

Shine like stars in the world
Philippians 2:15

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FOR THE RECORD



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Elliff elected

IMB unanimous in vote for new leader



Newly elected International Mission Board President Tom Elliff is welcomed by IMB trustees after a unanimous vote selecting him as the mission board's 11th president. (IMB photo)

By Erich Bridges
International Mission Board

Dallas—By a unanimous vote, Tom Elliff was elected International Mission Board president last week by IMB trustees meeting in Dallas.

Elliff, 67, a longtime pastor, Southern Baptist Convention leader and former missionary, will lead one of the largest evangelical missions agencies in an era of rapid change at home and around the globe.

The greatest mission challenges, he said, are the world's overwhelming spiritual loss and the urgency of mobilizing churches to take the gospel of Christ to all peoples.

"We must realize that we're in a world that is hostile to the message of the gospel, yet there are so many people who are longing to hear," Elliff said. "That's why we must go to the uttermost now."

"Frankly, I think we live in a generation of students who are asking, 'Why do we keep hearing about these unreached people groups? Why don't we just go reach them?' I believe we are seeing, even in our own convention, a groundswell of men and women of all ages who have the heart and are willing to go to the unreached now."

Addressing questions about his own age, Elliff said: "I'm not coming as an 'interim.' I'm coming with a vision—and I will serve as long as God gives me grace and energy."

Elliff succeeds Jerry Rankin as president of the mission board, which serves Southern Baptists and the 5,000 missionaries they

□ See Elliff unanimously elected ... *Page 3*

JAPAN EARTHQUAKE

IMB personnel in east Japan relocated



Mission board following military's lead

Tokyo—Late last week, in response to deteriorating conditions following the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear power crisis, all International Mission Board personnel in east Japan began relocating southwest of Tokyo. They have been given temporary assignments south of Nagoya. The relocation was expected to be completed last weekend.

Meanwhile, the United States military began taking similar action, voluntarily relocating family members and dependents of U.S. personnel in Tokyo, Yokohama and Nagoya—a total of some 600 people. (BP)

□ See IMB personnel in east Japan relocated ... *Page 6*

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Mission leaders: Elliff is right man for tough job

By Erich Bridges
International Mission Board

Dallas—Tom Elliff is the right person for the challenging task ahead, according to two men who know just how tough the job of International Mission Board president can be.

Jerry Rankin served as IMB president for 17 years before his retirement last July. Executive Vice President Clyde Meador, who oversees the day-to-day operations of the global missions agency, took on the added responsibility of interim president last year when Rankin stepped aside.

Both think Elliff, who was elected IMB president last week, has what it takes to mobilize Southern Baptists for international missions in the coming years.

"Tom brings an amazing combination of qualities to the task," Rankin said. "He has a deep personal walk with the Lord that inspires and challenges others. His heart for missions grows out of a personal calling. His understanding of mission strategy comes from years of involvement as a mis-

□ See IMB leaders: Elliff is right man ... *Page 3*

Growing Sunday schools survey

Holding classes away from church leads to growth

By Ken Walker
Kentucky Baptist Convention

Bell City—Bell City Baptist, a country church 12 miles southwest of Murray, is based in the same building it was in 2003. Yet, since then Sunday school enrollment has mushroomed well beyond its capacity.

Bell City's secret: starting off-campus classes that meet in assisted living facilities and nursing homes. Pastor Bill Dodson said he hopes one day even to send a teacher into the county jail.

"To me, Sunday school is wherever you're teaching God's word to people," said Dodson, Bell City Baptist's pastor since 1992. "I grew up in Pigeon Forge (Tenn.) and we had Sunday school on Saturday night. All they had Sunday morning was preaching."

Formerly pastor of First Baptist Church of Benton, Dodson's first 12 years at Bell City brought only modest growth.

However, after reaching 38 people in 2003, over the next five years it grew to 330. That gave it the highest percentage growth in a recent survey conducted by Darryl Wilson, director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention's Sunday school department.

With a total enrollment of 600, attendance has

since grown to around 360. Even though located at seniors' facilities, 40 percent of those attending off-campus classes are younger than 50.

Dodson leads three of them during the week. Robert Herring, associate pastor, leads the other three. To show their importance, less than one-third of overall attendees are at the main building on Sundays.

Although the two pastors take the lead, Dodson said everyone has a role in Sunday school growth, whether it is through visitation, following up on prospects or caring for existing members.

"There's never a person in our church who is sick or in need who isn't visited by somebody from Sunday school," said the graduate of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. "If I'm sick and can't make it to a class, (another member) does it for me."

Sunday school also has propelled church growth. When Dodson retired from First Baptist, Benton and went to Bell City as a guest speaker, only 10 other people heard his first sermon.

Today worship services average between 60 and 70 although only one of the members from 1992 is still living. All but three of the new members

□ See KBC churches discover keys ... *Page 2*

Ky. Baptists' 'spring training' extends into April

By Dannah Prather
Kentucky Baptist Convention

Louisville—"Spring training" continues for Kentucky Baptists in April as the Kentucky Baptist Convention provides a variety of workshops and other equipping opportunities, including a new church growth event that focuses on Sunday school.

Literacy and short-term international missions, youth ministry, mentoring, and the debut of the Sunday School Growth Academy also are among the KBC-sponsored events scheduled.

All of the upcoming training opportunities are made possible by Kentucky Baptists' gifts through the Cooperative Program. Some workshops are free; others require a registration fee.

Billy Compton, KBC's executive associate for Cooperative Program and resources, said the impact of such equipping events extends to eternity.

"I have observed how one training event can lead to connecting entire families to Christ," he said. "One person I interviewed had been reached for Christ (and) then led all four of her teenage children to faith in Christ and involvement in their local church.

"It all began with one training experience made possible through Cooperative Program gifts," Compton said.

Workshops for overseas missions

In many foreign cultures, learning English is a significant life goal. Christians have the opportunity to share the gospel while teaching English overseas through short-term missions. Teaching English as a Foreign Language is an eight-hour workshop to prepare short-term teachers of English.

The class, which will be held April 2 at the Kentucky Baptist Building in Louisville, also will be helpful to those already teaching English in an established ministry who want to sharpen their skills.

Participants will learn how to plan and prepare an EFL lesson, introduce new vocabulary, teach pronunciation and involve students in communication activities. Upon completing the class, students will receive EFL certification by the North American Mission Board.

The course fee of \$10 per person includes materials and registration. Training begins at 9 a.m. Online registration is underway via the KBC website, www.KyBaptist.org/EFL.

According to Scott Pittman, director of the KBC's partnership missions department, there is a "right way" to organize and lead an international mission trip. At Team Leader Training, participants will learn from those with years of experience serving

Christ and working with international missionaries via short-term missions.

"Every missionary has stories of volunteer mission teams that did more harm than good to their ministries," Pittman said. "Often volunteers return home disappointed and frustrated by their overseas experience because of poorly planned trips or inadequate team preparation."

This free equipping event will be held April 8-9 at the Kentucky Baptist Building in Louisville. Kentucky Baptists who complete the class will qualify for a \$500 scholarship to the in-country expenses of a future KBC mission trip they may lead. The convention currently is organizing trips to Puerto Rico and Africa.

There is no fee but advanced registration is required. Visit www.KyBaptist.org/TLT to sign up. Training begins at 6:30 p.m. on April 8.

Youth ministry gatherings

Iron Sharpening Iron, an annual networking opportunity for youth ministry leaders, begins April 12. For one month, KBC youth ministry department director Joe Ball will facilitate discussions in eight communities across Kentucky. The \$5 per person fee includes lunch.

Online registration is underway at www.KyBaptist.org/Iron. This year's schedule is:

April 12, Hot Rods Stadium, Bowling Green.

April 18, Lewis Lane Baptist Church, Owensboro.

April 21, Kentucky Horse Park, Lexington.

April 25, Jenny Wiley State Park Lodge, Berea.

April 28, Bernheim Forest Garden Pavilion, Clermont.

May 3, Grove Marina on Laurel Lake, London.

May 5, Kentucky Dam Village, Gilbertsville.

May 12, Great American Ballpark, Cincinnati.

"No one understands youth ministry like another youth minister," Ball said. "My hope and prayer is that these gatherings can become a source of encouragement, sharing ideas—because we all know that as youth leaders we are always looking for ways to borrow what someone else is doing—and building relationships between youth ministers serving in the same areas of the state."

The tour concludes May 16 at Whitaker Bank Ballpark in Lexington. For \$10 a person, plus parking, ministry leaders can watch the Lexington Legends take on the

Asheville Tourists in the comfort of a suite.

Online registration for the May 16 Youth Ministers' Day at the ball park is underway at www.KyBaptist.org/YouthMinistersDay.

Leadership and Sunday school

Kentucky Baptists who serve professionally—or as volunteers—as leaders, coaches, managers, mentors or supervisors are encouraged to attend the Developing and Managing People workshop April 26 at the Kentucky Baptist Building.

"Supervision can be challenging but this training will help decrease confusion and multiply effectiveness in any ministry setting," said Eric Allen, director of the KBC's mission service and ministries department.

The instructor is Virgil Grant of NAMB's Next Level Leadership Network. The \$15 per person fee includes materials and lunch. Training begins at 9 a.m. Registration is underway at www.KyBaptist.org/DevelopingPeople.

The Sunday School Growth Academy, April 29-30, is an intensive two-day workshop designed specifically for pastor-and-Sunday-school-director teams from each church.

According to Darryl Wilson, director of the KBC's Sunday school department, pastors, ministers of education and Sunday school directors are ideal candidates for the academy because of the event's primary goal: To provide participants the opportunity to develop a plan for growing their churches using the ministry of Sunday school.

With that goal in mind, Wilson said he wanted the academy to be Kentucky focused and do more than provide training and encouragement. Time will be set aside during general sessions for church teams to discuss issues, set goals, make plans and schedule actions.

"I think the discussion will build the team, and their excitement will grow about possibilities as they work together," Wilson said. "The result could be that more growth actions will be implemented when the teams return home."

The Sunday School Growth Academy convenes at 1 p.m. at Paroquet Springs Conference Center in Shepherdsville. Fees are \$100 for the first person from a church and \$50 for each additional person from the same church.

Visit www.KyBaptist.org/SSGA to register or for lodging information and other details. For additional questions, contact the department by e-mail at SundaySchool@KyBaptist.org or call (502) 489-3572 or toll free in Kentucky at (866) 489-3572.

Kentucky student recognized as Acteens' Top Teen

Birmingham, Ala.—National Woman's Missionary has selected Kayla Tomlin of Living Faith Baptist Church in Hartford as one of its Top Teens for 2011. She was chosen based on her dedication to Christ and missions, as well as her strong leadership and service in her church, school and local community.

Acteens is a missions organization that teaches girls in grades 7-12 about the need for sharing the gospel around the world and provides young women with opportunities to serve and grow in their walks with Christ. Each year, national WMU selects six to eight Acteens to serve on the National Acteens Panel, and also recognizes outstanding Acteens across the country as Top Teens.

Cathy Chinn has been Tomlin's Acteens leader at Living Faith Baptist Church since Tomlin was in the sixth grade. Over the



years, she said she has witnessed Tomlin's growth and involvement in Acteens.

"She is very faithful in Acteens, and I am very pleased in how I have seen her grow and mature both personally and in her faith," Chinn said. "Kayla is a young lady who is sold out to God, and she is a very positive influence on other young people."

Kenny Rager, pastor of Living Faith Baptist Church, said he sees firsthand the results of Tomlin's commitment and passion for Acteens.

"She is a growing Christian," Rager said, "and her participation in such organizations only helps her grow more."

Through Acteens, Tomlin has served on the Kentucky Acteens Panel, as well as on numerous mission trips.

In addition to Acteens, Tomlin ministers to others by helping teach preschoolers in Mission Friends and serving as the prayer captain for the Upward football ministry. She also seeks to share Christ's love at school where she is involved in several student organizations.

"My favorite thing about missions work is that you don't have to go across the country, or somewhere dangerous," Tomlin said. "You can minister anywhere and lead someone to Jesus."

KBC churches discover keys to growing Sunday school

Continued from page 1

joined because they first participated in Sunday school.

Dodson is a longtime advocate of this educational emphasis. While some consider it passé in times of busy lifestyles and Internet-driven outreach, he insisted Sunday school is the only way to build a strong congregation.

"We've just taken what we've had and worked with it," Dodson said. "All my Sunday school training says the way you grow is to build new units."

"I'm a great believer that Sunday school is where the people are," he continued. "If they can't come to you, take it to them. Some of these people have joined our church."

Paul Sisk of Lexington's Anchor Baptist Church is another proponent of Sunday school, which strengthened the congregation's outreach after the 11-year-old church moved to its current site in 2004.

Located on the south side of Lexington, less than a mile from the busy Fayette Mall, Anchor's average attendance of 85 in 2003 swelled to 224 over the next five years and is more than 250 today.

Sisk identified two keys to the growth of Sunday school, starting with its new facilities. After meeting in a school, having a permanent home and more visibility helped establish the church's identity in its neighborhood, he said.

The other illustrates one of the underlying values of Sunday school.

"The second is people," the pastor said. "We look to build relationships and the best relationships are formed around the word of God. The primary component is connecting people. We have to look for ways to engage them."

That meant getting more involved in its community. Anchor Baptist offered its building to election officials as a voting precinct and today hosts four. It also welcomed scout troops and blood drives and joined the neighborhood association.

Among its outreach tools are mailings, door hanger distributions and its website, which Sisk said is common today for attracting visitors.

"People today look at the Internet to see who you are, where you are and what you believe," the pastor said. "Then they come and kick the tires, shop around. The key to growing Sunday school is to connect with people when they come."

Besides connecting in classes, the church follows up with visitation each Monday night. Though a church-wide project, its underpinnings include outreach leaders from Sunday school.

Like Bell City, Anchor does not restrict its Bible studies to Sunday mornings. A college-age class meets on Sunday nights and a session for 20-somethings meets on Thursday evenings.

"People will come to worship service first and then we need to get them into Bible study," Sisk said of weekly visitors. "If we can do that, we have a better chance of developing relationships and holding on to them."

New IMB leader issues unreached people group challenge

By Erich Bridges
International Mission Board

Dallas—Minutes after his unanimous election as International Mission Board president, Tom Elliff vowed to challenge Southern Baptists to engage all of the estimated 3,800 people groups worldwide that still have not been touched by the gospel.

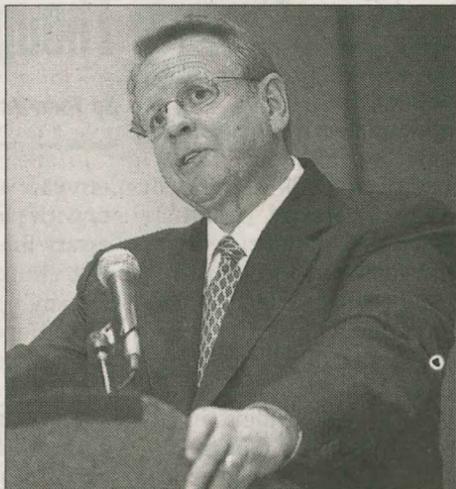
"I intend to introduce at the 2011 annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention a very simple plan by which each one of these 3,800 unengaged people groups can be embraced by a Southern Baptist congregation," Elliff told trustees, meeting last week in Dallas.

"I believe we can accomplish this in one year," he said. "Should Jesus grant us the days, by the 2012 Southern Baptist Convention meeting, we would be able to say that to our knowledge, every people group on this globe has some church committed to take specific steps to strategize, to pray over, to learn about and discover some way that the gospel witness can be shared with those people."

For Southern Baptist churches that make such a commitment, Elliff said, the IMB "has developed all the pieces necessary" to help them fulfill it. IMB missionaries and staff are "both able and committed to doing all that's necessary to mobilize our Southern Baptist churches in a fashion that we've never thought possible."

Southern Baptist missionaries are "your boots on the ground," Elliff reminded IMB

trustees and the churches they represent. But fulfilling the Great Commission is "going to require local churches ... becoming burdened for the unengaged and the unreached of this world, signing on, creating vital partnerships. This is not a new way of doing missions. This is a biblical way of doing missions—and your missionaries are ea-



ENGAGEMENT URGED Missionaries are "your boots on the ground," new IMB President Tom Elliff, following his unanimous election March 16, told trustees and the churches they represent. But fulfilling the Great Commission is "going to require local churches ... becoming burdened for the unengaged and the unreached of this world, signing on, creating vital partnerships." (IMB photo)

ger for you to step up to the plate."

SBC President Bryant Wright, who addressed the trustee meeting, strongly endorsed Elliff's plan for connecting churches to unengaged people groups. He promised to work closely with Elliff to present it at the SBC meeting in Phoenix June 12-15.

"What Tom is talking about is something that the Lord has already put on my heart, and I love it when the Holy Spirit works in two different places at once," Wright said.

Times 'demand our prayer'

In his post-election comments to trustees, Elliff also emphasized the overwhelming need for prayer in the days ahead.

"I think you and I agree that Southern Baptists ought to constitute ... a veritable furnace of intercessory prayer," he said. "As we look at the graphic images of the tragedy in Japan and realize they could be duplicated other places, (we must realize) there are moral earthquakes and spiritual earthquakes. There are earthquakes and tsunamis that are washing people away financially, politically and physically, and they demand our prayer."

Southern Baptists are "determined to minister to people all over the world, not just in Japan, who are hurting. We are determined that we're going to share with them the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ as well."

Elliff admitted he is on a "fast learning curve" as IMB president. But in every decision he makes regarding IMB work and potential new initiatives, he promised to ask three questions: Is it biblical? Is it balanced, taking into account the three Great Commission commands of evangelism, discipleship and church planting? And is it bold?

"If there was ever a day to require boldness, it is this day," he said. Southern Baptist leaders "can't simply be content to say you're for the church ... and the rotary and good government and low taxes and oh, by the way, you're for missions. It is something that is going to have to consume us."

"Now, should the churches of the South-

ern Baptist Convention rise to this challenge and should IMB selflessly and tirelessly join hands with them while pointing the way, ... God just might be inclined to bring spiritual awakening to our nation—the spiritual awakening that we so desperately need."

Following Elliff's remarks, members of the IMB's presidential search committee and others surrounded the new IMB president and his wife as retired IMB president Jerry Rankin led trustees in prayer for Elliff's ministry in the days to come. (BP)

SBC president Wright to be renominated

Birmingham, Ala.—Georgia pastor Bryant Wright will be nominated for a second term as president of the Southern Baptist Convention, Alabama pastor David Platt announced March 11.

Wright, senior pastor of Johnson Ferry Baptist Church in Marietta, Ga., will be nominated by Platt, pastor of The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, Ala.

Platt praised Wright for providing "kingdom-minded, Christ-exalting servant leadership" for the SBC over the past year.

"I have known Bryant for many years and have great respect for him both personally and pastorally," Platt said in a statement. "Bryant possesses a deep love for the local church he leads and for the convention of churches of which he is a part."

Wright has led Johnson Ferry Baptist since 1981. Wright and his wife, Anne, have three children and three grandchildren.

The SBC annual meeting will be held June 14-15 in Phoenix. (BP)

Elliff unanimously elected to lead IMB

Continued from page 1

send worldwide. Rankin retired last July after 17 years as IMB president. Executive Vice President Clyde Meador has served as interim president during the search for a new leader.

"This is the result of many months of missionaries praying, Southern Baptists praying and our trustees praying," said IMB Trustee Chairman Jimmy Pritchard, who led the presidential search committee. "God has answered our prayer."

Elliff served with his wife, Jeannie, as a missionary to Zimbabwe in the early 1980s. They resigned in 1983 after their daughter, Beth, was seriously injured in a car accident there.

He was twice elected president of the SBC, in 1996 and 1997. He has led several key churches in the denomination, including First Southern Baptist Church of Del City, Okla., where he was pastor from 1985 to 2005.

Elliff then served as IMB senior vice president for spiritual nurture and church relations from 2005 to 2009. In that role, he taught and counseled missionaries and helped mobilize churches for missions involvement. Since then he has led Living in The Word Publications, a writing and speaking ministry he founded in 2005. He is the author of numerous books about prayer, spiritual awakening and family life.

IMB leaders: Elliff is right man for job

Continued from page 1

sionary, pastor and IMB senior executive team member. He has great communication skills, genuine passion to reach a lost world, the favor and respect of missionaries and IMB staff, and he is well connected with the churches and Southern Baptist Convention leadership."

Elliff will need all of those strengths and more to draw on for the task to come, Rankin predicted.

"The next president faces the challenge of leading IMB in a new paradigm of limited financial resources, declining numbers of missionary personnel and ... a convention that is becoming more and more fragmented and diverse," Rankin said. "Prayer will be needed for his greatest challenge: building support and credibility for the vision among Southern Baptist churches and leadership."

"It is uncertain where the SBC is going in this era of change," Rankin added. "Someone of Tom's reputation and stature is clearly needed at this critical time."

Elliff is passionate about evangelism and missions, Rankin noted. But he is "able to put issues into a big-picture perspective. He never allows disagreements and differences of opinion to disrupt a personal relationship. He is an optimist who infects those around him with joy for life and deeper faith in God."

Elliff contributed to IMB "revisioning"

that resulted in its current organization and strategy, Rankin said. So he understands the philosophy behind it, but also has the flexibility to "move IMB to a new dimension of effectiveness around the world."

During the long search for a new IMB leader, much speculation and discussion "focused on whether or not the next president should be an insider or outsider," Rankin said. "More important than that is that it should be God's man. The fact that everyone was surprised (by Elliff's selection) confirms to me that God brought about this recommendation."

Meador, who will provide assistance to Elliff as he settles into his new role, thinks the new president will keep the missions vision "clearly before our personnel and Southern Baptists."

Elliff has a "close walk with the Lord, knows IMB, is a great communicator—both speaking and listening—and is realistically optimistic in every situation," Meador observed. "He can always be trusted, and he can be counted on to consult. I'll be praying for him for wisdom in setting priorities and in making the big decisions and for energy in the face of great demands. I will walk beside him in every matter where he needs my assistance, and I expect we will be working very closely together."

"I am thankful that the Lord has brought Tom to this responsibility at this time."

Thanks, Kentucky WMU!

There are many reasons to express thanks to Kentucky Woman's Missionary Union. The Kentucky WMU board and Executive Director Joy Bolton have provided significant leadership in prayer for missions, promotion of offerings for missions, mobilization for mission projects, missions education, and cooperation in missions and evangelism.

And now, at the request of the North American Mission Board, National WMU is assuming responsibility for missions education for boys and teens. The Kentucky Missions Growth Team and Kentucky WMU were already in conversation about this change when the national announcement was made.

I am grateful for the organization's willingness to assume this major responsibility without any funding from NAMB. This is another example of the servant spirit of WMU in a very challenging denominational environment.

Kentucky WMU is willing to take on this added responsibility, even though its funding through the Cooperative Program will be reduced by 5 percent in the next budget year based on the action of messengers to the KBC annual meeting in November. Kentucky WMU accepted that reduction in order to send more resources to world and national mission causes in the spirit of the Great Commission.

Kentucky WMU also continues to provide prayer support for missionaries and evangelism and missions in Kentucky, across North America and around the world and especially for the mission offerings. Kentucky WMU members have been enthusiastic supporters of prayer emphases in Kentucky, including prayer walking in support of Find It Here.

Kentucky WMU also has provided significant financial support for Find It Here 2010 and 2011 through the Eliza Broadus Offering for State Missions. The media emphasis for Find It Here 2011 and the John and Romans distribution to prisons, nursing homes and language groups would not be possible without WMU's financial support. The same was true for church planting during Crossover Louisville.

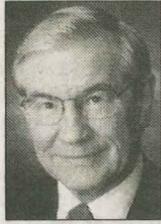
Mobilization for missions continues to be a significant emphasis for Kentucky WMU. The partnership between Kentucky WMU and the Baptist women of Korea was a significant three-year partnership. Kentucky WMU has been among the first responders to organize relief efforts during crises locally, nationally and around the world.

Kentucky WMU also has been a cooperative partner with KBC staff in coordinating support for state missions, sharing missions and evangelism information, promoting state missions and coordinating strategic planning and training.

During the upcoming WMU annual meeting at First Baptist Church of Bowling Green, March 25-26, Friday afternoon will be spent doing hands-on missions through local churches and ministries. Please pray for the WMU annual meeting and get involved in missions by praying, giving and going for the glory of God.

Bill Mackey is executive director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

Partners in the Mission



By Bill Mackey

IMB trustees, KBC leaders optimistic about IMB future

In electing Tom Elliff as the next president of the International Mission Board, have the trustees reached a good decision? I believe so.

Elliff is a pastor with a missionary's heart—or is it the other way around? He answered God's call to missions service, but an unfortunate circumstance brought his family home. He since has served as a pastor, including a long tenure in Del City, Okla. He also has served as convention president and, more recently, as the IMB's vice president for spiritual nurture and church relations. He certainly seems to have been uniquely prepared.



Beyond these credentials, retiring IMB President Jerry Rankin, SBC President Bryant Wright and others have highlighted some admirable attributes. "He has great communications skills, genuine passion to reach a lost world, the favor and respect of missionaries and IMB staff, and he is well-connected with churches and Southern Baptist Convention leadership," Rankin observed. And, Wright called him "a godly man and a prayer warrior." These qualities were evident in his humble, down-to-earth demeanor during a press conference after his election and in a very personal appeal for prayer.

Yet, what was most striking was Elliff's burden for spiritual awakening and the vision that God has "painted on the walls of his heart." At the SBC meeting in Phoenix, he anticipates presenting a simple plan to lead churches to embrace all 3,800 unengaged people groups with the gospel. He quickly outlined some guiding principles that frame his view of missions: Is it biblical, pursuing the Great Commission? Is it balanced, including evangelism, discipleship and church planting? And, is it bold, demonstrating a sacrificial, selfless lifestyle? "The urgency of the hour requires a fresh kind of boldness on our part," Elliff urged. He recognized, however, that cooperation is essential: "The simple truth behind the Cooperative Program is that we can do things together better than we can alone."

These winsome attributes have not been lost on Kentucky Baptist missions leaders:

Paul Chitwood, Mount Washington pastor and the immediate-past IMB trustee chairman who appointed a diverse presidential search committee, declared Elliff's election to be a great day for Southern Baptists: "The unanimous recommendation of the search committee and the unanimous vote of the entire Board of Trustees to hire Tom Elliff confirm my belief that God, indeed, has spoken. God has used Tom in a tremendous way in every role he has served, and I am certain the same will be true in what will prove to be his most challenging role."

Hershael York, Frankfort pastor and IMB trustee, observed: "Tom Elliff brings not only an unparalleled history of integrity and service in the SBC, but also a mis-

sionary's passion with a pastor's heart and the zeal of a man who believes that Jesus is returning soon. Having earned the confidence of the board, the staff and the missionaries, he brings us leadership that God will use to propel Southern Baptists around the globe in a balanced mission of engaging the unreached, planting churches, and providing theological education that keeps those churches faithful to the Word of God."

Charlie Davis, Louisville pastor and an IMB trustee, believes Elliff is a great fit: "From his many years of pastoral experience, he certainly has a solid grasp of who we are as Southern Baptists. I believe Elliff will have definite credibility with pastors and will understand what will be necessary for generating greater funding from our state-side churches. His heart for reaching the nations has already been demonstrated by his time served on the field. Hopefully, all of our missionaries will welcome his leadership as coming from someone who has walked in their shoes."

Norman Coe, another IMB trustee from Louisville, agreed: "He will be a bold leader of our missionaries as they face tremendous challenges," and will excel in relating to the IMB's staff, seminary leaders, other SBC agencies and pastors. "He is a family man, a theologian, an author, but most of all he is a man of prayer."

Larry Baker, team leader for the KBC missions growth team, recalled that Elliff recently led four sessions at the annual leadership event for director of missions: "His messages focused on personal spiritual development in the life of the believer. ... It was apparent to all present that he didn't come to our meeting just to preach to us, but as a fellow traveler. He became part of our group, rubbing shoulders with the DOMs, laughing and crying with the men. He demonstrated tremendous spiritual discernment in connecting with the body of DOMs on a very personal level."

Joy Bolton, executive director of Kentucky Woman's Missionary Union, who attended that DOM event, also remembered being personally challenged by his messages and impressed with how down to earth he seemed: "Elliff told stories about going along with his grandfather, an associational missionary, and I was impressed with his heart for associational missions. For me, that is a plus because churches and associations are the grassroots of the SBC. His experience in all facets of SBC life will help him relate well to everyone from people in the pew to other entity heads. I believe his demeanor and passion will be a positive influence on the work of the IMB."

Our International Mission Board trustees and KBC missions leaders are enthusiastic about the days ahead, and we should commit ourselves to be partners in prayer for Elliff and the IMB missionaries during this time of transition and great hope.

After Thought

By Todd Deaton

Pray for Japan

I greatly appreciated the front page article, "So. Baptist assessment team at work in Japan." As a bivocational pastor, I have traveled to Japan over 50 times during the past 13 years.

It was very encouraging to read that our Southern Baptist Convention is working in conjunction with Tokyo Baptist Church to "provide our first point of contact and partnership for our initial assessment." Located within the foreign embassy area, the Tokyo Baptist Church in Shibuya serves at least 42 people groups. Worshiping with them is like a precursor to heaven, with people of so many nationalities.

In Dec. 2009, I stood in a long line in TBC's parking lot waiting for over 20 minutes to be ushered into one of five Christmas programs that week-

end. It is more common than not to witness a baptism during their services. Their mission team has visited Kentucky. Tokyo Baptist Church also recently started a church in Misato, just north of Tokyo.

Please continue to urge Kentucky Baptists to pray diligently for the ministry team at Tokyo Baptist Church as they minister through this unimaginable triple tragedy (earthquake, tsunami, and failed

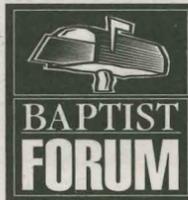
nuclear power plants). Pray for Pastor Dennis Folds and his wife, Judi, for Associate Pastor Takeshi Yozawa and his wife, Miki, for Evangelism Pastor Joel Cuellar and his wife, Cynthia, for Worship Pastor Ted Oman and his wife, Judy. I have watched these couples work tirelessly for the furtherance of the gospel. Their enthusiasm and vigor for the Lord are truly inspirational.

Pray for the membership of Tokyo

Baptist Church. They, indeed, have a heart for God. Pray for the churches of the Japan Baptist Convention. They have had an enormous task witnessing daily to a population vastly non-Christian. They now face an enormous task in ministering during this recovery. Pray also for the many Japanese families in Kentucky who are suffering for friends, families and acquaintances at home.

*Jerry Smith, pastor
Salem Baptist Church
Spout Springs*

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.



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

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Becoming real worth the wear and tear and hurt

By Duane Bolin

My favorite account of one of Jesus' encounters with Peter is found in John 1:42. Andrew brought his brother to meet the Lamb of God. "We have found the Messiah," Andrew told Simon. The Lord looked at Andrew's brother, and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas," which when translated is Peter (the Rock).

Jesus saw the person who Peter would become, the real Peter. He also sees who we can become, if we will follow His call. If we will follow Him, He will help us become our real selves.

It is a constant struggle for me to shrug off the mask with which I attempt to cover my inadequacies, to reveal my true self to students, colleagues, my fellow church members, and even members of my family. Why should this be such a struggle? Why is it a struggle to be real?

Margery Williams centers on the process of becoming real in "The Velveteen Rabbit," one of my family's favorite children's stories. As is true of the very best children's stories (C. S. Lewis' "The Chronicles of Narnia," Kenneth Graham's "The Wind in the Willows" and E. B. White's "Charlotte's Web" come immediately to mind), the mother or father who faithfully reads the stories to a daughter or son is rewarded as richly as the child.

In "The Velveteen Rabbit," a conversation between the Skin Horse and the Rabbit is really about the moral and theological problem of becoming the person that we are meant to be in the company of those that we love the most:

"The Skin Horse had lived longer in the nursery than any of the others. He was so old that his brown coat was bald in patches and showed the seams underneath, and

most of the hairs in his tail had been pulled out to string bead necklaces. He was wise, for he had seen a long succession of mechanical toys arrive to boast and swagger, and by-and-by break their mainstrings and pass away, and he knew that they were only toys, and would never turn into anything else. For nursery magic is very strange and wonderful, and only those playthings that are old and wise and experienced like the Skin Horse understand all about it.

A Letter from the Laity



Duane Bolin

"What is REAL?" asked the Rabbit one day, when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender, before Nana came to tidy the room. "Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?"

"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real."

"Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit. "Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are Real you don't mind being hurt."

"Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," he asked, "or bit by bit?"

"It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."

"(And) once you are Real you can't become unreal again. It lasts for always."

Surely, becoming real is worth the surrender, the wear and tear and hurt of the effort. What a liberating concept—to drop the protective mask and live and behave genuinely regardless of the consequences, to live as the Lord meant us to live, to become what the Lord calls us to become. Becoming real. Jesus sees us and He says, "You are ____, but you will be ____!"

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

How can I help my child find the knowledge of God?

By David Garrard

I found this quote in the Oct. 1, 1997 issue of Martin Marty's Context newsletter: "Whatever you do repeatedly, over and over again, has the power to shape you." It reminded me of some advice I received years ago from a pastor friend. He told me, "Read your Bible every day. Read all of it—not just the New Testament. Especially read the Proverbs. If you will do this, you will find a wisdom settling over you that will make you unafraid to be a dangerous Christian."



The second chapter of Proverbs encourages us to "accept my words," "store up my commands within you," "turn your ear to wisdom," "apply your heart to understanding." It also urges, "Call out for insight; cry aloud for understanding; look for it; search for it." These admonitions are coupled with a promise: "Then you will find the knowledge of God."

Recently, I was talking with a young boy about his decision to trust Christ. I asked him how it all came about. Jonathan told me how every night, his family reads the Bible together. They take turns leading this time, which simply consists of a few verses of scripture and prayer.

When we consistently expose ourselves to the truth found in Scripture, God's wisdom enters our hearts. We begin to understand what is right, just, fair and good. We begin to understand the ways of God. We come to know God (Proverbs 2:9-10). That is what happened with Jonathan ... and it can happen to your child as well.

Your child can attain this same wisdom and understanding if you will be diligent and intentional in providing opportunities for God's Word to shape his or her life. Read the Bible as a family. Make Sunday school or some kind of Bible study a priority—just as important as sports or music or any other activity. Encourage participation in programs like Children's Bible Drill. Do these things over and over again and you will be helping your child find the knowledge of God and preparing them to put their trust in Jesus.

David Garrard is minister to children at St. Matthews Baptist Church in Louisville.

Retirement like trip into space

By Don Spencer

Most of us are somewhat familiar now with the basic stages of space travel. There is the initial "blast off" and fast acceleration phase, the slowing down phase

as the boosters are jettisoned, and finally the sustained orbit around the earth. Planning for retirement has a similar three stage process—the accumulation stage, the transition stage and the retirement income stage. The "blast off" stage is the accumulation stage of life. This is where you provide

the fuel for a successful retirement through adequate savings and earnings.

In space travel, when adequate height above the earth has been achieved, the main engines are throttled down. Otherwise, the spacecraft would break apart as it leaves earth's atmosphere. In retirement planning, the individual generally throttles down from an aggressive investment to a more conservative one. Depending on how one plans to take their retirement income, this transition stage generally extends from about five years before until about five years after retirement.

In space travel, if the first stages were successful, then orbit is achieved. This orbit stage is analogous to moving into the retirement years with adequate retirement income on a regular basis that cannot be outlived. Sometimes there are surprises and necessary adjustments, but these generally can be handled with early preparation.

In space travel, you cannot reach the orbit stage unless there was a successful blast off and transition. Likewise, the adequate retirement income stage is only achieved if the first two stages are successful. There can be no transition stage unless there was a successful accumulation stage.

In space travel, if things go wrong in the initial stage or the transition stage, you cannot achieve a successful orbit or go back and successfully "fix it." In retirement planning, once you reach the time for the transition or the income stage, you cannot go back and successfully "fix it." Thus, it is critical that you do everything possible in the early years to achieve a successful "blast off," which means putting aside an adequate amount for retirement and making sure it is invested appropriately.

Don Spencer is a certified financial planner and directs the Kentucky Baptist Convention's church financial benefits department



Begin helping Japan by praying for survivors, relief workers

By Carlton Walker

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following article was written by Carlton Walker, an International Mission Board missionary to Japan for nearly 30 years.

It is hard to believe that more than 48 hours have now passed since Japan's earthquake. In some ways it seemed like the longest couple of days in our lives.

The government has upgraded the earthquake from 8.9 to 9.0. Thousands are still trying to contact family, friends and loved ones caught in the sweep of the tsunami wave. They say that the "not knowing" is the hardest.

We hear that there will be rolling blackouts several hours at a time here in Tokyo to conserve power nationwide. Given that bottled water, toilet paper and batteries are scarce to nonexistent in most places here, one can only imagine what things are like in the harder-hit areas in the northeast.

Many gasoline stations are closed. If you are fortunate enough to get gas, it is a limited amount, with lines stretching for blocks.

Watching news reports is overwhelming. It is not just one event, one place, one story. It is a vast collage of human suffering. Yet, even the pain you see on television is understated because the Japanese are stoic in nature.

We know many things that we didn't know last night:

■ This is the biggest quake in all of Japan's recorded history.

■ Geophysicists have reported that the force of the quake was so strong that it moved the island of Honshu 2.5 meters (8.2 feet) to the east.

■ There have been 164 aftershocks at the time of this writing. Many are having a hard time distinguishing between actual aftershocks and feeling like things are moving when they really aren't.

Japan's self-defense forces have been among the first on the scene. The problem is that there are so many scenes! A nationwide call to medical personnel, rescue workers, policemen and truck drivers to converge on the most affected areas has been issued. Rescue teams worldwide are either on the way or poised to come.

FIRST PERSON

How you can help

International Mission Board personnel and the Baptist Global Response assessment team on the ground in Japan continue to remind Southern Baptists that they can best help at this time with a concerted prayer effort and monetary donations. You can contribute to disaster relief efforts in Japan through the KBC website or send a check to the Kentucky Baptist Convention at P.O. Box 43433, Louisville, KY 40253-0433; note "Japan Earthquake/Tsunami Relief."

One colleague's comment sums up how most of us living in Japan feel: "My heart is racing with emotions and thoughts that come. I want to fly to the hard-hit areas and minister. I just want to be their hands and feet for whatever they need right now."

She concluded with the wisest advice of all: "What do you do in times like these but pray and ask for His guidance?"

Although it doesn't make sense in human terms, perhaps the way that most of us can make the most significant contribution for the time being is to pray because the lives of others both physically and spiritually depend on it.

Join my colleagues and me in praying for Japan:

■ for the survivors and families of victims; for the opportunities we have to minister in the name of Jesus and for God to use this disaster to soften the spiritually hard ground of Japan and open multitudes of hearts to Him.

■ for Christian workers and local Christians as they meet to come up with plans on how best to plan and implement relief efforts. Pray that they will know how best to serve the Japanese during this time of crisis, that these relief efforts will minister to the hearts of those in need.

■ that those who hurt will receive aid and comfort. Pray that all will recognize there is only one Rock who will never be shaken. (BP)



At the Shibuya Station intersection in Tokyo, people normally are shoulder-to-shoulder crossing the street. Since the March 11 earthquake and tsunami, transportation has been difficult. Meanwhile, as Japan's nuclear crisis escalates, fewer and fewer people take to the streets. (IMB photo)

Missionaries in devastated Japan pray for 'divine wind'

By Jennifer Rogers Spinola
International Mission Board

Tokyo—After a devastating tsunami and the worst earthquake in Japan's recorded history, four nuclear power plants in Fukushima continue to deteriorate and release rising levels of radioactive emissions.

According to Lana Oue, an International Mission Board missionary in Tokyo, "all efforts to get water into the cooling tanks have failed."

The nuclear disaster "has the potential to directly affect a large part of the nation, if reactors continue the meltdown process and emissions blow directly over the land," said Carlton Walker, an IMB missionary in Narashino City. "If the emissions rise to the jet stream, they will be carried as far away as Europe."

Walker said he believes an east wind that stays low and out of the jet stream—toward the Pacific Ocean and out of Japan—may limit the damage from high radiation.

Wind in Japanese culture

Not only is prayer for an east wind critical to containing the damage, but Walker said the idea of wind is an intrinsic part of Japanese culture.

While best known for suicide attacks on Allied forces during World War II, the Japanese term "kamikaze" (literally, "god-

wind," or "divine wind") originally referred to typhoons that saved Japan from fleets of Mongol invaders in 1274 and 1281.

"In the history of Japan a 'divine wind' has played a pivotal role in the survival of the nation several times," Walker explained. "Now is the time for Christians to arise and lay hold of God for a powerful east wind to protect this land."

Walker added that the east is the only direction without heavily populated land masses.

Walker also urged Christians to pray for the "wind" of the Holy Spirit to "blow with great power over this land and create a spiritual revival that will remake Japan from the inside out."

Oue's son, Richard, also an IMB missionary in Kawasaki, reported that missionaries have been operating in crisis mode since the earthquake hit.

"What we've been dealing with this week is unprecedented in recent history—dealing with three major interrelated, catastrophic events at once: a major earthquake, a huge tsunami, and disasters at nuclear power plants," he noted.

Richard Oue said missionaries are "extremely exhausted" but thankful to be safe, and continue to request prayers as they reach out with Japanese Christians to share the gospel.

Japanese Baptist leader says 3/11 will be that country's Sept. 11

Tokyo—A Japanese Baptist leader predicted the March 11 earthquake and tsunami disaster would leave its mark on Japan the same way the U.S. was changed after the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11.

"3/11 will be etched on our heart and psyche just as 9/11 is imprinted on the American psyche," wrote Makoto Tano, general secretary of the Japan Baptist Union. "The reasons are totally different, but it is a single event which determines how we as a nation will live for many years to come."

Two Baptist conventions in Japan assessed damage to churches and awaited word on the safety of pastors and church members in the days after the disaster.

Makoto Kato, executive director of the Japan Baptist Convention, said in a letter dated March 14 that attempts had

been made to communicate with all 17 churches in the stricken area of northeast Japan. In general, inland churches and mission points suffered earthquake damage in smaller structures but larger buildings were not severely damaged. Several members of Baptist churches living near the Pacific coastline remained unreachable due to communication and travel outages.

Kato said the "most urgent concern" facing the Japanese people right now is the danger of a nuclear disaster from nuclear power facilities.

The Japan Baptist Union worked to compile a list of churches reporting damages to buildings and tolls of human suffering. As of last week, leaders still had not heard from six pastors, reported Tomoko and John Armagost, International Ministries missionaries in Japan. (ABP)

In wake of disaster, KBC DR establishes fund for Japan

Louisville—Kentucky Baptists seeking to help those affected by last week's earthquake and tsunami in Japan can make a financial contribution through the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

Gifts to "Kentucky Baptist Disaster Relief" with the memo "Japan Earthquake/Tsunami Relief" may be sent to the KBC, PO Box 43433, Louisville, KY 40253-0433. Online giving is available at www.KyBaptist.org/DR. Find the link under "contributions."

Funds will be forwarded to the International Mission Board to be used in disaster relief and recovery efforts, said Coy Webb, KBC's disaster relief associate.

"My hope is that Kentucky Baptists will step forward as they have always done with grace and compassion and with aid for those affected by this disaster," Webb said.

A Southern Baptist disaster relief assessment team arrived in Japan March 12 and began work to determine the best way Southern Baptist volunteers can help on the scene, he said.

However, last week a member of that assessment team reported that the growing radiation danger in the country has hampered Southern Baptist disaster relief efforts.

Baptist Global Response's Mark Wakefield said the nuclear threat has limited assessments to the non-coastal areas of Japan that were affected.

Teams from the Alabama, California and South Carolina Baptist conventions

are expected to be the first Southern Baptist disaster relief volunteers called upon to serve in Japan.

Prayer is a gift everyone can give to the Japanese people, Webb added.

"We should pray ... for those who are hurting that they will receive aid and compassion and that they will be drawn to Christ," he said.

While efforts are just beginning to help the people of Japan, here at home, 20 Kentucky Baptists recently finished serving in Ohio following widespread flooding there. The group volunteered in Wapakoneta, Ohio, about 90 miles northwest of Columbus.

Webb said the 17 "mud-out" volunteers, two chaplains and one command team leader from 10 Kentucky Baptist associations completed their work last week.

Through Kentucky Baptist disaster relief, more than 7,000 individuals have been trained to respond to natural and man-made crises with an array of services. Feeding units can provide thousands of meals on short notice. Volunteers in other units can move in with chainsaws to remove debris, remove mud from flooded homes and provide other assistance.

Kentucky Baptists are part of a larger network of Southern Baptist volunteers that comprise the third largest relief organization in the United States. To learn more about Kentucky Baptist disaster relief, go to www.KyBaptist.org/DR.

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Fed up with Hollywood Churches make their own films

By Kim Lawton
Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly

Yorba Linda, Calif.—This year's Oscars may have been passed out, but for some churches across the country the major motion picture season is just getting started.

Frustrated with the movies Hollywood has been releasing, more and more congregations are making their own feature films.

One is Friends Church in Yorba Linda, Calif., a Quaker congregation with an evangelical megachurch worship style where members are finishing production on a film called "Not Today."

"I still hear people say it in the church, 'What are we doing? We're making a movie? What are you talking about?'" Jon Van Dyke, Friends Church's media director, told the PBS show "Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly."

Van Dyke is director of "Not Today," which tells the story of a spoiled young American who goes on a partying trip to India and gets pulled into the search for a little girl sold to human traffickers. The film was partly shot in India and centers around Dalits, the so-called "untouchables" on the lowest rung of the traditional caste system. Friends Church connected with Dalits during mission trips.

"I had never heard of the Dalits until I went to India," said Brent Martz, producer of "Not Today" and pastor of creative ministries at Friends Church.

The congregation committed to help free Dalits who had been trafficked and to build 200 schools for Dalit children. And, because the congregation is in the back-

yard of Hollywood, members decided to make a movie as well.

"It wasn't just to make a movie, because we're not in the movie business; we're a church," said Matthew Cork, the congregation's lead pastor. "But as a church, we do have an obligation and a responsibility to tell the message, and we believe that this was the best way for us."

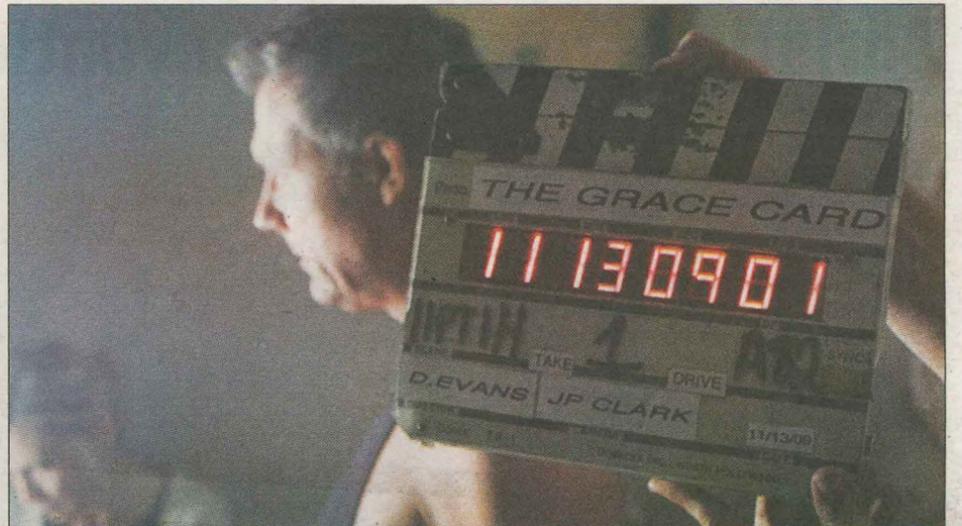
Some experts question whether this is something local churches should be doing.

"I guess I have an outdated notion that churches are there to inspire parishioners to then go and do things, in whatever genre, whether it's politics or media or whatever," said Mark Joseph, a film producer with the MJM Entertainment Group who writes about religion and pop culture.

"I'm not sure about church as film studio or church as commercial enterprise," he said. "But that's, I think, the danger down this path."

The church filmmaking trend began at Sherwood Baptist in Albany, Ga., where associate pastors and brothers Alex and Stephen Kendrick have released three feature films since 2003. They are finishing the fourth one, "Courageous," about policemen struggling to be good fathers.

At Sherwood, volunteer church members make up nearly all the cast and crew and do everything from catering to building sets. Sherwood teamed with Provident Films and found a very receptive audience. Their third film, "Fireproof," starring Kirk Cameron, was made on a \$500,000 budget, and it took in more than \$33 million at the box office, making it the highest-grossing independent film of 2008.



MEGAPLEX CHURCHES Frustrated with Hollywood's fare, churches are making their own films, such as "The Grace Card," which was made by Calvary Church in Memphis, Tenn. (RNS photo courtesy of Sony Entertainment)

Sherwood's films have a specific message, and making their own movies allows them to express it. The films have an overtly Christian tone, and the upcoming "Courageous" continues that.

Sherwood's efforts have inspired other congregations.

"You've got these church media directors and their pastors going, 'Hey, why can't we do that?'" Joseph said.

At Calvary Church of the Nazarene in Cordova, Tenn., optometrist David Evans wrote and directed the church's annual passion play for 15 years. He said after watching "Fireproof," he came away believing Calvary should make a film too.

"I realized that God had been preparing us for the last 15 years to do something far greater than we could ever imagine, and that's what set off the course of actions for me to begin writing the basic story of 'The Grace Card,'" he said.

"The Grace Card," which Evans also directed, is a story about forgiveness and racial reconciliation. Although many in the cast are Calvary Church members, the film stars Academy Award winner Louis Gossett Jr., and it has several Hollywood partners, including Samuel Goldwyn Films.

"We want, No. 1, for God to be glorified through this movie," Evans said. "We want to plant seeds that result in people demonstrating forgiveness and extending grace. That's something we all need to do on a larger scale."

At Friends Church, filmmakers said they tried to incorporate their characters' faith into the story in a natural way.

"This isn't a Christian movie," Martz said. "It's a movie about human trafficking that happens to be (seen) through the experience of a couple of Christians who are really struggling to live a good Christian life." (RNS)

"Did you know there is a quiet, secluded Christian retreat right in the middle of Pigeon Forge, Tennessee?"

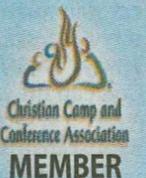


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Christians question conventional wisdom on divorce stats

By Adelle Banks

Storrs, Conn.—It's been proclaimed from pulpits and blogs for years—Christians divorce as much as everyone else in the United States.

But some scholars and family activists are questioning the oft-cited statistics, saying Christians who attend church regularly are more likely to remain wed.

"It's a useful myth," said Bradley Wright, a University of Connecticut sociologist who recently wrote "Christians Are Hate-Filled Hypocrites ... and Other Lies You've Been Told."

"Because if a pastor wants to preach about how Christians should take their marriages more seriously, he or she can trot out this statistic to get them to listen to him."

The various findings on religion and divorce hinge on what kind of Christians are being discussed.

Wright combed through the General Social Survey, a vast demographic study conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, and found that Christians, like adher-

"The divorce rates of Christian believers are not identical to the general population—not even close. Being a committed, faithful believer makes a measurable difference in marriage."

—Glenn Stanton of Focus on the Family



ents of other religions, have a divorce rate of about 42 percent. The rate among religiously unaffiliated Americans is 50 percent.

When Wright examined the statistics on evangelicals, he found worship attendance has a big influence on the numbers. Six in 10 evangelicals who never attend had been divorced or separated, compared to just 38 percent of weekly attendees.

Wright questions the approach of The Barna Group, evangelical pollsters based in Ventura, Calif.

Barna's latest published divorce statistics say one-third of all adults, including "non-evangelical born-again Christians," have ended a marriage.

Barna's statistics are tied to its highly specific—and controversial—definition of born-again Christians and evangelicals.

For instance, Barna labels Christians "born-again" if they have made a personal commitment to Jesus and believe they will go to heaven because they have accepted

Him as their Savior.

Evangelicals, on the other hand, are those who fit the born-again definition but also meet seven other conditions, including sharing their beliefs with non-Christians and agreeing that the Bible is completely accurate.

David Kinnaman, Barna's president, said the statistical differences reflect varied approaches, with Wright looking more at attendance and his research firm dwelling on theological commitments.

"We've tried to measure it based on theological perspective, not merely their church attendance or whether they call themselves Catholic or mainline," Kinnaman said.

Glenn Stanton of Focus on the Family wrote a recent column in Baptist Press highlighting Wright's interpretation of the state of divorce for Christians.

"The divorce rates of Christian believers are not identical to the general population—not even close," he wrote. "Being a

committed, faithful believer makes a measurable difference in marriage."

Brad Wilcox, director of the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia, agreed there has been some confusion.

"You do hear, both in Christian and non-Christian circles, that Christians are no different from anyone else when it comes to divorce and that is not true if you are focusing on Christians who are regular church attendees," he said.

Wilcox's analysis of the National Survey of Families and Households has found that Americans who attend religious services several times a month were about 35 percent less likely to divorce than those with no religious affiliation.

Nominal conservative Protestants, on the other hand, were 20 percent more likely to divorce than those who are religiously unaffiliated.

"There's something about being a nominal 'Christian' that is linked to a lot of negative outcomes when it comes to family life," Wilcox said. (RNS)



I DO? Jim Bob and Michelle Duggar, seen here renewing their wedding vows on an episode of TLC's "18 Kids and Counting," shun all forms of birth control and trust in God to dictate the size of their family. A new study claims that Christians like the Duggars are less likely to divorce than nonbelievers. (RNS photo courtesy of TLC)

Meet the class of 2011

'Annie' closes out her time at Oneida looking forward to 'new beginnings'

I'm going to say the most selfish thing I ever have written in all my years of doing this column: If it were not for some wonderfully generous people who support our ministry, my staff and I wouldn't have the opportunity to work with some of the most wonderful kids in the world. And this article is about one of them.

"Annie" (not her real name) came to the U.S. from Mongolia when she was 5 years old. Space does not allow me to give details about her family dynamics, including moving many times, but I assure you she has had a difficult time. Here is part of her senior essay:

"While living in Arkansas, an older couple took me to church every Sunday; (they) planted God's seed. After church they would take me to eat at a nice restaurant. I remember once the husband asked me, 'Do you only go to church with us because we take you out to eat?' I told him 'No,' but my stomach was saying otherwise."

After moving to North Dakota and then to California, Annie wrote, "I would come home every day to an empty house. ... This is not a self-pity address; ... the important lesson is there will always be a hole in a person's heart that only God can fill. ... The summer after my sixth grade (year), I was asked if I wanted to attend Oneida Baptist Institute."

"While traveling to Oneida the only thing I could think about was, 'Wow. ... This has to be where they filmed The Texas Chainsaw Massacre.' ... That Sunday I was waiting ... to go to the evening chapel service with the other girls. I was

aware of everyone welcoming and hugging each other, and I remember wondering if I was ever going to have friends like that. Then one of the most amazing girls came up to me and said, 'Hi, I'm Julia. What's your name?' ... Since then I've made ... relationships that are worth hanging on to. After a full week of God's love being poured on me, I gave my life to Christ in August of 2006 and was baptized the next month.

"It's not Oneida itself that is special to me, it's the people. ... The faculty and staff are the most amazing group of people I know. They took time to help and guide me, not because I deserved it but because of God's love in them. They loved me, cared for me, prayed for me and so much more."

"At Oneida I've grown in Christ and though it was not, nor will it always be, a smooth road for me, it has, and will continue to be, one big adventure. OBI is a miniature world. There are so many cultures in this one place. One of the highlights of the year is the Culture Fair where the international students cook their native dishes. It's also the most delicious time of the year."

"So I leave you with this: God's love and presence is everywhere. He is never far away. ... Let us not shed tears because of an end (graduation), but let us rejoice in a new beginning."

Without the love and support of our many friends, we would not be able to help worthy and lovely students like Annie. When she needed help, you made it possible for us to reach out to her. If you knew Annie you would be blessed, too. Thank you so much!

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

This is Oneida



W.F. Underwood

Now clinging to the cross

Once 'worldly' student Zach thankful God changed his life

First-year student Zach Stone from Lexington is thankful the outlook on life he has now is far different than a few years ago.

"I basically grew up in church," Zach recalled. "My parents were involved in children and youth ministry as I grew up, so I was around church all the time. I knew about God and Jesus, but I never fully understood about the personal relationship with Christ. So when troubles came to my life, I didn't cling to the cross, I started clinging to worldly things."

"I eventually got involved in some things that I shouldn't have," Zach said. "After a few years of living like that, I just wanted to give up on everything, including life. That was when my friend invited me to go to church with him and I decided to go."

"The message that night was on the prodigal son," he said. "It amazed me because the lies that Satan had been telling me was that I needed to clean up before I came to Christ. God spoke to me through the message telling me that He was glad to see me come to Him no matter what shape I was in."

"That message fit me perfect-

ly that night. I surrendered my life to Christ that night and everything changed for me. I quit the worldly scene I was caught up in, got involved in church and just got on fire for the Lord.

"I feel the Lord leading me to minister to other young people who are clinging to the cross," Zach said. "I feel a need to go into the cities of America and minister to young people who are caught up in the worldly scene like I was. This summer I will participate in a summer mission trip to New York City with missions professor Dr. Bob Hughes. I am excited to see how God is going to use me on the trip."

"I am glad that Clear Creek gives students the opportunity to go on summer mission trips. It really is a good opportunity to get a feel for a specific area where God may be leading."

Clear Creek Chronicle



Donnie Fox

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

Critics fired up over Rob Bell's new book, views on eternity

By Cathy Lynn Grossman
USA Today

Grand Rapids, Mich.—Talk about hell-fire. One of the nation's rock-star-popular young pastors, Rob Bell, 40, has stuck a pitchfork in how Christians talk about damnation.

Pastor Bell's "Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived," arrived in stores last week.

Critics pounced before the book even was published, provoking weeks of debate among pastors, theologians and anyone

else who scans the Christian blogosphere.

In "Love Wins," Bell claims:

■ Heaven and hell are choices we make and live with right now. "God gives us what we want," including the freedom to live apart from God (hell) or turn to God's way (heaven).

■ Death doesn't cut off the ability to repent. In his Bible, Bell says he sees no "infinite, eternal torment for things (people) did in their few finite years of life."

■ Jesus makes salvation possible even for people who never know his name. "We have to allow for mystery," for people who

"drink from the rock" of faith "without knowing who or what it was."

■ Churches that don't allow for this are "misguided and toxic."

Small wonder that traditionalists call him a false teacher of a Jesus-optional gospel, leading innocents to damnation and a traitor to the evangelical label.

In an interview with USA TODAY, Bell joked: "I am not aware that labels are the highest form of goodness and truth." He rebuffed critics who say he presents a Jesus-optional Christianity: "Jesus spoke of the renewal of all things. He said, 'I have sheep who are not of this flock.' Through Him, extraordinary things are happening in the world."

Bell's view is "that God is love, that He sent Jesus to show us that love, that love demands freedom. So making definitive judgments about other people's destiny is not interesting to me. The heart of God is to rescue everyone from everything we need to be rescued from."

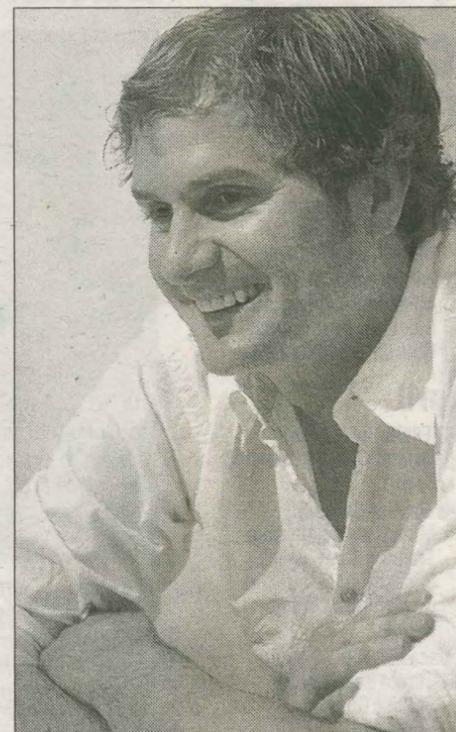
Justin Taylor of the Gospel Coalition, a network of traditionalist scholars and pastors, said Bell's views are "dangerous and contrary to the word of God. ... If Bell doesn't believe in eternal punishment, then he doesn't think sin is an offense against a holy God."

It was Taylor's critique last month, based on reading a few chapters, that triggered explosive arguments radiating from Christian sites to CNN. Now that he has read all 200 pages, Taylor said he is even more convinced of Bell's errors.

"Whether you like it or not, the Bible presents true teaching and warns against false teachers, even those who look like great people," said Taylor, digging at Bell's highly stylized videos circulating online and among churches coast to coast.

But Richard Mouw, president of the world's largest Protestant seminary, Fuller Theological Seminary based in Pasadena, Calif., calls Love Wins "a great book," well within the bounds of orthodox Christianity and passionate about Jesus.

Southern Baptist leaders are among



HEAVEN AND HELL Rob Bell is a Michigan pastor and author of "Love Wins: A Book about Heaven, Hell and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived." (RNS file photo)

those who have targeted Bell as "the very definition of a wolf in sheep's clothing," according to Denny Burk, dean of Boyce College in Louisville.

Last week, Burk joined Taylor and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary leaders Albert Mohler and Russell Moore in a panel discussion about Bell's book at the seminary. The men claim Bell's popularity among evangelicals makes such a discussion and response to his book necessary.

Bell "has a tremendous influence, especially with younger evangelicals, and I think that's why we have to talk about this. We're very concerned about the loss of the gospel," Mohler said. (RNS)

With additional reporting by Baptist Press

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Students' hearts 'washed' this summer

With camp season nearing, staff at Crossings seek changed hearts

By Lindsay Swartz
Guest services coordinator

"Such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11).

Take a look at your walk with the Lord. Is it vibrant and full of faith, yielding good works that glorify the Father? Or have you blended in with the world and grown hard in your heart? If we're not careful to guard our hearts, they can grow dull to the treasure of Christ, the cost of following Him, His grace that works in and through us. And this is the message we want to share with more than 9,300 students and adults at Crossings camps this summer.

Our 2011 theme is "Washed," taken from 1 Corinthians 6:11. Although our themes change annually, our message never does: There is salvation in no other name by which we must be saved but Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12).

During camp, we want to see students cross over from death to life through faith in Christ. But we also want to challenge those who have known Christ for

awhile, yet have grown cold and stagnant in their love for and walk with Him. Like Paul does in our camp passage, we want to remind them who their Savior is, who they were apart from Him, and what He has accomplished on their behalf.

Our burden is to remind ourselves, as well, because we never outgrow our need for the gospel. We simply forget that we need Him every hour. We forget that He is greater than we can imagine. We forget that we have been washed of our sins, set on the road to sanctification, and declared innocent before God because of His blood. And our lives start to look like the world; like what we once were.

So, we pray that the Spirit will transform all of us by this truth this summer. We pray that students, adults and staff will leave changed—some of them washed for the first time, while others of us get out of the mud and start to see rivers of living water flow out of our hearts again.

David Melber is president of Kentucky Baptist Assemblies. Contact him at Box 99918, Louisville, KY 42069-0918; phone (502) 491-7000.



David Melber

Ky. Baptist Assemblies

'Pure religion'

Caring for Kentucky's abused kids is mission of Sunrise, all churches

By Carmen Peckenpaugh
Associate director of faith-based partnerships

While more than 780,000 Kentucky Baptists were in the midst of worshipping together last year, more than 19,500 children in Kentucky were being abused.

The Bible tells us that the litmus test for 'pure religion' is the way we treat widows and orphans. "Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for the orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you" (James 1:27).

With a legacy dating back to 1869, Sunrise Children's Services has been Kentucky Baptists' answer to ministering to the hurting children and families across the state for a long time. With so many children continuing to suffer abuse and neglect, the need is greater now than ever before.

Our mission at Sunrise is to provide care and hope through Christ-centered ministries. Sunrise cares for more than 2,000 of Kentucky's abused and neglected children each year in 10 residential facilities, state-wide foster care, adoption and in-home services. Our ability to provide these services

is reliant upon the continued faithful giving and support of our churches.

God has blessed me with the opportunity to join Sunrise as the associate director of faith-based partnerships in order to encourage and support our local churches and ministry organizations to deal with the devastating issue of child abuse.

During my studies at Kentucky Wesleyan and Asbury Theological Seminary, I worked for four years with below-poverty-level children and families in a family-education program. I also vocationally served at Zion Baptist Church in Henderson in student ministry.

I am passionate about serving hurting kids and pursuing the church to partner with us to answer the call to care for our children. I look forward to meeting and speaking with you about Sunrise and how we can partner to help kids in crisis shine with the love of Christ.

If you would like additional information or to arrange a speaking engagement, please contact Carmen Peckenpaugh at (502) 538-1046 or by e-mail CPeckenpaugh@Sunrise.org.

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



Bill Smithwick

Sunrise Children's Services



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

March

- 24 Growing Ministries Tour, Living Hope Baptist Church, Hopkinsville.
- 25-26 Kentucky Woman's Missionary Union Annual Meeting, First Baptist Church, Bowling Green.

April

- 1-2 Exalt, Forest Park Baptist Church, Bowling Green.
- 1-3 Baptist Campus Ministries Leadership Training Conference, Cedarmore Camp and Conference Center, Bagdad.
- 2 Vacation Bible School Clinic, Beacon Hill Baptist Church, Somerset.
- 7-8 Joshua Cluster Celebration, Hilton Garden Inn, Louisville.
- 8-9 Team Leader Training for International Missions, Baptist Building, Louisville.
- 8-9 Women on Mission Regional Retreat, Laurel Lake Baptist Camp, Corbin.
- 9 Disaster Relief Regional Training, Beacon Hill Baptist Church, Somerset.
- 14-15 Quarterly Prayer Meeting for Spiritual Awakening, Northside Baptist Church, Mount Vernon.
- 14-16 Ministers in Transition, Louisville.
- 16 Youth Bible Drill and Speakers' Tournament, Northside Baptist Church, Elizabethtown.
- 26 Developing and Managing People Workshop, Baptist Building, Louisville.
- 29 Children's Bible Drill, St. Matthews Baptist Church, Louisville.
- 29-30 Sunday School Growth Academy, Paroquet Springs Conference Center, Shepherdsville.
- 29-30 Women on Mission Regional Retreat, Camp Schafer, Pellville.
- 29-5/1 All-State Children's Choir—East, Cedarmore Camp and Conference Center, Bagdad.
- 29-5/1 All-State Children's Choir—West, Jonathan Creek Camp and Conference Center, Hardin.
- 29-5/1 Equestrian Trail Ride, Mammoth Cave National Park.

Butler's legacy honored



The legacy of longtime Kentucky Baptist pastor LaVerne Butler was honored earlier this month by the school he once served as president. At its annual banquet, the alumni association of Mid-Continent University presented Butler's daughter Sandra Hodge (left) and grandson Ryan Hodge (right) with the school's Lifetime Service Award in recognition of the late Dr. Butler, who died last December. Also pictured is Mid-Continent President Robert Imhoff (center left) and MCU trustee chair Tom Butler. LaVerne Butler served as president of Mid-Continent from 1988-97. Prior to that, he served as pastor of Louisville's Ninth and O Baptist Church, where he was known as a leader of the conservative movement in the Kentucky and Southern Baptist conventions. (Mid-Continent photo)

Actress' book reaches NYT list

Nashville, Tenn.—“Reshaping It All: Motivation for Spiritual and Physical Fitness” by actress Candace Cameron Bure (“Full House,” “Make It or Break It”) has debuted at No. 13 on The New York Times’ paperback advice & miscellaneous best-sellers list.

Bure, recently featured in People magazine and on NBC’s “Today” show, recalls in the book her inspirational victory over food addiction and explains how she keeps a healthy outlook on weight despite Hollywood’s toothpick-thin expectations.

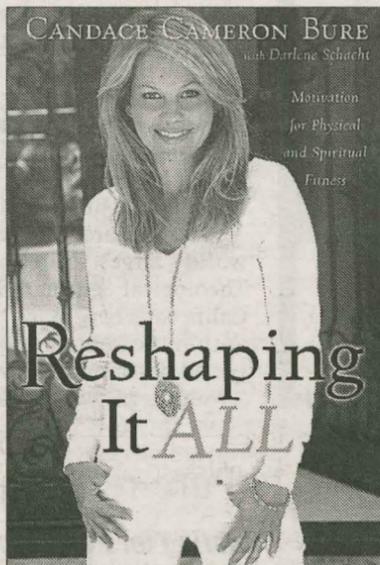
The book, which moved onto The Times’ best seller list last month, was released Jan. 1 by B&H Publishing Group of LifeWay Christian Resources.

Bure, now married with three kids, is a rare Hollywood mom who maintains a normal life—no trainer, no nanny, no chef—and is outspoken about how her Christian faith has helped her overcome various obstacles such as her struggle with food. “Reshaping It All” seeks to help women begin to embrace a healthier lifestyle by moving faith to the forefront, making wise fundamental choices about diet and exercise, and finding their worth in God’s eyes.

“I knew who God was, but I still hadn’t grasped who I was in His sight,” Bure writes. Now, with everything in proper perspective, she adds, “I’m 25 pounds lighter than I was on Full House, have a full house of my own and feel better than ever.”

“Candace has said that first and foremost she is a wife and mom,” said Jennifer Lyell, B&H Publishing Group’s executive editor for women’s books.

“Her career as an actress comes after those most important roles,” Lyell added. “What we have observed from the tremendous response to ‘Reshaping It All’ is that readers really resonate with her as a wife, a



RESHAPING LIVES Candace Cameron Bure’s book “Reshaping It All” seeks to help women embrace healthier lifestyles, make wise diet and exercise choices, all through an emphasis on faith, as well as find discover their self-worth in God’s eyes. The book was published by B&H Publishing Group of LifeWay Christian Resources.

mom and as a trusted friend they’ve grown up alongside. They connect with her as a woman who so different than them. Her struggles, victories and resulting guidance are not those of a sensational Hollywood tell-all, but rather of a day-to-day reality with which we can all identify and respond.”

Bure starred for eight seasons on the hit ABC series “Full House” (still syndicated in more than 100 countries) and now is a featured cast member on ABC Family’s popular drama, “Make It or Break It.” She also is active in several charities and speaks to women nationally about her faith-based weight loss success.

Bure lives with her husband, National Hockey League star Valeri Bure, and their three children in Los Angeles. (BP)

MOUNTAINS TO THE MISSISSIPPI

COMPILED BY STAFF

Spotlight on ...

Alexandria



Grant’s Lick Church will host the **Oneida Baptist Institute Choir** in concert March 27, 11 a.m. Tom Wilkes is pastor.

- **BEREA**—White Lick Church recently called **Wayne Dunn** as pastor.
- **CAMPBELLSVILLE**—Campbellsville University will host theologian **Walter Shurden**, minister at large at Mercer University in Macon, Ga., for a Baptist Heritage Series lecture March 29, 6:30 p.m., in the banquet hall of the Badgett Academic Support Center. For more information, call the office of church and external relations at (270) 789-5520.
- **CORBIN**—Piney Grove Church recently called **Ralph Rogers** as interim pastor.
- **FRANKLIN**—Calvary Church will hold revival services March 27-30 with **Bill Whittaker** as evangelist. **Steve and Becky Carver** of One Way Ministries in Mississippi will lead music. Wyman Copass is pastor.
- **GRAY**—Candle Ridge Church recently called **Jeremy Abner** as pastor.

- **LEBANON**—Woodlawn Church will hold revival services March 27, 11 a.m. & 6 p.m.; March 28-30, 7 p.m., with **Patrick Butcher**, pastor of Northside Church in Science Hill, as evangelist. **Greg Haynes** is pastor.
- **LEITCHFIELD**—Little Clifty Church recently called **Gerald Otahal** as pastor.
- **PRINCETON**—Emmanuel Church recently called **Matt Smothers** as pastor.

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FOR SALE: Six-tier lighted patriotic singing flag—used for choir cantatas. Manufacturer’s construction/lighting instructions included; photos available. POC: John Rice (Elizabethtown, Ky.), john@severnsvalley.org or (270) 765-7822.

FOR SALE: Seventeen 15-foot solid oak pews. Contact Rodney Vincent at First Baptist Church, Bowling Green, (270) 842-0331; or by e-mail: rvincent@firstbaptistbg.org.

FREE: Large brass chandelier needs new church home. Contact Joyce at (270) 534-1400 for more information.

SEEKING: Full-time youth minister. Elk Horn Baptist Church, Campbellsville, Ky., a Spirit-led, soul-winning, life-changing church seeks a creative and experienced youth pastor who has a passion for working with young people and can lead and minister to a diverse, multi-cultural youth group (grades 7-12). Send resumé to office@elkhornbc.org; or 3145 Elkhorn Road, Campbellsville, KY 42718.

SEEKING: Full-time minister of students for Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, Somerset, Ky. Candidate must be a God-called man who can provide leadership to all student ministries of PHBC from preschool through 12th grade. He must be competent in the areas of teaching, administration, and student pastoral care. Church Website is phbc.comerset.com. Send resumé to Personnel Committee, PHBC, 1685 Hwy. 3091, Somerset, KY 42503; or e-mail phbc@newwavecomm.net.

SEEKING: Full-time children/educational minister for First Baptist Church, Hodgenville, Ky. Hours of work: 8 a.m.—4:30 p.m. during the week with scheduled day off, plus weekend ministerial duties to include coordinating Upward, VBS, etc. Starting salary commensurate with education and experience, with a range of \$35,000—\$42,000. Contact Sally Lewis at (270) 358-3193.

SEEKING: Interim youth director to lead our young ladies and young men to a better understanding of God’s will for their lives. This position is planned to begin June 1, 2011. Please indicate your interest by forwarding your resumé with a recent photo to Glasgow Baptist Church, 401 S. Green St., Glasgow, KY 42141, Attn: Personnel Committee.

SEEKING: Pastor for Reid Village Baptist Church. Please send resumé and audio/video sermon to eddierratliff@roadrunner.com; or mail to Pulpit Committee, 1827 Stratford Place, Mt. Sterling, KY 40353.

SEEKING: Bivocational youth minister to lead our youth to be mature Christ followers. Is the Lord leading you? Please send resumé to Turner Ridge Baptist Church, 60 McGraw Road, Falmouth, KY 41040; or send e-mail to daleannbeighle@yahoo.com.

SEEKING: Exciting, passionate leader to direct children’s ministry and oversee daily activities of family life center. Must have vision and desire to share the love of Christ with children and families through God-given spiritual gifts. Experience preferred, college degree a plus. Please send cover letter and resumé to: Search Committee, Marion Baptist Church, PO Box 384, Marion, KY 42064; or e-mail to: searchcommittee@marionbaptistchurch.com.

SEEKING: Part-time minister of music who will be responsible for planning weekly worship services, working with the adult choir and all instrumentalists, and overseeing the entire music ministry of the church. Contact Pastor Rodney Bice at Bardwell Baptist Church, (270) 628-3645; or bbcpastor1@windstream.net.

Vibrant leadership in Sunday school

By David Francis

If you've read about organizational leadership, you'll recognize the idea of the "inverted pyramid." Vibrant leaders see themselves as servants at the bottom of a pyramid, whose primary job is to exhort and support those charged with carrying out the organization's vision and mission.

Vibrant leaders keep organizational energy focused on a few key principles. My boss at LifeWay, John Kramp, urges me to guard against letting an issue "spin out into complexity." That's a particularly good word for Sunday school leaders.

Volumes have been written on administering effective Sunday schools. I've written a few myself, which you can download free at www.lifeway.com/sundayschool, including the newest—Transformational Class: Transformational Church Goes to Sunday School. But at its essence, effective Sunday schools have vibrant leaders who may try different organizational schemes or experiment with new ideas, but who hold fast to two key principles and one irreducible law.

Two key principles

Vibrant leaders champion missional Sunday school classes that operate on two uncompromising principles:

1. Open groups that practice open enrollment. "Open" is what distinguishes Sunday school classes from discipleship groups that are "closed" for the purpose of studying deeper content, or "closed" small groups that develop deeper relationships. Closed groups are not bad. They're just closed. Sunday school classes are essentially open groups.

2. Open groups that expect new people every week. That's a short definition of an open group. If a group really does expect new people every week, it will change everything about its strategy. Leaders will arrive early. They will arrange the room with newcomers in mind. Members will consistently wear nametags. Every lesson will be a complete and satisfying Bible study experience.

"Belong before you believe"—that's a short definition of open enrollment. Enrolling as a member of a Sunday school class is a great first step for those undecided about becoming Christians, being baptized, joining the church or exploring Christianity, while they experience the powerful words of the Bible. They should understand that enrolling in Sunday school neither

makes them church members, nor obligates them toward membership. It's simply a safe place to belong before they believe, whether or not they ever do.

These principles go against the grain, because the natural inertia of any group is to become closed. Vibrant leaders continuously exhort Sunday school classes to:

- remain vigilant about staying open.
- create a welcoming place for newcomers every week.
- facilitate next steps for those deciding to move beyond worship attendance alone.
- offer a safe environment to learn more about Christ—and Christians—before making a deeper commitment to Him.

Start new units

That's the irreducible law of kingdom growth! This law would probably also fit under the first element, "Missionary Mentality." I wrote about that element earlier (<http://bit.ly/gx6KTy>). On the mission field, this means starting new preaching points, new missions and new churches. In established churches, it means starting new groups for discipleship, ministry and evangelism. For Sunday school, it means starting new classes. It takes incredibly vibrant leadership to persuade and equip classes to reproduce themselves.

The average Southern Baptist church has about 93 people in Sunday school, meeting in nine or 10 classes, each week. A church with 50 in attendance has about five classes. Only about 3,000 SBC churches have more than 250 in attendance, and most have at least 25 classes. In all, about 4 million Southern Baptists will attend one of 400,000 Sunday schools this Sunday.

Do you see the pattern—and the promise? Assuming that churches can enlist and train new leaders and provide resources, any "double-digit" church should be able to exceed 100 in Sunday school with 10 or 11 classes. This is the "law of 10."

You might be surprised to learn that many of the transformational churches LifeWay interviewed were smaller churches. The churches I interviewed in New England each had about 120 in attendance. They were all transformational congregations. None seemed "small." Why not? Vibrant leadership! (BP)

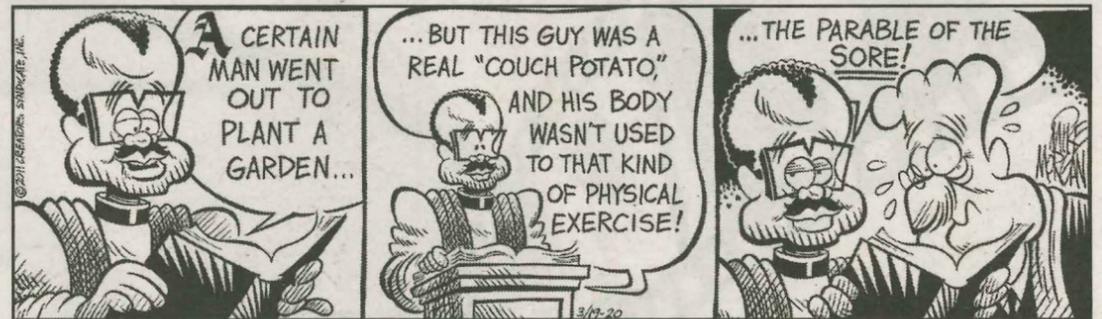
David Francis is director of Sunday School at LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention.



HERE! Two members of Fairview Baptist Church in Mount Vernon have 40 or more years of perfect attendance in Sunday school. At left, Buddy Gabbard, who received his award from Pastor Vaughn Rasor in 2009 and now has reached 42 years, recently presented an attendance award to Judy Cummins, far right.

For Heaven's Sake

Mike Morgan



Preacher's Kids

David Ayers



Bible Crosswords

By Beverley Barnes

Across

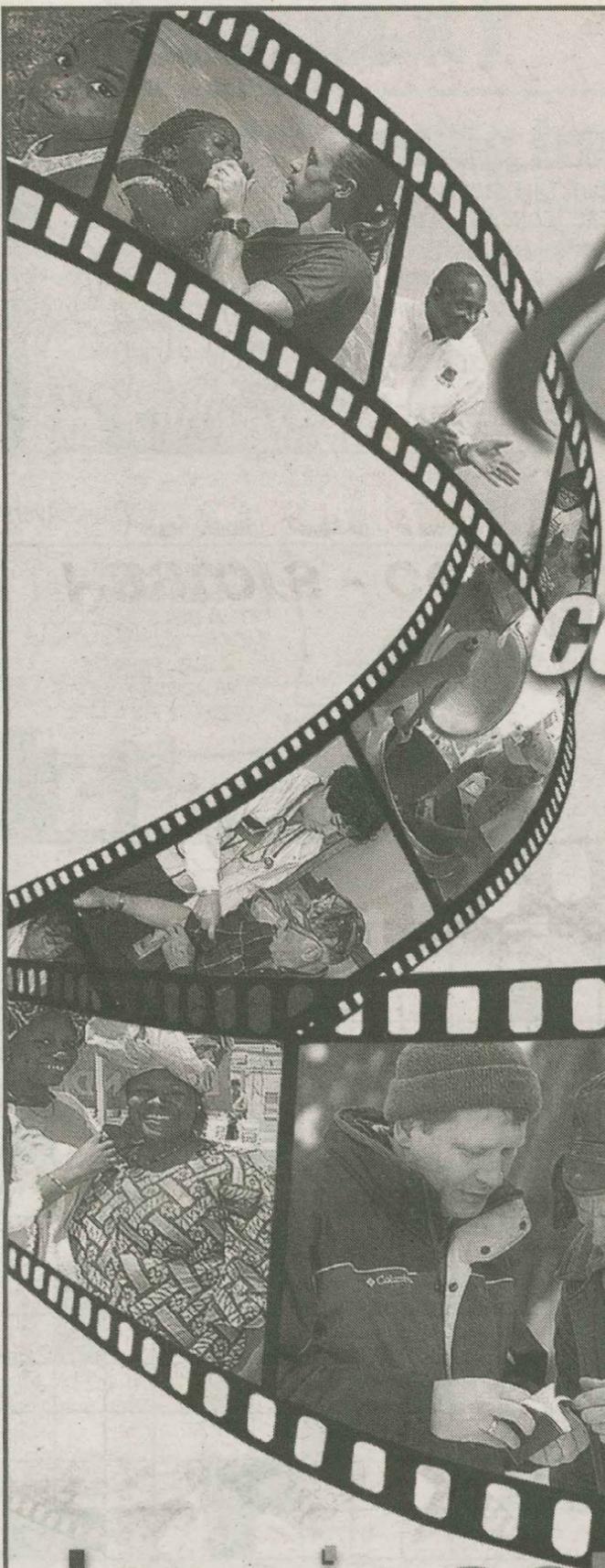
- 1 "Confession is made unto ____" (Romans 10:10)
- 8 To make a choice
- 11 "There ____ I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20)
- 12 Woman's name
- 13 A narrow fold or wrinkle
- 15 "To know ... the ____ of my days" (Psalm 39:4)
- 18 Man's title
- 19 North America, abbr.
- 20 "____ the day in which he was taken up" (Acts 1:2)
- 21 "____, Father" (Mark 14:36)
- 22 Southwestern state, abbr.
- 23 Playful aquatic mammal
- 25 The book before Nehemiah
- 26 Man's name
- 28 "Brightness of his ____" (Hebrews 1:3)
- 29 New covenant writings, abbr.
- 31 "____, I say unto you" (John 3:3)
- 33 Suffix
- 34 A precious stone
- 35 Opposite of yes
- 36 Holds royal office
- 39 One of Paul's epistles, abbr.
- 41 Cable News Network, abbr.
- 42 Gym class, abbr.
- 44 Meaning partial or half, prefix
- 46 "Put thou my tears into thy ____" (Psalm 56:8)
- 49 Prince of Islam
- 50 First person contraction

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54										55		

- 51 "He shall ____ like a lion" (Hosea 11:10)
- 53 "The ____ of the valleys" (Song of Solomon 2:1)
- 54 "He gave his only ____ Son" (John 3:16)
- 55 Helena's state, abbr.
- 24 A city of Judah (Joshua 15:39)
- 27 "____ evil with good" (Romans 12:21)
- 30 "We have seen and do ____" (1 John 4:14)
- 32 Participle ending
- 33 The meek shall ____ the earth (Matthew 5:5)
- 37 Inward, prefix
- 38 South American language, abbr.
- 40 What David wrote
- 43 Plural of E
- 45 1,000 x 1,000, abbr.
- 46 Put this on baby when feeding
- 47 Abram's nephew (Genesis 12:5)
- 48 Of every tree thou mayest ____ (Genesis 2:16)
- 52 Do, ____, mi

Last week's solution

1	F	E	L	L	O	W	S	H	I	P							
11	O	R	I	O	N		12	L	O	V	E	13	P				
			14	N	O		15	O	N		16	E					
17	B	R	A	G		20	A	W	E		21	C	A	R	T		
23	E	O	N		24	A		25	S		26	L	S	E			
26	A	Y		27	C	H	A	S	T	E		30	P	E	N		
31	R	A	C	A		33	J	O	Y		34	A		35	V	T	
36	A	L	A	R		37	A	U		38	S		39	H	E	M	
						40	H			41	A		42	L	E		
43	C	A	I	N		46	D	O	R		48	L	E	N			
49	E	N	I	G	M		50	B	A	L	L		52	L	A	M	T
										53	E	N	T	E	R		
55	H	U	M	I	L	I	T	Y		56	S	T	A	R			



COOPERATIVE PROGRAM

Did you know the
Cooperative Program
helps support...

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...more than 5,100 North American missionaries including nearly 3,000 full-time funded missionaries and more than 2,200 long-term Mission Service Corps missionaries?

...annual training and inspirational events that help over 27,000 Kentucky Baptists strengthen their churches?

...Kentucky missions programs such as Disaster Relief, Kentucky Changers, Partnership Missions, Appalachian Regional Ministries, and others?

...the work of Baptist Campus Ministry on nearly every Kentucky college campus -- touching the lives of more than 23,000 students each year?

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