

T E N N E S S E E ' S B A P T I S T & REFLECTOR

Volume 164 / Number 48

Statewide Edition

December 16, 1998

this week's news

- ▶ Gene Williams reports on fact-finding trip to areas hit by hurricane. — Page 3
- ▶ Wife of pastor in Bluff City waits for transplant. — Page 7
- ▶ State associations minister in different ways at Christmas. — See Pages 8-9
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In Honduras following hurricane

Minister leads community to help his countrymen

By Connie Davis
Baptist and Reflector

BROWNSVILLE — Mario Maldonado was very concerned when Hurricane Mitch struck Honduras Oct. 30 – Nov. 1.

Maldonado, associate pastor, Hispanics/missions, Brownsville Church here, grew up in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, and has family members there.

For days during the disaster, the only thing he and his wife could do for their countrymen was pray. They couldn't contact anyone by phone. Their only contact was a message on a telephone recording machine from Maldonado's brother-in-law who reported a major disaster was underway.

Maldonado went to church Sunday, Nov. 1, despite his anxiety. The Hispanic congregation of Brownsville Church, which he leads, was glad to get together to express their concerns. One other family of the congregation besides the Maldonados is from Honduras.

Anglo members of the church also were sensitive to the Hondurans because they have been accepted by the congregation and community,

Maldonado explained, along with the other members of the Hispanic congregation.

As media reports began to reveal the extent of the destruction on Monday, the church's benevolence committee, led by Jan Yates, met with Maldonado. The committee decided the church should begin collecting items for the victims.

A huge task

Maldonado finally learned his family and his wife's family had been spared, but many friends had died and many people were homeless.

He called some Tennessee friends at Bellevue Church, Cordova, who had served in Honduras several times and had led a group of members to minister there this past year. The Tennesseans agreed they must collect items for the victims and try to find ways to transport them.

Maldonado kept in contact with family and friends in Honduras to learn the needs of



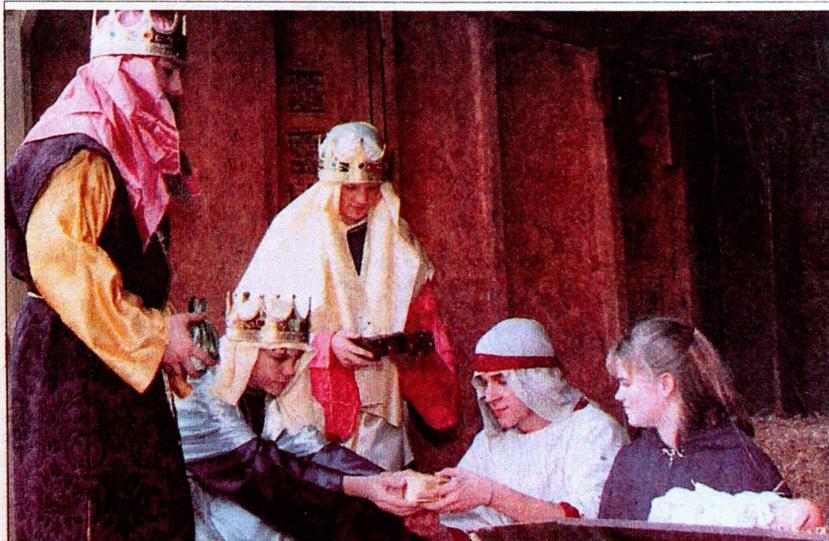
PREPARING A BOX of relief items to be sent to Honduras are, from left, Mario Maldonado, associate pastor, Hispanics/missions, Brownsville Church; Roniann Cox, member, benevolence committee of the church; and Robert Connerley, pastor.

storm victims and the protocol for sending relief. His contacts included a cousin who was a close friend of the president of Honduras. And Maldonado called the office of the president's wife since she is in charge of benevolence in Honduras. Maldonado received a fax just two hours later with the needed permit and a per-

sonal note from the first lady. She told him she originally was from Tennessee.

Within a few days, Maldonado learned Bellevue members had collected many items and had arranged for a jet which was part of the fleet of the Federal Express Company based in Memphis to transport — See Minister, page 6

Baptist and Reflector staff wishes readers a happy holiday season



YOUTH FROM Tulip Grove Church, Old Hickory, portray events surrounding the birth of Jesus during a holiday Open House at Woodcock Memorial Church, Nashville, Dec. 6. Tulip Grove Church helps Woodcock Church, which ministers in the inner city. The youth are, from left, H.G. Wood, Kenny Stephens, Robbie Stephens, Andy Sutherland, and Kristin Ulmer.

The staff of the *Baptist and Reflector* — Lonnie Wilkey, Connie Davis, Susie Edwards, Mary Nimmo, and Betty Williams — is thankful for the privilege of communicating with our readers during 1998.

We are proud to be part of Tennessee's only Baptist newsjournal which reaches about 53,000 readers. And we are proud of the great work of Tennessee Baptists during 1998, which we had the privilege of reporting.

The staff wishes you a blessed Christmas and many opportunities for you to experience God during 1999.

This issue of the *Baptist and Reflector* is the last of 1998. It contains Sunday School lessons and partnership prayer requests through December. The next issue will be dated Jan. 6. *B&R*

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- **Publisher** - Tennessee Baptist Convention Executive Board
- **Convention Communications Committee**: Mattie Mullins, chairman; Benny Keck, vice chairman; Randall Cummings, Pat Fife, Jerry Legg, Mark Mangrum, Wallace McGill, Bill Parks, Vern Powers, Glenda Roach, Michael Smith, Joseph Sorah, Thomas Vinson, Ambers Wilson
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- FAX** - (615) 371-2080
- E-mail** - 70420.63@CompuServe.com
- **Membership** - Southern Baptist Press Association
- **Postmaster** - Periodical postage paid at Brentwood and at additional mailing office. (USPS 041-780) POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Baptist and Reflector*, P.O. Box 728, Brentwood, TN 37024.
- **Frequency of issue** - The paper is published weekly except for the weeks of Christmas, New Year's, Fourth of July, and Labor Day.

Printed on recycled paper

Tennessee volunteers weather storm on St. Kitts

By Marcia Knox
For Baptist and Reflector

BRENTWOOD — Tennessee Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers weathered a second storm Nov. 28 on the island of St. Kitts following severe rains, which wreaked havoc on a church they were repairing that was damaged by Hurricane Georges in September.

Herb Adams, team leader and member of First Church, Alamo, is dealing with the second phase of disaster recovery at Mt. Carmel Church in Bourryeau Village on St. Kitts. He will direct Disaster Relief operations there until Dec. 21. He has been on the island since the first week of November directing relief efforts for hurricane victims. He is now coordinating a second wave of teams following flooding of the repaired church.



ADAMS

Adams reported several deaths in the area from the Nov. 28-29 rainstorm, which flooded the church basement, sent mud into nearby homes, and took businesses into the ocean. The church was previously repaired Nov. 14-28 by

Disaster Relief volunteers: Ronnie Snoderly, a member of Dotson Memorial Church, Maryville, and Curt Fowler, a member of West Lonsdale Church, Knoxville. Another volunteer Bob Jones, a member of Woodbury Church, Woodbury, served on the island November 10-19.

"When we left Nov. 28, the sky was overcast and it had already started to rain," said Snoderly. Heavy rain continued through the next day.

The resulting storm caused more destruction on the island. Adams said it was the worst thing that he had ever seen.

In addition to the loss of life and destruction, Adams was concerned about the new materials that had been taken to the job sites and wondered if they had weathered the storm, Snoderly reported. Two more Disaster Relief teams were scheduled to arrive the following week in St. Kitts.

Half the houses in the community were destroyed by the initial hurricane which included a new house under construction for Kelvin Jones, pastor of Mt. Carmel Church. Some of the team rebuilt the church rafters, roof, and repaired two church members' homes. The team stayed in the church basement and on the porch of a church family's home.



WORKING ON A ROOF in St. Paul Village, St. Kitts, are Tennessee Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers Ronnie Snoderly, left, member of Dotson Memorial Church, Maryville, and Curt Fowler, member of West Lonsdale Church, Knoxville.

"The church is ministering to its members that at one point held three services on Sunday," Fowler said. "The hurricane not only reduced their services to one service on Sunday, but the storm also resulted in a 82 percent reduction in the offering."

"Building repairs were slow due to weather changes, lack of volunteers, and materials," said Jones, who reroofed two different houses, one in Lodge Village and another in St. Paul Village.

"It rained at least two to three times a day which created problems while working on roof repairs that had to be constantly covered up with tarps."

According to Jones, the people on the island cannot afford to buy the building materials to fix their homes, and some materials are being supplied in containers from the Southern Baptist International Mission Board. With more damage in the area, more volunteers and materials are needed, Jones said.

"People were very thankful for our help on the island," he said.

"The people saw our work as a witness through the Baptist churches and as an outreach ministry to the communities and to the church members.

"We set the example of brotherly love." ■

TBC's Weathersby to join NOBTS faculty

By Debbie Moore
For Baptist Press

BRENTWOOD — Kenneth B. Weathersby has been elected associate professor of church planting at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and is the first African American pastor the seminary has appointed to a full-time faculty position.

Weathersby also will be director of the seminary's Cecil B. Day Center for Church Planting and direct the Nehemiah Project, a five-year partnership agreement between the Southern Baptist Convention's North American Mission Board and NOBTS. NAMB's Nehemiah Project seeks to bring about a dramatically higher percentage of seminary students graduating to become church planters across the United States.

Weathersby currently is evangelism specialist and team leader for evangelism strategies for the Tennessee Baptist Convention, where he has worked since 1993. He also was director of the TBC's black church extension and multi-

housing office for four years.

Before moving to Tennessee, Weathersby was a church planter and pastor in several states.

Weathersby will begin his duties at NOBTS, effective Feb. 1, 1999. He will work through the Tennessee State Evangelism Conference to be held Jan. 17-18 in Nashville.

Weathersby was elected Dec. 8 during the semi-annual session of the NOBTS trustee executive committee. In his position with the Nehemiah Project, he also will be a fully appointed missionary with NAMB.

"The appointment of Ken Weathersby to be both a professor and director for New Orleans Seminary's Nehemiah Project and center for church planting is a strong affirmation of the wide diversity of gifted leadership within the SBC as God continues to bring key leaders into strategic places as part of a continent-

wide church-planting movement," said Richard Harris, NAMB's vice president for church planting.

"Ken Weathersby has been a tremendous worker with us," said Larry Kirk, leader of the TBC Evangelism/Missions Strategies Group.

"He took church extension to the highest level possible and also served tremendously in the area of evangelism," Kirk said.

Kirk observed Weathersby has been a role model for the African American community and leadership. "He has a passion for the work."

TBC Executive Director James M. Porch echoed Kirk's sentiments. "We appreciate greatly the work Ken Weathersby has done for Tennessee Baptists and wish him the very best in his new endeavors."

Porch said resumes and recommendations for a new evangelism specialist are now being accepted and should be sent to the TBC Human Resources Office, P.O. Box 728, Brentwood, TN 37024. ■ — B&R Editor Lonnie Wilkey contributed to this article.



WEATHERSBY

Discipleship 2000 Forums Scheduled

For Baptist and Reflector

BRENTWOOD — Discipleship 2000 Forums are planned for January and February across the state.

Leaders from bivocational, small, medium, and large churches will share what they are doing in their churches to make disciples. This one-of-a-kind meeting will take place in five locations throughout the state from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. each day, according to Jerry Chapman, Discipleship coordinator for the Tennessee Baptist Convention.

Dates and sites are:

Jan. 26 — Baptist Center, Brentwood

Jan. 28 — Englewood Church, Jackson

Feb. 8 — Tri-Cities Church, Johnson City

Feb. 9 — Wallace Memorial Church, Knoxville

Feb. 11 — Red Bank Church, Chattanooga.

There is no fee or registration. For more information, call Chapman at 1-800-558-2090, ext. 7932. ■

Williams describes needs in Central America

By Lonnie Wilkey
Baptist and Reflector

BRENTWOOD — Reports of devastation in Central America have not been exaggerated, said Gene Williams, adult specialist in Baptist Men's Ministries for the TBC Executive Board.

Williams was part of a five-member assessment team that toured Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala Dec. 1-11. The team included Disaster Relief officials from Tennessee, Texas, and North Carolina, along with Mickey Caison of the North American Mission Board and Bill Cashion of the International Mission Board.

All four countries received extensive damage from flooding related to Hurricane Mitch, Williams reported. Honduras seemed to be the hardest hit, he said. In Honduras, for example, the country received a year's equivalent of rain in only six days, Williams said.

Entire communities were wiped out. Even mountain areas were not spared as landslides occurred.

Response will be divided into three levels, Williams said.

The first is growth areas where churches already are established and are self-sufficient. Relief help there will result in stronger churches with little missionary involvement, he said.

The second target is outreach communities where there are churches, though they may not be strong. Result of work there will be to strengthen existing churches.

The main focal point, Williams said, will be target communities where there is no evangelical witness. The goal is to plant seeds which will result ultimately in a church.

Plans are still on the drawing board, Williams said. He noted NAMB and IMB will sponsor a meeting in January for Disaster Relief officials from states interested in long-term recovery efforts.

The four countries have been divided into 10 areas.

Tennessee Baptist Disaster Relief Director Tim Bearden said Tennessee Disaster Relief will explore the possibility of

accepting one of those areas.

Williams observed the people in Central America are resourceful. "They are rebounding so well. They have a community spirit and are sharing their limited resources with each other," he noted.

Williams stressed that among the victims of the disaster are the local pastors and missionaries.

The pastors, some of whom lost their homes and occupations (many are bivocational and work in agriculture), have thrown themselves into counseling and helping those in their communities, Williams related.

Also, he added, the missionaries have spent the last month ministering to victims in every possible way.

While the immediate response stage of Disaster Relief is ending, long-term response is expected to take two years, Williams said.

The best way Tennessee Baptists can help now is with financial contributions, Williams stressed. To date, more than \$60,000 has been received for relief work in Cen-

tral America, Bearden said.

Williams said response will be geared around the ultimate goal of planting new churches and sharing the Gospel of Christ.

He noted Cashion of the IMB told the team: "If we operate solely out of need, it will burn you out. If we operate out of God's glory, that will spur us on."

Williams related that one medical doctor told of a patient who had lost everything — home, business, clothes. The doctor asked the patient if he could get everything back, would he be happy.

The man told the doctor, "No, because I still wouldn't have anybody to love me."

"We are there to provide that love," Williams said.

Tennessee Baptists interest-



IMB MISSIONARY Jimmy Egar talks to a hurricane victim in Nicaragua in the Nueva Vida Barrio. — Photo by Gene Williams.

ed in donating to the relief effort may send contributions marked "General Disaster Relief" or "Hurricane Mitch" to TBC Disaster Relief Office, P.O. Box 728, Brentwood, TN 37024. ■

Tennesseans provide food, medicine to Hondurans

By Wally Poor
For Baptist and Reflector

CHOLUTECA, Honduras — The prospects for a Merry Christmas in Honduras are dim.

The ravages of Hurricane Mitch are still too fresh for that. Many have lost family. More are homeless and lost all their material possessions. Illness, much induced by post trauma stress and unsanitary conditions, is rampant.

Into this somber situation, a dozen volunteers from Tennessee, have done their part in the past week (Dec. 5-11) to minister to the hurting population.

Eight joined four other volunteers from Virginia and Alaba-

ma to give sorely needed medical attention to between 1,000 and 1,500 persons.

They worked in the department (state) of Choluteca, one of Honduras' hardest hit regions.

Five other Tennesseans worked with other Baptist volunteers to unload and distribute 300,000 pounds of food in Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras.

The group was led by Bill Currington of Roseberry Church, Mascot. Other team members included Currington's wife, Joyce; Bethany Irvin of Grace Church, Tullahoma; Bob Stephenson, First Church, Hendersonville; and Keith Lyle of Central Church, Johnson City.

In Choluteca, two and one-

half hours south of Tegucigalpa by bus, the medical volunteers were led by Dr. Roy Renfrow of Nashville. Other Tennessee Baptists who conducted three two-day medical clinics in Baptist churches with a daily average of about 250 patients, are the following: Hilda Cobb and Gene Elliott, both of First Church, Fairview; Judy Jackson, Faith Church of Bartlett; Brenda Hebert, Knob Creek Church, Columbia; Alvin Word, First Church, Cleveland; and Jean Quinn of First Canaan Baptist Church of Palmyra.

The group was organized by retired SBC missionary Harold Hurst who served in Honduras nearly three decades.

"A lot of the symptoms we're seeing date back two months to when the hurricane came through," said Renfrow, who has made numerous medical volunteer trips to Latin America. "The sore muscles, headaches, back aches, stomach aches, all that dates right back to the time of the hurricane. The stress that has one effect on one person will have a different effect on another person, you see. The mind and the body is all connected but all minds and all bodies don't react in the same way."

The Hondurans had reason to be stressed. In Barrio Providencia, in the outskirts of the city of Choluteca, Pastor Renee Dario Carranza, his family, and 24 other persons were trapped by fast-rising flood waters for 15 hours on the roof of the pastor's home.

In Santa Cruz, which is three

and one-half miles from the river, the 3,000 residents of the town fled in neck high water at night to a sugar cane factory. Some didn't make it.

"I'll never forget one mother I talked to yesterday," said Judy Jackson. "She had six children and lost four of them."

Jackson, president of the Baptist Nursing Fellowship of Tennessee, said many mothers report their children are having nightmares.

On the last two days, the group went to the remote mountain town of Santo Domingo, where little medical attention had yet reached.

The group was guided to the neediest areas by Pastor Eduardo Garcia of First Baptist Church, Choluteca.

"The great need now is for people to be able to rebuild their houses. They can work but they do not have the financial resources to buy cement blocks and roofing to put up a basic house," he said. He estimated materials for such a house would cost about \$1,500. More than 1,000 homes were lost in the area, he said.

Incidence of malaria in the area is up.

The people, mostly employed in cutting sugar cane, which is now destroyed, are destitute.

"Today in *Mission Mosaic* the devotional was about shepherds, who were the lowest people in Jesus' time, being the first to be told of his birth," Brenda Hebert said. "Maybe if he came today, the Hondurans would be the first to know." ■

Fairview volunteers serve as translators

By Betty Poor
For Baptist and Reflector

CHOLUTECA, Honduras — When Tennessee medical volunteers came to minister in this hurricane-ravaged country, they brought two of their Spanish-speaking translators with them, who also hail from Tennessee.

One was Gene Elliott of First Church, Fairview, a retired graphic designer from the Baptist Sunday School Board, now LifeWay Christian Resources. He studied Spanish twice a week for six years as the board prepared to increase publication of Spanish-speaking materials.

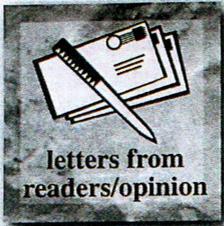
The other translator was Hilda Cobb, a native Honduran who has been a U.S. citizen for 16 years. She, too, is a member of First Church, where she and Elliott help teach a Spanish-speaking Sunday School class for Hispanics.

In Honduras they described each patient's symptoms to doctors and then explained the dosage for free medicines or other treatment to the patients. Because they could speak their language they were also able to witness to the Hondurans.

Elliott was thrilled to be able to use his acquired language for the Lord's service as was Cobb. "I have had many opportunities to share the Gospel," she said. ■



PEDIATRIC NURSE Judy Jackson of Faith Church, Bartlett, listens to the heartbeat of a Honduran child during a medical clinic at the Baptist church in Santa Cruz. — Photo by Betty Poor



letters from readers/opinion

about letters

- > Make it concise, no more than 250 words. Letters may be edited for length.
- > Name may be withheld for sufficient reason. Include address and phone number.
- > Avoid personal attacks on the character or integrity of anyone.
- > Send original copy. Form letters and 'open' letters will not be published.
- > Only one letter in a three-months period per writer will be published.
- > If letter does not conform, it will be returned.
- > Opinions and ideas expressed in letters are not necessarily shared by the Baptist and Reflector and its staff.

just for today

by Fred Wood, pastor emeritus, Eudora Church,



Start with a smile

Charlie to Tim: "If you knew exactly when and where you would die, what would you do?" Tim: "I'd spend my last dollar the day before I died." Charlie to Carl: "What would you do?" Carl: "That's easy. I wouldn't show up."

Take this truth

Most of us avoid responsibility when we can. Yet accepting and discharging it is the one thing that brings maturity. One wise man said, "When your shoulders are carrying responsibility, there isn't any room for chips." Most people grow under responsibility — but some only swell! Those who enjoy responsibility usually get it. Those who merely like exercising authority usually lose it.

Memorize this Scripture

"For we will all stand before God's judgment seat ... give an account ... to God." — Romans 14: 10, 12

Pray this prayer

"Lord, help me to realize the final chapter in my life is when I meet God." ■

Wood can be e-mailed at docfred1@Juno.com

Perplexed Baptist

I am a perplexed Baptist. I grew up in a church whose members reflected the wide spectrum of theological understanding which has been characteristic of Baptists who believe that God speaks directly to each of us and that we do not require an interpreter other than the Holy Spirit. This is broadly reflected in our doctrine and polity. Each church member has a direct relationship to God and a duty to interpret God's will and to speak on the direction of the church. The pastor and church staff have no less or more responsibility.

I am perplexed by what I heard at the TBC in Kingsport and since which reflects an idea that, absent uniformity in a particular understanding, one cannot be a part of the fellowship. As a trustee of Carson-Newman, I am perplexed that people who oppose the action of the trustees do not give the trustees credence for having sought and tried to follow what they understand to be God's will. Followers of Christ cannot reflect an attitude that "if you don't agree with me you are wrong." None of us have got it all right. Theology is no exact science. Trying to follow

God's will is an awesome responsibility.

Carson-Newman will stay true to its distinctive Baptist heritage. Carson-Newman is known by its fruits. The trustees acted to try to preserve these values which place Christ first.

T. Maxfield Bahner
Chattanooga 37402

Rush for power

Baylor, Carson-Newman, where-ever, and when-ever, the clerics rush for power.

Self-perpetuation of trustees destroys a carefully planned succession procedure.

Colleges will suffer from these decisions which are fundamentally unsound. Self-perpetuation will cause problems similar to genetic difficulties created by family inbreeding.

Later, perhaps too late, the trustees will realize that the self-perpetuation decision developed from persons with shallow perspectives.

Bill Pope
Chattanooga 37443

Let trustees do job

Well over 12 years ago we became a part of the Carson-New-

man/Jefferson City community and the fellowship of First Church. As pastor of that wonderful congregation for over nine years, I had the privilege of becoming quite involved in many of the activities of the school, and Diane and I found great joy in close relationships with quite a number of those on the faculty, in the administration, and in the student body. We can honestly say we have never known a finer group of Christians anywhere — nor do we know of any college in America doing a better job at creating a quality educational experience while seeking to be thoroughly Christian and desiring to be openly identified with the family of faith called Baptists.

I have served as a trustee in two Baptist institutions. We know from personal experience and from long hours of deliberation as a trustee that it is much easier to present a tightly controlled conformity and indoctrination than it is to creatively construct a community of faith marked by Christ-like love, acceptance, grace, prayer, and inner discipline.

Cordell Maddox continues to give superb leadership to the school, with vision and energy.

Note from editor

Letters printed this week are all that have been received on the Carson-Newman matter through Dec. 11. Both sides have been presented in the letters forum in recent weeks. Unless new developments arise, no additional letters on this subject will be printed. — Lonnie Wilkey

The faculty goes to great lengths not only to be prepared professors but also to be genuinely caring friends to the students.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could all celebrate this reality seen and experienced up close by many of us rather than fuss over the fiction that some see and hear at a distance? Why not rejoice in a positive relationship with a college that existed long before the TBC and allow these fine trustees that are knowledgeable, caring, and thoroughly Christian to do their job with integrity?

Moncrief "Monty" Jordan
Talbot 37877

Foundation president offers end of year tax strategies

By William L. "Bo" Childs

Christmas tree lots are popping up everywhere, decorations are lighting homes and businesses, Christmas is just a few days away, and a new year is just around the corner.

A new tax year will begin Jan. 1, 1999. However, there are still actions you may take to save tax dollars for the year 1998. I receive tax newsletters and updates frequently suggesting the following strategies:

> **Contribute to your IRA, SEP, or KEOUGH Plan.** If you do not have an IRA, establish one. These contributions may be taken in addition to your standard deduction or itemized deductions. Earnings accumulate tax-free. Determine if the new Roth IRA would be of benefit to you.

> **Maximize contributions to your 401 (K) or 403 (B) retirement plan.** These plans are great because additions are with pre-tax dollars and they grow tax deferred. I call compound interest

the eighth wonder of the world.

> **Bunch tax deductible expenses.** Many itemized deductions are subject to limitations or phaseouts which reduce or eliminate their benefit. By claiming (paying) several deductible expenses in one tax year you may be able to exceed the applicable floor.

> **Pay off non-deductible interest.** Maximize your interest deduction by paying off non-deductible (such as credit cards and personal loans) with money from a deductible class such as a home equity loan.

> **Give to charity.** The income tax code has always encouraged charitable giving by allowing a full deduction, subject to adjusted gross income limitations, as long as you itemize deductions. Giving to your church and other charities is one way to reduce your taxes and benefit others. There are tremendous tax benefits to giving appre-

ciated property such as stocks and real property.

> **Claim all of the exemptions to which you are entitled.** Along with your immediate family, you may be able to claim other relatives (parents, nieces, nephews) if you support them.

> **Maximize new education incentives, credits, and deductions.** Beginning this year you may be eligible to claim the Hope Credit or Lifetime Learning Credit and to deduct student loan interest. A new education IRA is available. If your adjusted gross income is below \$150,000 (\$95,000 for singles) you may make a \$500 maximum annual contribution. The contribution is not deductible. However, withdrawals are tax-free if used to pay for the recipient's post-secondary education expenses.

> **Consult a professional tax preparer.** The tax law is complicated and you will need a professional.

Tax planning is a year-round, ongoing process. ■ — Childs is president of the Tennessee Baptist Foundation.



CHILDS

Church of the Covered Dish

By Thom Tapp, pastor, Oral Church, Lenoir City

I JUST DON'T GET IT! WHAT'S THE REAL MEANING OF CHRISTMAS?



IT'S THE BIRTHDAY OF JESUS... HE WAS BORN ABOUT 2000 YEARS AGO...



BECAUSE OF HIM, WE HAVE CHRISTIANITY... AND CHURCHES!



THAT EXPLAINS IT... I ALWAYS WONDERED HOW CHURCH GOT MIXED UP WITH CHRISTMAS!



©1998 Thom Tapp - e-mail: ttapp@bellco.net

Christmas is coming — go, tell the Good News

By Lonnie Wilkey, editor

There is something special about the Christmas season. And it's not the gifts and good food (lots of it) that go along with it.

Christmas is the time Christians celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

One of my favorite Christmas hymns is "Go, Tell It On the Mountain."

The chorus of that popular hymn, which is found in *The Baptist Hymnal*, is a constant reminder of what we, as Christians, should be doing every day of the year, not just at Christmas:

The chorus reads: "Go, tell it on the mountain, Over the hills and everywhere; Go tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born!"

Churches all over Tennessee are busy with Christmas musicals, dramas, and other productions. Many are doing special ministry-related activities. On pages 8-9 of this issue are a story and photos of how associations in Tennessee are ministering in a variety of ways.

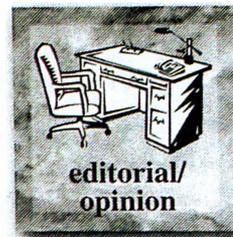
Whether it is the Christmas story presented in music or drama, a toy store, food baskets, clothing drives, or whatever, each and every activity has an underlying theme — to share the Good News of the coming of Jesus Christ and, more importantly, why he came. Through a



ministry such as a toy store or food basket, churches meet human needs and, thus, earn the right to tell people they do it because of the love of Jesus Christ.

Relating the Christmas story should be the major emphasis of every Tennessee Baptist during this holiday season.

We need to be telling the Good News of Jesus Christ throughout our great state. Share how people can come to know Jesus as personal Lord and Savior. Tennessee Baptists — go and tell the Good News. It is worthy of our best effort. *B&R*



Partnership Prayer Requests December

- 16 — Pray for the Tennessee Disaster Relief volunteers who are working on the island of St. Kitts as they help rebuild homes and lives.
- 17 — Pray for IMB missionaries Pam and Keith Travis who serve in the area of San Rafael de Guapiles in Costa Rica.
- 18 — Pray for the Tennessee/Portugal partnership which is set to begin in 2000.
- 19 — Pray for Patrick Binns, the premier of Prince Edward Island, Canada, as he governs the province which needs unity among ministries and denominations.
- 20 — Pray for IMB missionaries Bill and Linda Egbert who work in the South Zone of Costa Rica. Ask God to bless them as they work with IMB missionaries Doug and Trisha Bagby to lead a Bible study in Coto 47.
- 21 — Pray for Jonanias Soares de Menezes, chairman of the Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, simultaneous crusade and citywide revival in May 1999.
- 22 — Pray for George Fountain, new president of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan.
- 23 — Pray for Russell MacLellan, premier of Nova Scotia, Canada, as he works with the families of the victims of the Swissair crash.
- 24 — Praise God for the recent annual meeting of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan.
- 25 — Pray for the evangelistic efforts at the Irazu Volcano in Costa Rica.
- 26 — Pray for Christians across Canada to work together to present the Gospel to their nation and the world.
- 27 — Pray for the Michigan convention's commitment to soul winning.
- 28 — Pray for the Costa Rica Mission as they seek to implement the "New Directions" from the IMB.
- 29 — Pray for the staff and ministries of the Michigan convention.
- 30 — Pray for Christians to mobilize in prayer for spiritual awakening in Canada.
- 31 — Pray for Gary MacManamy, evangelism ministry associate in Michigan.

For some, holiday season is not so joyous

families matter

by Paul Barkley, counselor, educator, pastor



As I write this, the words of one of my clients rings in my ear. She is facing some of the most devastating events that one could imagine and still trying to give her young child a good Christmas. "I feel bad," she observed, "because this is supposed to be a happy time."

Many look around at this time of year and see all the hustle and bustle of the season, the faces of the shoppers looking for just the right present, the smiles, the laughs, the happy songs, and everyone seems to be having a great time. Maybe we go back in our minds to that Christmas when every-

thing was great and we know that we will never forget how happy we were then. For many, the Christmas season is a "set-up" that they do to themselves chasing the illusive, flitting butterfly of happiness.

Instead of feeling happy, merry, and jovial, many find the season produces feelings of hollow loneliness, haunting memories, and helplessness of the tyranny of time. The layoffs in some industries, hospitalization of relatives, emotional disappointment of let down by family members, grief over that special person who is not here this year, frustration because of lack of employment advancement, and the list is endless.

There is an acronym used by Alcoholics Anonymous and other self-help, 12-step groups to help each other take better care of themselves. HALT reminds them not to let themselves get

too Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired.

I have a one-track mind. When I have my mind on a project or task, I may even forget to eat. I usually then get real hungry, so when I do eat, I eat everything that doesn't crawl off the table before I can get it. I have also noticed that when I do not eat regularly I am more likely to get down emotionally. It is important to remind ourselves to eat sensibly and regularly during the holidays.

Despite popular idealization, the holidays are a wonderful time to nurse grudges, especially with family members. We have stockpiled and catalogued the slights and slams of different family members so that the expected reunion for the holidays brings visions of revenge or at least avoidance. Most of us will have as good a time with people as

we make up our mind to have. The holidays provide a good time for "truces" not only in international conflicts, but in family feuds.

Even if you can't get "home for the holidays," why not make up your mind to spend the time with someone — maybe a co-worker's family, church group, social group, or somebody. Many need to make themselves go. Others of us might think of those who don't have any place to go for the holidays and invite them to our house.

One of the biggest contributors to holiday depression is physical exhaustion. Don't try to do too much. Billy Hanks taught me a valuable lesson Years ago in a book on daily devotionals. He said, "The most spiritual thing you can do when you are tired is REST!"

I wish for you and your family a happy and holy holiday season. ■

Communication Services Group unwraps holiday spirit

making Christ known

by Eleanor Yarborough, Executive Board



As the Christmas holidays approach, the Communication Services Group of the Tennessee Baptist Convention wants to extend our warmest greetings and best wishes for a blessed Christmas to all Tennessee Baptists. Furthermore, we thank you for the comments and suggestions so many of you have shared with us during the past year. Your ideas and feedback have helped shaped the many publications, services, and products produced by the group.

You can be assured that meeting your needs for accurate, up-to-date information in an easily accessible form is our

most important objective. Dr. James Porch, executive director-treasurer, has stated that convention staff is "here to serve you." We hope you will experience the truth behind his words in everything we do. The men and women who are a part of this group are committed to serving the communication needs of all Tennessee Baptists.

Communication Services has as its mission the responsibility of creating a positive awareness of the resources and services provided by the Tennessee Baptist Convention through a proactive, responsive, coordinated program of communications, activities, and relationships.

This entails providing focused communications which facilitates effective teamwork with the churches and associations of Tennessee.

To salute this wonderful season of thanksgiving and cel-

ebration, the Communication Services Group is excited to have this opportunity to remind and inform you about an array of "gifts" available for your ministry and church needs.

These include the *TBC Resource Directory*, produced annually for church leaders statewide; *Green Light*, a bimonthly, four-color promotional magazine; the *TBC Web site* (www.tnbaptist.org); the *Convention-elected Leadership Directory*; the *TBC Journal*; the *Calendar of Events and Activities*; the *Pocket Calendar and Directory*; *Highlights* (a quarterly newsletter on the ministries of the TBC); the *TBC annual meeting promotion*, printed materials, and graphics; and a variety of other publications designed for specific target groups.

Never before have Tennessee Baptists had access to such a broad range of up-to-

Rockwood church grows from about 20 members

By Connie Davis
Baptist and Reflector

ROCKWOOD — A few years ago the congregation of White's Creek Church here endured a traumatic period.

The highway which ran beside the church facility was widened so the members had to plan for a new building, watch their building be torn down, and then rebuild.

As members tried to make the many decisions needed during that period, consensus among the members often was difficult to reach. As a result, members left White's Creek Church. At one point, the number of members was so small they considered closing the church.

Two years ago, Roger Britton accepted the call to serve the congregation as pastor.

On his first Sunday, 12 people attended Sunday School and 32 were present for the morning worship service. And those totals included the four members of the Britton family.

But in the last two years, the expectations of White's Creek Church members have improved dramatically. Today about 60 people gather for Sunday School and about 90 attend Sunday morning worship. In fact, if the congregation grows much more, it will outgrow its educational space.

Just two years ago

When Britton began serving White's Creek Church, he was struck by the incongruity of the small number of members meeting in a new facility which was large enough for a medi-

um sized church.

But he wasn't sure he was up to leading a congregation facing so many challenges.

Britton said he realized most of the members had worked through the traumatic period, but he would need to help some accept it and move on. Then he would need to lead the members to grasp a vision to reach people not attending church so the congregation could grow.

He would have a very limited number of hours in which to do this work. Britton is a bivocational pastor. He holds a full-time job as a senior computer analyst at a large insurance company in Chattanooga.

Finally, although Britton had served as a bivocational minister for almost 20 years, this was his first service as pastor of a church.

Fun events for children

During the first few months of his tenure, Kathy Britton, Roger's wife and partner in the ministry, planned several events. One was an Easter Party.

Members promoted it by distributing flyers to homes in the rural area. This was hard work because of the distances members had to travel to visit very many homes, but about 150 peo-



VISITING WITH a long-time member of White's Creek Church, Lela Roddy, center, is Kathy Britton, left, and Roger Britton, pastor. Roddy leads missions activities, including Woman's Missionary Union, at the church. — Photo by Connie Davis

ple attended, Kathy Britton reported.

A good result of such efforts was that children were drawn to the church. Initially, the two young children of the Brittons were the only ones attending church activities.

Another good result of these activities was to remind adult Christians of the fun they can have in Christian fellowship, noted Kathy Britton.

Witnessing in neighborhoods

As members distributed flyers for these events and others, they got to know people and some church members witnessed to people, reported Roger Britton.

One day when Britton was distributing an announcement, he met a man working on his truck outside his home. Britton visited with him and discovered the man had lived there for 20 years



but no one from the church had ever visited him.

Britton said although he realized the man was drinking alcohol, he continued to talk with him. Britton was encouraged when the man admitted he was drinking.

The man, Buddy Poland, began attending White's Creek and became a Christian. He has made a tremendous impact on the congregation and community, reported the Brittons. And many of Poland's family members have become Christians and joined the church.

The future

The Brittons report they have instituted another fellowship time in the church. A covered dish meal is held in conjunction with every service in which a person is baptized. Because of the number of people being baptized, almost every worship service is followed by a meal.

A common joke here is that the deacons are going to have to buy chlorine for the baptismal because of the constant use.

"It's busy for me because I have a day job, but it's worth it," said Roger Britton. **B&R**

Minister leads community to help his countrymen ...

— Continued from page 1
relief items to Honduras.

Soon an 18-wheel tractor trailer filled with relief items was on its way from here to Memphis. Several weeks later another one followed, once again filled with items which would be added to what had been collected in Memphis. Within weeks, two plane loads of relief items from Tennesseans had arrived in Honduras.

Of course, the Cordova church, which has 18,500 resident members, led the effort. But Brownsville Church, which has about 400 each Sunday morning in worship along with 60 in the Hispanic congregation, participated.

Members led an effort which resulted in 30,000 lbs. of items given to Hondurans and \$13,000 to Baptist pastors who will help victims.

Visiting home

Accompanying the second shipment were Maldonado, who could serve as a translator, other members of Brownsville Church, and members of Bellevue Church. The team members were Bill Presley and Mel Cox of Brownsville Church and Scottie Shows and Steve Tucker of Bellevue Church.

Maldonado will never forget what he saw in the city where he grew up.

Not only were buildings destroyed, but the topography was so altered by rampaging torrents of water that it was hard to identify sites, he described. Maldonado saw hills which had collapsed, burying houses and their residents.

Central Church, Tegucigalpa, his home church, was gutted — only the outside walls remained. Maldonado's father, Vicente, served as pastor of the church while he was director of the Baptist seminary there. Thankfully most of the seminary buildings were only damaged,

Maldonado added. Brownsville Church will lead a team to repair the seminary facility and minister to hurricane victims in Honduras Feb. 4-11.

Sorrow

The visit is still difficult for Maldonado to recall.

A pastor showed him a list of members and their whereabouts. Several family names had question marks beside them, which meant they were missing. Since the storm had struck almost four weeks earlier, the families were certainly dead, Maldonado observed, but the pastor was in denial.

Another victim he met was a teenager. She was standing on the remaining portion of a hill on the skirts of Tegucigalpa. British soldiers were searching for bodies there. Although the girl showed no emotion, she told Maldonado that six of her classmates had lived on the hill and presumably were buried as the storm blew houses and part of the hill down.

"That poor girl will need help," said Maldonado, noting the emotional and long-term effects of such a disaster.

The 11,000 people reported missing are certainly dead, said Maldonado. And about one million residents of Hon-

duras are homeless.

Following the trip Maldonado went through the hardest period of his life, he explained.

"Being away is harder sometimes," he said.

He realizes he can do more to help his countrymen from the United States, as one Honduran pastor reassured him, but he has mixed feelings.

"I know they are suffering (as he would be if he were there), but being away is hard."

Thanks

Maldonado feels a great sense of gratitude to the Brownsville community, especially the Brownsville Church, for helping his countrymen.

"The people here have so great a heart. I feel like it really has been a blessing from God to be here in Brownsville."

Except for a gift of towels from an area company, everything else given here to hurricane victims was from individuals, noted Maldonado.

The church is still collecting items and will try to make other shipments to Honduras. For information on this effort or the Feb. 5-12 project in Tegucigalpa, contact Maldonado at the church at (901) 772-9753 or at mario@pchnet.com. **B&R**



HOMELESS PEOPLE in Tegucigalpa make a home in a classroom of a school. Eleven families were living in this room. All schools have been closed and transformed into shelters for the homeless, which number about one million. — Photo by Mario Maldonado

Maintains focus on needs of others

Bluff City pastor, wife wait for transplant

By Lonnie Wilkey
Baptist and Reflector

KINGSPORT — Always the pastor's wife, Kay Christian spent the first weekend in December praying and showing concern for a family she did not even know.

The family had lost a loved one who happened to be the donor of a pancreas that Kay Christian desperately needed.

Unfortunately, she had a positive reaction to the donor's blood and has returned to her home here, waiting for the next call which will take her and her husband, Bill, bivocational pastor of New Life Church, Bluff City, back to the University of Maryland Medical Center in Baltimore where she will have not only a pancreas transplant, but a kidney

transplant as well. Because of the seriousness of her condition she has been classified as a "top priority" which means she will be tested for every pancreas that becomes available.

The kidney donor happens to be her husband, Bill, which they say is highly unusual.

Less than 3 percent of spouses are matches for a kidney transplant, said Bill Christian, who also is in management with Eastman Chemical Company. "Our doctors were shocked."

The fact he will donate her kidney is significant for both. "With our relationship as special as it is, the fact he is my donor makes it even more special," Kay Christian said.

Her husband noted that the scars Jesus bears from the

'Courage in Ministry' series

The series "Courage in Ministry" continues in this issue. These articles consider ministers and family members who continue ministry during extreme trials in their lives. *B&R*

cross are love scars. "The scars that I will have will be the same," he said.

Kay Christian suffers from hypoglycemia (a condition where the blood sugar gets low and can be life-threatening) and has been a diabetic for 30 years. She has had surgery for an eye disease and has kidney disease which caused the need for a transplant.

As if that were not enough to deal with, they have two children (Amber and Adena) who have had a history of medical problems including cerebral palsy.

"We've encountered a few pressures over the years," Bill Christian acknowledged.

"But the Lord has been very faithful," he is quick to add.

They noted they have lived by the saying, "This too shall pass."

"Tomorrow holds fresh new promises," he said.

Kay Christian said only one time in her life has she asked God "Why?"

It happened when their 18-month old daughter (Amber, now 21 years old and married)

was diagnosed with cerebral palsy. "We didn't know how she would progress. At that point I asked God "why?" she said.

She noted that shortly afterwards as she was doing the dishes with tears streaming down her face, God spoke to her and told her he had entrusted her to bear that burden and responsibility.

"I have never asked why again," she said.

The couple keep their minds off their problems by concentrating on the needs of others.

Christian observed that his wife is a magnet for someone hurting. "God uses her to minister to others," he said.

His wife noted that because of her illnesses and those of her children she has spent countless hours at the hospital and physician offices.

"God has put me in people's paths that otherwise I would not have been," she said.

"I try to be positive and have a smile on my face. I laugh and talk with those in the doctor's office.

"I decided one day to use my illness as a ministry. ... I have tried to bring glory to the Lord."

"Only Heavenly records will record how many people Kay has touched," her husband noted.

Through the long transplant process and even before the couple have been supported mightily by the congregation at New Life, the two agreed.

"They have prayed for us and have been with us every step of the way," they said.

Bill Christian is convinced God has brought good out of



his wife's illness.

He noted he has grown in his faith through his wife's illness. "It's not always easy and there are days when I struggle," he admitted. "But my overall outlook is very positive."

The Christians' struggles have also impacted the congregation at New Life Church. "Our church has learned the value of prayer.

"As we ran into roadblocks along the way our church prayed and they have seen how God has removed those roadblocks," the pastor said.

He also believes that couples in the church have been drawn closer together as they watched their pastor and his wife deal with their situation.

Their medical history also has brought their family closer together and has taught the girls that people sometimes have to face some tough experiences in life.

The key is that "when you have Christ in your life, you can face anything," Bill Christian affirmed.

The family also has learned to view each day as a gift from God.

"We embrace each day as positive and view it as a gift," Bill Christian said.

"We don't live for tomorrow because there is no promise of it — certainly in our family," he added.

"We've learned to capture the day." ■



BILL AND KAY CHRISTIAN relax together at New Life Church in Bluff City where he serves as bivocational pastor.

New LifeWay bookstore at Union named after trustee

By Nedra Kanavel
For Baptist and Reflector

JACKSON — LifeWay Christian Resources' only bookstore on a college campus will reside in Edward P. Hammons Hall, after a Dec. 4 vote by Union University trustees to name the building after the late Edward P. Hammons of Forrest City, Ark.

Hammons, a trustee and member of the board's executive committee and a major donor of Union, died suddenly of DIC syndrome Dec. 5.

"Dr. Edward P. Hammons was a man with a Kingdom of God agenda," said Union President David S. Dockery.

"He lived his life for the good of others and was generous with his time and resources for the cause of Christian higher education in particular and nu-

merous other benevolent causes," Dockery said.

In 1997 Hammons established Union's first endowed chair, The O.P. and Evalyn Hammons Chair of Pre-Medical Studies, and the Hammons Endowed Scholarship Fund.

Union and LifeWay broke ground on the new building last September and is expected to open the store this summer.

The LifeWay store will occupy the first level of the building while the second story will provide classroom and office space for Union.

During the trustee meeting Union also launched construction of its west campus. The ceremony was the result of the university's Campus Master Plan which will expand Union's campus west of its present site. ■

Problems continue for Tazewell church

By Cathy Casper
Special to Baptist and Reflector

TAZEWELL — For members of Mount Pleasant Missionary Church in Cumberland Gap Association, there seems to be no end to the problems which have plagued them since October when their water turned muddy and they discovered cracks in the concrete of their church and structural damage. Church members who still are not sure how and when the damage occurred assumed it was from the blasting being done to make way for a new four-lane highway.

After several conversations between the construction company thought to be responsible, a meeting was set up between the two parties.

According to Rufus Cook, youth director at the church, three different teams of geologists, structural engineers, and geographical specialists hired by the company or their insurance company visited the church and a sizegraph was installed on the church grounds.

At this point church leaders were optimistic the company was trying to work things out until Nov. 17, after more blasting on the highway, church members and officials found even more damage to their buildings.

The reports done by the team of experts were not forthcoming as promised and church officials

were not allowed to see the readings from the sizegraph that is in a locked covered box on the church's property. It is powered using the church's electricity.

Church officials say that during the Nov. 17 blast a neighbor across the street from the church reported it shook her pictures off the wall. Pastor Wayne Epperson, who lives nearby, confirmed the shaking but the sizegraphic did not report anything.

Cook said the experts reported damage was caused by lack of care of the facility which church leaders refute. In recent years more than \$40,000 has been spent in repairs on the church, he said.

The church is now recording the damage should more damage result from future blasting.

Though it is not their desire, church leaders are not ruling out the possibility of a lawsuit. Another meeting with the construction company is set for mid-December.

The church presently has about 50 members, most of them elderly.

The church has been accepting donations at an account set up at a Harrogate bank. The church also needs someone qualified who can assess the damage and provide an estimate of repairs, providing it can be repaired. Anyone interesting in assisting the small, rural congregation can contact Cook at (423) 626-7061. ■

State associations lead Christmas ministries

By Lonnie Wilkey & Connie Davis
Baptist and Reflector

BRENTWOOD — Tennessee Baptists, working through their local Baptist association, are finding numerous ways to minister this holiday season.

Following is just a sample of what various associations are doing this Christmas to share the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Helping Hands

Churches in Bradley County Association have joined to work on "Project Helping Hands," according to Michelle McCluskey, Church and Community Ministries director for the association.

In early December the association had 17 volunteers from eight churches (200 volunteer hours) who helped local families make application for help. During this process three people made spiritual decisions, McCluskey said.

She noted 235 families made application. The association passed information about the families on to association churches which will assist the family in some way.

"We anticipate helping between 250-300 families," McCluskey said.

Gifts to prisoners in two associations

Once again Indian Creek Association churches provided gift bags for prisoners at South Central Correctional Center in Clifton, said David Miller, director of missions.

Last year the association provided about 700 bags, he noted.

The bags contain items such as candy and toiletries and a Gospel tract. Church members compile the bags and deliver them to the association or provide funds and the association buys the items, Miller said.

"Last year was a great success," Miller noted, adding that he expects the association to do about the same number of bags this year.

For about 15 years, mem-

bers of Big Emory Association churches, led by Woman's Missionary Union members, have provided gifts to prisoners in two correctional facilities in the association.

This year Baptists collected 1,950 gift bags for residents of Brushy Mountain State Penitentiary and the Morgan County Regional Correctional Facility. The project was conducted in conjunction with chaplains Dean Yancey and Joe Crichton, both of whom are Baptists.

The gifts cost Baptists here about \$10,000, reported Bill Bargiol, director of missions, Big Emory Association. The gift items are proscribed by the institution.

In past years, the association has received feedback from prisoners after receiving the gifts, added Bargiol. Prisoners have signed thank you cards and sent them to the association office. And the association has received notes from prisoners expressing their thanks because it was the only Christmas gift he or she received, he said.

Christmas letters

In Copper Basin Association needy children write Christmas wish letters which are funneled through the association's crisis center to churches, said Al Patterson, director of missions.

As of early December the association had "adopted" 525 children and Patterson said he expected the number to rise to about 600 before Christmas.

Churches buy toys and clothing for the children, Patterson explained. It is left up to the church as to how they respond, he said.

In addition to Copper Basin churches, other congregations, including churches in Concord and Robertson County Associations, assist the ministry, Patterson said. Concord has an ongoing relationship with Copper Basin. "They help tremendously," Patterson said.

He noted most of the chil-

dren they help receive very little for Christmas except through the ministry. "God has plugged us in here. He always provides," Patterson said.

Appalachian ministry

Last year Hopewell Church, Springfield, discovered a need at Freeda Harris Baptist Center in Lookout, Ky., and bought toys, blankets, and diapers for more than 600 children and their families.

This year, other churches in Robertson County Association joined the effort to minister to people in the Appalachian area of Kentucky. "The Lord is really working," said Ed Simpkins of Hopewell Church, who along with Leslie Hancock, also of Hopewell, are leading the ministry.

Last year Hopewell also sent about 7,000 pounds of potatoes and eggs to the area and hope to take about 10,000 pounds of potatoes, plus eggs this year, according to Hancock.

In addition to gifts given by churches, pastors and their wives attending the association's annual Christmas banquet brought toys for the effort, said Dennis Pulley, director of missions. "There has been a very good response from the churches. They are very missions-minded," he observed.

Keith Woodall of Crossroads Christian Bookstore also is providing discounts for Christian music and T-shirts. Last year missionaries at the Freeda Harris center said the youth were introduced to Christian music for the first time and that it really ministered to them, according to Hancock.

Gifts for needy in Jackson area

Madison-Chester and Crockett associations led a gift giving project here for the second year. It was directed by Ellen Vaughan, director of church and community ministries for the associations.

The gifts were given by members of the biggest church in the association, West Jackson Church, Jackson. Needed gifts were outdoor wear, certain clothing, personal items, and household items.

The church, which has about 1,100 in Sunday School, collected the gifts through its annual White Christmas March for Missions held during the Sunday School hour.

Nearly all ages of members participated, reported Lonnie Sanders, minister of education, marching to a collection point to give their gifts. Very young children rode in carts bearing their gifts to the collection point.

The church's members gave gifts which filled about two

pick-up trucks, reported Sanders.

The items will be distributed by members of churches, including students at Union University, Jackson, and the staff of the associations. The gifts go to residents of three county jails, homeless people who visit a soup kitchen, needy Hispanic people who live in Bells and Maury City, and residents of seven communities who receive government subsidies, reported Vaughan.

Toy Store

in Bledsoe Association

Bledsoe Association conducted its fourth annual Toy Store for needy families in Sumner, Macon, and Trousdale counties.

More than 250 families including about 700 children received gifts for their families during the two-day event. The gifts were donated or purchased from offerings given through the 35 churches of the association, according to Mike Pennington, director of missions.

Academy Heights Church, Gallatin, hosted the store.

After shopping, each client met with a prayer team member for counseling. Eighteen adults made professions of faith, Pennington said.

"We really took a step of faith this year by expanding the Toy Store to two days. Our churches accepted the challenge and provided more toys and family items than ever before," said Judy Ross, Toy Store director.

Pennington said the ministry is worthwhile. "Of course, our ultimate joy is sharing Jesus personally. The look of joy, faith, and hope on the faces of those who accepted Christ lets us know we have touched not only time, but eternity," he said.

Christmas Store in Concord Association

Concord Association held a Christmas Store this year for the fourth year. It was led by Ellen Chapman, a Mission Service Corps volunteer from Memphis who is multihousing coordinator for the association.

Chapman said this year the three-day store helped 247 children of 103 families and resulted in nine people making professions of faith and four people making other spiritual decisions. It is provided for needy participants of year-long association ministries.

The store was held in a storefront which is part of First Church, Murfreesboro. So many gifts were received from members of churches Chapman opened the store to people staying at several shelters in Murfreesboro for homeless people.

The Christmas Store holds that name because "we empha-



size Christ," said Chapman.

Volunteer Delores Smith of New Vision Church, Murfreesboro, explained when she counseled clients she told them the store was providing gifts to them in the name of Jesus Christ. In that way she could introduce the person to the purpose of the store and encourage them to share any faith they hold, she explained.

Faye Jaro of Ward's Grove Church, Milton, told of getting to know a mother who was a client of the Christmas Store. The woman was the mother of a teenaged girl Jaro tutors through a project of the association. The woman was saved while visiting the Christmas Store, Jaro reported.

Such blessings make all the hard work worthwhile, explained Chapman, because some of the clients "go out with the greatest gift of all and that's Jesus Christ."

Toy Store

in Nashville Association

For the 47th year, Nashville Association held its Toy Store at Shelby Avenue Church, Nashville. Volunteers served 3,026 members of 806 families, of which 109 people made professions of faith, reported Pat Malone, director from Haywood Hills Church. Malone has served the ministry for about 24 years.

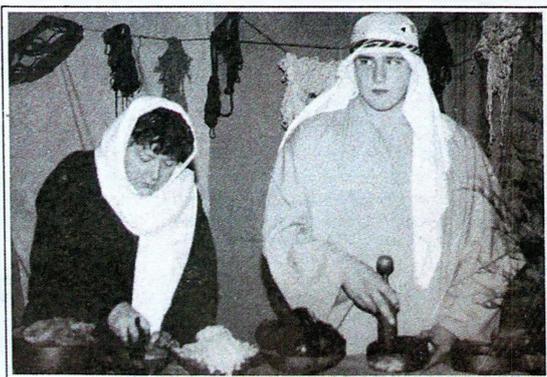
The store, which was open four days serving clients and for an Open House, was led by hundreds of volunteers from about 80 churches.

Malone said she was impressed by those volunteers who take vacation, sometimes a week, to serve. Workers included Acteens, Royal Ambassadors, and Girls in Action members, she noted.

The Toy Store served people who are referred by government organizations and live in a zip code area near the church. The ministry also served people referred by ministers if they weren't being helped by other ministries. The Council of Community Services of Nashville helps control duplication of ministry, explained Malone.

To pull off the huge project, an associational committee works all year. But it's worth it, according to Malone.

"It's a very emotional time," said Malone, describing the tears which are shed by parents who find a gift, such as a bike, which they explain is just what their child wants. Tears are shed by volunteers, too, she added. **BSR**



PORTRAYING workers in The Bethlehem Marketplace of Southeast Church, Murfreesboro, are, from left, Joyce Adams and Edward Belcher. The two-day event, which was held for the 17th year, drew about 6,000 people. — Photo by Steve Butler

Associations celebrate Christmas by ministering



PEGGY HAWKINS, left, of Shelby Avenue Church, and **Diana Lindsey** of Park Avenue Church, both in Nashville, sort through toys provided by Nashville Association churches for the association's annual Toy Store which assists families in Nashville.



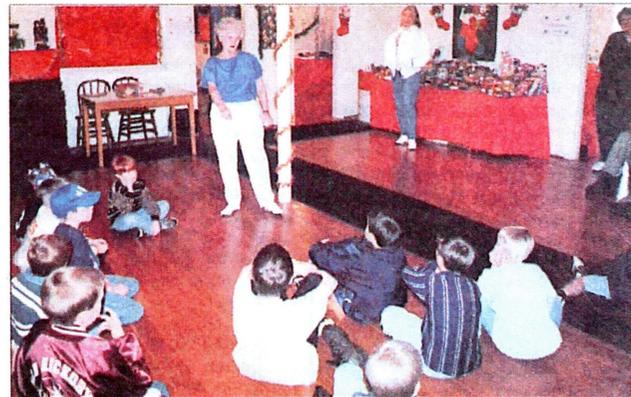
HELPING Katie Copeland, right, of Murfreesboro with gifts for her family from Concord Association's Christmas Store are Ben Curtis, left, River Rock Church, Murfreesboro; and Ellen Chapman, center, Concord Association staff. The store was hosted by First Church, Murfreesboro.



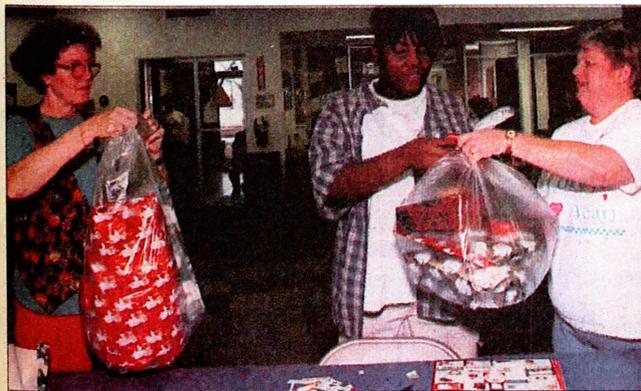
STAFF OF Madison-Chester and Crockett associations, from left, Conroy Ryan and Ellen Vaughan, look at gifts with Lonnie Sanders of West Jackson Church, Jackson. The gifts, donated by the Jackson church, will be distributed by the association staff and members of churches to three county jails, a soup kitchen for homeless people, needy Hispanic people, and residents of three apartment complexes who receive government subsidies.



ROYAL AMBASSADORS, from Tulip Grove Church, Old Hickory, along with their leaders and dads, help load a trailer owned by RA counselor Steve York with 63 bikes for the Nashville Association Toy Store held at Shelby Avenue Church. Boys collected aluminum cans throughout the year to help purchase the bikes. RAs also assembled the bikes with help from their counselors.



CAROLYN DE-MONBREUN tells a group about the Nashville Association Toy Store which provides toys and other items to needy families at Christmas. The Toy Store has ministered to families for 47 years.



ACCEPTING the wrapped gifts she picked out at the Christmas Store of Concord Association is Chinneka Watkins of Murfreesboro from Theresa Scantland, right, of First Church, Walter Hill, Murfreesboro; as Avon Davis of the Walter Hill church watches. This is the fourth year the association has provided the Christmas Store.



DENNIS PULLEY, center, director of missions for Robertson County Association, helps Leslie Hancock, left, and Ed Simpkins, both of Hopewell Church, Springfield, sort items donated by association churches for an Appalachian Project initiated by Hopewell Church and sponsored by the association. Items were taken this past weekend to the Freeda Harris Baptist Center in Lookout, Ky.



■ **Bradley County Association** is accepting resumes for the position of director of missions through Jan. 30, 1999. Resumes may be sent to Bradley County Baptist Association, c/o DOM Search Committee, 2702 N. Ocoee Street, Cleveland, TN 37312.



SIAM CHURCH, Elizabethton, recently observed its 125th anniversary. Ray Sorrells, right, director of missions for Watauga Association, presents a plaque to Pastor Jack Roddy on behalf of the Tennessee Baptist Historical Society.

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■ **Mabel King Beeker**, a retired assistant editor at Life-Way Christian Resources, died Dec. 4. She was instrumental in beginning the international ministries, including the language congregations, at Belmont Heights Church, Nashville.

■ **Clara Lee Hall**, wife of Paul Hall, long-time Tennessee Baptist Convention Executive Board staff member in the area of missions, died Dec. 7 after an extended illness. She was a member of Brentwood Church, Brentwood. She was 80 years old.



■ **D.A. "Bud" Jones** was ordained to the ministry Dec. 13 at Covenant Church, Smithville. He has been called as pastor of Shiloh Church, Woodbury.



■ **First Church, Parsons**, will present its first annual Living Christmas Tree Dec. 16-20 at 7 p.m. each night. Admission is free, but advance tickets are suggested. Call (901) 847-2466.



ANNIE PROFFITT, center, was recently honored for 52 continuous years of service as Sunday School secretary at Siam Church, Elizabethton. Presenting her a plaque of appreciation are Glenda Estep, left, Sunday School director, and Jack Roddy, pastor.

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MINISTER: First Baptist Church of Chattanooga, Tenn., is receiving resumes for Minister of Youth and Recreation. This position is one of six full-time pastoral ministers for a regional congregation averaging 600 on Sundays. Inclusive in theology and creative in ministry. FBC is supportive of both SBC and CBF. Resumes should be mailed by Jan. 15, 1999, to Search Committee, First Baptist Church, 401 Gateway Avenue, Chattanooga, TN 37402.

MINISTER: Southside Church, Martin, in search for Youth/Education Minister. If you prayerfully feel led to send your resume, mail to P.O. Box 121, Martin, TN 38237 by Jan. 15.

MINISTER: Tulip Grove Baptist Church is seeking a part-time preschool and children's director. Send resumes to Jim Bussett, Tulip Grove Baptist Church, 563 Shute Lane, Old Hickory, TN 37138.

MINISTER: Seeking full-time Minister of Music and Worship. Please send resume to Mt. Carmel Baptist Church, 8645 Kenwood Road, Cincinnati, Ohio 45242.

MINISTER of education: Large Sunday School-oriented church seeks a Minister of Education with substantial experience. A seminary degree and a passion for the lost is required. Send resume to Personnel Committee, Calvary Baptist Church, 331 Cleveland Street, Clearwater, FL 33755.

MINISTER: Calvary Baptist Church of Tuscaloosa, Ala., is seeking a full-time Minister of Education and Administration to lead a fully developed educational ministry and to administer financial and personnel matters. Calvary averages over 1,000 in morning worship (800 in Sunday School) and about 500 on Sunday evenings. Calvary is located adjacent to the University of Alabama. Send resume to Personnel Committee, Calvary Baptist Church, 1121 Paul W. Bryant Drive, Tuscaloosa, AL 35401. Resumes will be accepted thru Jan. 31, 1999. (205) 758-0495 for more information.

CLASSIFIED

DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS: Grainger County Association is searching for a Director of Missions. If you would like to submit a resume, please send it to Search Committee, Grainger County Association of Baptists, P.O. Box 127, Rutledge, TN 37861.

MUSIC DIRECTOR: Part-time Music Director position available. Interested parties may send their resume to Fort Robinson Baptist Church, 2012 Fort Robinson Drive, Kingsport, TN 37660. Attn: Personnel Committee.

MINISTER: Interim part-time Minister of Preschool and Children's Education — Franklin, Tenn. ClearView Baptist Church is searching for an interim part-time minister to serve the Preschool and Children's areas. Position is responsible to develop and administer a comprehensive program of preschool and children's education. Related experience and education is mandatory. Send resume and additional information to ClearView Baptist Church, 537 Franklin Road, Franklin, TN 37069. Fax — (615) 591-3845.

MINISTER: Full-time minister for youth and children to develop, coordinate, and administrate Family Life Center. Send resumes to Bardwell Baptist Church, P.O. Box 147, Bardwell, KY 42023.

MINISTER: Calvary Baptist Church of Tuscaloosa, Ala., is seeking a full-time Minister of Education and Administration to lead a fully developed educational ministry and to administer financial and personnel matters. Calvary averages over 1,000 in morning worship (800 in Sunday School) and about 500 on Sunday evenings. Calvary is located adjacent to the University of Alabama. Send resume to Personnel Committee, Calvary Baptist Church, 1121 Paul W. Bryant Drive, Tuscaloosa, AL 35401. Resumes will be accepted thru Jan. 31, 1999. (205) 758-0495 for more information.

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■ **Frank Hawkins**, pastor of First Church, Kingsport, and former president of the Tennessee Baptist Convention (1994-95), will retire on Sunday, Jan. 17, 1999. A native of South Carolina, Hawkins has been at the Kingsport church since 1980. He served as pastor in several states and was a Southern Baptist missionary in Brazil from 1966-70. He has held numerous positions in the TBC and in other places of service. He holds both the Th.M and doctor of ministry degrees from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky. Hawkins and his wife, Patricia, have four children.

HAWKINS

■ **Gary M. Armstrong** is the new associate pastor for worship at Mount Olive Church, Knoxville. He joined the staff from Alpha Church, Morristown. He and his wife, Tammie, have two daughters.

■ **Calvary Church, Knoxville**, recently called **John Hensley** as minister of music, effective Dec. 1. Hensley holds the master of church music degree from Southern Seminary

and formerly served for six years as minister of music at First Church, Winchester.

■ **Pleasant Grove Church, Maryville**, has called **Nathan Wilkes** as youth minister.

■ **Ray Ridgeway**, pastor of Arlington Church, Knoxville, for the past 10 years has announced his retirement. He also has served as pastor of Ridgeview Church, Chattanooga, and First Church, Smithville. After Jan. 1 he will be available for interim and supply work as well as Russia presentations. He and his wife, Judy, reside in Knoxville.



RIDGEWAY

associations

■ During the recent annual meeting of **Sweetwater Association**, the association voted to host a missions night during the Wednesday evening session of their 169th annual meeting next year and to participate in the Tennessee Baptist/Rio Revival in May. The association's churches also are in the process of receiving a special offering to help hurricane victims in Honduras.

churches

■ **Elm Springs Church, Sneedville**, is building a mission church in Linitus, Mexico, and needs some pews for the



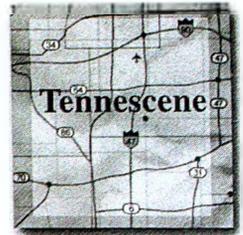
MERTON AVENUE CHURCH, Memphis, recently held its fourth annual community Thanksgiving Dinner. The entire community was invited and the church served more than 300 people. The meal provided the opportunity to give to surrounding neighborhoods and to tell others about Jesus, according to Pastor Fred Trexler Jr.

church. Call Pastor Seven Gibson at (423) 733-4800 or write to Route 1, Box 66B, Sneedville, TN 37869

■ **Women's Ministries of Grace Church, Nashville**, is hosting a seminar on spiritual gifts on Jan. 8-9. The leader for the seminar will be Marie Strain, a Bible study leader and workshop trainer for Precept Ministries. The registration cost of the seminar is \$19.75 before Dec. 30 and \$25 after that date. The Friday session is from 7-9 p.m. while Saturday's schedule is 8:45 a.m.-4 p.m. Lunch and child care is

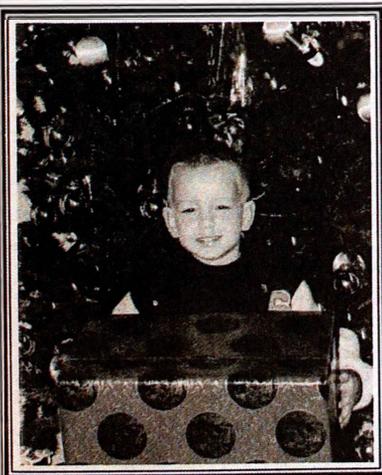
provided. For information, call (615) 865-6262.

■ The church choir and drama team of **Central Church, Hendersonville**, presented the Christmas musical, "Mary Did You Know?" on Dec. 12-13.



SWEETWATER ASSOCIATION officers include from left, Sheri Stephens, administrative assistant; Bennie Creel, director of missions; Russ Cooper (seated), pastor of Watson Chapel Church, vice moderator; Tommy Self, pastor, Mt. Zion Church, moderator; and Audrey Stephens, WMU director. Cooper is the youngest pastor ever elected as vice moderator.

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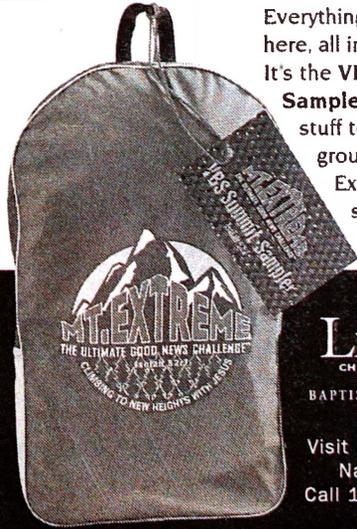
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But the concept isn't new

Church Christmas pageants may be bigger

By Mark Wingfield
For Associated Baptist Press

FORT WORTH, Texas — While church Christmas pageants may have advanced from bathrobes to elaborate costumes during modern times, the basic idea is anything but new.

Christians have been telling the Gospel story through drama since at least the fifth century, according to Lyndel Vaught, associate professor of church music at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary here. "Every-

thing that goes around comes around," said Vaught, who himself directed special events as a music minister for more than 30 years.

Scholars agree the church of the fifth century used dramatic devices, but the earliest surviving example of a church drama comes from the 10th century, he explained.

Liturgical drama reached its peak in the 12th and 13th centuries, Vaught said. Those events were a mixture of sacred and secular elements, much like

many Baptist churches put together today in Christmas programs.

The church drama went through several variations in the following centuries, including the madrigal and then opera.

Vaught points to 1968 as a pivotal year, "the advent of the church musical in Baptist churches." That was the year the youth musical "Good News" premiered, becoming the first in a long line of musical dramas used to tell biblical stories in a Broadway-like fashion, combining choral numbers with a dramatic story.

These new church musicals weren't confined to youth choirs for long. Soon adult choirs had their own dramatic musicals, and the Christmas cantata gave way to the Christmas musical and ultimately the Christmas pageant.

Around 1972, the Christmas program in Baptist churches took a new twist that some thought might be a passing fad but has endured now more than 25 years: "The Living Christmas Tree."

This, too, began as a vehicle for youth programs but soon expanded to include a growing number of adult choirs. Pinpointing exactly where the Living Christmas Tree concept originated is difficult, but some believe the first such event was staged not in a church but by a

secular choir in North Carolina. The Charlotte Choral Society put 85 singers in a 33-foot-high tree of steel construction in 1958.

But it was a Baptist minister of music who brought this trend into the church. In 1963, John Gustavson introduced the Living Christmas Tree at First Church in Van Nuys, Calif. Word quickly spread, and other Baptist churches began copying the idea.



First Church of Denton, Texas, led by then Minister of Music Bill Shadle, and Bellevue Church, Cordova, then in Memphis, were the first two churches to copy the Van Nuys tree, according to Shadle.

It was the Texas connection, however, which turned out to spread the use of the Living Christmas Tree worldwide. When Shadle returned to Denton from California, he asked a member of his church, Millard Heath, if he could design the structure needed to form the backbone of the Living Christmas Tree.

Heath, a mechanical engineer who owns a heating and air conditioning business, gladly did so, creating a perfectly balanced and secure structure of steel and wood that could be covered with greenery and lights to look like an enormous Christmas tree while allowing space for singers



to stand in ascending rows inside the tree.

Word of mouth quickly spread, and soon Heath was approached by other churches about building such a structure for their use. Eventually, he patented the design and launched a second business called MH Specialities to produce the Living Christmas Trees. Business peaked in the late 1980s, when Heath and his wife, Pat, shipped out 37 trees in one year. Though things have slowed down a bit, they still sell 10-15 trees each year, Pat Heath said. Last year they sold one to the City of Bethlehem, to be used on Manger Square.

Churches may spend anywhere from \$10,000 to \$40,000 on the trees and accessories, such as greenery, ribbons, bows, lights, stars, and crosses, she continued. While that may sound expensive, it's actually economical considering the many years a church will use the tree, she added.

Vaught said the Living Christmas Tree, with its computerized light displays, may be only one of a continuing series of technological innovations that will shape church productions in the years ahead. "What I see in the future is a greater and expanded use of technology," Vaught explained. ■

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HEALTH CARE UPDATE

Many questions have arisen about Annuity Board medical plan options for Southern Baptist agencies, institutions, ministers and church staff members in Tennessee. Here is some clarification.

- Effective Jan. 1, 1999, the Annuity Board has a new Preferred Provider Organization (PPO) through Private HealthCare Systems (PHCS). This network includes Baptist Hospital in Nashville.
- The PHCS network does not currently include the Baptist Health System of East Tennessee (BHSET) or the Memphis-based Baptist Memorial Health Care Corporation (BMHCC).

- The Annuity Board has a direct contract with BHSET and its two hospitals — East Tennessee Baptist Hospital in Knoxville and Baptist Hospital of Cocke County. The contract also includes a physicians' network. Effective Jan. 1, 1999, participants will receive enhanced benefits — discounted rates and lower copayment — when they use one of these hospitals or physicians.
- Currently, the Annuity Board is negotiating a similar direct contract arrangement with Baptist Memorial and all its hospital affiliates.

We apologize for any confusion over your 1999 medical plan options. We look forward to working with you in the future *Serving Those Who Serve the Lord.*



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Analysis of movies

Not all Christmas films have Santa or reindeer as stars

By Phil Boatwright
For Baptist Press

THOUSAND OAKS, Calif. — Tired of the barrage of TV shows and "family films" with Santa as the star or featuring reindeer? Here's a list of films that contain positive messages about family and the true meaning of the season as well as some that entertain without crudity or profanity.

The True Meaning

"Jesus of Nazareth" — This Franco Zeffirelli epic production of the life of Christ is considered by many as the best film about Christ. It is acclaimed for its thorough biblical and historical research and is a very moving and spiritual experience with many memorable performances.

"It's A Wonderful Life" — George Bailey wishes he had never been born. When the angel Clarence grants him that wish, George is able to see what life would have been for his friends and relatives had he not

been around. James Stewart's George Bailey reminds us that we touch so many lives and can have a real influence on those souls. Not rated, it does contain one suggestive remark made by onlooking men as the town's wild girl walks by.

"The Fourth Wiseman" — Based on the Henry Van Dyke tale of a good magi seeking the birthplace of Jesus but, because of his duty to others, is delayed in the desert for 33 years, only to see (from afar) the Savior as he is being crucified. He spent his life searching for the Messiah in order to give valuable treasures, but one by one he sells his priceless gifts to help others in need. Full of illustrations of how our Lord would have us treat our fellow men.

"A Dream for Christmas" — A Baptist minister moves his Arkansas family to Los Angeles during the Christmas season of 1950. Unfortunately, the church elders have neglected to inform him that the church he's to pas-

tor has been set for demolition. The family must work to save the church. Lessons: family togetherness, faith, perseverance.

For little ones

"Little House on the Prairie: The Lord is My Shepherd" — Troubled Laura Ingalls learns a lesson in love from a kindhearted hermit, who may be more than he seems. Lessons in faith, family love, and forgiveness.

"The Greatest Adventure — The Nativity" — Three young archeologists go through a time portal and find themselves in Jerusalem during the time of Jesus' birth.

"A Charlie Brown Christmas" — A perfect animated tale by Charles Schultz with the "Peanuts" gang searching for the true meaning of Christmas. It is a rarity — cartoon heroes quot-



ing Luke's Gospel, proclaiming the Christ child as Messiah. ■ — Boatwright is a Baptist layman in California. He is the editor and reviewer for The Movie Reporter, a monthly film guide from a Christian perspective.

Analysis of pre-Christmas movie

'The Prince of Egypt' brings Moses to animation

By Phil Boatwright
For Baptist Press

THOUSAND OAKS, Calif. — Taken from the Old Testament Book of Exodus, the story of Moses and the enslaved Hebrews has been vividly brought to animated musical life in "The Prince of Egypt" through the sophisticated work of DreamWorks Studio.

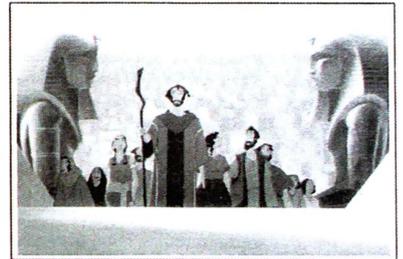
Songsmith Stephen Schwartz and composer Hans Zimmer contribute the musical numbers. Each song is moving, literate, and furthers the story. Two songs, "I Will Get There" and "When You Believe" rank structurally alongside any movie melody written in this past decade.

The voice characteristics, led by Val Kilmer as Moses and Ralph Fiennes as Rameses, are all satisfactory, but the promi-

nent star is the animation itself, in which no expense, it seems, has been spared.

The bottom line for any movie that intends to live on through cinema history is its story. "The Prince of Egypt" succeeds because it is taken from the Bible. The dialogue is rich, simplistic and at times poetic, careful to reverently suggest the meaning of the book which spawned this project.

The movie is rated PG for some intensity. Parents should be there to assure little ones during Moses' nightmare and the plague sequence. It's one thing reading about the Holy



MOSES leads the Hebrews out of Egypt. — DreamWorks Pictures photo

Spirit taking the lives of the firstborn where the house does not display the blood covering. It's another to see a re-enactment.

Never condescending or phlegmatic, "The Prince of Egypt" is the perfect blend of epic scale and dramatic intimacy. ■

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The Foundation provides a one-stop, convenient opportunity to accomplish a variety of your charitable goals including making holiday gifts in honor of family, friends, or co-workers.

Your gifts to any of the funds housed at the Foundation can be made in any amount. It is an easy way to do year-end giving and be assured that your contribution will provide permanent support for any or all of these causes. We are equipped to set up scholarships and match every dollar you place with us for scholarships up to a total of one hundred thousand dollars.

Your Foundation stands ready to assist you with your year-end gifts by making your charitable vision a reality. Telephone me at your earliest convenience to discuss your plans for year-end giving.

As you know, the IRS requires written confirmation of all charitable gifts. A fund — named for you — will ease the burden. One check, one receipt, one tax deduction. Call my office today for a consultation on how your year-end charitable gift can make a difference to Tennessee Baptists.

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H.G. (Gary) Coltharp, Vice-President Estate Planning

Gift of Jesus

By Martin Babb

Focal Passage — Isaiah 9:6-7; Matthew 1:18-23; 2:1-2, 9-11

By the time we terminate our three-month relationship at the end of February, you will know a lot more about me than I will about you. Christmas at my house is like a rugby scrum. As presents are opened, my family leaves a trail of destruction matched in history only by Sherman's march through Atlanta (obviously not accomplished during peak traffic). Today's lesson is about opening the biggest present of all time ... the gift of Jesus.

It begins in Isaiah 9:6-7 where we see the gift prophesied. Isaiah ministered as a prophet in Jerusalem from about 740 B.C. to 700 B.C. At the time of this prophecy Israel had been invaded by Assyria and the people were in the midst of some really difficult times. On a basic level of interpretation, Isaiah's words promise hope of a new king (probably Hezekiah) to a seemingly hopeless people. This king would rule in a time of great peace, free from rule by foreign powers. At its deepest level, the prophecy was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus. Every time I read this passage I want to break into song because this is also the "For unto us a child is born" chorus from Handel's *Messiah*. It reminds us that even in the midst of extreme difficulty, there is hope. Through this baby in Bethlehem comes joy, light, and peace. It is available, as a gift, to all who will accept it.

Matthew 1:18-23 leads us to the gift verified. I am always fascinated by the headlines on the tabloid newspapers that appear in supermarket checkout lines. If there had been one of these in Bethlehem, it would have read, "Virgin gives birth to Savior of the world ... in a stable!" I laugh at the headlines in the supermarket line, and had I been in Bethlehem, I would have laughed at this one. Only one problem. This one was true. The King, prophesied for centuries, had arrived, in a manger. Simple in setting. Immeasurable in impact. God's present in the manger revealed his presence in the world.

Matthew 2:1-2, 9-11 explains to us the gift glorified. What we know about the wise men we have learned from living room manger scenes because there was very little mentioned in Matthew's Gospel, the only biblical account. We do know they were wise men who came from the east to find the newborn king. Led by a star, they found Jesus and brought gifts to worship and praise him. We may sing, "We Three Kings of Orient Are," but we need to sing, "Give of Your Best to the Master." What better gift to glorify the King.

I conclude the lesson with the gift multiplied. The gift of Jesus is multiplied every time we share it with someone else. When we accept Jesus we take on the traits of Jesus and we multiply the gift whenever we exhibit those traits, such as joy, peace, patience, self-control, etc. But we also multiply the gift when we share Jesus with our lost friends. They may not open the package, but we must never stop offering it. What does Christmas have to do with evangelism? To fully understand the manger we must understand that it will always be eternally connected to the cross event. And yet the simple story of the manger, when understood at its deepest level, is the essence of Christmas, the greatest gift ever given. Jesus could not stay in the inn ... and ultimately, neither could he stay in the tomb. — Babb is associate pastor/education, Springfield Church, Springfield.

What's Christmas all about?

By Edgar Pierce

Focal Passage — Luke 12:1-17

Have you got your Christmas shopping finished? How about all the Christmas cards mailed? Have you had your Sunday School class party, office party, and planned the get away to the in-laws? What about the play rehearsals and extra choir practices so the pageant and musical will be just right?

Oh! I almost forgot to remind you about wrapping all those presents. That is if you can remember what you bought for which persons. Don't you hope they all fit? What about setting up the Christmas tree and putting out the lights to out do the neighbors? Is this what Christmas is all about?

You have just read two paragraphs and not one thing has been said about what Christmas is all about biblically, only secularly. So what is Christmas all about? If someone looked at all our activities during this time of the year would they see the Christmas story in our lives?

Family Bible Lesson

Luke records for us the humble earthly beginning of our Savior. All of the events surrounding the birth were not accidents of fate or blind luck or mere chance occurrences but were providential events.

God had the ruler he wanted ruling and the tax plan he needed to get Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem from Nazareth. While there she would give birth to the Christ child in the city that had been prophesied. Mary and Joseph were both descendants of the line of David.

The rooms were all taken and they ended up in the animal stable. What a contrast from where he stepped from to where he descended. From the splendors of heaven to the heartaches of earth was a giant step.

The act of Christmas

By Maurice Hays

Focal Passage — Luke 2:7-14, 16-17, 20-21, 39-40

The announcement of the birth of the Messiah was a great and powerful event.

The retelling of this story is still powerful today. Our church was doing a live nativity scene several days before Christmas and an intoxicated man stopped by and looked for sometime at the live scene with people and animals.

A few days later he came to the church and made a profession of faith. He said he had been moved by the Christmas scene and could not get it out of his mind. As our children were growing up we read the Christmas story from Luke on Christmas Eve as we gathered together. Now I have the privilege of reading the Christmas story to our grandchildren and it still brings joy to those who hear.

Mary would bring forth her first born son. She would have other children, for we are told that Jesus had brothers and sisters. There would be other children but none like Jesus, born of woman, but conceived by the Holy Spirit as God had promised. The Son of God born in the most humble circumstances. He who is King of kings and Lord of lords identified himself with the poorest and lowest of mankind. He was born in a stable not because of the lack of hospitality of the people but because of

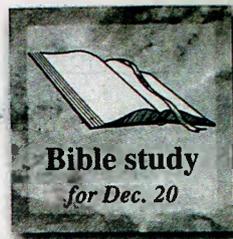
When the sun set the evening before the birth the world went to sleep in the darkness. When most of the world awoke, they were unaware of the momentous event that had taken place in the night. I am afraid that no less will be true as Christmas comes and goes in the world this year. Most will not grasp the significance of the event we celebrate.

Out on the hillside under the stars the shepherds were tending their flocks. The angel of the Lord comes with the glory of the Lord shining. The angel said, "Fear not..." These were the same words Mary heard when the angel announced that she would give birth and Joseph when he was concerned about putting Mary away. These shepherds are given the birth announcement of the ages. The Savior has been born in Bethlehem.

How were they to recognize him? How were they to be sure they had the right one? They would find him in a humble stable lying in a manger. Then suddenly the sky came alive with angels proclaiming peace and good will. This beloved is what Christmas is all about. Wonder what the shepherds would think of the way we celebrate Christmas.

Christmas celebrations have somehow lost their focus. Depression is very much a part of a lot of homes at Christmas. While this is humanly natural the way we can restore the joy of Christmas is to again see what it is about. Not the presents, the trees, the lights, but a Savior that was born of a virgin that has saved us from our sins.

The response of the shepherds was to go and find the child. Don't you guess that God allowed the angels to tend the sheep for a while for them? Let's not miss the last verse here though. Not only did they go find the Savior, they spread the good news of his birth to others. What is Christmas all about? It is about a Savior to be had and then to be shared. — Pierce is pastor, Cedar Grove Missionary Church, Kingsport.



Explore the Bible Lesson

the great number of people there because of the census and because they did not know who he was. Many today still do not know who Jesus is.

The first to be told of Jesus' birth were the shepherds. The least likely to have been picked by the religious people of the day, but chosen of God. The shepherds in general were known to be of bad reputation. They were kept from observing ceremonial law and could not even give testimony in law courts. The angels told the lowly shepherds of the birth of the Great Shepherd. Their message was one of joy and hope to all people for the Savior had been born. The praise expressed by the angels was not only of the highest degree but in the highest realm — heaven itself.

Verse 15 reads differently in various manuscripts. Some say "good will toward men" while others have "peace ... among men of good will." The best may be "Glory to God in the highest, and upon earth peace among men of (God's) good will." The birth of Jesus was evidence of God's good will to all men. He is not against us or indifferent to us, he is for us.

When the shepherds had heard the good news, they left their work to go and see this great thing that had

happened. When they had experienced his birth they told everyone they saw what great things God had done. The same should be true of us when we experience his birth in us.

The major emphasis in verses 20-21 is the receiving of the name of Jesus, which Mary had been told by the angel and the name the angels had proclaimed to the shepherds. The circumcision was also further identity of his humanity in the fulfillment of Moses' law.

When all had been done according to the law, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph returned to their home in the city of Nazareth. Jesus possessed both a divine and a human nature. The exact relationship between the two is not revealed to us. Verse 52 states the growth of Jesus in all areas. And Jesus increased in wisdom (intellectually), in stature (physically), in favor with man (socially), and with God (spiritually). This should be the goal of all young people as they grow. It is said that we do not know much about the maturing of Jesus, but this is all we need to know.

May I take this opportunity to wish each of you a merry and joyous Christmas and pray that each of us will experience the true meaning of Christmas, the birth of the Messiah, God's son, Jesus. "Merry Christmas." — Hays is collegiate ministry specialist, Jackson State Community College, Jackson.

A new start

By Martin Babb

Focal Passage — Philippians 3:13-14; Philemon 10-21

I do not ordinarily make new year's resolutions. Several years ago I did attempt a rather vigorous but spineless program of weight loss. I just have never been able to work them in between bowl games and helping my wife around the house. The lesson today concerns getting a new start. Only with this one, you do not have to wait until Jan. 1.

In order to start fresh, we must **forget the past**. Paul's letter to the Philippians reflects his joy and affection for them, but he reminds them in verse 13 that he has not reached the level of Christlikeness he wanted to attain. He knows one thing. He must forget what is behind him and push on to what is ahead. It is good advice for anyone trying to make a new start. God is not concerned with what we did in the past, good or bad. If it is bad we need to forget it and move on. If it is good, we need not to dwell on it, boast about it, or deify it, but move on to what God has for us next. One thing about God — he is much more concerned with what we are doing right now than what we did yesterday, both as individuals and as churches.

Once we have forgotten the past we must **follow the prize**. The only possible way we can let go of the past is to grab hold of God. When we give our lives to Christ, he forgives us. He cleanses us and we begin again. Our goal is to become like Christ and to live our lives according to God's plan. In these verses, Paul compares the Christian life to running a race. Runners run with pain and they never look behind them because all that matters is what lies ahead. They are concentrating on the prize, finishing the race. When we finish our race, the prize will be eternity with God.

As you read through your Bible, if you sneeze or blink between Titus and Hebrews, you will miss Paul's letter to Philemon, all 25 verses. In verses 10-21 is our third point, **free your perspective**. Paul and Philemon are friends and fellow laborers in Christ. Onesimus was a slave of Philemon's, who evidently did his master some kind of wrong and ran away. While in prison he met Paul and found Christ. In this writing, Paul is encouraging Philemon to look at Onesimus differently now. Forget the past. That is what the saving power of Christ can do. It enables us to free our perspectives from the man-made blinders and boundaries we place on them and see people through the eyes of Jesus.

It is the beginning of a new year. Do not let the new year cloud the realization that we can start over with God any time, forgetting what is behind us. There was a popular song a few years back about a lonely place people go to dwell when they suffer from the pain of a broken relationship. That story dealt with a boy-girl relationship but Heartbreak Hotel has people checking in all the time because of a change in jobs, divorce, death of a loved one, a spiritual struggle, or a lost person facing his separation from God. Each has one thing in common — the need of a fresh start. Checking in is one of the easiest things in the world to do. Checking out and starting over is the difficult part. Because unlike a real hotel, in Heartbreak Hotel there is only one manager, and he is on duty all the time. And when you check out you must leave all of your baggage from the past with him. That is the way he wants it. Otherwise, you never really leave ... do you? — Babb is associate pastor/education, Springfield Church, Springfield.

Is Christ's presence real?

By Edgar Pierce

Focal Passage — Luke 24:36-53

Happy Easter! But Christmas just passed. It is not Easter time, or is it? A Christian should live each day with the awareness of a risen Lord. Isn't that what Easter celebrates, so Happy Easter.

Our background is the story of the Emmaus Road encounter between the risen Lord and two disciples. Discouraged, disillusioned and doubting they were returning home. Jesus was in their midst and they could not see him because of their own pain. Sometimes we can't feel the presence of Christ because of discouragement. Unrealized expectations dull our vision.

These two on the road to Emmaus had heard about the resurrection but they wanted to dwell on the death and not the life. They recognized Jesus when he broke the bread after giving thanks. Let's learn from this to look at what he had done in the past so we can recognize him in the present.

Family Bible Lesson

The scene shifts back to Jerusalem. They overcame their fear of traveling in the darkness and their fatigue. The presence of Christ energized them.

As they were telling the others Jesus appeared in their midst. He said, "Peace be unto you." They were terrified. They knew he was dead and thought it was a ghost. They failed to hear the words he had spoken about his resurrection. Those who crucified him had heard. This was the reason for the guard and seal on the tomb.

It is clear they were not expecting Jesus to show up. Why? He had plainly told them he would rise again after

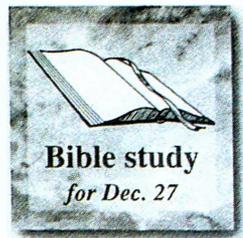
three days. They were expecting that Jesus would be a military leader.

Are we expecting Jesus to show up in our midst? Do we want the presence of the risen Lord manifest in our church? When he shows up do we recognize him? How real is his presence? Is he there and we are not seeing him?

The fact of the resurrection is not just a biblical fact it is a historic one. Jesus didn't just show up one time and then leave them to wonder if they were seeing an illusion. Jesus tells them that they are "witnesses of these things." Are we not called to be witnesses as well? A witness can only tell what he or she knows and has seen. We can witness that he is alive in our hearts.

The visual and physical presence of Christ is taken away from them in the ascension. They travel to the backside of the Mount of Olives to Bethany and he is taken up into heaven. The ascension is important for two reasons. First, while Jesus was here time and space limited him, as a human. He could only touch so many lives due to this. He loved personal one-on-one ministry as seen by the time he spent with the Emmaus Road couple, Nicodemus, the rich young ruler, and others. However, now that he is ascended he is free to be Lord to all the earth.

Second, because of the hope of his coming. Acts 1:11 records the words of the angels who said, "why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." Zechariah 14:4 tells us it will be to the very place he left from. "And his feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east" How real will his presence be then? — Pierce is pastor, Cedar Grove Missionary Church, Kingsport.



People of action

By Maurice Hays

Focal Passage — Mark 3:13-15, 31:4-2a, 30-34

The church is not a building, in the New Testament terms, but a group of called out people who have accepted Jesus to be their Savior and Lord. The church is a modern day miracle when we function as a body under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. The church is made up of people from different backgrounds, cultures, education, wealth, and social status. None of these matter when we have one purpose. That purpose should be to grow in Christ and advance the kingdom of God. So it was when Jesus selected the 12. They were different in many ways but together in purpose. They were critical to the spread of the Gospel and so are we today.

After prayer on the mountaintop Jesus selected 12 men to serve with him. The 12 was significant because God had started with Jacob's 12 sons in Exodus and built them into a great nation. Now Jesus would build a holy nation beginning with the 12 apostles. It would be a new spiritual nation. Verse 14 says he "ordained" them or better "appointed" them. The Greek simply says "made." They were called to be disciples (learners, pupils, or apprentices), and apostles (ones sent on a mission). They were called first to be his companions, to live with him, and to learn from him. They were to be bound to him in loyalty and love. Secondly they were

Explore the Bible Lesson

commissioned to preach the good news, and thirdly they were given power.

Jesus would not let his enemies deter his ministry nor would he allow his family to stop him. When these family members came to take him away he did not discount his family but expanded it to those who would follow him. William Barkley makes these suggestions: "True kinship is found in a common experience. True kinship lies in a common interest. True kinship is found in common obedience. True kinship lies in a common goal."

Halford Luccouk in *The Interpreter's Bible* says, "A family should be a harbor from which the ship leaves to sail the seas, and not a dock where it ties up and rots." If they had succeeded in keeping Jesus home they would have kept him from the world and the world from him.

Jesus taught in the synagogues but the Pharisees had encountered Jesus with deadly wrath. Jesus adapted by teaching in boats, as he walked along, and in homes. Dr. Raymond Brown noted that Jesus taught informally. He would respond to a situation or an event with his teaching. His teaching was drawn from everyday life. He used real live

stories or possible happenings to draw his message. Jesus' teaching was popular, not philosophical. He used parables, sometimes called "earthly stories with heavenly meanings." Jesus' teaching was pictorial. His teaching causes us to think, to imagine, and to respond.

Though the mustard seed is not the smallest of seeds it was probably the smallest one the Jews would plant in their garden. They were aware that from this small seed a great bush would grow. Jesus is comparing the growth of that seed to that of his kingdom. It too was in its small beginning.

There are other thoughts that come from this parable but for sure it seems to say, God will surely bring his kingdom to fulfillment and even though there are many enemies to the kingdom they cannot overcome it. God's kingdom will bring people from all over the world to dwell in that kingdom. We should remember that God's kingdom has to do with God's rule. In this time of grace God allows individuals to choose, to accept, or reject his rule. Even in this day of sins and weaknesses of the church the Gospel is being carried to the world and the kingdom is growing. One day saints from every nation will worship before his throne and the kingdom will be complete. Hallelujah, Amen. — Hays is collegiate ministry specialist, Jackson State Community College, Jackson.



Documentary on Billy Graham to begin airing Dec. 27

Baptist Press

ALPHARETTA, Ga. — "History is going to remember Billy Graham as perhaps the greatest evangelist this nation, perhaps the world, has seen. He's ministered to so many people all around the world," said former U.S. President George Bush in a new documentary about the life and influence of Billy Graham.

Produced by the North American Mission Board for ABC television, "Common Ground" is not a biography of Graham's life, but rather a documentary about his influence. Most of the people interviewed on the program made a commitment to Christianity, 10, 20, or even 50 years ago, but they give testimony about the impact Graham's influence has had and continue to have on them and others.

In production since early February, the program will debut on Dec. 27, and local ABC affiliate stations can air it sometime during the eight weeks following the release date.

For information on air time in a particular market, or to order a copy of the video, call 1-800-777-1127. ■



GRAHAM

Midwestern prof composes anthem for 'Bethlehem 2000'

Baptist Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — An anthem composed especially for Palestinian Christians celebrating the 2000th anniversary of Christ's birth in Bethlehem was commissioned during a Dec. 10 chapel service at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Titled "O Bethlehem!" the piece was written by A.L. "Pete" Butler, professor of church music at the seminary. It will be performed under Butler's direction.

The piece has three sections and a Middle Eastern musical style. Composition of the work was initiated in 1996 by Baptist representative David Swenson, a Midwestern graduate working in the Bethlehem area. At the time, Swenson and other Christian workers noted the growing excitement about the 2000th anniversary of Christ's birth, known locally as "Bethlehem 2000." ■

Student ministry reaches collegians

Baptist Press

NASHVILLE — Increases in the number of students reached and total contributions for student missions highlighted the Southern Baptist student ministry report for 1998.

According to annual statistics compiled by National Student Ministry at LifeWay Christian Resources, 276,399 college students were reached by Southern Baptist student ministry programs on college campuses in 1998, up almost 10 percent from last year.

In national television premiere

Veggies aim to save Christmas

By Mark Wingfield
For Associated Baptist Press

CHICAGO — "Christmas isn't about whining and wanting more toys."

How many parents have gone blue in the face trying to tell their kids that very thing to no avail?

But maybe they'll listen to a tomato, a cucumber, and a small sprout of asparagus. At least that's the hope of the folks who use common vegetables to cook up clever morality plays for kids at Big Ideas Productions, home of VeggieTales.

In case you've been hiding in a pantry somewhere, VeggieTales is a series of computer-animated children's videos that are also popular with teenagers, college students, and parents. And they're well-seasoned with Christian themes and biblical stories.

This week, Bob the tomato, Larry the cucumber, and their farm-fresh friends are getting prepared for their network television premiere. The veggies have their own Christmas special.

The VeggieTales Christmas Spectacular will air nationwide on the PAX TV network Dec. 19 at 8 p.m., Eastern Standard Time.

PAX is the new network founded this year by Paxson Communications, offering gentler family fare such as "Touched By an Angel" and "Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman."

Most of Bob and Larry's network television debut will be footage from the VeggieTales video "The Toy that Saved Christmas." The network version, however, will include an additional 15 minutes of animation not on the video.

The story line revolves around the children of Dinkletown, who have been brainwashed by the greedy toymaker Wally P. Nezzar to think Christmas is only about getting more toys — and specifically the new toy Nezzar's factory produces, Buzz-Saw Louie.

Louie's right arm turns into a fully functional buzz saw. But he also has a sharp tongue.

Push a button and he spouts one of two lines: "Christmas is when you get stuff" and "You need more toys."

Life changes in Dinkletown, however, when Buzz-Saw Louie learns the true meaning of Christmas and teams up with his veggie pals to spread the news about the baby born in Bethlehem. ■

Total contributions to student missions — which includes contributions to state Baptist Student Union mission funds, campus-sponsored mission trip contributions and state student ministry department budgets for student missions — also increased, from \$3,363,393 to \$3,912,525.

"When it comes to student ministry, Southern Baptists continue to operate a world class program," said Bill Henry, NSM director.

Among other increases included in the 1998 report were:
▶ students preparing for church vocations, 18,625, up from 17,808.

▶ students involved in Bible study groups, 43,561, up from 41,292. ■

Kentucky Baptist agency fires lesbian

Associated Baptist Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Following protests over the firing of a lesbian employee, officials at Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children said employees know when they're hired that the childcare organization has lifestyle requirements consistent with its Christian mission.

Alicia Pedreira told the Louisville Courier-Journal newspaper she was fired from KBHC Oct. 23 after a picture of her and her female partners appeared in a Kentucky State Fair photography contest.

Jack Cox, a manager who hired Pedreira, said he and

four other employees resigned from the agency in protest.

Brenda Gray, the agency's vice president for communications and development, said privacy concerns prohibit discussing specific employees. But she said the agency is up front about its expectations of workers.

In a released statement, the agency noted homosexuality is a lifestyle that would prohibit employment. "Every employee who comes in to our agency is made aware of our values," Gray said.

Pedreira and Cox acknowledged she told him she was a lesbian when she was hired. Cox said he told her it would not be a problem as long as she didn't talk about her private life at work. ■

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