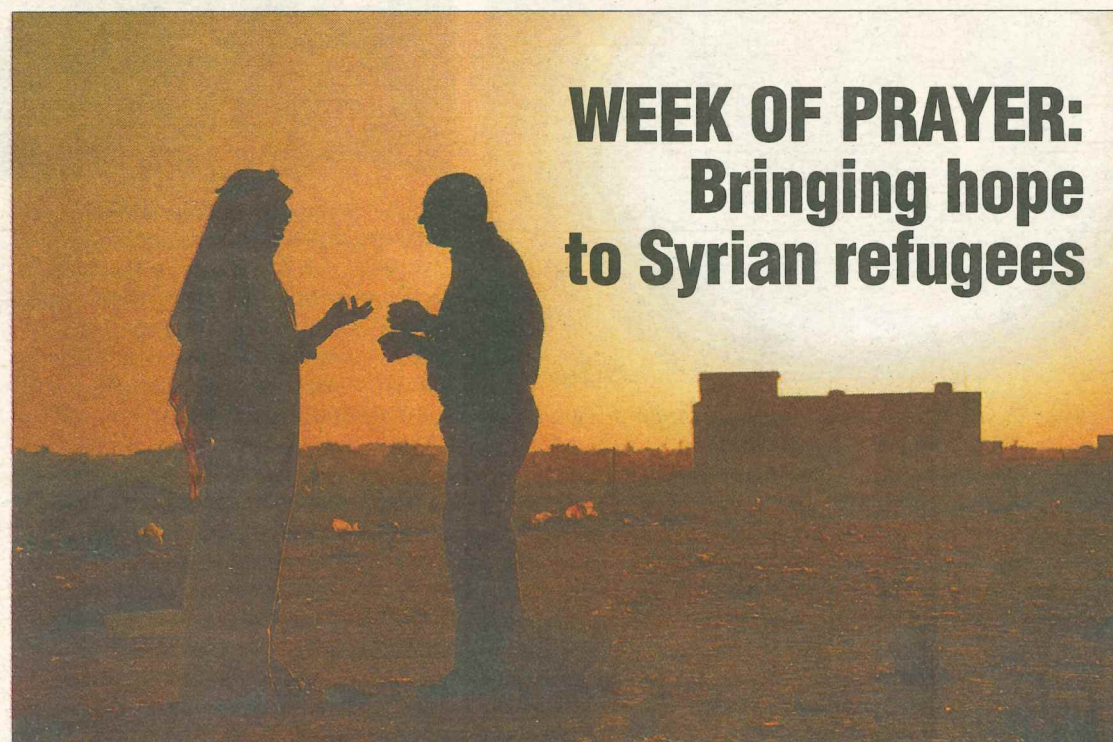


WESTERN Recorder

December 15, 2015

Shine Like Stars * Philippians 2:15

Volume 189, Issue 25



WEEK OF PRAYER: Bringing hope to Syrian refugees

The sun sets as Christian worker Peter Matheson* talks with a father of six children about pressing needs his family has as they live outside the refugee camps. (*Name changed)

By Rolan Way

Middle East—Christian worker Peter Matheson* is working to bring hope to refugees. But the ongoing crisis has taken a toll on the many he serves—and on him personally—as he ministers in the midst of tremendous suffering.

Syrian and Iraqi refugees have become victims of a rebellion being fought against the Syrian regime and brutality caused by

the self-proclaimed terrorist group ISIS and other Islamic extremists.

"The hardest thing in this ministry is just sitting down and listening to their hurts," Matheson said about spending time with the refugees. "They come, they arrive with little children just with the clothes on their back, because back in Syria their homes are destroyed, their businesses are destroyed ... women have been raped ... real torture goes on among men and young

men in Syria."

Images and reports of beheadings, cruelty and pure evil continue to shadow refugees—numbering in the millions—from any light of hope. But Matheson is there to tell them about a loving God who cares deeply for all who are fleeing violence and that only He can push back the descending darkness.

Through the support of Southern Baptists, Matheson and fellow workers are able to distribute boxes of food and other critical necessities provided through gifts to Global Hunger Relief along the Syrian border.

"We are able, through the Cooperative Program and Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, to focus 100 percent on the ministry that God has given us as workers ... as laborers in the field,"

Matheson said. "We're able to give all of our attention to people who are hurting by ministering to their physical, emotional and, most importantly, their spiritual needs."

U.S. churches also are playing a direct role in ministering to refugee needs alongside Matheson. A medical team from Mandarin Baptist Church of Los Angeles

□ See Week of Prayer ... Page 7

Ky. Baptists surpass \$800M in CP giving

Louisville—Kentucky Baptist churches reached a major milestone when total Cooperative Program giving topped \$800 million on Dec. 2.

"\$800 million really is a staggering amount of money," said Kentucky Baptist Convention Executive Director Paul Chitwood. "Seeing the cumulated generosity of Kentucky Baptists represented by this missions giving milestone helps us understand the enormous kingdom impact of the Cooperative Program."

The Cooperative Program is the primary means through which nearly 750,000 Kentucky Baptists in 2,400 churches support missionaries in the state, nation and around the world.

Lowell Ashby, head of the KBC's finance and business services team, said end of November tallies placed CP giving about \$48,000 shy of the mark. Woodland

Missionary Baptist Church in Greenville gave the last needed push with their gift of \$805.

Total CP receipts through three months of the current 2015-16 fiscal year stood at about \$5.2 million. The \$1,579,360 given to the Cooperative Program in November was \$165,000 more than contributions at the same period last year.

"How many churches have been started and strengthened with these funds? How many missionaries have been supported in Kentucky, North America, and overseas? Most importantly, how many souls have been saved as a direct result of God using the ministries funded by the CP?" Chitwood asked.

Kentucky Baptist churches baptized 14,228 new believers last year and had a part in more than 305,000 baptisms globally because of their support through the Cooperative Program.

"I have to believe that every Kentucky Baptist will be as humbled as I am right now as we cross this significant milestone," Chitwood said. "As the Psalmist writes, 'Let the nations be glad!'" (KBC)

"I have to believe that every Kentucky Baptist will be as humbled as I am right now as we cross this significant milestone."

Kentucky Baptist Convention Executive Director Paul Chitwood

Seminary leaders, church participate in Bevin's inauguration

By Craig Sanders

Frankfort—On his first day in office, Kentucky Governor Matt Bevin asserted his evangelical convictions with a morning worship service Dec. 8 hosting an estimated crowd of 1,500 and an inaugural clergy that included leaders from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Southern Seminary President Albert Mohler Jr. and Hershael York, professor of Christian preaching at Southern Seminary and senior pastor of Buck Run Baptist Church in Frankfort, were among the 11-member clergy.

A businessman who never before held political office, Bevin won Kentucky's gubernatorial election in November over Democratic nominee Jack Conway. He becomes only the second Republican governor for Kentucky in four decades.

Mohler joined Rabbi Joe Rooks Rapport of The Temple in Louisville and Archbishop Joseph Kurtz of the Archdiocese of Louisville as the clergy



The Buck Run Baptist Church's Kings Kids Choir sings during the inaugural worship service.

(Photo by Kristen Lowry)

participating in the swearing in ceremony on the Capitol steps. Delivering the invocation, Mohler asked God for "daily guidance and protection upon our new Governor Matt Bevin, and upon our first lady Glenna Bevin, and upon their beautiful family."

In his first public address as governor, Bevin focused less on policy and instead

challenged Kentuckians to embrace the Golden Rule and practice unity. Bevin, who in 2012 endowed the seminary's Bevin Center for Missions Mobilization, urged constituents to "treat our Commonwealth with respect" and to "go the extra mile" in

□ See Bevin's inaugural events... Page 10

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WESTERN RECORDER
Celebrating 190 years of "shining the Light through what we write"

Western Recorder 12-15-2015

Paducah First: Changing lives for 175 years

By Myriah Snyder

Paducah—First Baptist Church of Paducah celebrated its 175th anniversary Nov. 21-22.

The church commemorated its many years in ministry by a "packing party," preparing 175 food baskets for local ministries to aid those in need, inviting former ministers to be a part of their celebration, hosting a special service and having various times of fellowship.

The church encouraged those whose lives have been changed by the ministry at Paducah First to tell their stories online.

"We visited three area churches, but after one visit to First Baptist ... we went back to FBC and never left. That was about 33 years ago," Linda Hart shared.

"This church has been where we raised our children and where we were strengthened in our walk with our Lord through good, solid teaching and preaching that stood the test of time and helped us weather the storms that life brings our way," she said.

Paul and Christina VanStone said, "Our story at First Baptist began in November 1986 when Dr. White baptized our family. After years of Bible study, prayer, growth in faith and mission trips, God called us to be career missionaries with the International Mission Board."

Robert White, current pastor Charles Moore, John Wood and Kevin McCallon are some of the living pastors of Paducah First. Far right, Kevin McCallon visits with members at the luncheon following the service.



"We thank God for First Baptist, Paducah, and the great pastors who taught us, inspired us, and opened our hearts and minds to have a heart for the Great Commission and a world vision to share His gospel," the VanStones shared.

Charles Moore, pastor of First Baptist, commented, "I delight in the thought that we have contributed an enduring legacy of passion for the Scriptures, an example of faithfulness and fidelity as unto God, and a heartfelt desire to serve anyone in need."

"Each of these contributions we have demonstrated quite imperfectly, but

hopefully we have pointed our friends and neighbors to a perfect Christ all along our 'broken road,'" he said, borrowing a song lyric from popular culture. "The Lord has surely and immeasurably blessed our broken road."

"First Baptist Paducah has thrived for 175 years because it was founded upon gospel truth, and because it has continually renewed its commitment to gospel truth," Moore said.

"Like all other local congregations, we have been battered and severely tested at times, but the persevering faith of the people has not wavered—and the cross of



Christ has remained at the center of every chapter of the church's history."

The church displayed a refurbished door signed by its members, representing their commitment to sharing the message of Jesus Christ for the next 175 years. It will remain at the church until the 200th anniversary. The theme of the anniversary celebration was "Of Christ, In Christ, For Christ."

"Our mission is rather simple: GROW in Christ's grace and truth; SHOW our love for Christ by the way we esteem and serve others; and GO into all the world as humble-yet-empowered ambassadors of Christ's good news," Moore said.

"Christ died, Christ is risen, and Christ will come again. This we believe with all our hearts. Our logo for the anniversary is 'Of Christ, In Christ, For Christ.' I love that. It says it all," he concluded. (WR)



A UC football player volunteers at a local elementary school helping a young girl pick out a gift for her loved ones. Generous donations to UC's Mountain Outreach program helped UC extend the gift of giving for Christmas.

Patriots join Mountain Outreach Gift Days

Williamsburg—University of the Cumberland's student-athletes from women's lacrosse, football, baseball and men's wrestling teams travelled to three area elementary schools to become personal shoppers. Joining with the campus Mountain Outreach Ministry, the Patriots assisted students in picking out Christmas gifts for parents or grandparents.

The reactions of the children were heart-touching.

"Do we really get to pick whatever we want? It's really free?" a Boston school student asked her teacher as she walked into the gym filled with gifts provided by Mountain Outreach. "This is so cool; My Nana will love this present, especially since I picked it out myself."

Marc Hensley, director of Mountain Outreach, explained, "The purpose of Gift Day is to get children involved in the giving part of Christmas. We want the kids to understand the good feeling that comes from giving as well as from receiving."

"It's great to get the athletes involved, too," Hensley added. "Usually their practice and game schedules keep them from participating in other outreach opportunities, but this specific opportunity allows the athletes to connect with many of the children who play sports in the local elementary schools."

The Mountain Outreach program raises funds throughout the year with which to purchase the gifts for the 735 elementary students to give to their loved ones for Christmas.

The athletes enjoy the influence they have on the students as well.

Football junior, Tan Hudson from Annville, spoke about his first experience with the program.

"It's a big day for these kids, knowing that they are able to give their parents a gift when they probably couldn't otherwise," Hudson said. "It's great just to be able to talk to the kids, see their smiles, and share their day."

The infectious giving spirit captivated the athletes as they spent time with the children.

One player held a bright-eyed child up above the others so he could see the table of gifts to make his selection. Another made it a point to get each child he helped to laugh and have the biggest smile possible.

Mathias Brewers, a senior baseball player from Lebanon, Ohio, commented, "It's always a good feeling to help out, but the best part is seeing the smiling faces on the kids when they leave knowing they'll be able to give their loved ones a gift."

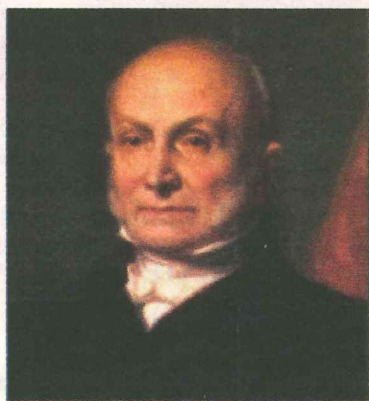
Head Baseball Coach Brad Shelton spoke about the changes he has seen in his players through this program.

"It's good for players to get involved in the community. It actually encourages our students as much as it does the children they help," Shelton said.

"It gives our students a chance to explore the area and become a part of the larger community, and it helps remind them that there are more important things in life than just school and sports." (UC)

Can you guess who this is?

If you were around in 1825-26 when your state Baptist paper was getting started, you likely would have recognized the President of the United States, John Quincy Adams.



WESTERN RECORDER

**Celebrating 190 years
of Kentucky Baptist newspapers**

Pastor's new bride a '12-cow kind of girl'

By Lily Jameson*

New Castle—A pastor knows his congregation loves him when it pays more than \$1,500 for his wife.

First Baptist Church of New Castle got involved in an unusual fundraiser just before its pastor, Daniel Lowry, married Kristen Sayres. For the previous two years, Sayres had served as co-director for the Naivasha Children's Shelter in Naivasha, Kenya, which rehabilitates homeless boys and tries to reintegrate them into their families.

Sayres had spent a total of seven years in Kenya, a country in which grooms normally give large sums of money to their brides' families before marriage.

After he proposed, Lowry discovered Sayres' friends in Kenya thought he and his church should honor the tradition and donate to the shelter.

"I didn't know how people (in Kentucky) would react because it's such a strange thing in American culture," he said.

Lowry had met his bride through an online dating website two years before.

They braved a long-distance relationship, and after a couple of trips to Kenya, a furlough in America and lots of online conversation, they decided they were done with cross-hemisphere dating. They were getting married.

And so, the fundraising began.

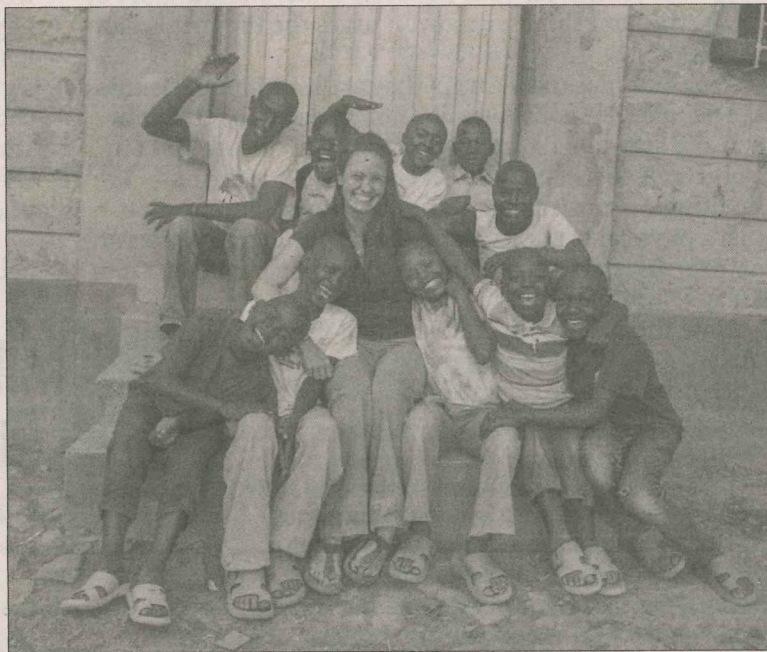
In August, New Castle's associate pastor, Chris Mann, received an email from Baptist Global Response Area Director Mark Hatfield. Hatfield cared about both Sayres and the Naivasha Children's Shelter.

BGR had donated two cows to the home before, and Hatfield and his wife, Susan, had lived close to Sayres in Kenya and had grown fond of her. He considered himself her "African uncle." As such, he had a duty to perform—negotiating a marriage fee.

"Susan and I have lived in Africa for 28

Kristen Lowry poses with residents of the Naivasha Children's Shelter in Kenya. She has served as the shelter's co-director for two years, and proceeds from her "bride price" will benefit the shelter. (Photo courtesy of Kristen Lowry)

Below, Daniel and Kristen Lowry married on Oct. 10. (Photo by Matt Jones)



years now and have become accustomed to a cultural practice known as 'lobola' or 'bride price,'" he wrote.

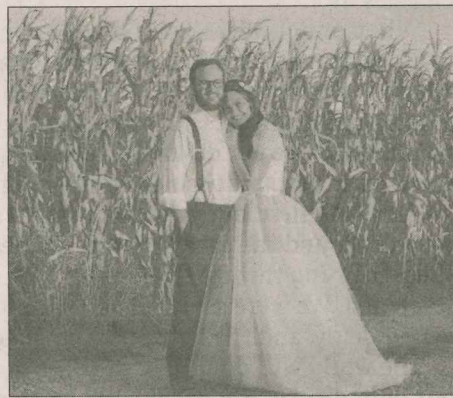
"This is a custom that values the bride to be and the investment that family and friends have made in her life and assures that the groom not only values her in words but (also) by honoring family and friends with physical examples of how he values her."

Hatfield also explained that Kenyan Christians evaluate brides by their godly characters, education, skills and experience.

By these criteria, he wrote, Sayres was worth at least 12 cows. Other close friends of Sayres and self-proclaimed "African uncles" also wrote the church, supporting the bride price idea. They decided two cows—donated to the shelter—would suffice.

"It would not be good for me to have to object during the wedding ceremony when the pastor asks if anyone has objections," Hatfield jokingly threatened.

Lowry says the email surprised his



associate pastor, to say the least.

They talked about the bride price idea for a while, wondering how the congregation would react to such a foreign concept. In the end, Mann proposed it to the church.

"Everybody laughed, and they were really gracious," Lowry says. "They had fun with it."

"For the next two weeks, everybody was asking me if I was a 12-cow kind of girl," Sayres adds.

Lowry says his congregation gave freely. Sayres had previously spoken to First Baptist of New Castle about the shelter, telling members about the boys she had helped and had grown to love. They understood the shelter's needs.

"I think that was part of the reason that people were willing to give—because they were able to hear about these boys and see some of their faces and hear their stories and know that this gift is going specifically to help them," Lowry says.

The pastor remembered that some of the cattle farmers in the church even asked if they could simply ship a couple of their cows to Kenya. That wasn't possible, so for about a month, members gave money until they had enough to purchase two cows. Then, they donated it through BGR.

Sayres is grateful to have inspired the effort.

"I thought it was entertaining," she reflected. "I didn't know they would actually follow through with it. But, I thought it was pretty exciting. It was a fun way to support the shelter, and I feel like I'm a bit African. I felt honored by the whole process."

Of course, things have changed since the donation.

Naivasha realized it didn't have the land to support two more cows, so it's conducting a feasibility study to decide whether or not to purchase goats with the money instead.

Still, Sayres says, her bride price will give shelter staff more resources with which to care for the boys.

Lowry and Sayres, who were wed on Oct. 10, will get to see the results of their bride price fundraiser when they visit the shelter in January for a Kenyan wedding reception. There, they will honor more local traditions in celebration of their marriage.

Hopefully, those traditions won't have anything to do with cows. (WR)

*Name changed

Louisiana prison church joins Baptist association

By Mark Hunter

Angola, La.—It may be the first time a local Baptist association has accepted a prison church into its fellowship.

Washington Baptist Association now counts among its members Grace Baptist Church of the Main Camp in Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola.

The association encompasses 38 churches in Washington and St. Tammany parishes.

Grace Baptist is five years old and is the only Southern Baptist church among the prison's 28 inmate-led churches.

Its 65 or so members meet five times a week in the Main Camp's Education Center and twice a month in the Main Camp's Tudy Chapel.

The church is led by inmate pastor Paul Will, 42, a 2007 graduate of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary's extension program at Angola.

Like most of the men at Angola, Will is serving a life sentence.

Andrew Voss, pastor of Hillcrest Baptist Church in Franklinton where Will was ordained last year, facilitated

the Washington association's vote during its Oct. 5 annual meeting at Franklinton's First Baptist Church.

"To our knowledge this is the very first, fully recognized Southern Baptist church ... located inside a penitentiary," said Voss, who also is an NOBTS adjunct professor. "The vote was unanimous and there was an overwhelming eruption of applause after the vote was taken."

The process started about a year ago "as a way to further validate what God is doing there," Voss said, "not only through the seminary but through the churches because these inmate pastors are the ones who are on the front lines touching these guys' lives and their families back in their communities."

Paul Will, Grace Baptist's pastor, wrote in a statement that "God has allowed, through His providence, an incredible history to unfold here at Angola, a history that only God could have orchestrated for no man could have planned all that has transpired."

Will credits Warden Burl Cain for bringing the New Orleans Seminary to Angola 20 years ago and creating the

prison's innovative re-entry programs.

"The Scripture has proved to be true," Will wrote about Ephesians 3:20-21.

"Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask, or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever, amen."

"If I were to sum up my feelings concerning this event I would have to say that I'm overwhelmed and humbled by the fact that God has chosen to love and use the most broken of souls, in the most unlikely of circumstances to do such a marvelous work," Will wrote.

NOBTS President Chuck Kelley, who was a featured speaker for the associational meeting, tweeted, "I'm at Washington Baptist Association that just accepted a church started at Angola prison by our inmate students as a member. Wow! What a God—Our God is so great!"

In a later phone interview, Kelley said, "To my knowledge I don't know of any other association that has accepted

as a member church a church composed of inmates inside a prison, so it was a very historic night, very wonderful night!"

Bill Sumners, director of the SBC Historical Library and Archives in Nashville, was reluctant to declare it as a historical "first."

But after he searched the convention's databases he concluded, "As far as we know this has not happened before."

Angola chaplains Rick Sharkey and Robert Toney also affirmed the Washington association embrace of Grace Baptist.

"I think it's an awesome thing," Sharkey said. "It's the Kingdom of God expanding beyond the walls of a prison."

"The Louisiana Baptists just love the inmates," Toney said. "For that we are forever grateful."

The Washington Baptist Association is one of three parts of the 91-church Baptist Associations of Southeast Louisiana, along with the William Wallace Baptist Association with 24 churches and Two Rivers Baptist Association, 29 churches. (BP)

Cooperation required

Fulfilling the Great Commission requires cooperation. None of us, alone, are able to make disciples among all the world's people groups. Working together, however, I believe the Great Commission can and will be fulfilled.

Baptist churches in Kentucky 176 years ago became convinced they could do more to reach

Kentucky and the world for Christ if they partnered together than if they worked in independence and isolation. Thus they formed an association that would later be known as the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

Today, the KBC represents a partnership of 2,400 churches. Most of

those churches are also committed to partnering with the broader Southern Baptist Convention family of churches. Altogether, that cooperative body represents more than 45,000 congregations.

During the Christmas season, Kentucky and Southern Baptists are challenged to focus on our partnering efforts to support Great Commission work overseas. Today, more than 3,000 unreached people groups around the world remain unengaged with the gospel.

At the same time, due to a lack of funding, our overseas mission force on assignment through the International Mission Board of the SBC remains in an ongoing state of decline. Tragically, with the most recent downsizing, our overseas force will be reduced by nearly 1,500 missionaries in less than a decade. The target number of missionaries the IMB hopes to keep on the field stands at roughly 4,000.

The issue is not that Southern Baptists are too poor to provide for the 5,500-plus overseas missionaries who work in the world's harvest fields. Rather, we are not willing to make the lifestyle sacrifices that would allow us to be, at a minimum, tithers.

If every Southern Baptist simply committed to giving the Lord 10 percent of his or her income, the result would be that church budgets would more than triple, as would the sending capacity of our mission boards in Kentucky, North America, and overseas.

While I hope you will join my family in making a gift to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering this year, more importantly, I challenge every Kentucky Baptist to recover the biblical teaching of tithing. Our obedience is at stake and lost souls hang in the balance.

Will you sacrifice so others will have the opportunity to hear the gospel?

Together We are the KBC



Paul Chitwood

Arise and Shine!

"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord shines over you," urges the Prophet Isaiah (60:1-2).

"For look, darkness covers the earth, and total darkness the peoples," he continues. We don't need to be told that evil and spiritual darkness pervades our culture and our world. We see its evidence everywhere! Murder, mass shootings, terrorism, bombings, refugees, famine, rape, theft, physical brutality, drug abuse, pornography, racism, natural disasters and debilitating illness scream out from today's headlines.

Note the double imperative Isaiah uses. "Arise!" Get up, and get moving! There's work to be done. Go ... into all the world. We have been given a mission, a calling: "Shine!"

Like Christmas lights twinkling on a dark December night, there is something about us that should beckon others to "come and see." We're to illuminate the path to the Savior. "Declare His glory among the nations, His wonderful works among all the peoples," Psalm 96:3 charges us.

When our children were smaller, we used to take them to a drive-through Christmas lights display at Roper Mountain, which is actually more of a large hill in Greenville, the city where we then lived. One warm December evening—or so we thought—we put down the top on my convertible so we could get a better look at the twinkling lights.

Faintly at first, but growing steadily stronger as we wound around the tour grounds, we heard a crackling sound coming through the woods. "It's sleeting!" my kids screamed. We were soon pelted by ice. The car's top went up very quickly, and the light show came to a hasty end.

The world will do its best at times to throw cold water on our light display. But we mustn't let that dampen our spirits: "For your light has come!" we joyfully exclaim with Isaiah. That's the good news a world filled with darkness most needs to hear: "Joy to the world the Lord has come."

"(T)he Lord will shine over you and His glory will appear over you," Isaiah encouraged the people of Zion. He foresaw



After Thought

By Todd Deaton

a coming physical restoration and rebuilding of the holy city of God, yet a long-awaited spiritual restoration would come as well. "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). Wise men would one night be drawn by a star shining in the East, and shepherds on a Bethlehem hillside would hear angels sing of the glory of God's salvation for all peoples.

In many cities and towns across Kentucky, lighted decorations—wreaths, reindeer, Santas, silver bells, candy canes and tin soldiers—are hung on light poles this time of year. The base motivation may be crass commercialism, getting people into a holiday giving (shopping) mood, but just driving down Main Street, the brightly colored ornaments lift our spirits and fill children with holiday glee and anticipation.

Shouldn't it be that way whenever someone passes us on the street? Our light shines brightly, and the beauty of our hearts makes them long to know the source of our lasting joy: the Christ child born in Bethlehem.

Borrowing Isaiah's words (9:6), we sing out: "For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulders. And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

In the prologue to his Gospel, John announces the arrival of "the light of men." He writes, "That light shines in the darkness, yet the darkness did not overcome it. ... The true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world" (John 1:4,9).

A former editor of Western Recorder, Chauncey Daley, years ago said it well, "Simply put, the good news is that One came from heaven to be our Savior from sin, our Light (in the darkness) ..., our Guide in the earthly pilgrimage. This good news set the angels to singing, the shepherds to praising and the wise men to searching."

Rejoice, for your Light has come. And, because of who He is, that light now shines in us, beckoning others. Arise and shine!

Why every Christian should say 'I will'

Why should every Christian say to God, "I will pray however You want me to pray, give whatever You want me to give, and go wherever and whenever You want me to go?"

Why should each person say, "I will go to my neighbor, and I will go to another nation?" And, "I'm willing to go to an extreme place difficult to navigate geographically and politically, such as Syria or Somalia?"

Why should every single Christian say that? Why must every Christian say that? Consider four reasons based upon Isaiah 6:1-13:

We have an incomprehensibly glorious God

Our God reigns. During the time of Isaiah, King Uzziah had reigned over Judah 52 years. The king had been the only ruler that a generation of Judeans

had ever known. But when he died, his reign came to an end. In contrast, Isaiah had a vision of "the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up" (Isaiah 6:1, ESV).

Like Uzziah, kings, presidents and leaders have come and gone throughout history, but only one King remains. God's reign knows no end.

In Isaiah's vision, the Lord is surrounded by angelic attendants (seraphs). Their name means "burning ones." The angels are all-consumed and ablaze with the worship of God. Myriads of heavenly beings circle the throne of God, shouting and singing praises to God without ceasing. They're doing that now!

What are they singing? "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord" (Isaiah 6:3). His holiness is all encompassing; the extent of His maj-

esty is terrifying to behold.

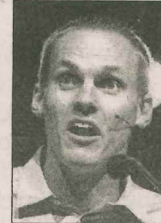
God being holy doesn't just mean He is sinless. He also is without equal (Isaiah 40:18, 25 and 45:5). And, "the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isaiah 6:3). The beauty of a sunrise, the resounding echo of a thunder, and the vastness of a mountain range all give us a glimpse of the glory of our Creator.

We are a sinfully lost people

In response to seeing a vision of the fullness of God's glory, Isaiah says, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5).

We might think that we aren't so bad, but we have no clue as to the seriousness ☐ See 'I will' ... Page 5

Guest Viewpoint



David Platt

WESTERN Recorder

Shine Like Stars *Philippians 2:15

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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.

Christmas: It changes everything

By Michael Duduit

It's that time of year again, when we put trees inside our houses, make strange egg-flavored drinks we'd never consume any other time of the year, and spend hours we don't have buying gifts we can't afford for people who will exchange them for something they really wanted.

Welcome to Christmas!

A Pew Research survey in 2013 found that 96 percent of Americans still celebrate Christmas. What may be more surprising is that only about half of all Americans still considered Christmas to be primarily a religious holiday; about one out of every three considered it essentially a cultural celebration with no religious meaning. So when you hear about the war on Christmas, that's half right. The war isn't on Christmas; it's a war on identifying Christmas with Jesus.

But even among people of faith, there's a lot of confusion about Christmas. We tend to fit Christmas into our own romantic pictures of the season, with chestnuts roasting on an open fire, home for the holidays and a picturesque nativity scene. No wonder the culture tries to draw us into this consumer-driven celebration, because the real picture is far more dangerous, far more revolutionary.

If we understand what God has told us in His word, we'll realize that Christmas changes everything. We should have seen it coming. Remember the song Mary sang upon learning that she was to become the

mother of the Messiah? She said:

He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;
he has filled the hungry with good things,

and the rich he has sent away empty. (Luke 1:51-53)

In other words, God is

about to turn things upside down—or, perhaps a better way to think of it is that God is going to take a world that has fallen upside down, and is about to make it right-side up. Those that the world considers weak are about to be made strong; those who consider themselves exalted are about to be brought low. Christmas changes everything.

Christmas changes the way we see the world.

We live in a world that celebrates wealth and celebrity. Donald Trump isn't constantly on the news because he has the best hairstyle. As a society we idolize money and power. Cameras follow movie and TV stars because we can't get enough news about them.

But what happened on that first Christmas day tells us that we've got it all wrong. The God of the universe sent His Son to be born not in a palace but in a stable. The angels did not announce the news to a general or a high priest but to

shepherds. Everything that our society glorifies is meaningless in the eyes of God.

Because of Christmas, we know that God does not view the world the way we do. The world sees through a faulty lens, thinking that human achievement is what matters. At Christmas, God turned things right-side up, to help us see that ultimate value and significance can only be found in our relationship to Christ.

Christmas changes the way we see God.

The Christmas story is the story of the incarnation—Immanuel, God with us. To those who would argue that God is a distant divinity, uninvolved in the lives of men and women, the Christmas event is proof that they've got it all wrong.

At Christmas we see a God of love and grace who humbles Himself, taking on the weakness of human flesh, in order to become Himself the sacrifice for our sins. The God of justice must righteously judge sin and rebellion, but in Christ He becomes Himself the payment for that sin.

Christmas changes the way we see ourselves.

Even as believers, it is so easy to be sucked into seeing things the way the world does. We let ourselves get caught up in the kind of consumer-driven culture that we see displayed around us, particularly at this time of year. Of greater concern is the way we judge ourselves and others by what we have done, the jobs we hold, the accomplishments on our resumés and

the houses and cars we own.

But Christmas changes everything. Because of what God did in Bethlehem that day—and what He would do 33 years later on a hill outside Jerusalem—He has changed the scales on which we weigh our lives. We need no longer see ourselves based on the flimsy foundation of what we can do, because in Christ we now are judged based on His righteousness.

If you and I were to stand before God dressed in nothing but our own inherent value, we would be lost. But because of God's grace, He has taken the cloak of His righteousness and wrapped it around us, so that God no longer judges us based on our achievements but based on the absolute righteousness of Christ. That's why the host of angels could proclaim, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

On that amazing night more than 2,000 years ago, the angels proclaimed that peace had entered the world in the person of a baby. He would bring God's peace into their lives through the power of the cross. More than 20 centuries later, that same promise of God's peace is made possible for us. Peace will not come this season through the gifts we buy or the decorations we hang. Real peace comes through the gift God gave to us in Christ.

Christmas changes everything. (BP)

Michael Duduit is the dean of Anderson University's College of Christian Studies and the Clump Divinity School.

Retirement account gifts

For many, one of the largest assets they may own is their IRA or other retirement account.

And, unlike almost any other assets you own, there is potential for a double tax "hit" on the transfer of retirement account assets at your death.

The value of your retirement accounts are part of what is counted in determining if your estate owes any federal estate tax (first tax "hit") and, if your family is named as the beneficiary/new owner of the retirement account, when family member beneficiaries take funds out of the retirement account after your death they will have to pay income taxes on what they take out (second tax "hit") just like you did.

To avoid, or reduce, the double tax hit, consider using all or a portion of a retirement account to fund the gifts you want to make at your death to your church and other charitable causes important to you.

The portion of the retirement account passing to charitable organizations provides your estate an estate tax charitable deduction and, since your church and other charitable beneficiaries are tax exempt, they do not have to pay income taxes on what they receive from your retirement account.

IRAs and retirements accounts are a great resource to use for giving you want to do at your death.



Laurie Valentine

'I will'

Continued from page 4

of our own sin. Man-centered perspectives view sin as a small offense to be excused, not warranting full and infinite punishment. But the magnitude of sin isn't determined by how small or large we perceive it. The magnitude of sin is determined by the majesty of the One who is sinned against.

One sin, the initial disobedience of Adam and Eve to the command of an infinitely holy God, brought condemnation to all man and continues to affect the entire world today (Romans 5:12-21). At its core, sin is a personal affront to God, and it leads to the most important question in all the universe: How can sinful people stand before an incomprehensibly great God and not receive infinite punishment?

We have a scandalously merciful Savior

In other words, how can a holy God say to a guilty sinner that he is innocent? That doesn't seem fair. But by His great grace, and in His great plan, God has made a way for us to avoid the punishment we deserve. God wills to show us mercy, so much so that He chose to provide the atonement for our sin. How is this possible?

In Isaiah 6:6-7, the live coal from the altar of sacrifice is a picture of what is to come. It's a picture given throughout the Old Testament (Leviticus 16; Isaiah 53:4-6) that points to Christ. He alone would endure the penalty for sin in our place, and He alone has made a way for sinners to be able to stand innocent, to be made righteous, before God. This a

scandal of infinitely significant proportions: through the sacrifice of His Son on behalf of sinners, God has made a way for our salvation!

We have an indescribably urgent mission

How shall we respond to such mercy?

"Whom shall I send ... and who will go for us?" God asks. And Isaiah responds: Here am I; send me! (Isaiah 6:8). The grace of God isn't designed for casual acceptance. It compels us to abandon plans, dreams, possessions, priorities, treasures and pleasures in this world. Our King is worthy of so much more than nominal, casual, cultural Christianity. He is worthy of absolute submission to His person and absolute surrender to His purpose: Declaring His glory and His gospel to the ends of the earth, particularly to the unreached.

The unreached are people who have never received the good news of the gospel and currently don't have access to this news. This includes more than 2.8 billion people around the world.

Why must we urgently pursue them? Why must we take the command of God to go to all people more seriously? Why must we stop giving only our spare time and leftover resources to this task?

Because their partial knowledge of God is enough to condemn them to hell

(Romans 1:18-32). Every unreached person in the world has some knowledge of God, whether it's a man in an African jungle, a woman in a remote Asian village or a nomad in a vast desert.

Even if they haven't heard the gospel, they have seen evidence of God. Every person in the world stands guilty of sin before God—which is why they need to hear the good news of the gospel.

This means there are more than 2.8 billion people in the world today who have enough knowledge of God to show them that He is incomprehensibly glorious. But that's all they have! They are sinfully lost without the rest of the gospel. We must take it to them!

And we must go to the unreached

There are more than 2.8 billion people in the world who have enough knowledge of God to show them that He is incomprehensibly glorious. But that's all they have! They are sinfully lost without the rest of the gospel. We must take it to them!

because the gospel of God is powerful enough to save them from hell and admit them to heaven, to one day be within the presence of the high and holy God.

Ultimately, we go with urgency to the unreached

because the glory of God is good enough to satisfy them forever. There is coming a day when we will see His face and join in the chorus that surrounds Him, proclaiming, "Holy, holy, holy!"

This is why we must say, without condition and regardless of cost: Here we are, Lord; send us. (IMB)

David Platt is president of the International Mission Board.

What is 'Iron Man' pastoral leadership?

By Paul Badgett

Cannonsburg—First Baptist Church of Cannonsburg has been experiencing church revitalization under the pastoral leadership of Stan Williams. A key to Cannonsburg's revitalization has been a pastor who loves the people enough—and is willing to stay with them long enough—to see a real church turnaround.

The term "Iron Man" was taken from the nickname given to Cal Ripken Jr., who appeared in 2,632 consecutive Major League baseball games. Ripken had broken the previous record set by Lou Gehrig, who appeared in 2,130 consecutive Major League baseball games.

Gehrig was given the nickname "Iron Horse," and Ripken, after breaking his record, was given the nickname of "Iron Man." The nickname relates to Ripken's dedication to showing up day after day to fulfill his assigned mission.

Iron man-type leadership shows up day after day to carry out the assigned mission. Williams has proven himself to be an "iron man" at First Cannonsburg.

Regional SPOTLIGHT



Paul Badgett
East

He has been showing up day after day for the past 28 years—since the spring of 1987.

Two years prior to William's arrival, the church went through an ugly split, which left the congregation with some real internal struggles. They were so disconnected that more than 100 church members would leave after Sunday School and not attend worship.

Since those days of struggle, the church has experienced steady progress toward revitalization. The church has benefitted from revitalization in almost every area, including spiritual and numerical growth. As a matter of fact, there is a building expansion currently underway to accommodate the new growth.

When asked to look back and share some of the steps he felt had led to the church's revitalization, Williams shared:

1. God blessed a mission-minded church. Not only was the church committed to percentage giving to the Cooperative Program, but they also contributed to missions in other ways. Examples include the 20 to 30 buckets given annually for Baptist Global

Response, involvement in local benevolence ministries, active participants in the Greenup Baptist Association, and collecting shoeboxes for Samaritan Purse's ministry.

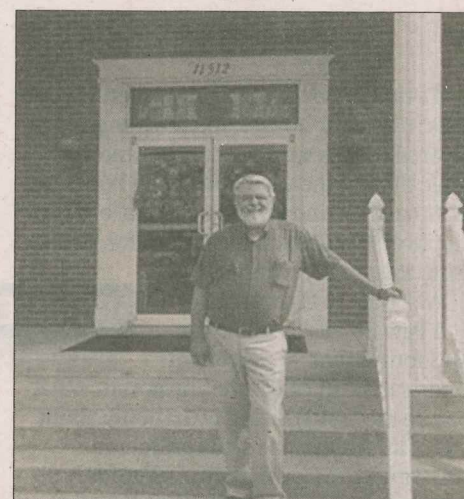
2. God blessed a traditional style of worship. Williams felt that a traditional style best fit the Cannonsburg community. His approach was to "use the culture in order to win the culture."

3. God blessed an expository preaching style. Williams said, "I was determined to preach the word and leave the results to God." The result has been a revitalized church family.

4. God blessed a spirit of cooperation. First Baptist is an active and cooperating member of the local association, along with the state and national conventions. Members of the church carry these labels with a sense of thankfulness.

5. God blessed a long-term pastorate. Williams said, "I have been at the church long enough to have been there at their births, at their baptisms, at their weddings, and the births of their children." He added, "Because of my long stay at the church, there is a 'trust factor,' along with a 'unity factor.' We may disagree about some minor issues, but we are unified on the weightier things of Scripture."

"The long stay has not only allowed me to grow the church, but it has also allowed the church to grow me," he continued. "Since selling everything that I



Stan Williams has proven himself to be an "iron man" at First Cannonsburg. He has been showing up day after day for the past 28 years—since the spring of 1987.

owned, quitting my job, uprooting my family, attending Clear Creek Baptist Bible College 30 years ago, then coming to Cannonsburg 28 years ago, the church has been so gracious in growing up their own pastor."

6. God blessed by giving the pastor a life verse. Williams' life verse has been "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6).

'Latte' Moon Café raises funds for missions

By Myriah Snyder

Cadiz—The Girls in Action group of Liberty Point Baptist Church in Cadiz is raising money for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and being missionaries from the fellowship hall of their church.

The "Latte" Moon Café is open every Sunday morning, and it's "employees" are girls in grades 1-6. The money they receive through their café goes toward reaching Liberty Point's \$6,500 Lottie Moon Offering goal.

Dianne McNichols, an associational WMU leader, former GA and mastermind behind the endeavor got the idea for the café from Pinterest.

The girls bake cupcakes, brownies and Lottie Moon sugar cookies—similar to the "tea cakes" that Lottie Moon used to bring to houses in China to start gospel conversations—with the help of their mothers and bring them on Sundays.

"They actually work the café, make hot chocolate, and put syrup, whipped cream and chocolate on people's coffee. I just sit there and watch them," McNichols commented.

"The girls love it. You can see their excitement every Sunday. They are always excited to come in, get their little aprons on and just be ready to serve."

They've even had a few little brothers who have helped out with it," said Anthony Jolly, pastor of Liberty Point Baptist.

To date, the church, which averages 125-150 on a Sunday morning, has raised \$2,000 for the LMCO. A large portion of this is a result of the café.

"I have been pastor here for two years and our Lottie Moon giving hasn't been great."

Part of that was from lack of promotion and lack of understanding the importance of it," Jolly said.

"God, how can we give more this year than we have ever before?" he prayed.

"I heard Danny Akin speaking at a chapel, and



The Girls in Action group of Liberty Point Baptist Church in Cadiz is raising money for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and being missionaries from the fellowship hall of their church.

he said there were 6,500 unreached people groups. As a bold goal for our church, we decided that we wanted to give one dollar for every unreached people group to send the gospel out," Jolly said.

"In GAs they learn about missionaries from all over the world. They learn about missionary kids their age, but it's sometimes hard for them to see themselves as a missionary," McNichols said.

She continued, "One of the elders in our church, Bob Lester, told them, 'You are missionaries today because of what you are doing this morning, people in other countries are going to come to know Jesus because of your being a missionary here.' That just says it all."

"The giving is important and we want to be able to send that good offering, but the most important thing is for my church and my congregation to realize that \$6,500 is a big number, but that's an attainable number," Jolly added.

"If we're willing to go, there is no reason those unreached people groups can't be reached and can't hear and experience the grace and gospel of Jesus Christ," he said. (WR)

Cumberlands among Baptist schools seeking waiver

By Bob Allen

Jefferson City, Tenn.—The federal government has granted waivers to more than two dozen religious institutions of higher learning from Title IX, which protects LGBT students from discrimination.

Carson-Newman University, affiliated with the Tennessee Baptist Convention, recently received exemption for "religious tenets regarding marriage, sex outside of marriage, sexual orientation, gender identity, pregnancy and abortion."

Other Baptist schools requesting an exemption include Judson College and University of Mobile in Alabama, Williams Baptist College in Arkansas, Baptist College of Florida, University of the Cumberlands in Kentucky, Louisiana College, William Carey University in Mississippi, Oklahoma Baptist University, Charleston Southern University and North Greenville University in South Carolina and Union University in Tennessee.

East Texas Baptist University, Howard Payne University and the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor all won Title IX exemption with aid from a resolution on "transgender issues" passed by the Baptist General Convention of Texas executive board in February.

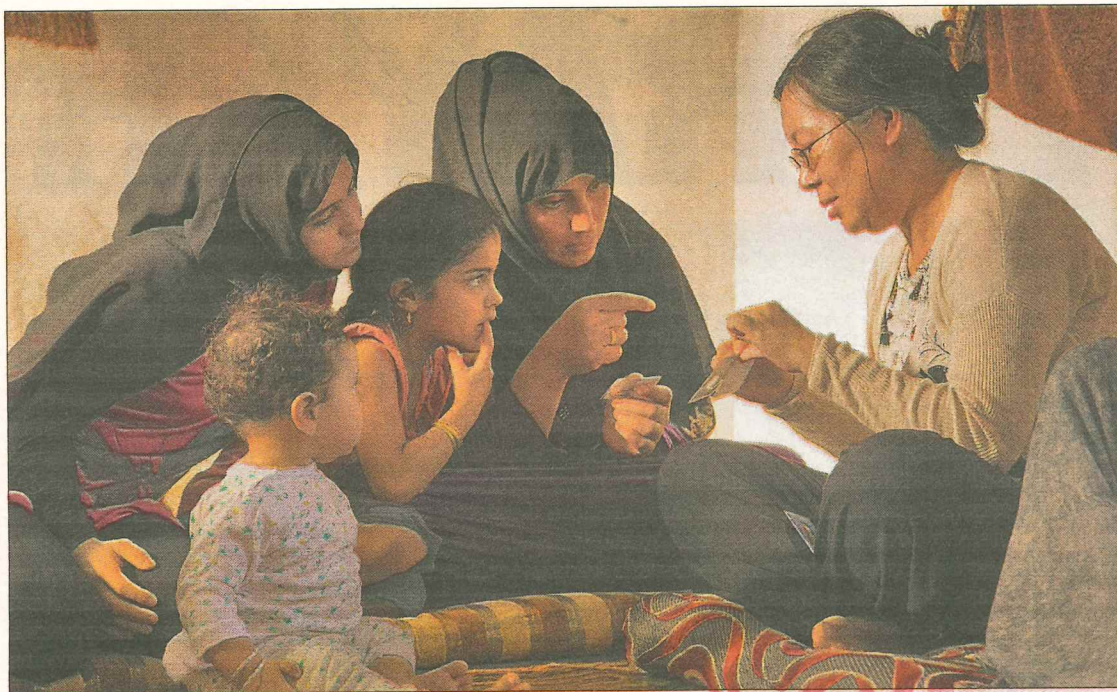
When Title IX was passed in 1972 to prohibit federally funded education programs and activities from discrimination based on sex, Congress added a provision stating an educational institution controlled by a religious organization does not have to comply in cases that "would not be consistent with the religious tenets of such organization."

Right-to-discriminate waivers were relatively rare until the Obama administration changed Title IX in 2014 to prohibit discrimination "based on gender identity or failure to conform to stereotypical notions of masculinity or femininity" in an effort to combat student-on-student violence against LGBT individuals.

Randall O'Brien, president of Carson-Newman University in Jefferson City, Tenn., told WVLT Local 8 News in Knoxville he filed for the waiver on the advice of an attorney in order to "further make us a Christian school."

"This is who we are our religious principles, and in a changing world we want to reaffirm who we are and intend to be," O'Brien said.

O'Brien said the school doesn't plan to discriminate against any students, but the attorney believed getting a waiver "would strengthen our First Amendment rights." (BNG)



Left, physician Stephanie Lim* (right) shares pictures of her life in the U.S. with a refugee family who was forced to escape war-torn Syria. The family of six made the 25-mile journey to the border of Jordan, where they live outside of the refugee camp zone. Above, Christian worker Peter Matheson* meets with four Syrian refugee families to pray, share Bible stories and just listen to the needs of the refugees. After Matheson tells the Bible stories, he encourages the family members to repeat the newly taught stories back to him. (*Names changed)

Week of Prayer

Continued from page 1

came to see the work firsthand and to help.

Nurse Katherine Lee* recognized that their physical presence to provide medical assistance is important, but the ongoing presence that Matheson provides is key to lasting hope. Matheson's physical presence, Lee said, has allowed him to listen and give comfort to the refugees, as well as to offer help and hope. She noted it makes a real difference in their lives.

"Giving to IMB is just one of the ways we can help," Lee said. "It is very important to support ... the local workers here. Without funding, they ... cannot stay here and build relationships..., and they cannot provide for their physical needs. They cannot provide for food or medicine or diapers or milk."

As more and more Syrians flee the violence, Matheson hopes he can help the refugees out of at least one aspect of the darkness in which they've been living.

"My aim is to move them from one level of understanding to another, building into their lives one brick of truth after one brick of truth until—by God's grace—the spirit of God (is) working in their lives," Matheson said.

Seizing this moment is critical, said Paul Tu,* pastor of Mandarin Church. "God is working definitely in this area in such a mysterious way, way beyond our understanding but yet God is working ... we must join God at His work and then take advantage of it ... and respond to it quickly."

Medical doctor Stephanie Lim* said, "We as churches in the United States, we're really blessed with a lot of resources that God has given us, and He has called us to help others who are in need as well. And there's a lot of local churches here who are meeting the demands, the needs of the Syrian refugees who cannot help themselves. They just have no resources, and the resources are being depleted because the need is so great. So, as Christians we are called, and we are responsible to help."

Matheson noted, "From the bottom of my heart, I thank Southern Baptists for giving to the Cooperative Program and the Lottie Moon Christmas (Offering) to keep us as workers ... on the field."

He added, "Yes, it's hard, (but) we're able to minister to their physical needs, showing the love of Christ in a practical way to these people and thus opening an opportunity for them to listen."

Matheson is providing tangible hope in

what may appear to many to be a hopeless place.

"My friend here asked me why we are doing all of this," Matheson said after he had explained to a refugee father and his family why the group from California had come.

Matheson told him there are 46,000 Southern Baptist churches with approximately 16 million people to lift "your

group, all the refugees and the people back in Syria, before the Father."

Matheson noted the man responded that if this many are going to lift them before the Father, it gives him hope.

Find resources for churches at imb.org to help promote the Lottie Moon offering. While Southern Baptists are encouraged to give to the offering through their churches, a "Give Now" option is available

for individual online gifts. (IMB)

*Name changed.

Editor's Note: The Week of Prayer, with the theme "Because of Who He Is" from Psalm 96:3 (HCSB), undergirds the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions. The offering, in tandem with Cooperative Program gifts from Southern Baptist churches, supports international workers in seeking to fulfill the Great Commission. This year's goal is \$175 million.

Syrian refugees finding help from WMU Foundation

By Caitlin Lea

Birmingham, Ala.—The Woman's Missionary Union Foundation is working with Arab Woman Today Ministries to help Syrian refugees currently living in Jordan. The number of refugees fleeing to Jordan has significantly increased in recent weeks.

The Jordanian government reports there are 1.5 million Syrian refugees currently living in Jordan, but only a small percentage resides in official refugee camps. Those who live outside of the camps are not eligible to receive food or

other assistance from the Jordanian government.

"Because of the increase in the number of refugees from Syria, we are seeing many families who are not being taken care of and have nowhere to turn," said Ruba Abbassi, founder and director of Arab Woman Today. "They need food, blankets and basic necessities."

The WMU Foundation has a long history of working with AWT.

"AWT is a trusted ministry partner," said David George, president of the WMU Foundation. "They have been sharing Christ's love in the Arab world

for many years, and this is an incredible opportunity to help these vulnerable families. The news media has recently picked up on the Syrian refugee issue, but AWT has been addressing this in Jordan for well over a year."

The WMU Foundation is asking people to provide a blanket for \$25, a heater for \$50, or a month's worth of food for a family for \$100. Gifts can be directed to the WMU Foundation's AWT Fund, 100 Missionary Ridge, Birmingham, AL 35242. Or, learn more by going to wmufoundation.com. (BP)

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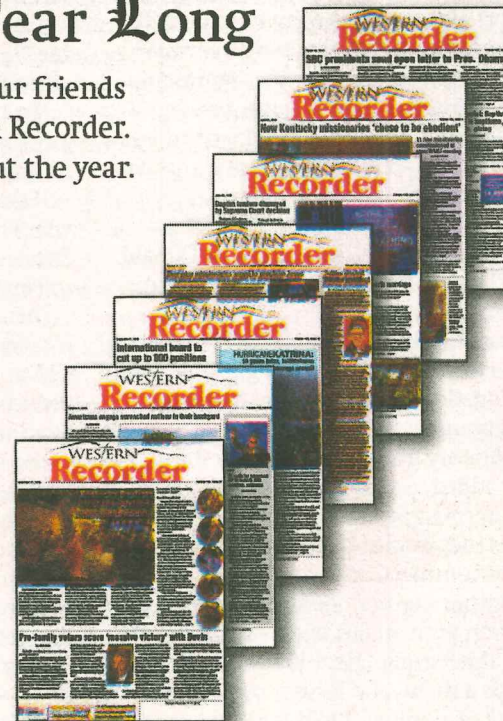
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WEEK OF PRAYER

Couple training Christian leaders amid 'ocean of idolatry'

By Kate Gregory

South Asia—Donald and Helen McKinneys' outreach to South Asians started in North America. They first got to know a South Asian people group in their church's backyard before becoming Christian workers on the other side of the world.

Helen and her Sunday School teacher from Trinity Baptist Church in Niskayuna, N.Y., began visiting the homes of the church's neighbors, several of whom were from South Asia. Each Thursday over tea, they formed friendships with the families, who showed them photos of family members in South Asia.

"The ladies would so welcome us, they were so lonely for their family," Helen recalled. The Thursday home visits turned into a weekly Bible study when they also swapped recipes and played with the children. A former school teacher, Helen gravitated to interacting with the children. Over the next 10 years, the Thursday class drew about 50 women each week.

"That really started in my heart a love for these people," Helen said of the South Asian people group she has served among. "They're so precious, so open to hearing the truth of God's word."

Donald was invited on a missions trip to South Asia while he was a professor and dean at Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary's Northeast Campus in Albany, N.Y. Year after year, the McKinneys spent their summers in South Asia, where Donald taught theology, outreach and leadership development to pastors who had started house churches in South Asia but had little access to pastoral training.

Most of the pastors were raised Hindu, which purports that "gods are in everything: nature, trees—not trees representing gods but that the trees are gods," Donald said. "They have a god for this and a god for that—one for prosperity, another for health, etc."

After deciding to devote his time to church leader development there, Donald said, "I was initially overwhelmed by this ocean of idolatry."

He visited Hindu temples to see how people worshipped, observing people offering food, flowers and incense to statues and praying to them. One evening, he saw a celebratory procession of a new statue being added to a temple. Devotees carried the flower-draped statue on their shoulders as they circled the temple, crying out, "God is coming! God is coming!"

Another night, Donald struck up a conversation with an electrical salesman praying at the temple. "He told me he worships 40 gods a night, and Jesus is one of them," Donald recounted. "I told him that wasn't good enough. Jesus needs to be the only one."

Overwhelming to Donald, in addition



to the number of gods that Hindus believe in, was the sheer number of people in the area.

There are 1.6 billion people living in this part of the world, and it has "the greatest concentration of lostness," Donald said. There are more unengaged, unreached people groups in South Asia than in the rest of the world combined.

One of the most rewarding yet humbling aspects of sharing the gospel in an unreached area is being the first one to tell someone about it, he said. When looking at someone absorbing the words of the gospel for the first time, Donald can see the person "listening to the power" of God's Word, curious to know more.

By the look on a man's face, "I know this guy's never heard this in his life. ... He has no idea how the story ends."

Donald, in contrast, started preaching when he was 14 at the church where his father was pastor, Calvary Baptist Church in Pensacola, Fla.

After serving as a pastor in Mississippi for nearly 17 years, Donald returned to Calvary Baptist to serve as pastor for four years before joining Mid-America Seminary's New York faculty.

He has used his pastoral experience and theological education to train South Asian church leaders how to share their testimonies and simple gospel messages, as well as how to form house churches and how to lead worship services and Bible studies in that setting.

The leaders are hungry "to grow and to know and to learn," said Donald, despite what it has cost them.

A former Hindu turned minister was told by his family, "You can either get rid of Jesus, or we're going to get rid of you."



Top, Helen McKinney* tells a Bible story to residents of a tent community, many of whom are beggars. Above, Donald McKinney,* prays alongside local pastors for two believers who have just been baptized in a small village church in South Asia. (*Name changed)

Donald noted. "I have to serve Christ," Donald said the man told his family, who kicked him out of the house.

"They closed his room and said don't come back, you're not welcome in this house anymore," Donald said. "If you're hungry, we don't intend to feed you. Don't call us if you're sick, we won't take care of you. As far as we're concerned, you don't exist anymore."

The pastor now goes village to village, preaching to a wide circle of 16 house churches. "What you give to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering helped me to

help him," Donald said. "He told me, 'What you teach me every month, I go home and I preach to all my churches, and I come back and I learn some more.' Thanks for helping him. It really matters."

"I see my brothers (in Christ) who are faithfully, steadily witnessing, seeing people saved, baptizing them and starting new churches," Donald said.

"I'm encouraged by the work of the Lord in the churches, by the work of the Holy Spirit to raise up young leaders, and I see many of them coming forward to do the work of the ministry." (IMB)

Former idol salesman plants network of house churches

By Kate Gregory

South Asia—Walk into a typical Hindu home in South Asia and lining its walls on at least one side will be a row of colorful, framed depictions of Hindu deities. In one corner of the main room will be an altar to the gods, with more pictures and figurines adorned with fresh-flower garlands.

David used to spend his days traveling from village to village near his home in South Asia to sell these pictures and figurines from his cart. He was proud of his mobile shop, and “I was proud of my Hindu gods and goddesses,” David recalled.

One day, a Christian minister approached him to talk about Jesus.

“I told him, ‘I have enough gods,’” David recalled. “I have my own gods and goddesses, I don’t need an extra god.”

The minister shared the gospel with David’s family. His father, mother and wife professed Jesus as Lord. But David refused to go to church or have anything to do with Christianity for three years.

Finally yielding to his wife’s requests for him to attend a church service with her, “the same day ... I decided to follow Jesus,” said David, who, like many of the Christians there, goes by a name from the

Bible instead of the name of a Hindu god he was given at birth.

The four Christian family members were baptized in a joint service. “Since then, the joy has been unspeakable and that obedience has made me to rejoice in the Lord every day,” David said.

As he began reading the Bible and praying, he realized “there are a lot of people perishing without Jesus ... my people ... so I need to share the gospel.”

Once going from town to town touting wares of countless Hindu gods, David now goes village to village planting house churches dedicated to the One True God. Among the four churches he has started, including one in his home town, there are 150-200 attendees. Sixty of them have been baptized—publicly forsaking all other gods and putting their faith in Jesus alone.

David doesn’t shy away from sharing the gospel in villages that others don’t or won’t. One village contains cases of leprosy. Another has been targeted by Hindu militants because dozens of villagers are joining the growing house church there.

The Christians there live in small tents “in the dirtiest area of their town,” said Donald McKinney,* who has provided pastoral and church planting training to



Donald McKinney* listens to children singing during a house church gathering in a small village in South Asia. (*Name changed)

Christian leaders there, including David. “They are despised, and they are very, very low in the social order.”

McKinney’s ministry partner, Nanjappa, who leads the church leader training program, helped the villagers start a microbusiness raising pigs in order to provide income for their families.

As villagers became Christians, they began tithing of what little they had to the house church. Believers stopped spending time getting drunk and began working

hard to make a go of raising pigs. The villagers built pens right next to their tents.

The impact of the gospel on one of the pig farmers was particularly pronounced. Now called Moses, the pig farmer was no longer known in the village as a drunk. He became a leader in the house church.

Area Hindu militants did not look favorably on the change in Moses, so they poisoned the pigs’ food or water. Nineteen pigs died—a loss of nearly one year’s income for the Christian families.

Instead of turning away from his belief, Moses “was encouraging others not to lose heart,” David said. “Even though it was such a loss, to focus on the Lord.”

“Let us follow Jesus,” Moses told them. The Christians were able to obtain more pigs to start again.

“Though they have less, they give,” David said of the villagers’ continued tithing. “If we say there is a need, they give. Sometimes if they cannot give cash, they give in kind (goods or services to help the congregation), and they are so happy to give.”

Contributions to the Cooperative Program and Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions have enabled McKinney to offer church leaders like David training, counsel and encouragement. (IMB)

Ways to support returning missionaries

By David Roach

Richmond, Va.—With the International Mission Board expecting hundreds of missionaries to leave their positions in the coming months, the board has published a list of ways individuals and churches can support field personnel returning to the U.S.

According to a Q&A posted on the IMB website and updated Nov. 18, at least 600 field personnel and stateside staff members are expected to resign as a result of a voluntary retirement incentive offered to all personnel 50 and older with five or more years of service and a subsequent “hand-raising opportunity” for all remaining personnel to indicate a call from God to pursue non-IMB ministry opportunities.

An undated document titled “Ways to Support Your Field Personnel as they Return to the U.S.” recommends that churches form “re-entry teams” to assist returning missionaries with practical services, friendship and prayer. Among the IMB’s suggestions:

- Let returning missionaries talk about their experiences. “Perhaps you could interview them during a worship service, invite them to lead a prayer time or share during Life Group or Sunday School times,” the document states.

- Be sensitive to culture shock as missionaries re-adjust to life in America. “Reconciling differences in the cultures, such as the materialism of the West as opposed to the poverty and suffering of developing cultures, can create stress,” according to the document.

- Give missionaries some breathing room while not neglecting to stay in touch with them. Guard against overwhelming them when they first arrive, then disappearing.

- Help them network with associational and state missions leaders who can connect them with ministry opportunities that fit their gifts and talents. Churches should prepare to recommend returning missionaries for ministry opportunities that suit them.

- Contact the IMB Member Care team at 804-620-3371 if returning missionaries seem to have needs that may necessitate professional direction and counsel.

- Be patient, recognizing that “anyone who has served cross-culturally needs time to adjust.”

Among other budget information noted in the Q&A update:

- The one-time payout to personnel who accept the VRI is estimated at \$23.1 million. In a November 2015 letter to trustees posted on the IMB website, President David Platt said that projection is based on the assumption 600-800 individuals will accept the retirement incentive.

- Personnel resigning as a result of the VRI are expected to save the IMB \$38.6 million in 2016. Factoring in the one-time payout, net savings are estimated at \$15.5 million for 2016.

- A projected 2016 budget deficit of \$22.58 million “is explained by one-time VRI costs” and will be covered from reserve funds.

- Proceeds from property sales were not factored into the 2016 budget. Any such proceeds “will be used to replenish and stabilize the organization’s reserves.”

The IMB estimated its total 2015 financial reserves at \$168 million, according to the 2015 CP ministry report it submitted to the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee.

- For 2016, the IMB has projected Lottie Moon Christmas Offering receipts “based on a historical projection of the past four years.”

In the past, the IMB has projected Lottie Moon receipts equivalent to the previous year’s offering goal, which at times has been higher than the amount received. For example, the 2015 SBC Annual listed 2015 and 2016 Lottie Moon income projections at \$175 million each—even though the 2014 offering totaled just over \$153 million and the 2013 offering totaled just over \$154 million. Platt told trustees in that projecting Lottie Moon income based on past receipts was a “key factor” in the 2016 budget.

“We have decided to project LMCO giving based on an historical projection of the past 4 years of LMCO giving rather than setting it equal to our stretch goal,” Platt wrote.

“We believe this better aligns our budgeted expenses with expected giving, while still leaving open the possibility that our actual LMCO giving may be much higher. We have estimated LMCO giving of \$151.8 million for 2016, which is \$23.2 million below our 2015 goal of \$175 million.”

The 2016 IMB operating budget of \$278,755,000 approved by trustees during their November meeting in New Orleans appeared to have been adjusted down by some \$26 million from the 2016 ministry costs estimated in the 2015 SBC Annual. (BP)

Franklin Graham echoes Trump’s anti-Muslim stance

By Bob Allen

Evangelist Franklin Graham says he agrees with presidential candidate Donald Trump’s proposal to bar Muslims from entering the United States, an idea Graham himself surfaced in July after the fatal shooting of four Marines in Chattanooga, Tenn.

“For some time I have been saying that Muslim immigration into the United States should be stopped until we can properly vet them or until the war with Islam is over,” Graham, head of both the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and the charity Samaritan’s Purse, said Dec. 9 on Facebook.

The son of revered evangelist Billy Graham said politicians like House Speaker Paul Ryan who are criticizing Trump “seem to be totally disconnected with reality.” Graham and Trump cited statistics from the Center for Security Policy claiming that 25 percent of Muslims in the U.S. believed violence against America was justified “as part of the global jihad.”

Graham posted on Facebook July 17 denouncing the death of four Marines and wounding of three others in attacks carried out “by a radical Muslim whose family was allowed to immigrate to this country from Kuwait.”

“We are under attack by Muslims at home and abroad,” Graham wrote in July. “We should stop all immigration of Muslims to the U.S. until this threat with Islam has been settled.”

“Every Muslim that comes into this country has the potential to be radicalized — and they do their killing to honor their religion and Muhammad,” he continued. “During World War 2, we didn’t allow Japanese to immigrate to America, nor did we allow Germans. Why are we allowing Muslims now?”

Trump’s proposal to temporarily close U.S. borders to Muslims was broadly condemned by evangelical leaders including the Southern Baptist Convention’s Russell Moore.

“I think it’s ridiculous, and insanity,” Moore said Dec. 9 on Fox News. “I frankly can’t believe we are having this conversation in 2015 in a presidential election.”

Moore, head of the SBC Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, penned an article about Trump’s plan Dec. 7 saying, “Anyone who cares an iota about religious liberty should denounce this reckless, demagogic rhetoric.”

With a combined salary of more than \$880,000, Graham is reportedly the highest-paid CEO of any international relief agency based in the U.S. Samaritan’s Purse, a Christian organization Graham has led since 1979, is currently processing shoebox gifts filled by volunteers for Operation Christmas Child.

Graham has a track record of criticizing Muslims, including blaming the 9/11 attacks on Islam and calling it a “wicked and evil religion.” (BNG)

Senate cuts federal Planned Parenthood funding, challenges Obama

By Tom Strode

Washington—The U.S. Senate passed a budget-related bill Dec. 3 that challenges President Obama to carry out his promised veto to protect, in part, the country's No. 1 abortion provider.

Senators voted 52-47 in a nearly party-line roll call for a reconciliation measure that cuts 80 to 90 percent of federal funds in the next year for the Planned Parenthood Federation of America and its affiliates. The legislation also repeals fundamental sections of the controversial 2010 health care law backed by the president and opposed by nearly all pro-life organizations.

The provisions prompted Obama to vow to veto the reconciliation bill if it reaches his desk.

Before it goes to the president, the legislation must return to the House of Representatives for approval. The Senate version approved Dec. 3 strengthened components related to the health care law included in the original measure passed by the House in October.

The votes by both houses to slash most of Planned Parenthood's federal funding provided a long-attempted breakthrough in Congress to hold accountable an

organization that performs more than 300,000 abortions a year, receives more than \$500 million from the government annually and continues to be plagued by scandal.

Planned Parenthood's latest black-eye—which fueled the current congressional defunding action—is this year's revelation through undercover videos it trades in baby body parts.

Pro-life leaders hailed the Senate's vote to slash money for PPFA in spite of their recognition the proposal will almost certainly die at the White House.

"This vote demonstrates that the conscience-shocking horror of Planned Parenthood's human piracy is still very fresh in the minds of lawmakers and their constituents," said Russell Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, in comments for Baptist Press. "While we still have far to go in the cause of life and human dignity for unborn babies and mothers, this vote is a step in the right direction."

Barrett Duke, the ERLC's vice president for public policy, told BP, "The recent revelations of (Planned Parenthood's) activity in aborting babies for their body parts has finally earned them the ire this vote

represents. God hears the screams of every one of these innocents. I am praying that President Obama will finally bring this horrific chapter in our nation's history to an end by signing this bill."

Marjorie Dannenfelser, president of the Susan B. Anthony List, praised the Senate vote as "a landmark victory for all who prioritize comprehensive women's health care over abortion industry profits."

Kellie Fiedorek, legal counsel for Alliance Defending Freedom, said the Senate "is right to recognize that taxpayer money should go to fund local community health centers, not to subsidize a scandal-ridden, billion-dollar abortion business. Americans shouldn't be forced to give their money (to PPFA)."

Pro-life advocates believe the reconciliation process—unsuccessful though it will likely be this year—could pay off in the future.

The debate regarding reconciliation "has continued the national conversation on Planned Parenthood and established an important precedent for the next administration," Dannenfelser said in a written statement. "If Americans elect a pro-life president next year, and safeguard our pro-life majorities in Congress, this bill—and many others—could be law by

2017."

Supporters of the effort to defund Planned Parenthood used the reconciliation process because it enabled the Senate to pass a budget-related measure without the need for 60 votes to overcome a filibuster.

The House had approved a different bill to defund PPFA in September, but the legislation was dead on arrival in the Senate because of the need for a super majority. In August, the Senate had fallen short on a defunding bill despite a 53-46 majority, because it failed to gain the 60 votes needed to invoke cloture, as it is known.

The legislation approved by the Senate does not name Planned Parenthood but specifies it prohibits funds to organizations and affiliates that receive federal and state Medicaid expenditures exceeding \$350 million annually. The bill does not eliminate those funds but redirects them to approved community health centers.

PPFA and its affiliates received more than \$528 million in government grants, contracts and reimbursements, according to its latest financial report (2013-14). Planned Parenthood affiliates performed more than 327,000 abortions during 2013. (BP)

Bevin's inaugural events

Continued from page 1
serving other people.

"Let's change the discourse. Let us treat one another in a way that rises above partisanship, because Kentucky is better than that," said Bevin, who also served as a U.S. Army captain. Remarking on how he prays for his children to have wisdom and courage, Bevin said he is now praying for Kentuckians to have those qualities as the state seeks a "fresh start."

The historic event also marked another kind of fresh start for Kentucky with the swearing in of the first African-American to hold statewide office, Lieutenant-Governor Jenean Hampton. Hampton was raised in the inner city of Detroit and compared her rise from poverty to political leadership to an astronaut launching into space. Like Bevin, Hampton is a military veteran, having served in the Air Force.

Bevin's evangelical convictions were made even clearer earlier in the morning with the worship service at the Frankfort Convention Center. York offered the welcoming remarks at the service, saying Bevin is "the governor of people of all faiths, or no faith, but he is unquestionably, openly, confessionally a man of deep faith, specifically a faith in Jesus Christ."

Beneath the undulated rhythms of election cycles and legislative sessions lies fixed a bedrock of human rights that have been endowed by the Creator," York said. "Among those is an absolute freedom of religious liberty that guarantees, wherever the pendulum of public opinion may presently swing, that any man or woman may choose to live out the convictions of conscience in the way of worship that expresses their heart of faith. In this, the first hours of the first day of a new administration, it is fitting and right to draw aside from the relentless pace and frenetic festivities of the day to acknowledge and worship the One who was granted those inalienable rights."

Bevin is a member of Louisville's

Southern Seminary President Albert Mohler Jr. (left) gives the invocation at the swearing-in ceremony for Gov. Matt Bevin (right, with first lady Glenna Bevin).



Southeast Christian Church, one of the nation's largest churches, and the service featured three of its pastors. In his message at the worship event, Bob Russell, Southeast's pastor emeritus, called for those in attendance at the worship to service to "make a pledge to pray for Matt (Bevin) every day." Russell said wisdom is the most important virtue in a leader and it is important for Kentucky's governor to know he has "God's people standing behind him, praying for him every day."

Prior to Russell's message, Southeast teaching pastor and bestselling author Kyle Idleman read to the audience Brittney Bevin's "dangerous prayer." Idleman said when he participated in the funeral of Bevin's eldest daughter 12 years ago, "the more I learned about Brittney, the more her life inspired me."

The prayer, recorded in Brittney's prayer journal shortly before her fatal accident, is displayed in the seminary's Bevin Center, which is named in her honor. It



Hershael York, Victor and Louise Lester Professor of Christian Preaching at Southern Seminary and pastor of Buck Run Baptist Church, gives the welcome at the inaugural worship service at the Frankfort Convention Center.

includes references to Brittney's aspiring missionary endeavors, saying: "Please fill me with your wisdom, that I won't just watch others suffer, but that I'll be able to say what they need to hear. As a new week approaches, my dangerous prayer is that you'll place brokenhearted people in my path and fill me with you so that I can let your love heal their pain."

At the official midnight swearing in ceremony preceding inaugural festivities, Bevin used Brittney's Bible opened to Micah 6:8. In the public ceremony, Bevin used a personal Bible he received from Glenna and Brittney. (SBTS)

Valley View's ministry trailer stolen, recovered

By Myriah Snyder

Louisville—Helping Hands Ministry's trailer filled with clothes, blankets and coats for the homeless was stolen from Valley View Baptist Church in southern Louisville.

It was later recovered, and Pastor Matt Morris believes that none of the items inside it were missing.

The thief cut through a fence and a lock to take the trailer out of the parking lot by the church's food pantry. While the trailer was missing, the church continued its ministry to hundreds of individuals living on the streets of Louisville.

Helping Hands serves dinner to the homeless on Monday nights, as well as distributes clothing items like those stolen in the trailer.

"We have people that come here that have addictions of all kinds, mental illness and they don't know how to survive."

"If it weren't for the donations, people giving jackets and hats and gloves, they wouldn't survive," a man who goes by "Army John" told WDRB news.

Before an arrest was made or the trailer was found, Morris told WDRB, "We don't know their circumstances but what we do know is we've already forgiven them."

On Dec. 3, a 31-year-old Louisville man was charged with stealing the trailer. (WR)

'God isn't fixing this' story draws Christian response

By Seth Brown

Cary, N.C.—Southern Baptist leaders are responding to the headline "God isn't fixing this" that dominated the Dec. 3 cover of the New York Daily News. Images of tweets from Republican leaders surrounded the headline, displaying sympathetic "thoughts and prayers" for the people affected by a Dec. 2 mass shooting.

"I'm hard-pressed to think of a more cynical and exploitative headline at a time of national mourning," Russell Moore, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, told the Washington Post.

The massacre occurred in San Bernardino, Calif., at Inland Regional Center, a state-run facility for individuals with developmental disabilities. Two heavily-armed assailants dressed in tactical attire opened fire at a party located inside the building, killing 14 and wounding 17 more, according to the Los Angeles Times.

GOP presidential candidate Sen. Ted Cruz responded through social media with words of encouragement shortly after the shooting was reported. "Our prayers are with the victims, their families, and the first responders in San Bernardino who willingly go into harm's way to save others," he said in a tweet.

But the subhead for the New York Daily News article, written by Rich Shapiro, called Cruz and others "cowards who could truly end gun scourge" that "continue to hide behind meaningless platitudes."

Shapiro wrote in the first line of the story, "Prayers aren't working," and quoted a tweet referring to gun control by Connecticut Sen. Chris Murphy, "Your 'thoughts' should be about steps to take to

stop this carnage. Your 'prayers' should be for forgiveness if you do nothing—again."

Emma Green, in an article for The Atlantic, called the sharp critique "prayer shaming." She said, "There's a clear claim being made here, and one with an edge: Democrats care about doing something and taking action while Republicans waste time offering meaningless prayers."

Green noted, "This cynicism offers a view into just how much religion and politics have changed in the United States."

Albert Mohler Jr., president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, addressed the issue in his podcast, The Briefing, Dec. 3.

He pointed out the oddity of a politically liberal news outlet demeaning Republican leaders for reacting to a tragedy by sharing "thoughts and prayers" since Democratic leaders, such as U.S. Vice President Joe Biden and Chelsea Clinton, daughter of Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, made similar statements only months ago after a mass shooting in Oregon.

Mohler declared, "It tells us something about our contemporary political scene and about the continued secularization of America that the words 'thoughts and prayers' have now become a matter of political debate."

Yet, the issue is not wholly political. "From a Christian perspective we have to understand that more than a response to the phrase 'thoughts and prayers' is at work here," Mohler said. "The New York Daily News after all, in that screaming headline, declared 'God isn't fixing this.' That is something Christians need to note very, very carefully."

There is a deep moral longing in all

people for the problems of this world to be solved, Mohler noted.

He continued, "Christians looking at this have to understand that nothing—no law, no political action—can actually solve the problem—can 'fix it,' as the New York Daily News demands—because the problem is in the human heart, not just in the events that come with horrifying headlines."

The insufficiency for governmental, educational, psychological and other solutions to truly fix the problem of human violence points to the necessity and propriety of prayer in the face of murderous evil, Mohler said.

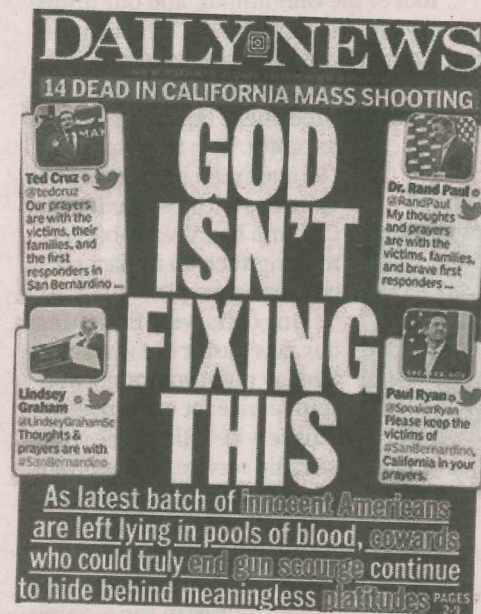
"(The Christian) reflex to prayer is not a matter of public gesture, it is a matter of heartfelt concern, or at least it certainly ought to be," he said. "We are both humbled and horrified from the biblical perspective in understanding the brokenness of the human heart that is reflected in the brokenness of the world."

Only God can, and one day will, "fix it," Mohler said. Yet, that doesn't preclude the necessity for Americans to have a meaningful discussion about gun control.

"(W)here there is the possibility of doing something that will really decrease the potential for human evil," he said, "we ought rightly to do it."

Moore said, "I have no objection to people making the case for tightened gun control—even if I don't agree with all their proposed solutions. Let's have that debate. ... The 'prayer-shaming' on social media, however, is not really about that debate at all."

"What most meant by 'do something'



was to, well, express an opinion about gun control on Twitter. Ironically, enough, the 'Don't Just Pray There, Do Something' meme will actually keep things from happening.

"We do believe that God can intervene, to comfort the hurting and even to energize ourselves and others for right action," he said. "For those who don't believe in the power of prayer, the last thing any of us should want is social pressure to pretend to pray. What we can expect, though, is for neighbors to express in whatever ways they have, 'We love one another, and we hurt for one another.'"

"When that becomes just another culture war battlefield, we've lost more than a set of policy proposals," he noted. "We've lost the social cohesion we need to do anything." (BP)

Megachurch boom rolls on, but big concerns are rising too

By Cathy Lynn Grossman

Change is coming to American megachurches—those behemoths for believers that now dot the religious landscape.

There are more participants in megachurch worship than ever.

"Last weekend 1 in 10 adults and children who went to a Protestant church went to a megachurch—about 5 million people," said Warren Bird, director of research for Leadership Network and co-author of a megachurch study released Wednesday.

But individual attendance is down to once or twice a month—or less.

"They think 'regular attendance' is 'I get there when I can,'" said the second co-author, sociologist Scott Thumma, director of the Hartford Institute for Religion Research. The study examines megachurches (2,000 people in weekend attendance is the basic qualifier) in comparison with other, smaller congregations.

"We found many of these large, successful congregations still have many of the same challenges of smaller congregations. They are not immune to the cultural dynamics in society," said Thumma.

"Everyone is trying to attract new people and hold on to them and make them disciples. But, today, people are seekers and shoppers looking for a temporary experience of worship, not a long-term commitment," said Thumma.

Megachurches, many launched a quarter century ago by baby boomers, now see slippage in the younger generations. Participation by millennials, ages 18-34, has flattened out at about 19 percent since 2010. But Gen-X attendees, ages 35-49, are drifting out the door—down from 28 percent in 2010 to 23 percent today.

The fickle, fast-moving faithful have prompted other changes.

Younger Churches Have Advantages but also Drawbacks

	Founded after 1990	Founded 1990 or earlier
Average growth rate over 5 years	91%	39%
% of 18-34 year olds in attendance	23%	16%
% of 35-49 year olds in attendance	29%	44%
Average pastor tenure in years	13	18
Weekend worship attendance	3369	3766
Member involvement	79%	83%
Giving per capita	\$1,368	\$1,865

Megachurches are still being built. Indeed, the study finds those established since 1990 are growing at more than double the rate of older megachurches. But the study, funded by the Beck Group, which builds megachurches, finds the new churches are constructed very differently.

Congregations are "getting bigger by getting smaller," said Bird. They're building smaller main sanctuaries (median down from 1,500 seats to 1,200 seats), but holding more services on more campuses.

Bird recounts a comment from Pastor Larry Osborne, who built North Coast Church in Vista, Calif. "A woman told him, 'I like your church because it's so much more intimate and personal.'"

She didn't realize North Coast Church serves 10,000 people in dozens of services—all with the same sermon but varying in worship styles and music—on four campuses, from a 40-acre plaza of worship settings in Vista to

a recast movie theater setting serving San Marcos/Escondido.

Five years ago, 46 percent of megachurches had multiple locations. Now it's 62 percent. And the number of sites bumped up, too—from an average of 2.5 sites to 3.5. Older megachurch congregations, such as North Coast, have a more diverse age range, higher member involvement in programming and \$500 more in per capita giving than big churches founded since 1990, the study finds.

The report, based on a survey of "key informants"—senior pastors or executive staff of congregations—also found a shift in how these churches describe their religious self-image.

Every year since Thumma and Bird began studying megachurches in 2000, the percentage that describe themselves as "evangelical" has gone up. Now, it's 71 percent, no matter what their denomination, said Bird.

About 40 percent of megachurches are nondenominational, and for those that do have ties, "it's not really a draw. God and Rick Warren know Saddleback Church is Southern Baptist," said Bird, but most people who worship there don't.

Most pastors said denominational ties were unimportant or not very important to their congregation.

What is increasingly important is service to others outside their own congregations.

Thumma said that "for a very long time, the focus of megachurch programming was inward—taking care of our own people. Now there's a huge shift to outreach: 43 percent said global missions were a specialty of their congregations, and 44 percent said one of their specialties was community service and helping those in need."

Worshippers care most, Bird said, "about finding a church that knows where it's going and what it's about. They like clarity of vision in a church." (RNS)

Cathy Lynn Grossman is senior national correspondent for RNS.

Love them to Jesus

Oneida Baptist Church sits at the foot of the OBI campus, and our ministry and the ministry of Oneida Baptist Church have had close ties down through the years. This local church recently hired one of our houseparents

This is Oneida



Larry Gritton

as pastor. This new pastor and OBI staff member already had close ties with the students of OBI, and has already been making such an impact on our young people.

One of the very first things our new pastor did was start a Sunday night voluntary worship service for our students. This service follows the adult worship service, and is often-times student-led. On a typical

night 25 to 50 will attend, but on a recent night in which pizza was involved, there were 180 in attendance. Food in our dormitories in the evening hours is at a real premium, so if you feed them, they will come. Once we get them there, we will love them to Jesus.

At one of these recent services, there was a great crowd that included many regular church attenders and also many OBI students and staff. Before the service began, one of our young men approached me and apologized for a recent mistake. Had he not apologized, I would have known nothing of the issue, and I was impressed by this unforced gesture of maturity.

After an opening hymn, our new pastor baptized four of our students who had given their hearts to Christ. One of our students then preached and brought a fine message on the family of God and God's love.

The Lord's Supper followed the message. I was blessed to see these new Christians participate. It was a great night of worship, fellowship and encouragement.

One of the biggest challenges we face today with our young people is apathy. It is difficult to make someone care about something if they don't already. If a young person doesn't want

to do well in school, keep a clean dorm room, get along with peers, or simply behave, it is a real challenge to help him or her overcome and improve.

That recent Sunday night service I have described was a reminder for me that young people do care, and when they find hope in Jesus Christ, their lives can and will change for the better. As a school or church, we oftentimes are averse to trying new things or ideas. People don't just come to church today because the doors of the church are open. We must find new ways to draw them in, and then love them to Jesus.

In our 116-year history, we have done many different things to draw young people to our campus, and we will continue to do so because it enables us to fulfill the Great Commission. Thank you for helping us love our kids to Jesus.

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.

Give to Lottie Moon

As I write my final article for 2015, I want to take this time to encourage each Kentucky Baptist to give to the

Clear Creek Chronicle



Donnie Fox

Lottie Moon Christmas Offering this year. Just like you, I was saddened by the recent news from the International Mission Board of plans to bring some missionaries home from the field because of a lack of finances.

One of the reasons I am so proud to be a part of the Kentucky Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention is the fact that we

emphasize the importance of giving cooperatively. I am proud of the fact that our missionaries in the Southern Baptist Convention do not have to be concerned about raising their own financial resources. They can focus on their ministry of sharing the gospel

and not have to be concerned with that aspect of their ministry.

Here at Clear Creek, we are constantly reminding our students about the importance of giving cooperatively. We always look for ways to share information with them about how they are on the receiving end of the cooperative spirit among Kentucky Baptists through gifts to the Cooperative Program and what that means for them at Clear Creek. Our desire is for them to learn the importance of cooperative giving while they are students here and then take that mindset with them as they leave here to serve in the local church wherever God plants them. For many of them, that is right here in Kentucky.

During this season of the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, we take another opportunity to present to our students how they can start their

cooperative giving right now. Each week in our chapel services, we highlight a video of different missionaries and ministries that the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering supports and we show it to our students. The videos really encourage them to give what they can now to help our missionaries.

I have personally been on the international mission field serving with some of our missionaries. I have observed how a lack of financial resources can be an obstacle for our missionaries to fulfill their ministry calling to the best of their ability when they do not have all the resources they need.

Please, give to Lottie Moon during this Christmas season.

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.

Giving appreciation

Many individuals are reviewing their charitable contributions at the year end and considering how they could provide additional gifts to their church and ministry causes. Perhaps you would like to make gifts above what you give out of income as tithes and offerings to provide on-going support to additional Baptist causes.

Ky. Baptist Foundation



Richard Carnes

One such way to achieve this giving is to use assets that have appreciated in value for making "above and beyond" gifts to support the Christian ministries that are important to you. If you have investment securities you have owned for more than a year that are worth more than the security cost, consider using this asset to make gifts.

Your deduction will actually be based on the full value of the security.

In addition, you will not owe capital gains tax that would normally be due on a sale of the security.

Using an appreciated asset to make a gift to your church or other Baptist cause can result in a lower after-tax cost to make your gift than if you use the same amount of cash to make the donation. Savings from the charitable deduction and the bypass of capital gains can be considerable. How much you save depends on your actual income and capital gains tax rates.

If you own investment securities that are now worth less than they cost, consider selling the security and give the cash proceeds. When you are able to deduct the amount of the loss as well as the gift amount, your deductions may well total more than the current value of the investment.

The process of making gifts of appreciated securities need not be complicated. If your financial advisor holds

the securities for your account, instruct that the security be electronically transferred to the financial account of the designated charity. This is often the most convenient way of making your gift.

When giving securities, including mutual funds, bonds, notes or mortgages, specific advice and instructions should be obtained from your financial advisor. Additional time should be allowed for completion of such gift transactions.

The Kentucky Baptist Foundation staff is honored to work with individuals seeking how best to make gifts of appreciated assets to their church and other Baptist causes. To learn more, you may 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.

KBC president names slate of committee chairs

Louisville—Kevin Smith, the newly elected president of the Kentucky Baptist Convention, has selected a new slate of committee chairmen to serve through next year.

Smith, teaching pastor at Highview Baptist Church in Louisville, was elected KBC president Nov. 10 at the 176th KBC Annual Meeting.

The Kentucky Baptist Convention committees chairs are:

■ Ron Andrew, Committee on Credentials, pastor at Elk Spring Valley Baptist Church in Monticello.

■ Joe Bufford, Committee on Committees, pastor at Hillcrest Baptist Church in Hopkinsville.

■ Travis Kaiser, Committee on the Annual Meeting, teaching pastor at Florence Baptist Church at Mt. Zion in Florence.

■ Mark Maynard, Committee on Constitution & Bylaws, member of Unity Baptist Church in Ashland.

■ Paul Strahan, Committee on Nominations, pastor at First Baptist Church of Owensboro.

■ Tommy Tapscott, Committee on Resolutions, associate pastor at First Baptist Church of East Bernstadt.

■ Neal Thornton, Committee on Public Affairs, pastor at First Baptist Church of Mount Vernon.

Chairing KBC Mission Board committees are:

■ Steve Bruce, business and finance committee, pastor at Crosswoods Baptist Church in Nicholasville.

■ Benita Decker, agencies & institutions committee, member of Farndale Baptist Church in Frankfort.

■ Andrew Dyer, evangelism and church planting committee, pastor at Corinth Baptist Church in London.

■ Adam Greenway, administrative committee, dean of the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Ministry at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville.

■ Steve Hussung, placement committee, pastor at Rich Pond Baptist Church in Bowling Green.

■ Brandt Lyon, church consulting and revitalization committee, pastor at Twelve Oaks Baptist Church in Paducah.

■ Jamaal Williams, missions mobilization committee, lead campus pastor at Sojourn Community Church in Louisville. (KBC)

Cadiz pastor called as Little River DOM

CADIZ—Little River Baptist Association has called Paxton Redd as director of missions.

Redd served as pastor of Oak Grove Baptist Church for five years before accepting the new position. Under his leadership, the Cadiz church experienced increased attendance and baptisms.

Redd has served as a member of the Kentucky Baptist Convention Mission Board and chair of the KBC Missions Mobilization Committee.

He previously served as minister of children and youth at Robinson Creek Baptist in Campbellsville and associate pastor of Liberty Point Baptist Church in Cadiz.

Redd is a 2014 graduate of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He and wife Chelsey have three daughters, Elli, 7, Lydia, 6 and Ada, 2. (KBC)

Sumners to retire, SBHLA begins search

Nashville—Bill Sumners, director of Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives since 1988, will retire from his post next July, he recently announced in a letter to the Council of Seminary Presidents, which governs the organization.

"It has been my pleasure and joy to serve in this position, in this place, for most of my career," Sumners told the CSP.

Since the 1997 reorganization of the Southern Baptist Convention, the SBHLA has been governed by the CSP, comprised of the six SBC seminary presidents. Albert Mohler Jr., president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, is also CSP president.

"We are very thankful for Bill Sumners for his many years of service to the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives," Mohler said. "He has been a key figure in bridging the Southern Baptist past to its present and future."

"We look forward to recognizing him in the months ahead for his service."

Mohler said the CSP is "now about the task of finding" Sumners' successor. As CSP president, Mohler will be "receiving all nominations for this very important post," he said.

Candidates for SBHLA director are required to have a graduate degree in librarianship, Baptist history or archival

studies, with a preference for certified archivists, Mohler said. Nominations will be received through Dec. 31, and can be mailed to: R. Albert Mohler Jr., President, Council of Seminary Presidents, 2825 Lexington Road, Louisville, KY 40280.

Sumners expressed his appreciation to the Council of Seminary Presidents for its support and encouragement through the years.

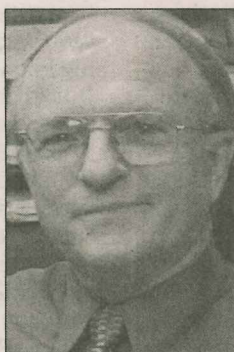
"You have let us do our work and championed our vital role in the life of the Southern Baptist Convention," he noted in his Sept. 21 letter to the CSP.

"I particularly want to thank Dr. Mohler for his foresight in his work with the Program and Structure Committee in placing the SBHLA under the management of the Council. I am

uncertain of our existence without his keen wisdom back in 1995."

Sumners said the SBHLA's "modest" collection in 1983 has grown to become the "largest, most diverse and most accessible collection of Baptist material in the world."

Established in 1938 as part of the Southern Baptist Historical Society, the SBHLA maintains thousands of books, Baptist associations' and state conventions' annuals, Baptist newspapers, histories of Baptist churches, archival records, and many other Baptist history resources in 10,000 square feet of office space in the SBC Building in Nashville. (BP)



Bill Sumners

Church donates reserve funds to IMB

By Jane Rodgers

Sulphur Springs, Texas—A small church in east Texas has made a sizeable gift to the International Mission Board, even though doing so meant sacrificing funds that could have been used for a permanent building.

Two years ago, Journey Baptist Church sold its building, a facility that was poorly located, with little parking and no room for growth. A purchase of 10 acres as a future building site followed, but constructing a new structure proved cost prohibitive, so church leaders were content to meet in temporary facilities until they were able to complete the project.

Upon hearing of the IMB's 2015 decision to reduce the numbers of staff and missionaries on the field, Journey church members set aside nearly a month in earnest prayer to decide how they could help, pastor Kyle Ray said.

"Our prayer focus was based on three truths or promises: (1) If we truly seek first God's kingdom, not our own, then he will take care of all these other things. (2) Are we going to believe it is better to give than receive? (3) Will we love our neighbors more than ourselves?" Ray said.

"During our season of prayer, a local man desiring to build a Christian ministry around Sulphur Springs contacted us about our using that ministry's building, (which is) expected to be completed within 18 months," Ray said. Information about the man's unsolicited offer was presented to the congregation at a meeting held in early October to determine the church's response to the IMB funding issues.

The congregation of about 60 members voted to give all of a special reserve fund, monies saved over and above operating funds, to the IMB—a sum of more than \$29,000.



Members of Journey Baptist Church walk among an unreached people group where they conducted eight mission trips.

Additionally, the church increased its Cooperative Program giving from 7 to 10 percent next year, with a commitment to increase it by 1 percent each year until they get to 15 percent.

While waiting on the new facility to become available, the church planned to continue meeting at a hotel, but Ray said the church discovered a better option.

"That week we were contacted by the pastor of First Baptist Church of Sulphur Springs who asked us, out of the blue, if we would be interested in meeting on Sunday mornings in that church's Recreation Outreach Center (ROC) facility," Ray said, calling the facility "one of the nicest buildings in town."

The move to the ROC facility will save Journey church a significant amount each month, and the building will be available to use until they move to their more permanent location.

"As we prayed about giving more to the IMB, the Lord has seemingly convinced our church family that we don't need to spend \$500,000 on a building when we can get along fine without one. He will take care of us and has proven to do so by providing two meeting locations (one temporary and one for more long-term use) for way less than we are paying now and way less than a mortgage plus expenses would be to own a building," Ray said. "It has been humbling to see God do so much." (BP)



*Christmas greetings
from Campbellsville*

As we approach the joyous time of the Christmas season and the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, all of us at Campbellsville University want to wish our alumni and friends a very Merry Christmas.

Campbellsville University is built on the strong foundation of Christian higher education. A superior academic program has been her hallmark through the years, coupled with a strong commitment of sharing the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ with our students and beyond.

Campbellsville remains the strong Christ-centered, church-connected university she has been for 110 years. Through our alumni, testimony after testimony can be heard about how the combination of academic excellence with a Christ-centered environment produces changed lives. Thousands of lives are impacting others in Christ's name through our alumni!

During our fall semester, CU had more than 3,500 students enrolled in classes, more than 100 decisions were made on campus to profess Christ as Lord and Savior, and a record number of students are involved in real world ministry and mission projects!

And faculty, staff, and coaches are leading the way to embody the love of Christ as we seek to create positive life changing opportunities for students who come to us from across Kentucky and 48 different nations!

We so appreciate our Kentucky Baptist churches as well as other Christ-centered ministries. Thank you for the many ways we work together to advance the Kingdom.



May God bless you at this wonderful time of the year as we each seek to be Christian servant leaders in a world that needs the love of Christ.

Dr. Michael V. Carter is in his 17th year as president of Campbellsville University.

Paid Advertisement

Defining success for young adults

Webster's defines success as "the favorable or prosperous termination of attempts or endeavors; the accomplishment of one's goals." With that definition I know that Jessie has reached success.

Jessie is a 21-year-old young lady who has a 4-year-old daughter. Jessie is in our VentureON independent living program. As a child, she endured a difficult divorce of her parents, relocation and then her mother's diagnosis of MS. The disease eventually took her mother's life. Jessie, along with her twin sister and handicapped sister, was taken into foster care where she was placed with a family that already had five children. Jessie was pregnant. For many of us, this is not a "path to success."

"...You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." Genesis 50:20

God has worked for good in Jessie's life. She is living independently with her daughter in their own apartment. She is attending college, working and raising her daughter—successfully. Jessie just finished her classes to become a Certified Nursing Assistant and will test for the certification next month. She will also begin classes to continue her goal of becoming a nurse.

She realizes the blessing of a good job. She works at the college. This job allows her the flexibility to work around her class schedule and still be home with her daughter on nights and weekends.

Jessie and her mentor talk daily to 'share life' together. She is prayed for daily, receives advice, comfort or "just someone to listen" from this relationship.

What really makes Jessie successful is her attitude. She believes she can. She is a full time mother, fulltime student, fulltime employee. She is also a sister, granddaughter and friend. To me, she is an inspiration.

While she has accomplished much, there is so much more she wants. She is taking driving lessons and saving for a car. She wants to finish school and move closer to her grandmother so that she may care for her. She wants a wonderful childhood for her daughter and hope for their future. I call that success!

Contact Sunrise Children's Services, P.O. Box 1429, Mount Washington, KY 40047-1429; (502) 538-1000; www.sunrise.org.





January

- 5 Power Lunch, Kentucky Baptist Building, Louisville.
- 8-9 Music Leadership Council, Kentucky Baptist Building, Louisville.
- 8-9 Tutoring Children and Youth Workshop, First Baptist Church, Williamsburg

MOUNTAINS TO THE MISSISSIPPI

COMPILED BY STAFF

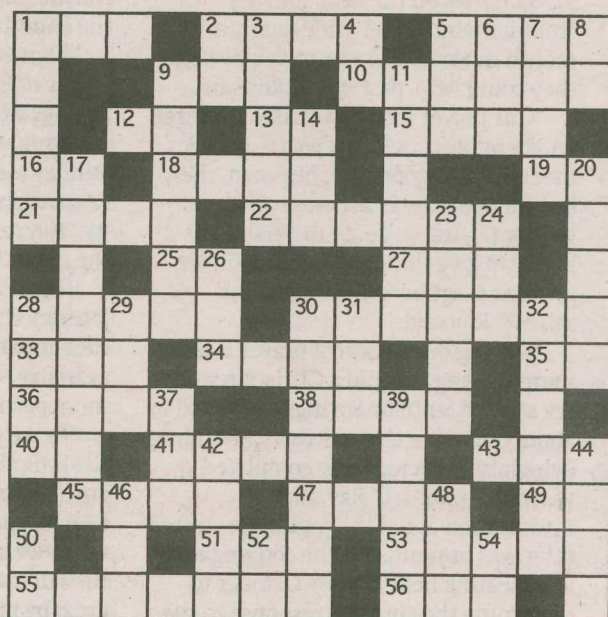
- HODGENVILLE** – First Church has called **Scott Williams** as associate pastor of family ministries. **Paul Richey** is pastor.
- LOUISVILLE** – Highland Park First Church will hold a Senior Fun & Games Night on Dec. 18 from 6-9 p.m.
- MAYFIELD** – New Life Church has changed its name to The Healing Place Baptist Church. **David Sassaman** is pastor.
- RICHMOND** – **Bradley Johns** has retired from Clarks-ville Church after serving 39 years as pastor and 59 years in pastoral ministry.
- SHELBYVILLE** – Highland Church will host **The Noblemen** in concert on Dec. 31 at 7 p.m. **Chris Platt** is pastor.

Got church news for the MTM section?
Email Karen.Martin@westernrecorder.org

Bible Crosswords

Across

- 1 "Behold I make all things ____" (Revelation 21:5)
- 2 "Praise him for his mighty ____" (Psalms 150:2)
- 5 Spheres or heavenly bodies
- 9 "Why make ye this ____ and weep?" (Mark 5:39)
- 10 "I will ____ a place for my people" (1 Chronicles 17:9)
- 12 Recreational vehicle, abbr.
- 13 "The kingdom of heaven is ____ hand" (Matthew 4:17)
- 15 "His teeth shall be set on ____" (Jeremiah 31:30)
- 16 Southeast, abbr.
- 18 Let ____ esteem other better than themselves (Philippians 2:3)
- 19 Registered nurse, abbr.
- 21 "____ so, come Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20)
- 22 "The Lord is my ____" (Hebrews 13:6)
- 25 "____ and prepare the Passover" (Luke 22:8)
- 27 "Adam called his wife's name ____" (Genesis 3:20)
- 28 "I send an ____ before thee" (Exodus 23:20)
- 30 "Be ____ to maintain good works" (Titus 3:8)
- 33 British Thermal Unit, abbr.
- 34 "By which it had gone down in the ____ of Ahaz" (2 Kings 20:11)
- 35 New York, abbr.
- 36 "Thou shalt bind this ____ of scarlet thread" (Joshua 2:18)
- 38 "For ____ are called but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14)
- 40 Education, abbr.
- 41 "He maketh them also to ____ like a calf" (Psalms 29:6)



By Joyce Handzo

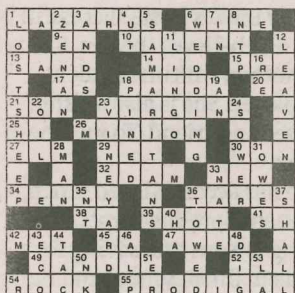
#052

- 43 "This is my beloved ____" (Matthew 17:5)
- 45 "His soul shall dwell at ____" (Psalms 25:13)
- 47 "Though an ____ should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear" (Psalms 27:3)
- 49 North America, abbr.
- 51 Professional, abbr.
- 53 A post erected by certain American Indians
- 55 A book of Psalms
- 56 A yearning
- 4:3
- 20 "They had but ____ set the watch" (Judges 7:19)
- 23 "____ perfect gift is from above" (James 1:17)
- 24 Referee, abbr.
- 26 "____ things are passed away" (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- 28 "He is ____ also to save them" (Hebrews 7:25)
- 29 A firearm
- 30 A synthetic gum used in medicine
- 31 Alabama, abbr.
- 32 "Woe is me! for I am ____" (Isaiah 6:5)
- 37 Curved shape
- 39 Vicious
- 42 "Neither was any thing ____ secret" (Mark 4:22)
- 44 "For there is none other ____" (Acts 4:12)
- 46 A king of Judah
- 48 Moses sprinkled the blood upon Aaron's great ____ (Exodus 29:20)
- 50 Associated Press, abbr.
- 52 A prefix meaning to do over
- 54 Tennessee, abbr.

Down

- 1 "This is the ____ that ye have heard" (1 Kings 1:45)
- 2 The year of our Lord, Lat. abbr.
- 3 A tutor or instructor
- 4 "I have not found ____ great faith" (Luke 7:9)
- 5 "The ____ number of them" (Numbers 3:48)
- 6 Worthless piece of cloth
- 7 "And he came and touched the ____" (Luke 7:14)
- 8 Shipping Note, abbr.
- 9 "____ not yourselves" (Romans 12:19)
- 11 "The plowman shall overtake the ____" (Amos 9:13)
- 14 Definite article
- 17 "For it was now ____" (Acts

#051



CLASSIFIED ADS

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: 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@tcatoneida.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 bbcpssc@yahoo.com.

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: 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.

SERVICE: JCA Media, LLC, well known in KBC. 20+ years' experience installing quality equipment at reasonable pricing. Let us help you enhance your worship experience. For information/references, visit www.jcamediaky.com or contact us at (270) 312-7492.

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 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: Crossings 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.

SEEKING: Edgewood Baptist Church, Nicholasville, KY is prayerfully seeking a full-time pastor. Send resume to edgewood@edgewoodbaptistchurch.com. Resume deadline is Jan. 31, 2016.

SEEKING: Jackson Grove Baptist Church in Bowling Green, Ky., is seeking a bi-vocational pastor with strong leadership skills to help the church connect with the community and communicate Christ clearly. The Church is strategically located just outside city limits with excellent facilities. Email resumes to hstewartbg@gmail.com or mail to: Jackson Grove Search, c/o Harold Stewart, 536 Detour Rd., Bowling Green, KY 42101-6501.

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

SEEKING: Unity Baptist Church in Ashland, Ky., is seeking a full-time minister of music to lead and coordinate an active ministry in a multi-generational church, utilizing a blended style of worship. Average attendance is 250-300. Send resume to Search Committee, P.O. Box 2286, Ashland, KY 41105.

FOR SALE: Roland AT-800 Atelier organ. The Atelier console organ featuring Roland's unique Supernatural technology and pipe organ sounds derived from Rodgers classic organs. \$3500 obo. Call 270-312-5375 for more information.

FOR SALE: Wickliffe First Baptist has a 1999 Ford Bus E-350 - 20 passenger - mileage 121,011. It is two tone, blue with silver and runs good. Sale price \$3,500. Call 270-335-3598 or 270-562-4097.

FOR SALE: Allen Organ Model 420T. Cabinet, pedals, keys in excellent condition. External speaker stack included. 32 note AGO pedal board and 27 stops. \$3,000 obo. Midway Baptist Church, Midway, Ky. 859-846-4514 or office@midwaybc.net

WESTERN Recorder + Your church newsletter
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Advent rediscovered by Southern Baptists

By David Roach

Nashville, Tenn.—Late preaching professor Calvin Miller once quipped to Christianity Today that many Southern Baptist churches “probably could hardly spell Advent” in the early 1990s.

Not so anymore.

LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention has published Advent devotional books and includes tips for observing Advent in at least two holiday magazines this year. North Carolina's Biblical Recorder newsjournal commends Advent to its readers, offering them a list of Advent resources. And Southern Baptist congregations across America light Advent candles weekly—many of them purchased from LifeWay.

So why the shift?

Church historian Stan Norman said Baptists have begun to see the usefulness of traditions once viewed as too liturgical or high church. Advent wreaths, calendars and readings “seem to provide a bit of structure in a tradition that has maybe gone too far without structure,” Norman, provost of Oklahoma Baptist University, told Baptist Press.

The focus on Christ inherent in Advent celebrations is needed “in a cultural context in which we are battered on every side to be diverted away from that,” Norman said.

Advent, derived from a Latin word meaning “coming,” refers to a four-week period of preparation in Western churches leading up to Christmas. For most believers who observe it, Advent is a time of reflecting on Jesus’ first coming and preparing for His second coming.

Advent origins

Advent became a recognized Christian festival in the sixth century, some 400 years after followers of Jesus began to celebrate Christmas, said Southern Baptist Theological Seminary professor Michael Haykin. He noted some evidence of fasting by believers in preparation for Christmas during the fourth century.

An Advent sermon preached by Pope Gregory the Great around A.D. 600 may be evidence Advent had gained



official recognition by then. The festival was a staple of the Christian calendar by the High Middle Ages (1000-1300), Haykin, a professor of church history and biblical spirituality, told BP.

Change came with the Protestant Reformation, when there was “a trimming of the calendar by all of the Protestants” in an effort to bring church activities in line with the instructions of Scripture, Haykin said.

Anglicans and Lutherans maintained Advent. Puritans—British and American Christians who sought to purify the Church of England in the 1500s and 1600s—believed churches should eliminate all worship practices without clear biblical warrant, and they included Advent in that category. In fact, they eliminated all Christian celebrations except the Lord’s Day.

Early Baptists, with many of their roots in Puritanism, “would have shared that sort of attitude,” Haykin said.

Not until the late 1700s did Baptists’ aversion to Christmas start to shift, with English pastor John Ryland, for example, preaching a Christmas sermon. By the mid-1800s, Baptists began to celebrate Christmas more broadly, Haykin and Norman said.

Basil Manly Jr., one of Southern Seminary’s founding professors, wrote in an 1867 letter that “a custom has sprung up, since the Civil War began, of having a Christmas tree.” London pastor Charles Spurgeon said in

an 1891 sermon that while “perhaps it is not right to have the birthday of Christ celebrated,” he would “say nothing, today, against festivities on that great birthday of Christ.”

Yet even as Christmas celebrations expanded among Baptists, Norman said, Advent remained unpopular, seen as a vestige of high church traditions, including Roman Catholicism. “Not until probably the middle of the 20th century did we see an openness to actual Advent being incorporated,” he said.

Among the early expressions of Advent’s blossoming was a 1965 Advent devotional book by R.L. Middleton published by the Baptist Sunday School Board, LifeWay’s precursor organization—though the book did not use the term Advent.

The flowering of Advent

Today’s proliferation of Advent observance may be part of a “pushback” against the contemporary worship movement, Norman said, as believers seek increased “solemnity” and “sobriety.” Haykin said Advent helps contemporary believers set themselves apart from a world that is more “hostile to the Christian faith” than the world of Puritans and early Baptists.

Allan Blume was one Baptist pastor to incorporate Advent into his Christmas celebration for the reason articulated by Haykin.

In 35 years of pastoral ministry, Blume found Advent was “a time to keep the focus on Jesus daily in the middle of a season that keeps drawing our attention to material items.”

For more than three decades now, Blume, now editor of the Biblical Recorder, has celebrated Advent with daily devotionals and candle lighting. In addition to enriching the Christmas celebration, Advent observance has created teaching moments.

Pastor Rhett Wilson of The Spring Church, a congregation in Laurens, S.C., had a similar experience.

“The Advent season can be a great time for families to celebrate Jesus Christ afresh,” Wilson wrote in LifeWay’s HomeLife. “Parents are wise to create opportunities for children to focus on Jesus amid all the holiday rush.” (BP)

Pastors bring church to NFL fans

By Nicole Kalil

Jacksonville, Fla.—Each Sunday during the fall, Christians all over America wrestle with this dilemma: Is it OK to miss church to go to the football game?

The struggle is real, but not for much longer in the Jacksonville metropolitan area.

On Dec. 13 at 11 a.m., tailgaters and ticket holders were able to enjoy a new worship experience called GameDay Church in the parking lot adjacent to Old St. Andrews Church before the Jacksonville Jaguars hosted the Indianapolis Colts at 1 p.m.

David Tarkington, lead pastor of First Baptist Church in Orange Park, said the idea to plant a church in the St. Andrews facility initially came to him several years ago, and his interest was renewed every time he attended a sporting event and saw the historic church.

This year, Tarkington reached out to the Jacksonville Historical Society, which maintains the facility and rents it out for events.

Josh Dryer, pastor of church planting at FBC Orange Park, is working with Tarkington to make GameDay Church a reality.

Dryer said as he and Tarkington began to dream up ways to further the Kingdom in Jacksonville, the vision for GameDay Church began to crystallize.

“The Lord is opening doors all around

us for the expansion of the Kingdom in places that we don’t normally look,” Dryer said. “We need to be available to be used by Him to reach those places.”

When Tarkington spoke to the director of the historical society, he was told he could rent the facility any time except during Jaguars home games.

“I told her that was the only time I really wanted it,” Tarkington said.

As he began to share his vision for the church, the director became intrigued and said she would work to accommodate his request.

Tarkington and Dryer continued to negotiate with the historical society and were able to arrange to hold GameDay Church in a high-traffic area adjacent to St. Andrews.

Tarkington said the Jaguars’ organization has been agreeable to the GameDay Church concept as part of its faith and family emphasis.

The team also has allowed GameDay Church to sell Jaguars tickets through a link on the church’s website.

“We may be the only church selling Jags tickets on our website,” he joked.

If the concept is successful, the Jaguars have indicated that GameDay Church could be a staple at all of next year’s home games.

“Jags leaders know there are many church attenders in our community,” Tarkington said.

He and Dryer hope to attract not only

church attenders, but their friends who might not be willing to go to a more traditional worship service.

“Some may already be believers who need a time to worship, and there may be those who love football, but might not love Jesus yet,” Dryer said.

Tarkington said it will be less like a typical church service and more like a “tailgate under a tent.” The “high-energy” service will feature music by Ascension Worship and a brief message by Tarkington, in addition to games and free food.

As part of the Jacksonville Baptist Association’s network of 200 churches, Tarkington said they will be able to connect people to churches near them no matter where they live.

If GameDay Church is successful, Tarkington and Dryer would like to see it not only continue in Jacksonville, but in other cities as well.

Both men are committed to partnering with like-minded churches in other markets that want to capitalize on the many fans who gather for football, baseball and soccer games all around the state and even the country.

“We’re a sports-crazy society,” Tarkington said. “I’d love to see other churches engaging people where they are and presenting the gospel in a clear way.” (BP)

Nicole Kalil is a reporter for the Florida Baptist Witness.

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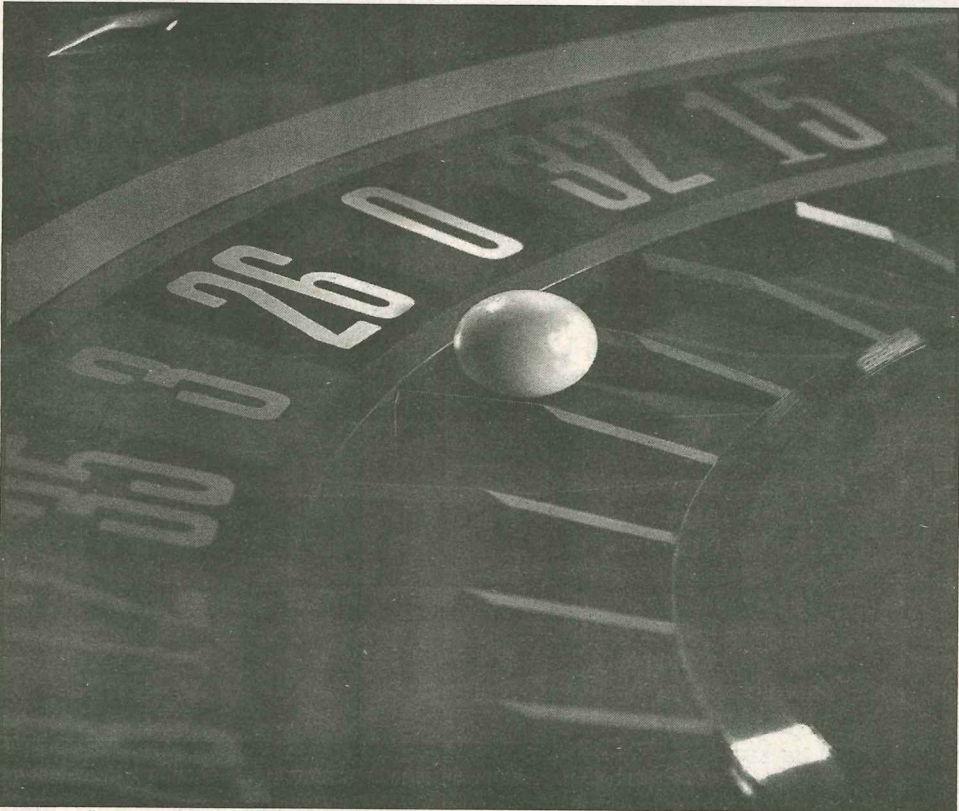
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CASINOS ARE NOT THE ANSWER

THE RESEARCH ON CASINOS

- Racing gamblers frequently cross over to play slots and other casino games, but casino gamers tend to stay in casinos.
- Casino gambling revenue typically supplies no more than 3% of state budgeting needs and state education needs.
- Most casino jobs are minimum wage positions, and the employed are at an increased risk for gambling addiction.
- Casinos contribute to increased social problems such as divorce, spouse and child abuse, and neglect.
- Proximity to a casino shows evidence of an increase in burglary, larceny, vandalism, and violence.
- Casinos typically drive down property values in their host communities.
- Local businesses lose consumer dollars to the casino, causing many of them to go out of business.
- The profit realized from operating a casino goes to the casino owners, who overwhelmingly are not Kentucky residents.

Kentucky League on Alcohol and Gambling Problems
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