

IMB: Globalization, urbanization & biblical priorities



Billions in the world are lost and dying without hope. It is for God's glory that we are compelled to go to the hard places — sprawling cities, arid deserts, dense jungles and war-torn villages — to tell the good news of Jesus.

RICHMOND, Va. —God deserves the worship of all people, and the gospel is the only hope for the billions of people who have yet to hear.

This is why we go to unreached peoples and places: to share with those who live in hard places—sprawling cities, arid deserts, dense jungles and war-torn villages—where very few or no disciples are proclaiming the truth about Jesus in a way that can be understood.

Global missions is not a compartmentalized program of the church for a select few people; it is the purpose for which we all exist. Every church and every believer has a part to play in fulfilling Christ's commission.

Today, globalization and urbanization present new opportunities for more men, women, singles and families to be active in international missions than ever before. As the International Mission Board equips churches to send ordinary Christians as missionaries to unreached people and places, it also partners with churches to send limitless missionary teams of business and medical professionals, students, retirees, teachers and others to work together in global cities.

Five biblical priorities fuel this partnership:

- **Exalting Christ:** Relying on the Word of God as the guidebook, both for the message proclaimed and the strategies utilized.

- **Mobilizing Christians:** Every church member has gifts, skills and opportunities for fulfilling Christ's commission.

- **Equipping churches:** The New Testament teaches us that God uses the local church to send missionaries.

- **Facilitating church planting:** Jesus established His church as the community for making disciples.

- **Fulfilling the commission:** Jesus commissioned His followers to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey all that He had commanded them (Matt. 28:19-20).

We as Christians must be faithful to live out our missionary identity, faithful to pray, give, go and send to multiply churches around the world for the glory of God. How do you fit into God's creative global plan? How does your church fit in?

During this season of prayer and giving, seek the Lord's guidance for what He would have you give to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. Your gifts and your prayers enable more Christians to be sent to make disciples and multiply churches among unreached peoples for the glory of God—because of Who He is.

□ See IMB: Biblical priorities ... Page 10

In Paris, 'death, pain & terror' met by prayer, hope

By Charles Braddix

Paris—Friday the 13th became a day of infamy in Paris after a series of coordinated terrorist attacks in Paris left at least 129 people dead and 350 wounded.

"This has been the worst attack in Paris since World War II," said Tara Chaney*, an International Mission Board worker in France. "People are in a state of shock and mourning; however, there is also a sense of resolve. Parisians are slowly going about their lives. They want to prove to the terrorists that they have not won."

IMB officials reported all of their personnel in Paris were safe, although four were at the national stadium that was one of six locations targeted by terrorists.

The self-proclaimed Islamic State claimed responsibility, yet many Muslims around the world took to social media to condemn the attacks, citing a difference between Islam and extremist dogma.

Mark Edworthy, IMB's top strategist



Flowers, candles and notes fill the streets as people begin to mourn the loss of those killed in terrorist attacks that left hundreds dead or wounded. (IMB photo by Adrianna Ramirez)

for Europe, said, "Some rush immediately to political or even ideological reasons behind the acts, but our workers understand the spiritual dimension of darkness in the world and the reality that violence can erupt anywhere and anytime."

Edworthy added that some would think the immediate response is that Paris needs to monitor more closely the

whereabouts of known terrorists or some other "empty solution" to a very complicated problem. "But our workers have one driving thought: 'Paris needs Jesus,'" Edworthy said.

"There are so many hurting people in our city," said Rebecca Edwards*, a Christian worker in Paris. "Aside from

□ See Paris met by prayer ... Page 3

Patterson, Kentuckians urge pastors to preserve Baptist identity

By Myriah Snyder

Elizabethtown—Modeling itself after early Kentucky pastors' conferences, begun in 1835, the 2015 edition sought to remind attendees of their doctrinal heritage, taking as its theme "An Identity Worth Preserving."

"What is it that we see in the Great Commission that Baptists have done right across the years?" asked Paige Patterson, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, speaking on "Baptist Identity in the 21st Century."

Patterson, who was joined on the platform by three Kentuckians—Adam Greenway, Ron Noffsinger and Moses Radford—listed four of the ways that "Baptists get the assignment right."

First, "Baptists get the assignment from the authority of Christ to make disciples," Patterson said.

"Until we care about where lost people spend eternity, we will go right on talking about the gospel while most people go to hell," he said.

He continued, "He will bless our witness, but not until we give our witness."

Second, "Baptists get it right when they get the order right which is make disciples, then baptize, then teach them all the commandments of Christ."

"You can't baptize them until they are saved," he noted, giving examples of historic Christians who died for this belief.

Third, "Baptists get the purpose of the ordinances right. The focus of the ordinances is on the atonement," he said.

"The faith of the New Testament is a very unritualistic faith," Patterson continued. Referring to the ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Table, he said, "They focus on one subject matter—the incarnation of Jesus Christ, His death on the cross, His burial and His rising."

Lastly, Baptists get it right by emphasizing the adequacy and sufficiency of

Christ's teaching. "Literally, they are all that you need," he maintained.

"Our forefathers paid an incredible price," he concluded. "We're in a bit of trouble in the convention. We aren't going to weasel our way out of it, but we can Great Commission our way out of it."

Adam Greenway

"If there has ever been a day and age where the true church of the Lord Jesus Christ needs to proclaim the word of God with no uncertain sound, no sense of hesitation or reservation, it is today," said Adam Greenway, dean of the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Ministry at Southern Seminary.

Greenway listed three things that happen when the word of God is proclaimed.

First, "confusion will be clarified," second, "God's authority will be authenticated," and lastly, "searchers will find salvation," he said.

Greenway declared, "We do people no favor by allowing them to embrace false and unbiblical ideas. My responsibility is to tell truth even when there may be the possibility of people not liking it."

"There is no more critical truth to tell than this: You are a sinner," he said. "Not just you, but every person that your eyes will ever behold is a sinner, lost and doomed in darkness. Red, yellow, black and white, they are all sinners in His sight."

"There is nothing you can do to overcome your sins in and of yourself. But praise God what we could not do, Christ did for us!" he proclaimed.



Adam Greenway

Asserting that the gospel unites us, Greenway stated, "I want to be the kind of Kentucky Baptist who is always looking for a way to cooperate, (rather) than separate."

"How can we not give all that we are to pushing back the darkness and shining forth the light, proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ and doing so with conviction, authority and purpose, seeing people's lives changed by the gospel of Christ?"

Ron Noffsinger

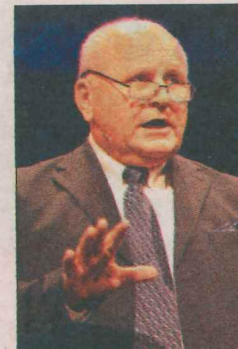
"Some of us want to change everything. You can change the music if you want to, change the way you light the church, or change the way you dress. But don't change the major doctrines of the faith," urged Ron Noffsinger. "You need to stay with the stuff."

Drawing from Acts 1:8, the pastor of Riverside Missionary Baptist Church in Drakesboro stated that a church needs two things to do the work of God.

"First of all, you need to be under the authority of Christ. Then you need the power of the Holy Spirit," Noffsinger said.

"You can't do the work of God without the Holy Spirit," he said. "A church is not a church unless the Spirit of God is upon it. You can have every doctrine right and be dead as a hammer."

Declaring the need for the power of the Holy Spirit, Noffsinger said, "If you don't have a passion for souls, my friend, there's something wrong with you. If a church doesn't have a concern for missions, you're as wrong as you can be."



Ron Noffsinger

"You (should) be pure doctrinally, but you better go out and reach souls," he urged.

Moses Radford

The pastor of Nicholasville's First Baptist Church, Moses Radford, preached on the ordinances.

"The ordinances are not ours, they are the Lord's that He has given unto the church," Radford said, identifying the two ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

"Jesus went to the River Jordan to be baptized. That ought to let us know that baptism is important. It is not an ordinance that ought to be erased from churches," Radford said.

He proclaimed that the mode of baptism is emersion. "The Lord doesn't give us multiple choice when it comes to baptism. He gave the ordinance, and He demonstrated to us that it is supposed to be emersion," he said.

"Who is to be baptized?" he asked.

"Only a person who has believed and confessed Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. They are the only ones who are to be baptized," he answered.

"Older people where I'm from used to say, 'If you're not saved, you go into the water a dry devil and you come out a wet one,'" Radford continued.

He said that a believer should be baptized "because it is an act of obedience."

"We ought not want to get saved then purposely disobey Him," Radford said.

Regarding the Lord's Supper, Radford said, "It's the Lord's Supper, not yours, not mine. I don't refer to it as communion, because people get confused who they're communing with."

Also on this year's program were Evangelist Bailey Smith, of Atlanta, and Jeff Faggart, founder of the Baptist History Preservation Society and pastor of Harvest Baptist Church in Rockwell, N.C. (WR)

Unto Me Shelter residents thankful for chance to make fresh start

By Myriah Snyder

Stanford—Since early October, the Unto Me Shelter has become a temporary home to five (and counting) persons, who are grateful for a chance to get back on their feet.

The shelter, begun and overseen by Lincoln County Baptist Association, has become a temporary place of refuge for those in transition between homes or

those trying to make some changes in their lives.

"We were looking at a name for this house, and we called it the Unto Me Shelter because Jesus said, 'What you have done to the least of these, you have done unto me,'" Nick Manzie, pastor of Stanford Baptist Church and committee member explained, referencing Matthew 25:40.

He continued, "It's not a shelter; it's not the type of place where someone is going

to come in here and stay a couple nights, and we kick them out. It's a place where we help them transition from the state they're in into a self-sufficient atmosphere."

Nick and Brittany came to the home ready to find jobs and a place to live. After spending time at the shelter, they now know Christ as their Savior.

"It's been a blessing in its own way," Nick said. "We were out in the cold, and they brought us in, fed us and put us on the right path."

"Me and my wife Brittany—we both accepted Christ," he said. "It's more than words can explain."

Brittany added, "Yesterday was exactly one month to the day that I have been clean, and if it wasn't for this house and the help that the Baptists are giving, I don't know where I would be."

"Our intentions are to share Christ with them," Manzie said.

He shared the story of James, one of the residents. "James ... was kind of contemplating it, but like most people he got caught up in the logic of things. We talked a little bit further and he realized faith isn't about logic; faith is faith. He accepted Christ as his Savior."

"That's probably our biggest want, is to see people either come to Christ or grow closer to Christ through this process,"

Manzie said.

The shelter was donated to LCBA by a local business owner in cooperation with First Southern National Bank, who repaired the home before donating it. The shelter is managed by a committee and funded by area churches and businesses. Additionally, some of the food for the shelter comes from the Kentucky Baptist Convention's Hunger Relief program.

The property consists of a common area, full kitchen, two rooms with four beds each and a small apartment for married couples. There is a strict no alcohol, smoking or drugs policy, and residents are reevaluated every seven days.

"We just want to work with these individuals and put some daylight into the dark," Gary King, Lincoln County Association's director of missions, said.

"This just proves that God answers prayer," he continued. "I've been working on trying to get some type of shelter in Stanford for 15 years. I knew God would do it in His timing."

"We're very fortunate to have the cooperation that we have with local businesses and governments," King concluded. "They have been very supportive. We're just thrilled to death that we at least have something to offer now and to be able to do more in the future." (WR)

Can you guess what this is?

If you were around in 1825-26 when your state Baptist paper was getting started, you likely would have been talking about the first steam locomotives.



WESTERN RECORDER

**Celebrating 190 years
of Kentucky Baptist newspapers**

Ky. churches use Inasmuch model to reach thousands

Louisville—What would it take to reach more than 34,000 people across the Bluegrass state with God's love? How do believers get the chance to share the gospel in an increasingly anti-Christian culture?

Both questions were answered recently by 104 Kentucky Baptist churches with "Operation Inasmuch."

That's the number of churches that used the Inasmuch model of community ministry to minister to 34,357 people in need from Fulton to Prestonsburg and from Boone County to London. The effort involved 4,937 volunteers from these churches conducting 592 mercy ministry projects, ranging from visiting nursing homes to building wheelchair ramps for disabled persons, from paying for a person's laundry at a laundromat to conducting a car care clinic for single moms, and many others.

"We are very proud of what Kentucky Baptists have done to reach people in their own community with God's love," said David Crocker, executive director of the Inasmuch ministry (operationinasmuch.org). "And we are pleased to have been part of this massive ministry project. It shows what can happen when ordinary believers are given the tools to minister to their neighbors."

The Missions Mobilization team of the Kentucky Baptist Convention partnered with the Inasmuch ministry, based in Knoxville, Tenn., in 2015 to train about a hundred churches in how to use the Inasmuch model.

In training sessions, a member of the KBC staff shared simple ideas of how people who are ministering to people's needs may also be prepared to share the gospel.

More than 300 opportunities to share the gospel were reported by churches using Inasmuch, and several resulted in either professions of faith or first-time attendance to a church by the people



Volunteers from Northside Baptist Church in Elizabethtown landscaping the Clarity Pregnancy Resource Center. Below, youth read to children at a Barnes and Noble Bookstore.

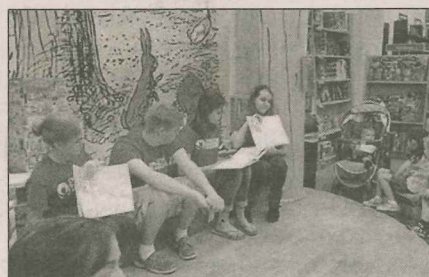
who were helped.

Eric Allen, Missions Mobilization team leader at the KBC, set up the Inasmuch training sessions in early 2015. He reported to the convention in Elizabethtown the results of the effort.

His team is planning to offer a new round of training sessions across the state in early 2016. For more information, contact him at Eric.Allen@kybaptists.org.

Calvary Baptist Church in London is an example of the impact that Inasmuch can have on a church as well as its community. With an average attendance of 350 on Sundays, the congregation sent out 230 volunteers to do 26 projects in which 710 people were served.

Monica Binge, coordinator for Calvary's Inasmuch, said, "We did everything just as presented at the workshop and had church members participating who had never done so before. It has really set our church on fire!"



Even small churches did well with Inasmuch. Pleasant Grove Baptist Church in Manchester has only about 20 people on Sundays, and all 20 were involved in its Inasmuch in which they served 130 people.

The total dollar value of ministry rendered through services by the 104 Kentucky churches totaled \$693,148, which is a combination of materials either donated or purchased and volunteer time.

"We look forward to seeing what God will do in communities across Kentucky in 2016," Crocker said. (WR)



John Adams pictured with his wife, Megan, and their daughter, Ellie Joye.

Adams called to serve as Louisville campus missionary

Louisville—The Kentucky Baptist Convention administrative committee approved the hiring of Virginia pastor John Adams to serve as campus missionary at the University of Louisville.

KBC Collegiate Evangelism Strategist Brian Combs described Adams as having a "great heart" for reaching the lost.

"John brings experience engaging the college campus from the local church," Combs said. "His experience of reaching and mobilizing students to engage the local campus will be a tremendous resource."

Adams, a native of Maysville, and graduate of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, began Dec. 1.

While on the mission field at U of L, Combs said Adams will have the crucial task of "helping churches help every student on every campus in the Louisville region encounter Jesus and experience life to the full."

Adams said it was on the Eastern Kentucky University campus where he first encountered Christ through the testimony of his roommate.

"It was a Saul-to-Paul transformation," said

Adams, "and my life has never been the same."

Adams comes to Louisville from his position as a minister to young adults at First Baptist Church of Norfolk, Va., where he has served since 2012. His ministry also includes stints as a senior pastor and student minister at churches in Kentucky and Virginia.

Adams, 36, holds a bachelor's and a master's degree from EKV, and a second master's degree from Southern Seminary in Christian apologetics and worldview.

Adams and his wife, Megan, have two children, Ellie and Preston. (KBC)

Paris met by prayer

Continued from page 1

those who have been personally affected by the loss of loved ones or the terror of being directly involved in the attacks, there are millions of people living in this city who do not have the hope that comes with knowing of the love of Jesus Christ."

French President Francois Hollande called the attacks "an act of war."

Michael Harrington, a Baptist worker in France, said, "These were not shootings in dark neighborhoods, not government targets, not military quarrels. Rather, the shootings and bombings ... happened in

the places of Paris in which life occurs every day: cafés, restaurants, the stadium, a concert hall. The purpose was clear: death, pain and terror.

"Are the French people hurting? Without a doubt," Harrington said. "Our hearts hurt. Our colleagues in the French Baptist Federation expressed solidarity in the face of hurt, pleading adherence to 1 Timothy 2:1-8, which calls for petitions, prayers and intercession."

The federation's website posted a response to the Paris attacks, saying, "Again this year, our country has now experienced the horror of terrorism: dark, cold, blind and blinded. France, where a state of emergency has been declared,

wakes up in pain, grief and bereavement. Beyond outrage, sadness and incomprehension, the Baptist Federation shares compassion for the victims and families affected by these murderous attacks. It encourages all to mobilize our churches to actions of help and support in prayer. The Bible invites us to establish a footprint of prayer in truth and love, commitment and authenticity."

Arkansas pastor Ronnie Floyd, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, said, "Our hearts are broken with the people of France over the tragedies in their nation. We are praying for them now and trust that thousands of our churches will pray in their worship services.

interceding for them. This evil calls us to resolve again of our great need to advance the gospel to all peoples of the world."

Trey Cassidy, an IMB strategy leader in France, said, "We mourn with our French brothers and sisters that many did not come home after the attacks. It brings to mind the verse in John that our enemy is a thief who 'comes to steal, kill, and destroy.'"

He encouraged the Christian community to not wait and see how others will respond to this tragedy. "Let us, as the body of Christ, be the first to respond with comfort for those grieving and an offer to share our hope," he said. (BP)

*Name changed.

Appreciating our pastors

Join other Kentucky Baptist churches and show appreciation for your pastor during the holiday season.

God has blessed us with faithful, fearless men who love the Lord Jesus and His church.

Two opportunities are coming up for churches to bless their pastors with times of retreat and learning.

Together We are the KBC



Paul Chitwood

First, registration is now open for the 2016 Shepherd event at <http://www.kybaptist.org/shepherding>.

The Kentucky Baptist Convention and Baptist Health hope that Shepherd 2016 will bring a time of godly refreshment to ministry couples.

As in the past, we desire to bring couples together in a relaxed setting where they can experience renewal, strengthen relationships, and encounter God in worship.

The conference begins Thursday, Jan. 28, with registration at 1:30 p.m., EST, and concludes Saturday, Jan. 30, before noon.

Space is limited. Register early to reserve your spot.

The registration fee covers only a portion of the costs associated with this event.

As a means of blessing and encouraging our ministers, the remaining cost is provided by Baptist Health and by Kentucky Baptists' gifts through the Cooperative Program.

Second, I will be hosting a Holy Land tour for any Kentucky Baptist who would like to join us, March 14-23, 2017.

The tour would be a great learning opportunity for anyone, but especially for pastors. Churches may want to consider sending their pastor or at least assisting him with the trip.

The estimated total price is \$3,869 per person from Louisville.

A \$300 deposit (paid to Jerusalem Tours) will reserve your place.

Included in the estimated price are: flights, hotels, touring, breakfast and dinner daily, 4 lunches, tips, airport taxes and fuel charges (subject to change by airline).

Not included in the estimated price are: optional travel insurance (\$292), meals not noted in itinerary, drinks and items of personal nature.

For more information, contact Stephen Rice, KBC Church Consulting & Revitalization team leader, at (502) 489-3434 or steve.rice@kybaptist.org or call Jerusalem Tours at (888) 373-8687.

Laughter — 'Life's best medicine' ... for whatever ails you

Over Thanksgiving, our son, Caleb, came home from college. As we were catching up, something triggered two of his humorous childhood memories and brought back a hearty laugh.

Whenever Caleb would bend over, I would sneak up behind him and give him a lighthearted kick in the seat—just enough to throw him off balance and send him toppling a few steps forward. He would return a look of disgust, and we'd both laugh. Then, whenever we were in a store, and someone would bend over near us, he or I would make a pose like a field goal kicker lining up for a "game-winning" boot. The pose usually would bring forth a stifled chuckle ... and a panicked expression from my wife like a football coach running up and down the sidelines trying to wave off a kick.

His other memory usually occurred between Thanksgiving and Christmas, when Michelle was in the height of present wrapping. Whenever Caleb—and sometimes Laura—was really into watching a television program, I would find an empty wrapping paper roll and sneak up behind his chair. Then I'd raise one end just behind his ear, press my lips on the other end, and out would come a sound like a trumpeting elephant that would cause a lame man to bolt.

I know: Real mature, right? Still, sometimes a moment of laughter can bring us all a little closer, and turn a frown into a smile. As the proverb says, "A joyful heart brightens one's face, but a troubled heart breaks the spirit."

As I was cleaning up my basement office over the holidays—something I seldom do—I ran across a column titled "Laughter—Life's Best Medicine," written by my father-in-law, John Dever, in 1980, while he was a professor at Averett College. I'd like to share it with you:

"A few weeks ago my wife, Marcia, was relaxing with a new book and thoroughly enjoying it. It seems that every two minutes the silence was broken with laughter or a semi-self-directed, 'That's exactly the way it is.' Finally, curiosity killed the husband. So when she laid 'Aunt Erma's Cope Book' down for a minute, I snatched it up and began perusing the pages to see what could possibly elicit such a response from her.



After Thought

By Todd Deaton

Before I knew it, I too was breaking forth with spontaneous bursts of laughter.

"Erma Bombeck had done it again. She had taken those irritating, tension-producing, anger-provoking, marriage threatening, everyday happenings and, with a peppering of sarcasm, over-exaggeration, and unusual wit, turned them into the medicine of laughter.

"There is little doubt that most of these problems that Erma deals with are traumatic and sometimes push us to the brink of our human endurance. But, that is just the point, we get too up-tight about these difficulties and instead of ruling the situation, the situation rules us.

"We need to learn to laugh at ourselves and some of our ridiculous situations. Once a little chuckle creeps through our pursed lips and clinched teeth the situation changes drastically. Some of the threat subsides and the problem seems to be reduced to a manageable size.

"... I'm reminded that Jesus was not a man of total solemnity. He possessed that rare ability

to cut through a difficult moment with first century humor that put the situation in the right perspective. For example, in the midst of the serious ethical teachings of the Sermon on the Mount, there is the passage in Matthew 7:3-5 dealing with criticizing others. Jesus says, 'Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?'

"Now, that may not bring any laughter from the 20th-century, scientific man, but it probably brought a prolonged guffaw from Jesus' audience. Laughter paved the way for dealing with the problem.

"Laughter is life's best medicine. Try it. It works."

In these days of terrorism, mass refugees, shootings and horrendous disasters in the headlines, we all could use a little more laughter. This Christmas, when the stress of shopping, parties and family gatherings produces a bit more angst than you can handle, find a way to bring a bright spot to someone else's day. You will probably find yourself smiling, too. Oh, and a word to the wise: Before you bend over, be sure that Caleb and I aren't anywhere around.

Lee: Go 'both feet in' for sake of gospel

By Wanda Lee

In his book "Both Feet In," retired missionary Dr. Bud Fray references an African proverb that says: "Only a fool tests the depth of the water with both feet." It's like testing the temperature of the pool water before you jump in; we stick our toe in first, and if it's too cold we have the option of pulling back. Once we jump in with both feet we are committed ... and we better know how to swim!

After serving 28 years among the people of Zimbabwe and South Africa, Bud and his wife, Jane, know firsthand what the Africans mean by this proverb. The Africans' life experiences taught them to tread cautiously before committing to something. They worshipped many gods, holding many beliefs that were contrary to the gospel. So when confronted with the truths of the Bible, they hesitated to commit to the One True God of Scripture.

Carefully and wisely, missionaries like

Bud taught them to weigh all the consequences and then, when they were ready, when they were totally committed to Jesus' teaching, then put both feet in, knowing there is no turning back.

Jesus calls us to likewise have both feet in for the sake of the gospel as we share with those who have yet to hear. This seems so counterintuitive to our culture.

In many ways our culture tells us: Focus on what I want and need, what makes me happy and feeds my ego. This comes first as I make choices for how I will live and what I will commit to with my time and resources. If something is going to cost me, if I stick my toe in first and don't like it, I have the right to pull back and not jump in with both feet. It all depends on what makes me happy first.

Bud Fray and our other missionaries are testimonies of individuals who weighed the consequences and, even though the cost may be great, have placed both feet in for the sake of the gospel.

We, too, have been called to do the same as followers of Christ. We are called to come alongside missionaries and pray for them and for the people we are trying to reach. We are called to search our hearts and find the level of sacrificial giving that will be pleasing to God, not what is easy for us. We have been called to lay aside our personal schedules and physically go to where the people are if God leads us to go.

In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, chapter 5, a portion of verses 14 and 15 reads: "For Christ's love compels us ... that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for the One who died for them and was raised." Paul put both feet in for the gospel in his day and would encourage us to do the same today in whatever way God calls us.

Wanda Lee is executive director of national WMU. The 2015 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering theme, "Because of Who He Is," focuses on Psalm 96:3. This year's goal is \$175 million.

WESTERN
Recorder

Shine Like Stars *Philippians 2:15

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Letters to the editor:

The Baptist Forum section of the Western Recorder provides an opportunity for Kentucky Baptists to express their viewpoints. Opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the Western Recorder's editorial staff, its Board of Directors, or the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

Letters should be no more than 300 words in length and will be edited for style, clarity and space.

Letters must reflect a spirit of Christian charity and civility.

Seeing the faces behind the numbers

By Jared Wellman

Several years ago I was pastor of a small church in East Texas. Our annual budget was slim, yet a stout conviction of our fellowship was giving to missions. We designated 10 percent of our annual budget to it. I sometimes wondered if our tiny church with our even tinier budget really made a scratch on the proverbial surface of the lost world.

One summer I was in Nazareth Village in Israel, alongside several other pastors on a tour of the country. While walking into a bookstore, one of the older pastors called me over and introduced me to an IMB missionary. I'll never forget how he did it: "Jared," he said, "come meet one of your missionaries." For the first time in my tenure as a Southern Baptist pastor, I felt connected to missions; my giving touched real people.

This illustrates the beauty of the Cooperative Program, but it also showcases a weakness. While it's true that every active church can say that they support international missionaries through the Cooperative Program, it's also true that, sometimes, the missionaries are nameless numbers (as are the lost people they serve).

The Cooperative Program is more than just sharing money to support missions. It's about sharing money to support missionaries. That is, the CP is about supporting living, breathing

people who share the gospel with dying, breathing people.

In the downsizing of our international mission force due to budget shortfalls, we are losing 600-800 living, breathing people whose lives impact countless dying, breathing people. I recently attended my first meeting as a member of the SBC Executive Committee and this

FIRST PERSON

loomed over the gathering. One major concern is how the IMB downsizing might impact the Cooperative Program and the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions. This, however, reflects our problem—that this concern is framed in financial terms.

The IMB isn't a budget item or an offering. It's people with passions and hopes and dreams and convictions and families and lives. But most importantly it's saved people reaching lost people with the gospel.

It's judicious to be concerned about the impact of the IMB's budget reset, but this concern should segue to the real problem—lost people. If we express more concern over a budget or an offering rather than the lives being touched, we forget who and what we are as Southern Baptists. Missions shouldn't be a cog of the church's machine, but the other way around.

The IMB has continued to send missionaries, but the average church isn't providing necessary assets to

keep missionaries on the field.

This is why the IMB needs the church's support now more than ever. It would be a categorical atrocity if our churches' Cooperative Program gifts stagnate or decline week by week or if this year's Lottie Moon Christmas Offering dips a cent lower than the \$153,002,394.13 received last year, when this year's ingathering should be the largest in history.

Southern Baptist pastors must teach their people that the Cooperative Program isn't just a line item in the budget but a cooperation of believers to create more believers. Pastors need to think about leading churches to increase their annual CP giving. The IMB needs consistent gifts to keep missionaries on the field.

And pastors need to prepare their people for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering by asking how we can strategically and creatively raise more money. What kind of event can we host? What kind of appeal can we make to place a face beside the number? What sacrifice can we make or what corner can we cut in our personal budgets?

More than ever, this is the time to come together as Southern Baptists. Let's turn the Cooperative Program into a Cooperative Initiative. Let's remember that our churches exist because of the Great Commission and not the other way around.

Let's remember that there are faces behind the numbers. (BP)

Misconceptions about disability

1. If I'm disabled, Social Security disability will cover my living expenses and start quickly.

Truth: Only those severely disabled qualify, usually by medical conditions that last at least a year or result in death. If approved, the average benefit is less than \$1,200 per month.

2. Most disabilities result from accidents.

Truth: According to the Council for Disability Awareness, 90 percent of disabilities are caused by cancer, heart disease, diabetes, back pain and arthritis. Only 10 percent are caused by accidents.

3. My family would be OK.

Truth: An estimated 71 percent of our population is at financial risk after missing a paycheck. According to the American Journal of Medicine, more than half of bankruptcies and home foreclosures are caused by medical problems.

4. Most disabilities are short-term.

Truth: One in eight people that are disabled will be disabled for more than 5 years.

5. It will be covered by Workman's Compensation.

Truth: Less than 5 percent of disability-causing incidents are work-related. More than 95 percent do not qualify for Workman's Compensation.

6. Others will provide for my family and me.

Truth: Friends, family and church members may help with early expenses. But disabilities can be lengthy and those who help are unlikely to be able to sustain the level of support you'll need.

7. It won't happen to me.

Truth: One in four Americans will become disabled at some time during their career. For young adults the odds of having a period of disability before age 65 is about six times higher than the odds of dying before age 65. Disability insurance protects your paycheck and your family's future.



Don Spencer

Do you have a good marriage?

Dave Carder uses a tool in his marital recovery work with couples called the "Marital Satisfaction Time Line." This tool allows a couple to create a time line of their marriage history. Each spouse creates one.

The longer the couple has been married the longer and more detailed the time line will be. The goal is honest sharing.

Any and all significant events in the marriage are recorded. The emotional impact of the events are noted. Events are rated for high or low marital satisfaction.

Once each time line is completed, they will take turns sharing. When the wife or husband is sharing, the task of the spouse is to listen and receive what is shared. Spouses may not interpret an event the same.

Some events may not be included in one partner's time line.

It is useful to discuss where on the time lines marital satisfaction is high or low for both and where it is high for one and low for the other. It is designed to learn about your marriage and when and why satisfaction is higher at some points.

With this knowledge, the two of you can work toward improving your marital satisfaction. At the beginning of the marriage, high marital satisfaction is expected. Daily struggles can severely challenge a marriage.

God's instruction for His people models the value of recalling important events to recognize how God has provided, sustained, loved, saved, and promised a future.

For marriage, it is vital to remember how we loved, cared for, attended to, encouraged, romanced, blessed, and cherished each other in order to ensure a future together.



Valerie Vincent

Finding a glimpse of Heaven

As I have become aged (pronounced with two syllables)—a relic—it is clear to me that my eyesight worsens with each passing year; this, in spite of the care of Dr. Reed Jarvis, whose heroic efforts bring relief, even though I find myself juggling several pairs of lenses.

I recently had cataract surgery for both eyes, but I still juggle eyeglasses for reading and another pair for the computer.

Surely when a student appears at my office door, only to see me frantically, awkwardly fumbling to take off one pair of glasses, while at the same time trying to replace them with another pair, the student must wonder, "Now, what is it with the eccentric professor. There is absolutely no telling. No telling at all."

Before my eye surgeries, however, there were times sitting out on the porch of our writing cabin, when I could enjoy looking out onto our backyard with no visual aides whatever; just my naked eyes.

It was at these times that I realized why I have always been drawn to the marvels of the impressionist artists, especially to the paintings of Claude Monet. This poem of Lisel Mueller brought it into focus for me.

In "Monet Refuses the Operation," Mueller wrote:

"Doctor, you say there are no haloes

around the streetlights in Paris
and what I see is an aberration
caused by old age, an affliction.

I tell you it has taken me all my life
to arrive at the vision of gas
lamps as angels,
to soften and blur and finally
banish
the edges you regret I don't
see,
to learn that the line I called
the horizon
does not exist and sky and
water,
so long apart, are the same
state of being.
Fifty-four years before I could
see

Rouen cathedral is built
of parallel shafts of sun,
and now you want to restore
my youthful errors: fixed
notions of top and bottom,
the illusion of three-dimensional space,
wisteria separate
from the bridge it covers.
What can I say to convince you
the Houses of Parliament dissolve
night after night to become
the fluid dream of the Thames?
I will not return to a universe
of objects that don't know each other,
as if islands were not the lost children
of one great continent. The world
is flux, and light becomes what it
touches,
becomes water, lilies on water,
above and below water,
becomes lilac and mauve and yellow

Notes from the Back Row



Duane Bolin

and white and cerulean lamps,
small fists passing sunlight
so quickly to one another
that it would take long, streaming hair
inside my brush to catch it.
To paint the speed of light!
Our weighted shapes, these verticals,
burn to mix with air
and change our bones, skin, clothes
to gases. Doctor,
if only you could see
how heaven pulls earth into its arms
and how infinitely the heart expands
to claim this world, blue vapor without
end."

I think it might have been those times of blurry-eyed porch meditations when I experienced a glimpse of heaven so real that however artists have painted it—Monet's "Lilies" or his "Rouen Cathedral" or his gardens at Giverny—or however writers have expressed it—Robert Penn Warren's "world enough and time," or C. S. Lewis' "a moment made eternity,"—I know beyond a shadow of a doubt in that transcendent instant, that there is more, so much more, beyond what we experience as pilgrims in what is at once a world of wonder and woe.

And then the Apostle Paul makes it all so clear, when he wrote, "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Duane Bolin teaches in the Department of History at Murray State University. Duane and Evelyn are members of Murray's First Baptist Church.

Benton First Baptist's vision: 'Pay the Way'

Benton—"Can we really do that?"

This must have been one of the questions in the mind of members of First Baptist Church of Benton, when Pastor Don Wilson first proposed that the church should set a goal of giving enough to the annual Lottie Moon Christmas Offering to pay a salary for an International Mission Board missionary for one year.

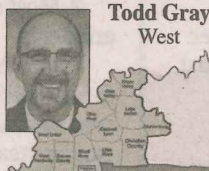
At the time of Pastor Wilson's suggestion, the church was giving about \$10,000 a year to the annual missions offering, and the annual salary published by the IMB for a missionary was \$46,000. The vision seemed almost unachievable.

Wilson was motivated to lead in missions giving because an IMB missionary couple were members of First Baptist. Kevin and Jessica Cartwright, then missionaries to Niger, were a treasured family at the church.

Kevin had grown up at First Baptist and had been a member of Wilson's senior high Sunday School class. Kevin and Jessica both served through the IMB's Journeyman Program. They married in 2005 and were appointed to the mission field in 2006.

In 2008, Wilson started talking to the leadership about giving enough to pay the salary for the Cartwrights. The church

Regional SPOTLIGHT



Todd Gray
West

gave \$15,000 toward the annual international missions offering.

In 2009 and 2010, the church gave about \$25,000 to the Lottie Moon Offering each year. In 2011, the amount jumped to \$32,800, and in 2012, they gave \$41,585.

Each year they were inching closer to their goal of supporting a missionary for a year. In 2013, the salary cost had increased to \$50,000, while giving reached \$48,800.

Last year, after a big push, they reached their goal and gave \$52,650 for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. For a church with 275 people in Sunday School, giving more than \$52,000 to a single missions offering is a great testimony to financial faithfulness.

When asked how he led the church toward such a sizable goal, Wilson noted several actions that could be practiced by

other pastors and church leaders.

1. Lead by example. Years ago Wilson began the practice of "giving the best Christmas gift to Jesus." He would determine the price of the most expensive Christmas gift he would purchase, and then he'd give more than that amount to missions. His next personal step was to match the total Christmas purchases of his family in missions giving.

2. Cast the vision. As he was casting the vision for matching a missionary salary through Lottie Moon giving, Wilson also was showing practical ways that church members could meet the goal. He broke the salary down to show how members could support a missionary for a week, for a day, or for an hour. He also encouraged members to make the Lottie Moon offering part of their weekly or monthly giving.

3. Make the missions offering personal. Pastor Wilson continued to make the connection to the church that they were not supporting an anonymous missionary family that they did not know. Instead, they were ministering to members of their own church. The

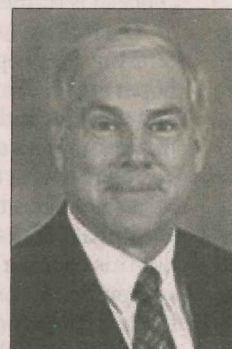
connection with Kevin and Jessica Cartwright made the giving personal for the congregation.

Reaching the missions giving goal has had several side benefits to the church. Members have seen that a mid-sized church can have a great impact through its giving. The emphasis on giving has transferred also to an emphasis on going, with the church taking multiple short-term missions trips each year.

Members have also become more concerned about the world in front of them, as well as more aware of needs in their own backyard.

The Benton congregation has also grown in a spirit of generosity and realized that they can sacrificially support missions without taking away from the needs of the church.

At a time when IMB missionaries are being asked to consider early retirement due to challenges in missions funding, First Baptist Church of Benton is showing that there can be a better way. Instead of pulling back on missions giving, it may be time to re-double our efforts to reach the world for Christ. (WR)



Don Wilson

Longtime Williamstown member celebrates 105th birthday

By Myriah Snyder

Williamstown—Caroline Ransdell, member of Williamstown Baptist Church since 1971, turned 105 on Nov. 13.

Ransdell has served her church in many capacities over the years as a librarian, a Sunday School teacher, a member of Woman's Missionary Union, and as church historian.

"She's been really active in our church, as far as the historical side of it. She's always been interested in history," Marietta Hedges, Williamstown Baptists' church historian, said.

Ransdell, a graduate of University of Kentucky, taught home economics, biology and advertising to high school children for 32 years. To this day, students will stop by and pay her a visit.

"It was God's plan and I loved it," Ransdell told Grant County News, referring to her teaching career.

Until recently, due to health issues, she continued to serve in her church as well as her community.

Ransdell told Grant County News that her hobbies include history and going to church. She also said that her secret to life was "having wonderful parents and being raised to be kind to others."

Ransdell's first husband, Theo McWhorter, died in a car crash leaving her with two sons, Raymond and Donald. She was later remarried to Alva Ransdell and their son, James, died of cancer at age 9.

"God has truly blessed her with abundant life and she is a great blessing to all



Ransdell

KYDR & NAMB partner for Johnson Co. rebuild

Paintsville—The Kentucky Baptist Convention Disaster Relief partnered with the North American Mission Board to provide First Baptist Church of Paintsville with a \$20,000 grant to sponsor rebuild efforts in Johnson County after devastating floods in July.

A check was presented to the church on Nov. 8.

"We just knew the tremendous loss that happened over there," Coy Webb, disaster relief director with the Kentucky Baptist Convention, said of the approximately 100 homes "destroyed or washed completely away during the flooding."

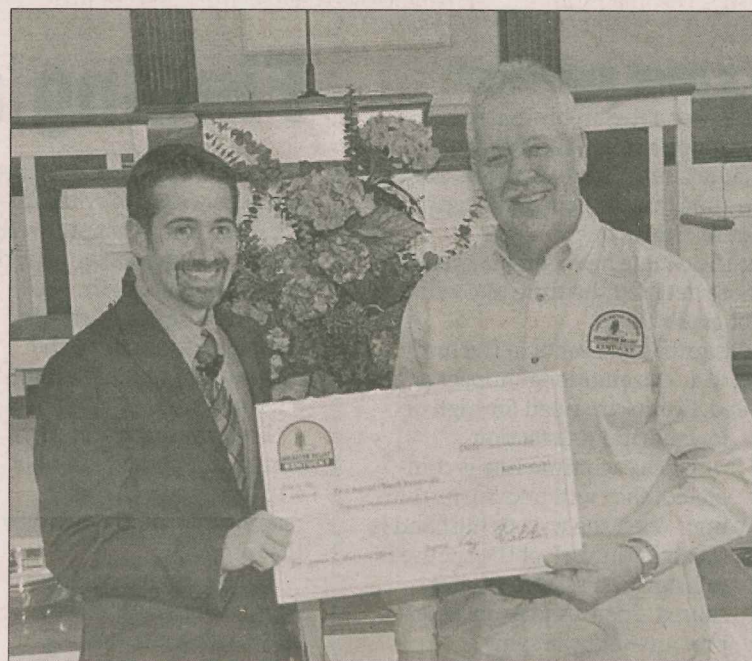
Webb continued, "As we went and ministered after the floods, we realized that there were a lot of vulnerable people who were going to have a hard time getting back in their home without some outside help."

"Over 1,000 people were affected with over 100 homes completely destroyed in the sudden severe flash flooding event with four fatalities. The Flat Gap community was the most heavily damaged by the sudden massive flooding. The event was unique in that such a large number of homes were completely destroyed," Webb commented.

DR began talking with local churches and then NAMB. "The good news is between both entities, we were able to pull together some resources for local churches there to continue that ministry," Webb said.

Enterprise Baptist Association and Paintsville First Baptist, among other churches and individuals, also donated to the effort, with overall gifts totaling \$28,500.

"We just want people in the community to know that we can help, that way maybe we can make contact with them



Wayne Cornett, pastor of First Baptist Church of Paintsville, receives a \$20,000 check to help with the Johnson County rebuild effort. Kentucky Baptist Disaster Relief Director Coy Webb (right) presented the check on behalf of the Kentucky Baptist Convention and the North American Mission Board. (Photo by Charles Castle)

and get to know them better," Charles Castle, part of the Johnson County long term recovery team and member of Paintsville First Baptist, said.

"Our hope is to help some families get back into their homes and demonstrate the love and compassion of Christ and His people," Wayne Cornett, pastor of Paintsville Baptist told the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

"Right now they're needing framers, roofers, plumbers, electricians, people who can hang sheet rock, painters—just about anything you would need to rebuild a home. They're looking for teams who might be able to come and assist," Webb added.

He said that people can get involved in the rebuild by churches sending teams to help or donating funds. "The funds we gave were a tremendous resource but certainly aren't going to

meet all the rebuild needs."

The grant is a "good reminder that it's not just those of us in Johnson County who care about Flat Gap, it's Kentucky Baptists across the state," Cornett added.

"I think it's a great partnership and shows the Cooperative Program at its best, how NAMB and the KBC can come alongside a church or churches in an association and empower them to better minister to their community," Webb said.

"Not only do they minister with compassion which biblically we're encouraged is the right thing to do, but also it opens tremendous doors for the gospel as we get into homes and minister and listen to their hurt; it gives us great opportunity to share the hope that we have in Jesus Christ," Webb concluded. (KBC)

Why evangelicals are torn about admitting refugees into the U.S.

By Trevin Wax

Evangelicals may be united that the Bible is the ultimate source of authority, but they are divided on how the Bible would lead us to respond to the growing crisis of refugees fleeing from Syria.

- What is the best way to show Christian love and compassion?
- How is the church's role different from the state's?
- How do we show wisdom and prudence in securing the safety of our neighbors and nation?

NEWS ANALYSIS

These are just a few of the questions that evangelicals are grappling with. One evangelical pastor today told me, "My church members are all over the place on this!"

The situation in Syria is dire. More than 300,000 people have died. Half the country is now homeless. Millions are fleeing. The plight of the refugees came to national attention in September with a picture of a 3-year-old boy whose body washed up on shore in Turkey. Many evangelical Christians sprang into action, making plans for welcoming and serving the refugees.

I've seen evangelical compassion firsthand. I once served a church in a small town where hundreds of Somali refugees, the vast majority of them Muslim, were resettled.

Our church opened its doors and hosted fellowships; we devoted space to ESL and other citizenship classes. The makeshift mosque in our town may have been closed off to us Christians, but we made sure the doors of our church were open to the Muslim refugees. At their best, evangelicals are on the front lines of "welcoming the stranger."

It's no surprise then that evangelical leaders have been calling for Christians to receive and serve refugees. A Christianity Today editorial this fall called Christians to embrace the "unparalleled opportunity to love neighbors here and abroad, and to showcase the beauty of the gospel that proclaims good news to the poor, liberty for those stuck in refugee camps, and a new life for those fleeing from oppression."

Evangelicals recognize that many of these men, women and children are "brothers and sisters in Christ" who are leaving behind the cradle of Christian civilization. But since recent terrorist attacks in Paris, the debate over whether and how to receive refugees has intensified.

On the one hand, there are evangelicals calling for "prudent compassion," the idea that we need not choose between accepting all refugees or no refugees, but through rigorous screening (understandably heightened in a time of war against terror), we can and should receive refugees.

Similarly, Ed Stetzer, vice president of LifeWay Research, urged believers to distinguish between our response to "the immigrants streaming across Europe to escape the radical Islamists" and our response to potential terrorists.

Richard Stearns, president of World Vision, called the church to love and serve the refugees even if it "goes against our instincts."

"We want to protect ourselves from those who might hurt us," he wrote. But he added: "Jesus asks us to love our



Syrian refugee children climb on a fence to watch a football training workshop at Azraq refugee camp near Al Azraq city, Jordan. (Photo courtesy of REUTERS/Muhammad Hamed)

neighbors—regardless if there may be enemies among them."

Matthew Soerens, director of mobilization for World Relief, explained the rigorous process for refugees and why potential

for admitting a terrorist is minimal.

"I think it's a tragic decision for states to attempt to thwart efforts to resettle a small number of carefully vetted refugees from Syria," he said.

But there are concerns that this process is not rigorous enough. And there are doubts about the ability of our government to properly screen out potential terrorists.

Commentator Cal Thomas, in a column for the evangelical publication World Magazine, argues for closing the borders, because "there is no way to be certain who is a jihadist and who isn't. What we do know for certain is that ISIS has bragged openly about including jihadists among those who have fled to Europe, and only a fool would believe that same strategy is not being applied to America."

Franklin Graham in a Facebook post said "we must reform our immigration policies" to ensure that Muslim immigrants do not "come across our borders unchecked while we are fighting this war on terror."

Many evangelicals agree with those sentiments and support the efforts of several Republican presidential candidates and two dozen governors to place a moratorium on any new refugees. These calls

□ See Evangelicals torn ... Page 10

Syrian refugees: Balancing compassion & security

By David Roach

Nashville—With at least 31 U.S. governors opposing the resettlement of Syrian refugees in their states following terrorist attacks in Paris, Christians have found themselves discussing the appropriate balance between security and compassion in immigration policy.

Various media outlets reported at least one terrorism suspect in Paris entered Europe among a wave of migrants by falsely identifying himself as a Syrian refugee. Only 1,500 Syrian refugees have been accepted into the U.S. since 2011, CNN reported, but the Obama administration has agreed to allow 10,000 more in 2016.

Among the governors to oppose continuing resettlement of Syrians in their states are at least two Southern Baptists:

Alabama's Robert Bentley and Georgia's Nathan Deal.

Bentley tweeted he "will not stand complicit to a policy that places the citizens of Alabama in harm's way." Deal said in a Nov. 16 letter to President Obama, "While we have empathy for the hardships that innocent Syrian people face, the terrorist attacks in Paris raise a need for additional scrutiny of those claiming refugee status."

The last time the Southern Baptist Convention spoke to immigration was 2011, when a resolution "on immigration and the Gospel" called for both compassion to immigrants and border security. Messengers to the SBC annual meeting in Phoenix that year adopted the resolution by what Baptist Press estimated at the time as a 70-80 percent majority.

The resolution noted that "our Lord

Jesus Christ lived His childhood years as an immigrant and refugee" and highlighted Scripture's admonitions "to show compassion and justice for the sojourner and alien among us." The statement also "ask(ed) our governing authorities to prioritize efforts to secure the borders."

Preeminently, messengers "call(ed) on our churches to be the presence of Christ, in both proclamation and ministry, to all persons, regardless of country of origin or immigration status."

The resolution concluded, "We affirm that while Southern Baptists, like other Americans, might disagree on how to achieve just and humane public policy objectives related to immigration, we agree that, when it comes to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to His church, the

□ See Syrian refugees ... Page 10

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'Wherever you go, we go,' church pledges

By Kate Gregory

Oaxaca, Mexico—Wherever you go, we go.

First Baptist Church of Oxford, Miss., made this commitment to Jeff and Liesa Holeman long before they began serving as International Mission Board missionaries in 2008.

It started a decade earlier when Jeff became student minister at the church, located in the town of the University of Mississippi. He led the youth group to make return missions trips to Brazil.

MATTER OF TIME

In 2003, during a Sunday morning service at Oxford, Jeff felt called to overseas missions fulltime.

Jeff jokingly said he did what he was supposed to do by telling Liesa, who had been at home caring for a sick child, "We're going to be missionaries."

"It didn't go well," he smiled. It wasn't that Liesa didn't feel a tug toward missions, but she thought that would be later in life after their children were grown. In the meantime, she thought she would continue to work as a criminal investigator for Mississippi's state tax commission, and the couple would spend their children's formative years doing student ministry together.

It turned out they would, just not how she had thought.

The Holemans stayed in Oxford for the next few years until they took their two children with them on the church's missions trip to Brazil in 2006. The children responded so well that the family then went on a trip to Southeast Asia to help lead activities for the children of missionaries during a retreat.

Talking with the missionary families gave Liesa the reassurance she needed about raising a family on the missions field, and the Holemans were appointed by IMB at the end of 2007.

First Baptist, Oxford, partnered with the Holemans where they first served in Peru. Then, in the three years since the Holemans have begun serving as cluster strategy leaders in Oaxaca, Mexico, the Oxford church has adopted the Tlacolula Valley Zapotec people group in that area.

"They didn't just send us," Jeff says, "they want to be a part."

"We have a huge support group behind us ... they don't let go of us," he says. "That's a two-way street. We value our relationship with one another. Just because we're out of sight, we're not out of mind. We know this because of the way they love us."

Earlier this year, a missions team from Oxford spent a week with Jeff and Liesa, teaching English-as-a-Second-Language



Michael Meurrier (center), a physical therapist from First Baptist Church of Oxford, Miss., demonstrates the best way to pick up a heavy object to this grandmother who still does backbreaking work on her farm.



Some of the youngsters that Liesa Holeman visits at a children's home will return home with their families after a couple months of specialized care, so she has learned to take every opportunity to share the love of Jesus with them.

and leading medical clinics. For some on the team, their children had been in Liesa's preschool class at the Oxford church and in the youth group led by Jeff. For others, they had taught the Holemans' children in Sunday School.

Oxford member Buster Hale had been part of Jeff's first missions trip to Brazil. He's served alongside him on missions trips to both Peru and Mexico.

"We've watched Jeff and Liesa grow," he said. "We've been a part of raising them in

the Lord."

Jeff and Liesa met while attending Ole Miss and became a part of the Oxford church.

"That's who first invested in me—my church," Liesa said. "We want other churches to do the same ... God called the church to do this. And we as missionaries have a responsibility to help our churches touch, feel and understand our stories ... to help them understand the importance of going to the nations."

"When they sent us," Liesa said, "they told us they would come alongside us. It's amazing to see that they sent us, and now they are coming themselves."

"They invested in me. I want to take the time to invest in others."

Jeff's home church, First Baptist Church of Yazoo City, Miss., also had taught him the value of missions.

Yazoo City member Gene Triggs had served as chairman for the Foreign Mission Board (now IMB) for four years. Layman Lawrence Owen Cooper had been president of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1973-74.

And, the church was home to comedian Jerry Clower for 34 years.

MISSION: MAKE GOD KNOWN

The Holemans mentor dozens of students and young adults from across the U.S. serving in Oaxaca as summer, semester and two-year missionaries, many of whom return to the missions field for extended terms of service.

Sarah Toles from The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, Ala., worked with the Holemans for four months as a Hands-On missionary in Oaxaca before returning to Birmingham to work as a nurse. This year, she went back to Oaxaca on a short-term missions trip to help medical professionals from First Baptist, Oxford, conduct medical clinics there.

"They're like family," she said of the Holemans. "They would invite us to their home. They would check in with us to make sure we were connecting not only there but with loved ones back home."

A student minister at home, Jeff realizes the impact short-term missions can make.

"God uses short-term missions to open our minds and hearts about what it means to be available to God and to question, 'Why am I here?'"

"We were created to make Him known," Jeff said. "Our role is making His Name known around the world. Obedience is asking, 'Where do You want me to go to do that?'"

Nearly every unreached people group in Mexico is represented in the U.S., Jeff said. "My prayer is that U.S. churches become aware that cross-cultural missions isn't just something they can do in other countries, it's something they can do in their own cities, and it will equip these people groups to share the gospel in their own countries."

Similarly, the Holemans have helped Oaxaca Christians to intensify their missions efforts both in Oaxaca and abroad. Jeff guided Iglesia Biblica Evangelica Lluvias de Gracia in Oaxaca to plan a missions trip to Guatemala.

"I'll get you connected," Jeff told us," said Juanita Perez, a member of the Oaxaca church. "He's just full of resources."

"Oaxaca's been so blessed by missionaries," said Juanita, noting the student teams and missionaries who have served there. "Now, it's our turn to go." (IMB)

After attending to medical needs, Cheryl Cannon (center), a nurse from First Baptist Church of Oxford, Miss., prays with Alejandro Rodriguez* in his home in Benito Juarez, Mexico. (*Name changed)



'They were praying for someone to reach them'

By Kate Gregory

Ocotlan, Mexico—There were times when Esteban Carrasco felt like giving up. He and his family had moved 15 hours inland to the mountains of Ocotlan from their hometown on the coast of Mexico without knowing anyone 15 years ago. They didn't have any other reason to move there except that Esteban had felt God leading him to plant churches in this Zapotec area of southern Mexico that had no evangelical churches.

Esteban faced the challenge head on, preaching in town parks and plazas against idolatry. This message of the supremacy of Christ hit a nerve with villagers, who tend to combine the traditions of Catholicism with indigenous tribal practices, offering crops on altars to be blessed by spirits or saints.

The reaction to the message was just as direct—villagers threatened to kill him if he came back. They threw rocks at him. They damaged his car. But he kept visiting village after village, sharing the gospel with anyone who would listen. Witch doctors cast spells on him. Villagers turned dogs on him. Drunks yelled at him.

"When these things happen, I'm reminded of the heart of God—that Jesus suffered, too," Esteban said. He remembers that he, too, was once an alcoholic with no understanding of God's word until someone shared it with him.

So, he kept preaching. Self-supported, he visited villages on the days he had off from work. It had become more difficult after obtaining a security guard job at a warehouse that required 24-hour shifts. But he kept praying that others would join him in the evangelistic work.

A total of 15 years had passed before he saw his prayer answered when Southern Baptists Rebecca Harrod, of Kentucky, and

When IMB missionaries Christy Willis (left) and Rebecca Harrod met pastor Esteban Carrasco, he had been praying for 15 years for someone to join him in planting churches in an unreached area of southern Mexico.



Christy Willis, of Virginia, sought him out.

The new missionaries had been given the task by their cluster strategy leader Jeff Holean to engage the Ocotlan Zapotec with the gospel, and they had heard about a local pastor who had been doing that.

When Esteban saw the young missionaries walking toward him, he told them, "You are here. You are an answer to my prayers." He invited them to visit the three small house churches he has formed in the area.

The missionaries came in the nick of time, Esteban said. The week after they met, his car stopped working. Since then, the trio travels to other villages to spread the gospel, using a car and fuel that the Cooperative Program and Lottie Moon Christmas Offering provides.

"Immediately, we knew that God had brought us our national partner we had been praying for," said Christy Willis, 29, an International Service Corps missionary from Village Church at Midlothian, Va. "He's so passionate about missions, but he was so overwhelmed in the work. He's

been preaching the gospel in areas where there are zero believers."

The two missionaries spoke Spanish. Christy had studied Spanish abroad and taught the language for seven years in the U.S., and Rebecca had majored in Spanish in college.

"I prayed for years, 'God, what do you want for me?'" said Rebecca, a 22-year-old journeyman missionary from Sojourn Community Church in Louisville. "It's cool to see that all through college, I studied Spanish, I spent summers in Honduras. Now, I'm using Spanish for God's glory."

"God's plan is so much bigger than I ever imagined," Rebecca said. "Fifteen years ago when I was 7—before I was even a Christian, before I loved Spanish, before I wanted to do anything international—Esteban was praying for me to come and help him. That blows my mind. What an honor that God used me to answer Esteban's prayer for more workers."

"What's sobering is that others may be waiting for people who may not be coming," Rebecca said. "People have been

telling us, 'We have been waiting to hear about Jesus, but there was no one here to tell us.'"

Alejandro Rodriguez,* 78, and his wife, Maria,* 84, had heard about the Bible in their remote village high in the mountains, but no one had spent time with them to share God's word. So they prayed that someone would come to their mountain village with God's word to share.

It is one of the areas Christy and Rebecca have been focusing on spreading God's word. When they encountered Alejandro and Maria, again they were told, "You are here. You are an answer to my prayers."

After a couple weeks of studying the Bible with the missionaries, Alejandro and Maria accepted Christ as their personal Savior.

"When you're literally on a top of a mountain, you're reminded that if you don't go, nobody else is," Christy said. "For years, Alejandro and Maria were praying for someone to come share God's word with them. They were praying for someone to reach them."

"Knowing that churches are praying for me, giving for me to be here, that is what is sustaining me on the field," Christy said. "There are so many ups and downs on the missions field, but we know there is a whole network of people supporting us, to keep us on the field and doing the work we're doing on a daily basis here."

Christy's and Rebecca's home churches planned missions trips this year to work alongside them among the Ocotlan Zapotec. Southern Baptist missionaries, including Christy and Rebecca, are supported through the giving of Southern Baptist churches to the Cooperative Program and Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions. (IMB)

*Name changed

Family gives father mission trip to Mexico for Christmas

By Kate Gregory

Oaxaca, Mexico—The Quinn family had agreed not to give each other any large presents last Christmas so they could send father, Breese, on a missions trip to Mexico.

So on Christmas morning when Breese saw his two children, ages 11 and 13, smiling at him as they stood beside a huge wrapped present, he thought they had reneged on their pact. But when he opened the big box, inside was a scene titled Oaxaca Missions 2015.

A depiction of the mountainous region of southern Mexico lined the bottom of the diorama. Son, Aidan, had used trees from his train set to represent the mountains and featured figures at the foot of the mountain reading the Bible.

Aidan and sibling, Erin, had written Romans 10:15: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news."

They included a family photo and one of Breese in Peru, his first missions trip in 2011 to visit IMB missionaries Jeff and Liesa Holean, whose home church is also the Quinns' First Baptist Church of Oxford, Miss.

This past February, Breese was a part of a missions team from the church that worked for a week alongside the Holeans, who had relocated to Mexico.

The greatest part of the gift to Breese



Breese Quinn, from First Baptist Church, Oxford, Mississippi, teaches English to pastor Carlos Vasquez (right) and his wife, Sara, who hope to use English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) classes as an outreach ministry to their community.

was the prayers from his children lining a side of the box.

"It's that part of the gift that really brought me to tears, that there weren't just prayers for me but also prayers for the people of Oaxaca. "It was the highlight of Christmas for me, representing the support my family was giving to send me out on their behalf," Breese says.

CHANGE OF PLANS

When a teacher's strike in Oaxaca was going to halt plans the Holeans had for Breese and fellow church member Buster Hale to teach English-as-a-Second-Language classes to a group of teachers there, they all wondered whether that part of the trip would need to be canceled.

They began thinking that Breese and

Buster would end up helping in clinics that a group of medical professionals from the Oxford congregation would be conducting in the area that same week.

But when Liesa heard that a family wanted one-on-one instruction in English, the ESL aspect of the trip remained, though different than originally planned.

Liesa, Buster and Breese taught ESL classes that week to a small group gathered at Iglesia Cristiana Biblica Evangelica Alamos. Liesa and Buster taught a handful of youth in the sanctuary, while Breese practiced English with Alamos' pastor Carlos Vasquez and his wife, Sara, around their parsonage's kitchen table.

The pastor dreams of offering English classes at the church as a way to reach out to his community. His wife, a teacher, was practicing for her certification exam, which will offer her greater job stability.

"Spending time with Sara and Carlos has been really gratifying, to support these folks in some little way, to help them to better minister to their community," Breese says.

An associate professor of physics at the University of Mississippi, Breese is accustomed to plotting out a trajectory of how things should work, but he says the change of plans on this trip taught him to "quit relying on my own plans and to follow God's lead." (IMB)

Evangelicals torn

Continued from page 7

for closing the border represent the only way to ensure that we do not inadvertently let in terrorists who are posing as refugees.

Congregations are divided. World reported that U.S. Rep. Trey Gowdy of South Carolina asked Secretary of State John Kerry to halt plans to settle refugees in his district. Meanwhile, the evangelical church Gowdy attends was one of several that expressed interest in helping with the refugee program.

Some evangelicals are opposed to all refugees; others say they do not know the best way forward.

In a widely shared blog post, Kevin DeYoung, pastor of University Reformed Church in Lansing, Mich., a church with an international ministry to immigrants, decried both the "harsh anti-immigrant rhetoric" and "broad appeals to compassion" that fail to take into consideration the complexities of our situation.

"Christian charity means loving the safety of the neighbor next door at least as much as loving the safe passage of the neighbor far away," he said.

My pastor friend was right. Evangelicals are "all over the place" on the issue. That's why, for the foreseeable future, they will continue to debate the best way forward while showing both prudence and compassion. (RNS)

Trevin Wax is managing editor of The Gospel Project and author of "Clear Winter Nights: A Journey Into Truth, Doubt and What Comes After."

Syrian refugees

Continued from page 7

message, in every language and to every person, is 'Whosoever will may come.'"

Paul Jimenez, chairman of the 2011 SBC Resolutions Committee, told BP that Christians must avoid the unbiblical responses toward Syrian refugees of "fear, anger and isolation" on one hand and "humanitarian assistance without due vigilance" on the other hand.

Christians should "praise and submit to the government that executes justice against evil and protects its people," Jimenez, pastor of First Baptist Church of Taylors, S.C., said. "It has not been given the sword or its authority in vain by the Father, but for our good (Rom. 13:1-7).

"At times like these, the lines of this framework get blurred. Instead, we should highlight them in bold colors for the world to see our faith in the Father and reflect His love for people," Jimenez said.

The Baptist State Convention of North Carolina adopted a resolution "on impacting lostness among immigrants." The Nov. 3 resolution observed that "North Carolina Baptists may not agree on specific public policy responses" to immigration crises, but it noted unity in the "call to extend love and compassion to those who are vulnerable and to reach all people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

Jarrod Scott, a North Carolina pastor who



Thousands who arrive on the island of Lesbos after fleeing war and persecution at home line up to take daily ferries to Athens. (Photo by Jedediah Smith/IMB)

proposed the resolution, told BP America's response to Syrian refugees should strike a balance between protecting U.S. residents from terrorism and loving the refugees fleeing war and genocide.

"We need more consideration before there is a quick, kneejerk reaction of ceasing the resettlement," said Scott, pastor of Green Pines Baptist Church in Knightdale, N.C. Christians must never, Scott said, "operate just out of fear."

"It's somewhat inconsistent for us as a church to be sending out missionaries into environments where they are at risk for the sake of love and sharing the gospel," Scott said, "and then ... not be willing to embrace some degree of risk to reach" the same people as they seek refugee status.

Scott acknowledged, however, that individuals, churches and governments play different roles in handling refugees.

Robert Jeffress, pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, agreed. He told BP that

"there's a lot of confusion among Christians on the right response to Syrian refugees because many people do not understand that while we as Christians have one responsibility individually, government has another responsibility."

Individuals, Jeffress said, must "show compassion for these refugees," support relief organizations and call on government to combat the terrorist group ISIS. "But government has another responsibility, and that is to secure our borders."

Citing Acts 17:26, Jeffress said "having a secure border is not an anti-Christian sentiment."

"(W)hile our government right now says we can trust them to properly vet refugees that come into our country from Syria, many Americans, like myself and these governors, don't believe that government is capable or willing to do that."

Russell Moore, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, called Christians "to remember human dignity" without neglecting border security.

"The screening of refugees is a crucial aspect of national security, and we should insist on it," he told BP. "At the same time, evangelicals should be the ones calling the rest of the world to remember human dignity and the image of God, especially for those fleeing murderous Islamic radical jihadis." (BP)

IMB: Biblical priorities

Continued from page 1

Declare His glory among the nations, His wonderful works among all peoples (Psalm 96:3).

The Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions in tandem with

Cooperative Program gifts from Southern Baptist churches support international workers in seeking to fulfill the Great Commission. Gifts to the Lottie Moon offering are received through local Southern Baptist churches or online at imb.org/offering, where there are resources to promote the offering. This year's goal is \$175 million. (BP)



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Ky. Baptists using blogs to 'invest for Kingdom good'

By Myriah Snyder

Louisville—Three Kentucky Baptists were featured in Newsmax's list of the "top 75 religion bloggers" in America.

The three include Al Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Ron Edmonson, pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church in Lexington, and Denny Burk, professor of biblical studies at Boyce College.

"The advantages of blogging as a Christian leader are numerous," Marty Duren, LifeWay's manager of social media strategy, told Baptist Press.

He continued, "Blogging is a viable tool to be used for discipleship, writing, apologetics and things I haven't thought of yet.... Not having a blog will not kill a person's ministry or influence, but having a blog can greatly expand both."

Charles Moore, pastor of Paducah's First Baptist Church, has been blogging for the past five years. His blog, mooretolife.com, has a fairly widespread readership, receiving comments all the way from California at times.

"I think it provides a forum to connect apart from one of our formal worship

services," Moore said. "It also takes the church and my ministry outside the walls and connects with people who are in other churches, unchurched and in different situations."

"Plus," he continued, "It allows dialogue because readers can say, 'Hey, I like that; I don't like that; Have you thought about this?' There can be a little bit of back-and-forth in terms of their comments."

He began blogging "to connect with the church family between Sundays."

"I think sometimes the view of the pastor is that he is disconnected from the world we live in," Moore commented.

"When you deliberately blog about everything from a horse race to a restaurant that just opened in town or something political, when you are interacting and dialoguing around those things that are on their minds, it really makes a great ministry connection that isn't possible via traditional forms."

Ron Edmonson's blog (ronedmondson.com) "started with an online devotional back in the dial-up days of the internet," he said. "It was a way for me to be intentional with my time online and do something with Kingdom purpose."

"About seven years ago the energy changed from doing devotionals—because there were so many then—to doing more of a personal blog. It has refined over the years to focus more on church leadership and family issues," Edmonson continued.

He brings a "different perspective from those who have only been in a ministry field," he said, because he has over 20 years of business experience before he began his ministry.

"I can reach far more people with a blog than I can in person. Even if you attend our church, this gives me another outlet to invest into people for Kingdom good. I hope God uses whatever I've learned—most of it the hard way—to help the Body," he added.

Denny Burk uses his blog (dennyburk.com) to focus on cultural issues from an evangelical perspective. He has been blogging for the last 10 years.

"Jonathan Edwards had his 'Miscellanies.' In some ways, a blog can be for a scholar a 'Miscellanies,'" Burk told Southern Seminary news, referring to Jonathan Edwards published theological journals.

Burk told Southern Seminary news that

his blog is "a potpourri, because sometimes I talk about sports; sometimes it's funny stuff." He continued, "For me, honestly, it's just what I'm interested in." His blog most recently has been focused on the sanctity of life, biblical marriage and religious liberty.

Dan Dewitt, professor at Boyce College, blogs at theolatte.com. His blog engages readers with illustrations, YouTube videos and colorful opinion pieces.

"Theolatte is my outlet to talk about everything from theology to espresso based beverages," he said in the "about" section of his blog. He continued, "I'm interested in the public intersection of faith and skepticism. That's where I spend a lot of my research and writing time."

Another Southern Seminary professor that uses his blog to translate his ideas and thoughts is Donald Whitney, whose blog (biblicalspirituality.com) relates to his passion at Southern, biblical spirituality.

"Blogging keeps me disciplined in writing out my thoughts and learnings. And, again, I believe there is a larger Kingdom purpose here. Blogging gives me a platform into a broader audience," Edmonson concluded. (WR)

Facing retirement, missionaries vow to continue evangelism stateside

By Adelle Banks

Tim Cearley is considering driving for Uber or substitute teaching—anything to continue meeting people from other lands, people like those who have been the focus of his missionary work in Africa.

His wife, Charlotte, who felt called to the mission field at age 5, will continue her prayers for "the unreached peoples of Africa" from the United States.

The Cearleys, lifelong Southern Baptists, have been missionaries together for 33 years.

But the couple now plan to take a voluntary retirement offer.

"It feels like going backwards," Charlotte Cearley said of her initial reaction to the offer. "At one point, we actually had 5,600 missionaries."

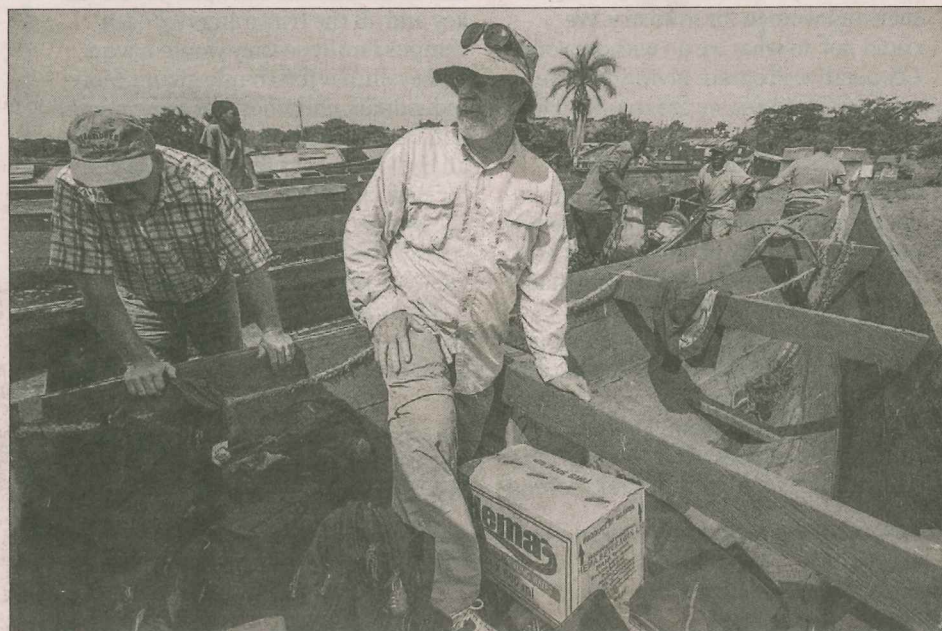
As of Nov. 8, the number of missionaries stood at 4,707 and officials say they want to reduce it to 4,200.

In late August, Southern Baptist leaders announced a course correction for their signal agency, the International Mission Board. Southern Baptists, who have also seen a decline in membership from 16.3 million in 2003 to less than 15.5 million, join other Christian denominations in facing fewer dollars along with smaller numbers of people in their pews.

"The denomination was founded as a missionary-sending denomination, and to cut back the numbers is very significant and it's something they've tried to avoid for several years," said Bert Hickman, senior research associate at the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

In a recent live-streamed webcast, IMB President David Platt explained the turn of events: "We have not been able financially to sustain that number of missionaries on the field."

For the IMB to balance its budget, 600



Tim Cearley, center, helps unload a boat after its arrival at a village on Lake Victoria in Uganda (IMB file photo).

Right, Tim and Charlotte Cearley are recognized for three decades of service in sub-Saharan Africa during IMB's trustee meeting in New Orleans on Nov. 5. (Photo by Thomas Graham)

to 800 missionaries and staffers must be cut. In December, the IMB will determine how many missionaries over 50 with at least five years of service have opted for the retirement incentive.

Unlike many evangelical organizations that require staffers to raise their own money to work in global missions, the SBC has paid on average \$51,400 a year per missionary for salary, housing, children's education and other expenses.

The Cearleys moved across Africa, learning four languages and living in five countries. They've helped start churches, converting Muslims and those of Africa's tribal religions to Christianity.

"I arrived in Rhodesia during the civil war and had to fly into the bush on a smaller prop plane," he recalled of his start in the 1970s. "I stayed two years



anyway and then took my family back five years later to the country after independence."

They became a family of five during the 11 years they were in what is now called Zimbabwe, working in towns and sometimes, he said, "pretty far out in the bush, 100 miles from people that were speaking English."

They lived in Mozambique for 10 years, after a stop in Portugal to learn Portuguese. And then Botswana, followed by South Africa, where he was a strategy associate for IMB missionaries. Their final stop was Senegal, where he oversaw 600

missionaries in sub-Saharan Africa.

"It's just overwhelming to see the difference in the need, the need for the gospel," he said, "and not just to get the gospel there but to establish churches that are healthy in leadership."

Back in the States, they see the vast choices in how people spend their money—from steakhouses to Halloween decorations—and wish more was directed to missions.

"We want to see the world reached for Christ and we talk that way, but for some reason the giving is going a different way," he said.

Platt honored the Cearleys for their more than three decades of service during a Nov. 5 recognition ceremony.

"This brother and sister have gone places that are remote and hard to reach," Platt said. "The fruit of their lives around the world has brought great glory to God."

At 61, the Cearleys said it was not an easy decision to come home. The couple expected to serve at least another five years. But they see it as a way to let younger missionaries take their place.

They plan to move in early 2016 to a house provided by a Montgomery, Ala., church, but they have no intention of losing their missionary zeal.

They expect to connect with internationals wherever they find them stateside—from the Muslim woman they met at a CVS Pharmacy to a Pakistani service station attendant. They want others to do the same: Tim Cearley said there are reports that at least 75 percent of international students never visit an American home.

"They go back home without ever really feeling the love of an American, much less the good news of Christ," he said. "We can just help awaken the eyes of Americans, but also Southern Baptists. We want them to be on mission where God puts them, where God has them." (RNS)

When life gives you lemons ... (Part 2)

In my last column, I left off with our choir bus broken down and Salvisa Baptist Church coming to our rescue.

My sister and her family came down to the church, which was a blessing to me. One of the ladies in our choir is from Mercer County, so her family also came to the church. By the time the service ended, our bus had been towed from Highway 127 to the church parking lot. The gentlemen who towed the bus did not charge us a penny.

The many folks who had worked during the service to accommodate us had taken our luggage from the bus and into their life center building. They had brought in enough food to feed our small army and had secured cots for us to sleep on, not knowing we had mattresses on the way that had originally been headed for Louisville.

I called back to school and arranged for a bus to come and get us in the morning and take us on into Louisville so we could make our 10:45 a.m. visit to Walnut Street Baptist Church. One of our teachers left campus at 5:45 a.m. to come and get us. The folks at Salvisa had said they would be getting us breakfast.

They swooped in early that morning and cooked us biscuits and gravy, sausage and pancakes. After breakfast, we loaded the bus and headed for Louisville.

Throughout the course of our stay in Salvisa, I learned that this church had just hosted a fall festival of 500 people the day before our unannounced visit. They had also hosted another group that Sunday morning.

You will find the following on Salvisa's website: When you visit our church, you will find a caring congregation that will gladly welcome you. We certainly found this to be true.

What an amazing church and group of people. I would love to see our friends from Salvisa Baptist again, but perhaps the next visit won't be so impromptu.

We made our visit to Louisville without further incident, and were blessed by a great church. Our visit to Highview has been rescheduled, and I trust our bus will cooperate.

While I don't really know what the Lord's purpose for all those involved was in all of these events, I do know He revealed Himself to me personally in all of this. It was a frustrating and exhausting ordeal, yet the Lord met our every need through his people.

Our choir has 30 scheduled events this school year. I pray our bus cooperates for all 30, but then again, if it does break down we might meet some more great Kentucky Baptists.

Larry Gritton Jr. is president of Oneida Baptist Institute. Website: oneidaschool.org. Phone: (606) 847-4111. Follow OBI on Facebook at www.facebook.com/OBI.KY and Twitter, @Oneida_Baptist and @lgritton.

Sunrise launches initiative to help young adults

Paducah—Sunrise Children's Services has announced the launch of a new independent living program initiative that will bring business, church and state resources together to combat the "aging out" crisis. The program, VentureON, connects young people aging out of foster care with resources that can help them find housing, jobs and an education to build their own future.

"We're more than excited to be able to bring together community resources and combat this crisis," said Sunrise President Dale Suttles. "In 2013 alone, more than 23,000 young people aged out of foster care, simply because they were too old to remain. This is not new because of the 402,000 children in foster care; more than 19,000 had case goals of emancipation, or aging out after leaving foster care without a permanent family.

"For the first time, we are giving these young people a full continuum of options to be successful in every aspect of their life," Suttles said.

The program begins by identifying deficits in basic life skills and then making a plan to address those deficits and aligning the young person with a Christian mentor that "does life" with them. As they move into the program, the young adult will be paired in an apprentice role with one of many corporate partners.

If additional training and education is desired or required, Sunrise will work with educational partners to secure the appropriate education. Clients will continue receiving counseling and life skills training while living in their own apartment.

Mentors who apply to the program will be screened and matched by Sunrise Independent Living staff, then receive training and support as they work one-on-one with the young adult, professional team, and community partners.

"Working on this program has been a labor of love and one that everyone is very excited about," said Sunrise Vice President Kenny Williams whose team will oversee the program. "We have seen the life changes that a mentor can make, and at Sunrise we are committed to changing the path of life for these young people who want something more for themselves and their future.

"VentureON is a pioneering program designed to work with young people ensuring their successful transition to becoming a contributing adult in our society under the watchful care and support of an organization that has been providing hope and care since June 1869," Williams added.

The program is "a forward thinking and vibrant continuum of care" for kids who cannot safely return home and be successful, he said.

The program was officially launched in Paducah on Nov. 17 at Sunrise's offices.

Mentor applications will soon be available online and at the program for community members who want to make a difference in the life of a young person. Sunrise is seeking individuals, groups, and churches to become mentors, hire one of its young adults, provide furnishings for apartments, and financially give to help a young person become successful.

For information on the VentureON Program visit sunrise.org. (Sunrise)

This is Oneida



Larry Gritton

Thank you, Kentucky Baptists!

It doesn't seem possible that I am already writing one of my last articles for the year. Another year has just about come and gone. It seems as though time really does fly by!

This has been another busy year for Clear Creek Baptist Bible College, and God has used many people to bless this ministry. During this season of Thanksgiving and Christmas, our campus family wants you to know how much we appreciate each of you. You are a major part of

the blessings that support and sustain this ministry and for that we want to say thank you from all of us here at Clear Creek Baptist Bible College.

Your gifts through the Cooperative Program are a blessing to Clear Creek. As you give through your local church

to the Cooperative Program, Clear Creek receives a portion of those gifts designated for Christian education. These gifts are a major portion of our operating budget, and they enable us to fulfill our mission to equip God-called men and women for ministry. We could not do what we do without your Cooperative Program giving, and we want you to know we are thankful for your support.

Many of our Kentucky Baptist Convention churches provide ministry opportunities for our students throughout the year. Many of our students are pastors or serve in leadership positions while they continue their studies at Clear Creek. Thank you for these opportunities that provide valuable practical ministry experience for our students outside of the classroom. This practical ministry focus goes a long way in helping equip our students for God's calling

on their lives.

We also want to thank you for the many blessings that have already been, and will be provided during this holiday season. We have had associations and churches who have provided a turkey and all the trimmings for each campus family so they would have a turkey dinner for Thanksgiving. More individuals, churches and associations will be providing another turkey and all the trimmings for Christmas also for each campus family. Through your support of our Christmas shopping spree our students will be able to provide a Christmas for their children.

Everywhere I travel people tell me they are praying for the ministry of Clear Creek. Thank you for praying for us.

Donnie Fox is president of Clear Creek Baptist Bible College, 300 Clear Creek Road, Pineville, KY 40977; toll-free: (866) 340-3196; cccbcb.edu; email: dfox@ccbcb.edu.

Clear Creek Chronicle



Donnie Fox

Planting spiritual shade trees

What are your favorite memories of shade trees? I vividly recall the shade tree planted by my grandparents at

their home in Rock Springs, Ala. My memories include making countless freezers of homemade ice cream under this shade tree; family reunion meals spread out beneath the canopy of this tree and lessons taught by two godly grandparents to 15 grandchildren. Looking back, while we grandchildren didn't plant this tree, we enjoyed all the benefits it provided.

My grandparents' life example and legacy were built on both spiritual investment and financial investment. As a farmer and an educator, they lived a modest life, but one committed to supporting their church with gifts of time, talent and property. They realized and instilled in their children and

grandchildren that they were working to touch lives across the world from their pew in Rock Springs Baptist Church. You might say that my grandparents were planting spiritual shade trees under which they would never sit, but for others to enjoy the lasting spiritual blessing they would provide.

You may be asking, what do shade trees and the Kentucky Baptist Foundation have to do with each other? The ministry of the Foundation is focused on encouraging and facilitating legacy actions on the part of Kentucky Baptist church members. Our team fulfills this mission through educating individuals on how to make gifts through their estate plans. These gift decisions will have the effect of planting spiritual shade trees under which the donor may never sit, but under which many others will sit and enjoy the benefit for generations to come.

That is what legacy planning and giving is all about: committing all the

talents and resources God has entrusted to you for the benefit of your family, your church family, and all persons that need the hope of Jesus Christ.

Many donors have entrusted the planting of their spiritual shade trees through the Kentucky Baptist Foundation during the past 70 years. The Foundation is pleased that this past year, through the earnings produced on the gifts and investments placed with the Foundation, it was able to distribute \$6,102,144 supporting the ministries of Kentucky Baptists across the state and the world.

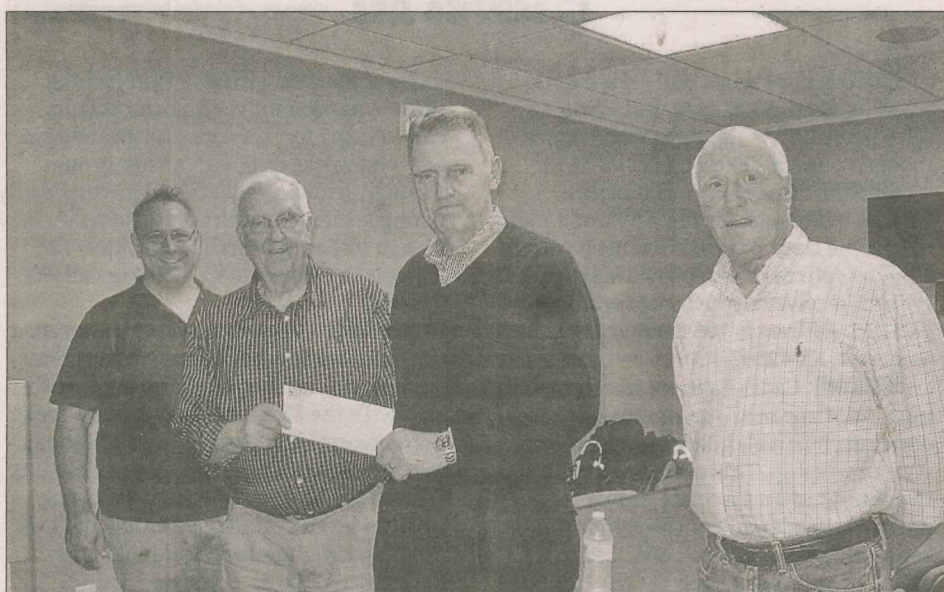
Let me encourage you to call on the Foundation to assist you in learning how you can plant your own spiritual shade trees. To learn more, contact the Foundation's trust counsel, Laurie Valentine, or me at our toll-free number (866) 489-3533.

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

Ky. Baptist Foundation



Richard Carnes



Rick Downing of Mayfield First Baptist, DOM Glynn Copeland, Phil Justice of Sunrise and Wayne Berry, pastor of Liberty Baptist Church (l to r) present the check for \$711. (Photo courtesy of Sunrise Children's Services.)

Graves County churches deliver big for Sunrise

Mayfield—The churches of Graves County Baptist Association recently stepped up and delivered for kids in foster care.

On Nov. 4, Glynn Copeland, director of missions; Wayne Berry, pastor of Liberty Baptist Church; and Rick Downing, associate pastor of missions and administration at Mayfield First Baptist, delivered 138 duffel bags filled with toiletries, socks and writing supplies to the offices of Sunrise Children's Services in Paducah.

The team also presented a check in the amount of \$711 to the agency.

The duffel bags, supplies and funds were all donated by members of the

association.

When children arrive at Sunrise, most are carrying all their belongings in a trash bag.

In an effort to preserve the dignity of the children entering its care, Sunrise issued an appeal earlier this year asking supporters to donate duffel bags for distribution.

Sunrise Children's Services, affiliated since 1869 with the Kentucky Baptist Convention, provides care and hope for hurting families and children through a variety of Christ-centered ministries, including foster care placement and counseling.

'God's got it,' retirees say of Mission:Dignity

By John Ambra

Dallas—As a newlywed college student, Kathie Mansell needed a side dish. Her father, a missionary from Brazil, was bringing a friend to dinner, and Kathie only had a meat loaf.

Then she remembered the rice.

Kathie, the daughter and granddaughter of missionaries, knew at age 13 she would be a pastor's wife one day. It just seemed natural.

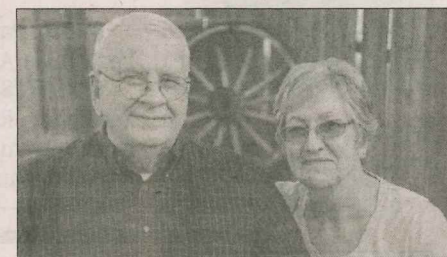
When Kathie married Johnny in 1969, their wedding was the foundation for a long marriage, fruitful ministry and provided a side dish.

Kathie looked in the closet and noticed leftover mesh bags of rice from the wedding—neatly packaged with a colorful ribbon. She gathered the rice to complete her meal. She was reminded that while she and Johnny had little income or resources, it didn't matter to God. He knew how to provide.

It was as if she heard a voice whispering, "I've got it."

The Mansells would lean into God's promises over the next four decades of pastoral ministry in New Mexico and Texas, but especially when health issues resulted in an early retirement in 2012.

A friend advised Johnny to opt out of Social Security early in ministry. (As they later discovered, opting out of Social Security is not recommended by most financial experts.) Medical bills drained the Mansells' savings. That left Kathie's teacher's pension to meet monthly expenses. But God wasn't taken by surprise. So this summer, as the Mansells' money ran out,



Retired pastor Johnny Mansell and his wife Kathie faced lean times but found help through Southern Baptists' gifts to Mission:Dignity.

Mission:Dignity stepped in. GuideStone Financial Resources' ministry to pastors and their widows in need extended a monthly grant to the Mansells and also paid for necessary dental work they could not afford.

"It's made such a difference because it's enabled us to purchase our medications," Johnny said. "We've had to make choices in the past to pay for food, utilities or medicine, and now we're able to take care of these expenses."

Kathie added, "We were always wondering, 'Next month, how are we going to do this?' We'd go to God in prayer and ask forgiveness for the anxiety about it all, but He always came through every month to help us."

Mission:Dignity assists nearly 2,000 retirees each month. For information, visit MissionDignity.org.

Johnny said he and Kathie have "a little deal between the two of us. When we get worried about something we hold three fingers up. That means, 'God's got it.' Through Mission:Dignity, God's got it, and we're so thankful." (BP)

'Forever changed' through Crossings

This is a column that has numerous emotions as it represents my final article as an employee of Crossings.

Actually, even determining what to write is terribly challenging as there are so many thoughts I would like to share. The Lord first brought us to the ministry before the term "Crossings" was even used.

We arrived to Cedarmore in January 1999, with Tera being eight months pregnant with Jonathan—who will be 17 in February.

As the story unfolded over these last years, our family has been blessed beyond words to be a part of this ministry.

To be clear, serving in camp ministry is much more than just a job. We always say that camp years are like "dog" years. Each year is packed with seemingly years of activities.

During our time with Crossings, we have faced some of the greatest difficulties we have experienced and even with those, we now stand thankful that God took us through the rough times.

However, far beyond the challenging times, God has given us so many great memories that go with us as we leave—memories that have had a profound impact on all the Melbers.

Through our international partnerships, God led us to adopt—actually, three times.

Additionally, the blessing of hearing God's word preached every day throughout the summer played a significant role in all six of our kids coming to know Christ as Lord.

The friendships run deep within camp as you spend so much time with co-workers and camp attendees alike.

I am so blessed to have partners in ministry that I think of as family from the last 16 years.

The blessing to see God's call lived out through staff and campers has been a huge benefit. We literally know people serving all over the world as a result of Divine callings that took place while at Cedarmore and Jonathan Creek.

In short, the Melber family feels a tremendous debt of gratitude to Kentucky Baptists for allowing me to serve with Crossings.

Our family has been forever changed through this ministry, and we take with us a lifetime of great memories of how God has changed the lives of countless numbers of people.

Crossings Ministries



David Melber

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

Reaching the nations in Kentucky

During this Week of Prayer for International Missions, it is fitting for us to note some of the ways that the Eliza Broadus Offering helps to reach internationals in Kentucky. At the top of my list is the work of Baptist Campus Ministry.

Through campus missionaries, interns and volunteers, international students are welcomed, fed and helped with English. They make friends and hear the gospel.

One important event for international students is the annual International Student Conference held each November in Cave City. Through this event, international students from many different Kentucky campuses gather for a weekend that includes serious discussions about faith in the midst of cultural sharing and fun activities. This year EBO will provide \$60,000 for international student ministry.

The KBC has recently hired Brett Martin to serve as the international campus missionary to develop strategies to reach students from other countries. Brian Combs reminded us that "many of these students plan to return to their home countries as leaders. If international students understand and receive the gospel while they visit our campuses, they will take their faith and their influence with them when they leave."

Kentucky Baptists also reach out to internationals through Friendship

International ministries. Groups in Lexington, Louisville and Paducah are sharing the gospel with internationals through weekly outreach activities that include Bible study, choir, meals, English classes, sewing and other activities. EBO grants to each Friendship International group have helped with supplies and other expenses.

Church planting among various language and ethnic groups is another way we share Christ with internationals in our state. Established language churches are also instrumental in reaching internationals that come to Kentucky.

With the news that 600-800 IMB missionaries will be returning home due to budget shortfalls at the IMB, it is our prayer that Southern Baptists will welcome these missionaries home and provide places of service for them. We need the tremendous language and cultural skills that they bring to help us reach the nations in our midst.

Please pray and give faithfully to all of our missions offerings. Remember that EBO is at work reaching the nations right here in Kentucky.

Joy Bolton is executive director-treasurer of Kentucky Woman's Missionary Union, P.O. Box 436569, Louisville, KY 40253; (502) 489-3534; kywmu.org

EBO at Work



Joy Bolton



December

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MOUNTAINS TO THE MISSISSIPPI

COMPILED BY STAFF

CADIZ—Paxton Redd is the new director of missions for Little River Association.

CATLETTSBURG—Burnaugh Church will host the Bethlehem Experience Dec. 4-5, 11-12, with tours running from 6-9 p.m. For information, call (606) 739-6592 or visit www.burnaughbaptist.org.

LONDON—Hart Church celebrated the 10th anniversary of Terrell Bradley as pastor.

Providence Church celebrated the 10th anniversary of David Thomas as pastor.

MAGNOLIA—Lynn Association has called John Smith as its new director of missions, effective Jan. 1.

PADUCAH—Bellview Church will host its annual March for Missions and International Missions dinner on Dec. 6, with special missionary guests David and Laurie Bledsoe. For information, call (270) 554-3173. David Nolen is pastor.

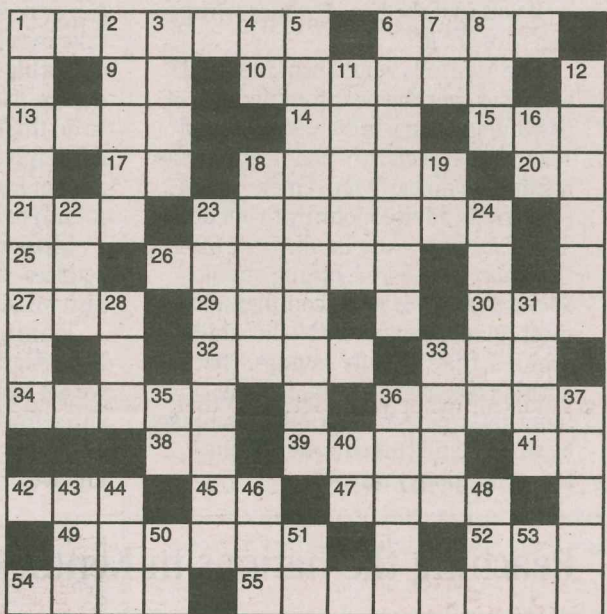
WINFIELD—New River McCreary County Association will hold a retirement party for Jack Fletcher on Dec. 14 at 7 p.m. For more information, contact Lacey at (865) 850-9813 or email nrmc@highland.net.

Bible Crosswords

By Sissy Magnusson

Across

- 1 The poor godly man in Christ's parable (Luke 16:20)
- 6 This liquid when new is not put in old bottles (Mark 2:22)
- 9 Printer's measure
- 10 Burying this was a mistake (Matthew 25:15-28)
- 13 Foolish man built his house on this (Matthew 7:26)
- 14 Half-way
- 15 Before, prefix
- 17 The Lord promised that though our sins be scarlet, they shall be white _____ snow
- 18 Bear-like animal related to the raccoon
- 20 Each, abbr.
- 21 Jesus is God's only begotten (John 3:16)
- 23 Jesus told a story about 5 wise and 5 foolish (Matthew 25:1-2)
- 25 Hello
- 26 Underling
- 27 Shade tree (Hosea 4:13)
- 29 What the disciples fished with (Matthew 13:47)
- 30 Finished first
- 32 City in the Netherlands famous for its cheese
- 33 No one puts this kind of cloth into an old garment (Mark 2:21)
- 34 A day's wage for a hired laborer (Matthew 20:2)
- 36 The enemy sowed these among the wheat (Matthew 13:25)
- 38 Thanks, Br.
- 39 Discharged a firearm
- 41 Hush!
- 42 Encountered



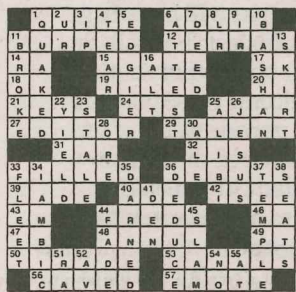
#051

- 45 Egyptian sun god
- 47 Full of wonder
- 49 We shouldn't put this under a bushel (Mark 4:21)
- 52 Sick
- 54 The wise man built on this (Luke 6:48)
- 55 In Christ's story, the father threw a party for this son (Luke 15:11-32)

Down

- 1 The shepherd left the 99 for this (Matthew 18:11-12) (2 words)
- 2 Town in Judah (Joshua 15:37)
- 3 No ifs, _____, or buts
- 4 Salt Lake's state, abbr.
- 5 The Jews ostracized these people (John 4:9)
- 6 Jesus told a parable about a king who invited people to this kind of celebration
- 7 Surrounded by
- 8 Normal temperature and pressure, abbr.
- 11 A dialect
- 12 Biblical term for yeast (Matthew 13:33)
- 16 Do over again, prefix
- 18 Yearned
- 19 Article that precedes a vowel
- 22 The wise took this for their lamps (Matthew 25:4)
- 23 Jesus spoke of laborers in this place (Matthew 20:1)
- 24 One who scatters seed (Mark 4:3)
- 28 "A certain _____ made a great supper" (Luke 14:16)
- 31 In debt
- 33 Nathan, for short
- 35 Bible part that contains the Gospels, Epistles, and Revelation, abbr.
- 36 Pulled
- 37 "True worshippers _____ worship the Father in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23)
- 40 Laughter syllable
- 43 Environment, prefix
- 44 Tactical Air Command, abbr.
- 46 European mountain
- 48 Delve
- 50 "Unforgettable" Cole, first initials
- 51 Son of Jose (Luke 3:28-29)
- 53 Californian city, abbr.

#050



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SEEKING: Duke Memorial Baptist Church of Somerset is seeking God's man to become their pastor. Previous pastor of 22 years retired due to physical disability. We will receive only printed resumes until 12/31/15. Address is 106 Layman Ave., Somerset, KY 42503.

SEEKING: Cadiz Baptist Church is seeking a full-time minister of music to lead our church in a blended God-glorifying style of worship. This person will also serve the church in an associate pastor capacity under the leadership of the senior pastor. Send resumes to P.O. Box 606, Cadiz, KY 42211, or call the church at (270) 522-6002. Previous experience and seminary education are not required, but preferred.

SEEKING: Cornerstone Baptist Church is seeking a senior pastor. A young church located between Lexington and Winchester, Ky. Send resumes to: 4451 Winchester Rd., Lexington, KY 40509.

SEEKING: Winfield Baptist Church in Winfield, Tenn., is accepting resumes for a full-time senior pastor. Applicants may send resumes to Search Committee at P.O. Box 100, Winfield, TN 37892, or emailed to dmurphy@catoneida.edu.

SEEKING: Bethany Baptist Church is seeking the pastor that God has called to His service. Please send resume by Dec. 31 to Bethany Baptist Search Committee, P.O. Box 155, Alvaton, KY 42122, or e-mail to bbcpcc@yahoo.com.

SEEKING: Small Southern Baptist church in scenic southeastern Kentucky is seeking a God-called pastor/preacher to help grow our church. Send resume to Pastoral Search Committee, P.O. Box 1332, Middlesboro, KY 40965.

SEEKING: Small/medium church looking to grow youth ministry requires full-time youth pastor. Send resume to Darlene@BBCLife.org

SEEKING: Immanuel Baptist Church in Somerset is seeking a full-time senior pastor. Immanuel is a conservative Southern Baptist church averaging 146 in Sunday School and 196 in worship. Send resumes to immanuelbaptistchurch@windstream.net or Pastor Search Committee, 808 Bourne Ave., Somerset, KY 42501.

SEEKING: Minister to children and family-part time position (15 to 20 hours a week) at Pinckard Baptist Church in Versailles. Send resume to pinckard-church@aol.com or 3401 Pinckard Pike, Versailles, KY 40383.

SEEKING: Bellview Baptist Church in Woodruff, S.C., is seeking a senior pastor. The candidate should have at least 3 years of experience as a senior pastor, have a seminary degree from a Southern Baptist Seminary, and be willing to relocate to within a 10 mile radius of the church. Information about our church and church family, as well as a list of our desired qualifications can be found on our website at www.bellviewbaptistchurch.org/#/contact-us. Resumes including statement of faith, references, DVD/CD can be mailed to Pastor Search Committee, Bellview Baptist Church, 901 Bellview Rd., Woodruff, SC 29388, or emailed to secretary@bellviewbaptistchurch.org no later than 12/31/15.

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SEEKING: Rock Lick Missionary Baptist Church, Somerset, Ky., is prayerfully

seeking a pastor with strong preaching skills, a passion for visiting and pastoral care, a heart for missions and evangelism, one who works well with all age groups through senior members and has especially strong leadership with youth. Resumes may be sent to: Pastor Search Committee, 122 Ashurst St., Somerset, KY 42501 or call (606) 678-5901.

SEEKING: Temple Hill Baptist Church, a conservative Southern Baptist Church in rural south east Barren County, Ky., affiliated with the Monroe Association, is seeking a bivocational pastor. Average Sunday morning attendance is approximately 130. Church services include Sunday School, worship service Sunday morning and evening, and Wednesday night Bible study. Resumes will be accepted Dec. 1, 2015-Jan. 15, 2016. Resumes should be mailed to Temple Hill Baptist Church, P.O. Box 1946 Glasgow, KY 42142-1946.

SEEKING: Barren River Baptist Church, in Bowling Green, Ky., is seeking a bivocational pastor with a strong leadership skill set to help the church connect to the community and communicate Christ clearly. The church is strategically located with excellent facilities, ample parking and an activities center. We will accept resumes until 1/15/2016. Email resumes to brbc-pastorsearch@gmail.com or mail to: Barren River Baptist Pastor Search, Chuck Threlkel, 720 Summerlin Dr., Bowling Green, KY 42104.

SEEKING: Pleasant View Baptist Church in Waynesburg, Ky., is seeking a full-time youth minister for grades 7-12. Additional responsibilities to coincide with the selected candidate's gifting. College or seminary degree with youth ministry experience preferred. Send resumes to bb.2917@yahoo.com or Youth Search Committee, 13571 KY Hwy. 1247, Waynesburg, KY 40489. Deadline is Jan. 15.

SEEKING: Full-time church ministry assistant/financial secretary. Parkland Baptist Church, 7206 Shepherdsville Rd., Louisville, KY 40219. Must have at least five years' experience in similar position; working knowledge of Microsoft Word, QuickBooks, PowerPoint and Publisher. Send resumes to Personnel Committee.

SEEKING: Crossing is accepting resumes for the position of president and CEO. For job description, go to www.gocrossings.org. Submit resumes with cover letters to crossingssearch@kybaptist.net

SEEKING: Full-time music and worship pastor at First Baptist Church of Murray, Ky. Contact Rhonda Roberts at First Baptist Church, 203 South 4th Street, Murray, KY 42071.

SEEKING: Garner Missionary Baptist in Rush, Ky.: pastor retiring after 23 years. Looking for godly man to continue the ministry. Average attendance 200. Multiple ministries church. Send resume to P.O. Box 630, Catlettsburg, KY 41129.

SEEKING: Oakland Baptist Church is prayerfully accepting resumes for lead pastor. Send resume to Pastor Search Committee, Oakland Baptist Church, P.O. Box 154, Oakland, KY 42159. We will be accepting resumes until Feb. 12, 2016.

SEEKING: Cecilia Baptist Church, Cecilia, Ky., is seeking a senior pastor. For more info check our website: ceciliabaptistchurch.com. Resumes or questions may be sent to: Ceciliapastorsearchcommittee@gmail.com, or P.O. Box 87, Cecilia, KY 42724.

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Build a manger; focus on Christmas; help dads lead

By Ken Walker

Jeffersonville, Ind.—Long before Thanksgiving, and even Halloween, Eastern Heights Baptist Church was getting ready for Christmas.

For the third consecutive year, the Southern Baptist church is participating in The Manger Build, a project to help men keep Christ in front of their families at Christmas.

It's a day of excitement as fathers and children gather to build a life-sized wooden manger to take home or give to a neighbor as a reminder of the reason for the season, said Patrick Lynch, associate pastor at the Jeffersonville church in southern Indiana.

"When everyone gets together in the foyer area, it's 30 hammers going at once," said Lynch, who directs the event. "It's overwhelmingly loud and kids and dads are getting together. The moment they grab their kits, that's when the fun starts."

The Manger Build was designed by Mike Young, founder of Noble Warriors (noblewarriors.org), a men's ministry based in Midlothian, Va., near Richmond.

It started more than a decade ago as a hobby. Formerly employed in his family's construction business, Young gathered his four children to look for materials they could use in the garage to build a manger.

After organizing Noble Warriors in 2005, Young said he wondered if other men would be interested in participating if he cut the wood.

"We came up with the design we use now," said Young, a member of Parkway Baptist Church in Moseley, Va. "I put out an email to my network and 21 families



Pastor Chris Gustafson and his sons Joshua (center) and Andrew show their handiwork at The Manger Build event for dads and their children at Eastern Heights Baptist Church in Jeffersonville, Ind.

showed up to build one at a United Methodist church in our community.

"The guys loved it. From the first experience until now, every church that does this says it's loud and a little chaotic. But the photos are always the same—dads on the floor with hammer and nails, coaching kids, and the kids are excited."

Noble Warriors didn't move its Manger Build kit into the marketplace until 2013. Over the past two years 200 churches in 32 states have participated, including a number of Southern Baptist congregations.

The kit, priced at \$74.99, includes a 50-page church resource manual, an instructional DVD, 10 participants' guides with a week of devotionals for home use, and several promotional posters.

Young said churches still have to buy the lumber, nails and other materials to assemble the mangers, a cost that can be defrayed by each family providing a mate-

rials fee.

In early September, Noble Warriors released an additional resource, Dad's Tools (\$29.99), which fathers can use to build a small manger at home. That kit includes wood, nails, sandpaper and an instruction-activity booklet.

Beyond its Christmas focus, the overarching vision of The Manger Build is to help churches lead men toward long-term discipleship and spiritual leadership in their families throughout the year.

At Eastern Heights Baptist Church, 15 mangers were assembled last year. Attendees included grandfathers and other men to work with children of single mothers, Lynch said.

"What we like about it is it's such an easy set-up," Lynch said. "The dads win out as a hero and it's a quick clean-up afterwards. It's the perfect project for dads. We usually have a sample made and it ends up in the children's ministry department and on stage Christmas Eve."

When Bethel Baptist Church in Yorktown, Va., organized its first build last year, project coordinator Joe Blanchard thought 30 families might show up. Instead, the church wound up with 77 fathers, 150 children and 22 coaches who helped where needed.

The sign-up proved so successful that Noble Warriors sent a video crew to record the festivities, which can be viewed at <https://vimeo.com/noblewarriors/the-bethel-story>.

"I'm a detail person," said Blanchard, a general contractor and longtime Bethel member. "I went by the book 95 percent of the time (to organize The Manger Build). The day of the event I was sitting back,

twiddling my thumbs because my work was done."

Blanchard said he started two months ahead of time, first praying about who to include on the six-member team to implement the build. He is experienced in hands-on missions. He served as World Changers' construction coordinator in Norfolk, Va., from 2010-12 and leads a Bethel Baptist ministry that repairs homes in the Yorktown area. Last summer, he led a 23-member crew to renovate dorms for Northeastern Baptist College in Bennington, Vt.

Not surprisingly, missions was uppermost in his mind when members discussed whether to extend invitations to people outside the church for The Manger Build.

"If we're going to do a ministry thing, I want to do it outside the church," Blanchard said. "We had guys signing up and telling guys at work about it. Thirty-three percent of the fathers who came weren't part of our church."

Bethel won't be participating this year, however. With Easter falling on the last Sunday of March, the church backed up its Upward Basketball season. That meant the gym isn't available, Blanchard said.

But he is looking forward to its return in 2016.

"I think the next time we do it, it will be even bigger," Blanchard said. "I think the best part is seeing kids' excitement after the mangers are built."

"In 20 to 30 minutes you turn this pile of wood into something."

To see how proud they were and involvement between fathers and their kids is exciting." (BP)

Pew data confirms faithful remnant

By David Roach

Nashville—The latest data release from the 2014 Pew Religious Landscape Study is significant, but not surprising. For students of Scripture and church history, it confirms with empirical data what God's people have known to be true for millennia: the Lord's modus operandi is to preserve a faithful remnant amid the sinful world. It was true in the times of Noah, Elijah and the Apostle Paul, and telephone surveys of 35,071 American adults confirm it's still true today.

The title and subhead on a Nov. 3 release from the Pew Research Center aptly summarize all 265 pages of data: "U.S. public becoming less religious. Modest drop in overall rates of belief and practice, but religiously affiliated Americans are as observant as ever."

Among those surveyed, 23 percent described themselves as "religiously unaffiliated," up 7 percentage points from a similar survey in 2007. Among the religiously unaffiliated—deemed the "nones" to describe their response to the question of religious affiliation—fewer than two-thirds (61 percent) said they believed in God. That represented a 9-percentage-point drop since 2007.

The net result is an adult population that "has become slightly less religious," according to Pew. That reality is reflected by overall declines in daily prayer, attendance at religious services and belief in God.

A significant cause of the decline in religiosity is that the Millennial generation is "far less religious than their elders" and has begun to replace the shrinking Silent and Baby Boomer generations in the U.S. population.

At the same time, Pew found, "religiously affiliated people appear to have grown more religiously observant in recent years." Scripture reading, sharing their faith with others and participation in prayer and Scripture study groups are all up modestly among the religiously affiliated.

Of course, the "religiously affiliated" are not all Christians. About 69 percent identified with denominations traditionally identified as holding orthodox Christian beliefs, with the remainder belonging to non-Christian religions and Christian offshoot groups with beliefs diverging from historic Christianity. And not all who self-identify as Christians are committed.

The findings, while significant for the scope of Pew's research, are not novel. This is how God has allowed humanity to operate since the Fall of Genesis 3. He permits the sinful world to decline in its devotion to Him while preserving a faithful remnant.

God preserved Noah's family amid a world flooded with sin. He chose Abraham's clan amid a Canaanite landscape that included Sodom and Gomorrah. He preserved Israel amid the violent and perverse peoples surrounding the Promised Land, Ruth and Boaz amid a

Jewish population that "did what was right in their own eyes" and the prophets Elijah and Elisha amid a kingdom led to idolatry by wicked monarchs.

In New Testament times and beyond, the church was a persecuted remnant amid pagan Roman culture. By the fourth century, Christianity had become an officially recognized religion, but faithfulness declined, leading a committed remnant to found the monastic movement, which for all its flaws was devoted to Christ in contrast to the cultural Christianity surrounding it.

More than a thousand years later, the Protestant Reformation represented the effort of a committed remnant to preserve the doctrine of justification by faith alone amid European moral and religious decline.

Later still, the Puritans of England and New England saw themselves as God's faithful remnant, as did the missions movement sparked by William Carey in the 19th century, the student volunteer movement of the 20th century and the early 21st century's wave of missions-driven evangelical youth.

Pew's findings should neither surprise Christians nor cause us to panic. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we have the opportunity to stand firm, knowing that God has long accomplished His purposes through a remnant. And Jesus promised that neither the gates of Hell nor the rise of the "nones" would prevail against His church. (BP)

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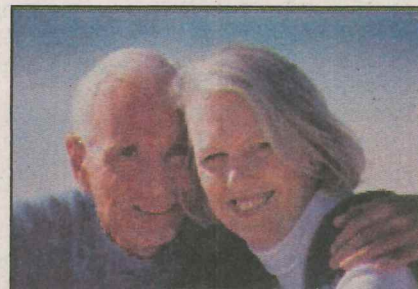


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