

WESTERN Recorder

February 10, 2015

Shine Like Stars * Philippians 2:15

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Super Bowl shines light on city's need of gospel

By Tobin Perry

Phoenix—As Southern Baptists turned their eyes to Phoenix and Super Bowl XLIX, local Southern Baptists said they'd encounter a city in desperate need of new evangelistic churches.

According to the North American Mission Board's Center for Missional Research, evangelicals make up only 12.6 percent of the population of the Send North America: Phoenix region. The metro area also has only one Southern Baptist church for every 19,338 people.

But in the last few years an influx of Southern Baptist church planters has begun to turn those numbers around.

When planter Jason Griffin arrived with his family of six in Phoenix in 2012, he didn't relocate for the nice weather or the long list of leisure activities.

Underneath all the fun and sun, the Griffins found a community named Surprise that needed the gospel.

"There have been a lot of people who have tried to plant here," said Griffin, who was sent by First Baptist Church of Woodstock, Ga. "For whatever reason—whether it was never gaining traction or losing their support—this became like a graveyard for church plants."

Griffin estimates that 95 percent of Surprise residents are not connected to evangelical churches.

Griffin himself started slow. Nobody showed up for the first Bible study he launched in his home a few months after his arrival. But after starting weekly worship services in January 2013, Griffin has seen Freedom Valley Church grow to an average of 120 in attendance most weeks.

"We've seen 15 people come to faith in Christ," Griffin said. "I'll tell you, the amount of work to see those 15 people



About 200,000 copies of a 16-page mini-magazine, featuring the testimonies of pro athletes, were distributed to sports fans during Super Bowl week. "As believers we have a responsibility to take the best news in the entire world to lost people," volunteer and pastor Daryl Bennett said. (Photo by Shawn Hendricks/BP)

come to Christ is incredible. It takes consistent relationship building, talking about the gospel and living out the gospel."

Phoenix is one of 32 Send North America cities that have become a church planting

focus since NAMB launched the strategy at the 2011 Southern Baptist Convention in Phoenix. Super Bowl XLIX was played in Glendale, which is about 30 minutes outside Phoenix. The sixth-largest city in the United States, metro Phoenix counts

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Jason Griffin, a church planter sent by First Baptist Church of Woodstock, Ga.

nearly 5.4 million people.

Monty Patton (@Phxokie), NAMB's Send City missionary for Phoenix, said the city's famous good weather can be a hindrance to church planting efforts.

"One of the blessings of our area is our climate, but it's also one of our greatest hindrances," said Patton, who planted Mountain Ridge Community Church in Glendale in 1996. "Everybody is outside. We're a very

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3 Ky. cities among nation's Top 25 most 'Bible-minded'

By Robin Cornetel

New York—Lexington is the most Bible-minded city in Kentucky, according to a new survey that rates municipalities based on the frequency of online Scripture reading and other measures.

Louisville was rated No. 2 and Paducah No. 3 in the commonwealth in a survey released last week by the American Bible Society.

"I'm glad to know that these Kentucky cities are getting positive recognition," said Paul Chitwood, executive director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention. "We know understanding the Bible is crucial to the Christian life. And this gives us encouragement that our churches are having an impact across our state."

All three Kentucky cities were listed among the top 25 most Bible-minded cities in the country.

Nationally, Lexington ranked 15th; Louisville 17th, and Paducah 23rd. The No. 1 spot went to Birmingham, Ala.

Survey respondents were considered Bible-minded if they had read the Bible in the past seven days and believed the Scriptures to be accurate.

Nationally, the survey found that only 27 percent of the population is considered Bible-minded.

Other notable findings:

Southern cities ranked higher than cities in the Northeast.

Dallas dropped off the list for the first time in three years, and New York City debuted at No. 91. (KBC)

Shepherding conference refreshes pastors & wives for ministry

By Robin Cornetel

Lexington—Souls were rejuvenated for kingdom work as nearly 140 ministry couples received some much-needed encouragement at the Shepherding conference in Lexington.

The Kentucky Baptist Convention and Baptist Health joined forces for a 16th time to sponsor the event packed with inspiring, even entertaining, presentations intended to refresh pastors and their wives in their ministries and marriages.

"We don't often get away with each other as much as we would like," said Greg Smith, pastor

of New Cut Road Baptist Church, but the Louisville couple said they typically make time for this conference.

Smith said he and wife, Pamela, have missed only one.

Pamela Smith said Shepherding provides one of the few times during the year when she can worship seated next to her husband.

Tears welled in her eyes as she talked about singing praise songs while holding his hand.

Worship throughout the three-day event was provided by director Mike Harlan and Craig Adams, creative/publishing director, both of

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Backpacks, school supplies distributed to 30,000 Appalachian students

By Kristen Camp

Alpharetta, Ga.—Weeks after the holidays, backpacks filled with school supplies given by Southern Baptist churches continue to bless students in Appalachia.

Teams from Appalachian Regional Ministry traveled all along the East Coast in December to deliver Christmas backpacks to 30,461 students in all grade levels. After receiving a backpack, the

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Green Valley DOM receives sabbatical

By Myriah Snyder

Henderson—The Green Valley Baptist Association recently commended the work of Director of Missions Bill Patterson by providing him with a three-month sabbatical beginning in March.

Patterson, having completed five years of service to Green Valley Baptists, received a unanimous vote at October's Executive Board meeting to begin his sabbatical.

"When the door opened and we felt the call to be their DOM, we were delighted about it," Patterson said. The first church he pastored in the 1970s was in the association. He was also the pastor at First Baptist Church of Henderson in the association before accepting the call.



Patterson

"I'm at the age now (63) that I am thinking about not just doing things myself, but passing the baton to others who are going to be doing them for years to come," Patterson commented.

He continued, "It's been a good opportunity to connect pastors and ministerial students with churches and help them and help pass the baton so we can do church in a better way."

Patterson's main goal for his sabbatical is to spend time writing. "I've just had on my heart for a long time to do a series of Bible studies for Sunday School classes or small groups on the life of Christ," he said.

"I had in mind several things that I wanted to do with that Bible study to stir small groups on the One who's more important than anyone else, the Lord Jesus," he continued.

He is the author of "Big Bottom Church," a humorous fiction about life in a Baptist church.

Additionally, Patterson has published a devotional calendar, "Building a House of Prayer," with Broadman & Holman and has written over 150 articles for such publications as Biblical Illustrator, Deacon, Homelife and Mature Living.

The association wanted "to recognize the outstanding leadership that Dr. Patterson brings to his service with us each and every day, to be a model for churches to consider being creative in crafting appropriate appreciation measures" and "to function both as a mark of retention and as a means to assist future growth," said Steve Custer, associate pastor of First Baptist Church of Morganfield.

"This sabbatical shows our tremendous love and level of support for his ministry with us. Saying thank you need not be reserved for the time at which an incumbent exits the field. It needs to be communicated at regular intervals all along the way," Custer said. (WR)

KBF continues search, appoints interim team

Louisville—The Kentucky Baptist Foundation Board of Directors announced Jan. 28 that the agency will be resuming its search for a new president and has approved an interim management team.

Laurie Valentine will serve as interim president, and Charles Barnes of Louisville, a veteran member of the KBF board, will serve as interim CEO and treasurer.

Barry Allen, who retired Feb. 1 after having completed 19 years as KBF president, will assist as a consultant. Prior to joining the KBF, Allen served 25 years as assistant business manager and business manager for the Kentucky Baptist Convention. Valentine will continue to serve as trust counsel and COO, and Barnes will continue to serve as KBF board chairman.

The board had previously voted to recommend Harold Monroe, vice president of investments for the Southern Baptist Foundation in Nashville, for the KBF position.

But in a Jan 28 statement, the board reported the President Search Committee had received information



Charles Barnes, chairman of the board of directors, presents Kentucky Baptist Foundation President Barry Allen and his wife, Larie, with a travel catalogue from which to select a trip during Allen's retirement dinner Jan. 30. Allen is retiring after 19 years as the foundation's CEO. (Photo by Larry Brannin/KBC)

that caused committee members to withdraw the nomination.

Willis Henson, search committee chair, said the search for a new president is on-going and that anyone interested in

applying or recommending a candidate should send the information addressed to: Dr. Willis Henson, President Search Committee, P.O. Box 436389, Louisville, KY 40253-6389. (WR)

Shepherding Conference

Continued from page 1
LifeWay Worship.

"What I love about Shepherding is the chance to be transparent and really deal with some things," said conference speaker Kevin Ezell, president of the North American Mission Board. "So often, so many of us feel we have to put up an outer shell that everything is okay."

During Friday morning's plenary, Ezell gave the couples a peek into his shell and shared some of his challenges as a young pastor.

Some were humorous, like him trying to fit in at a cattle auction while wearing khakis and a sweater vest.

Others were heart-wrenching, such as the time when bitterness toward Ezell resulted in his daughter being the only girl in her Sunday School class not invited to a slumber party.

"Looking back now, I see how God used certain experiences to build and prepare me," Ezell said.

Using the illustration of Joseph, Ezell encouraged the couples to work for the glory of God no matter their circumstances.

He reminded them that God is sovereign and his work will be accomplished even when it seems the whole world is conspiring in evil.

"Never buy Satan's lie of evaluating your self-worth on the difficulties you are going through," Ezell said.

"Wherever you are, do whatever it takes and work it with all your heart. Remember that ministry is a journey, not a destination."

Also speaking was KBC President Tom James, pastor of Eastwood Baptist

"People today are still looking for a dead Jesus, or an impotent Jesus. One that doesn't care enough to save your marriage... One who is not concerned about our daily life. That's what the world is looking for, but that's not my God."

KBC President Tom James, leading Thursday night's plenary on the victory in Jesus



Kevin Ezell, president of the North American Mission Board, shares personal challenges in ministry with pastors and their wives attending Shepherding in Lexington Jan. 29-31.

Church in Bowling Green, who led Thursday night's plenary on the victory in Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:57).

"People today are still looking for a dead Jesus, or an impotent Jesus. One that doesn't care enough to save your marriage. One who isn't compassionate enough to heal your hurts. One who isn't powerful enough to set you free from sin. One who is not concerned about our daily life," said James. "That's what the world is looking for, but that's not my

God."

First-time Shepherding attendees Kyle and Amanda McDanell said they appreciated the breakout sessions that focused

on the ministry of marriage and family.

"Things like this are a big encouragement when ministry is really tough," said Kyle McDanell, pastor of East Frankfort Baptist Church.

Breakout sessions at this year's Shepherding included topics such as, protecting the minister's family, dealing with critics and criticism, stress management and holistic living.

In addition to the practical advice, "excellent" speakers and worship, the Smiths agreed they most look forward to returning each winter for the fellowship with other brothers and sisters in ministry.

"It's just a great time for us. Pamela enjoys it so much, she would kill me if I didn't bring her," Greg Smith said. "We have friends that we have made here that we meet every year."

"I want it to be longer," Pamela Smith added. "There never seems to be enough time for fellowship." (KBC)

Grayson layman recognized for Hurricane Sandy relief

By Robin Cornetet

Portland, Ore.—Kentuckian Bill Johnson was recognized as one of the top disaster relief leaders in the country at the Southern Baptist Disaster Relief Roundtable Jan. 28 in Portland, Ore.

The North American Mission Board presented Johnson, of Grayson, with the SBDRL Distinguished Award for his exemplary service during 2014 through the Hurricane Sandy Rebuild efforts in New York.

"Bill has a deep passion for helping people," said Mickey Cason, NAMB's disaster relief recovery coordinator.

"He not only does a great job leading the work of the Southern Baptist Disaster Relief, but his love for people is so evident every day," Cason said of Johnson.

"It does not matter if Bill is working in the home of a survivor or with leaderships of partner organizations; Bill is comfortable," Cason said. "His passion for serving our Lord expresses itself in his willingness to share the gospel with those he works."

Johnson, a member of Liberty Missionary Baptist Church in Cannonsburg, has served with Kentucky Baptist Disaster Relief since 2008. Before moving to the Bluegrass State, he was a leader and rigging trainer with SBDRL in Texas.

"This is a prestigious national award," Kentucky Baptist Disaster Relief Director Coy Webb said, "and one that is

given to no more than six people annually."

Award recipients were selected from 42 Southern Baptist Convention-affiliated state conventions and chosen because they demonstrated an exceptional ability to serve the kingdom of God through disaster relief. In essence, they showed "Christ in a crisis."

Webb, who nominated Johnson, described him as a man with "a passion for Christ and a willingness to go wherever He leads," even if that means accepting a long-term assignment away from the comforts of home.

When Hurricane Sandy hit the Northeast coastline more than two years ago, Johnson was among the first Kentuckians to respond, Webb said. During the crisis, Johnson revealed his leadership qualities while working with the New York Incident Command Team.

As the humanitarian effort transitioned from meeting immediate needs to those that were more long term, many volunteers went back to their home states—not Johnson.

At the request of NAMB, he and his wife, Donna, signed up to serve the next couple of years as rebuild coordinators in New York.

"Bill and Donna are caring people," said Kentucky DR volunteer Lew Cook. "They are the right folks to call and get things done."

Cook, a former award recipient, said he has worked alongside Johnson for several years and has always admired his



Bill Johnson (center), of Grayson, received the Southern Baptist Disaster Relief Distinguished Award from the North American Mission Board at the Southern Baptist Disaster Relief Roundtable in Portland, Ore. With Johnson are SBDRL Executive Director Fritz Wilson (left), and Coy Webb, director of Kentucky Baptist DR. Johnson is a member of Liberty Missionary Baptist Church in Cannonsburg. (Photo provided by Karen Smith)

ability to minister to people regardless of the circumstances.

"One of his strongest attributes is his ability to witness to people," Cook said. "Whether it's a homeowner, someone who has gone through a loss, or a group

of disaster relief folks, Bill can talk with them and pray with them. I haven't seen a situation where he wouldn't witness to someone.

"He's very much deserving of this award." (KBC)

'Take It to the Streets' with creative arts March 6-7 in Bowling Green

Bowling Green—Using creative arts to share the gospel will be the focus of Creative Ministries Festival 2.0—"Taking It to the Streets," March 6-7 at Living Hope Baptist Church in Bowling Green.

The event includes classes in creative arts, a missions fair, and block parties where participants will use their skills to present the gospel.

General sessions will feature guest artist Jeff Smith, director of Salt and Light Ministries of Richmond, Va. Smith uses drama, music and storytelling in his unique brand of ministry.

He offers basic instruction on a variety of creative arts, but his niche is creative movement and human video, where he is known as "The Rodfather."

Creative Ministries Festival 2.0 is a two-day experience that will equip students and adults to share the gospel in creative ways. The 2.0 version refers to new features and a missions emphasis that has been added to the traditional elements of the popular event, which recently came under the direction of Kentucky WMU.

Five workshop times will be offered to teach techniques and routines in puppetry, balloons, interpretive movement, sign language, "God Rods," skits, juggling, face painting, magic, lip synch, clowning and human video.

The event's theme, "Taking It to the

Streets," emphasizes the importance of using creative arts to tell others about Jesus.

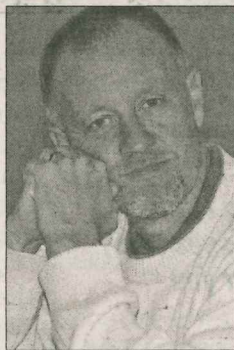
During a missions fair on Friday evening, students will meet missionaries and ministry leaders who want creative ministry teams to come serve in their areas. Every participant will attend a workshop on sharing the gospel and will be encouraged to use creative arts in missions.

"Taking It to the Streets" will become reality on Saturday when students use their creative arts skills in four simultaneous block parties. Sites have been selected to help a new church plant as well as outreach in needy communities.

Every group will be assigned to participate in a block party and groups may sign up in advance to perform routines that they have prepared.

Creative arts workshop leaders include: Dawn Baker, Tim Bertram, Felicia Bland, David Buckner, Lori Durbin, Katherine Gilbert, George Halitzka, Ashley Hicks, Karen Holbrook, David and Susan Huffman, Terry and Sharon Kelly, Peggy Leach, Beth Swadley, and Matt Tullios.

The registration fee per person is \$20. Registration information and other details may be found at www.kywmu.org/cmf. For more information contact Peggy Murphy at 502-489-3457. (WMU)



Jeff Smith

College missionary to internationals gets nod from administrative group

Louisville—The administrative committee of the Kentucky Baptist Convention approved establishing a full-time position for an international student evangelism strategist during their Feb. 5 meeting at the Kentucky Baptist Building.

"The position will work with collegiate staff and local churches to develop a comprehensive missions strategy to engage international students with the gospel and equip them to engage their people group via indigenous ministry both domestically and abroad," according to Brian Combs, KBC collegiate evangelism strategist.

Baptist Campus Ministry leaders are now called college missionaries and the state has been divided into nine regions, with each college missionary responsible for about 20 campuses in their area," Chuck McAlister, leader of the KBC's evangelism, church planting and collegiate ministries team told the committee.

The international student strategist would identify the people groups represented on the state's 170 collegiate campuses and assist the college missionaries in helping churches engage those people groups utilizing an intentional evangelism strategy developed by the International Mission Board, McAlister said.

Committee members also approved eliminating a campus ministry position at Campbellsville University since the

school has severed its partnership agreement with the state convention. Funds currently budgeted for the Campbellsville position will be combined with monies for an existing part-time international student ministry position to help upgrade it to full-time status.

Ed Pavy, campus minister at Campbellsville, has been hired by the university and will continue ministering to its students.

"We will remain open to CU's engagement with Kentucky Baptist Campus Ministry as appropriate opportunities present themselves," Combs stated.

In related action, the administrative committee voted to eliminate three part-time contract student ministry positions on the campuses of Alice Lloyd, Prestonsburg and Pikeville. Two of the three positions, which are filled by volunteers, are vacant.

The \$10,189 budgeted for use by these contract workers for programming will be used to support continued ministry at these campuses by local churches and associations.

Lowell Ashby, business and finance team leader, reported that Cooperative Program receipts from Kentucky Baptist churches for December and January totaled \$4.136 million. For the first time in at least seven years, he noted, the KBC is both ahead of its budget and ahead of last year's CP totals through the first five months of the fiscal year. (WR)

Haynes: patriot, abolitionist

Guest article from Curtis Woods, associate executive director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

African-American evangelicals have been passionate about social justice and biblical reconciliation since the late 18th century. Allow me to introduce you to Lemuel Haynes (1753-1833), an American patriot and abolitionist intellectual.

Haynes was born in West Hartford, Conn., to unmarried biracial parents.

Together
We are the KBC

Paul Chitwood

Haynes's earliest biographer described his father as an African of "unmingled ancestry." His mother could have been an indentured servant or an aristocrat. Most historians cannot irrefutably identify the parents. They only know the father was black and the mother was white. Biracial relations were common practice in early American history. For evidence, one need only observe the number

of biracial births by African, Native American and Anglo females. Sadly, laws of the land often gave special liberties to Anglo male citizens, which accounted for many pregnancies.

Shortly after Haynes's birth, his mother abandoned him. He became an indentured servant at the tender age of 5 months. Haynes lived his entire life as an indenture to a family in Granville, Mass. They treated him like one of their own. Haynes was emancipated on his 18th birthday. The uninhibited one would soon become a great liberator, as his writings helped plow the ground from which would sprout Abraham Lincoln's "Emancipation Proclamation."

Long before Martin Luther King Jr. wrote the now-famous "Letter from a Birmingham City Jail," which called for the death of Jim Crow society in the South, Haynes penned "Liberty Further Extended" even before the birth of Jim Crow. In 1776, Haynes attacked American slavery and the slave trade. He struggled to understand how colonial leaders could picture "freedom as a natural right" while denying liberty to enslaved Africans.

In similar fashion, King rhetorically asked, "How can you (political leaders) advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?" King answered, "The answer lies in the fact that there are two types of laws: just and unjust." Just laws come from obeying God's Word, whereas unjust laws take place when leaders forsake truth. These ideas were generated by King on April 16, 1963. We remember King, but we have forgotten evangelicals like Haynes.

In their struggle for freedom, African-American evangelicals kept God's sovereignty in line with Scripture when they critiqued injustice. God was never portrayed as incapable of acting on behalf of truth and love. God's hands, as it were, were never tied by the will of His creation. These evangelicals believed, "Our God is in heaven and does whatever He pleases." If you respond, "How can someone say that God's hands were somehow involved with the horror of slavery?" I would respond, "In the same way God's hand—and our hands—crushed his own Son so that the innocent One could provide salvation for the guilty" (Acts 2:23).

Like Haynes, evangelicals today must contend for the faith in order to transform society. Contemporary African-American evangelicals cannot allow the apparent cultural tsunami to change the tide of truth. Let us strive to keep the gospel first as we pursue biblical reconciliation and social justice.

Bomb survivor discovers blessing in adversity

How do you handle adversity? Do you cry out, "God, what are you doing? How much more can I possibly handle?" Or, would you allow God to use your pain for His greater purpose?

Rebekah DiMartino steadfastly maintains, "Whatever you are going through in your life, don't give up because God has got a plan for everything, and everything that we go through, it ultimately works together for your good."

That's not an easy statement for her to make, considering what happened.

The Louisville native and graduate of Eastern High School was at the Boston Marathon on April 2013, standing just three feet from where a bomb exploded at the finish line. But she's quick to tell you that she isn't a victim; she's a survivor.

She now lives in Texas, but DiMartino recently spoke at St. Matthews Baptist Church in Louisville, telling about her experience at the marathon, her months-long recovery, and how her faith has played a large part in it.

"It was my birthday weekend," DiMartino began. In Boston for her first time, she was there to watch her now mother-in-law in the race. "No, I was not the runner," she quipped. "I was actually the one on the sidelines eating chocolate-covered pretzels and watching everybody else pass."

"Here was me," she said, pointing to a spot on the floor. "Right here was a bomb!" she exclaimed, pointing only three feet away. "Three! And I'm alive, and I'm standing here to tell you about it," she marveled.

"But the most miraculous part of my story is the way that God uses me," she continued. She told how God had used her leg that day to shield her then 5-year-old son, Noah, and spare his life. On the screen behind her was one of the most iconic pictures of the Boston Marathon bombing: Her little boy being rushed away in a wheelchair by first responders.

When the bomb went off, Noah was sitting at her feet, playing with some small rocks. Had he been standing, she was told, he likely would have died instantly. "I took everything in the back of the legs so that Noah would be saved," she said. "That is God's purpose (for me)," she nodded. "I cannot feel sorry for myself in the least bit, because I know my son is running around like normal today. ... I thank God every day for

my little boy still being here."

DiMartino stayed in the hospital for 56 days, though. In the past 18 months, she endured 30 surgeries—more than half on her left leg alone, which below the knee was nearly destroyed. Doctors told her that it may never function again. "I was miserable. It was weighing on my heart for me to have to endure the pain and frustration of a leg that didn't work," she said.

After
Thought

By Todd Deaton



could make a change.

"And God's glory shines through better when things don't hold you back," she asserted.

"My leg is not my life," she said. "I'm so thankful that I get to be here. A leg is just a leg. Cut it off, and give me a new one." She introduced her new prosthesis as though it were a baby: "On Jan. 7, Felicia was born. She weighs 4 pound, 8 ounces—18 inches long. She's absolutely beautiful. I just love her; she's a doll. She's so high maintenance, but we're working it out."

When you have tough decisions to make, she discovered, it ultimately leads you to your greater purpose. "I believe with all of my heart that my purpose in life is to inspire and encourage other people," DiMartino said. "I don't feel I have it figured out at all. But I know that I have such a passion to help other people, based on the struggles that I've been through ... and that's what I'm going to spend the rest of my life doing."

"It's a scary world; change it!" she urges. "I try very hard every day when I wake up to say, God, let me have that open heart to where whoever talks to me, whoever comes in my path, sees that I radiate some type of light for you."

As for her, rather than let adversity destroy her, "It's gonna make me stronger," she declared. In a couple of months, she hopes to run the Boston Marathon. "I'm going to climb mountains; I'm going to dance; I'm going to run; I'm going to do anything and everything that I can, because it's my life and I'm not going to waste a second of it."

Across Felicia, her new leg, is the word "blessed" in embroidery. Discovering a blessing in adversity—it's an inspiring word for us all.

"I try very hard every day when I wake up to say, 'God, let me have that open heart to where whoever talks to me, whoever comes in my path, sees that I radiate some type of light for you.'"

Rebekah DiMartino, survivor of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing

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Call to Prayer: 'Do not be anxious ...'

By David Roach

Most of us know that the Bible says not to worry. Jesus put it memorably when He said, "Do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble" (Matthew 6:34).

But often that's easier said than done. Anxiety can feel uncontrollable when finances are tight, when relationships are strained, and when there doesn't seem to be enough time to fulfill all of life's obligations.

Does the Bible provide any specific strategies for avoiding worry? Fortunately it does. Try the following next time anxiety feels unavoidable.

Go deeper with Christ

God wants to walk with His people like He did with Adam and Eve in the garden. In fact, He "takes pleasure in His people" (Psalm 149:4). In times of great worry, depend on Jesus as a personal friend and return to your first love (Revelation 2:4-5). Experiencing His friendship is often the only force more powerful than life's overwhelming cares.

Pray

The apostle Paul advised the Philippians to "not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer ... let your requests be

made known to God" (Philippians 4:6). Sometimes the best antidote to troubled stewing over life's problems is to translate the stewing into specific requests for the Lord.

Meditate on an uplifting thought

Paul told the Philippians to think about whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent and worthy of praise (Philippians 4:8). The possibilities

are almost limitless, and you can't think about things while also

mulling over your stresses.

Go to church

One reason God commands Christians to be part of a local church is that being with His people provides encouragement and "stirs" us up "to love and good works" (Hebrews 10:24-25). Attending a prayer meeting, worship service or small group Bible study can provide a needed lift of spirit.

Serve others

Ministering to others can help us get away from the self-focus of worry. The Macedonian believers, despite their own "severe test of affliction," experienced "abundance of joy" by turning their energy toward assisting others (2 Corinthians 8:2).

Sing

This can be a powerful

alternative to worry. Think about the psalms of lament in which King David soothed his cares with worship songs. When his own son usurped the throne and sought to kill him, David sang, "You, O LORD, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head" (Psalm 3:3).

Spend time with family

Scripture has much to say about the joys of family, whether biological (Proverbs 12:4; Psalm 127:3-5) or spiritual (1 Timothy 5:1-2). To put the subject of your worry aside momentarily and enjoy time with loved ones can markedly reduce anxiety.

Seek wholesome entertainment

"A joyful heart is good medicine," according to Proverbs 17:22. The next time you're anxious or stressed, try watching an uplifting movie or television show, reading a book or attending a play. Entertainment of the wholesome variety is among God's gifts to lighten troubled times.

Thankfully the Bible doesn't just give us abstract commands, but also provides concrete strategies for doing what God says. Avoiding anxiety is a case in point.

The next time your stress level elevates, remember that Jesus cares about your troubled heart and provides all the strategies needed for those "who labor and are heavy laden" to experience His "rest" (Matthew 11:28). (BP)

Preparing for retirement

By Scott Wigginton

Q: My husband and I are baby boomers who are both approaching retirement after very active and busy careers. We've prepared our portfolio, but how can we prepare our marriage for this stage?



A: "Second-half" marriages need to remember that retirement is not God's word, but a construct of our own making. God's desire is that we never retire from His service, but remain fruitful all the days of our lives.

While it is wise to save for our older years when energy may flag and health may fail, it is equally important to pay attention to how aging might affect our marriages.

As great as the concept of retirement sounds, the sudden cessation of a job or career can also bring with it a lot of unanticipated grief related to the loss of an identity which has been cultivated over many decades.

Wise couples carefully think about the older years as an opportunity to cut back in intensity of work and perhaps even to emphasize a different aspect of their talents, gifts, and desires then was possible during the full-time working years.

Couples benefit greatly when they take time to anticipate this stage of life, asking questions such as:

- With more time together as a couple, what new things might we enjoy doing together?
- In what and in whom do we want to invest in this stage?
- What dreams do we have as a couple for this time?
- How can we imagine moving from being "kings" and "queens" in our work spheres to "sages" who wisely advise the younger kings and queens?
- What do we need to do to prepare for possible challenges to our health and resources? (e.g. long-term health insurance)
- How do we want to prioritize, support and encourage our adult children and grandchildren?
- How much structure do we need to create to feel there is a good balance of routine and flexibility?

4 keys words for retiring

By Donald Spencer

Which would you rather do over the weekend—plan for next summer's vacation or for retirement? People spend more time planning for a one-week vacation than they do for 20-30 years of retirement.

Many baby boomers are more concerned about outliving their money than they are about dying. But studies show about one-third of adults in their 50s don't have a retirement plan.

Below are four key words to keep in mind in retirement planning:

Participate—Do not assume your employer or retirement plan provider is looking out for your retirement needs and wants. Set goals for 10, 20 and 30 years into the future. Even the best financial advisors cannot help you until you've established these goals. Unless you're engaged in the process, you'll end up with a retirement plan that looks like it was designed for someone else.

Harmonize—A plan for financial security in retirement cannot be done in isolation. A well designed retirement plan will always take into consideration other aspects of your financial life.

Anticipate—Unforeseen things will occur in your retirement years. Make provision for these. Things that have a direct financial impact include unusual market volatility, changes in tax law, change in health conditions and medical costs, unexpected family crises, and changes in life expectancy. Also factor in the changing world as it might be in 20 or 30 years. No one anticipated retirees needing computers and cell phones. Changing technology increases financial needs in retirement.

Discipline—No retirement plan, however perfectly designed, will help unless you have the commitment and discipline to stick to it. Set your retirement goals. Make your plan. Then make it an integral part of your way of life.



John Sampey & Christ-centered Bible study

By Trevin Wax

I confess to being a bit of a Baptist history nerd. In my office are pictures of two Southern Baptist heroes—John A. Broadus and E.Y. Mullins. I admire Broadus for his example of Christ-centered preaching and Mullins for his denominational statesmanship and advocacy of religious liberty in Romania, where I was involved in missions for several years.

I may soon be placing another picture on my desk, that of John R. Sampey (1863-1946).

The past few weeks, I've been reading his memoirs, written in the twilight of his long life after having served as a professor of Old Testament for nearly 60 years, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary during the worst of the Great Depression (1929-42) and president of the SBC from 1936-38.

Sampey's autobiography displays his passion for evangelism, scholarship and missionary work, particularly in Brazil. He often speaks of the church's ongoing discipleship ministry, particularly through Sunday School.

Sampey was a brilliant Old Testament theologian, but he didn't simply busy himself with

discussions and debates in the ivory towers of academia.

In his book, we find him traveling frequently to Nashville to meet with workers at the Sunday School Board (now LifeWay Christian Resources). We see him serving on the International Sunday School Lesson Committee, recommending study plans and Bible passages.

This was a scholar who knew the conversations in Sunday School every week are just as formative and important as the debates in academic halls or the sermons from a pastor's pulpit.

In 1914, some were complaining that the lessons lacked a "redemptive" focus. So, Sampey recommended a study plan for taking participants through the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation.

They formed a six-year plan through the Bible, followed by a briefer overview of both Testaments in two years. World War I put the plans on hold, but Sampey wouldn't be deterred. The new plan launched in 1918.

Looking back over his decades of service to Sunday School planning, Sampey reflected on the trends and changes in developing and using curriculum. But through it all, there was one principle that guided him—he wanted people to see how the whole Bible

points to Christ.

Sampey wrote: "When the advocates insisted that the lessons be pupil-centered, I countered by insisting that the lessons should be Christ-centered. I sought to make Jesus Christ the center of each cycle... For 46 years I sought to exalt the redemptive element of the Bible. And how many noble men of the Lesson Committee joined me putting Christ Jesus and His salvation in the center of our lesson system!"

Even today, 100 years later, we are told we should be "pupil-centered" if we are to reach people in our congregations. But "Me-centeredness" isn't a solution; it's part of the problem. The way we realize the world doesn't revolve around us is by seeing how it revolves around Jesus—the One from whom, and to whom, and for whom are all things.

Every generation needs to be reminded of redemption.

I can't help but feel a sense of a gratitude for men like Sampey and their vision of Christ-centered Bible study.

After all, we never stop needing to be reminded and refreshed of the redemption God has given us in His Son. May the Spirit of God empower us to spread the news of His great salvation to all people everywhere. (BP)

FIRST PERSON

Evans, Lee, 6 others added to race summit

Nashville—Megachurch pastor Tony Evans and hip-hop artist Trip Lee are among additional speakers for a racial reconciliation summit sponsored by the Southern Baptist Convention's ethics entity.

"The Gospel and Racial Reconciliation" will be the theme of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission's second Leadership Summit, March 26-27 in Nashville.

The ERLC announced in December it was changing the theme of its 2015 summit from pro-life ethics to racial reconciliation in the wake of grand jury decisions in the police killings of black men that provoked widespread protests and a nationwide discussion.

The shift in plans followed refusals by

grand juries in St. Louis County and New York City to indict police in the high-profile deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner.

Evans is senior pastor of Dallas' Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship, where he has served for nearly 40 years since founding the church. He is the author of several books and the president of the national ministry The Urban Alternative.

Lee has recorded five rap albums, including his latest, "Rise," which quickly reached No. 1 on the iTunes list upon its release in October.

He is the author of two books and has served as a pastoral assistant and elder at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C.

Other African American leaders

named Jan. 21 as additional speakers for the summit are:

■ Marshall Williams, president of the National African American Fellowship of the SBC and senior pastor of Nazarene Baptist Church in Philadelphia.

■ Thabiti Anyabwile, church planting pastor of Anacostia River Church in Washington, D.C., and an author and popular blogger.

■ Derwin Gray, founding and lead pastor of Transformation Church, with campuses in Indian Land and Rock Hill, S.C.

■ Dhati Lewis, founding and lead pastor of Blueprint Church in Atlanta.

Other newly named speakers are:

■ Frank Page, president of the Southern Baptist Executive Committee.

■ Jim Richards, executive director of

the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention.

In a news release introducing the new summit speakers, ERLC President Russell Moore said the summit "will help equip us to tear down carnal divisions, to bring about peace, so that churches reflect the kingdom of God."

"The New Testament is clear that the gospel reconciles us not only to God but also to each other," Moore said. "Racism and injustice are not just social ills; they are sins against God. Racial reconciliation is a matter of what gospel we believe and to what mission we've been called."

Information on the March summit and registration for the event are available at erlc.com/summit2015. Sessions will be live-streamed at erlc.com. (BP)

Backpacks

Continued from page 1

students had the opportunity to listen to a gospel presentation, resulting in 701 salvation decisions.

"All in all, this is a good approach to open doors to share the gospel," said Bill Barker, North American Mission Board missionary and ARM director.

The holiday activity builds good will that lasts throughout the year, Barker said, noting, "We have seen individuals with such hostility toward the church just melt because of the Christmas backpack ministry."

ARM, a NAMB ministry, started the backpack outreach in 2001 when an Atlanta-area church collected shoeboxes full of school supplies and hygiene items to deliver to a poverty-stricken community in West Virginia. In 2011 ARM moved from shoeboxes to backpacks, reaching more than 5,800 students at Christmas in West Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia and Mississippi.

After a slight decline in the number of backpacks in 2012, John Waters, then-president of the Georgia Baptist Convention, challenged the state's Baptists to support ARM's Christmas backpack ministry. The next year, ARM collected and distributed 23,808 backpacks, and the number grew again this past Christmas.

"We are seeing a lot of lives changed and Georgia Baptists are really leading the way," Barker said. "Churches from Alabama, California and other states have contacted us after seeing the success we have had with this ministry on the East Coast."

Churches from Georgia, North

Carolina, Virginia and Kentucky participated in this year's initiative. The response was so positive that 1,100 backpacks were shared with the Mississippi River Ministry for distribution through its partners. In 2014 more than 4,000 salvation decisions were recorded through the ministries of ARM and the Mississippi River Ministry.

But the backpack ministry doesn't happen just once a year. Teams are working year-round to provide for students and families in need. Each fall, ARM distributes backpacks filled with school supplies to students of all ages. Coats, shoes, clothing and food boxes also are available to students and their families at each distribution location.

ARM received approximately \$67,000 in unsolicited funds in 2014 specifically for helping needy children in Appalachia.

Along with accepting donations, ARM welcomes volunteers to assist with the



Children received backpacks and Christmas gifts. In all 129 decisions to follow Christ were made at events during the holiday season. (Photo courtesy Gary Snyder)

Christmas backpack ministry, partnering with different state conventions, local churches and Southern Baptist Disaster Relief. But there is always a need for individuals to help assemble, collect, deliver and distribute backpacks to their various destinations.

"It's amazing to see how individuals

come together to serve alongside this ministry," Barker said. "Entire congregations will take part in distributing backpacks, and church members who haven't shown up to a service in five years will come to help make this ministry happen."

While ARM is accustomed to receiving calls from churches about getting involved in the backpack ministry, 2014 was the first year schools called to request backpacks for students on their campuses.

"We were surprised but thrilled to see how public schools were welcoming us onto their campuses," Barker said. Other church groups have taken the backpack idea and created similar ministry opportunities.

"This is just one way we have found to show others the love of Christ and to share His story. And as long as the gospel is shared, in the end that's the ultimate goal." (BP)

NAMB, IMB to partner on Send North America Conf.

By Joe Conway

Alpharetta, Ga.—The Send North America Conference has gained a major partner for the Aug. 3-4 sessions at Nashville's Bridgestone Arena.

North American Mission Board President Kevin Ezell has announced that the International Mission Board is partnering with NAMB to make the Send North America Conference fully comprehensive in missions scope.

At its core, the heart of the two-day Send North America Conference is a gathering of the church in North America to see a movement of people living out the mission of God in their everyday lives. It aims to bring mission leaders at every level from across the continent together for encouragement, vision and action.

The conference holds promise to be one of the largest missions gatherings in North American history. Paid registration has already surpassed 7,300.

"Working together on this conference means churches and individuals will truly be able to come away with a complete vision and plan for their church's

mission activity in North America and around the globe," Ezell said. "This kind of opportunity is unprecedented in Southern Baptist life and I am very excited about the potential."

In addition to providing a comprehensive vision and plan, missions mobilization is a natural partnership for NAMB and IMB.

David Platt, IMB president, recounted, "When I first agreed to be a part of the Send North America Tour, culminating in this event in August, I had no idea that I would soon be serving alongside NAMB as president of IMB. I am exhilarated when I think about all the possibilities we have to mobilize Christians and equip churches for mission in North America and the nations together, and this conference is a reflection of that reality. I am eagerly looking forward to NAMB and IMB together hosting thousands of people in one place for God-glorifying, gospel-saturated worship all aimed at sending those people out from local churches on mission all over the world."

The conference will provide many opportunities for networking between its main sessions, worship times and

breakout sessions. An abbreviated list of speakers includes Platt, Matt Carter, Louie Giglio, Al Mohler and Eric Mason, among others.

Worship sessions will be led by Passion Band, Casting Crowns, David Crowder and Shane and Shane.

With the Send North America Conference's focus on mobilization and next steps, participants will have the opportunity to respond on-site to several missions avenues, from exploration to support to church planting and unreached people group engagement.

Organizers hope churches and individuals will be encouraged to live life on mission as a result of participating in the conference.

That may mean beginning the conversation about what life on mission looks like, exploring where to plug in with NAMB and IMB, increasing support for missions or becoming personally involved as a church planter or other type of missionary.

The cost of the conference is \$129. The event's website—sendconference.com—provides information on registration, lodging and other important details. (BP)



Kevin Ezell



David Platt



Al Mohler



Members of Bowdon Baptist Church in the Carrollton Baptist Association in Georgia supported and hosted several backpack distribution events throughout Appalachia. Churches in the association contributed 500 backpacks for the effort. (Photo courtesy Gary Snyder)

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Guest Speakers



Paul Chitwood
Kentucky Baptist Convention



Jesse Connors
Founder of TrueLife.org



Ronnie Floyd
Cross Church



Alex Himaya
theChurch.at



Gabe Lyons
Q Ideas



Chuck McAlister
Kentucky Baptist Convention



Brian Mills
Englewood Baptist Church



Al Mohler
Southern Baptist Theological Seminary



Russell Moore
Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission



Trillia Newbell
Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission



Frank Page
Southern Baptist Convention



Vic Sholar
Main Street Baptist Church



Ed Stetzer
LifeWay Christian Resources



TC Taylor
New Breed Church



Isaac Frasure
Highview Baptist Church



Jason Stewart
Kentucky Baptist Convention

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502-489-3418

Register by email:
evangelism@kybaptist.org

QUESTIONS?
Contact DeAnna Terry
502-489-3418

SCHEDULE

MONDAY, FEB. 23

- 7:00 p.m. Worship led by Isaac Frasure & Jason Stewart
PreRISK Service with Ronnie Floyd, Jesse Connors, Ed Stetzer
- 9:00 p.m. Dessert Fellowship & Networking

TUESDAY, FEB. 24

- 8:45 a.m. Worship led by Isaac Frasure & Jason Stewart
- 9:00 a.m. RISK Session 1 – **Church is... Challenging. I didn't sign up for this.**
Featured Speakers: Gabe Lyons, Ed Stetzer, Al Mohler
- 10:30 a.m. RISK Session 2 – **Culture is... Resistant. I wasn't prepared for this.**
Featured Speakers: TC Taylor, Russell Moore, Trillia Newbell
- 11:35 a.m. Lunch
- 1:00 p.m. RISK Session 3 – **Change is... Hard. I'm overwhelmed.**
Featured Speakers: Brian Mills, Frank Page, Alex Himaya
- 2:30 p.m. RISK Session 4 – **Courage is... Required. I'm determined!**
Featured Speakers: Paul Chitwood, Victor Sholar
- 3:30 p.m. Worship & Panel Discussion with All Featured Speakers
- 4:30 p.m. What am I going to do? Led by Chuck McAlister
- 5:00 p.m. Close

ERLC, Focus unveil Evangelicals for Life

By Tom Strode

Washington—Southern Baptists' ethics entity and a leading pro-family organization took a public, first step Jan. 22 in mobilizing extensive evangelical Christian involvement in the annual March for Life.

The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission and Focus on the Family introduced Evangelicals for Life—a major evangelical, pro-life conference in conjunction with the 2016 March for Life—at an event by the same name that preceded this year's march. At the morning session, the ERLC and Focus on the Family announced they will sponsor with other organizations the first-of-its-kind event next Jan. 21-22 in Washington, D.C.

The ERLC and Focus are planning in 2016 "to really initiate a massive movement of evangelicals present at the March for Life," ERLC President Russell Moore told those gathered Jan. 22 in a Washington hotel meeting room.

The March for Life, a signature event of the pro-life movement, began in 1974, a year after the Jan. 22 Roe v. Wade decision legalized abortion nationwide. Held on or near Jan. 22, it brings together many tens of thousands of pro-lifers—or a few hundred thousand, depending on estimates—to rally on the National Mall in Washington, then march up Constitution Avenue to Capitol Hill. Leaders from the diverse groups that make up the pro-life movement typically gather for the march and surrounding events.

While many religious groups are involved, Roman Catholics dominate attendance at the march. Catholic parishes and



ERLC President Russell Moore prays during the Evangelicals for Life event Jan. 22 in Washington, with Kelly Rosati of Focus on the Family, Samuel Rodriguez of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference and Phillip Bethancourt of ERLC. (Photo by Chad Bartlett)

schools from numerous states send busloads to Washington for the event, and many other Catholics travel by train and vehicle. The Catholic Church also sponsors events in Washington before the march.

Evangelicals are deeply involved in a variety of pro-life efforts in the United States, but they have been significantly underrepresented at the March for Life. That needs to change, Moore said.

"I don't want to see any fewer rosary beads at the March for Life, but I want to see more evangelicals here also at the March for Life," he told the Jan. 22 ERLC-Focus gathering that included a sizable number of evangelical, pro-life leaders.

"(O)ur absence is a shame. And so we don't need any less 'Ave Maria,' but we need some more 'Amazing Grace' in the mix as well."

Of the 2016 conference, Moore said, "You're going to see a gathering of evangelicals saying, 'This is our issue too,' ... to cultivate a new generation of born-again men and women who care about the unborn, who care about their mothers and who care about consciences that are torn apart by the culture of death.

Moore and Focus President Jim Daly are the only conference speakers named so far.

Kelly Rosati, Focus' vice president of community outreach, told the audience of about 70 pro-lifers, "We really believe that God is doing something in the evangelical community to encourage and strengthen those of you who have been on the front lines for so long....

"We are going to turn this around, and we are never, never going to stop speaking out for unborn kids." (BP)

Refocus benevolent ministries during ReThink Mercy

Louisville—Scripture calls on Christ-followers to care for the poor, widowed and orphaned, but how does a church go beyond meeting physical needs to transforming lives in the community?

ReThink Mercy, a new workshop offered by the Kentucky Baptist Convention, is designed to equip churches to be more effective, more intentional and more gospel-centered in benevolent outreach. Through one-day workshops held in Louisville, Feb. 12, and Bowling Green, Feb. 13, ministry experts will provide practical tools for churches to engage the lost and suffering.

"Our goal in showing mercy is to see those we help come to know Christ as their Lord," said Eric Allen, KBC's Missions Mobilization team leader. "Mercy ministries must do more than just meet a felt need. They must lead to total restoration of the individual in need."

Participants will walk away with a better understanding of poverty and how God established the church as a conduit for mercy and gospel proclamation. Workshops will include a time of defining goals and refocusing ministry priorities.

For more information, go to www.kybaptist.org/rethink or contact KBC's mission mobilization team at (502) 489-3530 or missions@kybaptist.org. (KBC)

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While thousands of sports fans descended on the Phoenix area, Southern Baptists looked to make the most of ministry opportunities as the city hosted the Super Bowl and Phoenix Open. Daryl and Julie Bennett of Flagstaff traveled to Phoenix to hand out gospel material to sports fans. (Photo by Shawn Hendricks/BP)

Super Bowl

Continued from page 1

outdoor city and we're very active. It's a barrier. They do everything outside. Kids are playing softball or soccer 12 months a year. It never stops."

To push back lostness in Phoenix, Patton said local churches will need the help and partnership of congregations elsewhere.

Because the area has relatively few evangelical churches and even fewer Southern Baptist congregations, church planters in particular need to know they have the support of other churches.

"For our planters to know that they have people all over the country praying for them and adopting them as their own, that's huge.

"Plus, it shows the community we're a bigger family," Patton said. "It shows the community that the church isn't just an

independent entity, but it's an interdependent one."

Patton said God has provided a great crop of church planters to the area in recent years, yet the city needs more.

"We are at a crossroads of opportunity," Patton said.

"Phoenix is a great city with a lot of opportunities. If we take advantage of the opportunity the Father has so graciously given us, we could really make a big impact.

"But if we miss this and don't get the support—the prayer support in particular—and the teams and the planters, we're going to miss a whole new generation in this city."

Griffin said the challenge of reaching Phoenix stirs him to plead to God for the salvation of his city and new friends.

"I'm in it for the long haul," Griffin said. "I'll do whatever it takes. I'll get a job—whatever it takes—because my passion is to reach this city for Christ." (BP)

Despite Boko Haram, gospel impacts Nigeria

Maiduguri, Nigeria—As Boko Haram militants continue to attack Nigeria and threaten neighboring countries, Christian workers there say the gospel is going forth and impacting receptive hearts.

Greg Dorsey*, a Christian worker in West Africa, said Nigerian Christians are effectively engaging many areas of the country.

"The northeastern corner of Nigeria where Boko Haram has wielded most of its activities remains a difficult area for believers to freely worship and share their faith," Dorsey said. "However, God has raised up believers who have remained steadfast and bold in the midst of applied pressures to silence them."

Another Christian worker told of hearing the testimonies of believers from troubled areas of northern Nigeria at a recent meeting.

"Each one that shared was brought to the Lord by a brother or other close relative. Earlier this year, some of these same men were imprisoned.

While we prayed for their release, they were sharing their faith and welcoming new brothers into the Christ-life."

One man exhibited amazing joy in Christ even as he showed scars from his imprisonment and torture.

The day after the man shared his story, he received a phone call that his house had been burned and his family scattered.

In what is described as Boko Haram's deadliest attack to date, hundreds of gunmen invaded the town of Baga and 16 surrounding villages in Borno state on Jan. 3 and continued to slaughter residents and burn homes throughout the following week, killing an estimated 2,000 people.

Yet, Nigerians continue to seek peace in the midst of the country's struggles, according to Christian workers.

One worker shared the story of a religious leader who said, "I've searched the Quran for peace, and every time Jesus is mentioned. Can you tell me about Him?"

After hearing stories of Jesus, the man repented, prayed for salvation and was later baptized.

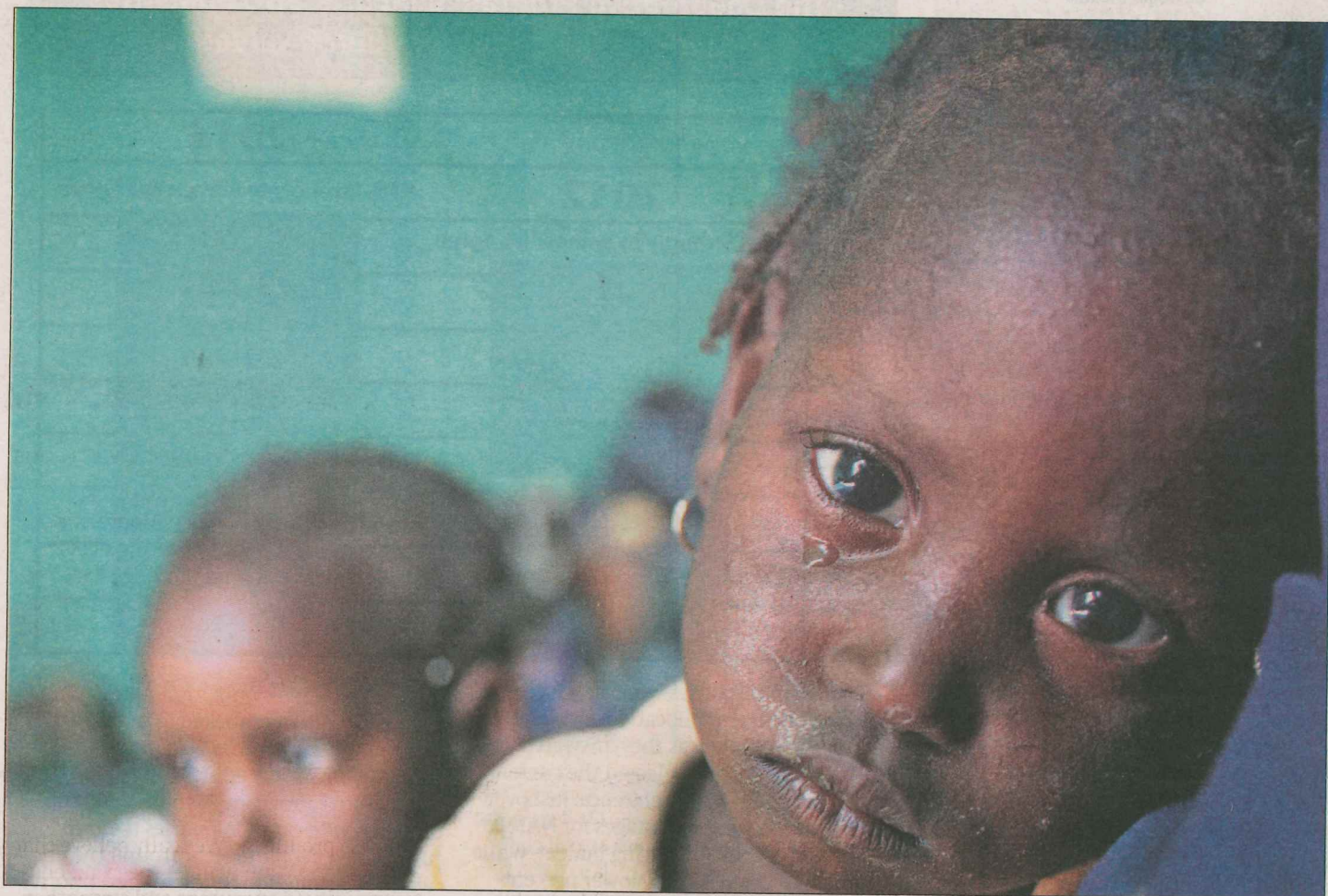
Amid the persecution, believers are reminded that even their persecutors can experience the power of the gospel.

"Remember that the apostle Paul was once a religious terrorist until he met Jesus on the Damascus Road.

"Ask God to open the eyes of those who are blinded by the deceiver and bring them to Christ that they too might become great evangelists," one Christian leader said.

Boko Haram, seeking to establish Sharia law, has killed thousands of Christians, moderate Muslims, government officials and civilians in attacks targeting religious communities in northern Nigeria since 2012, according to news reports, with the death toll calculated between 10,000 and 12,000.

An estimated 1.5 million Nigerians



Top, Nigerian refugees in the makeshift Gagamari camp in the Diffa region of Niger line up to have their children screened for malnutrition by Save the Children. (©EC/ECHO/Anouk Delafortrie. Used by permission.)

Right, Indiscriminate attacks by Boko Haram in northern Nigeria are causing immense suffering among innocent civilians who are killed, chased, enrolled as fighters or enslaved. (©EC/ECHO/Anouk Delafortrie. Used by permission.)



have been forced to flee their homes, according to the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs as of September 2014.

Boko Haram intensified attacks in Nigeria after

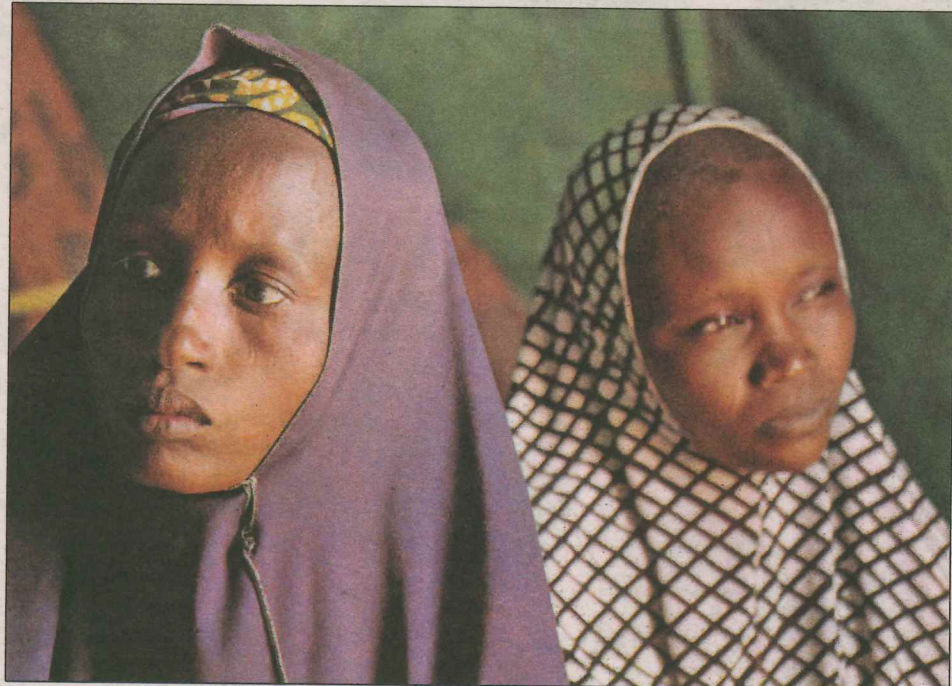
Goodluck Jonathan declared a state of emergency in northeastern Nigeria in May 2013 and has become more indiscriminate in attacks that originally targeted Christians.

Christians around the world are urged to pray that believers will share eagerly with

"Remember that the apostle Paul was once a religious terrorist until he met Jesus on the Damascus Road. Ask God to open the eyes of those who are blinded by the deceiver and bring them to Christ that they too might become great evangelists."

fellow Nigerians the truth of God's peace and love; that persecuted Christians will have courage and strength in spite of losing homes, belongings and even family members; that believers will remember Jesus' promise that He has overcome the world and find His peace that passes all understanding; for followers of Jesus to have boldness from the Holy Spirit to share "the hope that lies within." (BP)

*Name changed.



Widowed and separated from their children by Boko Haram violence in northern Nigeria, Halima's and Amina's lives have been shattered. (©EC/ECHO/Anouk Delafortrie. Used by permission.)

Cooperative Program still drawing pastors' confidence

By Roger Oldham

Nashville—Southern Baptist pastors are strongly supportive of the Cooperative Program, according to a study commissioned by the SBC Executive Committee and published in its Winter 2014/2015 edition of SBC LIFE.

The survey shows a continuing increase in confidence among pastors that the Cooperative Program supports ministries and missions valued by their churches—moving up to 81 percent from 73 percent in a 2012 survey that asked the same questions of pastors and 71 percent in a 2008 survey that included pastors, laypersons and other church staff.

The study also indicates that pastors' support for the Cooperative Program does have its limits. Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) agree that the strategies of SBC entities receiving CP dollars are moving in an appropriate direction, though one in eight pastors (13 percent) say they are not. Asked whether the entities are using their Cooperative Program support effectively, more than six in 10 pastors (63 percent) say they are and 13 percent say they are not.

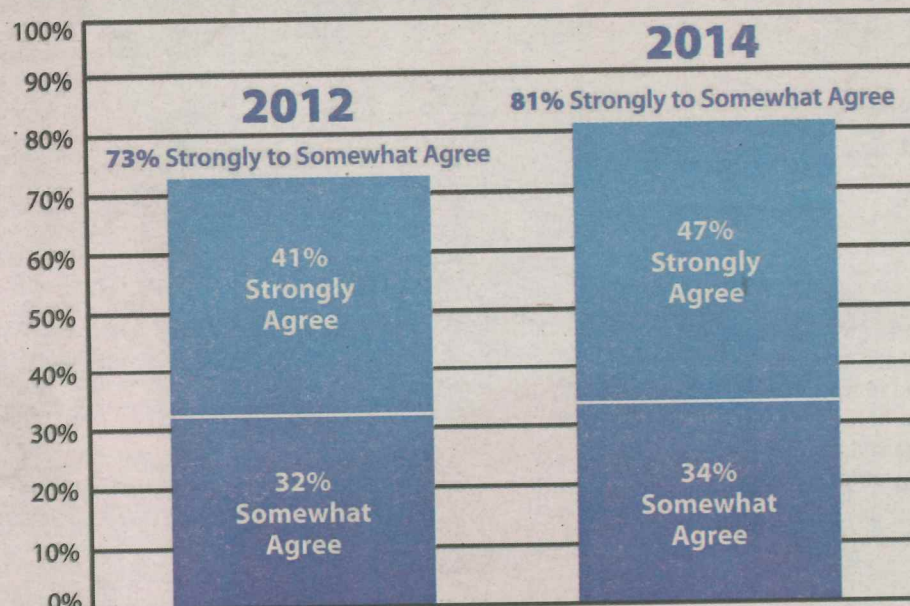
"This is encouraging news," said Ashley Clayton, Executive Committee vice president for Cooperative Program, said of the survey conducted during the spring of 2014. "A few years ago, a Florida pastor told me the Cooperative Program would have to compete for his church's missions dollars. More recently, he told me, 'Count me in,' in support of the CP." The pastor's confidence in the CP increased as he watched what he called a "renewed focus" by SBC entities responding to "the values his church embraces," Clayton said. "I believe this report shows that he is not alone."

"However, the survey also shows we still have a way to go to earn the trust of all our pastors," Clayton said.

Cooperative Program allocations

Southern Baptist pastors also indicated they generally agree with the current allocation of national Cooperative Program funds for the entities that receive CP funding—the International Mission Board, North American Mission Board, six SBC seminaries, Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission and SBC operating budget.

The Cooperative Program supports SBC ministries and missions that my church values.



The median responses were all within 1.2 percent of current allocations, which the pastors were shown as they answered.

While 15 percent selected the current distribution as their preference, just over half listed higher percentages for NAMB, ERLC and the SBC operating budget, while nearly half listed slightly lower percentages for IMB and the seminaries.

"This is the third survey of pastors the Executive Committee has commissioned since 2007," Clayton said. "We continue to see strong pastor support for the current allocation of the SBC portion of CP funds. In all three surveys, pastors indicated their agreement that IMB should receive about 50 percent of the SBC CP allocation budget, our seminaries should receive slightly less, with the difference distributed to small increases for NAMB and ERLC," he said.

A large majority of pastors affirmed the statement "the Cooperative Program supports missions and ministries that my church values" in all three surveys, he said.

More than three-fourths (77 percent) agreed with the statement, "The SBC allocation budget places a high priority on penetrating lostness both locally and worldwide."

Ministry priorities

Pastors also were asked to indicate the priority their churches place on 12 missions and ministry efforts funded by the Cooperative Program. "Sending and supporting overseas missionaries to reach unreached people groups around the world" continues to be the highest priority.

It is the only ministry selected by more than 70 percent of pastors as "essential" or a "high priority" (71 percent), up 3 percentage points from the 2012 survey. And it is the only ministry effort that fewer than 10 percent of pastors rated a "low priority" (6 percent) or "not a priority" (2 percent).

The most notable change was reflected in pastors' desire for the SBC to provide "a Christian perspective and response about social, ethical, and public policy issues" (54 percent selecting it as "essential" or "high priority," up from only 37 percent in 2012).

70 percent range

■ Sending and supporting overseas missionaries—71 percent (68 percent in 2012)

60 percent range

■ Engaging in local ministry for evangelism—66 percent (65 percent in 2012)

■ Developing and implementing an evangelism strategy for penetrating lostness in North America—63 percent (59 percent in 2012)

■ Improving vitality and health of churches—62 percent (59 percent in 2012)

50 percent range

■ Educating and training future pastors, missionaries, church planters and other denominational leaders—57 percent (57 percent in 2012)

■ Providing a Christian perspective and response about social, ethical and public policy issues—54 percent (37 percent in 2012)

■ Reaching ethnically and culturally diverse people—52 percent (51 percent in 2012)

■ Promoting an ongoing program of missions education for all ages—51 percent (48 percent in 2012)

■ Conducting an ongoing program of leadership development—50 percent (45 percent in 2012)

40 percent range

■ Engaging in direct international missions—48 percent (45 percent in 2012)

■ Intentional church planting in cities and towns across North America—44 percent (44 percent in 2012)

■ Intentional church planting in urban centers—43 percent (43 percent in 2012)

"While international missions remains the highest priority, pastors also place a high priority on participating in local ministry projects for evangelism, developing and implementing an evangelism strategy for penetrating lostness in North America, and improving the vitality and health of existing churches," Clayton said. "It is not a case of either/or. Pastors see value in both/and—supporting an aggressive global vision while simultaneously strengthening a strong home base."

Church CP contributions

The Executive Committee also asked pastors about the decision their churches made regarding contributions through the Cooperative Program in the most recent budget process. The vast majority of churches (80 percent) decided to keep CP giving the same as the previous year. Three times as many churches raised their CP contribution (12 percent) as decreased it (4 percent).

Of churches making a change in their giving through the Cooperative Program (nearly 20 percent of the churches surveyed), 5.6 percent increased it by more than 2 percentage points of the church's undesignated receipts, with another 9 percent increasing their CP contributions from 0.1 percent to 1.9 percentage points of their budget. On the other hand, 4.8 percent of churches decreased their contribution through the CP.

The final question on the survey referred to the "1% CP Challenge," an effort by the SBC Executive Committee to encourage all Southern Baptist churches to raise their Cooperative Program contributions by 1 percentage point of their church's undesignated contributions. More than one-fourth of pastors had not heard of the "1% CP Challenge" (28 percent). Forty-nine percent said they have not accepted the challenge. Eight percent of pastors said their church had accepted the "1% CP Challenge" and another 9 percent plan to do so in the next budget year. (BP)

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KBC

Top Catholics & evangelicals: Gay marriage worse than divorce, cohabiting

By David Gibson

New York—A high-profile alliance of conservative Catholics and evangelical Protestants is set to issue a sweeping manifesto against gay marriage that calls same-sex unions “a graver threat” than divorce or cohabitation, one that will lead to a moral dystopia in America and the persecution of traditional believers.

“If the truth about marriage can be displaced by social and political pressure operating through the law, other truths can be set aside as well,” say the nearly 50 signers of the statement, which is to be published in the March edition of the conservative journal *First Things*.

“And that displacement can lead, in due course, to the coercion and persecution of those who refuse to acknowledge the state’s redefinition of marriage, which is beyond the state’s competence,” they say.

The declaration adds that some people “are already being censured and others have lost their jobs because of their public commitment to marriage as the union of a man and a woman.”

Social conservatives have rallied around a number of cases that they say herald a gloomy future, including the recent dismissal of the fire chief in Atlanta, who had given employees a copy of his book in which he detailed his beliefs, based on his Christian faith, that homosexuality was “vile.”

Other cases include a New Mexico photographer who lost her fight to opt out of taking pictures of a same-sex wedding; bakers and florists who wanted to turn away gay customers; and an Idaho wedding chapel whose Christian owners wanted to conduct only heterosexual

weddings.

This latest statement, “The Two Shall Become One Flesh: Reclaiming Marriage,” comes from the group Evangelicals and Catholics Together, a coalition formed in 1994 under the aegis of former Nixon aide Charles Colson, an evangelical, and the Rev. Richard John Neuhaus, a Catholic priest.

One of their goals was to encourage the two Christian communities to overcome their historical suspicions and doctrinal differences in order to battle what they saw as a growing moral laxity in the U.S.

Neuhaus died in 2009, and Colson in 2012, but the movement has continued and in some ways has become more focused as Christian conservatives have grown increasingly united in their alarm over the sudden and spreading acceptance of gay rights, especially same-sex marriage.

Discussions on a document on same-sex marriage began in June 2013—the same month the U.S. Supreme Court required the federal government to recognize same-sex marriages—according to Russell Reno, editor of *First Things* and a member of ECT; Reno provided a copy of the declaration to RNS.

But Reno said the members first had to agree to set aside their differences on the legitimacy of divorce and contraception, for example, and even whether marriage is a sacrament.

That enabled them to focus on the advance of gay marriage, which they say not only betrays religious tradition but, more than any other development, undermines society because “marriage is the primordial human institution, a reality that existed long before the establishment of what we now know as the state.”

“(W)hat the state defines as marriage no longer embodies God’s purposes in creation,” says the 5,000-word statement, which was first reported by Baptist Press. “An easy acceptance of divorce damages marriage; widespread cohabitation devalues marriage.”

“An easy acceptance of divorce damages marriage; widespread cohabitation devalues marriage. But so-called same-sex marriage is a graver threat, because what is now given the name of marriage in law is a parody of marriage.”

Excerpt from “The Two Shall Become One Flesh: Reclaiming Marriage”

“But so-called same-sex marriage is a graver threat, because what is now given the name of marriage in law is a parody of marriage.”

Signers of the statement include popular megachurch pastor Rick Warren and longtime gay marriage foe Maggie Gallagher, as well as prominent conserva-

tive Catholic intellectuals George Weigel and Robert George.

Timothy George, a Southern Baptist and dean of Samford University’s Beeson Divinity School; Mark Galli, editor of the evangelical magazine *Christianity Today*; and J.I. Packer of Regent University also endorsed the statement.

The signers say they “do not dispute the evident fact of hormonal and chromosomal irregularities, nor of different sexual attractions and desires.” But they say

that in legitimating same-sex marriage, “a kind of alchemy is performed, not merely on the institution, but on human nature itself.”

“We are today urged to embrace an abstract conception of human nature that ignores the reality of our bodies. Human beings are no longer to be understood as either male or female,” it says.

The result, it says, will undermine society by eliminating any moral compass except that which the state declares to be the norm, to the exclusion of all others.

The document declares that a “faithful Christian witness cannot accommodate itself to same-sex marriage,” and it suggests that believers who accept gay marriage are no longer fully Christian.

The signers themselves do not offer a detailed plan of action to counter gay marriage, which is now legal in 36 states and the District of Columbia.

Reno said the statement was not intended as a road map for political or judicial action, but more as a rallying cry to Christians and “to disabuse folks of the notion that we can just keep on keeping on as we have been.”

The signers raise the possibility—which has been debated among religious conservatives in recent months—that clergy could refuse to sign state marriage licenses as an act of civil disobedience.

But they conclude simply that “whatever courses of action are deemed necessary, the coming years will require careful discernment.”

They say that the best strategy is for Christians themselves and others “of good will” to live lives that are faithful examples of traditional marriage. “On this basis alone can we succeed,” they say. (RNS)

Wise foolishness

True wisdom of cross reduces everything the world values

In 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 the Apostle Paul contrasts human and divine wisdom.

To understand his argument one must pay attention to the shifts in the meaning of the word “wisdom.”

When he uses it for human reason apart from God, it has a negative connotation, which is “wisdom of the world.”

When he uses it of God, it has a positive force, which is something like “God’s wise plan of salvation.” Since God’s plan of salvation is ultimately revealed in the cross of Christ, the word is personified.

In other words, Christ on the cross is the ultimate wisdom of God.

Thus, the contrast is between wisdom as human intellectual striving to attain the ultimate and wisdom as revelation, God’s gift.

The cross is the divider which separates those who are on their way toward salvation and those who are perishing. “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (v 18).

In verses 19-20 Paul establishes the premise that God has rendered worthless all human-centered attempts at

salvation: “Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?”

Not only did God reject the fruitless striving of human wisdom, but also He chose a means of revelation actually contradictory to that wisdom, namely, the foolish proclamation of a crucified Savior: “but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (v 23).

But those whom God has called are able in faith to understand Christ is the ultimate wisdom and power of God (v24).

“For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength” (v 25).

Therefore, let us demonstrate in our lives this wise foolishness about which Paul wrote,

which is the true wisdom of the cross that reduces to foolishness everything the world values, and let us be faithful in living sacrificial lives as we share the gospel to a culture to which the gospel seems foolish.

Ky. Baptist Foundation



Barry Allen

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

Camp theme change

Embracing our appointed task to PROCLAIM the gospel

Why do we have a theme for camp each year? If you were like me growing up, this likely would be a question that you would never ask—since I never attended “church” camp as a youth. If you have attended, you know the camp theme is something quite significant, as it should help to communicate a key biblical theme.

Each day at camp has several teaching times that set forth a key biblical truth that all combine together to reinforce the overall theme.

Every year we develop a theme for the coming camp year and that theme is revealed on the final day each respective week of camp. Last summer we revealed a particular theme for 2015, but over the last six months something changed.

As our staff focused on God’s word and, furthermore, considered why we exist as a ministry, God began to concentrate our focus on a different direction.

The single word that we could not get away from was “PROCLAIM.”

While the term proclaim by itself does not hold unique value, when it is used in our Mission Statement—“We exist to proclaim the gospel through

partnering with churches to make disciples and equip leaders”—proclaim has a whole new significant meaning because of the message that is being proclaimed.

This process over the last six months led us to change our theme for this coming summer to “PROCLAIM.”

Our desire is that everyone who attends a camp at

Crossings would leave with the burden and privilege that we all exist to proclaim the gospel.

Our prayer is that if 14,000 attend camp this summer and 14,000 leave all unified about that goal, what could be accomplished by God for His kingdom’s sake?

How many would go to their respective communities and be a witness for the gospel?

How many would go on a mission trip locally, nationally, or internationally?

How many would become pastors, ministers, or missionaries one day? God only knows but our desire is that all will embrace our appointed task to PROCLAIM the gospel to all the earth.

Crossings Ministries



David Melber

David Melber is president of Crossings Ministries. Contact Crossings at (502) 491-7000 or visit GoCrossings.com.

The tie that binds

A wonderful little place where people are like a big family

"I would die or fight for my wonderful family. I would die or fight for my family because they mean so much to me. I couldn't imagine not having my brothers or parents being there for me. I love my amazing family, and I would do anything for them."

The preceding four sentences were recently penned by my 11-year-old daughter, Madison, for a school assignment. What parent wouldn't be beaming with pride over these words? Naturally, there are moments where my children don't always get along, but I have been blessed with three great kids.

I have an older sister and a younger brother. Since I was in the middle, I seemed to have my share of fights with each. Although my siblings and I fought from time to time, we also loved each other and always had each other's backs.

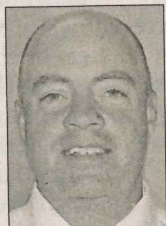
My father once gave me a whipping, because my brother had gotten into a fight, and I witnessed it and didn't stop him from fighting. Perhaps I didn't totally deserve that whipping, but I am sure there were other instances in which I got away with something that merited a whipping.

The young people on our campus don't always get along the way we would like, but for the most part our students live, eat, play, work and worship together pretty well. The Oneida bond is so much different from the

typical school bond. Our kids don't just attend classes together from 8 a.m. until 3 p.m. and participate together in extra-curricular activities. They are together around the clock. Although they fight and argue at times, they also stand up for each other.

Our overall school spirit is typically pretty good because of this strong bond. We recently hosted some basketball games which nearly all of our student body attended. We lost the games to our cross-county rival, but I was glad to see our students support our teams as if they have gone to school at Oneida all of their

This is
Oneida



Larry Gritton

lives.

A classmate of mine visited for the game. We hadn't seen each other in about 20 years, but it was as if we had never been apart as we hung out and reminisced of Oneida days gone by.

Some of the best friendships I enjoy today are with friends I made while a student or staff member at Oneida. The tie that binds Oneida hearts together is undeniable. I invite you and anyone you want to bring with you to come and see and experience this Oneida bond.

Come and see a game, have a meal with us, watch a drama production, or attend a daily chapel service. Then you, too, will be forever bonded with this wonderful, little place and her people.

Larry Gritton Jr. is president of Oneida Baptist Institute, a Christian boarding and day school. Website: oneidaschool.org. Phone: (606) 847-4111

Playing to a different crowd

Student leaves musical aspirations for God's calling

Online student John Haller serves as bi-vocational pastor of East Dayton Baptist Church in Dayton, Ky., and also works as a mail carrier in the Fort Thomas area. He didn't envision himself in this position earlier in his life.

"I didn't grow up in church," said Haller. "I don't mean to say that I never went to church growing up because we did sometimes, mostly at Easter."

"But as I got older even that dropped off. (During) my senior year in high school, I met a girl named Angie and she started asking me to go to church with her. I had to work on Sunday mornings so I couldn't go to church."

"I was going to be a rock star anyway so there was no reason for me to go to church. I played guitar in a band and we were going to be famous, so I didn't need to go to church."

"Angie persisted in asking and there were times that I went with her," said Haller. "I graduated high school and the decision was made to close the restaurant that I worked at. I was eventually hired to work for the post office that summer. So I left the restaurant

business behind and started delivering mail. I no longer had to work on Sundays and I was starting to rethink the whole rock star idea."

"I didn't have any excuses to get out of going to church anymore. I started going more often because Angie was very persistent in asking me."

"I publicly accepted Christ and on June 6, 1993, I was baptized at First Baptist Church of Cold Spring," said Haller. "On June 18 the following year, Angie and I were married."

"I felt God calling me to preach and I didn't want to do it," said Haller. "It was uncomfortable for me to stand up in front of people and talk to

them."

"I told God that I can't do that. I'm way too shy to do something like that. I'm terrified of talking to people. There is no way that I can do that. I'm not good enough to do that. I'm not qualified. It wasn't going to happen."

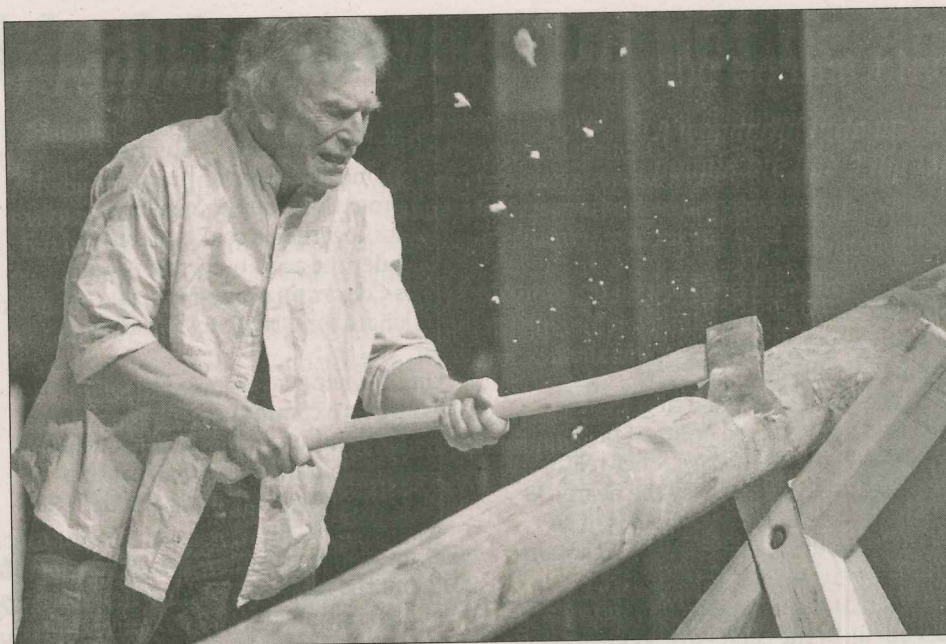
To be continued ...

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; ccbbc.edu; email: dfox@ccbbc.edu.



Joe White, a nationally recognized speaker for Christian Men's Ministries carried a 14-foot pole through the crowd Jan. 20 at the University of the Cumberlands. White spoke during UC Founders' day and spring convocation.

White helps UC focus on what matters most

Williamsburg—"If He's not alive on Sunday then the world will never hear of Him again," Joe White said, emerging from the crowd carrying a 14-foot pole.

White, a nationally recognized speaker for Christian Men's Ministries and pro sports teams, was guest speaker for University of the Cumberlands' Founders' day and spring convocation held in the O. Wayne Rollins Center Jan. 20.

Speaking in character as a Roman carpenter who constructed Jesus' cross, White continued, "The cross wipes men from history. If He's alive on Sunday, this will be a day the world will never forget."

As he reached the stage, White used an axe and nails to construct a cross and continued his monologue, describing who Jesus was and His claim that He would rise from the dead in three days.

After relating to students through various anecdotes, he began his drama with a video of events throughout history leading to the turning point in history 2,000 years ago. White then told the

story of a Roman carpenter who constructed Jesus' cross.

Upon finishing the cross, he spoke to the students about how Jesus had risen from the tomb and their sins were nailed to the cross, so they don't have to carry them anymore, as Colossians 2:13-14 says. He invited students to write down their burdens to be nailed to the cross. Hundreds of students responded.

"Joe connected with our students in a powerful way and told the story of Christ from a little different perspective than many had likely heard before," stated Rick Fleenor, assistant to the president and director of church relations. "The program was just an incredible way to begin our semester, helping to focus attention on the thing that matters most."

The cross made in the convocation program is displayed on the lawn in front of Gatliff Chapel, as a reminder of the message and as an encouragement for students to continue to grow in their relationship with Christ. (UC)

WR editor wins Ky. Press awards

Louisville—Western Recorder Editor Todd Deaton received three awards in journalism from the Kentucky Press Association on Jan. 23 at a conference in Louisville.

Deaton placed first in the Best Editorial category for the Associate Newspaper division. The collection of three editorials included "Hear their haunting cry: 'I ain't ate yet!'", "It's time to tell them 'enough is enough'" and "Decision sends shockwave among Ky. Baptists."

"These editorials reflect a moral

clarity and depth of knowledge about the issues involved that most of the editorialists at Kentucky's secular newspapers could use more of," contest judges commented.

Deaton also placed second for a separate collection of editorials from 2014.

Additionally, Deaton took first place in the Best Investigative Story or Series in the Associate Newspaper division with a series of seven articles on Sunrise Children's Services.

The series tracks the proposed and ultimately rejected hiring changes by the former Sunrise president, Bill Smithwick, to reverse its practices banning open homosexuals and lesbians from working at Kentucky Baptists' child-care agency.

One contest judge commented, "Excellent, week in, week out coverage of an ongoing issue. I found myself caught up in the weekly drama, as I'm sure other readers did too. Well balanced, fair stories. Well done!"

The Kentucky Press Association represents nearly 175 newspapers throughout the Commonwealth. (WR)

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Page addresses suicide epidemic, personal loss

By Frank Michael McCormack

New Orleans—"I've never preached on this subject at a seminary before," Frank Page said. I've spoken on it in churches a few times, but not often.

"For you see, five years and two months ago, my daughter left her family behind when she committed suicide. That 'left behind' feeling still affects us to this day," Page, president and CEO of the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee, said in his chapel message at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary Jan. 27.

He described how, in late 2009, he received a call from his oldest daughter Melissa.

"It had been a tumultuous few weeks prior to that," Page said. "But believe me, my antenna went up when she said, 'Daddy, I love you.' I said, 'Baby, I love you.' She said, 'Daddy, tell mama and the girls I love them too.' I said, 'Honey, I'm not going to do that. You tell them that.' 'Daddy, I can't. I love you, daddy.' Click."

Page said he immediately began calling and texting Melissa, with no answer. A few minutes later, he received a call from a member of his church who was Melissa's neighbor. "Pastor, there's an ambulance. Please, what's going on at Melissa's house?" she asked.

Page rushed to his daughter's house only to be met by a police officer who said Melissa was at the hospital.

He rushed to the hospital, where a physician and member of his church met him and said, simply, "Oh pastor, I'm so sorry."

"What did I do? What do you do when you hear something like that? Your first-born baby has killed herself. I didn't know what to do, so I did what I knew to do. That was to quote Scripture," Page said.

"God didn't need me to quote it to Him, but I needed to hear that word from the Lord."

So Page fell to his knees in a secluded hospital room and quoted Job 1:21, "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord." The second Scripture to come to mind was John 14:1-3: "Let not your hearts be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would've told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go, I will come again and will receive you unto myself. That where I am you may be also."

Page's message from John 14:1-3, framed by the story of his daughter's death, was weighty and timely, given the issues of depression, mental illness and suicide in the United States today.

"Out of all people groups, all races, all ethnic groups, all socio-economic levels, it is epidemic," Page said. "In some parts of our country more so than others. Particularly among the younger demographic. In fact, it has taken a massive jump over the past few years among young women ages 18 to 29."

According to the Centers for Disease Control, in 2012 (the latest record available) the suicide rate in the United States was 12.6 deaths per 100,000 Americans. That's the highest suicide rate in 25 years. In 2012, suicide was the 10th leading cause of death among Americans. According to the organization Suicide

Awareness Voices of Education (SAVE), 15 percent of people who are clinically depressed die by suicide. Ninety percent who die by suicide have an existing mental illness or substance abuse problem at the time of death. Also according to SAVE, one in 65,000 children ages 10 to 14 die each year by suicide.

Peace

In light of the suicide epidemic in the United States, Page offered four words from the John 14 passage. He first pointed to a "word of peace."

"Jesus said in that powerful Johannine passage: 'Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me,'" Page said. "He knew we would be troubled. ... It's not a question of if. It's a question of when."

Page also pointed to John 16:13: "In this life you will have tribulation."

"Some of you have very deep scars of difficulty that have already beset you, even in your young lives," Page told the seminary audience. "We all struggle in life, but our Lord speaks a word of peace. 'I want to help you through that. You need to believe in God and believe in Me.' In that, you will find solace. In that, you will find a help which you cannot find anywhere else."

Page said ministers and believers in general must be ready to confront and refute bad theology that declares suicide an unpardonable sin.

"Teach the word that says if salvation is true it is forever," he said.

He also challenged pastors to be deliberate about teaching believers to effectively minister to those going through difficult times, to be careful in what they say, and to avoid "trite platitudes" that are often untrue and many times inappropriate. One common, hurtful platitude is "You just need to snap out of it."

"Don't ever say that," Page said. "If they could snap out of it, they would snap out of it."

He also said it's important to practice and teach the ministry of comfort.

"The Bible says we are to provide the comfort we received ourselves. It is our job to give that word of peace and comfort the Lord so desperately wishes people to have," he said.



Frank Page of the SBC Executive Committee speaks on his daughter Melissa's suicide and the nation's suicide epidemic. At New Orleans Seminary, Page calls for Christians to hold forth the peace of God to those who have lost loved ones to suicide. (Photo by Boyd Guy)

ple to have," he said.

Preparation

Secondly, Page pointed to a word of preparation in John 14:2.

"I go to prepare a place for you," Page emphasized. "My friends, those who know Him have a place in heaven, and I know my baby is in heaven now."

Promise

There's also a word of promise, found in John 14:3: "If I go ... I will come again."

Unfortunately, Page said, the second coming of Christ is an often-overlooked matter of theology.

"It has just been left on the dusty shelf of theology," he said. "History is not cyclical. It is linear. It is going somewhere. It is headed for a collision course with eternity, and we need to preach it."

Presence

Finally, Page emphasized a word of presence at the end of verse 3: "that you also may be where I am." He also noted Psalm 46:1's assurance that "God is our

refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." People with depression and considering suicide as well as those left behind following a suicide desperately need to experience that presence, Page said.

"They need to know there's a God who will love them and care for them. There is a God who will be there for them in the good times and the bad," he said.

"Suicide is a horrible experience, but it happens. Marriages fail. The instances of divorce among those who have experienced suicide in the immediate family dramatically increase. Suicides themselves dramatically increase among survivors with a suicide in the family. There are ongoing consequences of any kind of tragedy, but particularly suicide.

"People need to know that the only place you will find hope is in the Lord. He will be with you," Page said.

Page chronicled the story of his daughter, Melissa, and his family's journey since her death in the book, "Melissa: A Father's Lessons from a Daughter's Suicide." (BP)

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

February

- 12 ReThink Mercy, Kentucky Baptist Building, Louisville.
- 13 ReThink Mercy, Warren Association, Bowling Green.
- 16 Regional Financial Benefits Conference, Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, Somerset.
- 17 Regional Financial Benefits Conference, Crosswoods Church, Nicholasville; Greenup Baptist Association, Ashland.
- 19 Regional Financial Benefits Conference, Long Run Baptist Association, Louisville; Grapevine Baptist Church, Madisonville.
- 23-24 RISK Conference, Highview Baptist Church - East Campus, Louisville.
- 26 Men's Chorale Concert, High Street Baptist Church, Somerset.
- 28 Kentucky WMU Leadership Network Meeting, Kentucky Baptist Building, Louisville.

MOUNTAINS TO THE MISSISSIPPI

COMPILED BY STAFF

BRONSTON—First Church will host the 25th Anniversary Celebration of The Family Foundation of Kentucky Feb. 17 from 7-8:30 p.m. The church is located at 401 Highway 790 in Bronston. For more information, see www.kentucky-family.org.

LOUISVILLE—Carol Taylor was recognized for her 30 years of service at Parkland Church as church ministry assistant.

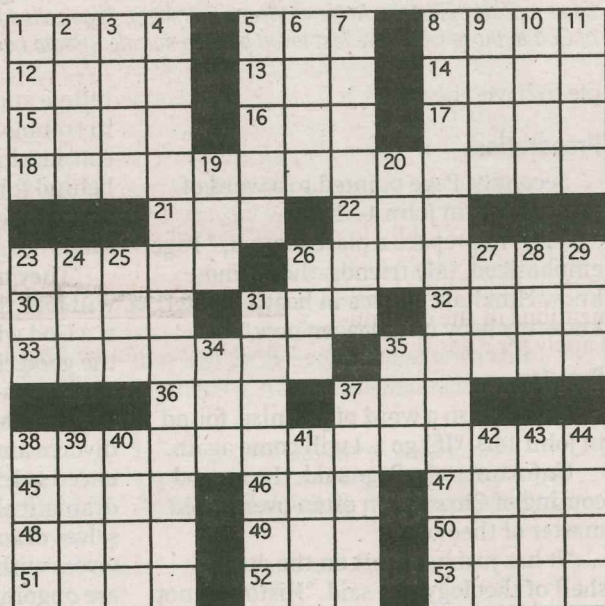
WAYNESBURG—Pleasant View Church has called **Jeremy Blanton** as pastor of the Hispanic congregation Iglesias Bautista "La Historia de Jesus." He was licensed by the church on Jan 11. Blanton has been a member of PVBC for 18 years. **Kyle Page** is pastor of Pleasant View.

Bible Crosswords

by Janet W. Adkins

Across

- 1 Fellow
- 5 Halfway, prefix
- 8 Charles, for short
- 12 Aircraft, prefix
- 13 Summer, Fr.
- 14 Alley Oop's girlfriend
- 15 "And he beat down the tower of Penuel, and _____ the men of the city" (Judges 8:17)
- 16 Resident, abbr.
- 17 "Shall _____ words have an end?" (Job 16:3)
- 18 "We are troubled on every _____ we are _____" (2 Corinthians 4:8) (2 words)
- 21 To make free of
- 22 Boy's name
- 23 "The _____ and flags shall wither" (Isaiah 19:6)
- 26 Belonging to the author of much of the New Testament (2 words)
- 30 Referring to the nose, prefix
- 31 "Let me _____ the death of the righteous" (Numbers 23:10)
- 32 Belonging to the National Security Agency, abbr.
- 33 Stutter
- 35 Sticks with a knife
- 36 Adjective suffix
- 37 Weep
- 38 "That the _____ might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God" (2 Corinthians 4:15)
- 45 Elbow-shaped pasta, for short
- 46 "But let your communication be, _____" (Matthew 5:37)
- 47 "_____ that great city, that was clothed in fine linen" (Revelation 18:16)
- 48 _____ Domini
- 49 "Of _____, the family of the Erites" (Numbers 26:16)
- 50 "But this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to _____ my feet"



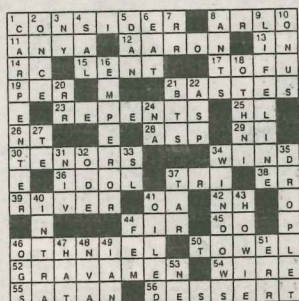
#028

- (Luke 7:45)
- 51 Chinese food
- 52 Noise
- 53 Feminine name ending

Down

- 1 One of the Mamas and the Papas
- 2 Sun, prefix
- 3 "They bring thee _____ heifer without spot" (Numbers 19:2) (2 words)
- 4 "Far above all principality, and _____, and might, and _____" (Ephesians 1:21) (2 words)
- 5 "The sons of Ezra were, Jether, and _____" (1 Chronicles 4:17)
- 6 Roman road
- 7 "Hath done _____ unto the Spirit of grace" (Hebrews 10:29)
- 8 "My _____ they _____, although I was an husband unto them" (Jeremiah 31:32)
- 9 Deception
- 10 "A strong delusion, that they should believe _____" (2 Thessalonians 2:11)
- 11 "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the _____ of the sea" (Romans 9:27)
- 19 Greek letters used for the ratio of a circle's circumference to its diameter
- 20 What you lose when you stand
- 23 Drs.' assistants
- 24 "Therefore, the children of Israel _____ not of the sinew which shrank" (Genesis 32:32)
- 25 That, Sp.
- 26 "And he answered _____ I go, _____: and went not" (Matthew 21:30)
- 27 Abbreviation for America
- 28 Where scientists work
- 29 Selective Service System, abbr.
- 31 "I made haste, and _____ not to keep thy commandments" (Psalms 119:60)
- 34 "I said of laughter, it is _____" (Ecclesiastes 2:2)
- 35 Soak
- 37 "I will _____ all my raiment" (Isaiah 63:3)
- 38 "Balak the king of Moab hath brought me from _____" (Numbers 23:7)
- 39 "Thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheek _____" (Psalms 3:7)
- 40 "Babukiah and _____ were over against them in the watches" (Nehemiah 12:9)
- 41 "Salathiel, which was the son of _____" (Luke 3:27)
- 42 Got down from
- 43 "Have ye not _____ out the priests of the Lord" (2 Chronicles 13:9)
- 44 To be, Lat.

#027



CLASSIFIED ADS

SEEKING: First Baptist Church of Whitesburg is hiring a full-time position for minister of children, youth and family. Send resumé to tony.brown@whitesburg-fbc.org. For more info, call (606) 633-2277.

SEEKING: First Baptist Church of Whitesburg is hiring a part-time director of church music. 20 hours per week. Send resumé to tony.brown@whitesburg-fbc.org. For more info, call (606) 633-2277.

SEEKING: Summersville Baptist Church located in Summersville, Ky., is accepting resumé for a full-time, God-called, God-lead, Spirit-filled pastor. Please send your resumé to Summersville Baptist Church, Pulpit Search Committee, P.O. Box 68, Summersville, KY 42782

SEEKING: Bardwell Baptist Church is seeking a P/T minister of music to lead a blended style of worship and to work with the adult choir, praise team and all instrumentalists. If interested contact pastor Rodney Bice at (270) 628-3645 or bbcpastor1@windstream.net.

SEEKING: Versailles Baptist Church seeks a minister of worship to join a great staff team in leading our growing church of 425 in worship. We currently experience a blended style of worship utilizing a praise band and choir. Send resumé along with DVD or internet link of you leading worship to glyn@versaillesbaptist.org or 125 East Green Street, Versailles, KY 40383.

SEEKING: Coral Hill Baptist is seeking to fill the full-time staff position of associate pastor. Primary responsibilities will include development of discipleship, leadership and mission strategies. Please forward resumé to jtyoung88@gmail.com or mail to Coral Hill Baptist Church, 3260 Coral Hill Rd., Glasgow, KY 42141, c/o Staff Search Committee.

SEEKING: Clarkson Baptist Church in Clarkson, Ky., is searching for a part-time youth pastor with additional opportunities to work with AWANA Children's ministry. Send resumé to: flfeezorj@hotmail.com. For more information call (270) 242-4567 or go to: www.clarksonbaptist.org

SEEKING: Calvary Baptist Church in Danville, Ky., is seeking a part-time minister of music to lead our congregation in blended worship. Send resumé to ashley@calvaryindanville.com by Feb. 15.

SEEKING: First Baptist Church of Farmington is seeking a full-time associate pastor with an emphasis in worship. Please email inquiries or resumé to sbcglobal.net, Attn.: Personnel Committee, or mail to Personnel Committee, 210 North A. Street, Farmington, MO 63640.

SEEKING: The Union Baptist Association, located in Bracken, Harrison and Pendleton counties in Kentucky, is seeking a part time director of missions. Resumé may be submitted by mail to Richard Kendall, 8528 Ky Hwy 356, Cynthiana, KY 41031 or emailed to ahkendall@outlook.com.

SEEKING: Crestwood Baptist Church in Frankfort, Ky., is seeking a full-time pastor. Download application at www.crestwood-baptist.com. Send resumé and application to: Pastor Search-CBC, P.O. Box 7010, Frankfort, KY 40602 or email to CrestwoodPastorSearch@yahoo.com. Applications will be accepted until 3/16/15.

SEEKING: Part-time minister of youth and children with emphasis 7th-12th grades at Pleasant Grove Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky. Applicant must possess or be pursuing an accredited college and/or seminary degree. Interested individuals should email their resumé by Feb. 15 to Carol Jean Epley (daughertyinsagcy@aol.com) and also a copy to the church (pgbconline@bellsouth.net) for consideration.

SEEKING: Trenton Baptist Church, Trenton, Ky., seeks a part-time minister to students, grades 5-12. Trenton is located in the Hopkinsville-Clarksville, Tenn., area. For further information or to submit a resumé, email trentonbaptist@bellsouth.net or phone (270) 466-5429.

SEEKING: Discipleship/Mobilization Pastor: Bellevue Baptist Church, Owensboro, Ky., is seeking a full-time pastor responsible for adult discipleship and mobilization of members into ministry and mission. Ministerial experience and education expected. Send resumé to administrative pastor, Adam Neel, aneel@bellnet.org

SEEKING: Full-time minister to families: Memorial Baptist Church, Staunton, Va. 450-500 avg. attendance church seeking minister to families. Position weighs heavily toward youth ministry, but includes children, special needs and encouraging parents. Please send resumé to revmjones1@gmail.com

SEEKING: First Baptist Church of Trenton, Mo., is seeking a full-time pastor. Send resumé to Pastor Search Committee, 2421 Oklahoma Ave. Trenton Mo. 64683 or email: fbcc@grundyc.net.

SEEKING: Macedonia Baptist Church, Mt. Sterling, Ky., is seeking a bi-vocational pastor, called by God, to lead our congregation. Resumé may be submitted by mail to Ronnie Smith, Macedonia Search Committee, 100 Four Wind Estates, Mount Sterling KY 40353 or by email to macedoniasearch1@gmail.com.

SEEKING: High Street Baptist Church of Somerset, Ky., is seeking a FT minister of music/education and assimilation. Job description available on the website homepage www.highstreetsomerset.org. Resumé may be submitted to resumes@highstreet-somerset.org through Feb. 28.

SEEKING: Plano Baptist Church, an established, family-oriented church in a growing community seeking our new leader. May be bivocational. Must be theologically conservative and willing to participate in community outreach. Able to partner with deacons, trustees, and other church leaders and represent the church in associational and civic matters. Parsonage, favorable compensation and benefit package included. Send resumé to planosearchcommittee@gmail.com or mail to P.O. Box 51712 Bowling Green, KY 42102. No resumé accepted after March 31.

SEEKING: Seeking a pastor of children and families. Should have a seminary degree, a minimum of 5-7 yrs. experience working with children and successfully leading children's ministries, must have a vision and passion for children, helping to equip and mobilize families in ministry. Send resumé to Children's Pastor Search Committee, Zion Baptist Church, 8158 Hwy. 351, Henderson, KY 42420 or email Mark Galloway, Pastor, at mgalloway@zionbaptist.org. Website: zionbaptist.org.

FOR RENT: Destin, Fla./Crystal Shores. 6 bed, 4 bath, 3,000-sf spacious family beach house. Sleeps 18. 2-minute walk to beach. Fully upgraded with fresh paint, flat screen TV's, new hardwood floors. (502) 727-7426. www.vrbo.com/454133.

FOR RENT: Two condos for rent in Destin, Fla. 2 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms. Book now for 2015. lbrammer@charter.net (423) 309-4422.

FOR SALE: 1996 International school/church bus. 52 passenger. Low mileage, and in great condition. \$5,500. Call Mike at (606) 437-7642. Located in Pikeville, Ky.

TRAVEL: Make plans now to join Dr. Roy Lucas and Dr. John Ditty on an inspiring, heart-changing tour of the Holy Land. Dr. Lucas is chair of New Testament, and Dr. Ditty is chair of Old Testament at Clear Creek Baptist Bible College in Pineville, Ky. Both professors have dug at Tel Gezer, Israel. Dr. Lucas has hosted 6 tours and been to Israel 8 other times. Dates: June 4-12. For more information call (606) 337-1355 or (606) 337-1340; or email roy.lucas@ccbbc.edu or john.ditty@ccbbc.edu. Space is limited so call or email soon. Presented through Maranatha Tours.

WANTED: Would you or someone you know be concerned about beginning a mission to Jewish people in Louisville? Call: Jim Hendricks, (540) 525-4116.

Harp's 'angel music' reaches autistic youth

By Erin Roach

Jonesboro, Ark.—Vivian Hardin, an 18-year-old with autism, was sitting in the balcony at First Baptist Church in Jonesboro, Ark., when church member Pat Qualls played the harp during a worship service. Hardin, in awe, whispered to her mother, "angel music."

After the service, Hardin's mother introduced her to Qualls and let her look at the harp. The girl indicated she would love to learn to play.

God impressed on Qualls' heart in the weeks to follow that she needed to teach Hardin to play the harp, and she shared the thought with the girl's mother, Teresa Hardin.

"Tears started rolling down (Teresa Hardin's) face," Qualls told SBC LIFE, and the mother said she had been praying for something special to interest her daughter.

"She is nonverbal," Qualls said of Vivian Hardin, "so I had to be real creative, mostly show and tell."

After a year of lessons, the autistic teen showed remarkable progress.

"She has an identity in the community. She plays all around town," Qualls said. "She has a goal in life now. Before she started playing the harp, when company would come (to her home) she would retreat to the library. After she learned to play the harp, when people would come in, she would say, 'Hi. I'm Vivian. Who are you? I can play the harp. Would you like to hear me play the harp?' It has increased her social and verbal skills."

Hardin's success inspired Qualls, a retired high school choir director and piano teacher, to start an annual musical presentation featuring special needs students. She began five years ago with four students, and this past spring more than 80 special needs musicians showcased their talent in a performance hall on the campus of Arkansas State University in Jonesboro.

Some of the presenters are autistic or blind; have cerebral palsy, Down syndrome or multiple sclerosis; or struggle with various emotional or mental illnesses or disorders. Qualls considers the program a Special Olympics for the arts.

Most of the presenters are part of the Overcomers choir, a ministry of Central Baptist Church in Jonesboro. The church has had a vibrant special needs ministry for about 30 years, and a few years ago Qualls visited their Sunday morning gathering.

"I sat in that service all emotional because I was so moved by them and what they were doing," Qualls said, recounting that the group sang choruses and heard a sermon.

In addition to inviting the group to sing in her annual music program, Qualls volunteered to start the Overcomers choir at the church. About 30 special needs singers took her up on the offer right away, so Qualls enlisted the help of former student Lynn Williams. The two now co-direct the choir of about 50 members.

"It's incredible what that choir has done," Qualls said. "They've traveled all over Arkansas, and they've probably done 20 or 30 performances, and they have been a role model and encouragement for other churches to start a special needs ministry."

Success stories from the choir abound.

One autistic girl named Sharon had multiple strokes when she was born, leaving her with a muscle disorder, Qualls said.

"This is what music can do and how it can draw you in: When we first started, Sharon would always sit at the back of the room and never interacted," Qualls said. Slowly, Sharon began to talk with other choir members, and now she sits at the front of the room. "She's a lot more social," Qualls said.

Sharon recently returned from a trip to Kansas where she and some others from Central Baptist attended a conference to learn how to advocate on behalf of people with special needs.

Another choir member, Carol, has an exceptional singing voice, Qualls said. The Overcomers choir gives its members an opportunity to win scholarships sponsored by individuals and organizations in the community, and Qualls urged Carol to apply for a vocal scholarship.

"She got a scholarship, and I can't tell you what that's done for her self-esteem and for her self-confidence," Qualls said. "She's doing really well."

Carol told Qualls she enjoys the Overcomers choir because she feels like she is giving something back to people who have invested in her.

About 20 percent of Americans struggle with some type of mental, emotional or physical special need, Qualls said, so any church in any community could start a similar ministry by identifying people with special needs and nurturing their talent.

"Music can produce positive effects in the life of a



Vivian Hardin, who has autism and is a member of First Baptist Church in Jonesboro, Ark., learned to play the harp and uses her talent throughout her community. (Photo by Amy Long)

special needs person that medicine cannot," Qualls said, adding that even for those who are not musically inclined, music is soothing.

Teresa Hardin said the music program increases awareness of the worth of all human beings.

"We believe every person leaves the (annual music) program with a better knowledge of how creative and wonderful each of us is, disability or not," she said. "No one should be taken for granted. We all have something to offer." (BP)

Film places biblical creation debate in college setting

By Diana Chandler

Lake Forest, Calif.—Biblical creation gets a college-themed airing as the origin of humanity in a film scheduled to open on select dates through March.

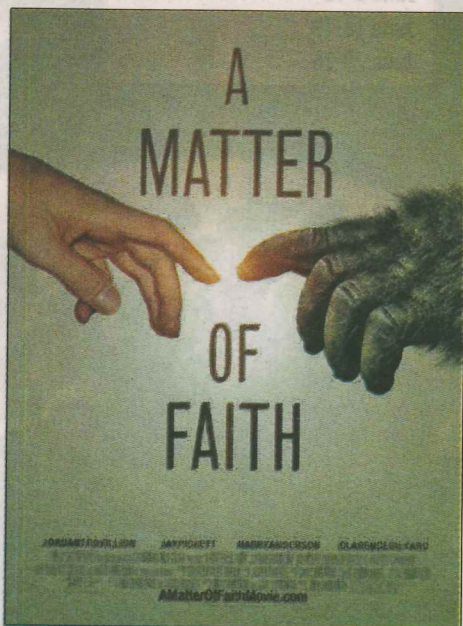
Longtime Christian filmmaker Rich Christiano directs "A Matter of Faith," which features a fictional debate between the Christian father of a college freshman daughter and her professor who teaches evolution.

"The main purpose of this movie is to present the gospel in a unique and touching manner, but the film revolves around the subject of evolution versus creation," Christiano told Baptist Press.

"As many know, the idea of evolution is basically taught in our schools and universities across this great land of ours as a matter of fact.

"Yet nobody can prove evolution, because nobody was there at the beginning; just as no person can prove creation, since nobody was there at the beginning.

"Both of these teachings then



become a matter of faith, not fact," he said. "The crux of the evolution/creation debate comes down to a simple question: 'Who are you putting your faith in—what Darwin and others like him

say or what God says in the Bible?'"

The film's cast includes Harry Anderson of the TV series "Night Court" and "Dave's World" and Clarence Gilyard of "Matlock" and "Walker Texas Ranger."

Among A Matter of Faith's endorsers are Ken Ham, founder of Answers in Genesis (AIG) and the Creation Museum among various Christian leaders and pastors.

"A Matter of Faith has a message that is highly relevant and desperately needed for America today," Ham is quoted as saying on the movie's website, AMatterofFaithMovie.com. "AIG doesn't endorse many movies, even those that are supposedly 'Christian' based. We are fully behind A Matter of Faith as it defends the authority of the Bible beginning in Genesis."

Phil Newberry, a campus pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church of Memphis, Tenn., encourages Christians and "seekers" alike to see the film.

"Every believer needs to see A Matter of Faith to challenge us in our faith and

our boldness to not be ashamed of the gospel and to be prepared to give the Hope of what we have," he said.

"Every seeker needs to see this movie as it answers the questions we might have about the truth of the gospel.

"In fact everyone, church or unchurched, should see this movie as it touches so many areas of one's life and faith."

The film has already been previewed numerous times, and opened in 60 locations as early as Feb. 6.

Communities can bring the film to their local theaters by purchasing 1,000 tickets in advance of opening night, the movie's website explains at AMatterofFaithMovie.com, which also encourages individuals to submit forms expressing a desire for the movie to be shown in their vicinity.

Christiano said he hopes the film "will cause a stir about the issue of evolution and creation, to bring this to the forefront so that Christians can dialogue with other people about this, and use the subject as a witnessing tool." (BP)



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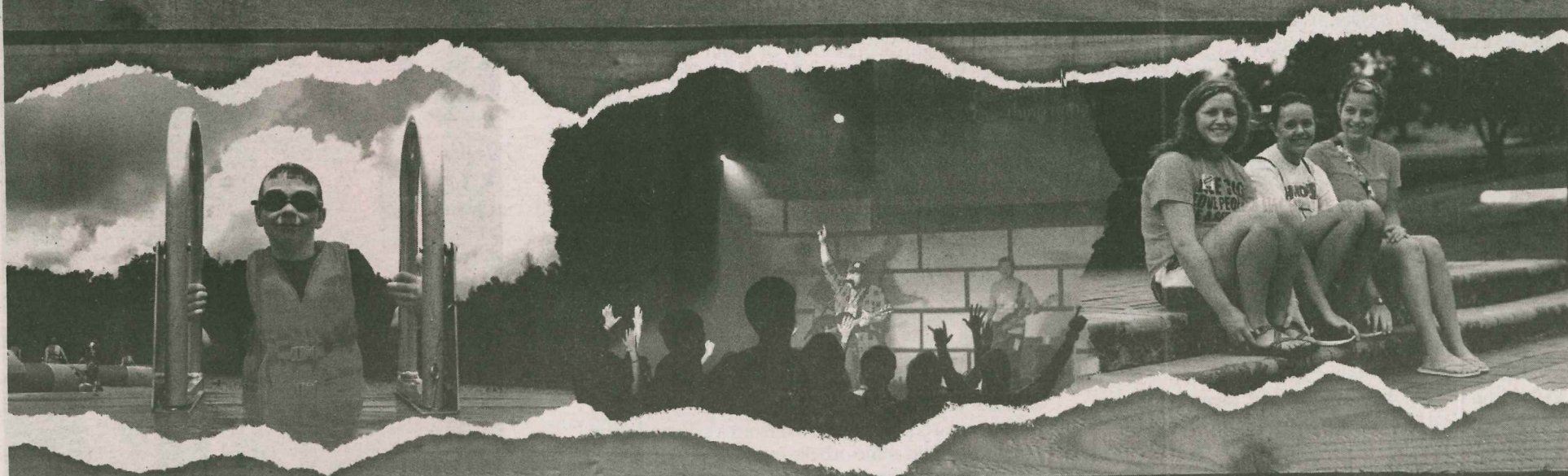


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