troutman** is pastor.
 ■ **CECILIA**—**Chris Lewis** recently resigned as student minister at Cecilia Church.
 ■ **HENDERSON**—Hyland Church will host guest speaker and author **David Ring** Nov. 30, 6 p.m.; Dec. 1, 6:30 p.m. **Don Moore** is pastor.

■ **HODGENVILLE**—First Church recently called **Adam Townsend** as minister of education and children. **Mike Rodgers** is pastor.
 ■ **LOUISVILLE**—East Audubon Church recently called **James Young** as youth pastor. **Ron Hennig** is pastor.
 ■ **SONORA**—First Church recently called **Andrew Hillard** as director of youth. **Walter Mantooth** is pastor.

Paducah couple among IMB's third-largest missionary group ever appointed

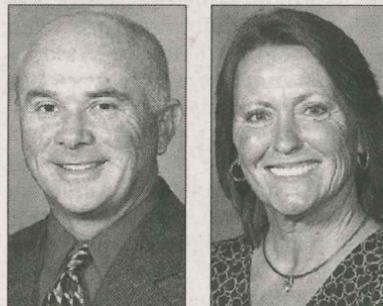
By Emilee Brandon
SBC International Mission Board

Houston (BP)—"Who will come back for us?" a Zambian man cried out as Tommy and Cyndi Morreau departed his village.

The short-term missionaries longed to stay and work among the unreached Tonga tribe, building houses and sharing Bible stories—but their two-year term was coming to an end.

As the Morreaus continued to seek God's will about the next chapter in their lives, the man's desperate cry weighed heavy on their hearts. They knew it was God confirming their call to serve Him full time.

The Morreaus, members of Lone Oak First Baptist Church of Paducah,



Tommy and Cyndi Morreau

are returning to their beloved Tonga people to continue their ministry. They were among 105 new missionaries from across the United States and nine countries appointed Nov. 11 at First Baptist Church of Hous-

KBC CALENDAR OF EVENTS

December

8-9 KBC Mission Board, Baptist Building, Louisville.

January 2009

15-17 Shepherding the Shepherd, Lexington Downtown Hotel & Conference Center.

22 Pastor/Staff Forum, Baptist Building, Louisville.

22-23 Quarterly Prayer Meeting for Spiritual Awakening, Hope Community Church, Lawrenceburg.

23-24 Region 1 Disaster Relief Recertification and Training, Lone Oak First Baptist Church, Paducah.

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

ton. The service marked the third-largest group ever appointed by the Southern Baptist International Mission Board, bringing the total of Southern Baptist missionaries serving overseas to 5,541.

Addressing the new missionaries, IMB President Jerry Rankin referred to the Apostle Paul's letters in 1 Thessalonians as he told them their most important witness is to live like Jesus.

"That is why we are appointing you as missionaries," Rankin said. "Jesus told us to go, but I believe He understood that the most effective witness is living out in flesh and blood the reality of" Christ.

Rankin told of a veteran missionary from Asia who said his most

effective time of ministry was his second year on the field. After completing language study, the worker went to a local market, sat at an empty vendor's table and started conversations with passers-by.

"I don't think there was anyone in my city that didn't know who I was or why I was there," Rankin recalled the missionary saying.

Unfortunately, he became too busy with ministry responsibilities and stopped going to the market.

Rankin told the new appointees they are compelled to share their life-changing experiences with others, just like the believers in Thessalonica.

"No one will ever see Christ in your life ... if you isolate yourself."

CLASSIFIED ADS

FOR SALE: Nice Spinnet piano in excellent condition: \$500 (includes bench). Contact church office at (859) 238-7004.

FOR SALE: Church buses and vans—new and used. Call American Bus and Accessories, Inc., (800) 582-7118.

FOR SALE: Christian, patriotic and military neckties, \$6. Humor book, "500 Laughter Doeth Good Like a Medicine" (over 1,000 sold), \$6. Booklet, "Death: How to Prepare," \$6. (606) 285-3051.

SEEKING: Part-time minister of recreation (25 hours per week) for Hall Street Baptist Church. Please send confidential resumé with cover letter to: Hall Street Baptist Church, 1102 Hall St., Owensboro, KY 42303, Attn: Personnel Committee.

SEEKING: Youth minister (part-time or full-time) with a minimum of 1 to 5 years experience. Send resumé with photo to Concord Baptist Church, 1945 Concord Lane, Hopkinsville, KY 42240.

SEEKING: Part-time music minister for Evergreen Baptist Church, Frankfort, Ky. EBC has 150-plus congregation, traditional and contemporary. Send to EBC, 2698 Evergreen Road, Frankfort, KY 40601, Attn: M. Hughes; or e-mail to office@evergreenbaptistchurch.us.

SEEKING: Church organist. Send resumé to Bethany Baptist Church, PO Box 155, Alvaton, KY 42122, Attn: Gary Wheeldon.

SEEKING: Part-time student minister (grades 7-12), central Pulaski County. Great congregation standing on God's Word with strong emphasis on youth. Seeking someone who is energetic and equipped to teach and reach youth for Christ. Send resumé to Ferguson Baptist Church, PO Box 247, Ferguson, KY 42533. Phone: (606) 679-1690.

SEEKING: Part-time children's minister. Send resumé and references to: Friendship Baptist, 5411 Bengal Road, Campbellsville, KY 42718.

SEEKING: Part-time music minister for South Jefferson Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky. Blended style worship. Send resumé to katmb@insightbb.com.

SEEKING: Associational director of missions for Clear Creek Baptist Association. We are an association of 43 church in beautiful southern Illinois. We have member churches in Union, Alexander, Pulaski and Johnson counties. Our churches range in size from 18 to 1,350 members. Our association currently is very healthy and positioned for a wonderful future, having had only two executive directors in the last 48 years. Interested individuals can learn more about this position at <http://clearcreekexecsearch.wordpress.com>.

SEEKING: Senior pastor who believes in the inerrancy of the Bible and has proven skills in preaching, teaching, visitation, counseling, visioning, soul-winning, discipleship and administration. We are a conservative and progressive church with a bright future for ministry and growth in a rapidly growing community just outside of Charlotte, N.C. We have six ministers and numerous outreach programs and specialized ministries, including a large deaf ministry. We are a missions-minded church, supportive of our local association, the Baptist state convention, and the SBC. Send resumé to Donna Jennings, chairperson, Pastor Search Committee, Parkwood Baptist Church, 1069 Central Drive, Concord, NC 28027; or donnaPastorSearch@carolina.rr.com. For general information: www.parkwoodbaptist.com.

SEEKING: Full-time pastor for Providence First Baptist Church. Send resumé and, if possible, a photo, DVD or cassette, and references, to Mr. Ray Gobin, 214 Benjamin Terrace, Providence, KY 42450. Phone: (270) 667-2307.

SEEKING: Part-time music director for church in central Pulaski County. We are seeking someone who is energetic and equipped to lead our choir and be responsible for all musical arrangements for services. Send resumé to Ferguson Baptist Church, PO Box 247, Ferguson, KY 42533. Phone: (606) 679-1690.

SEEKING: Full-time high school/college pastor for Valley View Church in Louisville. Candidates should have a verifiable track record (8-10 years) of successful student ministry experience (ministry growth and spiritual development) with a group of approximately 60 students within a larger church context. Candidates should possess skills in communicating God's Word in practical ways, a vision for building a team of volunteers, and an understanding of current student cultures. We seek candidates prepared for a long-term commitment. In addition, we prefer candidates to have formal youth ministry training, past focused concentration on high school ministry, experience with college students and experience in a church of approximately 700. Administrative and budget-conscious skill sets are a plus. More details are available upon request. Candidates should send a cover letter, resumé and message sample, along with a current photograph, to the following address or e-mail: Valley View Church, 8911 Third Street Road, Louisville, KY 40272, Attn: High School Position; studentpastorsearch@valleyviewchurch.org.

SEEKING: Minister of students and activities for First Baptist Church, Farmington, Mo. Send resumé, recommendations or inquiries to: Personnel Committee, 210 North A St., Farmington, MO 63640; or e-mail wc-miller-fbc@sbcglobal.net. Inquiries will be kept in confidence.

SEEKING: Full-time pastor for Second Twelve Mile Baptist. Preaches from the Bible; willing to work with all ages; build a youth program, community and hospital visitation; mission-minded. Please send resumé, tape/DVD to Scott Horn, 14007 Hwy 10, Butler, KY 41006; e-mail kybigrack@aol.com.

SEEKING: Senior pastor. First Baptist Church, Morganfield, Ky., is looking to call a pastor who is community-minded for a church having an existing community outreach presence. FBC is located in a small, western Kentucky town and has an average attendance of 200-250. We have two Sunday morning services, one contemporary and one blended. This is an awesome church that has a strong potential for growth. Send resumé to: Pastor Search Committee, First Baptist Church, 200 North Morgan St., Morganfield, KY 42437.

SEEKING: Pastor for Mt. Carmel Baptist Church, a rural (175 worship average), conservative Southern Baptist congregation near Williamstown, Ky. Requires some seminary training and pastoral experience. Send resumé to Pastor Search Committee, c/o Steve Paynter, 270 Gumlick Road, Falmouth, KY 41040.

SEEKING: Full-time pastor for Petrey Memorial Baptist Church in Hazard, Ky. Please forward resumé and, if possible, DVD, CD or tape, to Pastor Search Team, Petrey Memorial Baptist Church, 141 Alto St., Hazard, KY 41701. www.petreymemorial.org.

At 72, gospel's most successful artist won't slow down

By Steve Rabey
Religion News Service

Alexandria, Ind. (RNS)—Bill Gaither may not be an A-list celebrity or household name, but over a half century he has sold 20 million recordings and 20 million DVDs—more than any other gospel performer.

And the impact of this musical legend far exceeds sales figures.

He and his wife, Gloria, have written more than 600 songs, including one immortalized by Elvis Presley ("He Touched Me") and others published in hymnals used in churches around the world ("Because He Lives").

If he wanted to rest on his laurels, Gaither certainly has enough accolades and money to do so. But at 72, he still is busy writing, recording and traveling with his current 32-city Homecoming tour.

Friends ask Gaither if he plans to slow down any time soon.

"Retire? And do what?" he asked in his signature soothing baritone voice during a phone interview from his Indiana office. "If I had to sing high 'C's every night, or play keyboard at a high level, it would be better to back off. By myself, I'm not really that fantastic. But what I do is bring together talent. And I'll continue to do that gladly."

Gaither was a college student in 1956 when he formed The Bill Gaither Trio with a brother and sister. After he married, Gloria became his primary partner in life, songwriting and performing. The Trio recorded more than 40 albums and filled arenas nationwide.

In 1980, he founded the Gaither Vocal Band. The quartet's 30 albums feature everything from old-timey Southern gospel chestnuts to pop-based contemporary songs.

No one has been more successful than Gaither at bridging the often-contentious divide that separates Christian music's traditionalists from its harder-rocking contemporary fans.

"Christian music is about a the-

ology and a message and can't be pinned down by any one style," he said. "Over the centuries that message has been wrapped in a lot of different styles. The wrapper is always changing, but the basic message is always going to stay. I don't think God really cares about the wrapper, but He cares very much about the content."

Through the Vocal Band and other activities, Gaither also has promoted and mentored some of the most popular Christian artists of the past four decades, including Sandi Patti, Larnelle Harris, Carman, Steve Green, Don Francisco, Michael English, David Phelps, Russ Taff and Mark Lowry.

"It sounds (like a) cliché, but he really is in a category all by himself," noted John Styll, president and CEO of the Gospel Music Association, who credits Gaither with "single-handedly re-energizing" Southern gospel, the genre he has called home for the most recent phase of his career.

Gaither was working on "Homecoming," the Vocal Band's 1991 album when he stumbled across the formula that has proved remarkably—and unexpectedly—successful.

He invited about a dozen gospel music pioneers to join in on the classic song, "Where Could I Go but to the Lord." After the recording session, the singers ate fried chicken and gathered around a piano to shoot a music video. Before they knew it, someone started playing and the singers all joined in.

Gaither recalled that three hours passed before the singing stopped and the camera had captured nearly an hour of the impromptu session. Four minutes were used for the video. The remaining footage gave birth to a Homecoming phenomenon that has spawned dozens of CDs, more than 60 DVDs, broadcasts on more than a dozen cable outlets and a popular concert tour that in 2004 outsold tours by Rod Stewart, Elton John and Fleetwood Mac. "My



lands," Gaither said. "Across the board, the response was amazing."

The Homecoming tours and products have been a boon for Gaither Music Company, the Alexandria, Ind.-based firm that includes a recording studio and company, concert booking, television production, copyright management, retail store, recording studio and a telemarketing department. A separate company publishes Homecoming Magazine and a radio show.

Homecoming's success also has provided steady work for a revolving roster of musicians and singers. And Gaither has plowed some of his earnings into the Gospel Music Trust Fund, which supports aging or ailing artists. In 1991, the fund had about \$20,000 in its bank account; today it is worth nearly \$3 million.

Gaither admitted he is surprised by the popularity of the Homecoming franchise, which he attributed to the sense of community and shared collective memory the music creates among both the artists and fans.

"The Christian church has often been guilty of neglecting its history," Gaither said. "But if you show me a person who does not know where he's been, I'll show you someone one who does not where he is going. The result is spiritual arrogance. What we're trying to do with the music we sing at the Homecoming concerts is salvage the best of the past."

There is so much good music to choose from that Gaither admitted he struggles to bring each concert to an end.

"Every night my job is to see how I can keep this thing to under four hours," he said. "There is so much talent. I want to be fair to the artists who are there."

Asked if he thinks his success over half a century is due to talent, smarts or luck, Gaither answered, "It's a combination of all the above. And we have been truly blessed by God in a special way. He is smiling on us and we are very happy for that."

STILL GOING Gospel artist Bill Gaither has sold more albums than any other Christian recording artist and, at age 72, shows no signs (or desire) of slowing down. (RNS photo courtesy of Lobeline Communications)

Chick-fil-A founder Truett Cathy honored for charitable leadership

By Sherri Brown
Georgia Baptist Convention

Naples, Fla. (BP)—Truett Cathy, founder of the Chick-fil-A restaurant chain, was named the 2008 winner of the William E. Simon Prize for Philanthropic Leadership earlier this month.

The annual award "honors living philanthropists who have shown exemplary leadership through their charitable giving, highlights the power of philanthropy to achieve positive change, and seeks to inspire others to support charities that achieve genuine results," according to Philanthropy Roundtable, a national charitable giving association. The award includes a \$250,000 prize, which is to be donated to the charities of the recipient's choice.

Cathy, 87, a lifelong Southern Baptist, has led his company to donate more than \$100 million since 1967, when the first Chick-fil-A opened in Atlanta. The company's charities have emphasized educational scholarships and foster care.

"Giving is one of the privileges we have," Cathy said. "The more I give,

the more I have. Very few people recognize the pleasure of giving—especially when you don't expect anything in return."

Cathy has based his business on Christian principles from his first days of running a 24-hour restaurant in south Atlanta 61 years ago. He and his brother owned the restaurant and decided from the beginning to close on Sundays. His 1,400 Chick-fil-A restaurants, including the mall sites, all close on Sundays, even though fast-food restaurants traditionally do 20 percent of their business on that day.

"Everybody needs a day of rest and a day to worship if they choose," Cathy noted. "That's the best business decision I ever made. We do more business in six days than our competition does in seven days."

He joked that he permits his customers to "eat somewhere else one day a week as long as they eat with

us the other six days."

Living out his convictions has been Cathy's theme throughout his career. He said he believes success is simple: good customer service and quality food.

Since teenagers comprise a major part of his workforce, Cathy explained that part of his mission is to train them to be good employees.

"For a lot of our employees, we give them their first job. We want to help them establish good work habits and good attitudes," he said. "It's a mission field."

Cathy teaches kindness and courtesy to his workers. When a customer says, "Thank you," he asks his employees to respond, "My pleasure." He also requires employees to do all kinds of jobs—including the less desirable ones.

"Clean restrooms are important in the restaurant business. If people

see a dirty restroom, they'll think other parts of the building might be dirty. No one is above cleaning a restroom," noted Cathy, who also has invested himself in teaching children. Last year, he retired from 51 years of teaching Sunday school to 13-year-old boys at his church, First Baptist Church of Jonesboro, Ga.

The award Cathy received offers him yet another opportunity to support some of his favorite charities. While Cathy is known for awarding \$1,000 scholarships to Chick-fil-A employees—\$24 million so far—he also established WinShape Foundation, which seeks to foster winning leadership qualities in young people. He also has built 12 WinShape foster homes that provide quality care for children. Chick-fil-A has donated \$100 million to foster care, marriage enrichment programs and camp retreats.

Cathy will donate his prize winnings to two Union City, Ga., organizations: Christian City, a foster care facility, and Southwest Christian Care, an organization that provides respite care.



Truett Cathy



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throw this away?**

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