

Shine like stars in the world
Philippians 2:15

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FOR THE RECORD

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Finding freedom

DOM: Churches must be leaders in helping those struggling with bondage of homosexual lifestyles

By Ken Walker
State Correspondent

Pikeville—Years after questioning his identity during a dysfunctional childhood, Bob Finch has a heart for those who struggle with same-sex desires, including church members who are afraid to reveal the truth.

Because Kentucky Baptists have taken such a strong stand against homosexual practices, many have forgotten their need to minister to those caught up in unwanted temptations, he said.

"There is no proof that one is born homosexual but that doesn't mean people choose to be homosexual," said Finch, director of missions for Pike Baptist Association in Eastern Kentucky. "We can't choose our temptations."
"In many cases, that's where local churches are dropping the ball. We're throwing the baby out with the bath water," Finch added. "We need to realize we're dealing with human lives here."

Though only with the Pike asso-

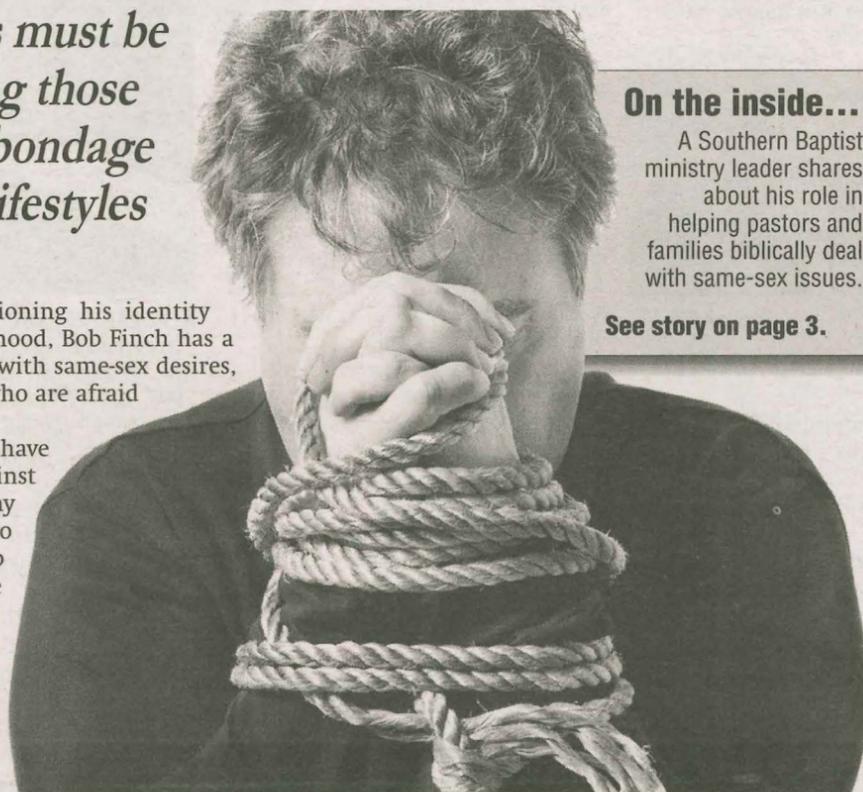
ciation for three and a half years, Finch graduated from Cumberland College (now University of the Cumberlands) and has served as a pastor and chaplain in Eastern Kentucky.

In those environments he has heard the crude jokes about gays and hostility expressed for them that make church the last place

someone with a problem would consider coming.

Finch said he hopes to change that, recently presenting his first workshop in Eastern Kentucky on a Christian response to homosexuals.

Held at the final Super Saturday conference in Pikeville back in Au-
□ See DOM: Churches must ... Page 3



On the inside...

A Southern Baptist ministry leader shares about his role in helping pastors and families biblically deal with same-sex issues.

See story on page 3.

Museum to host Christmas events through new year

Petersburg—The Creation Museum in Northern Kentucky is offering a special planetarium presentation called "The Christmas Star," which focuses on the "remarkable astronomic event that occurred at the birth of the Savior."

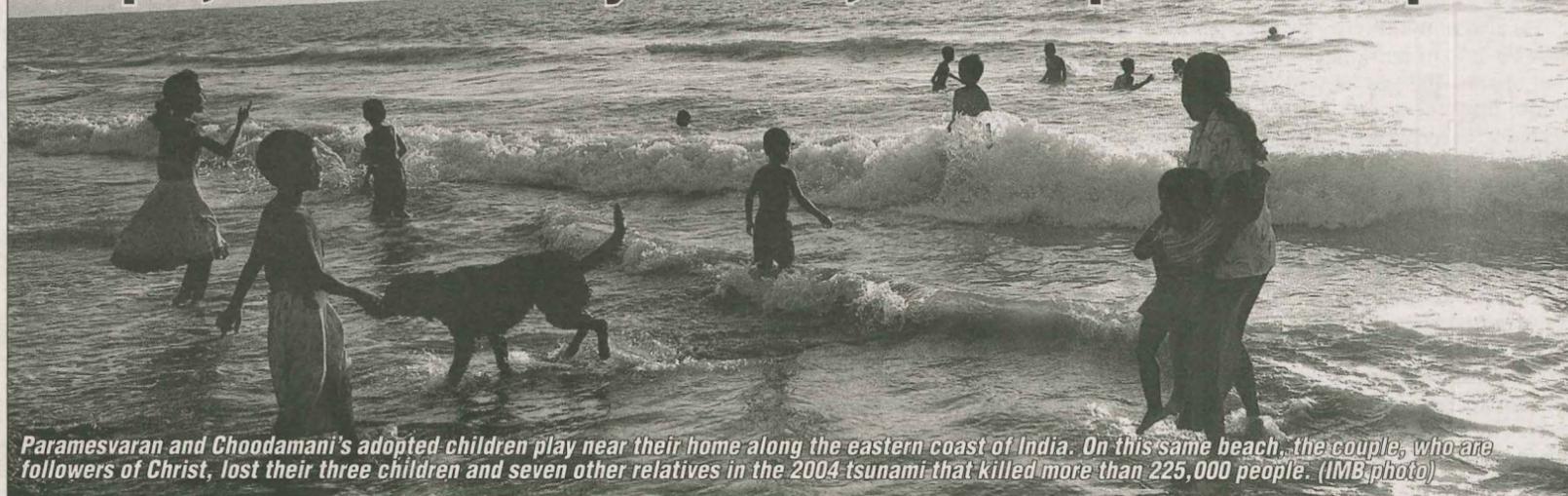
The museum, located in Petersburg, also is hosting a live nativity featuring a representation of a small first-century home in Bethlehem, where an archeologist explains the historical account of Christ's birth.

"As Christians, we love to celebrate Christmas in a big way and to remind our visitors of the importance of Christ's birth as part of the culmination of God's plan for humanity," said Ken Ham, founder and president of the museum. "While creation is a big focus of the museum, it is one part of the history we teach here, helping our guests to understand how it all fits together."

"Bethlehem's Blessing" is a free event scheduled for Dec. 18, 19 and 26 and Jan. 1-2 from 6-8 p.m. Tickets are required for the planetarium show.

For more information, visit www.CreationMuseum.org. (BP)

Couple, left childless by tsunami, become parents to orphans



Paramesvaran and Choodamani's adopted children play near their home along the eastern coast of India. On this same beach, the couple, who are followers of Christ, lost their three children and seven other relatives in the 2004 tsunami that killed more than 225,000 people. (IMB photo)

By Shawn Hendricks
International Mission Board

Tamil Nadu, India—"Daddy, what's that?"

Paramesvaran looked toward the ocean. Curiosity turned to horror as a 30-foot wave bore down on him and his 5-year-old son Kirubasan. He grabbed the boy and ran.

But it was too late.

The wave lifted them up off the ground and tossed them back down.

Paramesvaran's son slipped from his grasp.

The water swept Paramesvaran

along until he could grab hold of a palm tree. Clinging tightly against the force of the waves, he felt the rough trunk rip into his arms, leaving gaping wounds.

Almost five years later, one glance at the jagged scars stretching along his arms like tattoos can transport him back to that day—Dec. 26, 2004. The Indian Ocean earthquake, which triggered a series of devastating tsunamis, was one of the deadliest natural disasters in recorded history.

As the tsunami waters receded, Paramesvaran stumbled home in

shock. He found his wife, Choodamani, sitting on the second floor of their house. The waves had topped the retaining wall around their home—located less than five minutes from the beach—and flooded the first floor.

What about Kirubasan and daughters Rakshanya, 12, and Karunya, 9? They and seven out-of-town relatives who had come to visit for Paramesvaran's 40th birthday had gone to the beach with him that day.

He had not seen any of them. The rest of the day he searched

the beach for his children, joined by panic-stricken neighbors also searching for loved ones. They later learned that more than 225,000 people had been killed by the tsunami that struck India, Indonesia and 10 other countries.

By midnight, Paramesvaran had found his children's bodies and the bodies of most of his relatives. He found Kirubasan "lying like a stone statue" on the beach. Rakshanya was floating face down in the ocean. The waves left Karunya's body entangled in a thorn bush.

□ See Couple gains heart ... Page 6

Long Run's Pitts honored for leadership, hard work with 2009 top DOM award

By Drew Nichter
News Director

Louisville—When the eyes of the Southern Baptist Convention were on Louisville, Wesley Pitts had been the most visible person involved. But he certainly was busy behind the scenes making sure the city put its best foot forward.

For Pitts, who has led Louisville's Long Run Baptist Association for more than a decade now, 2009 was a busy and unique year.

During the SBC annual meeting, Crossover Louisville, his term as president of the Southern Baptist Conference of Associational Directors of Missions and leading the largest association of Kentucky Baptist churches, Pitts had his hands full this year.

In recognition for his tireless work, the Kentucky Baptist Fellowship of Directors of Missions recently named Pitts as its DOM of the Year.



Wesley Pitts

It was an honor for which Pitts said he was surprised to even be considered.

"I wasn't expecting it at all," he said, adding though that he appreciated the award because it came from his fellow DOMs.

But that was just about all the credit Pitts seemed willing to accept.

When discussing Crossover Louisville, the evangelistic campaign which preceded the SBC annual meeting in June, Pitts deflected all praise and recognition.

"I had a real quality group of people to work with," he noted.

The work for Crossover started more than a year earlier with Pitts and Kentucky Baptist Convention Evangelism Growth Team Leader Ross Bauscher enlisting former KBC president Charles Barnes to coordinate the wide-ranging event.

When all was said and done, more than 3,000 Baptist volunteers from across the U.S. participated in Crossover. That included 79 churches throughout the city with block parties, a Hispanic and international festival and construction of a downtown community center.

In all, more than 1,000 people made decisions for Jesus Christ during the weekend.

The job now, Pitts said, is getting all of those people connected with a church. Follow-up efforts have been ongoing since June and a number of the respondents have been contacted by a Long Run Baptist church. "Of course, there's still a lot of them that we haven't reached," Pitts acknowledged.

He also noted the work of the North American Mission Board's ICE (Intentional Community Evangelism) teams that shared the gospel with people "cold turkey," 400 of whom made decisions. Many of them still need to be connected with a church, he said.

With work still to be done, Pitts remained hopeful. "Somewhere down the road, I believe they'll get involved with a church," he said.

Not only did Pitts have the responsibility of Crossover, he also wrapped up a one-year term as president of the Southern Baptist Conference of Associational Directors of Missions. With that came the responsibility of leading its annual meeting.

Pitts "hit a home run with that," said Larry Baker, KBC's director of new work and associational missions department. "He just did a great job encouraging our directors of missions around the country. ... He represented Kentucky Baptists very well."

When he wasn't leading Southern Baptist events, Pitts had the day-to-day task of leading Long Run Association, the largest and, quite possibly, the most diverse collection of Kentucky Baptist churches in the state.

Leading the churches is a challenge in itself, Pitts noted, but the pastors "have been very cooperative and friendly. They're an enjoyable group to work with."

Asked if Crossover was a feather in the cap of a ministry career which has spanned more than 40 years, Pitts rebuffed the idea, saying it's the everyday ministry work that still is most important.

"Crossover would have happened if I hadn't been here," he said. "We tried to do it as well as anybody has done. ... Overall, I think it is a high mark for the association."

National race track chaplaincy group to relocate to Georgetown in new year

By Drew Nichter
News Director

Georgetown—The turning of the calendar page to 2010 will signify a new era for a national chaplaincy group.

The Race Track Chaplaincy of America organization will relocate from its current home in Inglewood, Calif., to the Georgetown College campus Jan. 1.

According to its Web site, the RTCA "is an evangelical, interdenominational, Christian organization whose purpose is to minister to those persons involved in all aspects of the horse racing industry."

The group oversees about 72 chaplains who serve at more than 100 racetracks in the United States. RTCA has chaplains at tracks in 11 other countries as well.

RTCA and Georgetown signed a working agreement last year "that provides for the enhancement and facilitates the mission and programs of both organizations," as stated in an RTCA news release.

The chaplaincy organization has been wanting to move to the Bluegrass State for some time, noted Enrique Torres, executive director for RTCA.

The organization, formed in 1971, currently calls Hollywood Park near Los Angeles home. "In California, we are in a corner of the country and we want to be in the middle," Torres said. "It will be easier to move among our chaplains."

"Kentucky is the horse capital of the world and RTCA belongs here," noted Paul Ransdell, RTCA's director of development.

Ransdell, a Kentucky native and Georgetown College graduate, was hired by RTCA in August and has maintained an office at Georgetown since then. The rest of the organization will relocate next month.

"RTCA is in a transformational kind of mode," Ransdell said. "This is not just a move for RTCA, this is a move up."

The shift to Georgetown makes sense for the chaplaincy group, Torres noted, because of its proximity to so many other racing industry organizations, many of which are head-



NEW PARTNERSHIP Race Track Chaplaincy of America Executive Director Enrique Torres (center right) shakes hands with Georgetown College President William Crouch Nov. 10 after two resigned the partnership agreement that originally was signed in 2008. The RTCA will relocate to Georgetown at the first of the year. Also pictured is Larry Martin (far left), a missions consultant with the Kentucky Baptist Convention, and Dan Fick, president of RTCA's board of directors. (Georgetown College photo)

quartered in the state.

RTCA also can tap in to the resources of Georgetown College, Ransdell said.

Specifically, RTCA holds chaplaincy training each year during its annual meeting. Organizers plan to "draw upon the talent and the expertise of the college in terms of instructors, facilitators and presenters that are either faculty or alumni," Ransdell explained.

Such resources will "help to really bolster the quality of our chaplaincy school and help us ensure that we've got better trained, better equipped chaplains doing what they do," he added.

Georgetown College President William Crouch said the partnership between the school and RTCA is "a perfect fit."

"They have the chance to interact with—and possibly recruit—some of our students," Crouch said, specifically noting the school's Equine Scholars program.

Crouch also explained that

RTCA's presence on campus could expose ministry-led students to chaplaincy and "a Christian-oriented career path that probably none of them had ever thought of."

Torres said RTCA chaplains do not emphasize denominational affiliation, but rather a "spiritual relationship" with God. "We are trying to move people closer to the Lord," he noted.

The chaplains deal with a great number of needs of those men and women—many of them Hispanics—who live and work on the backsides of racetracks. Often these individuals are caught up in alcoholism, drug abuse and pornography, Torres said.

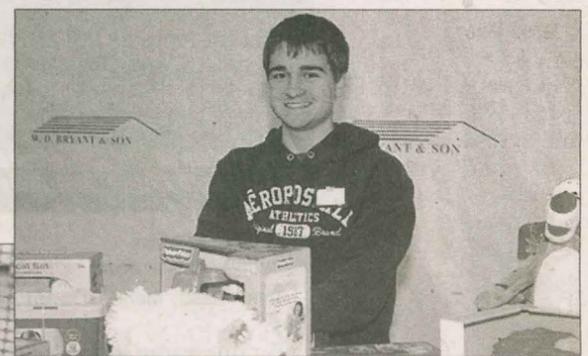
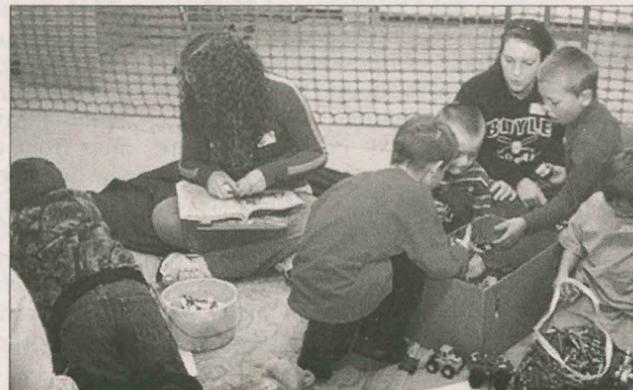
RTCA chaplains provide "healthy entertainment" for workers to get them away from their troubles. The group also provides English as Second Language and GED classes, Internet access so workers can stay in touch with their families in their home countries, and basic necessities such as clothing and food.

"Kentucky is the horse capital of the world and RTCA belongs here."

Paul Ransdell, RTCA's director of development

Cumberlands' students bring cheer to families

Williamsburg—The first snowfall of the year did not keep volunteers for University of the Cumberlands' Mountain Outreach from helping 176 local families at the organization's annual Gift Day Dec. 5. Because of the group's year-long efforts, 435 children will have Christmas gifts whose families otherwise might not have been able to provide. Mountain Outreach students also gave out food vouchers to be used at a local grocery for specific food items.



MAKING CHRISTMAS 'MERRY' ■ Above: Freshman Jeffrey Barnett, surrounding by toys, mans one of the age-group stations during University of the Cumberlands' Mountain Outreach Gift Day Dec. 5. ■ Left: During the Gift Day, children had a safe place to play while being watched by members of the university's chapter of the Kentucky Education Association Student Program. More than 160 people volunteered at the Gift Day, including 52 Cumberlands students. (Photos by Daphne Baird)

DOM: Churches must take lead in ministering to homosexuals

Continued from page 1

gust, he said it attracted the largest attendance of the afternoon sessions.

"I never lost sensitivity to the fact there were a lot of people out there who were like me," said Finch, who as a youngster was molested by an older brother—and as a teen had another same-sex experience during a drinking binge.

"I wanted to fit in and was willing to do anything to fit in," he recalled. "Many people are looking for love, acceptance and appreciation. If the only place they can find it is in the homosexual community, that's where they're going to be."

Homosexuality's reach

Finch noted that some question why the church should be concerned about same-sex issues when they only affect between two and five percent of the population.

However, he said adding parents, siblings, friends and relatives of those individuals multiplies that to 30 percent—meaning in a church of 100 members, 30 are impacted in some way.

Instead of getting caught up in political wars over same-sex marriage or anger toward gay activists, Finch said churches need to seize the opportunity to minister to hurting people.

He said that many offer support groups for those with drug abuse, gambling addictions or marital problems, but seldom for those who struggle with same-sex attractions or pornography.

Finding help in rural areas particularly is tough, according to Bob Stith, Southern Baptist Convention's national strategist for gender issues.

The Dallas-area official said he hopes to persuade more directors of missions to sponsor workshops to spread awareness and combat misinformation.

"Every area should have this kind of ministry," Stith said of support groups for same-sex strugglers. "We've had people drive 100 to 200 miles to meetings because they don't have help where they live. You have to be pretty serious to drive that far."

The two steps that Stith said any congregation can take to make their church a safe place are:

- Teach members that cruel jokes and snide remarks about gays are painful to anyone affected by this issue.

- Invite ex-gays to share testimonies about how they overcame same-sex desires through the power of Christ.

Recalling the time a former homosexual spoke to the church he then was pastor-



ing, Stith said it was a powerful event.

"That was a valid contradiction to what people hear in the media every day," Stith noted. "What are we going to do to show the other side of the coin? One man said when you hear the testimony of people being set free (from homosexuality), you'll know nothing is too hard for God."

He suggested rural pastors make an effort to get informed. Stith mentioned Joe Dallas' book, "When Homosexuality Hits Home;" Alan Chambers' "Leaving Homosexuality;" and the Exodus ministry Web site as good sources of information. Exodus is a network of ministries across the nation that offer help to people wanting to overcome same-sex attraction.

Attitude change needed

Some members will have to make a paradigm shift, Stith explained, recalling how at one time his views were shaped by overreacting to gay activists.

"Many rural Christians grew up with a mindset and they think it's biblical," Stith said. "The negativity and condemning attitudes are not from Scripture."

"One thing that hinders the evangelical church is the attitude, 'They should just quit it.' What about struggles with overeating, gossip or a critical spirit? Do people even acknowledge" those?

Finch agreed, saying if the only thing people hear from churches is how awful homosexuals are, someone who wants help "isn't going to darken the doors" of a church.

The DOM said Baptists can help by mentoring people, forming friendships and offering biblical guidance to those who usually hear that homosexuality is natural and they should accept it.

"Do people see the church as a place where they can be honest about their struggles?" Finch asked. "I would like people to see church as a place where they can come and not only receive spiritual healing but emotional healing as well."

Minister seeks to raise profile of gay ministries

By Ken Walker
State Correspondent

Paducah—Richard Holloman shared a revelation recently with members of West Union Baptist Association. While married for 16 years and serving as a Southern Baptist pastor in churches and on college campuses, he also engaged in numerous homosexual relationships.

Fourteen years after first revealing that, Holloman said he still is making amends privately to churches and others he hurt by his actions.

"That was a secret until 1995; my wife was never aware of it," said Holloman, whose spouse died in 1988. "I had a lifetime of sexual abuse, sexual addiction, being out of control and doing things the wrong way."

Now executive director of The Sight Ministry in Nashville, the former staff member at that city's Two Rivers Baptist Church also serves on the Southern Baptist Convention's task force on gender issues.

His proximity to Kentucky sometimes brings him into the state.

In addition to his trip to Paducah during the summer, in late September he visited a General Baptist church in Morgantown to lend moral support to a couple from Alabama.

That couple spoke about their son who grew up in church and later was killed by his homosexual lover when he tried to end their affair.

Holloman also has met with a minister in Bowling Green who has asked for help on dealing with same-sex matters.

"This is a major issue in our nation," Holloman acknowledged. "I wonder why more churches don't deal with it and why more pastors and youth pastors aren't dealing with it."

He started The Sight Ministry nine years ago. In 2003, it became affiliated with the ex-gay ministry, Exodus, which Holloman serves as the Southern Gulf regional representative. Yet, Holloman said one of his major challenges is informing pastors and Christians of The Sight Ministry's existence.

Church members often fail to recognize how many young people struggle with same-sex attractions, yet never reveal them because they are terrified of rejection, Holloman noted.

"They just hear the gay-identified side: 'Embrace this and be happy,'" he said. "We've got to get the message out that these ministries exist. A number of Southern Baptist churches have Exodus-affiliated ministries like mine."

Despite the existence of homosexuality in rural areas, Holloman said many people are blind to its existence.

Although not hostile to his appearance, one lay leader at the West Union meeting wondered why they were having the event.

Yet, when Holloman asked who knew someone who had struggled with homosexuality, everyone else in the room raised their hands.

"I think a lot of people in rural areas don't realize it is a problem," he said. "This isn't just an issue in metropolitan areas."

The former counseling director of Two Rivers Baptist still has an office at the church. It also provides The Sight space for support groups for men, women, wives of men struggling with homosexuality, and one for family and friends.

Although saying he hasn't encountered much hostility, Holloman admitted he knows of some churches that aren't too receptive to The Sight. He attributes that to a failure to understand the ministry's purpose.

"This is a very complex issue, with roots in early childhood and environmental issues in the home," Holloman said. "Somebody didn't just wake up and decide to pursue this, (although) there's not a gay gene either."

Two things he said he has observed are considerable ignorance about homosexuality and apathy, which surprises him considering the attention same-sex marriage and related events generate in major media.

What Holloman said he hopes to see develop in Southern Baptist churches is more caring and compassion.

If they are known for judgmental attitudes, hatefulness and gossip, they won't be seen as safe places where people can confess their problems, he noted.

"We all struggle with something," Holloman said. "What would have happened if the boy (from Alabama) who was murdered could have talked to his pastor when he was 14 and told him about his struggle? Would he still be alive today?"

Campbellsville University student pulls double duty as full-time pastor

By Jason Tiller
Special to the Western Recorder

Hodgenville—Worship music plays in the pastor's study at Pleasant Grove Baptist Church in Hodgenville.

The room is dimly lit, with a bookshelf in the corner housing numerous books and every Bible translation imaginable.

On the wall are hundreds of pictures, records of the past and relationships cultivated by a loving church family. Behind the big wooden desk sits 21-year-old Campbellsville University student Chris Taylor, diligently preparing his weekly sermon.

Taylor, a native of Hopkins County, came to Pleasant Grove Baptist as its youth pastor in August 2007.

When the church's pastor announced earlier this year that he was leaving, Taylor was appointed transitional pastor. In August, the church called him as its full-time pastor.

"I believe that the people were OK with

having such a young pastor," Taylor said. "I had been the youth pastor for two years and people liked me and viewed me as a spiritual leader."

Taylor is a full-time student at Campbellsville majoring in pastoral ministries. He also is the son of Gary Taylor, a pastor for 21 years who currently leads Olive Branch Baptist Church in Hanson.

"My dad has been a big help to me in a lot of ways. He's always there to listen and share his experience, as well as his resources," the younger Taylor said, adding, "Sometimes it's hard though, being 'Brother Gary's son.' I'm trying to make a name for myself rather than live in his shadow."

As a full-time pastor, as well as a student taking 18 hours of classes, Taylor acknowledged that he faces many challenges. Some of those include lack of resources, money issues, fundraising and time management.

Taylor also has other responsibilities like the youth group which he still leads.

He also is in charge of the church's music and media ministries and chairs most of its committees as well.

"One of the biggest stress factors of my job is when I can't relate to someone who is having problems," Taylor noted. "Then, of course, you always have people who disagree with you, and you worry about making them angry."

"It's not all stressful though," he pointed out. "It's really rewarding for me to see people get the message and run with it. My people genuinely want to change the church (as a whole), the community and influence their family and friends. I love to watch them transform into true disciples of Jesus."

Taylor said Pleasant Grove is trying to become more missions oriented. In September, they held a month-long emphasis called "Hula Hoop September."

"We stepped out of our 'hoops' and tried to reach the community by going out on

Wednesday nights and inviting people to church," Taylor recalled.

"The people seem to like the new ideas of taking the Word to the people and reaching out," he added. "We have even begun to introduce some more modern ideas into our worship service, such as new music and new styles of music that are more upbeat. ... For the most part, I have met little resistance with our new programs."

Taylor said his ambition, should God lead him away from Pleasant Grove, is simply to "follow God's will." But he said he does hope to start a new church one day.

"I'm blessed with a beautiful wife, an awesome church family, supporting friends, friends for me to support and the Word," he noted.

Taylor was one of the 168 graduates during Campbellsville's winter commencement Dec. 11. He said he plans to remain at Pleasant Grove Baptist Church.

Jason Tiller is a student at Campbellsville University

A lifestyle of cooperation

I am so grateful for the thousands of Kentucky and Southern Baptists who cooperate out of a strong conviction that working together glorifies God. We all know that God can do His work any way He may choose, but historically and biblically He has chosen to work through His people as empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Partners in the Mission



By Bill Mackey

I believe that cooperation is of such great value to Kentucky Baptists that we always will find a way to cooperate for the sharing of the gospel of Jesus Christ locally and around the world, for the planting and strengthening of His churches, and for the support of valued ministries and missions for the glory of God.

Kentucky Baptists began cooperating financially in 1915 when we adopted a unified budget even before the Cooperative Program was established in 1925. This financial cooperation continues strongly today as was evidenced by the first quarter fiscal year report on the support of missions by Kentucky Baptists. For the September–November quarter, Kentucky Baptists were ahead of last year in CP giving and in giving to the missions offerings. The Eliza Broadus Offering for State Missions was ahead of last year by 5.3 percent (\$41,651).

Kentucky Baptist cooperation is not limited to finances, though, as there are thousands of lay leaders who make cooperation a personal lifestyle choice. They participate in ministries such as disaster relief, Baptist Builders, partnership missions, evangelism and many others that are cooperative efforts among churches.

Many serve as volunteers in their local churches and associations for the glory of God and without public recognition. I estimate that there are 80,000 who serve faithfully as Sunday school teachers and music participants every week in their local churches.

There also are thousands of Kentucky Baptists who are prayerwalking their communities as a part of the Find It Here emphasis. An estimated 50,000 will be involved in distributing the gospel March 6–21, 2010.

These lay leaders serve unselfishly and sacrificially. By way of example, I would like to mention some of the key roles of just one with whom I'm familiar.

Charles Barnes serves at Hurstbourne Baptist Church in Louisville as a Sunday school teacher, deacon and supporter in many areas. This past year, he served in the Long Run Association office 20 to 30 hours per week for months as volunteer coordinator for Crossover Louisville. Now he is serving as the volunteer coordinator for the association's Find It Here effort.

Barnes also has served as president of the KBC and on many boards and committees for the Mission Board, convention, agencies and institutions.

Barnes is just one of thousands who are as committed and involved. May God be praised through the lifestyle of cooperation and service by lay people all across Kentucky and beyond.

Bill Mackey is executive director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

When you follow a star and find a stable

As a denominational journalist, I have heard many sermons at conferences and conventions. Many of these were excellent messages. But one that was preached many years ago by David Horton, who then was serving as a pastor in Charlotte, N.C., still lingers with me. Though not entirely historically accurate—since most scholars agree that by the time the wise men found Jesus, He was probably a toddler and living in a house—Horton's point was no less poignant: Never forget that our Lord, the Savior of the world, was born in a humble setting.



After Thought

By Todd Deaton

The wise men set out expecting to find a newborn king. They followed a star in search of something grand and glorious when they reached their destination. Instead, they found something very different. No crown. No regalia. No palace. No royal court. No throne. Staring back at them was a small child who had been wrapped snugly in cloths and placed in a manger.

All of us can identify with that kind of experience. They had followed a star and wound up in a stable, the preacher observed. There have been times when we, too, followed a star thinking that our future looked so bright. Yet things turned out far different from what we expected. We wound up in a stable somewhere, disappointed.

Horton suggested three things that Christ's followers might learn from the wise men's actions. First, they continued to search for God and recognized Him in the form of a child who had been born in the most unlikely of places. Wise men of every age still choose to look for God. Even in the midst of discouragement and disillusionment, they insist, "I know God is here somewhere, and if I keep looking, I know that I will see Him." Second, they went ahead as planned and offered their best gifts to God. Often when faced with adversity or disappointment, we are tempted to hold back, to not give or do our best. The wise men didn't begrudgingly present their precious gifts, complaining that they were meant for someone of noble birth—not for a baby born in Bethlehem. Finally, God spoke in a dream to the wise men in the home of the child who was laid in a feeding trough, and it changed their direction in life. They went home a different way—no doubt, as different people, having been in the presence of the Lord.

If you have followed a star and found yourself in a stable, God wants you to allow Him to use that sit-

uation to change your direction in life, Horton challenged. God put you there and perhaps as much as growing a church, a Sunday school class, a family or a career, God wants to grow a faithful disciple, Horton declared.

Why has this message stuck with me so long? It resonates with my own experience.

When I was a junior in high school, my father, a Baptist pastor, felt that God was calling him to another church in a different town. Now this may not sound like a major tragedy, and I will readily admit now that there are far more devastating circumstances. Yet, for a 16-year-old boy, it seemed like my world was ending. I would have to leave behind my best friends and my first love. Even worse, I would have to quit the school basketball team, which was undefeated and headed for a championship game. My life could not be any worse!

But Woodruff, the town where my family moved, would play a pivotal role in my life. There were new friends, girl friends and sports teams. More importantly, my life took a new direction. An English teacher helped me discover a potential talent in writing, and I joined the school's newspaper staff. Then, through serving as a counselor at a state Royal Ambassador camp, I felt a calling to enter the ministry. These two facets eventually united in a vocation as a religious journalist, through which God has blessed me to serve two other state Baptist newspapers and led me to the Western Recorder.

My purpose in sharing this is not to draw attention to my story, for many of you also have wondrous stories of how God has worked in your lives. Nor is it to offer an example of what can happen when one gives one's life totally to God, for I must sadly confess that this is more often than not far from the case. Rather, I share it as an illustration of what God is able to do in our lives with what one perceives at the time to be a lowly stable.

Therein is the wonder of Christmas, the beauty and majesty of the story of Christ. God, through a babe in a manger who became a suffering servant, is able to transform our humble stables into glorious vistas in His eternal Kingdom. The challenge to us: Go back into our stables—our jobs, churches, homes, schools—and look for God at work. Because when we worship God and give Him our best, God still changes lives.

Missions and class Christmas parties

By David Francis

What in the world (pun intended) do Sunday school Christmas parties and international missions have in common? Generally, not much. But you can change that. Here are a few ideas:

■ **Raise money for Lottie.** The most memorable Christmas party I ever attended was with a 40-somethings department that conducted an auction to benefit the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for the International Mission Board. Each of the men brought a homemade tree ornament, which was auctioned off. It was great fun. We still hang the glittery floppy disk on our tree—it was worth the money.

■ **Tell Lottie's story.** At the party, the auctioneer, Rick, prompted higher bids by exhorting, "It's for Lottie!" After the auction, one of the attendees with a non-SBC background asked, "That was fun, but who is Lottie?" Why not use your party to tell the inspirational story of Lottie Moon's sacrificial life of missions in China?

■ **Identify with a Unreached People Group.** Use the Christmas

party as the kickoff for the class to adopt an unreached people group. Go to www.imb.org and click on the heading "Lead your church" to adopt a group. For the party, use what you learn about your UPG to inspire ideas for decorations, food, activities and, of course, prayer.

■ **Emphasize missions in North Africa.** The emphasis for this year's International Missions Study is missions in North Africa, specifically in North Africa, specifically in North Africa, specifically in North Africa. Study materials, promotional materials and an inspirational DVD are available through the IMB (www.imb.org) and the Woman's Missionary Union (www.wmu.org).

■ **Don't forget to invite your own missionaries.** Be sure to include your associate members, the folks you've released from your class to serve in preschool, children and student classes. They're not serving in a foreign land, but sometimes they feel like it. Celebrate their service teaching kids about Jesus.

David Francis is director of Sunday School at LifeWay Christian Resources.

A nativity a day

By Diana Davis

Looking for a way to keep Christ in your Christmas celebration this season? Try this Christian version of The Twelve Days of Christmas.

FRESH IDEAS

1) Purchase a nativity scene with separate pieces. It can be an expensive nativity or a dollar-store set.

2) Select a recipient for your ministry project, such as a homebound church member or neighbor, a person with an extended illness, or someone who will be alone or hurting this Christmas.

3) Deliver one piece of the nativity set each day, ending with baby Jesus on Christmas Day.

The nativity-a-day project can be accomplished by an individual or group. Your Sunday school class can assign a different class member to deliver the piece each day. Deacons can do the project as a gift for an ill person or a new member.

A friend of mine makes secret deliveries with her children, leaving a gift-wrapped nativity piece with a note on the porch each day. On Christmas Day, they reveal their identity and deliver the baby Jesus. Each recipient becomes a dear friend of their family.

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"Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another." Romans 14:19

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Jesus and the gift of spouse

By Valerie Vincent

Imagine that Jesus is traveling to Galilee. He comes upon a man and a woman. They stand apart, separate and unmoving. They are turned away from one another.

When Jesus comes closer, he asks, "Woman is this your husband?" She replies, "He is."

Jesus addresses the man, "Is this your wife?" The man replies, "She is."

Jesus is painfully aware of the deep chasm between these two. They are cold and dead inside. Their words are bitter as is the taste in their mouths. Their breath is dust because the soul is decaying.

Jesus asks, "Why have you chosen death?"

Together they curse, "She..."/ "He..."

Jesus' face is sad. "You could have had life. That is what I have for you: a life that is full and sweet."

Both cry out to Him, "Yes, give us life!"

Jesus shakes His head, "I have."

To the man, Jesus points at the wife, "Here is life for you."

To the woman, Jesus points at the husband, "Here is your life."

Jesus concludes, "You each have despised my gift for you in this world."

Why do we take what God intends for good and make it useless? We live in a culture that readily blames anyone or anything rather than takes responsibility. Do we even know how to take responsibility for our actions, our thoughts, our lives any more? Jesus calls us to take responsibility. Deny yourself and follow Me is the calling of Christ.

Have we missed the gifts and blessings from God because we ignored or misused them? Take time to reflect on your life and search for the gifts. How is your spouse a gift to you? How are you meant to be a gift to your spouse?

Valerie Vincent is a Christian counselor with Hardy Associates in Louisville.

The gospel: Bad news, for many, about eternity

By Jerry Rankin

We always have thought of the gospel as good news. In fact, the Greek word evangelion, which is translated "gospel," literally means "good news." And certainly the fact that Jesus Christ died and rose again to give us salvation and victory over sin is good news, indeed.

However, for many people in the world, the gospel will be bad news. They will discover that Jesus Christ is the standard of judgment for whether or not one receives salvation and enters into eternal life in heaven.

Jesus Himself said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6, ESV). The Apostle Paul testified, "On that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus" (Romans 2:16, ESV).

Many people, even in our own society, have heard the gospel but have chosen not to believe and accept it. Some think their good works or faithful and perfunctory attendance at church will save them. Many humanistic thinkers in our postmodern society are convinced their own efforts, or whatever they chose to believe, are of equal value to faith in Jesus Christ.

Then there are those around the world who have been exposed to the gospel but choose to follow other religions. They are going to be terribly disillusioned one day to discover all roads do not lead to God. Only the one through faith in the blood of Jesus can cleanse our sins.

However, the greatest tragedy is not found in the arrogant self-righteous or those who reject a Christian witness. It is found among those who never have heard the good news that Jesus saves. There are many in our own country, or neighborhood, who have never been confronted with a clear evangelistic witness of Christ.

Multitudes around the world live in pockets of lostness where they never have even heard the name of Jesus. They are likely to live their entire lives without an opportunity to hear, understand and re-

spond to the life-changing message of God's redemptive love. For many, it is going to be quite disturbing to arrive at the judgment throne of God to find that faith in Jesus Christ is the only hope of salvation. And they didn't even have a chance to hear and believe.

Do we think they are satisfied to follow religious traditions that give no hope and assurance of eternal life? Are they happy to be in bondage to legalistic rituals that do nothing to give them victory over sin and bring peace to their lives? Is lostness and dwelling in spiritual darkness a preferable choice to experiencing the grace of God and finding forgiveness of sin?

For them, the gospel is bad news because it describes who joins God in His eternal Kingdom and who spends an eternity in hell.

Whose mission and responsibility is it to proclaim the gospel to all peoples? Who has our Lord commissioned to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth? Every believer and every church.

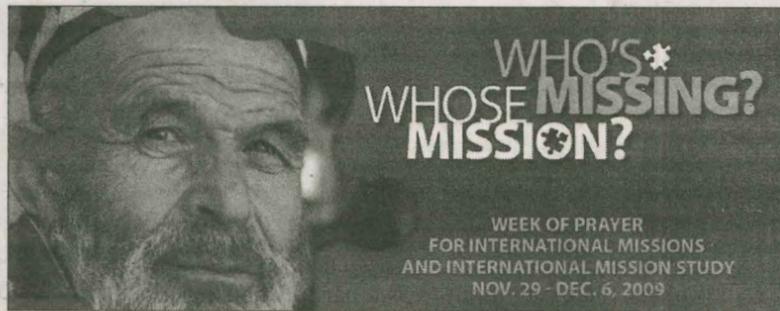
What are we doing to make sure the gospel is good news to the whole world?

Will we pray for those without Christ? Will we give sacrificially so that God-called missionaries can go and make disciples of all nations? Will we offer our lives to be used to take the gospel to the remaining pockets of lostness that all people everywhere might know Jesus? (BP)

Jerry Rankin is president of the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.



FIRST PERSON



Villagers called her the 'Heavenly Book Visitor'

By William Perkins Jr.

Charlotte Diggs Moon was born into the rarified Virginia aristocracy at her family's Albermarle County estate on Dec. 17, 1840. She died a pauper's death 72 years later, thousands of miles from home and a lifetime away from her privileged early life.

Those are the cold, hard textbook facts. We all have a beginning and an end on this earth, but it's what we do in between that counts for eternity. "Lottie," as she came to be known, understood that fact.

In 1858, God moved in Lottie's life and she accepted Christ as Lord while attending First Baptist Church of Charlottesville, Va. God moved again in her life in 1873, when she requested and, against all odds, received her missionary appointment from the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board (now the International Mission Board). She was one of the first single women chosen for Southern Baptist missionary service.

Lottie set sail for China in September of that year and by December had settled in the northern town of Tengchow, where she lived for the next 40 years. She devoted herself to evangelistic work among the women and children of the surrounding area, telling all who would listen about the "true God," giving away books and teaching those who couldn't read the books.

Lottie was rejected many times and earned the nickname of "Devil Old Woman," but her persistence never flagged. She wrote to friends in the United States, "How I wish I had a thousand lives that I might give them to the women of China!"

Lottie's love for the Bible and for the Chinese people became legendary in the villages around Tengchow, and opposition to her work eventually faded. Then one day as she moved among the people with her Bible, she heard someone refer to her as the

"Heavenly Book Visitor." The name quickly stuck with villagers.

In Lottie's day, China suffered almost constant internal turmoil, with outside powers also attempting to exert their influence. Still, Lottie fervently continued her work through the chaos.

The Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 ignited famine that soon spread through the Chinese countryside and foreshadowed fateful events to come in Lottie's life. Desperate to help the starving people around whom God had called her to build her life, Lottie began to withdraw her personal life savings and use the money to feed the hungry.

When that money ran out, she used virtually all her meager salary to buy food for others—often failing to retain enough food for herself. She collapsed five days before her 72nd birthday, her health broken and her 4-foot-11-inch frame nearly decimated. Years of personal sacrifice had taken its toll.

Lottie died of starvation on Christmas Eve, 1912, in the harbor of Kobe, Japan, aboard a ship that was taking her home to America. The world took little note of her life and death, but she changed Southern Baptists and China forever.

Many sad events have transpired in China since Lottie came home—some of which involved Southern Baptists—but God will yet prevail in that nation of soft-spoken, humble people.

A marble gravestone in a small Virginia cemetery carries Lottie's name, as does the greatest international missions offering in all of Christendom. Also on that gravestone is the simple phrase, "Faithful unto death."

God permit that those words, bought at so great a price by the Heavenly Book Visitor, should also mark the Christian service of each one of us.

William Perkins Jr. is editor of *The Baptist Record*, news journal of the Mississippi Baptist Convention. Reprinted by permission.

FIRST PERSON



William Perkins

Lottie Moon devoted herself to evangelistic work among the women and children of Tengchow, telling all who would listen about the "true God."

Less stress during Christmas

By Doug Strader

As the lyrics of a popular song say, "It's the most wonderful time of the year." Although everyone would not agree with that sentiment, I agree with those words. Since I was a child, the Christmas season has been one of my favorite times of the year. It seems to me that people are a little friendlier, there seems to be a spring in their step, and they seem to be more generous with their time and resources.

But, in spite of what I have just written, this also is a time of the year that brings much stress into our lives, and it is a time when many people get into financial difficulties because they overspend buying gifts for family and friends.

There are some guiding principles that should govern the way Christians use their financial resources throughout the year—and not just at Christmastime. The things listed below are a good starting place for most Christians:

- We must always remember Psalm 24:1, "The earth is the Lord's and all that fills it, the world and those who dwell therein."

- Southern Baptists should make an effort to be sure our largest monetary gift is one given to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions.

- Most of us can look around our neighborhood, church or workplace and find someone who is in need of food, clothing and friendship and help to fulfill those needs.

- We want to give Christmas gifts to family members, but we do not need to be extravagant or try to impress others by how much money we spend for those gifts.

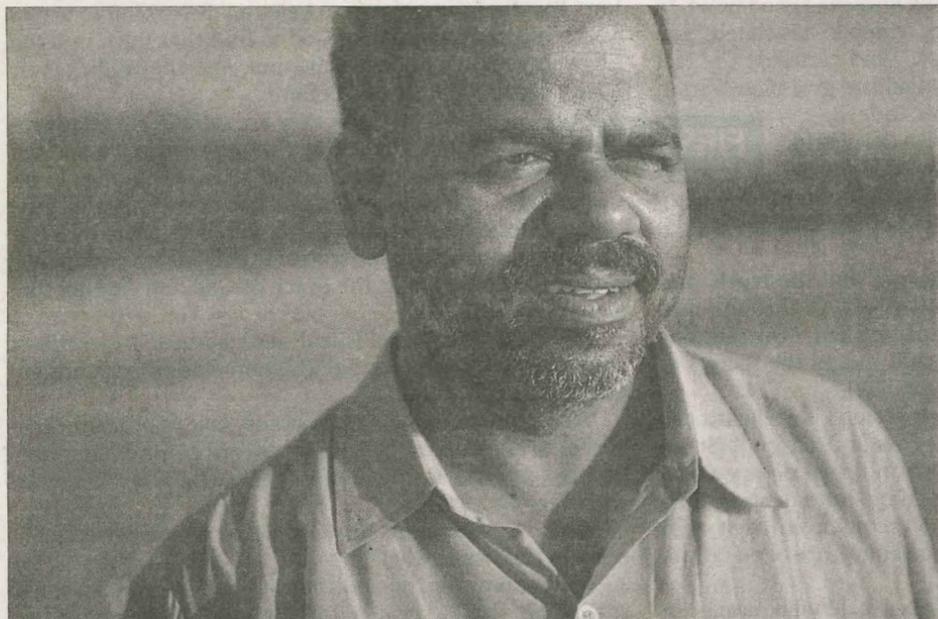
- We do not need to go in debt in order to give gifts to anyone. It is best to save money throughout the year for our gift buying at Christmas. If you failed to do that this year, plan to do so next year and follow through with those plans.

Remember the words of Jesus, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." You can make this season a wonderful time for someone by just visiting with them and sharing some home-baked cookies, or maybe taking them out for a hamburger and coke. It doesn't take much money to give some of the most important gifts that money cannot buy.

Doug Strader, retired director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention's stewardship department, is pastor of Farmdale Baptist Church in Louisville. Reprinted from *Western Recorder*, Dec. 16, 2008.



Couple gains heart for orphans after losing own kids in tsunami



IN GOD'S HANDS Paramesvaran lost his three children in the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. He and his wife, Choodamani, had considered a suicide pact, but God opened their hearts to the plight of children orphaned by the disaster. The couple since has adopted 20 orphans, some of whom join Paramesvaran in sharing Christ in the community. (IMB photos)

Continued from page 1

The next morning he buried his children together in a grave he dug by hand.

Local Hindus said he and Choodamani were being punished for converting years earlier to Christianity. Paramesvaran's own brother taunted him: "Where is your Jesus?"

Reeling with grief, the couple considered a suicide pact.

Paramesvaran said he was haunted by thoughts of letting go of his son's hand. Choodamani was angry that her husband had taken the children to the beach so early that day. It was Sunday and they should have been getting ready for church.

God began to comfort Choodamani in those first few days following the tsunami. She said she realized how blessed she was still to have her husband and to be alive.

"God talked to me in a very crystal-clear voice," she recalled. God said, "Don't be upset. So many people died, and yet your husband is alive. ... I have some purpose in your life."

"It's why we are still alive," she declared.

Questioning God

Paramesvaran, however, continued to sink deeper into depression and thoughts of suicide.

"I went to my wife and asked her, 'Can I drink any poison?' he recalled. "'Can I commit suicide? I don't want to live.'"

Choodamani tried to comfort her husband by sharing what God had revealed to her. Instead, Paramesvaran became angry. He didn't feel God's comfort; he couldn't hear His voice.

Her Paramesvaran pushed his wife out of the room, locked the door and collapsed to his knees.

"I was beating my hands saying, 'Oh, Jesus, speak to me,'" he said. "I asked God why He hadn't given me a word."

Clutching photos of his children, Paramesvaran said he suddenly could hear them comforting him.

"They said they were safe with Jesus," he recalled. "They said, 'Daddy, don't cry. We are OK, Daddy.'"

That day, Paramesvaran said, he felt "enormous strength" from God. He also began to feel a deep burden for the orphans in a nearby village.

More than 60 children in the village lost their parents in the tsunami. With no one responsible for them, they wandered from house to house, relative to relative,

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LOTTIE MOON
CHRISTMAS OFFERING

National Goal: \$175 million

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begging for food and living under blue tarps that served as temporary shelters.

"If we would have died," Paramesvaran noted, "I could have seen my children in this group."

The couple initially took four children into their home. Over time the number has grown to 20—six girls and 14 boys.

God said, "You were a mother for three, but now you can be a mother for so many," said Choodamani, who has given birth to two sons—Shemaiah, 2, and Micaiah, 1—since losing her first three children.

"Without God we'd never (have) made it through this," she remarked.

Help from Southern Baptists

The financial burden on the couple, however, took its toll in the beginning. Though Paramesvaran works for a gas company and Choodamani is an accountant, the couple struggled to make ends meet.

They turned to Cole Elbridge*, an International Mission Board representative who was leading relief efforts along the coast. Southern Baptists gave more than \$17 million to help tsunami victims. From a portion of those gifts, Elbridge was able to provide the couple with kitchen appliances, beds, clothing, books and school supplies, in addition to meeting other needs. The funds also provided food, shelter, boats, nets and supplies to the community.

Elbridge was there, thanks to Southern Baptists' support of the Cooperative Program and the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions.

"There were so many needs that Southern Baptists helped us with," Paramesvaran noted. "Through that (support), we were able to spread the gospel. Many people came to Christ."

Tsunami orphans gain new family

By Shawn Hendricks
International Mission Board

Tamil Nadu, India—Life as Sangeedhas knew it was gone.

Her home was destroyed. Her mother was dead.

Only 8 years old, Sangeedhas was one of thousands of children left homeless by the catastrophic tsunami that hit Southern Asia in 2004. Most of these children were left vulnerable to poverty, child trafficking, prostitution and hopelessness.

Sangeedhas' father survived the tsunami, but he sent her away after he married her mother's sister. Her stepmother refused to care for a girl who was not her natural child—a situation that happens all too often in India to children of widowed fathers.

"When his wife has died and (the widower) remarries, his previous children are usually discarded," said Cole Elbridge*, an International Mission Board representative.

The stepmother does this because she "doesn't want previous children to have inheritance when it comes time for that and dowries. She wants it simple for her children."

Sangeedhas, however, was one of the fortunate ones. She was taken in by Paramesvaran and Choodamani, a Christian couple who lost their three children and seven other relatives in the tsunami.

The couple welcomed Sangeedhas and other orphaned children into their home. They provided for them with the help of Southern Baptist tsunami relief funds.

Since the tsunami, the couple has provided a loving home for 20 orphaned children—six girls and 14 boys.

Sangeedhas had been raised in a Hindu home. After she came to live with the couple, she heard about Jesus Christ for the first time.

"This changed my life," she said. "I also want to be a great blessing to others in the days to come, like my parents are now."

"Jesus told me ... 'Be here. Stay here. I will comfort you.'"

Today, all of the children have accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Before dawn each morning, the children gather for worship to sing praises to Jesus. With Bibles sprawled on the floor in front of them, they listen to the daily message.

On one morning, Sangeedhas' 14-year-old brother Saravan leads the service. He tells his family to never give up praying "big prayers." He speaks from experience.

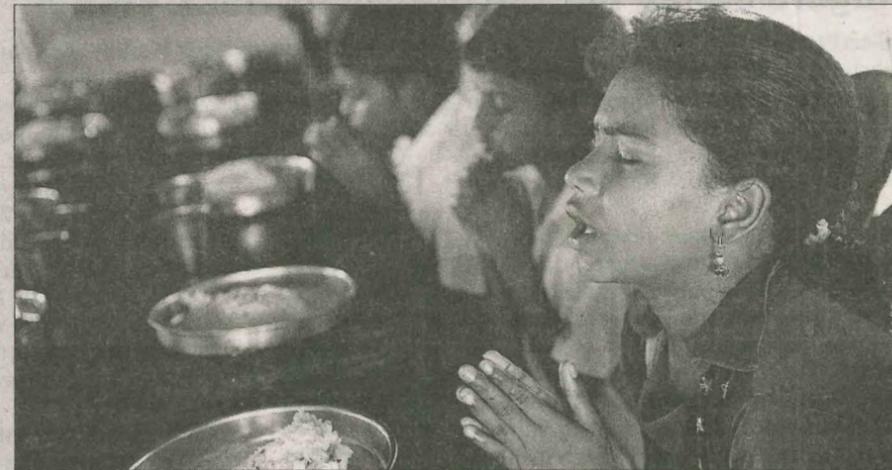
Saravan's father died when he was 2 years old. Eventually his mother was unable to care for him. The boy often cried himself to sleep after arriving at the couple's home two years ago.

"Paramesvaran told me I could go to God's feet and cry," Saravan said.

Now one of his life goals is to preach the gospel to a lost world and impact those who haven't heard about Jesus.

"Jesus is my mother and my father," Saravan said. Christ "is everything to me." (BP)

*Name changed for security reasons



BLESSING Sangeedhas prays with her family before breakfast. The girl's mother, along with more than 225,000 others, died in the catastrophic tsunami that struck Southern Asia in 2004. Since then, a Christian couple has adopted Sangeedhas and other tsunami orphans.

That support also allowed the orphaned children, all from Hindu backgrounds, to hear about Jesus for the first time.

Today, all of them have a relationship with Christ. Some are sharing the gospel alongside Paramesvaran in the community.

Residents along much of India's eastern coast still have scars and pain from that tragic December day.

A faint waterline still is visible around the perimeter of the couple's house. Here and there, collapsed buildings dot the beachfront. A rusty barge rests in the sand where the tsunami's waves abandoned it. There now are lakes and ponds where there were none before.

While most of the wreckage and damage has been removed or repaired, broken hearts aren't as easy to mend. But the love of Christ shown by Indian Christians such as Paramesvaran and Choodamani has brought the Good News into areas that once were unreceptive to Christians.

Since tsunami relief began in India and Bangladesh, more than 1,400 house churches have been planted, 12,000 people have accepted Christ as their Lord and Savior, and 4,000 have been baptized.

With training and support from Elbridge, Paramesvaran has started two churches and vocational training centers in his community.

Paramesvaran and Choodamani said they can see God's faithfulness through all they have experienced. Some have compared their story to that of Job—a man who suffered great loss, yet remained faithful to God.

"I read (in the Bible) that Job lost everything on the same day," Paramesvaran said. "I used to wonder how it was possible. Now I understand that it is true because it happened to me."

"When we think about our children, now, I can see the grace of God," he noted. "God has given us a second life." (BP)

*Name changed for security reasons

2010 PowerPlant project will touch 19 U.S. cities

Alpharetta, Ga.—The North American Mission Board's PowerPlant initiative—designed to expose students to church planting and evangelism—has announced it will conduct projects next summer in 19 cities nationwide, including Los Angeles, Atlanta, Denver and Cincinnati.

During the summer of 2009, PowerPlant connected 109 Southern Baptist churches with more than 100 church planters for one-week mission projects involving more than 1,900 student participants.

Church youth groups—those who have finished sixth grade to college students—are eligible to participate in PowerPlant, a pre-packaged program designed to let students learn “hands on” about church planting principles and evangelism skills.

“We are excited to partner with great church plants in these cities,” said John Bailey, team leader for PowerPlant at NAMB. “I think we have a lot of options for youth ministers to choose from.”

Other cities on the 2010 PowerPlant schedule are Port Arthur, Texas; Memphis, Tenn.; Savannah, Ga.; Indianapolis; St. Louis; Phoenix; Greenville/Spartanburg, S.C.; Philadelphia; Seattle; Ottawa, Canada; San Francisco; and Charleston, W.Va.

Church youth groups will be teamed up with a church planter, and participants will minister to the community through a variety of assignments that could include sports camps, vacation Bible schools and servant evangelism projects.

In addition to hands-on missions involvement, participants will learn key principles of church planting in morning sessions, and will work with their church plants each afternoon. PowerPlant's 2010 theme will be “Unhindered,” based on 2 Corinthians 5:14-15.

For more information or to register for a 2010 PowerPlant project, visit www.Power-Plant.net, or call (800) 462-8657.

State Baptist convention messengers pass resolutions emphasizing family, evangelism

By Tammi Reed Ledbetter
Southern Baptist Texan

Nashville—Pro-family issues remained the most often cited concern in resolutions adopted at the 41 state Baptist convention meetings in recent weeks. Prayer for the Great Commission Resurgence Task Force and evangelistic efforts also were noted quite frequently in state convention resolutions.

Messengers in Kentucky, South Carolina and Wyoming expressed concern over threats to the sanctity of human life appearing in proposed federal health care legislation.

Kentucky Baptists' resolution urged President Obama and Congress to ensure that “there will be no federal funding of abortion in any health care legislation that is passed.

Meanwhile, Wyoming's resolution encouraged other believers “to seriously consider the terrible impact” that government-funded abortion would have on the nation and resolve to “prayerfully prepare to actively respond, as God would desire and lead, to this national wanton disregard for innocent and defenseless human life.”

GCR Task Force

Prayer for the Great Commission Resurgence Task Force launched last June at the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting was encour-

aged by the state conventions of Kentucky, Alabama, California, Louisiana, Michigan, Missouri, Virginia and Texas.

“We are not praying for a Great Commission resurgence because we think the churches or the ministries of our state/national conventions are bad, but because we want to be better,” Louisiana Baptist Convention Executive Director David Hankins noted. “We are not suggesting the churches have lost their way, but that we have not arrived at our destination.”

Oklahoma Baptists' executive director, Anthony Jordan, said Southern Baptists are not going to have a Great Commission resurgence unless they get out of the pews and go tell someone about Jesus.

“This is not a convention made up of denomination structures but of churches,” he declared. “The greatest day is when we hit the streets and meet people who are lost.”

Messengers in Kentucky and Florida authorized creation of similar task forces to evaluate how their state conventions can more effectively fulfill the Great Commission, while Ohio messengers voted to create a committee to address anticipated recommendations of the SBC-level task force.

Southern Baptists in Kentucky, Colorado, the Dakotas, Iowa, Ohio

and Wyoming voiced support of statewide evangelism strategies while Southern Baptists in Arizona, New Mexico and Virginia set aside time to learn about the launch of Southern Baptists' “God's Plan for Sharing” nationwide evangelistic emphasis in 2010.

Find It Here

Kentucky Baptist messengers passed a resolution concerning the Find It Here statewide evangelistic campaign set for next year. It urges Kentucky Baptists to “pray for a great harvest of souls” and “make every effort to see that a gospel message is shared with every household in Kentucky.”

The Baptist General Convention of Texas reported 1,917 professions of faith during a pre-convention evangelistic effort in Houston. The Southern Baptists of Texas Convention reported 512 professions of faith during a citywide crusade and evangelistic rally.

A commitment to share the gospel was reflected in the theme of Arkansas Baptists' three-year focus on “Reaching Generation Now,” while both Alabama and California Baptists observed the 400th anniversary of Baptist heritage stemming from John Smyth and Thomas Helwys' creation of a Baptist church in Amsterdam. (BP)



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Pro-life groups urge senators to filibuster health care bill

By Michael Foust

Washington—Having seen an amendment lose that would have prevented the Senate health care bill from funding abortions, the nation's leading pro-life groups say they now will urge senators to defeat the overall bill with a filibuster.

Although the possibility for success is unknown, pro-life groups have an apparent Democratic ally—Sen. Ben Nelson of Nebraska—who said he has “drawn a line in the sand” and would filibuster the bill if it didn't contain language prohibiting tax dollars from paying for abortions. It was Nelson's amendment that was defeated Dec. 8 when the Senate voted to “table” the proposal. The amendment mirrored language that was added to the House health care bill by Michigan Democratic Rep. Bart Stupak.

Nelson's support of the overall bill may prove critical. There are 60 senators in the Democratic caucus; it takes 60 votes to break a filibuster. The pro-life groups say they'll ask their constituents to call their senators and urge a “no” vote on “cloture,” which if passed with 60 votes would stop a filibuster and limit debate.

“This is a long way from over,” the National Right to Life Committee said in a statement, noting that the bill again must pass the House, where there is a bloc of pro-life Democrats.

Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, said he found Tuesday's Senate vote both “discouraging and encouraging.”

“It's discouraging that the Senate as a whole could not comprehend the need to respect the will of 70 percent of the American people that public funds should not pay for or subsidize the killing of our nation's unborn citizens,” Land told Baptist Press. “It was encouraging in that the motion to table got 54 votes, well short of the 60 needed to stop a filibuster.”

Other groups, including the Family Research Council, Democrats for Life, Concerned Women for America and Americans United for Life, also said they would support a filibuster.

“We now have no choice but to work vigorously to defeat this bill,” Americans United for Life announced.

The Nelson amendment would have:

- Prevented a government-run public op-

tion from covering abortion.

- Prohibited federal subsidies for lower-income people from purchasing private plans that cover abortion.

Exceptions would be made for cases of rape, incest and to save the mother's life. A woman would be permitted to use her own money to purchase a “rider” that covers abortion.

It is not known, though, whether the public option will remain in the bill. If it is dropped—as some media outlets reported last week—then the bill could pick up the support of one of Maine's two Republican senators (Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins), who both are pro-choice, thus offsetting Nelson's vote for a filibuster.

Putting citizens on alert

Pro-life groups are trying to pressure those who opposed last week's vote to table the amendment, as well as other Democratic senators to support a filibuster if pro-life language isn't added. The Family Research Council said it is calling every household in Arkansas, South Dakota and Louisiana—all conservative states with Democratic senators—to conduct a survey on such topics as

abortion funding, rationing, higher taxes and the public option. The group also will urge individuals to contact their state senators if they oppose such issues.

“We're doing everything in our power to make sure that the constituents of those senators know that those senators are voting to expand abortion in this country,” Family Research Council President Tony Perkins said.

One concern among pro-lifers is that Democrats in both chambers will avoid the customary House-Senate conference—where the differences in the two bills normally would be worked out—and instead simply send the Senate bill straight to the House, which could pass without changes, thus sending it to President Obama.

The challenge for House leaders, Perkins noted, would be to get the 64 Democrats who voted for the Stupak pro-life amendment to support a pro-choice health care bill.

“They would have to go back on that vote and support taxpayer funding of abortion,” Perkins said of the 64 Democrats. “I think it will be a major fight in the House to approve the Senate bill.” (BP)

Mainline groups working to keep abortion

Washington—While evangelical and Catholic leaders have been working to prevent a health care bill from including federal funds for abortions, leaders of the nation's mainline denominations have been doing just the opposite, at times calling abortion a “God-given right.”

The Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church (USA), United Church of Christ and the United Methodist Church's General Board of Church and Society all are members of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, a pro-abortion rights organization that took part in a Dec. 2 “Stop Stupak” rally in Washington D.C., urging the Senate not to include the pro-life Stupak amendment in its version of the health care bill.

The United Methodist General Board of Church and Society—the denomination's lobbying arm—even sent out an alert after the health care bill passed the House, calling the bill itself a “major milestone” but lamenting passage of the Stupak amendment, which it saw as “a tremendous set-

back for access to comprehensive reproduction health coverage.”

The four denominations all have pro-choice positions of varying degrees, but their leaders' stances on abortion in the health care bill have surprised some observers.

Mark Tooley, president of the Institute on Religion and Democracy, said most church members of mainline denominations know little about the lobbying effort. “They would be very surprised,” he said.

The issue recently captured attention on the Web when Carlton Veazey, president of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, told a small gathering at the Stop Stupak rally, “Don't let anybody tell you that religious people don't support choice. You not only have a constitutional right for abortion, but you have a God-given right.”

Tooley said Veazey's quote was “in line” with other past comments. (BP)

Survey: Nearly quarter of Christians dabble in Eastern, New Age beliefs

Washington—The vast majority of U.S. residents may be Christian, but nearly a quarter of them delve into a range of Eastern or New Age beliefs, a new study shows.

Asked about their supernatural experiences, significant minorities of American Christians respondents said they believe in astrology (23 percent), reincarnation (22 percent), spiritual energy in physical things like trees or crystals (23 percent) and yoga as a spiritual practice (21 percent).

The survey by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life found that Christians are about as likely as Americans overall to say they've

been in touch with the dead (29 percent), had an experience with a ghost (17 percent) or consulted a psychic (14 percent).

Overall, the survey found that most Americans have had some connection with the supernatural. More than six in 10 say they have had at least one of these experiences or beliefs, including the “evil eye,” or spells and curses.

“With the exception of white evangelicals, majorities of all major religious traditions report holding at least one of these beliefs or having experienced one of these phenomena,” the survey concluded. (RNS)

N.J. Senate postpones vote on same-sex marriage bill

Trenton, N.J.—A much-anticipated vote in the New Jersey Senate on the issue of same-sex marriage last week was postponed apparently due to a lack of support.

The vote was scheduled to take place Dec. 10, three days after the bill narrowly passed a committee. But the primary sponsors, Democratic state Sens. Loretta Weinberg and Raymond Lesniak, requested the delay, saying they wanted to see it voted on in the state assembly first.

The bill now advances to the six-member Assembly Judiciary Committee but has not been scheduled for a vote and may not be considered until early January.

Supporters are hurrying to get the bill to the desk of Democratic Gov. Jon Corzine before he leaves office Jan. 19. He supports the bill but his successor, Republican Chris Christie, opposes it.

Weinberg and Lesniak were quoted as saying the vote was delayed not because of a lack of support but instead because they wanted the assembly to have the same opportunity to hear from citizens on the matter.

The bill's opponents, though, disagreed.

Brian Brown, executive director of the National Organization for Marriage, told Baptist Press: “If they had the votes they would have posted the bill. ... It's a last-ditch effort because they knew they were going to fail in the Senate so they're going to try and prolong it and see what they can do so they don't have another loss like New York on their hands.” A gay marriage bill in the New York Senate was defeated Dec. 2. (BP)



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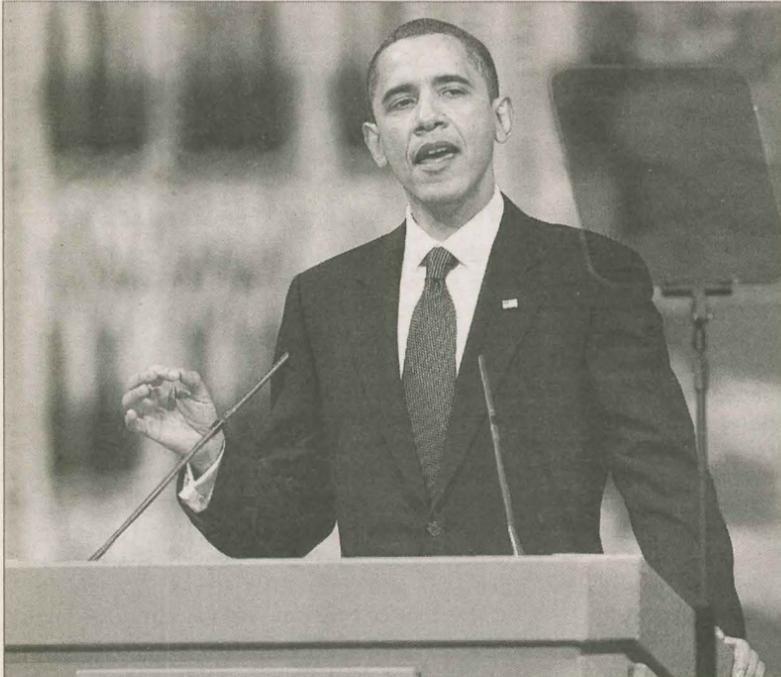
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ACCEPTANCE SPEECH U.S. President Barack Obama gives a speech after receiving the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo City Hall Dec. 10. In his speech, Obama acknowledged the controversy over the choice of a wartime president and said he reserves the right to take action to protect the United States. (Reuters photo by Bjorn Sigurdson/Scanpix Norway)

Obama accepts Nobel, denounces 'holy war'

Oslo, Norway—In a speech bemoaning the necessity of war and the potential for peace, President Obama accepted the Nobel Peace Prize Dec. 10 by declaring that “no holy war can ever be a just war.”

In his 36-minute remarks in Oslo, Norway, Obama addressed how fear of loss of identity—including religious identification—can lead to conflict and cited the Sept. 11 attacks on the U.S. eight years ago as an example.

“And most dangerously, we see it in the way that religion is used to justify the murder of innocents by those who have distorted and defiled the great religion of Islam, and who attacked my country from Afghanistan,” Obama said. “These extremists are not the first to kill in the name of God; the cruelties of the Crusades are amply recorded. But they remind us that no holy war can ever be a just war.”

Supreme Court to hear case of Christian student group

Washington—The U.S. Supreme Court agreed Dec. 7 to hear the case of an evangelical Christian group that was prevented from being recognized as a campus organization at a California law school because it excluded gays and lesbians.

The Christian Legal Society sued to be officially recognized at the public Hastings College of Law—part of the University of California in San Francisco—but was denied because it excluded membership to gays and non-Christians. Officials from the group said the school’s policy violated their freedoms of speech, religion and association.

“Public universities shouldn’t single out Christian student groups for discrimination,” said Kim Colby, senior counsel for the Christian Legal Society’s Center for Law & Religious Freedom. “All student groups

Perpetrators believing they are “carrying out divine will” have no restraint in who they harm, he added.

“Such a warped view of religion is not just incompatible with the concept of peace, but I believe it’s incompatible with the very purpose of faith,” the president said, “for the one rule that lies at the heart of every major religion is that we do unto others as we would have them do unto us.”

Obama referred to the late civil-rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., who won the prize in 1964, several times in his speech and called himself “someone who stands here as a direct consequence of Dr. King’s life work.” He urged listeners to strive to follow the example of non-violence advocates like King and Mahatma Gandhi, using “the love that they preached” as a guide.

“Let us reach for the world that ought to be,” he urged. (RNS)

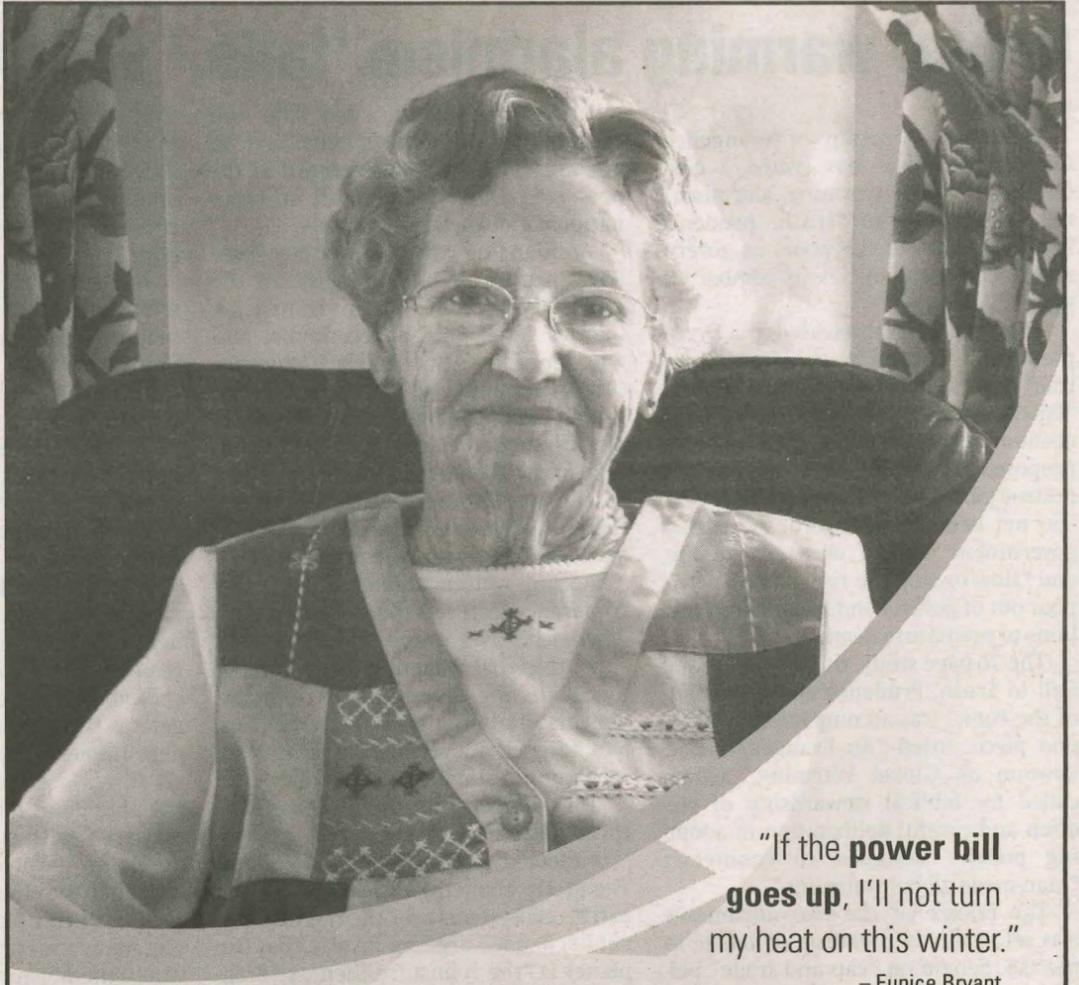
have the right to associate with people of like-mind and interest.”

Hastings said the organization must comply with the school’s non-discrimination policy to receive formal recognition, which gives them access to resources and travel funds.

“This case is about fundamental fairness,” said Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. “If the student religious group wins, it will mean some students will be compelled to support clubs that won’t even admit them as members.”

After a federal judge ruled in the school’s favor, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed the decision. A panel of the appeals court ruled in March that the law school’s denial of recognition was “viewpoint neutral and reasonable.” (RNS)

With additional reporting by Baptist Press



“If the **power bill goes up**, I’ll not turn my heat on this winter.”

— Eunice Bryant

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Global warming alarmism 'fails,' scholars say

By Mark Kelly

Washington—A group of evangelical Christian scholars has issued a challenge to "global warming alarmism," releasing a call to "truth, prudence and protection of the poor" as governments consider policies to combat climate change.

Their document, released at a Dec. 3 press conference in Washington, warns that the "science" of climate change "fails the tests of theology, science and economics" and alarmist policies being proposed to combat global warming will destroy jobs, cost trillions of dollars with "no net benefits," dangerously expand government control over private life, and "slow or stop the rise of the world's poor out of poverty and so condemn millions to premature death."

The 76-page study, titled "A Renewed Call to Truth, Prudence and Protection of the Poor," was accompanied by a second piece, titled "An Evangelical Declaration on Global Warming," which called for biblical stewardship of creation and careful deliberation in adopting policies designed to counteract "man-made global warming."

The release of the two documents was set against a backdrop of debate in the U.S. Senate on "cap and trade" policies, an emerging scandal over activist

scientists who manipulated data and censored opposing viewpoints, and an ongoing United Nations summit in Copenhagen, Denmark, to draft an international global warming treaty.

Announcing the declaration were Roy Spencer, a climatologist at the University of Alabama in Huntsville; Charles van Eaton, an economist and founder of the Bryan College Center for Critical Thought and Practice in Dayton, Tenn.; Craig Mitchell, associate professor of systematic theology at Southwest Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas; and E. Calvin Beisner, national spokesman for the Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation.

According to a statement, the press conference featured Spencer explaining why he believes sound science doesn't support global warming fears; Van Eaton discussing the respective costs and benefits of alternative climate policies; and Mitchell addressing the ethical implications of climate change policy.

The longer document examines three collective issues:

■ **Theology, worldview and ethics.** The group challenges the idea that the earth's ecosystems are "the fragile product of chance," arguing instead that the planet is "the robust, resilient, self-regulating and self-correcting product of

God's wise design and powerful sustaining." It warns about a "rush to impose draconian reductions in greenhouse gas emissions ... (that) ignores the destructive impact of that policy on the world's poor."

■ **Science.** The document disagrees with assertions that recent global temperature changes have been greater and more rapid than in the past "and therefore must be man-made." It criticizes over-reliance on computer climate models and false claims of overwhelming scientific consensus in favor of man-made global warming. The group also criticizes efforts to intimidate or demonize scientific skeptics.

■ **Economics.** The group argues that global warming alarmism "grossly underestimates the costs and overestimates the benefits of policies meant to reduce carbon dioxide emissions" and "exaggerates the technical feasibility and underestimates the costs of alternative fuels to replace fossil fuels in providing the abundant, affordable energy necessary for wealth creation and poverty reduction." Alarmism also "fails to recognize that the slowed economic development resulting from its own policies will cost many times more human lives than would the warming it is meant to avert," the document states. (BP)

Sociologist: Divorce redefined marriage at close of century

Washington—In an extensive report titled "The Evolution of Divorce," University of Virginia sociologist W. Bradford Wilcox explained how divorce redefined marriage in the latter quarter of the 20th century.

The article, recently published in the journal *National Affairs*, traces the rise of divorce which began in 1969 when Gov. Ronald Reagan of California signed the nation's first no-fault divorce bill, something he later would call one of the biggest mistakes of his political career.

The sexual revolution, as well as scholars, therapists and journalists served as enablers for the divorce epidemic even as churches lost much of their moral authority to reinforce marital vows, said Wilcox, director of the National Marriage Project at UVA.

"The divorce revolution's collective consequences for children are striking," Wilcox wrote. "Taking into account both divorce and non-marital childbearing, sociologist Paul Amato estimates that if the United States enjoyed the same level of family stability today as it did in 1960, the nation would have 750,000 fewer children repeating grades, 1.2 million fewer school suspensions, approximately 500,000 fewer acts of teenage delinquency, about 600,000 fewer kids receiving therapy, and approximately 70,000 fewer suicide attempts every year.

"As Amato concludes, turning back the family-stability clock just a few decades could significantly improve the lives of many children," Wilcox stated.

Among the statistics the sociologist cited in his article:

■ About two-thirds of divorces are legally initiated by women.

■ In the early 1970s, 70 percent of married men and 67 percent of married women reported being very happy in their marriages; by the early 1980s, these figures had fallen to 63 percent for men and 62 percent for women.

■ Marriage rates have fallen and cohabitation rates have surged in the wake of the divorce revolution as men and women's faith in marriage has been shaken. About 40 percent of American children will spend some time in a cohabiting union, and 20 percent of babies now are born to cohabiting couples. (BP)

Baltimore officials target city's pregnancy help centers

Baltimore—The city of Baltimore has enacted a law that pro-life advocates say discriminates against pregnancy help centers. The bill requires such centers to display signs saying they do not provide abortions or contraceptives or make referrals for such services. The law is thought to be the first of its kind in the U.S.

The measure would levy a fine of \$150 a day for any pregnancy center that does not abide by the requirement.

Opponents criticized the proposal as inconsistent because it does not require abortion clinics to post signs indicating what services they do not provide. Many pro-life pregnancy help centers provide such free services as pregnancy tests, ultrasound exams, prenatal care, childbirth classes, testing for sexually trans-

mitted diseases, abstinence education, post-abortion counseling and material assistance. Abortion clinics typically do not provide many of the same services.

Care Net President Melinda Delahoyde described the new law as "unconstitutional because it discriminates against pregnancy centers solely because of their pro-life viewpoint."

"It is nonsensical for the Baltimore City Council to undermine local efforts to provide free support to pregnant women in this city, but that's exactly what they've accomplished with this legislation," Delahoyde said in a written statement.

With the economy faltering, "wouldn't it make more sense for the Baltimore City Council to pass a resolution praising the contribution of preg-

nancy centers, which rely solely on charitable contributions, not on state or local funding?" she asked.

"Sadly, this bill sends a message to city residents that local pregnancy centers may not be completely forthcoming about their services," Delahoyde added. "This couldn't be further from the truth and is an affront to women who rely on their support."

Care Net supports a network of more than 1,100 pregnancy centers, including its inaugural center, the Greater Baltimore Center for Pregnancy Concerns.

The city council approved the measure in a 12-3 vote Nov. 23. Baltimore Mayor Sheila Dixon signed the bill Dec. 4, three days after she was found guilty of embezzling about \$500 in gift cards intended for charity. (BP)

Sexually transmitted diseases on the rise as abstinence education funding takes hit

Atlanta—The rates of sexually transmitted diseases in the United States are among the highest of any developed country in the world, a spokesman for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said after a study found that STD cases continue to rise.

The CDC study released last month said chlamydia and gonorrhea are stable at unacceptably high levels, while syphilis, a life-threatening disease that was on the verge of being eliminated a decade ago, is resurgent.

Overall, the CDC estimates that 19 million new sexually transmitted infections occur each year and almost half are among 15-24-year-olds. But the study found that 63 percent of syphilis cases were among men who have sex with men. Syphilis cases have increased by nearly 18 percent since 2007, the study noted.

Valerie Huber, executive director of the National Abstinence Education Association, said the high rates of STDs among teenagers likely stem from a combination of causes.

"If you look at chlamydia and gonorrhea, we know that up to 80 percent of those who have the disease don't even know it, so they can easily spread it to others," Huber told Baptist Press. "Chlamydia especially is asymptomatic. Gonorrhea is to

a lesser degree. Even if a partner says, 'I'm clean,' they might think they are, but they're not."

Also, Huber noted the highly sexualized culture in America where teen sex is depicted as expected and without consequences, and she said the cultural view of teen sex may place undue pressure on that age group.

"Teens are risk takers, and they know people can get STDs, but they're sure they aren't going to be one of them who gets it," she pointed out.

Huber said about 68 percent of sex education programs across the country teach contraceptive education. She said abstinence education was promoted by President Bush but President Obama has proposed the elimination of federal funding for such programs.

"The fact that President Obama is seeking to zero out all funding for abstinence education is a mistake," Huber said. "We know that the earlier a person becomes sexually active, the more lifetime partners they're likely to have, and the more lifetime partners they have, the more likely they will be to be infected with an STD."

"Our primary goal should be to give young people the skills they need to delay sexual activity, which are exactly the skills that an abstinence program provides," she said. (BP)



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Mike Morgan

'Finding Hope in Hard Times'

Book presents stewardship tips for believers to live by

Recently, I discovered a publication titled "Finding Hope in Hard Times." The subtitle is "Seven Spiritual Practices: A Faithful Steward's Guide." It was produced by the Episcopal Church's office of stewardship. Given the anxieties caused by the economic times in which we are living, I am sharing a shortened version of these stewardship practices which I believe are worthy for every believer prayerfully to ponder and practice.

Ky. Baptist Foundation



Barry Allen

Count your blessings (Matthew 6:25-27). Focus on

what you have, not on what you want or what you fear. Write down the things for which you are thankful and give thanks to the Lord for all the ways He has blessed you.

Count your cash (Luke 14:28-30). Review your spending to determine if it is consistent with your priorities. If not, take control and make the necessary shifts in your spending.

Learn to be content (1 Timothy 6:7-10). Learning to be content is one of the most significant disciplines one can achieve. It reduces your desire to spend and increases your ability to save and to give.

Choose a simpler lifestyle (Luke

9:1-4). This post-recession period is an excellent time to evaluate your lifestyle and to reassess what is important to you. Any gardener will tell you pruning is a vital part of encouraging healthy growth. Ask yourself why Jesus linked the sending out of the disciples to living without the clutter of possessions.

Keep on giving (2 Corinthians 9:6-8). It's important to continue to give during an economic downturn not only because churches and other charities depend upon you, but also because you need to give to experience the joy of growing into the full stature of Christ. You need to give thoughtfully, thankfully, generously and cheerfully.

Rebuild generous communities (Acts 2:44-47). Like the early church, demonstrate a willingness to sacrifice to meet the needs of others.

A financial downturn can be a spiritual upturn (Colossians 2:6-7). If you are "rooted" in Christ, you can emerge from these hard times more thankful, nourished, content and faithful.

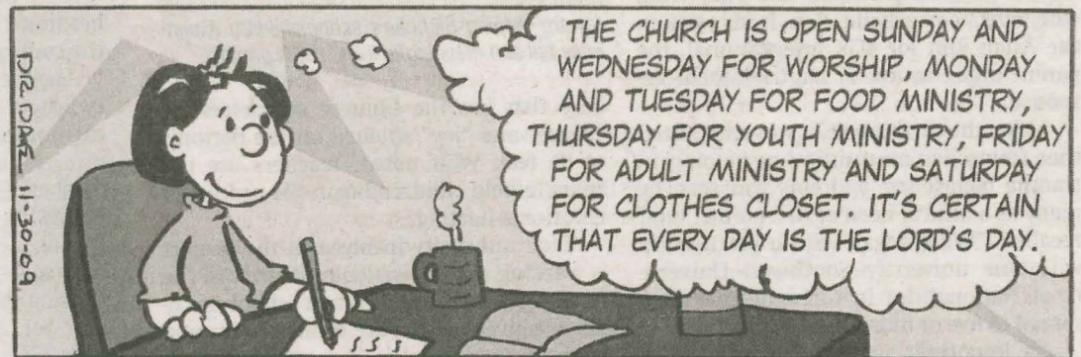
Barry Allen is president of the Kentucky Baptist Foundation, PO Box 436389, Louisville, KY 40253; toll-free (866) 489-3533; www.kybaptistfoundation.org

For Heaven's Sake



Preacher's Kids

David Ayers



Bible Crosswords

By Evelyn Boyington

Across

- 1 ___ Colonies, in eastern Iowa
- 6 Balmy weekend sky sight (pl.)
- 11 "I will bring the third part through the fire and will ___ them" (Zechariah 13:9)
- 13 Reason for saying "excuse me"
- 14 Popular NYC art museum, for short
- 15 Org. that includes Braves but not Indians
- 16 Pacific state (abbr.)
- 17 Pitcher's stat.
- 18 Mulberry, for one (abbr.)
- 19 Recover from the attic? (2 words)
- 22 Masculine nickname
- 23 "And ___ were the more added to the Lord" (Acts 5:14)
- 25 Prohibits
- 27 Compass pt.
- 28 Site of Miami University
- 31 Door sign
- 32 "Open ___"
- 33 Pictured on highway sign
- 34 Sporty Ford model
- 37 Mimic
- 38 "Ye became ___ of us and of the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 1:6)
- 41 Hospital abbr.
- 43 Desired deeply
- 44 Kind of M.D.
- 46 Bygone automobile
- 48 Article
- 49 Sound of hesitation
- 50 Library section (abbr.)
- 51 "Thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the Lord shall ___ thee" (Proverbs 25:22)
- 53 Missouri and Ohio
- 55 Mohair measure
- 56 "The way of an ___ in the air" (Proverbs 30:19)

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41	42		43						44	45
46		47		48			49		50	
51			52				53	54		
55								56		

- 5 Abolish
- 6 Butter, for one
- 7 Common abbr.
- 8 Summer wear, for short
- 9 Old Testament scribe
- 10 "___ the law among my disciples" (Isaiah 8:16)
- 12 Feminine nickname
- 13 More pointed than push
- 19 "There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to ___" (James 4:12)
- 20 "Abram had dwelt ___ years in the land" (Genesis 16:3)
- 21 "A ___ man soweth strife" (Proverbs 16:28)

- 23 Lawyer's homework
- 24 "King Solomon made a navy of ___" (1 Kings 9:26)
- 25 "Arise, take up thy ___, and go" (Matthew 9:6)
- 26 Let go (colloq.)
- 29 Chemical suffix
- 30 Poetic contraction
- 34 Pituitary, for one
- 35 Rocky hill
- 36 Land ___
- 39 "Now ___ a parable of the fig tree" (Matthew 24:32)
- 40 Strange
- 41 Answers incorrectly
- 42 Exude fumes
- 44 "That ___" (one-time TV sitcom)
- 45 Assume a position
- 47 Assume a mortgage, for example
- 50 "Let his children be continually vagabonds, and ___" (Psalm 109:10)
- 52 "I have given into thy hand the king of ___" (Joshua 8:1)
- 54 Site of Jamestown (abbr.)

Last week's solution

R	A	M	B	E	N	S	O	N			
A	D	O	E	N	E	P	A	U	L		
W	A	S	T	E	D	H	U	R	A	H	
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D	E	C	K	V	I	A	R	U	N		
A	T	E	A	N	T	N	E	E			

Down

- 1 "Underneath are the everlasting ___" (Deuteronomy 33:27)
- 2 Track competition
- 3 Astern
- 4 Metal in a 5-ct. piece

*You've opened your heart to Heaven's Child...
Will you open your home?*

"Whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me."
- Jesus

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Post-quake trauma counseling helps China's children, teachers

By June Lucas
Baptist Global Response

Wenchuan, China—Schoolchildren in China's Sichuan province—which was devastated by a massive earthquake 19 months ago—have new opportunities to experience full and meaningful lives, thanks in part to a long-term development project assisted by Southern Baptists.

What began as an effort to help Sichuan's children deal with trauma caused by the magnitude 7.9 quake has grown into a first-of-its-kind partnership with five of China's leading universities to train counselors for Sichuan's schools, said Pam Wolf, who with her husband, Ben, leads work in the Asian Rim for BGR International, the parent organization of Baptist Global Response.

"After the earthquake, it was recognized that China has no training in helping in trauma counseling and this was seen by many as a critical need at this point," Wolf recalled. "What began with a partnership with one university—Southwest University of Nationalities in Chengdu—has now spread to five or more universities."

An important part of the training in trauma counseling is encouraging teachers to become comfortable with the hug as a comforting or affirming touch. Chinese parents generally refrain from showing their children physical affection.

"The culture teaches that you must help your children become independent," Wolf said. "This is done by most by cutting off the hugging and kissing of the small child once they reach the age of 3 or 4 years old. So when trying to work through traumatic things, physical comfort is not an option."

The training program uses a set of six books designed to help teachers walk through the effects of post-traumatic stress syndrome with the children in their classrooms. It also uses a "hug therapy" teddy



A WARM EMBRACE A "hug therapy" session helps teachers from China's Sichuan province process their own grief over the 2008 earthquake that upended their lives. The session is a first step toward helping Sichuan's schoolchildren experience full and meaningful lives. (BGR photo)

bear that has the Chinese characters for "peace" and "joy" stitched on the bottoms of its feet, Wolf noted. Teachers use the bears to help children begin the process of emotional healing.

Each university involved in the project is working with a particular district in the quake area, Wolf said. When school teachers in a given district are trained in trauma counseling techniques, the university that has taken responsibility for that district sends in professors to do some of the lecturing. Teachers attend seminars to receive a certificate in trauma counseling.

"During the training session, not only are the school teachers being trained but the university professors also are getting exposure to techniques of hands-on trauma counseling through the books and the bears," Wolf said.

"This program is the first of its kind in China," she added. "One of the results is that some of the teachers being trained will go back and become school counselors. There has never been such a position before in the schools. This will open lots of doors for personal interaction with students and

LieuLieu: One of the fortunate ones

By Kate Taylor
Baptist Global Response

Wenchuan, China—No warning sounded before the ground began to shudder. One minute, the kindergartners were inside the building, pulling out their literature books. The next instant, an earthquake of unimaginable force shook the school from its very foundations.

For a moment, everyone struggled to understand what was happening. The teacher was the first to spring to action, herding the children outside and into the courtyard.

LieuLieu was at Wenchuan Primary School May 12, 2008, when a massive earthquake shook China's Sichuan province, killing thousands of people and displacing millions from their ruined homes. In a single day, LieuLieu lost her school, her home and everything that once seemed familiar. Her uncle was buried in a mountain mine close to Wenchuan. Yet LieuLieu is one of the fortunate ones.

with their families."

One reason the program is expected to have a profound impact is that many Chinese children are sent to boarding schools at a young age and teachers become the primary influences in their lives. The program begins by helping Sichuan's teachers deal with their own grief, in order to prepare them to help their students.

Wolf described how teachers in one training session experienced their own breakthrough in dealing with the trauma they had experienced.

"The hugging exercise began with an activity in which nine volunteers played roles of mother, father and child," Wolf said.

Wenchuan sits between steeply sloped, high-rising mountains and straddles a fast-moving river full of violent rapids. After the quake hit, the city was cut off, with no way for help to get in or survivors to get out.

The city was a virtual demolition zone. Few, if any buildings were left undamaged from the force of the quake. During the ongoing rebuilding process, buildings still standing after the quake are being leveled and reconstructed—building by building and block by block.

Many Wenchuan roads are lined with new houses and businesses. The entire city appears to be under construction.

LieuLieu's life looks very different now, just a year and a half after the earthquake. She and her parents live in an apartment with her grandmother and it will be a long time before they are able to move back into their own home. With many people still living in "temporary" camps, LieuLieu's family is fortunate to have a relative with whom to stay.

"The 'parents' in the scenario were blindfolded and instructed to hug the 'children.' When the hugging began, it was quite difficult for them and very distant, but as it continued you could see a change take place."

One teacher who participated in the activity had been buried in rubble for three days after the earthquake before she was rescued. The hugging activity led other teachers to express their respect and admiration for her.

"Dealing with their own grief will equip these teachers to help thousands of hurting Chinese students deal with the trauma of the earthquake as they all move on and rebuild their lives," Wolf said.

2009: A challenging year

This year was tough financially, but OBI's success is not measured in \$\$

At this time last year, most of us thought that, financially, things had gotten just about as bad as they could get. Then January, February and March of this year proved that things could, in fact, get much worse.

The stock market closed the end of December 2008 at 8,776. That was a far cry from the December 2007 close which was 13,265. The slide did not end until early March when the market finally stopped its free-fall at 6,594. It took many of us a few days to catch our breath, and most would agree that nearly everyone was relieved that the carnage finally was over.

The recently retired and others who were planning on retiring soon wondered what happened to all of those years of planning for a secure retirement. Most agree that things look better now, but many still are licking their wounds and the emotional pain still is fresh in our minds.

The past 12 months have been difficult for most ministries—and Oneida is no exception. While we have a decades-old policy of not borrowing money and only doing those things we can pay for, we still felt the pain of the economic woes.

After meetings with my faculty and staff and making other adjustments in January, we all knew we had to prepare for some lean times. We needed to implement several changes, some painful. We were keenly aware that our friends could not give what they did not have. Though I believe good stewardship always has been at the core of our ministry, we knew we had to do even more to make ends meet.

During all of 2009 as I signed the thousands of thank-you letters for donations, I wondered how our friends would be able to share with us and, at the same time, be able to meet their financial needs. I wish I could have written a large check to each of our friends and said, "You have helped us so much, now we would like to help you." I could not do that but I could make every effort possible to be sure each donor would be pleased with the way we used their gifts.

This is Oneida



W.F. Underwood

We don't sell cars, real estate, furniture, electronics or other things advertised on TV. We cannot chart our progress by looking at our sales, how many new customers we acquired or how much money we made in 2009. It is a little more difficult to chart our progress.

During the past 12 months, how many students went from failing grades to making the honor roll? How many finally began to understand the importance of being responsible and knowing that one's character is an important and fragile part of who we are? And, like every year, we had a very unique opportunity to share Christ with boys and girls who had little or no understanding of how Christ can impact their lives.

Just a few days ago, Kay picked up a new student from China at the airport. On the trip home, Kay asked the young lady if she knew who Jesus was. Her answer was "no." Do you know any Christians and have you ever seen or read a Bible? Her answer was the same—"no." The next day during our chapel service, she heard, for the first time, about God and His Word. Our successes in 2009 cannot be measured by charts and graphs.

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

'I didn't even know what church was'

Student shares about impact of church-bus ministries

Clear Creek student Larry Goad may be new to our campus but he definitely is not a new college student. "I'm an old freshman," Larry said. "I went into college right out of high school in 1988 to get a degree in business. I may be coming in with the freshmen but with the hours I was able to transfer in, I am closer to a junior."

Larry's journey to Clear Creek has brought him literally across the country in his lifetime. "I am a bus child," Larry said. "I am a Christian today because a church saw the importance of bringing kids in their community to church. I was 7 years old and living in San Diego. My sister and I were playing out in our front yard one day when an older couple walked by and began to talk to us and asked us if we would like to go to church with them.

"I didn't even know what church was," Larry recalled. "My parents never went to church, so I didn't even know what they were talking about. But they told us that the church had a bus that would come every Sunday and pick us up at our front door and take us to church. Well, I had never even been on a bus before because I walked

to school every day. But these people were so nice to us and my mom and dad didn't care if we went to church with them, so I told them that I would go. So, Sunday morning the bus came right to our front door and my sister and I went to church.

Clear Creek Chronicle



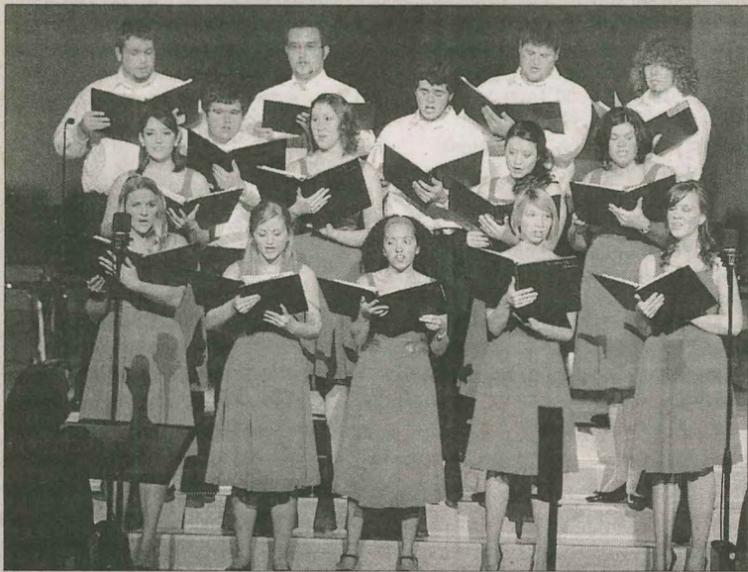
Donnie Fox

"That's the first time I ever heard the gospel," Larry noted. "I remember hearing the message from that pastor that I was separated from God because of my sins. During an invitation, I went forward and one of the counselors did an excellent job explaining to me about salvation and making sure that I knew what I was doing. That's when I accepted Christ as my Savior.

"I place a great value on church-bus ministry," Larry said. "We do it at our church. Without it, there would be a lot of kids that would never go to church."

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

Campbellsville professor, student compose Christmas carol for troops



CHRISTMAS SPIRIT Campbellsville University's chamber choir performs "What is Christmas?" a new carol composed by music professor Frieda Gebert and graduate student Matt Hodge, during the school's annual "Christmas Tapestry" performance. (Campbellsville photo by André Tomaz)

Campbellsville—Thousands of American soldiers will be apart from their families this Christmas, but Campbellsville University graduate student Matt Hodge has written a Christmas carol for them in hopes of providing a way for the troops and their families to feel closer together this holiday season.

The carol, titled "What is Christmas?" came out of a brainstorming session between Hodge and Frieda Gebert, associate professor of music at Campbellsville.

Gebert said she remembered her parents telling her about being apart at Christmas while her father was fighting in World War II. The two recalled listening to "I'll Be Home for Christmas," which they called "their song," to think of each other while they were apart.

"When I heard President Obama say that 30,000 more troops would be heading for Afghanistan, my heart went out to their families," Gebert said. "When he said that many of those would be leaving home before Christmas, I thought of my parents and the years they spent apart during World War II. I wanted to find a way for those back home to say, 'Christmas will be here when you get back.'"

She then called Hodge and

asked what he could do to help. "He came through in a big way," she said.

Hodge's carol was performed by Campbellsville's chamber choir during the school's annual "Christmas Tapestry."

Gebert said the audience's enthusiastic reception convinced her and Hodge that the song conveyed the message which they hoped it would.

Hodge recalled that after the concert he and Gebert were "flooded with people wanting to share their personal stories of how the song touched them."

"Dr. Gebert and I are so happy that we could bring a song to the public that could touch people in their own personal experiences," he added.

Gebert said the carol recently was recorded at the Nashville studio of Buzz Cason, a Campbellsville University trustee. The chamber choir also will make trips to Fort Campbell and Fort Knox to perform the carol.

"We are also exploring ways to get the carol out to the troops through the Internet," Hodge said.

CDs will be available for purchase for sending to troops in time for Christmas. For more information, contact Gebert at FEGebert@Campbellsville.edu.

Away in a manger ... or was it?

Bible scholars debate details of Gospels' Nativity account

By Daniel Burke

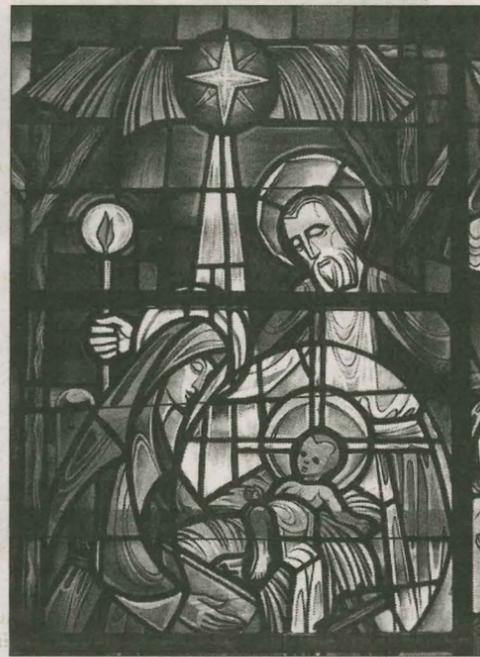
Dallas—Close your eyes and picture a Christmas creche, or its animated embodiment, the Christmas pageant.

Baby Jesus, Mary and Joseph are there for sure. Three wise men, a few shepherds. Maybe a donkey, ox and lamb stand nearby in the stable.

Centuries of Christmas carols, creches and pageants—among countless other works of art—have ensconced this scene in the heart of the Nativity for generations of Christians. But the Bible does not.

The New Testament has two accounts of Jesus' birth, in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Matthew doesn't say anything about animals or shepherds. Luke omits any reference to wise men. Neither mention a stable. Luke says Mary wrapped Jesus in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, or trough, because there was no room at the inn. Matthew says the wise men (the Bible doesn't say how many) follow the eastern star to find Mary and Jesus—but not Joseph—in a house.

The plot of the Christmas story is one of the most well-known narratives in human history, carved in cherished creches on living-room tables, or re-enacted by Magi in bathrobes, who travel on rented camels



NATIVITY ART A stained-glass nativity scene at a Washington church shows the infant Jesus in a manger. Scholars point to Jesus' birth in such humble surroundings as evidence of divine humility. (RNS photo by David Jolkovski)

beneath animatronic angels. But over the centuries artists have taken certain liberties, which have become as much a part of contemporary Christmas as the Bible's narratives themselves.

In fact, though nearly everyone knows the rough outline of the Nativity story, many people are unaware of the Bible's specific details, argue scholars Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan in their book "The First Christmas."

That's a shame, they say. "Paying attention to the distinctiveness and details of the Nativity stories is how we enter into the possibility of understanding what they meant in the first century and might still mean for communities of faith today," Borg and Crossan write.

At the same time, Matthew and Luke did not intend their Nativity narratives to be strictly factual accounts, Borg said in an interview. Rather, they are thematic introductions to their respective Gospels.

For instance, Luke presents Jesus as a champion of the poor and the marginalized. "So, it is perfect that in Luke's Gospel Jesus Christ is born away from home, that His birth is attended by shepherds, who were very low in the social order," Borg noted.

As for the inn and stable, they were probably for traveling merchants. So the animals would have been beasts of transport—donkeys, camels, horses. No sheep, no cows, Borg pointed out.

That's the way scholars like Borg and Crossan view the Bible, but probably was not the perspective of early Christians, said Darrell Bock, a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary.

"They would have taken the Nativity stories as historical accounts that tell us something real about Jesus; they are an important part of understanding who Jesus is," Bock said.

For instance, the Gospel writers highlight aspects of the Nativity that seem to fulfill Hebrew prophecies, such as the belief that the Messiah will be born of a virgin. Many scholars, including Pope Benedict XVI, believe Luke's manger detail refers to Isaiah's prophecy that, "The ox knows its owner, and a donkey its master's manger; but Israel does not know, and my people do not understand."

Christians still argue, however, about whether Jesus was born in a stable or a house. This year, for example, the Creation Museum in Northern Kentucky is ditching the stable in its Nativity scene, instead sheltering the Holy Family in a first-century-type house, believing it to be a more likely birthplace.

In Bock's view, the wise men probably visited Jesus and Mary in a house several days after the shepherds followed the angels' beckoning to the baby in the manger. "To have them both there on the same night is unlikely," the scholar pointed out.

But artists have been collapsing the stories of Matthew and Luke and adding extra-biblical material to Christmas scenes for centuries, said Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, a professor of art and cultural history at Georgetown University.

Take, for example, the "Miracle of Christmas" show at Sight & Sound Theatres in Lancaster, Pa., and Branson, Mo., which features 45 actors, dozens of animals, angels that fly over the audience, and a cameo by Mary's mother, who proclaims herself proud to be "God's grandma."

Glenn Eshelman, the evangelical who founded Sight and Sound 33 years ago, said the audience is forewarned that "this is a fictional account of a factual occurrence" and encouraged to read the biblical accounts. (RNS)

British Baptist Nativity endeavor invites public to 'Get in the Picture'

By Mark Woods
Great Britain Baptist Times

Didcot, England—Thousands of people around the United Kingdom are set to be involved in an ecumenical initiative that invites people to take part in an "instant Nativity" this Christmas.

The effort, co-sponsored by the Baptist Union of Great Britain and called "Get in the Picture," seeks to include all kinds of people in the Christmas story by encouraging them to have their photographs taken in a Nativity tableau. The photographs are then available to view and download for free on the Get in the Picture Web site, which also has information about carol services at local churches, a reading of the Christmas story from the Bible and stories

of what Christmas means to people today.

More than 40 towns across the United Kingdom have signed up to host Get in the Picture events.

The project originated in the English city of Chester last year, where Baptist-affiliated evangelistic group The Light Project first gave it a trial run.

In 2009, it has been rolled out nationally by the Baptist Union of Great Britain and endorsed by a number of British Christian denominations and organizations.

The Baptist Union's missions department organized a Get in the Picture event last month for the Didcot Christmas Street Fair—the town west of London where the union is headquartered. They took more than 100 photos.

"It was a great success," said the union's missions head, Ian Bunce. "You could see people were having fun engaging with the Christmas story in a new, non-threatening way."

"From stories I have heard across the country, Get in the Picture is really capturing people's imagination."

The event featured the Nativity scene in the middle of the fair, with robes, shepherds' crooks and other clothing available for participants to use for their photos.

Sparking the Christmas imagination

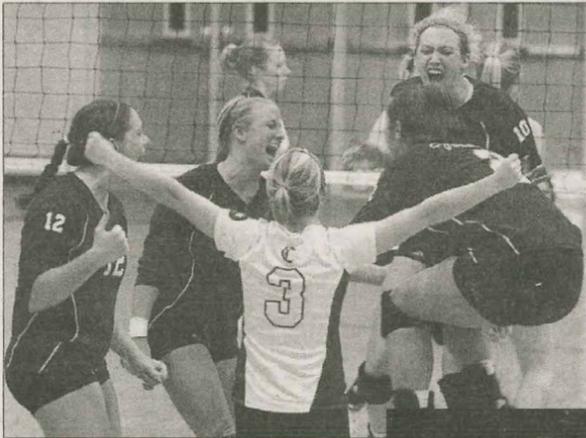
Park Road Baptist Church and a coalition of other congregations in the city of Peterborough, England, also have embraced the initiative in an imaginative way. The group

has rented a shop in the city's downtown area until Dec. 20. Called Love Came Down at Christmas after the familiar British carol, the shop features a variety of other attractions—including free mincemeat pies and gingerbread cookies and an exhibition of children's drawings of the Nativity.

Project coordinator Jo Vernon said she hopes the initiative will provide an antidote to some of the more commercial aspects of the festive season.

"It's a really, really exciting project," she said. "Christmas is so commercial these days, and Get in the Picture is an uncomplicated way of putting across to the public what Christmas is all about. We've had a tremendous response. It's inspired a lot of people to become involved." (ABP)

National Champions



CELEBRATION ■ Above: Campbellsville University's women's volleyball team celebrates after the final point to clinch the National Christian College Athletic Association National Championship Dec. 5. ■ Right: The team and coaches show off the National Championship banner. It is the first team title won for Campbellsville University. (Campbellsville University photos)



Kissimmee, Fla.—The Campbellsville University women's volleyball took home the school's first-ever national championship in any sport, capturing the National Christian College Athletic Association Dec. 5 in Kissimmee, Fla.

The volleyball team knocked off top-seeded Mount Vernon Nazarene, thanks to back-to-back kills from All-American Renee Netherton in the match's third and final set.

The win was the team's 38th of the season, a new record.

"It's a great swan song to a great season. We're excited to win the first one for the school. Regardless of it being the NCGAA or the NAIA, it's hard to win," Campbellsville head coach Randy LeBleu said. "The girls had a will to go out with a bang. The closeness of them the last month has been great."



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

January

- 14-16 Shepherding the Shepherd, Downtown Hilton Hotel, Lexington.
- 22-23 Region 2 Disaster Relief Recertification and Training, Second Baptist Church, Madisonville.
- 26 Pastor/Staff Forum, Living Hope Baptist Church, Bowling Green.
- 28-30 Southeast Conclave, Chattanooga, Tenn.
- 29-30 Deacon/Pastor/Spouse Retreat, Holiday Inn Plaza, Bowling Green.
- 29-30 Preschool/Children's Ministry Meeting, Baptist Building, Louisville.
- 29-30 Regional Women on Mission Retreat, Laurel Lake Baptist Camp, Corbin.

February

- 5-6 Region 4 Disaster Relief Recertification and Training, Ninth & O Baptist Church, Louisville.
- 15 Regional Church Financial Benefits Conference, First Baptist Church, Calvert City, and Oakland Baptist Church.
- 16 Regional Church Financial Benefits Conference, CrossPointe Baptist Church, Owensboro, and Versailles Baptist Church.
- 17 Regional Church Financial Benefits Conference, Baptist Building, Louisville.
- 20 Kentucky Changers Crew Chief Training, Baptist Building, Louisville.
- 20 Women's Chorale Winter Retreat, TBA.
- 22-23 Kentucky Baptist Evangelism Conference, Severns Valley Baptist Church, Elizabethtown.
- 27 Region 3 and 7 RA Congress, South Fork Baptist Church, Hodgenville.

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

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Please pray for the following Kentucky Baptist missionaries and ministries:

Isaiah House Recovery Center in Willisburg. Choe Sergent directs this residential treatment center that ministers to recovering addicts. Isaiah House provides a place of recovery, life transformation, healing and wholeness by focusing on hope in Jesus Christ. The center is supported by donations from individuals, churches, South District Baptist Association and pri-

vate grants. Pray for the freedom and spiritual development of the 30 men who are living there. Pray that God will provide the resources and staff needed to continue this vibrant ministry.

Mission Service Corps missionary Robin Reeves of Corbin. Robin serves through South Union/Mount Zion Baptist Association as minister to children and families, coordinating vacation Bible schools, Bible clubs, clowning and creative ministries, volunteer missions teams, food/clothing giveaways and block parties. The newest ministry, "Sewing Seeds

of Kindness," uses handmade dolls as a means of "sowing" the gospel to children, hospital patients and seniors in nursing homes. Pray that doll recipients will come to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior through the ministry. Pray, also, that God will send more laborers to help with the assembly and distribution of the dolls.

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.



GO TEAM Basketball players and coaches at Adair County High and Middle schools participated in a special recognition service Nov. 29 at Columbia Baptist Church. With them are (front row, third from left) Kansas City Royals outfielder Josh Anderson, Columbia Baptist Pastor Ted Taylor and FCA Regional Coordinator Greg Gover.

Major League outfielder speaks to ball players at Columbia

By Todd Deaton
Editor

Columbia—The coaches and players of the Adair County High School boys' and girls' basketball teams and the middle school boys' team were recognized recently at a special sports-themed service at Columbia Baptist Church that featured Major League outfielder Josh Anderson.

Anderson, who played at Pulaske County High School and attended Eastern Kentucky University, told the players how faith in Christ and the values he learned while growing up in church has helped him to avoid many of the temptations and pitfalls experienced by professional ball players.

For Transitional Pastor Ted Taylor, who is professor of sports ministry and director of the CLASS (Character, Leadership and Stewardship Studies) Institute at Campbellsville University, the service was just "a natural connection" for a minister who has a background in college athletics.

"As pastors, we are always looking for strategies to connect with our communities and reach out to people; this is one avenue that is pretty much available to any church," Taylor said.

Christian coaches can have big influences on their players, Taylor noted. "We wanted to encourage them

from a Christian perspective, especially in our sports-oriented culture," he said.

Two high school coaches and four coaches at nearby Lindsey Wilson College attend church at Columbia Baptist, Taylor added.

Through the years, he said he has made it a point to regularly invite teams at area schools to attend special services at the churches where he has served. "It helps the church to be more relevant to someone with a sports mindset," he explained, emphasizing that "not only do you get the players, but their families follow them to church to show support for their children."

Mark Fudge, head basketball coach at Adair County High School, agreed. "Some of the players and parents really enjoyed being recognized, and a non-traditional, sports message is something that really relates to their lives," he said.

Fudge, a deacon at Columbia Baptist Church, noted that while the players are strongly encouraged to participate, their attendance is not mandatory. "If they have their own church where they regularly attend, I tell them to go there," he said.

Anderson, a native of Eubank, is affiliated with the regional Fellowship of Christian Athletes organization, and a \$1,500 love offering was collected to support its ministries.

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SEEKING: DOM for Boones Creek Baptist Association. Conservative Southern Baptist with pastoral experience. Send resumé to Calvary Baptist Church, 21 Glory St., Irvine, KY 40336.

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TOURS: 11-day Israel and Jordan tour, March 21 from Nashville, \$2,788. For a color brochure, contact Pastor Jack Studie, (270) 889-7604; or jestudie@aol.com. Our 18th pilgrimage.

Gettin' in the swing

Students at Christian colleges taking to the dance floors to unwind from campus life

By Angela Abbamonte

Jackson, Tenn.—Classes are done for the day. Meetings and work are winding down, and Facebook can provide a study break only for so long. So, what's a restless Christian college student to do?

For undergrads at Union University in Jackson, Tenn., a walk down to the campus theater provides one solution: dancing to the tunes of Duke Ellington and Cab Calloway.

Inside, young men offer their hands to available girls and take them to the middle of the hopping dance floor. Beginners practice basic steps while more advanced dancers take on the more complicated moves, flipping their partners over their heads and through their legs.

At Union, like a growing number of Christian campuses, it don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing.

Dance fever hit the Southern Baptist campus when two freshmen, Grant Kelly and Brandon Walker, started recruiting students to dance for fun last fall. The group has grown from just a few friends meeting in a small classroom to about 50 dancers who now take over the theater.

Fans say the swing thing now has taken root in at least 10 Christian colleges in the U.S.—and the fever is spreading.

But like a scene out of the 1984 classic "Footloose," some campuses have had to overcome religious or moral qualms about dancing. Union's student handbook, for example, says the university "prohibits dancing at any Union University-sponsored event held on campus." Students simply host the dance-offs as unofficial events either on or off campus.

"It's fun and innocent," said Dean of Students Kimberly Thornbury, who said she was given a heads-up by the students. "The university is not going to hunt people down. That's not the spirit of the policy."

While swing is downright innocent compared to the bump-and-grind moves found on many secular campuses, at Christian schools it often falls under the category of "social dancing" that some believe could lead to temptation, and therefore comes with guidelines attached.

To be sure, many conservative schools like Bob Jones University in Greenville, S.C., continue to prohibit all forms of dancing, yet some Christian schools have lifted the dancing ban in recent years. In Waco, Texas, Baylor University students were able to boogie in 1996. Wheaton College in Illinois whirled in its new dancing policy in 2003. In 2006, John Brown University in Siloam Springs, Ark., expanded its dancing policy to allow students to jive at more campus-sponsored dances with gentler genres such as ballroom and swing.

Randall Balmer, an expert on American evangelicals, said he was a little shocked to learn students on Christian campuses were picking up swing dancing, but sees it as an indicator of shifts within the evangelical subculture.

"What clearly has happened ... is that after 1980, evangelicalism was still a subculture—but it was no longer a counter-culture," Balmer said. "With that decreased attention to 'worldliness,' some of the taboos have fallen."

Balmer, who teaches American religious history at New York's Barnard College and is the author of "Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America," said the suspicion of the "outside world" beyond evangelicalism has faded.

"There has been a general loosening of the (fundamentalist) structure of the 1920s and 1930s," he noted. "The dancing is just another evidence of that loosening."

Still, some schools have reservations. In Kirkland, Wash., Northwest University's

dancing policy states the school "recognizes the temptations inherent in the sensuous and erotic nature of some social dancing," and then sets guidelines to keep dancing off campus.

Those rules haven't dissuaded Michael Weber, a Northwest student, from dancing for four years. He and his friends go off campus to community centers and dance halls in order to stay within the guidelines and still swing.

Weber organizes dance events a couple times a month to encourage students to learn basic moves. He said he likes swing because, in his opinion, it's easier to master than ballroom dancing.

"Swing dancing is easy to learn," he acknowledged. "It's not as proper."

Kristen Henley of Franciscan University of Steubenville, Ohio said her mostly Catholic campus is "a little obsessed with swing." Every Sunday night, as many as 75 Steubenville students turn out for swing dancing and dance competitions.

Henley connected with the group her freshman year when they hosted a welcome-to-campus dance. She had so much fun she vowed never to miss a Sunday night dance session. Now, as a junior, she can say she has kept the vow almost religiously and rarely misses a week.

"As long as you can follow," she said, "you can (swing dance) instantly." (RNS)



CUTTIN' A RUG Students at Union University in Jackson, Tenn., swing dance at an unofficial student-led dance party because the Southern Baptist campus officially prohibits dancing. (RNS photo by Angela Abbamonte)

'Blind Side' mother shares how religion has shaped her family's life

By Lilly Fowler

Los Angeles—In the new movie "The Blind Side," Sandra Bullock plays real-life Memphis mother Leigh Anne Tuohy, a woman whose family is turned upside down when she spots Michael Oher—a young boy who has left the projects and has nowhere to turn.

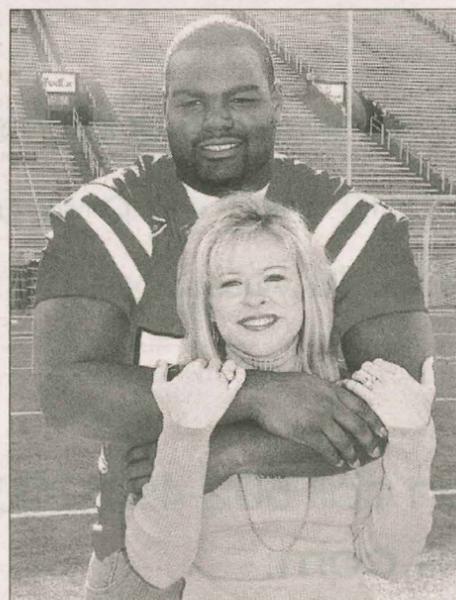
The Tuohys decide to provide a home for Michael and as a result, he reaches heights—both as a student and as a football player—that few could have imagined. In the process, he not only transforms himself, but those around him.

"The Blind Side" has become a surprise hit in the movie's first few weeks in theaters nationwide. It surpassed the latest film in the wildly popular teen "Twilight" series, grossing more than \$20 million during the weekend of Dec. 4-6. In less than a month, "The Blind Side" had totaled nearly \$130 million in ticket sales.

Oher, 23, now plays for the Baltimore Ravens. Tuohy spoke about the movie that depicts her family's life and in particular, the role faith played. Answers have been edited for length and clarity.

Q: Religion is definitely hinted at in "The Blind Side." Can you tell me more about your family's religious background?

My husband and I met at Ole Miss. Sean was Catholic, and I went to a nondenom-



A MOTHER'S LOVE Leigh Anne Tuohy and her adopted son, Michael Oher, are the real-life family behind Sandra Bullock's new film, "The Blind Side." (RNS photo courtesy of Grace Hill Media)

inational evangelical church. We did all different churches. And after we moved to Memphis, we started our own church called Grace Evangelical. We started with less than 50 people. It really has grown, and we have a great core of people.

Michael, I don't think, had ever attended church, probably very little. The children are all born-again Christians, and we're just a very blessed family.

10 Minutes With ... Leigh Anne Tuohy

Q: How did faith influence your decision to take in Michael?

You know, there never was a decision to take in Michael. Michael was there, he had a need and we were able to fill it. Do I think that our

faith played a part in that? Absolutely. We looked over and we said, "Wow, that young man needs some clothes."

Q: Your children attended Briarcrest Christian School in Memphis, Tenn. Did you find that people at the school were more open to what you were doing because of its religious nature?

By the time we encountered Michael, he was already attending Briarcrest. We just came along after the fact. There were some other people at Briarcrest who saw the need. There were already teachers stepping up who saw that Michael was an extremely intelligent young man. Like Michael always says, "I could never repay

them for what they did." I think they would do it for the next kid, which is a great thing because there are certainly more Michael Oher's out there.

Q: Was there anything you felt the movie got particularly right or wrong?

By the time they decided to take on this project, they were the ones who wanted to get it right. Sandra Bullock put herself into this. It does portray us more accurately than most Hollywood projects would. These people cared about getting it right, and I think it shows. Maybe I wouldn't use those drapes, and maybe I don't wear my skirts that tight, but what does it matter?

Q: What do you want people to take away from the movie?

The most impactful message is that society had deemed Michael worthless. There were very few people who cared where Michael Oher was any minute of the day. He is now a contributing member of the society. He is intelligent. He made the dean's list in college. If it can happen to Michael Oher, it could happen to anyone.

We need to figure out what we can do. Our system is flawed when it comes to kids. And I just really hope people will walk out of this movie better than they walked in. Do something little. But whatever it is, do it well. (RNS)

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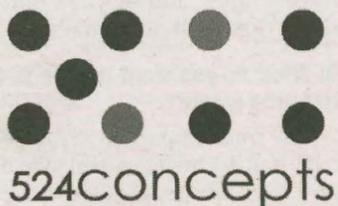
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