

Shine like stars in the world
Philippians 2:15

WESTERN Recorder

December 21, 2010
Vol. 184, No. 49

FOR THE RECORD



Kentucky
Kentucky Baptists honor African-American pastor Lincoln Bingham on his work in racial reconciliation. *Page 2.*

Christmas
New survey shows Americans are split on whether to say 'Merry Christmas' or 'Happy Holidays.' *Page 3.*



Missions
90-year-old volunteer sparks breakthrough among the deaf community in the Czech Republic. *Page 6.*

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'It was God's Plan A'

Kentucky Baptist couple's adoption journey sees them return home with not one, but two precious gifts

By Robin Bass
Partnerships Editor

Lexington—Family and friends of Jeff and LaRaine Rice could skip shopping for the Lexington couple this Christmas.

"We got our gifts," said Jeff, 47.

After waiting three years, the Rices recently were given the opportunity to adopt not one, but two infant children and said no store-bought present could bring them greater joy.

"I feel so content, so full and happy," said LaRaine, 43, as a smile lit up her face.

Smiles come easily since the couple welcomed 1-month-old Elizabeth Lynn and 5-month-old Christopher Jeffery into their family. The Florida-born children were adopted within eight days of each other, just in time to celebrate Christmas in their new Kentucky home.

Among some sociology circles, adopting two children so close in age is called artificial twinning. At the Rice house, they call it providence.

"After many attempts, miscarriage and losses, we realized adoption was God's plan for us. It was not second choice for us. It was God's plan A," LaRaine wrote.

The new mom typed these candid words on Facebook soon after learn-



Proud new parents Jeff and LaRaine Rice hold their early Christmas gifts, 1-month-old Elizabeth Lynn (left) and 5-month-old Christopher Jeffery. After several unsuccessful attempts at having children, the Rices pursued adoption. The couple traveled to Florida last month to adopt Elizabeth and returned home with Christopher as well, who they had pursued for adoption at first, but didn't get him until a last-minute change of heart by his case workers. (Photo by Robin Bass)

ing that God's will for their lives included both babies they had sought after. The Rices' honest tale of enduring one disappointment after another—only to have their patience and tenacity doubly rewarded—spoke to the hearts of many. Comments on LaRaine's social networking page were a flurry of well wishes and praises for answered prayers.

More than 100 people read and responded to their good news on Facebook during the next few days. That number jumped into the thousands when the Lexington Herald-Leader featured the family of four in a front-page story, and multiplied even further when the Associated Press sent the Rices tale across the nation.

Jeff and LaRaine said they were in awe. At first, they wondered how the account of two ordinary people going through the adoption process could generate so much attention. Then they realized it was always part of a greater design.

God "was able to get the glory," LaRaine said. "We were just thankful." See 'God's Plan A' ... *Page 7*

Americans celebrate Christmas, yet most stray from its religious meaning

By Brooklyn Lowery
LifeWay Christian Resources

Nashville, Tenn.—It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas, and it's not just Christians turning December into a festive month of themed décor, gift giving and mailboxes packed with greeting cards.

A new study by LifeWay Research reveals that 9 in 10 Americans personally celebrate Christmas—and they aren't all self-identified Christians. A majority of agnostics or those claiming no religious preference (89 percent), individuals claiming other religions (62 percent) and even atheists (55 percent) celebrate Christmas along with 97 percent of Christians.

Overall, married adults, people with children under 17 and individuals who are older than 30 are more likely to celebrate Christmas than their counterparts, though the differences in percentages are minimal.

"There's a reason that Christmas themes dominate television, stores and neighborhoods come the end of November," said Scott McConnell, director of LifeWay Research. "Nearly every American celebrates the holiday in some form or fashion."

Once it was determined who is celebrating Christmas, the survey turned to how Americans are celebrating. LifeWay Research uncovered a gap, even among Christians, between the religious emphasis of the holiday and the merry, family-focused traditions.

In fact, 81 percent put family first at Christmas, agreeing, strongly or somewhat, with the statement, "Family traditions are the most important part of Christmas to me."

"There is no question that Americans celebrate the Christmas holiday, although" See *Most Americans celebrate ... Page 3*

KBC Mission Board signs off on 'More for Christ' emphases, cuts costs

By Drew Nichter
News Director

Louisville—Complying with the mandate from Kentucky Baptist Convention messengers in last month's adoption of the Great Commission Task Force report, the KBC Mission Board signed off on a trio of emphases centered on giving "More for Christ."

At their meeting last week in Louisville, Mission Board members approved three specific action plans presented by KBC President Floyd Paris aimed at Kentucky Baptist adults, youth and children.

In his opening message to board members last Monday, the pastor of Unity Baptist Church in Ashland laid out his vision for the initial phase of the More for Christ emphasis. The initiative was recommendation No. 1 in the Great Commission Task Force's report that was approved. See *Mission Board approves ... Page 2*

Kentucky Baptists honor Bingham's work as reconciler

Longtime proponent of racial reconciliation stepping aside from role with convention

By Drew Nichter
News Director

Louisville—Retiring from his duties at the Kentucky Baptist Convention after 35 years, the KBC Mission Board did not allow Lincoln Bingham to step aside quietly.

"I want to say thank you very much for not allowing Daddy to just tip-toe quietly from this KBC building, because he would have done that," daughter Ava Bingham Reynolds told board members last week.

The longtime pastor and racial reconciler was honored with a resolution of appreciation for his three and a half decades with the state convention and more than 50 years in ministry.

"He is known and loved in churches across the Commonwealth of Kentucky as a preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ," the resolution states.

"I am so grateful for the privilege of having been able to serve with Kentucky Baptists over these many years and the many

blessings that have been mine," Bingham told his fellow Kentucky Baptists.

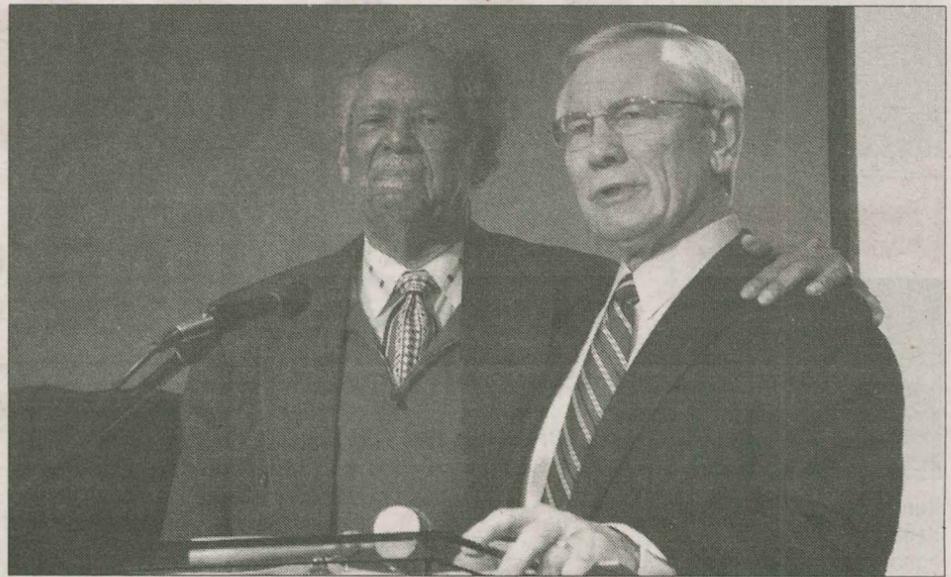
KBC Executive Director recalled the story of Bingham as a child in Trigg County who harbored feelings of anger and bitterness over the way his grandfather had been treated as a former slave.

However, Bingham's father and grandfather were not angry about the past, Mackey shared. "In fact, in (Bingham's) own words, he said he got angry because they weren't angry," Mackey said. "But they said to him, 'You'll understand when you're saved.'"

At age 9, Bingham accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior and "all of a sudden, love for all people flooded his soul and his being, and he went about the community telling people about God's love," Mackey noted.

Bingham has devoted much of his ministry to racial reconciliation in Kentucky Baptist life. He co-founded Greater Louisville Christian Reconciliation Ministries, Inc., and is a leader with the Reconciliation Networks of Our World organization.

He also has served as a longtime pastor in Louisville, leading West End Missionary Baptist Church and St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church. Last year, he led St. Paul, a predominantly African American congregation, to merge with the largely Anglo Shive-



LIFE OF RECONCILIATION Retiring consultant Lincoln Bingham stands with Kentucky Baptist Convention Executive Director Bill Mackey as Bingham is honored at last week's KBC Mission Board meeting. The Louisville pastor and racial reconciler is stepping aside from his role with the state convention. (Photo by Brenda Smith/KBC)

ly Heights Baptist Church, a move which garnered national media attention.

"His ministry exemplifies transcending racial, ethnic, socioeconomic and denominational barriers," the resolution says of

Bingham's work.

"I know that even though Dad's jersey's being retired, so to speak, he'll stay in the game until God calls him on to glory," Reynolds said of her father.

Mission Board approves 'More for Christ' emphases, tries to cut costs

Continued from page 1

proved at the KBC annual meeting last month in Lexington. That recommendation described the emphasis as an "intentional time of repentance, renewal and re-direction for the future."

The report further implores the KBC Mission Board, staff, agencies and institutions "to seek ways that we can implement this theme in every part of Kentucky Baptist life and that it become a clarion call to our churches and individuals."

Paris' three-pronged approach involves getting more money to the Cooperative Program, Southern Baptists' primary missions giving channel.

Emphasis No. 1, called "\$3 More for Christ," is intended to encourage individual Kentucky Baptists to give \$3 more per week through their local churches.

Breaking down the numbers, Paris said if only 100 church members committed to giving \$3 more each week, each local church would have \$15,600 more at the end of the year.

If only 100,000 Kentucky Baptists follow through on the challenge, it would result in \$15 million more given through local churches, Paris noted—more than \$1 million of which would go to the Cooperative Program.

The second emphasis, "Children Changing the World," urges churches to involve their children in collecting spare change beginning on Cooperative Program Sunday, April 11, 2011, through vacation Bible school.

Not to be outdone by the kids, Kentucky Baptist youth, too, have their own emphasis: "Youth: A Million More 4 Missions," or YM3. It calls on students statewide to raise \$1 million total for Cooperative Program-supported missions.

Noting that he understands the language of the institution, but would rather speak in terms of the pew, Paris said the only thing the average church member wants to know about the Great Commission Task Force report is: "What does that mean for me?"

"The problem is we've been thinking institution and not pew," he added. "Why can we not challenge our people?"

"I'm not here pushing programs, I'm here trying to win the world for Jesus Christ," Paris said.

KBC Second Vice President Greg Nimmo helped jump-start the \$3 More for Christ emphasis with an offering challenge on Tuesday morning.

Lamenting the decline in Cooperative Program giving in Kentucky over the last decade, Nimmo said church leaders often look for who's to blame. "But I have to look and say it's my fault," he declared.

"Lord, is it my \$3 that's between You and I?" Nimmo asked.

The Crittenden Association director of missions then challenged Mission Board members to lay their \$3 at the altar. The impromptu offering netted \$365 for the Cooperative Program.

The three-pronged More for Christ emphasis approach was unanimously adopted by KBC messengers in a motion by immediate past KBC president Don Mathis.

"There needs to be specific ways for it to be implemented, otherwise it just floats around as a wonderful idea," Mathis said.

Getting more money to the Cooperative Program was the impetus for a pair of adopted resolutions from the Mission Board's business and finance committee.

Board members approved the establishment of five endowment funds toward which legacy gifts can be given, committee chair Charles Barnes said.

The established funds support individually the Cooperative Program, Baptist Builders, Baptist Campus Ministries, church planting and disaster relief.

Efforts to save money

In other money-related business, Mission Board members also adopted a series of cost-cutting measures.

The proposal that elicited the most discussion was a recommendation to utilize "various modes of teleconferencing" to conduct meetings of Mission Board committees as a way to reduce travel expenses.

Paris said he proposed the idea since the KBC has the means to facilitate telephone and video conferences among individuals across the state. An hour-long meeting can be done electronically for a cost of about \$7

per person. The cost of a typical committee meeting with 10-12 people traveling to Louisville is between \$1,200 and \$1,500.

"If we're just getting approval for a report, we don't all need to be together," Paris said. "I don't know about you, but another meeting is not what I need."

Discussion on the proposal ranged from whether votes taken by teleconference would need to be later ratified in person (they would not) to who would decide if a meeting would be held in person or electronically (that committee's chairperson). In the end, the proposal was adopted unanimously.

The Mission Board also agreed to take a cut in its mileage reimbursement rate. The KBC's non-employee mileage reimbursement rate previously was 75 percent of the IRS' per-mile rate of 50 cents. Last year, the cost to the convention was \$120,146 (320,388 miles driven).

Beginning Jan. 1, the IRS rate will go up a penny, increasing the KBC's total cost by nearly \$2,500. As a way to save nearly \$38,500, the Mission Board approved a decrease to 50 percent of the IRS' per-mile rate—25.5 cents per mile—for KBC Mission Board members and special workers.

In other business, board members:

■ Approved the distribution of \$235,000 in year-end funds from unspent salary/benefit funds and Kentucky Baptist Connect money. Board members also voted to hold back \$258,174 in unspent budget and short-term interest funds to be used as income for future budget years, beginning with the next fiscal year.

The convention's 2011-12 budget will take a 5 percent hit, as dictated by the Great Commission Task Force report. That will total about \$428,000, according to Lowell Ashby, the KBC's business services team leader.

In addition, the KBC must prepare for as-yet-unknown reductions in revenue from the dissolution of the North American Mission Board's cooperative agreements, as approved by Southern Baptist Convention messengers in June.

■ Agreed to extend the KBC's three-year missions partnership with the Baptist Convention of Tanzania by one year with the purpose of "continuing the development of

the spiritual, organizational and financial stability of the BCT."

■ Heard a report from the administrative committee which agreed to postpone action on a motion approved at the November Mission Board meeting to study the effectiveness of the board.

Committee chairman Don Mathis said that in light of the imminent changes in store for the convention, including the retirement of Executive Director Bill Mackey, potential staff cuts and Mission Board downsizing, the proposal should be put off and revisited next year.

Mathis also said the administrative committee approved additional duties for Richard Adams, director of the KBC's leadership development department. He now also will serve as a church development strategist for Kentucky's southeast region.

November CP gifts help ease slow start to fiscal year

Louisville—Kentucky Baptists gave more to the Cooperative Program in November than October, exceeding the monthly budget requirement, but overall support is 10.5 percent behind for the 2010-11 fiscal year.

The total for November's CP gifts was \$1,967,616 compared to \$1,485,219 in October. Gifts exceeded the \$1,958,333 needed for the month by more than \$9,000.

"It is encouraging to see our November giving exceed our budget," said Billy Compton, executive associate for Cooperative Program and Resources at the Kentucky Baptist Convention. "We are grateful for the generosity of our KBC church family."

November giving helped offset October totals that contributed to the slow start to the fiscal year. The annual budget goal is \$23.5 million. As of Dec. 1, gifts to the Cooperative Program were running more than \$618,000 behind budget.

Newly released survey indicates Americans are split on saying *Merry Christmas* or *Happy Holidays*

By Nicole Neroulis

Washington—While more than 9 out of 10 Americans say they plan to celebrate Christmas this year, they are divided on whether businesses should use messages like “Season’s Greetings” rather than “Merry Christmas,” according to a new poll.

The latest PRRI/RNS Religion News Poll, released last week, found Americans are split, 44 percent in favor and 49 opposed, on whether retailers should use generic holiday greetings out of respect for people of different faiths.

The so-called “War on Christmas” has been a rallying cry for conservatives in recent years as they resist attempts to remove nativity scenes from town squares, Christmas carols from public schools and the words “Merry Christmas” from sales flyers.

The poll found a significant number of people engaging in secularized celebrations of Christmas, with Americans more likely to watch Christmas movies like “It’s

A Wonderful Life” than attend religious services on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.

The holiday season also is slightly inter-religious: One in 10 Americans say members of their families also celebrate another December holiday, such as Hanukkah or Kwanzaa.

Researchers said the range of ways that Americans celebrate Christmas could explain why the holy day is taking on a less religious feel.

Robert Jones of Public Religion Research Institute, which conducted the poll in partnership with RNS, said Christmas always has evolved, from its Dec. 25 date, claimed from a Roman pagan festival, to the decorated tree from German tradition.

The fact that significant numbers of Americans read both the biblical story of Jesus’ birth and “Twas the Night before Christmas” is a continuation of that tradition, he said.

The PRRI/RNS poll also found that:

■ College graduates, Democrats and people with no formal religious affiliation are more likely to have family celebrating more than one December holiday.

■ Slightly more Americans (43 percent) read “Twas the Night Before Christmas” than read a Christmas story from the Bible (40 percent).

■ Half of Republicans, 3 in 4 white evangelicals, and 2 in 3 black Protestants say they read the Christmas story from the Bible. Fewer portions of Democrats (34 percent), white mainline Protestants (37 percent) and Catholics (26 percent) do likewise.

■ Most white evangelicals (79 percent) and Catholics (82 percent) attend Christmas Eve or Christmas Day services, compared to 63 percent of white mainline Protestants.

■ White evangelicals (69 percent) and Republicans (64 percent) are most likely to say stores should use “Merry Christmas,” while

a majority of Democrats (58 percent) and Catholics (55 percent) prefer generic holiday greetings instead.

■ People in the Midwest (56 percent), South (54 percent) or rural areas (53 percent) are more likely to object to generic holiday greetings than those living in the Northeast (33 percent) or urban areas (47 percent).

While some Christians bemoan the commercialization of Christmas, interfaith organizations and Christmas advocates see reason to cheer its wider appeal.

Robert Putnam, a Harvard scholar and co-author of “American Grace: How Religion Unites and Divides Us,” said he found it surprising that nearly half of Americans choose “Happy Holidays” as their preferred consumer greeting. “That represents a major change over the last 50 years toward greater interfaith sensitivity,” he said.

Although there’s no long-term data on the trend—“because no one would even have thought to ask that on a survey,” he said—Putnam said he suspects it closely mirrors America’s growing acceptance of interfaith marriage.

Phil Okrend, president of MixedBlessing, a company that makes interfaith and multicultural holiday cards, said it makes sense to consider regional demographics regarding December behavior.

“If you live somewhere with a majority of Christians, then you can say ‘Merry Christmas,’ and if you’re in a more diverse area, you can say ‘Happy Holidays,’” he said. “It’s not diminishing anything, because we’re more alike than not.” (RNS)

Dallas church’s ‘GrinchAlert’ garners national attention

Dallas—At the time of year when “Happy Holidays” supplants the traditional “Merry Christmas” at various businesses, a website, GrinchAlert.com, is giving consumers an opportunity to register their compliments or complaints about which seasonal greetings they see or hear at stores or in advertising.

Robert Jeffress, pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, announced the web-

site’s launch by saying that “naughty” and “nice” lists would be broadcast daily on the church’s radio station.

“I wanted to do something positive to encourage businesses to acknowledge Christmas and not bow to the strident voices of a minority who object to the holiday,” Jeffress said in a recent news release noting how several businesses nationwide reportedly are avoiding Christmas verbiage.

GrinchAlert.com’s tabs allow the public to submit reports for the “nice” list of businesses that use “Merry Christmas” alongside those that employ “Happy Holidays” for the “naughty” list.

With dozens of reports posted, the ratio between nice and naughty is 10/1, respectively. Businesses throughout the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex and several states are listed on the site. (BP)

Most Americans celebrate Christmas, but not its intended meaning

Continued from page 1

many institutions shy away from using the words ‘Merry Christmas’ so as to not offend the 9 percent who do not,” said Ed Stetzer, president of LifeWay Research.

“But a closer look at how they celebrate reveals that it typically revolves around family and that Christ-centered elements are not as common,” he added. “For many in our culture, the season is disconnected from the reason. For many of those, family is the reason for the season.”

Christmas activities

Among a list of 14 things people do at Christmas, giving gifts to family members is the most common activity. Additionally, more than three out of four households report they gather with family or friends for a Christmas meal, put up a Christmas tree, listen to Christmas music, and decorate their homes.

Christians actually are among the most likely to enjoy elements of the Christmas season not related to Jesus’ birth, with two-thirds saying they watch fictional Christmas movies, as compared to half of agnostics or those with no preference, and less than half of atheists and Americans of other religions.

Gift giving also is most popular among Christians, 94 percent of whom say they give gifts to family members. This affinity for giving gifts perhaps points to why Chris-

tians also are most likely to encourage belief in Santa Claus. Overall, a little more than one-third of households encourage belief in St. Nicholas, compared to 42 percent of Christian households. Just 27 percent of agnostics or those without a religious preference, 22 percent of those claiming other religions, and 18 percent of atheists encourage belief in Santa Claus.

Encouraging belief in Jesus as Savior actually is more common among all Americans (58 percent) than encouraging belief in Santa. In fact, more than three-quarters agree with the statement, “I believe Jesus is the reason for the Christmas season,” and 59 percent strongly agree that “Mary was a virgin when she gave birth to Jesus Christ.”

“That’s good news, but it is not the whole story,” Stetzer said, pointing out that 38 percent encourage belief in Santa Claus, yet only 28 percent read or tell the Christmas story from the Bible.

“Acknowledging the source of Christmas is widespread, but telling the story is not. Christians should do both and share that with others,” Stetzer explained.

Though a majority encourage belief in Christ at Christmas time, two-thirds of Americans agreed that, “Many of the things I enjoy during the Christmas season have nothing to do with the birth of Jesus Christ.”

“Americans give Jesus a head

nod at Christmas but spend most of the season pleasing their eyes, ears and taste buds with decorations, music and meals,” McConnell said. “Many celebrate Christmas the way most have celebrated Halloween—the fun traditions without sharing the religious significance.”

Christmas at church

Still, nearly half of all households do attend special church services on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, including 2 percent of atheists, 9 percent of agnostics or those with no religious preference, and 22 percent of those claiming other religions.

“Churches often look forward to some of their largest attendance of the year at Christmas week services, and 47 percent of Americans say their household typically attends such church services,” Stetzer pointed out based on the research. “It may not be a huge percentage, but the survey suggests that Christmas does provide an opportunity for churches to reach typically unchurched individuals.

“Christians can often get distracted during Christmas and completely overlook the opportunity to represent Christ to their neighbors,” Stetzer added. “Believers can and should put Christ first in our Christmas celebrations and then represent Him to a world in need of the biblical understanding of ‘peace on earth.’”

Christmas prime time for invites

Nashville, Tenn.—A study conducted by LifeWay Research found that 91 percent of Americans celebrate Christmas, including a majority of atheists, individuals claiming other religions and agnostics or those claiming no religious preference.

The study also found that one of the ways 47 percent of households celebrate the holiday is by attending special Christmas Eve or Christmas Day church services, which perhaps points to an earlier LifeWay Research study.

In December 2008, LifeWay Research presented respondents with nine seasons or life moments and asked: “Have you been more open to considering matters of faith during any of the following times in your life?” Among the nine occasions tested, “during the Christmas holiday season” earned the highest response with nearly half of respondents citing that as a time they were more open to considering matters of faith.

“Our research shows that people are open during the Christmas season,” said Ed Stetzer, president of LifeWay Research. “When someone says ‘Happy Holidays,’ I’m not sure the response should be snarling ‘Merry Christmas.’ Instead, I’d suggest seizing the opportunity the season provides. Christians should be as bold in their witness as some are in protest.”

In the 2008 study, LifeWay Research found that 67 percent of Americans say a personal invitation from a church-going family member would be the most effective method a local congregation or faith community could use to invite them to attend. Invitations to attend church from a friend or neighbor are almost as effective, with 63 percent of Americans indicating this variety of invitation would be effective.

“Americans celebrate Christmas, but are often disconnected from the birth of a personal Savior,” Stetzer said. “There’s a gap between practice and belief, and Christians need to step into that gap and share why Jesus was born.”

More for Missions

Christmas is a time for giving. As Kentucky Baptists, we focus on giving to missions through the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. The offering is named in Lottie Moon's honor because she gave her life to share the gospel in China.

Partners in the Mission**By Bill Mackey**

In scripture, we see this same willingness to sacrifice in Mary. In spite of her concerns and all the challenges expressed in Luke 1:26-33, Mary said, "Be it unto me according to thy Word." Mary surrendered her soul to God to be the channel for the birth of God's Son, Jesus.

Mary had been told that she was highly favored by God but she must have wondered during her long trip to Bethlehem, the birth in a stable and the flight to Egypt if she were truly favored by God. Jesus grew into manhood and Mary would see her son loved by the poor, but hated and crucified by the powerful and religious.

When Mary received the visit of the angel, she knew even then some of the challenges she might face, but the messenger of God gave her Elizabeth, who was barren and was now with child, as an example of God's power. Then the messenger exclaimed, "For with God nothing shall be impossible."

At the very heart of the Christmas story is the supernatural intervention of God in human history. Through His life, atoning death on the cross, resurrection and ascension to heaven, Jesus fulfilled His earthly mission and gave His followers an incredible mission.

As Kentucky Baptists, we are in the process of renewing our commitment to the Great Commission. Kentucky Baptists have long expressed their commitment through personal witness, service through their local church, involvement in missions and ministries as well as giving of their tithes and gifts.

Kentucky Baptists also have consistently supported missions beyond their local churches through the Cooperative Program—a unified budget plan for the support of state, national and international missions.

At the KBC annual meeting in November, messengers voted to increase the percentage of CP gifts going to Southern Baptist Convention missions causes from 38 percent to 43.54 percent this next year. In order to do this and more in the future without weakening the foundation in Kentucky, growth in giving through local churches is needed.

Floyd Paris, our new KBC president, has recommended that each Kentucky Baptist consider giving \$3 more per week through their local church. This could be an incredible blessing to the local churches and all missions causes. He has also recommended plans to involve children and youth in missions education and giving.

These are resources for the local churches that could produce supernatural results with God's blessing and help to fulfill the prophesy, "... of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:33).

Bill Mackey is executive director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

Board highlights point to themes of peace & joy

"Is it my three dollars? O Lord, please don't let it be," Greg Nimmo prayed. His soul-searching plea weighed heavy on the hearts of members of the Kentucky Baptist Mission Board during last week's meeting. "So, here's my three and some more," he offered, laying his offering at the foot of the podium and initiating an impromptu offering that was one of the highpoints of the December meeting.

Outside, snow was falling with bone-chilling gusts; inside, Nimmo, the KBC's second vice president—responding to a visionary challenge by Convention President Floyd Paris—rekindled our hearts to do "more for Christ." In his opening remarks, Paris set forth three practical initiatives to encourage children, youth and adults in discovering ways to unthaw Cooperative Program giving. Urging adults to give "three more for Christ" as part of their weekly offerings, the Ashland pastor estimated that if 100,000 Kentucky Baptists were to give \$3 more each week, it could mean an additional \$1 million annually for missions work "here, there and everywhere."

Paris' invigorating initiatives grew out of the Great Commission Task Force's vision of a three-year, spiritual renewal emphasis called "More for Christ." In an effort to "speak pew," Paris suggested two other creative ideas that will help younger church-goers learn about the importance of missions by having a part in increasing their church's giving: "Children Changing the World" encourages collecting change from CP Sunday in April until vacation Bible school is conducted in the summer months; "A Million More 4 Missions" encourages youth groups to set aside 15 weeks to raise funds for missions. Not only would these efforts promote Cooperative Program awareness, they also help connect our children and youth with enabling other people around the world to hear about Jesus.

Paris urged Mission Board members to set an example by stepping out in faith and increasing their giving. And after hearing reports from leaders of KBC agencies, benevolent ministries and universities, Nimmo, director of missions for Crittenden Baptist Association, framed some soul-searching thoughts: "Lord, is it my \$3? ... Is it my \$3 that is causing KBC staff to wor-

ry about their jobs? ... Is it my \$3 that is causing a child at our children's home to worry about whether he or she is going to be (able to stay) there or not ... in a safe place? ... Is it my \$3 that (is causing) an international missionary not to be able to go and spread the good news of Jesus Christ?" His challenge to "take the Great Commission seriously" was issued to fellow board members, yet the call extends to every Kentucky Baptist: "How about you? Are you willing to lay something down at the altar" to do more for Christ? His impassioned plea calls us to look at Jesus' command personally, to examine critically "where we are at with Him," both in our giving to the Lord's work and in our obedience to be His witnesses.

Another highpoint was the recognition of someone whose name has become synonymous with a ministry of reconciliation: Lincoln Bingham. In a lengthy resolution, Kentucky Baptists honored Bingham, senior pastor of St. Paul Baptist Church at Shively Heights in Louisville, who is retiring after 35 years as a North American Mission Board missionary. KBC Executive Director-Treasurer Bill Mackey shared how "the crucible of his own life experiences" led Bingham to a "marvelous transformation" of accepting Christ through which "all of a sudden God's love for all people flooded his soul." Bingham became the first African-American employee of the Baptist Bookstore, a much sought-after revival and crusade evangelist, and co-founder of the Greater Louisville Christian Reconciliation Ministries.

"The thing that I love most about his ministry of reconciliation is that he focused first of all on reconciliation to God," Mackey said. "He knew that only God's love in your heart could enable you to love others who are different from you." In commending Bingham's model as a leader and advocate for reconciliation, Mackey prayed that Kentucky Baptists always would follow his example of working together for the sake of the gospel being shared with all people.

Together, these highlights point us toward rejoicing in the angels' song of peace on earth, good will toward men, and committing ourselves anew to go tell it on the mountain and everywhere that Jesus Christ is born.

After Thought**By Todd Deaton****Unintended results**

In your Dec. 7 editorial, you brought home a very good point about unintended consequences. Many things that Christians push for could, indeed, have such results.

Several weeks ago, the Western Recorder published a story about a group who wished to make Christians more aware of the religious freedoms available in our public schools. I remember thinking at the time that often we do not realize when we are well off. As you pointed out in "After Thought," what we celebrate as a victory for the Christian faith can become a victory for all, including some that we would not celebrate.

*Mary Graves
Campbellsville*

Timely warning

Accept my congratulations on your thoughtful and insightful editorial entitled "Look who's building an ark now" on Dec. 7.

I have no quarrel with any organization with a specific religious worldview attempting to develop a theme park which seeks to advance their particular faith agenda so long as they do so "on their own dime."

However, when any government, state or federal, becomes financially involved in such a project, the constitutional and legal pitfalls which present themselves become obvious.

You certainly posed the right question: Does granting \$37.5 million in tax incentives to construct a theme park that promotes a Judeo-Christian worldview not present an intriguing church-state separation dilemma? One need not be a constitutional scholar to arrive quite quickly at the conclusion that it certainly does! Thanks again for your timely warning to Baptists and all Kentucky citizens.

*Jim Ogden
Fort Thomas*

The end of the KBC

Last month, I was there for the end of the Kentucky Baptist Convention. On Tuesday night, there was no need to park at the Methodist church as I had earlier in the day. I didn't see any charter buses from that morning. As a matter of fact, two dozen cars could have joined me parking in front of the church.

The more than 1,200 messengers and guests from the morning now were about 150. Cas McCaslin preached a challenging message about capturing the heart of children. Eighty-five percent of the

crowd never heard his prophetic word about churches being complacent. And, for the record, I would report that the highest percentage of those there for the end of the KBC were gray-headed.

Earlier in the day, our convention voted for a radical shift in mission funding. But I saw few of the Great Commission Task Force members there for the end of the KBC. They were so confident of the vote results that minutes after the announced result, I was given a pre-printed commitment card.

We allotted more time for congregational singing in the convention than we did for hearing from agencies and institutions whose funding is now being cut. A scant shadow of the earlier hubbub remained for the benediction of the KBC. But then maybe the convention I have come to know and love has been over for some time now.

*Jay Robison
Lexington*

Forum Disclaimer: Baptist Forum is provided as an opportunity for Kentucky Baptists to express their viewpoints on a variety of subjects. Opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the Western Recorder's editorial staff, its Board of Directors, or the Kentucky Baptist Convention. Letters should be no more than 300 words in length and will be edited for style, clarity and space. Letters must reflect a spirit of Christian charity and civility.

WESTERN
Recorder

Box 43969
Louisville, KY 40253

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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

Western Recorder is published weekly 49 weeks a year by Western Recorder Inc., an agency of the Kentucky Baptist Convention, Box 43969, Louisville, KY 40253. It will not be published the first week of January, the week of Independence Day or the week of Christmas. Periodicals postage paid at Louisville, Ky. (USPS 679-380)

For general information, to give news tips, or to place an advertisement, call (502) 489-3535.

POSTMASTER: Send address corrections to:
Western Recorder, Box 43969, Louisville, KY 40253.

To subscribe: Send \$12.50 for a one-year, individual subscription. Group subscriptions on the church budget plan are \$10 per year. An additional church newsletter service is available for churches of all sizes.

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Home by another way can be life-saving, life-changing

It is the Gospel of Matthew that records the visit of the Magi to the Christ child. After they had seen the baby, they heard of Herod's plan to kill him. So instead of returning to Jerusalem, we learn that, "having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route." The wise men went home by another way. Perhaps my wife Evelyn's father took it from scripture; whenever he took his family on a drive in the country or even to the metropolis of Paducah, he always came home by another way.

I have taken this practice to heart, too. When my neighbor found me passed out by the side of Fairlane Street on a Thursday afternoon in April, she and her husband for some reason were going home by a different route than they usually traveled. They found me collapsed by the side of the street, and when she came to my side, I had stopped breathing, my heart had stopped beating, and I had turned a deep blue. A trained nurse, Alisia administered CPR, and she and the Lord brought me back. I am thankful that on that day my neighbors came home by another way.

Evelyn recently talked with Linda Purcell at our church, Murray's First Baptist Church, about the well-worn paths we usually take to arrive at home. Linda wondered what she had missed all these years by taking the same route home day after day. Writers from Robert Frost to William Zinsser know that taking alternative routes are sometimes life-saving and life-changing. Frost wrote that taking the road less traveled "made all the dif-

ference." Zinsser wrote that "change is a tonic."

Travel writers such as H. V. Morton knew that great discoveries are often made off the beaten path. Neglected ruins, pristine brooks and mysterious forests can be found only if one ventures off the highways and interstates. As comforting as familiar paths and terrains can be, the unfamiliar, the altogether new, can also bring joy. Someone asked Daniel Boone if he had ever been lost, and the Kentucky frontiersman said, "No, but I was once confused for several days." Boone always tried to search out the unfamiliar, crossing the Mississippi River to die in Missouri, far from his Kentucky home.

I sometimes write about my travels, in Kentucky and beyond. But it is home that I yearn for; it is home that comforts me. I remember vacation trips that my father planned for us when I was a child. I remember the anticipation of those trips, but I also remember the palpable excitement and joy that my father had as we neared home at the end of the journey. Even though he might be exhausted after several days of vacation, his fastidiousness and grave concern at the beginning of the trip were replaced with a levity and even giddiness as we returned home.

Those vacation destinations, though, would never be forgotten: the Alamo, Galveston Beach, the Smokies, the California Redwoods. It always seemed that we came home by another way because we had already been changed by the experience of the destination. We came home renewed; we came home changed.

It was after meeting the Christ child that the wise men went home by another way. They returned to the east forever changed. We, too, have been changed by the Savior, and however we came to the gospel—or however the gospel came to us—through scripture presented to us by a Sunday school teacher, a pastor, an evangelist, a writer, a parent, or a friend, we now will find our way home, not by the route we had been traveling before we met Jesus, but by a new and different way, paved by the Master himself.

Duane Bolin teaches in the Department of History at Murray State University and serves as a Sunday school teacher and deacon at Murray's First Baptist Church. Contact him at duane.bolin@murraystate.edu.

A Letter from the Laity



Duane Bolin

Approaching Christmas as a single

By James Stillwell

Q: As a single person, it seems that the world in general, and the church in particular, lines everything up in pairs, two-by-two, like Noah's Ark. As I approach Christmas, I begin to be filled with some anxiety as to how to approach the holiday.

A: You know the story of the single adult, Joseph, who has been told in a dream to marry a girl who has become "with child" simply by the power

of the Holy Spirit. If there was ever a story of one who lived "by faith" it was Joseph.

Of course, there is Mary. Mary became an "espoused wife, being great with child," and she seemed to keep her wits about her along the way, in spite of her youth and her unique circumstances.

As far as we know, there were single adults among the shepherds that fateful night.

Later, as Mary and Joseph took Jesus to be dedicated, two older single adults, Simeon and Anna, who had "waited for the time of consolation from the Lord," found they had lived to see it. So, how does one celebrate it?

- Like Joseph, be open to God's dreams in your life. As you face the end of the year, spend time in quiet reflection asking God where He might lead you in the coming year. It could turn out to be an incredible adventure. Consider going on a "solo retreat" to inventory the year past and anticipate the year ahead.

- Like Mary, be receptive to what God brings your way. Rather than focusing on what others may expect you to do or be, see every day as an opportunity to find God at work. Look at the meeting of every new individual as a friend whose friendship is a gift. Live in the moment, knowing that God is always here, bringing to pass miraculous purposes.

- Like the shepherds who celebrated Christ's birth that very night, know that in your places of work and fellowship, God may show up so bright that your world may be changed forever. Know God in community. The kingdom of God, one translation says, is among you. Have some fellowship in your life. Reach out to someone else who may be facing the season alone. The shepherds had each other. Who can you contact to accompany you through the events of these days?

- Like Simeon and Anna, inventory the dreams of your life, and how it might be that God is bringing them to pass in the day-to-day service and ministry you are offering to Him. Spend time in service, worship and prayer during this season. No other season has as many opportunities for unique and beautiful worship.

James Stillwell is minister to singles at Immanuel Baptist Church in Lexington.

Biblical wisdom is always right, relevant and unchanging

By Jeremy White

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



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

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

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

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

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

"Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge" (Psalm 62:5-8).

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

Reprinted from WR Nov. 25, 2008. Jeremy White is a certified public accountant with Blythe, White & Associates in Paducah.

What to do about Santa Claus?

By Todd Brady

It's almost time to be jolly, and with the season comes Christian parents who are doing some high-energy theological and cultural gymnastics about "What to do about Santa Claus?"

It seems that a lot of people make a bigger deal out of the whole question than they should.

I have one word: relax! Have fun with Santa Claus, or have fun without Santa Claus. Just make sure you are loving your kids and being honest with them.

Walking with your children through Christmas is your responsibility. What you decide to do about Santa Claus goes right along with what you decide to do about having a Christmas

tree, sending out Christmas cards, going to Christmas parties, buying Christmas presents, and more—it's your choice and you'll want to make decisions which are best for your family.

Each year Amy and I have folks ask us if we "do Santa Claus." Well, the answer is "kind of." Of course, on Christmas morning, we videotape our boys coming down the stairs and rushing to open their presents under the tree from Santa. They know that the presents are really from us. Santa Claus is not real. He's not bad either. He's just "pretend." It sure is fun to pretend.

In every Christmas season, we want our kids to understand the pretend part of Christmas, and we want

them to understand the real part. Santa is pretend; Jesus is real.

Each day in December, we'll read "The Advent Book" by Jack and Kathy Stockman. We'll decorate the tree. We'll bake cookies. We'll wrap presents. We'll make sure our boys know we are giving to others this Christmas. We'll tell the story of Jesus' birth over and over. We'll spend time with friends, family and, of course, with those who are a part of our faith fellowship. We'll make memories that I hope the boys will look back on with warm hearts.

Whatever you do with Santa Clause ... or whatever you do this Christmas season, make sure you do it in the name of the Lord Jesus (Colossians 3:17).

Todd Brady is pastor of First Baptist Church of Paducah.

Bring in the New Year with prayer

Looking for a fresh idea to help your church ring in the New Year?

Pray in the New Year with a "Resolutionary" Prayer Marathon from 6 a.m. to midnight on New Year's Eve. Designate multiple prayer sites around the church building so several groups can pray simultaneously if needed, and ask every group in your church to pray together for one hour.

Create a huge chart listing the 18 hours, and let every adult and youth Sunday school class or small group choose a prayer hour. Then ask every other church group to choose a time:

church committees, ushers, drama team, A/V team, every choir or band or praise team, deacons, staff, daycare workers, mother's day out teachers, women's group, men's ministry, preschool Sunday school team, ball teams, children's Sunday school leaders, library workers, Upward coaches, mission group leaders, etc. Some overlap may occur, but those people can simply choose one or both groups. Doesn't this sound exciting?

Send an email or letter to group leaders, confirming their prayer hour and assigned room. Include a copy of

Fresh Ideas



Diana Davis

the registration and recommitment page they'll receive at the marathon.

Each prayer group begins with a scripture and spends at least the first half hour in prayer seeking God's wisdom and direction for the coming year. Groups spend the closing minutes discussing their goals and commitments for next year. As they leave, they turn in an attendance sheet, with a list of their New Year "resolutions" for effectively serving God and reaching people next year.

The entire church could be invited to return for midnight prayer led by the pastor and a big New Year celebration and snacks.

Diana Davis is the author of Fresh Ideas (B&H Publishing). Her husband is Indiana Baptist Convention's executive director.

Lottie Moon Christmas Offering GOAL: \$175 MILLION

By Don Graham
International Mission Board

Prague, Czech Republic—Never underestimate the difference one person can make.

Mark and Vesta Sauter came to the Czech Republic to start churches among the nation's deaf. But the Indiana- and Texas-born missionaries weren't having much success until God brought them an unlikely volunteer—90-year-old Lillian Beard.

Beard, from Fort Worth, Texas, was a pioneer for deaf work among Southern Baptists and a lifelong mentor to Vesta. The women shared a common bond; as hearing children of deaf parents, both learned to sign as their first language.

Serving through the International Mission Board, the Sauters spent three years telling deaf Czechs about Jesus. They'd made deaf friends, dined in deaf homes, spoken at deaf gatherings, even taught in deaf schools. But despite their efforts, they hadn't seen a single deaf person come to Christ, and the stakes were too high to fail.

Nearly 50,000 deaf live in the Czech Republic. When the Sauters first arrived in 1996, there were no deaf churches and few, if any, deaf Christians. Worse, the country's hearing congregations weren't doing much to change that.

"The church can be one of the most oppressive and disheartening experiences for deaf people," Vesta said.

Unlikely volunteer

The Sauters shared their struggles with Beard, who told them she was no longer content to simply pray for their ministry; she wanted to come to the Czech Republic to help. Beard's friends thought the 90-year-old was crazy.

"I can die there just as easily as I can here," she told them. And if that happened, "They can put me in a box and send me home.... Serving Him is all I want to do."

Though she loved Beard dearly, Vesta wasn't keen on the idea. "I was very apprehensive; she's 90, in a wheelchair and doesn't know Czech sign language. I thought, 'What am I going to do with her?'" Vesta says.

But Beard was determined.

Reluctantly agreeing to the visit, the Sauters used their connections to arrange a luncheon at the Prague deaf club where Beard would be a guest speaker. What they didn't know was how deeply Beard's story would touch Anna Smolkova, a particularly hard-hearted deaf Czech woman.

Smolkova is the matriarch of a large deaf family (more than 60 members) that is well-connected within the country's deaf circles. Vesta knew Smolkova's conversion could catalyze the efforts to plant the Czech Republic's first deaf church, but Smolkova had been very resistant—even hostile—to the Gospel.

"I want to make (it) very clear to you that I don't want anyone in my family to know about Jesus or God," Vesta recalled Smolkova warning her.

But Smolkova had never met Lillian Beard.

The Prague deaf club was packed the day she spoke because people were so intrigued that a 90-year-old American would cross the Atlantic just to talk to them. The crowd demanded to see Beard's passport as proof of her age, passing it around the room for all to see.

Beard shared her life story—a hearing person immersed in a deaf world. Orphaned and then adopted by deaf parents, she became a skilled interpreter for the deaf, helping found the Texas Society of the Deaf, the National Registry



"I didn't believe this woman was 90.... I was amazed at how beautiful she was, how she radiated. Something touched me inside about her," Smolkova said.

"I had a very hard heart—an atheist. I really didn't know or believe anything about God.... (The Gospel) was so foreign, so new, like nothing I'd ever heard about.... Something began knocking at my heart ... and wouldn't release me."

Taken with Beard's testimony, Smolkova peppered her with questions after the luncheon, kneeling at Beard's wheelchair so their eyes met.

"What is it? Why are you so beautiful? Why do you radiate?" Smolkova remembered asking. "And she signed to me, 'It's the love of Jesus.' ... That struck a chord in my heart and a conviction, and I couldn't run from it."

With Vesta's guidance, Smolkova asked Christ into her life that day. The change was dramatic.

Alcoholic to evangelist

"I was a gossip, an alcoholic. I loved to get drunk," Smolkova said. "I can remember the first sip I took after Jesus came (into my life) and it was just horrible.... I started looking back on my life, how I acted and how I talked and how I behaved, and I was so grateful ... to no longer have those things control my life."

Family and friends noticed Smolkova's change as well. She couldn't keep it to herself. Working with the Sauters, she hatched a plan to witness to her entire extended family, simultaneously, by being baptized at her 50th birthday party.

"The most incredible thing happened during my baptism. Here I had an auditorium full of my lost relatives, and when I went into the water and came out, a ray of light flooded through the ceiling and just covered me.... It was miraculous," Smolkova says.

"There's one skylight in the auditorium of this Czech Baptist church that has stained glass in it," remembers Vesta's husband Mark, who baptized Smolkova. "Somehow, at that moment in time, the sun broke through and, just like 'Star Trek,' this cylinder of light came down and surrounded her.... Everybody saw it, and she looked at us ... like 'Does that always happen?'"

Lenka Wienersova was there that day. She'd become friends with Smolkova years earlier and was struck by her

friend's public display of faith.

"I really didn't understand about those who were following Jesus," Wienersova said. "I saw a change in her, yes. I saw within Anna (Smolkova) this joy that she'd never had before and a sense of peace."

Eventually, Wienersova couldn't escape the truth she found in the stories that Vesta and Smolkova shared from the Bible.

"I didn't want to carry those sins anymore. I didn't want

Reaching a nation starts with one 90-year-old volunteer sparks breakthrough among Deaf Czechs

of Interpreters and the Southern Baptist Conference of the Deaf. But Beard's accomplishments weren't what impressed Smolkova.

to carry the shame anymore," she says. "And I turned to Christ. From that point on, life was different. And then I began to understand why their lives had been different—why Anna's life was different."

Smolkova became increasingly enthusiastic as Vesta disciplined her about sharing her faith with other deaf Czechs. They met almost daily so Smolkova could learn new Bible stories to use for evangelism, making Scripture "come alive" through her hands.

"The deaf people that I encounter ... are like me—they have a very, very difficult time reading the Bible. The written word is not their first language," Smolkova explained. "When they see the story on their hands, then in their heart, there comes conviction and in their minds comes understanding."

Smolkova helped lead her three daughters to the Lord, followed by her daughters' husbands, baptizing one of them in her bathtub.

"Anna's filling up the bathtub, and I'm looking at her son-in-law and the bathtub's probably half his size, but she is so excited," Vesta remembers.

"We took the door off of the bathroom so everybody could see.... They get in the bathtub and she baptizes half of him, and then baptizes the other half of him."

And Smolkova didn't stop with her family and friends. She started traveling with Vesta to cities outside Prague, starting churches in a hotel room in Brno and in a deaf home in Valasske Mezirici. She helped start house churches in her daughters' homes and in her own home. Smolkova was so passionate about sharing Jesus with the deaf that she quit her job to work with Vesta full time, cleaning houses on the side to support herself while serving as the Sauters' primary church-planting partner.

Above all, Vesta believes Smolkova's biggest impact has been on her 14 grandchildren, many of whom she's led to Christ. Her desire for reaching children even spurred her to start a Christian summer camp where deaf Czech youth can learn about Jesus.

"So many deaf people are 'blind' ... (but) there's a new openness, an awakening to who He is," Smolkova said. "I know it's nothing I did, but it's what God can do through one person who is willing to say that they'll believe and follow Him."

Then and now

Today, 10 years after Beard's visit, Smolkova continues to share Christ among deaf Czechs and speaks fondly of her American friend who led her to Jesus. Beard remained an active advocate for the deaf and for her Savior until her death in June 2010. She was 101. God has since broadened the scope of the Sauters' work—they now lead the International Mission Board's global efforts to reach the deaf around the world.

"God really showed me (that) one volunteer—one woman, 90 years old—was willing to come across the ocean in a wheelchair. That one woman penetrated a barrier I'd been trying to penetrate for years.... Why that spoke so strongly to Anna and why Lillian's story broke down all of Anna's defenses, I don't know—but I know that one woman reached that one woman who has now reached a nation," Vesta says.

"It was a beautiful, wonderful experience," Beard said of her encounter with Smolkova. "Why did God send me? ... God can always use anyone who is willing to give of their life, and say, 'Lord, here I am.'" (BP)



"The deaf people... have a very, very difficult time reading the Bible... When they see the story on their hands... there comes a conviction."

Anna Smolkova, a deaf church planter in the Czech Republic who came to Christ after meeting Lillian Beard 10 years ago.



God can always use anyone who is willing to give of their life, and say, 'Lord, here I am.'

Lillian Beard, who at age 90 witnessed to the deaf in the Czech Republic.

'God's Plan A' Adoption journey brings double blessings for Rices

Continued from page 1
ful to talk about (Him) and share our faith."

As the youth/college consultant for Kentucky Woman's Missionary Union, LaRaine's career always had been about serving God. While on an Acteens mission trip to Slovenia, she recalled some of the girls grilling her about waiting so long to get married.

"I told them God's got stuff for me to do," LaRaine recalled. "But they decided to make it their goal in life to set me up. On our last night (of the mission trip) they started praying for me."

Meanwhile, Jeff, who works as a project manager for Lexington's division of water, was on the other side of the globe returning from a mission trip in Guatemala. Within hours of the young girls' prayer, Jeff said a friend on his trip unknowingly was trying to set him up with LaRaine. Jeff did not give the comment much thought until he got home and checked his matches on eHarmony. There it was—LaRaine was a match.

"I thought we should at least meet since we were connected somehow," Jeff said.

After that initial introduction, the pair discovered they both had been a part of the eHarmony database for some time. It was only after the girls' prayer that the online dating service put the two together.

The two were married Nov. 17, 2007. The teenage prayer warriors were, of course, asked to be a part of the ceremony.

Not long after they returned

from the honeymoon, Jeff and LaRaine sought out a new mission—one that traded in trips to Slovenia and Guatemala for sippy cups and baby gates.

Their first roadblock came when LaRaine discovered it would be nearly impossible for her to conceive naturally. Under the care of fertility experts, LaRaine endured five rounds of fertility shots only to be heartbroken with multiple miscarriages.

"Infertility was a deep spiritual struggle," LaRaine said. "I thought God would have my back. I did what I was supposed to do. I did all the right things. But I had to realize that God is allowed to say, 'No'. He can receive glory by us still praising Him even when He says, 'No'. It's not easy, but you can always trust Him."

'Faith-strengthening journey'

Jeff said the decision to explore adoption was an easy one for him. Having family members and friends who had gone through the process only made the option seem more natural.

The couple said they deliberately cast their net as wide as possible to find the child God wanted them to love. They pursued as many no- or low-cost adoption agencies, attorneys and referral agencies as they could find. Hopes were nearly met when word came from a Florida attorney that he might have a match. When the child was born, the Rices drove all night—only to discover the parents had changed their minds.

LaRaine wanted to give up, but said it was Jeff who kept her going. Less than a month later, the attorney

called again. This time he had found a 3-month-old boy that was in Florida's foster care program, but the birth parents were trying to give him away through a private adoption. Jeff and LaRaine drove to the state for a second time. LaRaine said she couldn't believe her eyes—the boy's name was Christopher. She described the encounter on Facebook:

"When we were dating, Jeff told (me) he always liked that name for a boy. (I) just assumed that would be the name of (our) son one day and it was on the short list of names. To (me), the fact his name was Christopher was a sign."

The next couple of days were a series of emotional highs and lows. First, Christopher's case workers decided to place the child with another family. But then, the attorney surprised Jeff and LaRaine with another possible match: a baby girl due at the end of the month. This new prospect seemed like it would come to fruition—but so did the others. The couple decided to pursue the latest child, but not let the other go so easily.

"We tried to see if we could push a little bit," said Jeff, and instructed the attorney to file a motion to intervene and fight for Christopher.

On the day the paperwork was to be filed, Jeff and LaRaine got the call that the baby girl was born three weeks early. For a third time, the Rices packed up and drove to Florida. Two days later, their new daughter, Elizabeth, was in their arms.

"When (I) held her for the first time, it was like she knew who we were. It was magical. She made faces, had eye contact, and her eyes seemed to sparkle," LaRaine wrote. "The entire experience was amazing. ... (but) something seemed wrong. ... (I) kept looking at Elizabeth and thought to (myself) that she had an older brother named Christopher. ... (I) felt like (I) was going to return to Kentucky half empty."

The Rices spent the next two days in a Florida hotel room getting to know their precious new daughter. As they were preparing for the next morning's journey home, Jeff received an unexpected call from their attorney. He had a dilemma; Christopher's case workers had a complete change of heart and were making the child available for adoption.

Christopher officially joined his sister as part of the family on Nov. 11—Jeff's birthday.



"For us, it has been a faith-strengthening journey. It's made me stronger," Jeff said. "The way all the circumstances played out, it was clear this was God's plan."

Adoption like salvation

With the whole family back home in Kentucky, the Rices' new life has been a whirlwind of baby showers, diaper changes and well wishers asking them to tell and retell their story.

The babies are eating well, sleeping in spurts like normal infants and seem to be growing over night. As the Rice family settles into their routine, Jeff and LaRaine are having time to digest all that they have gone through.

"We're hoping our story will help people think about adoption and foster care," said Jeff, referring to the number of children who need homes.

LaRaine said she hopes to use the story as a teaching tool for leading someone to Christ.

"Adoption is a lot like salvation," LaRaine said. "It's beautiful and ugly at the same time."

She said that on one side, adoption is painful and heartbreaking when one thinks about the circumstances that lead a woman to give up her child. On the other hand, there is immeasurable joy for the barren couple that receives the gift of a child. LaRaine said this aspect of adoption could be compared to the biblical stories of Good Friday and Easter morning.

For Jeff, he said he clearly sees a parallel between the love God has for us and the love the new father has for his adopted children.

God "treats us the same as His own son," Jeff said.

LaRaine agreed. "We don't think of these babies as our adopted kids. They are our children. I don't see how we could love them more."

PRECIOUS GIFT Baby Christopher enjoys some grandmotherly attention from Pat Beverly, a ministry assistant in the Kentucky Baptist Convention's executive office, during a recent baby shower given for Jeff and LaRaine Rice at the Kentucky Baptist building in Louisville. The couple recently adopted 5-month-old Christopher and 1-month-old Elizabeth. (Photo by Robin Bass)

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NAMB will cut one-third of its staff at year's end

Alpharetta, Ga.—One-third of the North American Mission Board's staff will be leaving at the end of the year as a result of retirement incentives and other downsizing of the Southern Baptist entity.

Of the 99 people who are leaving, 81 are taking an early retirement package announced by new NAMB President Kevin Ezell in October. Employees age 54 and older were eligible for the package.

In addition to incentives offered by NAMB, retiring employees also were able to lock in a higher annuity rate through Guidestone Financial Resources. The Southern Baptist financial services provider announced over the summer that the floor on its annuitized rates would drop from the current 6 percent to somewhere between 3 and 4 percent.

Anticipating a lower number of people in the building due to retirements, NAMB

also trimmed a number of services and support staff positions. These additional reductions brought the total number of departures to 99.

Carlos Ferrer, NAMB's chief financial officer, said the entity is providing support for those in transition.

"The package we are giving to those who are departing is as generous as we could make it," Ferrer said. "In addition, we are providing the services of a Christian job-placement company to assist those who are seeking further employment."

Meanwhile, the Georgia Christian Index reported Dec. 9 that Lester Cooper, pastor of Concord Baptist Church in Cumming, Ga., had resigned from NAMB's board of trustees saying he does not share Ezell's vision for the agency's future.

"I believe that throughout my life, and particularly as I've gotten older, that it's

very important to take your body where your heart is," Cooper told church members Nov. 28. "If you've got your body somewhere where your heart's not, that just not where it ought to be."

Cooper said he agrees with the strategy of focusing on church planting in urban areas with large populations, but doesn't think the way to do it is by losing senior staff members recognized as leading experts in the field.

"I can't imagine how you can see 80 people leave an organization that has 260 people in it and have any idea of how you are going to function or come to the conclusion of who is going to go before you have been there two months," he said. "It's not reasonable, and I cannot get a satisfactory answer from anybody where we are going."

Cooper also said that since the Great Commission Task Force report adopted by

the Southern Baptist Convention calls for a restructuring of NAMB within seven years, he doesn't understand why decisions are being handed down so quickly and without vote by the board of trustees.

Ezell said in a statement Dec. 8 that he admires Cooper and appreciates the service he has given as a member of the board of trustees. Ezell said the timing of the voluntary retirement incentive package was driven primarily by changes being implemented by Guidestone Financial Resources.

"We haven't shared details of a new direction yet because we are still in the important phase of meeting with and listening to our state partners," he added. "We will have a clearer direction to share after NAMB's next board of trustees meeting in February."

Compiled from reporting by Baptist Press and Associated Baptist Press

Changing culture leads to decline in Baptist revivalism, historian says

By Bob Allen

Atlanta—The real culprit behind declining baptisms in the Southern Baptist Convention might be youth soccer, according to Baptist historian Bill Leonard.

Because of nightly requirements for church-going families—including children's sports—week-long and two-week revivals that once were mainstays of Baptist life are becoming a thing of the past, Leonard writes in the summer/fall 2010 issue of the journal Baptist History and Heritage.

Leonard, professor of church history at Wake Forest University Divinity School, said revival movements of the 19th and 20th centuries not only propelled Baptists from a small sectarian community to America's second-largest denomination, but also had an impact on Sunday mornings.

Walking the aisle, surrendering to

preach and rededicating one's life to Christ, Leonard said, all were born in the revivalist movements. That "liturgy of conversion" served generations of Baptists as a mechanism for determining church membership.

As revivalistic techniques have waned in recent decades, Leonard said Baptists, particularly in the South, have struggled to make their evangelistic case and articulate a process of conversion that holds the attention of the larger population.

Leonard cited several factors in the decline of the revival system.

One is the understanding of conversion itself. Leonard said as early as the 1930s, H. Richard Niebuhr criticized a "mechanical conception of conversion" used more often "for enforcing prevailing standards" than producing followers of Christ.

Another factor, Leonard noted, is that

more Baptist congregations have turned to the nurture of persons in faith in ways that produce alternative entry points to the Christian life. As the church and its ministers assumed the role of spiritual mentors, the need for celebrity evangelists diminished.

A third factor, Leonard pointed out, is simply that the culture has changed. "While revivals remain forceful in other cultures and some American religious subcultures, the revival system has increasingly become the exception, rather than the norm, in much evangelical life," he wrote.

Leonard said many Baptists took a long time to realize that revivals were not accomplishing what they once did. The practice of re-baptizing church members, for example, spawned a class of evangelists known for leading large numbers of con-

gregants to doubt the validity of their first profession of faith. Leonard surmised the phenomenon is either "a terrible indictment" of earlier revival methods or "one way of propping up the tradition."

Leonard predicted Baptist congregations will continue to utilize "event evangelism" in ways that mirror traditional revivals. Some congregations still use traditional revival practices without acknowledging their declining impact, he said, but that seems to be a "dwindling constituency."

A larger question, Leonard said, is how Baptists will make their evangelistic case amid the diversity of spiritualities and church models in the larger culture. He said that might require "niche evangelism" where clergy and laity listen to an increasingly secularized and pluralistic culture rather than simply pointing the way. (ABP)



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and students of
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White as snow

Reflections from a snowfall at the Clear Creek campus

This year definitely has gone by fast. It's hard to believe this already is the last article I will write for 2010.

As I write this article, I am looking out my window at the 11 inches of snow that has just fallen on our campus. That's right, I said 11 inches. It's a rare thing when our campus closes for the weather, but this winter storm shut us down for a day.

The white snow is beautiful as it lies on our campus grounds. It still is untouched by the footprints of people and the tire tracks of the cars. All the signs of things dying out and decaying that are evident with the changing of the seasons have been covered with a bright and shiny white blanket of snow.

Our entire campus looks like it is covered by a gigantic, pure white sheet. The entire campus has a look of newness and freshness to it with the covering of the snowfall. The white blanket of snow definitely has put everyone in the Christmas spirit.

The picture of the blanket of white snow also is a great reminder of the reason we celebrate the

Christmas season and what Christ has provided for us through His birth. I am reminded of the sinless Savior, Jesus Christ, who was born of a virgin into the world to save the world from our sins. His birth and ultimate death gives the whole world hope of a new life found only in Christ; the hope of a life where our sins are forgiven and we now can have a personal relationship with Christ.

The prophet Isaiah also reminds us of this picture: "Come now, and let us reason together," says the Lord, "Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool" (Isaiah 1:18).

The picture of this beautiful snowfall has been a great reminder to me of how Christ's birth and death has provided that newness and freshness for our lives that only He can provide through the forgiveness of our sins. I pray this picture will be a focus for you this Christmas season.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from Clear Creek!

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

Clear Creek Chronicle



Donnie Fox

'Are we there yet?'

Even Lottie Moon offering can benefit from legacy gifts

Christmas means different things to different people, but to us Kentucky Baptists it means the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions. It's a special opportunity during a special season of the year to demonstrate in a special way our desire to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with the nations, those beyond where we can go and what we see.

How fortunate we are to have more than 5,000 self-sacrificing international missionaries scattered to the ends of the earth telling the good news of Jesus 24/7. To undergird and facilitate their boldly going, we at home must boldly pray and give.

Did you know contributions through the Lottie Moon offering provide more than half the support for international missions through the IMB? As a result, it is critical that we as individuals continue to enhance our giving through this Great Commission giving channel even as our churches enhance their giving through the Cooperative Program, which is the other major Great Commission giving channel of support for international missions.

The question, "Are we there yet?" is the theme for this year's week of prayer for international missions. The answer to the question is "no," we are not there yet in reaching the world for Christ. However, the IMB has identified the 6,426 people groups that still need to be reached. So, let's get busy and start reaching more and more of them before it's too late.

This year I want to encourage you to consider moving from a transactional to a more comprehensive approach to giving. This will result in you more boldly giving to reach all peoples with the gospel. This would be consistent with the Kentucky Baptist Convention's new More for Christ emphasis.

What I mean by a more comprehensive approach is this: In addition to your annual contribution through the Lottie Moon offering, consider including in your estate plan a provision(s) to perpetuate your contribution beyond your lifetime. Call Laurie Valentine or me for assistance in accomplishing such a life-changing legacy.

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



Barry Allen

How to measure changed lives

It's not easy to place a value on changing a child's future

We Baptists love numbers. Admit it or not, numbers provide the metric by which we measure success. We view churches with higher numbers of baptisms as being more successful than those with fewer baptisms. A higher percentage of undesignated dollars committed to the Cooperative Program marks a supportive Kentucky Baptist church. When missions offerings are up, the "missions-minded" church can take comfort in its faithfulness.

A pastor's success is measured by the size of the church budget and/or the numbers in Sunday school. The greater the numbers, the greater prestige, salary and denominational influence he has. Sadly, we have not fixed a denominational metric for faithfulness, servant leadership or humility for our pastors. What would happen if Baptists quit counting and focused more on simply serving; letting God keep the score?

Sunrise Children's Services keeps numbers, too. Last year, we served 2,039 children, providing 141,402 days of care. We cared for 586 children through our 10 residential centers, 564 children through our 10 regions of foster care, and 889 kids through other community-based programs. We subscribe to the adage, "If you cannot measure it, you cannot manage it." At Sunrise, we strive to be

good stewards of every dollar we receive by carefully monitoring everything we do.

As with pastors, there is a missing measurement for us, too. A faithful, humble, servant of the church's ministry among his people may be impossible to score, but is there for all to see. The core mission of Sunrise Children's Services is greater than the numbers posted in the annual report. The problem is there is no way to adequately measure the effectiveness of our mission.

How can we measure a child's growth from a life of fear to one of security, from constant anxiety to calm and peace? There is no metric to adequately score growth in trust from distrust or the move from feeling unwanted to being included in a family—but we know it when we see it.

To be good stewards, we must measure and manage what we can, whatever our mission. However, that is not, in reality, our mission because selfless love, however fulfilled, has no scale. Our numbers or metrics are simple indicators of our efforts to fulfill our mission. What the love of God does through faithful people for victimized, innocent children is immeasurable.

You can be a part of our immeasurable mission. Just give us a call at (800) 456-1386 or visit us online at www.sunrise.org.

Bill Smithwick is president of Sunrise Children's Services. Contact Sunrise at (502) 538-1000 or www.sunrise.org

Sunrise Children's Services



Bill Smithwick

LifeWay study shows recession is catching up to America's churches

By Bob Allen

Nashville, Tenn.—After two years of only moderate impact on offerings, the recession has caught up with America's churches, according to new figures compiled by LifeWay Research.

One in three Protestant churches reported receiving less money this year than in 2009, the research division of LifeWay Christian Resources found. That makes 2010 the third consecutive year that the number of churches reporting reduced income has grown.

Just one in five, meanwhile, reported 2010 giving above the 2009 figure. That is down from 43 percent who reported larger offerings last year than in 2008 and 47 percent who did better in 2008 than in 2007.

"The reality has been that the economic downturn has not hit churches as hard as it hit other sectors of society," LifeWay Research President Ed Stetzer said in a Dec. 14 webcast discussing the poll. "Churches have actually fared relatively well compared to other sectors of the economy."

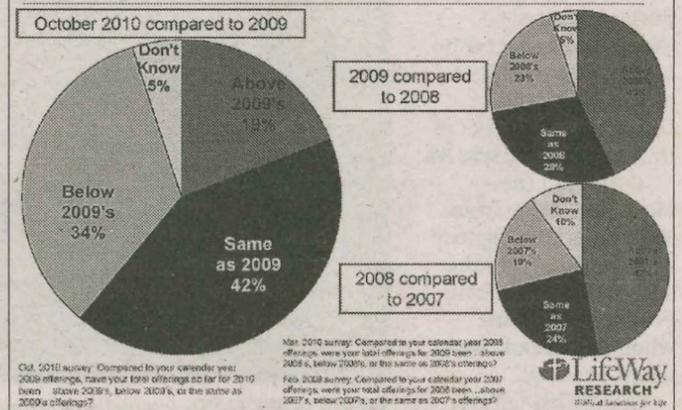
The National Bureau of Economic Research declared in September that the recession that began in December 2007 ended in June 2009, but Stetzer said, "Now we're kind of having church recession."

"The pattern in churches tends to be tied more to unemployment than the stock market," Stetzer explained. "Many churches are supported by people who give proportionately. When a high percentage of our congregations are unemployed, that impacts the giving."

In a survey of 1,000 pastors polled in October, 66 percent said the economy is having a somewhat negative impact on their churches. That's up from 54 percent in March. Thirteen percent described the economy's impact as very negative, up from 8 percent in March. Forty-six percent said their churches are running behind budget, 10 percent more than in November 2009.

Stetzer said he doesn't expect the recession to be over for churches for quite a while, especially if the jobless rate remains high. More than half of the pastors surveyed (58 percent) said more people in their churches have lost jobs than in the past, and 30 percent said more churchgoers have moved away to find work.

2010 is on course to be the third straight increase in the number of churches receiving less total offerings



Seven percent more churches reported freezing staff salaries this year—54 percent in October 2010 compared to 47 percent in 2009. One in five (19 percent) delayed a building project or other large capital expenditure. That compares to 14 percent in November 2009.

Sixteen percent delayed hiring that was planned; 14 percent reduced salaries from last year's levels; and 10 percent laid off one or more employees. More churches also reduced insurance benefits for staff.

Stetzer said the news about the economy is not all bad. Historically church attendance increases during an economic downturn, and a bad economy also creates new opportunities for ministry.

Half of the pastors said there is a greater sense of excitement in their church about opportunities to minister to the needy, and 49 percent said more people are volunteering their time in community service.

In light of the new data, Stetzer urged church leaders to "quantify" the economy's impact in planning their budgets. "Scarcity brings clarity," he said. "This is actually an opportunity to stop doing some things you probably needed to stop doing anyway."

He encouraged church members to approach budget planning with an eye toward what is "mission critical" for the church. He discouraged short-term solutions like cutting back on supporting worldwide missions.

"I'm not seeing this as a time to retreat," he said. "We may have less as a church but do more for the kingdom."

Another positive thing that comes out of economic hard times is that churches become less clergy-driven and more dependent on volunteers. Instead of viewing the pastor as CEO and lay people as customers, Stetzer said clergy and laity must work as "co-laborers" in order to get the job done.

He also reminded church leaders that the recession is an opportunity for Christians to focus on higher things than the economy.

"Our faith is not built upon the monetary system," he said. "Our faith rests upon the rock that is Jesus. These are opportunities God is giving us to give Him glory." (ABP)

NATIONAL NOTES

Guilty pleas in Texas church arsons—Two men accused in a string of East Texas arsons early in 2010 pleaded guilty Dec. 15 to burning five churches. According to the Tyler (Texas) Telegraph, Jason Bourque, 20, pleaded guilty to five counts of arson. Daniel McAllister, 22, pleaded guilty to two counts of arson and two counts of attempted arson. Prosecutors said they will seek life in prison for the duo when they are sentenced Jan. 10. The charges stemmed from fires that destroyed five Smith County churches, four of them Southern Baptist congregations. In all the men are suspected of setting 10 churches on fire in three counties between Jan. 1 and Feb. 8. They were arrested Feb. 21. On Dec. 9 they waived their rights to a jury trial. They entered guilty pleas Dec. 15 to all of the charges against them, with some of the charges reduced or dropped.

Fewer 'Middle Americans' married, attending worship—Marriage among Americans who have graduated high school but not college is on the decline, and their religious attendance has dropped at the same time, a new report shows. "Middle Americans" ages 25 to 60 who were in their first marriages dropped from 73 percent in the 1970s to 45 percent in the 2000s, according to "The State of Our Unions," an annual report from the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia. The group described as "Middle Americans" comprise 58 percent of the U.S. adult population. Its members have a high school diploma and may have some post-secondary education, but have not gained a four-year college degree. Members of this group have seen a similar drop in religious attendance, from 40 percent attending nearly every week or more in the 1970s to 28 percent in the 2000s.

Butler, 84, led Mid-Continent University, Ky. Baptist churches

Lexington—LaVerne Butler, a retired Kentucky Baptist pastor and former president of Mid-Continent University, died Dec. 16 in Lexington. He was 84.

Butler led the Mayfield college from 1988-97. According to a news release from the school, Butler became president at a time when the school "was losing ground."

During his tenure, Butler secured accreditation for Mid-Continent for the first time in its history in 1992 and expanded its curriculum to include liberal arts two years later. In doing so, "doors were opened to educate more students and point them toward Christ," the release stated.

"Because of Dr. Butler's vision, Mid-Continent is today a thriving Christian university teaching the inerrant, infallible word of Christ."

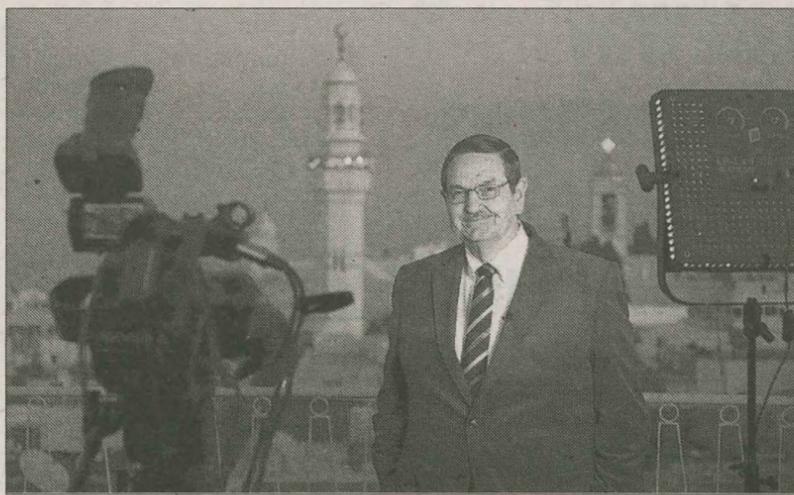
Butler also was known as a leader in the conservative shift of the Kentucky and Southern Baptist conventions.

As pastor of Ninth and O Baptist Church in Louisville, where he served nearly 20 years, Butler was outspoken in his criticism of the perceived liberal bent of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, of which he was a graduate.

Butler led several other churches as pastor in Kentucky, Florida, Illinois and Indiana. He also was a graduate of Georgetown College.

Butler is survived by his wife, Shirley, three children, two step-children, 10 grandchildren, five step-grandchildren, 13 great-grandchildren and one step-great-grandchild. Butler's first wife of 57 years, Lillian, preceded him in death.

Funeral services were held Dec. 20 at Ashland Avenue Baptist Church in Lexington. He was buried at Cave Hill Cemetery in Louisville.



SEEING IS BELIEVING International Mission Board worker Dale Thorne speaks to several Baptist churches live from Bethlehem in a Dec. 5 webcast about the vast spiritual needs in cities like it around the world. The pilot program was a test run for a December 2011 webcast to Southern Baptist churches across the country to promote giving to Southern Baptists' Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions.

Webcast connects churches in U.S. live with Bethlehem

By Ava Thomas
International Mission Board

Bethlehem, West Bank—The Muslim call to prayer echoed through the streets of Bethlehem at the same time it pierced the air at First Baptist Church of Montgomery, Ala.

And as Muslims in Jesus' birthplace were praying, the congregation in Alabama was praying for them.

"It was especially stirring to be able to see the mosque and hear the Islamic call to prayer so close to the place where Jesus Christ was born," said Brian Gay, First Baptist's minister of missions.

The experience was part of a pilot webcast the International Mission Board produced from Bethlehem Dec. 5.

"The fact that the video was live got excitement going in our church," Gay said. "We were encouraged and challenged to give, pray and go—and we'd love to be part of something like this again next year."

During the live event, eight Southern Baptist churches watched a six-minute personalized webcast as part of their Sunday morning schedule. The pilot program was a test run for a December 2011 webcast to Southern Baptist churches across the country to promote giving to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions.

"People only think of Bethlehem in terms of the Christmas story. They don't think of what is going on there today," said C.S. Stanley, IMB's media team leader for the project. "We wanted to broadcast from the city because it is a microcosm of spiritual needs globally. Just like we don't want people to overlook the unfinished task in Jesus' birthplace, we also don't want them to forget the

unfinished global mission task."

The unfinished global mission task is what the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering is all about, combining with the Cooperative Program to support more than 5,000 Southern Baptist missionaries as they share the gospel overseas.

At Oakhurst Baptist Church in Clarksdale, Miss., the Bethlehem broadcast was "a great source of information and encouragement," said Neal Creecy, the church's interim pastor. "It gave us greater understanding of the need for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, as well as reminded us of the unfinished task of the Great Commission."

"As we celebrate Christmas this month, I know that the sights and sounds from Bethlehem will be on our hearts and will serve as a source of motivation to pray, give and go for the glory of Jesus Christ," Creecy noted.

Participating churches saw a live shot of the Bethlehem skyline with the Church of the Nativity, Jesus' believed birthplace, and the large mosque next to it prominently featured. As IMB worker Dale Thorne explained what life is like for Palestinians living in Bethlehem, churches viewed photos and video clips from the area.

A Southern Baptist worker in the area said he was thrilled with the opportunity for churches to become better acquainted with the people in his area, as well as their needs.

"The whole project focused the attention of Baptist churches on Palestinian people and encouraged them to pray," the worker said. "It was also an encouragement to local Palestinian believers that they were not forgotten by their evangelical brothers and sisters outside." (BP)



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

January

14-15 Celebrate the Mission, First Baptist Church, Hopkinsville.

20-22 Shepherding the Shepherd, Hilton Downtown Hotel, Lexington.

February

3-5 Southeast Conclave, Chattanooga, Tenn.

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

MOUNTAINS TO THE MISSISSIPPI

COMPILED BY STAFF

■ **BARBOURVILLE**—James Vandy recently announced his retirement as pastor of East Barbourville Church. He has served the church for 30 years.

■ **GLASGOW**—Bill Whittaker recently resigned as pastor of Glasgow Church.

■ **LOUISVILLE**—Walnut Street Church will host a Forethought Financial Seminar Jan. 15, featuring speak-

ers covering topics such as finding income, estate tax planning and health care. The cost to pre-register is \$15 or \$20 at the door. For more information or to register, call (502) 589-5290.

■ **WILLIAMSBURG**—First Church recently called Matthew Wohlfarth as pastor. He previously was pastor of First Church of Union City, Tenn.

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FOR SALE: Give the "Jesus Bait" to your unsaved fisherman friend or family member. This lure will catch bass and/or lost fisherman. Send \$5 for each lure, postpaid in Kentucky. Fishing for Christ, PO Box 436, Morgantown, KY 42261. (270) 526-3639.

FOR SALE: Standard Yamaha ebony Baby Grand. Excellent condition. Call (270) 843-3942 for more information.

SEEKING: Full-time pastor for Temple Baptist Church, a multi-generational church in central Kentucky. We are prayerfully searching for a man called of God to shepherd God's flock, who has a strong knowledge of God's Word, the desire to love and reach out to the community, and the ability to communicate with all ages. Our church embraces the BF&M and all ministries are biblically-based. Seminary degree preferred; prior leadership experience required. Submit resumé to Pastor Search Committee, 1179 Jimtown Road, Springfield, KY 40069; or by e-mail to burns@kywimax.com.

SEEKING: Director of missions for Liberty Association of Baptists. The vision of LAB is to assist each church in becoming an Acts 1:8 church, and to assist in strengthening and starting churches. Must be a called man of God, visionary, able to promote unity. Mail resumé to Task Randy Shaw, PO Box 1524, Glasgow, KY 42142; or e-mail to rand@cbcglasgow.com with DOM in subject line. Deadline: Jan. 31, 2011.

SEEKING: Pastor for small, 20-year-old church in growing community north of Georgetown, Ky. If interested, send resumé: Ed Boden, 2629 Frankfort Road, Georgetown, KY 40324; e-mail: edboden@qx.net.

SEEKING: Church secretary for Beechland Baptist. Strong computer and organizational skills are essential; 35 hours per week. Salary TBD. Please send resumé to bbcbishop@bellsouth.net.

SEEKING: Pastor of senior adults and shepherd ministries. A detailed job description can be found on our website: www.livinghopewired.com. Click on the "About Us" tab, the "Job Opportunities." Resumés will be accepted through Jan. 14, 2011. Submit resumés to Living Hope Baptist Church, 1805 Westen St., Bowling Green, KY 42104; or to shepardpastorsearch@lhbg.org.

SEEKING: Full-time minister of music. Job description on website at www.horsecavebaptistchurch.com. Please e-mail resumé to hcbc@scrtc.com; or fax: (270) 786-4650. Deadline is Jan. 28, 2011.

SEEKING: Full-time minister to students to serve alongside four full-time ministers at First Baptist Church, Tullahoma, Tenn., a conservative Southern Baptist church. Minister will focus on middle school, high school and college students. Contact Pastor Herb Hester at 108 East Grundy St., Tullahoma, TN 37388; or hester.herb@fbc.tullahoma.org.

SEEKING: Part-time children's and youth minister at Willow Baptist, a growing rural church with desire to grow current children's and youth ministries. Lots of potential to grow. Interested candidates should submit resumé to Pastor Mark Ketron at mketron@hotmail.com; or mail to 2535 Powersville-Willow Road, Brooksville, KY 41004; or call (859) 462-2028.

SEEKING: Qualified applicants for part-time youth minister at Locust Grove Baptist Church in Cadiz, Ky. Locust Grove BC is a loving church serving a living Lord. All applicants: please submit resumé to lgbcpastor@yahoo.com; or mail resumé to 73 Locust Grove Church Road, Cadiz, KY 42211.

SEEKING: Bivocational pastor for Bethlehem Baptist Church in Bethlehem, Ky., 40 miles NE of Louisville. E-mail Search Committee: lindamroberts@bellsouth.net.

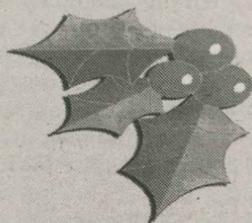
SEEKING: Full-time pastor of students for Zion Baptist Church in Henderson. Candidate must have 5 years leadership experience, be visionary in student ministries, a team player, highly relational with students and families, and passionate about reaching youth and families for Christ. Responsible for development and leadership of all student ministries, middle school through collegiate. Resumés should be sent to Zion Baptist Church, 8158 Hwy. 351, Henderson, KY 42420.

Please Remember ...

The Western Recorder offices will be closed Dec. 24, 27-31.

Look for our first issue of the new year Jan. 11.

Merry Christmas from the Western Recorder staff.





The Christmas Star

By Todd and Michelle Deaton

Outside, Seamore Seahorse was gazing up at the stars. It was nearly Christmas.

"What are you doing?" Sunny Starfish asked.

"I was wondering if we could still see the Christmas star," Seamore replied.

"What Christmas star?" Sunny asked.

"The bright star that the wise men followed to find Jesus," Seamore answered. "There was something special about that star. Maybe it is still there," he added. "Wouldn't it be cool if we could find it?"

"I guess so," Sunny answered.

"Can I borrow your telescope?" he asked. "I'm going to stay up all night to look for the star."

"How do you know where to look for it?" Sunny asked.

"I'm going to the library," Seamore said.

"The library?" Sunny repeated, puzzled.

"The song says that they look it up," Seamore replied.

"What song?" Sunny asked.

"The First Noel," Seamore replied.

"I think it said, 'They look-ed up and saw a star,'" Sunny said.

"That's what I said," Seamore replied.

"No! No!" Sunny corrected. "L-O-O-K-E-D," she spelled. "It's E-D, as in past tense, not I-T," she explained. "It helps the words fit with the music."

"I don't get it," Seamore shrugged.

"Just forget it," Sunny said, throwing her hands in the air.

"I'm trying. You're the one making a big deal out of I-T," he chuckled. "I'm just going to check out some books about stars."

That night, Seamore sat in his room with books scattered on his desk. He was peering through Sunny's telescope, searching for the Christmas star. It was getting late, and he was getting sleepy.

"I've got to stay awake," he thought. "Maybe I will do some jumping jacks."

"Stop jumping. You're shaking the house," his mom called out.

"Maybe a brisk jog will wake me up," Seamore thought.

"Seamore, get back inside this instant. You'll catch a cold," his mom called out.

"Next Seamore tried to drink as many sodas as he could, but his mother scolded, 'You'll get a stomach ache.'"

Seamore then went to his room and turned on his stereo.

"Turn that radio down before you wake up the neighborhood," his mom yelled.

Seamore tried hard to stay awake, but he soon nodded off, leaning against the telescope. The next Sunday, Pastor Porpoise overheard Seamore complaining, "I'll have to wait another whole year to see the Christmas star."

"You're right," Pastor Porpoise smiled. "The Christmas star still shines bright and points people to Jesus. But you don't have to wait until next year."

"I don't?" Seamore asked, scratching his head.

"No, it's possible to see the star shining even during the day," Pastor Porpoise said. "You see, the Christmas star is now inside each of us. It shines whenever we do something kind for others and tell them about God's love. Doing good things points others to Jesus and helps show them the way."



Treasure Chest

What did Seamore Seahorse stay up late to see?

What did Pastor Porpoise tell him about the Christmas star?

Was he talking about a star in the sky?

Read Matthew 2:9-11 together.

For Heaven's Sake

Mike Morgan



Preacher's Kids

David Ayers



Bible Crosswords

By Cheryl Keiser

Across

- 1 "Except a man be born of _____ and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom" (John 3:5)
- 5 Preposition
- 6 "Wisdom giveth _____" (Ecclesiastes 7:12)
- 9 The son of Boaz (Matthew 1:5)
- 10 Two, prefix
- 11 Four, Romans num.
- 12 Edge
- 13 Flesh-eater
- 16 "Let their table be a snare, and a _____" (Romans 11:9)
- 18 Girl's name
- 19 "_____ ... was wicked" (Genesis 38:7)
- 20 _____ Christian Anderson
- 21 "We remember the fish which we did eat freely in Egypt ... and the leeks, and the _____, and the garlick" (Numbers 11:5)
- 23 A celebration
- 25 Perform
- 26 Article
- 28 Osmium, chem. symbol
- 29 A deep breath
- 31 Taxis
- 32 "A serpent _____ him" (Amos 5:19)
- 33 Group of three
- 34 "I will not _____ out his name" (Revelation 3:5)
- 35 Single, prefix
- 36 Recover strength
- 37 "How long will it be _____ they attain to innocency?" (Hosea 8:5)
- 38 Executive order, abbr.
- 40 "I will _____ of mercy and judgment: unto thee, O Lord" (Psalms 101:1)
- 42 Library numbering system, abbr.
- 44 "There shall be no _____ on the vine" (Jeremiah 8:13)
- 48 Compass point
- 49 "As the _____ among thorns, so is my love among the daughters" (Song of Solomon 2:2)

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36						37			
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42	43		44		45	46	47	48	
49					50			51	

- 50 "It is a _____ thing that the king requireth" (Daniel 2:11)
- 51 "For _____ so loved the world" (John 3:16)

- 7 "Behold the _____ and the wood: but where is the lamb?" (Genesis 22:7)

- 8 "Whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have _____ life" (John 3:16)

Down

- 1 Value
- 2 Man who conspired against Moses (Numbers 16:1)
- 3 Son of Esau (Genesis 36:11)
- 4 "Called the altar _____" (Joshua 22:34)
- 5 Pagiel's father (Numbers 1:13)
- 6 "Why seek ye the _____ among the dead?" (Luke 24:5)

- 10 Bismuth, chem. symbol
- 14 Old Testament prophet
- 15 The person we are to love the same as we love ourselves
- 17 Science of the mind
- 22 Southern continent, abbr.
- 24 Cut of meat
- 25 Nimble
- 26 Story
- 27 This, Sp.
- 29 Casual walk

Last week's solution

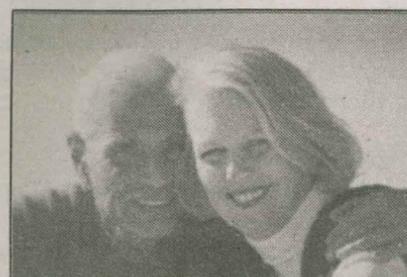
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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11	O	N	L	Y	12	L	I	G	H
13	A	E			14	O	F	15	T
16	E	E	R		17	S	E	18	R
19	V	E			20	D	21	W	E
22	L	I	V	E	23	S	A	R	A
24	N	H			25	E			
26	A				27	S	T	A	R
28	L	I	V	E	29	T			
30					31	B			
32	A	L	I	T	33	B	A	T	H
34					35	E			
36	I	S	R	A	37	E	L	38	C
39					40	H	E	41	U
42					43	C	H	44	B
45					46	L	E	47	C
48					49	A	S	50	S
51					52	A	S	53	T
54					55	W	O	56	U
57					58	N	D	59	L
60					61	E	R	62	

- 30 Hero of David's guard (1 Chronicles 11:40)
- 31 Type of radio
- 32 Purchasing
- 39 "Break also the _____" (Amos 1:5)
- 41 New, prefix
- 43 101, Romans num.
- 45 Ma's mate
- 46 More, suffix
- 47 Compass point

Stewardship Convictions Every Christian Should Consider



God is creator and owner of all things, and we are called to be His stewards.



How we plan our estates likely will be

the single most important act of financial stewardship we shall ever make.



Through estate stewardship, each of us can impact the world for Christ.



Contact us for assistance in discovering how you can impact the world for Christ through your estate plan.

Barry Allen, President
Laurie Valentine, Trust Counsel
Kentucky Baptist Foundation
P O Box 436389
Louisville, Kentucky 40253-6389

502.489.3533
866.489.3533 (Toll-free, KY only)

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