

The Alabama Baptist

Toll free 800-803-5201
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December 15, 2022

Vol. 187, No. 49
Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



M E R R Y C H R I S T M A S



FROM PRESIDENT AND EDITOR-IN-CHIEF JENNIFER DAVIS RASH AND THE TAB MEDIA GROUP STAFF



Your TAB Media Group staff members count it a joy to serve you each week through the print and digital editions of The Alabama Baptist and The Baptist Paper as well as a variety of other media offerings. They are: **(top row, l to r)** Grace Thornton, Amy Hacker, Susan Stevens, Sarah Gill, Annette Brown, Carrie McWhorter, Jessica Ingram, Debbie Campbell, Shawn Hendricks, **(middle row, l to r)** Pam Holt, Robin McCall, Thomas Felder, Dianna Cagle, Jennifer Davis Rash, Daniel Gilliland, Trennis Henderson, Pam Henderson, **(bottom row, l to r)** Hannah Muñoz, Deb Lowery, Dave Walsh, James Hammack, Maggie Evans and Lauren Grim.

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File photo/The Alabama Baptist

Morris Murray Jr. speaks with TAB's Jennifer Davis Rash (center) and Debbie Campbell in 2020 about children and divorce. In January, he will bring his expertise in counseling and theology to TAB for a seminar on adults and ADHD.

TAB to host adult ADHD seminar in January

Attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder is on the rise in the United States. The World Health Organization estimates the U.S. has the highest rates of ADHD in the world. Between 2003 and 2011, there was a 42% increase in ADHD rates in the U.S., rising from 7.8% to 11%. Through the past 10 years, there has been an additional 30% increase.

It's important to understand what ADHD is and how to treat and prevent it, Morris Murray Jr. said. "This health challenge tends to begin in childhood, but if not properly diagnosed and effectively treated, it may linger into adulthood and hinder one's concentration, discipline, social interactions and spiritual development," he said.

Understanding

Murray, who is a health care management specialist, therapist and minister, wants to help others understand the scope of ADHD. He will use his vast experience in education, health care and ministry to lead a special seminar, "ADHD for Adults," on Tuesday, Jan. 17, at The Alabama Baptist building in Homewood.

The objectives of the seminar are:

- ▶ To learn more accurately what ADHD is.
- ▶ To gain insight into its causes.
- ▶ To develop skills in providing intervention or treatment options.
- ▶ To adopt practical skills in preventing ADHD.

Murray, who lives in Jasper, has a bachelor's degree in religion, philosophy and psychology from Samford University in Birmingham and master's and doctoral degrees in health care management from Beeson Divinity School at Samford, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and Newport University in California. He frequently speaks at workshops, seminars and on podcasts.

The seminar will be from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. Lunch will be provided. The seminar is free, but registration is required. Call 205-870-4720, ext. 122, or email jingram@thealabamabaptist.org to register. Murray also offers free Bible study resources through email at morrismurrayjr42@gmail.com. (The Alabama Baptist)

To register for the free seminar "ADHD for Adults" on Jan. 17, call 205-870-4720, ext. 122, or email jingram@thealabamabaptist.org.

The Alabama Baptist

"If ye continue in My word, then ... ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:31-32

(ISSN 0738-7741; USPS 011-080)
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is published weekly except for one week in July and December by The Alabama Baptist, Inc., at 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209. Phone: 205-870-4720. Statewide phone: 800-803-5201. Website: www.thealabamabaptist.org Email: news@thealabamabaptist.org or subscribe@thealabamabaptist.org Periodicals postage paid at Hattiesburg, Miss.

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Includes print, digital, app and full web access

Group Rate per subscriber per year — \$16.25 (Check with your church or group to find out if it has a TAB group account)

Individual — \$34.95 per year (50 issues)

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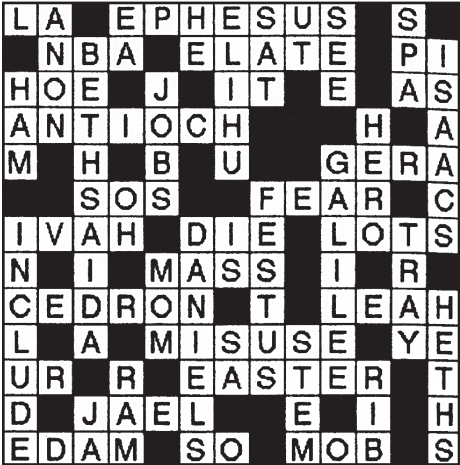


'Nation's Top Regional Christian Newspaper'

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— Correction —

In the Dec. 4 Explore the Bible Sunday School lesson "In the Beginning," the correct verse introducing Jesus as the Logos (Word) should have referenced John 1:1, not Genesis 1:1. Genesis 1:1 does not contain the term "word."



The crossword puzzle can be found on page 15.



GUEST EDITORIAL

for this week's issue of The Alabama Baptist

By Gary Fenton, retired pastor and chair of TAB board of directors

Father's Christmas surprise helps son better understand God

Leonard was a good man who seemed unnecessarily stern to his two sons. He loved his wife and children, but his sons did not always feel loved. Leonard was neither diplomatic nor tactful, and his rules seemed unfair.

One December was particularly difficult for Leonard and his family.

Living in the Midwest, an early winter snowstorm kept Leonard from working at his hourly construction job.

As Christmas approached, Leonard hoped he would be able to work a few days before the holiday. But a second snowstorm on Dec. 18 postponed outdoor construction work until the first of the year.

Unable to work, Leonard was home with his sons while his wife worked part time at a small laundry.

Unexpected gifts

Two days before Christmas, Leonard uncharacteristically asked his younger son if he would like to put on his snow boots and go for a walk.

Leonard's youngest son was excited, but also suspicious. A walk with his father usually turned into work.

As they left the house, Leonard's youngest son asked, "Where are we going?"

Throwing a soft snowball at his youngest son, Leonard smiled and said, "You will see."

Leonard playfully threw more snowballs, and his youngest son did as well.

It was unusual for the father to throw snowballs. In his world snow was shoveled, not thrown.

Leonard and his youngest son's walk ended at a five-and-dime store. On this day, Leonard went into the store with his youngest son.

Leonard opened his wallet and said, "This Christmas will be different for our family. I have not been able to work, and your mother is working part time. This is all the money I have. Let's purchase three gifts: one for your mother, one for your brother and one for you."

The boy realized his father was not exaggerating about this being all the money he had.

They quickly picked gifts for his mother and brother, but Leonard's youngest was more deliberate in choosing a gift for himself. Eventually, he chose a fountain pen.

Father and son walked home together, and they wrapped the

gifts and placed them under the tree with a note that said, "From Dad."

Christmas day had no surprises for Leonard's youngest son as he knew what he was getting.

But now that Leonard's youngest son is a father and grandfather, it is his favorite Christmas memory from childhood. It helped him better understand his father.

Power of sacrifice

Seeing that his father was willing to spend all he had on his family and that he could be fun, helped Leonard's youngest son see his father in a new light.

As a child, Leonard's son did not understand why his father seemed so stern. But as an adult, he understands his father was often trying to protect him.

That Christmas changed his understanding of his father.

Christmas — the incarnation — helps us understand our heavenly Father too.

We often think of God as being strict and stern, but this is because of His character. He is holy and knows how sin destroys us.

On Christmas, we celebrate God becoming flesh and making His dwelling among us so we could see Him differently.

God does not change, but God in flesh provides us with a portrait of God so we can better understand.

God's generosity in sending His Son will transform your understanding of Him. For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son (John 3:16).

This Christmas memory taught me, as Leonard's youngest son, to have a new appreciation for my earthly father, and every Christmas teaches me about my heavenly Father's amazing love.



RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

By Jennifer Davis Rash, President and Editor-in-Chief, will return in January.

Your Voice



Share your comments, letters to the editor, blog excerpts, social media posts

What more can we ask? What more can we do?

By George Yates

SBOM church health strategist

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given" (Isa. 9:6).

This verse is packed so full of information that it cannot be exhausted in a thousand books.

Ponder for a few minutes what the verse says about your redemption from the clutches of sin and eternal separation from God.

To grasp only that one perspective is mind-boggling. Then there is the fact that the Creator of the universe came to earth to live as one of us, His most cherished creation. That is mind-boggling too.

We could go on and on about the implications of Isaiah 9:6. We certainly serve a gracious God, the only true God of the universe.

As we walk through this month of celebrations and joyous occasions, let us not only make memories of wonderful times.

Let us also leave memories of the love God has poured out on us by pouring out His love onto as many other people as we can.

Acts of kindness

What will you do this holiday season to share the love of Jesus with others — family members, neighbors and strangers?

The list of possibilities is endless.

► Bake a few extra cookies or purchase extra candy to distribute at random to neighbors or to others.

► Hand out greeting cards to strangers in stores, shops, medical offices, gas stations or other places

you find yourself in during this season.

I plan to once again hand out \$10 bills at random to cashiers, restaurant workers and others on the street, but gifts of kindness need not cost you money.

► Sit with an elderly person and listen to his or her stories.

► Share with people of other generations your appreciation for them.

► Stand at a store entrance and open the door for all going in or coming out, telling each one "God loves you."

► Volunteer at a local store to carry items out for shoppers (but get the consent of the store manager first).

► Spend some time with children and teachers, sharing the love of God as He has loved you.

Let me encourage you to find at least one way to share the love of God with people outside of your normal circle of influence this holiday season.

Be certain you are not doing it for recognition or to put a feather in your cap.

Nothing in return

Do something for which you expect nothing in return. Perhaps your greatest blessing will come when you share the love of Christ anonymously.

Whatever you do, do it as unto the Lord. You will be blessed indeed!

After all, "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given." What more could we ask than what He has done?

There is not a single moment where God is not loving and merciful to us.

When I cannot see the goodness in my situation, I remember to shift my focus not on what the world may see but to what God sees, knowing He is at work and has a purpose for every moment I find myself in.

I know the temporary suffering is bearable because He has promised to deliver us and to provide rivers in the wilderness. I am not alone through the wandering and struggles of this earthly life.

Selah Vetter
the-scroll.com

"Rivers in the wasteland"

This year, I decided to do something a bit different.

I tried giving myself new resolutions each month. So far it's been really helpful.

Instead of feeling like I have to wait until the next year to get going, I can have a fresh start every 30 days.

Hannah Muñoz
the-scroll.com

"Making your goals stick"

Instead of demanding an answer, when I truly begin trusting Him as my Creator, I have peace knowing no matter how the answer looks or when it comes, it will be from Him.

Amy Hacker
the-scroll.com

"Trusting God when there is no answer"

Inspired by Christ

Christianity is a singing faith. Throughout the Bible, the people of God have sung about their Maker and Redeemer.

Indeed, many of the most beautiful expressions of faith in the Scriptures are demonstrated in song.

Think no further than the shepherd boy David, who would become Israel's great psalmist and king. Music and song express truth and emotion that mere thoughts or spoken words cannot.

The life of Christ is the greatest story ever told, and Christmas is the story of the greatest gift given.

It should come as no surprise that the Christ Child has given inspiration to countless pieces of music through the years and inspires new ones each year.

Some of the greatest music and art in history, in fact, is entirely about Christmas.

Brian Hobbs

Oklahoma Baptist Messenger

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“ A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn. ”

“ O HOLY NIGHT ”

Our main goal should be to live out the real meaning of Christmas as we journey through this December, making preparations and counting down until Christmas day.

How can we live out the real meaning of Christmas? Here are some ideas:

► Determine to keep Christ first in your Christmas. Make the season all about Him. Do not allow any event, responsibility or expectation to squeeze Him out or place Him on the back burner. He's the main event. Center every day of your life around Jesus.

► Follow Mary's and Joseph's examples of obedience. The Christ-centered believer obeys God. When Gabriel appeared to Mary and announced she would be the mother of

Jesus, Mary naturally was troubled but humbly accepted God's assignment. Joseph also obeyed the Lord's command (Matt. 1:24). Obedience fills the Christmas story. Obedience should fill our lives also.

► Forgive quickly. Christ came to give us forgiveness, and He calls us to forgive one another. Don't let bitterness and past hurts hinder your Christ-centered Christmas. Make the effort to mend a fractured relationship.

David L. Chancey
Fayetteville, Ga.

This is my favorite time of year, and I think a lot of other people would say the same. I love the decorations, the food, the time spent with family and the focus on the birth of

Christ. It's usually a very busy time, but I do try to pause and reflect on the real reason for the season amid the hustle and bustle.

It's not always easy. Sometimes we get so caught up in the places to be and the things to buy that we forget the meaning behind it all.

I challenge you to slow down this year.

I challenge you to soak in those moments with your loved ones and the awestruck look on a child's face when he sees Christmas lights on a pretty tree.

I challenge you to give meaningful gifts that are a gift to more people than just the recipient.

Maegan Dockery
Marketing manager
WMU Foundation

Foley church shares Christ in parade

The first Christmas parade in Foley was three years ago. There were two church floats, but neither one said anything about Jesus. Two radio stations had floats but no music.

I found that strange and just plain not right.

As soon as the new year was started, I brought the lack of Jesus in Christmas to my family at Magnolia Springs Baptist Church.

Of course, all agreed a correction was needed, and we were the ones to do it.

I have a box truck just ideal for a rolling billboard. Signs were made covering both sides. They say, "From the manger to the cross, For you and for me."

A CD player and music proclaiming Christ and Christ alone was provided.

Christian decorations were set aside for the truck cab and tailgate. We were all set.

The next Christmas parade in Foley, Magnolia Springs Baptist Church was represented with the decorated truck, Christian music playing loud and clear and a dozen members passing out gifts about the reason for the season.

Participating in the parade brought joy to us, and we pray our presence brought joy to all those hearing and seeing that Jesus was in the Christmas parade.

Tony Berry
Foley, Ala.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Mr. Berry shares this story in response to the Nov. 17 Rashional Thoughts editorial in which TAB Editor-in-Chief Jennifer Davis Rash asked readers to tell us how they are spreading cheer in their circles of influence this holiday season.

Do you have a story to share? Send it to us at news@thealabamabaptist.org.

From the *Twitterverse*

@BillyGraham

"We are only stewards of the world's resources. They are not ours; they are God's. When we find our security in Him, we can then give generously from what He has entrusted to us. This is our Christian duty." #BillyGraham

@DanielDickard

Many are the churches that ask God to bless the plans they have self-manufactured.

Few are the churches, though, that beg God to reveal His plans and divine purposes and then depend on Him to carry them out.

Be the latter, not the former.

@LiciB

My child wore me out tonight as she said her prayers! She prayed for her teacher who has cancer and won't be back to school and thanked God for healing me after my stroke. I'm done.

@richvillodas

In a world torn by rage and anxiety, one of the greatest gifts followers of Jesus are called to offer is [a] simple, non-anxious (i.e., calm) presence. Not a presence removed from this reality, but a presence that refuses to be shaped by it.

@brocraige

"Preach Christ, and Christ, and Christ, and Christ and nothing else but Christ." —Spurgeon

Lord, may our pastors preach this message clearly, and may we who gather be ready to receive this message. Lord, we need You!

@jaredcwilson

American evangelicals are prone to panic about the waning faith in our nation. But we forget America is not the center of Christianity. The center of Christianity is seated at the right hand of the Father, and of His kingdom there will be no end.

@SBCExecComm

Pray for the Lord to help Southern Baptists see the long-term value of their short-term commitment to serve overseas [and] for more churches in the U.S. to partner with IMB missionaries who live in hard-to-reach places.

@johnthweatt

A lot of talk in the sports world and in the church about "deserving" second chances. Good time to remember the words of Clint Eastwood at the end of "Unforgiven": "Deserve's got nothing to do with it!" It is all grace!

@kristenpadilla

"The mystery of our religion is the incarnate, crucified, risen and exalted Jesus Messiah ... the living Lord, who for us and for our salvation ... came down from heaven ..." — Osvaldo Padilla, Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles

3 stories you should know



AP photo/Manuel Balce Ceneta

Contemporary Christian singer Amy Grant (center) on Dec. 4 became the first such artist honored by the Kennedy Center, whose recipients are recognized for their lifetime of contributions. Actress Chita Rivera noted that “in her amazing 40-plus years, Amy has logged success after success without ever compromising her faith or her individuality.” Grant, 61, has six Grammys and more than 20 Dove Awards from the Gospel Music Association. (RNS)

‘Negative economic forces’ affect CP giving

Giving through the national Cooperative Program is off to a slow start for the 2023 fiscal year.

The Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee reported churches gave \$14,697,627.87 through the CP in November. That amount was 8.27% under the monthly budgeted amount of a little more than \$16 million.

November 2022 gifts were also less than November 2021 and November 2020 gifts (\$16.45 million and \$15.7 million respectively).

A statement from the EC attributed the drop in gifts to “negative economic forces affecting churches and individuals across the country.”

“I am incredibly thankful for the unified efforts of churches giving through the Cooperative Program,” said SBC EC interim president Willie McLaurin. (TAB)

Marriage protections enshrined in law

Congress on Dec. 8 gave final passage to the Respect for Marriage Act, a measure that enshrines protections for same-sex “marriage” in U.S. law.

Legal protections for same-sex unions already exist under the Supreme Court’s 2015 Obergefell decision. The Respect for Marriage Act codifies those protections should Obergefell ever be overturned.

Opponents of the bill worry that in addition to contradicting the biblical view of marriage, it poses a threat to religious freedom. Despite language saying nonprofit organizations, including churches, will not be required to provide services “for the solemnization or celebration of a marriage,” many say the new law opens the doors for more lawsuits related to such unions. (TAB)

Persecuted church

Extremists in India stop children as they travel to Christian event

KHANDWA, India — A busload of tribal children going to a Christian event in India was stopped by radicals claiming the event was an attempt to convert the youths.

According to the relief group Barnabas Fund, the children from a Christian community were intercepted Oct. 3 on their way to an annual Christian conference in Khandwa in India’s Madhya Pradesh State.

Madhya Pradesh is one of 11 states in India with anti-conversion laws that prohibit the use of force, fraud or allurement to convert an individual to a religion.

The extremists claimed the purpose of the three-day conference was to convert participants to Christianity.

Khandwa police responded. After taking statements from the conference organizers, teachers, and all 200 children at the event, officials said the extremists’ claims were unsubstantiated.

The conference was eventually canceled because of the disruption, Barnabas Fund reported.

India is No. 10 on Open Doors’ 2022 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.

Four in Uganda wounded for telling Muslims about Jesus

KAMPALA, Uganda — Four evangelists sustained significant injuries from attacks in eastern



IMB photo

Uganda after telling Muslims about Jesus Christ.

Andrew Dikusooka and Ronald Musasizi were attacked with knives Sept. 24 for leading some Muslims to profess faith in Jesus Christ. The two men had engaged in a series of debates Sept. 20–24 with Islamic scholars in Iganga District.

Dikusooka told Morning Star News that Muslims and witch doctors were among the people who put their faith in Jesus.

Dikusooka and Musasizi were hospitalized for their injuries.

In a separate incident, Robert Okia and Wilberforce Mutenga told about Jesus in Busakira village, and eight Muslims put their faith in Christ. On Oct. 7, the evangelists were visiting a home when a group of Muslims encircled them, beat them and slashed them with knives.

Both Okia and Mutenga required medical treatment, Morning Star reported.

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

► **Jerry Butler**, former pastor of First Baptist Church Pelham (1974-'78), died Nov. 27 in Albertville. He was 86.

He previously served as pastor of South Sauty Church, Langston, and trained chainsaw volunteers for Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief and helped coordinate efforts as a white cap (top-level DR leader on-site). Samford University named Butler as the 2007 Alabama Baptist Minister of the Year.

Butler was preceded in death by his wife, Janet.

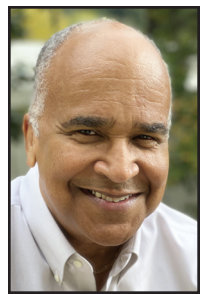
He is survived by two children, two grandchildren and a great-grandchild.



BUTLER

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

► **John E. King Jr.** celebrated 35 years of ministry Oct. 24 at the **Birmingham Metro Baptist Association**. He has more than 40 years of ministerial and pastoral experience. He is a pastor with more than 20 years of pastoral leadership experience and 20 years of experience as an attorney. As a church and community relations specialist, King assists churches in dealing with church and community relations, church planting, church revitalization, coaching, conflict resolution, leadership development and other pastoral and legal matters.



KING

► **First Baptist Church Trussville** is hosting "Declaration of Dependence" Jan. 27-28 with Whitney Capps from Proverbs 31 Ministries serving as keynote speaker.

The conference will be Friday 6-9 p.m. and Saturday 8 a.m.-noon. Dinner Friday and continental breakfast Saturday is included. Visit touchpoint.fbctrussville.org/OnlineReg/1159.



RAGSDALE

CALHOUN ASSOCIATION

► **Garry Ragsdale**, pastor of **Mount Zion Baptist Church, Alexandria**, received the Hope Award by retired Sav-A-Life executive director Michelle Payne at the Sav-A-Life dinner Oct. 20. Payne said Ragsdale was recognized for his consistent commitment to the sanctity

of life, his courage to preach on the topic and his influence on her life and the lives of many others.

► **Calhoun Baptist Association's** 131st annual meeting Oct. 23 featured Paul Chitwood,

president of the International Mission Board.

"God honored and blessed our efforts and preparation," said Roger Willmore, director of missions. The meeting featured a missions fair and a combined choir and orchestra. It was hosted by Hill Crest Baptist Church, Anniston.

COOSA RIVER ASSOCIATION

► **Ernest "Skip" Parvin** recently retired as pastor of **First Baptist Church Childersburg** where he had served since March 2016. He holds a bachelor's degree in education as well as master of theology and doctor of ministry degrees. He previously served as pastor to senior adults at Bellevue Baptist Church, Memphis, Tennessee, for nine years.

He has served in ministry for more than 50 years at churches in Alabama, Florida and Tennessee. He currently serves on the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.



PARVIN

ETOWAH ASSOCIATION

► **Cherry Street Baptist Church, Attalla**, celebrated its 100th anniversary Oct. 16 with its pastor, Philip Elliott, preaching. The choir and congregational music was led by former music director, Pam Morgan.

Attalla Mayor Larry Means presented a proclamation from the city.

A plaque was presented on behalf of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. Pam Morgan presented a flag from U.S. Rep. Robert Aderholt. The flag had flown over the U.S. Capitol. Aderholt also had a commemoration of Cherry Street's milestone anniversary put in the Congressional Record. Morgan also mentioned congratulatory letters from three former pastors. Elliott read letters from a former pastor and Craig Carlisle, director of missions of Etowah Baptist Association.

HALE ASSOCIATION

► **Antioch Baptist Church, Greensboro**, celebrated its 125th anniversary Nov. 20 with Fred W. Karthaus III (right) serving as the guest preacher. Karthaus, who is currently associate pastor of **First Baptist Church Rogersville**, is a descendant of Antioch's first pastor.

Pastor Arthur Thomas (second from right), who was raised in the church, presented the church history and recognized former mem-



Photo courtesy of David Nelson

bers. Solos were sung by Ginger Jones and Jon Thomas. Thomas led congregational singing.

David Nelson of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission presented a certificate.

"We had a grand turnout and are hopeful the anniversary celebration will draw people back," said Maxine Perry (second from left next to Joe McDaniel, deacon).

MARION ASSOCIATION

► **Gilbert Butler**, a member of **First Baptist Church Guin**, celebrated his 100th birthday Dec. 3 at the church. Born in 1922 in Woodville, Alabama, his birthday was Dec. 2.

A graduate of Auburn University, Butler was a public school teacher for 35 years, mostly as Marion County High School's agriculture teacher.

He and his late wife, Marguerite, began serving as missions volunteers in 1975, and participated in more than 80 assignments.

He has three children, seven grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.



BUTLER

MOBILE ASSOCIATION

► **Alan Floyd**, pastor of **Cottage Hill Baptist Church, Mobile**, celebrated his 10th anniversary recently.



Photo courtesy of Cottage Hill Baptist Church

Smokie Norful, Grammy Award-winning soul gospel artist, along with hundreds of church members, family and friends attended the celebration Nov. 2.

Floyd holds degrees from the University of Mobile, Southwestern Seminary and New Orleans Seminary. He led churches in Florida and Georgia before coming to Cottage Hill in 2012.

He and his wife, Kathy, have two children and a grandchild.

MONTGOMERY ASSOCIATION

► **Jim Graham** celebrates 20 years as pastor of **Coosada Baptist Church** this month.

He has served in ministry since 1986 and is a graduate of Samford University with a bachelor's degree in education. He also holds a master's degree from New Orleans Seminary and doctorate from Southwestern Seminary.

He and his wife, Pearleen, have four children.



GRAHAM

A milestone

'Celebrate Life!' musical celebrates 50th anniversary, brings people together

By Art Toalston
The Alabama Baptist

Leslie Anne Tarabella was in elementary school when her father, Cordell Harrison, minister of music at Myrtle Grove Baptist Church in Pensacola, Florida, began to make plans to produce "Celebrate Life!"

"I believe he heard it as a demo performance at a conference. He came back very excited about it and wanted to be one of the first churches to produce it," recounted Tarabella, who now lives in Fairhope.

"Celebrate Life!" was an early Baptist expression of what was happening in the Jesus music movement on the West Coast. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the musical.

Harrison, who died four years ago, was building toward a moment like "Celebrate Life!"

"A lot of people in the church were against any kind of contemporary music aimed at teenagers," Tarabella said. "So in the morning, he would always have traditional hymns, but in the evening, the youth choir did more and more contemporary music."

Reaching young people

"Some people would call our house after church about how they didn't like guitars and drums being used. He would just smile and say, 'Yes, yes, I understand,' and then he would hang up and shake his head because he knew what was important — trying to reach the young people. And because of that, he had a large youth choir that overflowed out of the choir loft and down both sides onto the platform."

"'Celebrate Life!' won over even the harshest critics when they heard the music and saw it was biblically based," Tarabella said.

"And once the parents saw their kids coming home from practice excited, they joined in the excitement and helped with the production."

Myrtle Grove produced the musical several times during the '70s and '80s, once in conjunction with churches in the Pensacola Bay



True North Presents is bringing together people from around the nation to perform "Celebrate Life!" at Carnegie Hall on June 24, 2023. For registration information for participating or attending, visit truenorthpresents.com/celebrate.

Baptist Association at the former Bayfront Auditorium.

Former choir members have gathered twice for reunions, each time including "He Is Alive" and "The Truth Shall Make You Free" in their performance at Myrtle Grove.

"It was just like yesterday. A lot of us, even though we need reading glasses, didn't even need the music because we remembered it by heart," Tarabella said. "If the accompanying musical score wasn't equally as powerful as the lyrics, I don't think it would have stuck with us all these years."

Tarabella is not alone in her fond memories of "Celebrate Life!" The musical enjoyed a broad acceptance among Baptist and other evangelical churches, said Roy Hayes, a former music minister in Alabama, Tennessee, Texas and Louisiana.

"It remained an important work [that was] performed for many years, and a number of individual songs from the musical retained a performance life of their own ... for choir tours and festivals and as a staple in the repertoire for weekly worship in local churches."

One of the songs, "In Remem-

brance," is in the Lord's Supper section of the 1991 "Baptist Hymnal" and the Communion section of the 2008 hymnal.

The late Buryl Red — a prolific New York-based composer, member of Manhattan Baptist Church and longtime musical director of The CenturyMen, a 100-voice chorus of music ministers — wrote the music for lyrics penned by Ragan Courtney, who turned 81 this year.

"Celebrate Life!"

emerged from Courtney's plan to end his life the previous year after the one-week failure of a Broadway musical he had written with a cousin.

Walking into the Caribbean to drown himself, he suddenly began singing "Jesus Loves Me," recalling distant memories from his childhood days

at church in Ruston, Louisiana.

"Stumbling back to the beach, I was overwhelmed with what I had experienced. Gasping in surprise, I ran to the house, grabbed a pencil and started writing as though I were taking dictation about a vision I was having," Courtney recounted.

The musical is told from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, "but not in a way with

pretense — just very real, with [informal contemporary language]. ... It goes back to the Scripture that the word of God does not return void. We are declaring the gospel, and we expect the Lord to move," said Clint Kimmel, worship and arts pastor at Sugar Land Baptist Church in the Houston area.

Earlier this year, Kimmel led a 50th anniversary rendition of the musical with a 79-voice adult choir and 34-piece orchestra.

On June 24, 2023, a 50th anniversary performance will be hosted at New York's Carnegie Hall under the leadership of Hayes, who is now president and artistic director of True North Presents. The organization focuses on enhancing the ministry of Christian artists and of church choirs.

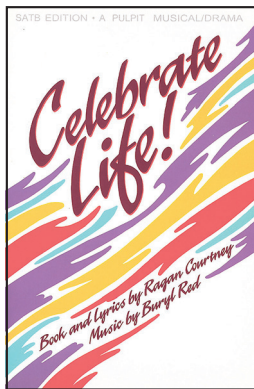
True North Presents is bringing together music ministers, worship pastors, choir directors, singers and instrumentalists from around the nation to perform "Celebrate Life!" at Carnegie Hall. Hayes expects 200–250 choir members and 55–60 orchestra members to participate.

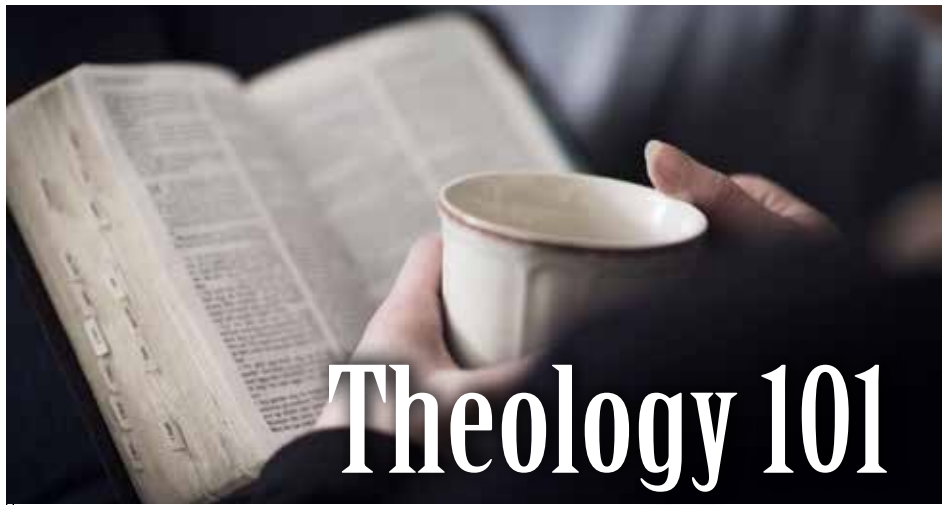
"It's an interesting thing to be in a historic setting like Carnegie Hall ... possibly the most famous stage on earth ... and to be present when the Holy Spirit comes into an environment like that in a very powerful way," Hayes said. "I fully anticipate that's going to be the case when we perform 'Celebrate Life!'"

'Greatest story ever told'

The idea of presenting the musical at its half-century mark started with Bruce Greer, a composer, songwriter and musical director as well as pianist at First Baptist Church Dallas. Greer first heard the musical when he was 11 years old. He was captivated then and remains so today.

Church music since the 1970s "owes a debt of gratitude to Buryl and Ragan's vision," Greer said. "It will remain significant for years to come because we're telling the greatest story ever told. We just have to keep introducing it to future generations so the church doesn't forget this beautiful work."





Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Living in gratitude

Christmas Peace

By **Jerry Batson, Th.D.**
The Alabama Baptist

The angel's announcement of the birth of Jesus was one of "good tidings of great joy" as we noted last week in thinking about Christmas joy.

Having delivered those good tidings to the shepherds, the heralding angel was joined by "a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men'" (Luke 2:13-14).

The coming of Christ into the world was the heavenly provision for the possibility of earthly peace. If our thoughts go immediately to world conditions, we wonder if we will ever see the fulfillment of the angels' announcement. Human history is packed with the reality of wars and rumors of wars. Nations continue to rise against nations.

'He shall reign'

Against this somber fact stands the heavenly announcement that one day it may be said, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). What we see now is a far cry from eternity's future.

In the meantime, God has made provisions for individuals to experience His peace in their hearts, even amid raging external conflict and hostility. The declaration of Psalm 119:165 still stands: "Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble."

Until peace on earth and goodwill toward men is brought to pass when Christ returns to establish His perfect kingdom, believers must live amid raucous times with inner peace, knowing that all is well between them and God.

Spiritual fruit

When Galatians 5:22-23 lists the various characteristics of a life indwelt by the Holy Spirit, the third listed fruit of the Spirit is peace. Later in the New Testament, Colossians 3:15 instructs us, "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts."

This ruling of the Spirit in a believer's heart is often compared to the function of an umpire in baseball, who has the authority to rule whether runners are safe or out when they slide into a base.

God's peace is often the divine umpire that indicates whether a given act or attitude is safely acceptable to God.

When inner peace follows an act, it may well be God's Spirit ruling the action to be "safe" or acceptable in His sight.

May the peace of God rule in our hearts this Christmas season, as well as throughout our earthly sojourn.

Jerry Batson is a retired Alabama Baptist pastor who also has served as associate dean of Beeson Divinity School at Samford University and professor of several schools of religion during his career.



Christmas Eve service remains popular holiday observance

Pastor Chris Woodall enjoys Christmas candlelight and Christmas Day worship services, and based on attendance at those services, it seems members of his church do too.

"We have seen higher attendance for those services, with visiting family members and guests coming along," said Woodall, pastor of Pinckard Baptist Church. "Those services are always sweet times of worship."

The Christmas season is a prime season for church attendance. Traditionally, Christmas is the second highest attendance time of the year behind only Easter, according to a 2012 Lifeway Research study.

In 2014 and 2015, around 3 in 5 Americans said Christmas activities should include a visit to church.

Among those who don't attend church this time of the year, 57% said they would be likely to attend if someone they knew asked them.

When Christmas falls on Sunday, as it does this year, church leaders know families will face conflicts with busy Christmas mornings and family traditions at play.

Jeff Gardner, pastor of Daphne Baptist Church, said in his experience, worship attendance is usually lower when Christmas falls on Sunday. Christmas Eve services on any day of the week present similar challenges.

Conflicting traditions

"Christians have many different Christmas traditions, and so do their churches," said Scott McConnell, executive director of Lifeway Research. "The nature of those traditions varies by church, with some seeing attendance culminating in a special Christmas Eve service, others a Sunday morning service and others a special musical experience."

McConnell said family and church traditions are most likely to

coincide for Christmas Eve services, but churches that have established the tradition of a Christmas Eve service often report the event has become an important part of the season to church and community members.

'Special time'

Philip Morris, pastor of Chulafinnee Baptist Church in Heflin, said he's always seen good attendance at Christmas Eve communion services, with church families bringing others who are visiting with them.

"It's always a special time," Morris said.

A Lifeway Research study found that about half of U.S. Protestant pastors (48%) say a Christmas Eve

service is their church's largest event during the holiday season.

Around a quarter (26%) of U.S. Protestant pastors say an event during the third week of the month is their top in attendance.

What's clear is that churches see a variety of attendance patterns during the Christmas season.

At Harrisburg Baptist Church in Tupelo, Missis-

sippi, early December services see the biggest crowds.

"Excitement about the Christmas season feeds into the higher attendance in the first few weeks of the month," said pastor Rob Armstrong.

Children's events tend to generate a lot of excitement too. John Dobbs, pastor of Forsythe Church of Christ in Monroe, Louisiana, told Lifeway Research his church's Christmas Eve children's program is their most popular Christmastime service.

"Since it involves very young children, it's a fun production of songs and readings that center on the birth of Christ," Dobbs said. "We had a large number of grandparents, parents and various family members who came last year to see the children participate." (Lifeway Research, TAB)



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OF ALABAMA BAPTIST MISSIONS AND MINISTRIES

Alabama's missionary heroes 'spur us on' to sacrifice for missions

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

For more than a decade, Pete Dunn and his wife, Pat, lived their lives out of five suitcases. And one of the places those suitcases landed was Jibla Baptist Hospital in Yemen.

"When the hospital administrator went home on furlough for a year, Pat and I filled in the gap," said Dunn, a missionary emeritus with the International Mission Board who served in the Middle East for 33 years. "The first visitor I had in the door was Martha Myers."

Myers — a doctor and IMB missionary from Alabama — wanted to talk to him about security at the hospital. She knew there were threats floating around outside its walls.

"The mosque in a major town close to Jibla [sent out a message] every Friday on a PA system — 'There is a satan among us; her name is Martha Myers,'" Dunn said.

But even though she was aware of the threats, they didn't stop her from doing the very thing that had raised her profile, he said.

She would get into an old four-

wheel drive Land Rover, use her own money to buy medicine and food and drive into remote areas where there were hardly any roads.

Serving the people

"She'd go to a little village and tend to the sick folks and feed those who were hungry," Dunn said. "Sometimes she'd get in late at night. Sometimes she wouldn't get in at all — she'd spend the night on the road. That was her attitude; she was there to serve the people."

Myers was humble, he said, and any money she got, she turned around and gave it away.

Sometimes she didn't have enough food to feed herself. Because of this, she was well known — and well loved. There may have been some who sought her for nefarious reasons, but the vast majority who sought her just wanted her help.

"People would come into the hospital clinic looking for her because she had such deep compassion for people who were sick and hurting," Dunn said.

But in 2002 — a year or two after Dunn and his wife left Yemen — he got a call that an extremist had come into the hospital looking for Myers with a gun in his hand. The



SBOM photo
Alabama native Martha Myers' legacy lives on. She served 25 years in Yemen before being killed in 2002.



IMB photo
Pete Dunn visits with a woman in a nursing home in 1984. Dunn and his wife, Pat, served with the International Mission Board. Candace McIntosh, Alabama WMU executive director, considers the Dunns "missions heroes."

gunman ended her life and the life of two others.

"I remember saying, 'Not Martha Myers,'" Dunn said. "I think she probably had more Bible studies going across the mountainous regions of Yemen than anybody else. She knew people needed help and hope, and she went. She was an example of the Lord Jesus at work."

He said something very similar to that when he spoke at one of her memorial services. So did Pastor Rick Evans back at her home

church, Dalraida Baptist in Montgomery.

"Martha was a victorious Christian and was obedient until death," Evans said Jan. 4, 2003, at a service filled with 1,200 people.

And Myers' legacy lives on. She's been memorialized in a number of ways after her death, including a statue in the Samford University library in Birmingham, induction

into the Alabama Women's Hall of Fame and most recently as one of the namesakes of the Myers-Mallory

For more information about Myers and Mallory and the state missions offering named after them, visit myers-mallory.org.

State Missions Offering, which was founded in 2016.

Rosalie Hunt, an IMB missionary emeritus and missions author from Alabama, said it's a wonderful blessing for Christ-followers in the state to have heroes like Myers and Kathleen Mallory, another missions force from Alabama, to look to as examples.

"Just about everybody likes to be a part of something important," Hunt said. "Maybe that is why we join causes. From the time we are young, we learn to look up to certain people."

She said, "Those earthly models reflect what we most admire and believe in. ... They embody Christlike virtues."

"Those heroes inspire us, spur us on to be the best we can be. Missions heroes are a vital part of our own missions inspiration," Hunt said.

"Those like Kathleen Mallory and Martha Myers give us standards of excellence toward which to strive. We realize that we serve the same Lord they served and He can enable us in service, even as He did those two amazing women."

'A great debt'

Mallory, the other namesake of the offering, was born and raised in Selma. She was one of the early leaders of Woman's Missionary Union. She served as superintendent of Dallas County WMU and as secretary-treasurer of national WMU.

She promoted work with every ethnic group and taught that every woman ought to be a soul winner and a generous giver.

"During her tenure, she saved the Foreign Mission Board (now the IMB) and the Home Mission Board (now North American Mission Board) from bankruptcy," Hunt said in an interview in 2020 when she released her book, "Guided by Grace: The Kathleen Mallory Story."

"She kept WMU and basically the Southern Baptist Convention solvent through the Great Depression, World War I and World War II," Hunt said. "We owe her a great debt of gratitude. So much of what we do now is on the foundation which she laid for us all those years ago."

Candace McIntosh, Alabama

WMU executive director, said Alabama is blessed with a number of people who could be called "missions heroes."

'Many, many others'

"To be one of the smaller states and maybe not as wealthy as some, we have had a number of missions personnel sent out from churches," she said, starting with Eliza Sexton Shuck, Alabama Baptists' first international missionary, sent to China in 1847.

McIntosh said when she thinks of missions heroes, in addition to Myers and Mallory, she thinks of Dunn, who with his late wife, Pat, served for 11 years before they saw the first person come to faith.

She said she also thinks of Mary Essie Stephens, who guided Alabama WMU through some

difficult times; Beverly Sutton Miller, who faithfully led in Stephens' footsteps; Bob and Mavis Hardy, early missionaries to Japan; and Stuart Calvert and Barbara Joiner, who were well-loved missions authors.

"And there are many, many others," McIntosh said.

All of their contributions matter to the missions cause, she said. "Truly we stand on the shoulders of our missions heroes who by their actions through faith have forged the way forward for the work that takes place today among the unreached across our nation and world."



IMB photo

Missionary Dr. Martha Myers cares for a young patient at Jibla Baptist Hospital. She had a deep compassion for the sick and hurting.



Photo courtesy of Samford Special Collections

Bob and Mavis Hardy (center) served as Southern Baptist missionaries to Japan. They retired in 1994 after four decades of service.



Photo courtesy of Samford Special Collections

As Alabama WMU executive director (1954-1984), Mary Essie Stephens (second from right) traveled internationally to partner with WMU women in other countries for training and fellowship, the first director to do so.

Right: Stuart Calvert (left) and Barbara Joiner were well-loved missions authors from Alabama.

Below: Beverly Sutton Miller, Alabama WMU executive director from 1984-2002, led the organization in creative new ways to involve members in missions.



Photo courtesy of Alabama WMU



Photo courtesy of Alabama WMU



Photo courtesy of Samford Special Collections

Alabama natives Pat and Pete Dunn served as IMB missionaries in the Middle East. They retired in 1991 after 33 years.

How to serve military families during the holiday season

By Kimberly Wootten
The Baptist Messenger

This will be the first Christmas my 4-year-old can say he's spent more Christmases with his dad than without — a common story for military families.

Having your service member home for birthdays, holidays and important milestones every year is rare and almost incomprehensible for a military family.

The holidays accentuate the needs military families feel throughout the year. Because of this, churches have a unique opportunity to step into these tender spaces and welcome military families into their communities, meet their needs and train them to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel.

In doing so, your church can obey the Great Commission and deploy military families for the glory of God.

In order to welcome military families into your church with Christlike hospitality, your congregation must first identify these families and the cultural barriers that exist.

Questions to ask

Here are a few questions you can ask to help highlight who these families might be in your area.

► What service members are in your community?

► Is there a nearby military installation?

► If not, are there National Guardsmen or reservists living or serving in your area?

If your church is in proximity to a military installation, consider designating a church member, deacon, staff person or elder to reach out to the chaplains and seek to understand the needs of the families in their unit.

Knowing the training and deployment schedules will



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reveal unique ways your congregation can come alongside those service members and their families.

We all live with constraints, but the difficulties military families face can be particularly tricky.

Meeting needs

As churches identify and welcome military families, the physical and relational limitations that leave them feeling disconnected and lonely will become evident. But a local body of believers can meet many needs.

For example, offer babysitting so a family member can make appointments or go Christmas shopping without the children in tow.

Providing meals can ease the burden of regular household tasks.

Helping with a household maintenance list while a service member is away can relieve a spouse who is maxed out.

House projects, winterizing the home or repairing broken items often remain unfinished due to limited capacity.

Simple things such as decorating a home or hanging or taking down Christmas lights can be a huge morale booster.

When church members see a need and step into that gap, they significantly lighten the constraints on military families.

The military and many military nonprofits offer services to support and meet the physical needs of service members and their families. But the church offers something none of those organizations can: the life-changing power of the gospel experienced through the body of Christ.

Due to the transient nature of military life, families are eager to develop connections within the body of Christ.

They look to the local church in hopes of forming deep relationships. Yet they face distinct hurdles to involvement in the local church: lack of child care, transportation needs, time and finances.

As your church plans holiday events, taking the time to consider these factors will bless your military families and enable more of them to participate and bring their friends.

Powerful forces

Seize the opportunity to invest in military families. Service members and the people close to them have bought into the understanding that their lives are not their own. This makes them incredible forces for the Kingdom.

As your church discipled them and builds them up in Christ, their lives of service will continue to have eternal significance.

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

Place a classified ad below for \$1 per word. For more information call 205-870-4720, ext. 200, or email ads@thealabamabaptist.org. To place an online classified ad for \$9.99/month, visit thealabamabaptist.org/classifieds.

CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

Parkway Baptist Church, Creve Coeur, Missouri, seeks a full-time senior pastor to lead our church into the future. Parkway Baptist is located in an increasingly diverse area of West St. Louis County, MO. Please visit our website at <https://www.parkwaybaptist.net> for more information about the church. Send resumé and cover letter to: pastorsearch@parkwaybaptist.net or Senior Pastor Search Committee, 12465 Olive Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63141.

PASTOR

First Baptist Church Rogersville is in search of a senior pastor. Interested candidates may email their resumé to: seniorpastorsearch@fbcrogersville.com or mail a resumé to: First Baptist Church Rogersville, 222 College St., Rogersville, AL 35652, ATTN: Senior Pastor Search Committee.

PASTOR

Newbridge Missionary Baptist Church in Asheville, North Carolina, a member of the Southern Baptist Convention, prayerfully seeks a man who will preach the inerrant word of God and has a heart for missions. Email resumé to: NewbridgePST@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Stowers Hill Baptist Church of Attalla, Alabama, is in search of a bivocational pastor. Please send resumé to email address stowershillbaptist@gmail.com or mail to 407 9th Ave. SW, Attalla, AL 35954.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Liberty Baptist Church in Morris, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational pastor who will preach God's word, pray for God's leadership and have a heart for missions. Send resumé to: garrettm2@bellsouth.net.

WORSHIP PASTOR

Seeking someone to lead all aspects of musical programs of Linden Baptist Church. This is a full-time position and will also have other responsibilities as an associate pastor. For full job description and to apply for the position, visit <http://www.lindenbaptist.org> and click on "associate pastor application." You may contact the church

directly at 334-295-4278 or by mail at P.O. Box 480776, Linden, AL 36748.

WORSHIP LEADER

Calvary Baptist in Tuscumbia, seeks bivocational worship leader. Mail resumé to: 601 North Main Street, Tuscumbia, AL 35674, or email to: lynndaleh@gmail.com.

DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND/OR PRESCHOOL

Parkview Baptist Church in Decatur, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a full-time and/or part-time director of children and/or preschool. Send resumé and questions to: search.committee@parkviewdecaratur.org.

OTHER POSITIONS

DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS

Coffee Baptist Association is seeking a director of missions. Resumé must be received by January 31, 2023. Please send resumé to: P.O. Box 127, New Brockton, AL 36351. For further information, please call 334-894-6411.

NURSERY COORDINATOR

First Baptist Church Spanish Fort is seeking a part-time nursery coordinator. For more information, contact the personnel committee at contact@fbcspanishfort.com.

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5 mistakes to avoid in weekly church emails

By Mark MacDonald
The Alabama Baptist

A weekly email serves as a tool for your church to interject into your members' lives and remind them what's happening.

But beware: Mistakes abound in managing this valuable tool. If you have regular church email mistakes, you'll lose subscribers quickly. It's very difficult to get them back.

Here are five church email mistakes to avoid:

Mistake 1: Sending to everyone. Consider sending different emails to email groups. Segmenting based on demographics is shown to increase opening rates.

Hone the message

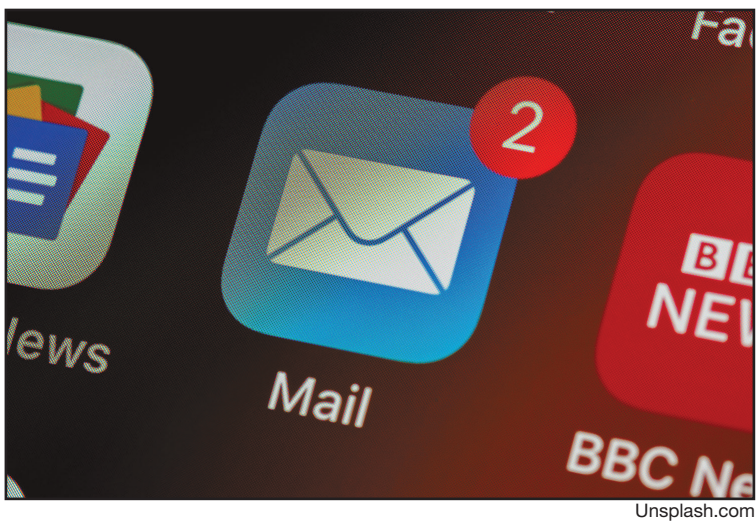
Why? Because you can hone the message directly to that group. And often your emails become shorter, which is a very good thing.

Mistake 2: Using the same subject lines. Spend time crafting a different, short and beneficial-sounding subject line that's connected to the email's information.

If you can, use the recipient's name in the subject line. This is easier when you build a list in an email management system like Mailchimp or Constant Contact. Many email campaign systems allow a placeholder that will be swapped with a name when it sends.

Mistake 3: Telling all the details. Do what it takes to raise awareness for key events and link to the details on your church website. But don't put all the details in your email.

If your website is set up properly, they'll discover other church events once you lead them online. Too many details make your emails too long.



Only give them promotional information that will make them interested enough to click on a website link.

The shorter your email is, the more people will read it.

Mistake 4: Having lots of paragraphs. Concentrate on subheads, bolded words, bullet points and links.

These eye interrupters will make your emails scannable, which respects the time of your audience.

A great email normally will be less than 150 words, avoids long paragraphs and ensures scannability so someone doesn't have to read the entire email.

Mistake 5: Using hidden calls to action. Lead your reader to the "now what" referred to as a call to action.

The best emails have the fewest calls to action. The most read emails have one point and one call to action.

What if your church wants to have lots of email information? Beware of too many buried calls to action in the content.

Create sections

Instead, consider subheads in your email to create sections. Here's an example:

"Mom? These events will connect you to other moms."

Then have a listing of event links like Moms Night Out with dates and times. Each event title should be a link that connects to your website for more details.

Finally, at the end of each email, have one call to action such as "Check out more church events here."

EDITOR'S NOTE — Mark MacDonald is a communication pastor, speaker, consultant, author and church branding strategist for BeKnownforSomething.com.

A promotional advertisement for The Alabama Baptist magazine. It features a gift box wrapped in brown paper with a red ribbon and a sprig of holly. Next to it is a copy of The Alabama Baptist magazine, showing the cover with the headline 'TRUE PARTNERSHIP'. The background is a light blue wooden surface with white snowflakes. The text 'Give the gift of The Alabama Baptist this Christmas season.' is written in large, bold letters. At the bottom, a red banner contains the text 'Visit tabonline.org/gift to send a gift subscription.'

Give the gift of

The Alabama Baptist

this Christmas season.

Visit tabonline.org/gift to send a gift subscription.

Coming together to help

Howardtown Baptist pastor says he's grateful for community of helpers after tornado

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Jamie Lay said he thought the weather had finally calmed down enough for him to go to bed in the early morning hours of Nov. 30.

"I had just laid down, and my phone went off," he said. "I saw the tornado was in Wayne County, Mississippi, and coming directly this way, so I got my family up and got in the bathroom."

Lay, who serves as pastor of Howardtown Baptist Church in Tibbie, had weathered eight tornadoes in the past, and he was about to meet his ninth. As his family huddled together, the bathroom doors started shaking, then the whole house, and they heard the storm roaring outside like a train.

"I asked them, 'Are you sure you're right with the Lord? Because this might be it.' It was a scary night, no doubt about it," Lay said.

Amazingly, their house didn't have any damage. But Howardtown Baptist just across the street didn't fare quite as well. As Lay

went over to check things out, he saw the columns on the front porch had moved, and the roof had been peeled back on the sanctuary and torn off the Sunday School wing. The stained glass windows on the east side of the building had shattered, and the sanctuary was filled with glass and water.

"The carpet in there is probably a total loss [because of] the water and the glass," Lay said.

Special community

An outside shed used for community ministry also was likely totaled.

But within 15 minutes of his viewing of the damage, Lay said help began rolling in — chainsaws, and then more chainsaws. They got the trees out of the road and helped with cleanup.

"Woody Baughn, the pastor at Tibbie Baptist, and Larry Darden, the pastor at Fairhope Baptist, were the first two to call," Lay said. "This community here is special. It's really special to see the way everybody comes together to help, no questions asked. It's just



Photo by Doug Rogers

Robin Crowe (right), a Montgomery Association Disaster Relief chaplain, prays with Cynthia McKenney, a homeowner in the Flatwood community north of Montgomery, as a volunteer team clears debris from her yard and tarps her roof Dec. 2. McKenney's home was damaged as a result of tornadoes which passed through Nov. 30.

a blessing. Everybody's tired, but [they] keep on going."

Since the storms, the Red Cross has been set up at Tibbie Baptist serving three meals a day. Volunteers from all over the Southeast have called and offered assistance, Lay said.

To the northeast, two other Disaster Relief teams, Elmore Baptist Association and Montgomery Baptist Association, have been hard at work after tornadoes hit their counties as well. North of Montgomery in the hard-hit Flatwood community, a mother and son were killed when a tree fell on their mobile home during an EF-2 tornado.

And in Elmore County, numerous residents had damage to their homes and property, according to Frank Autery, who leads the Elmore Association Disaster Relief team.

"We had a tornado that came through the Wetumpka area, and it

also came down over here in Tallassee," he said.

Help from students

His team of more than 10 volunteers has worked more than a dozen job requests since the storms hit, with the help of 160 local high school students who came to help drag limbs and debris to the road.

"We would cut the limbs off, and they would pull those smaller branches to the road for us," Autery said.

His team continues to be available for job requests in their area, as well as to help in other areas as needed, he said.

Mark Wakefield, state Disaster Relief strategist, said the system operates well when disasters like this hit, with teams mobilizing quickly in their areas and communicating with others as they need help.

"They work hard, and that's a blessing for many," he said.

For more information or to give to Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief efforts, visit sbdr.org.



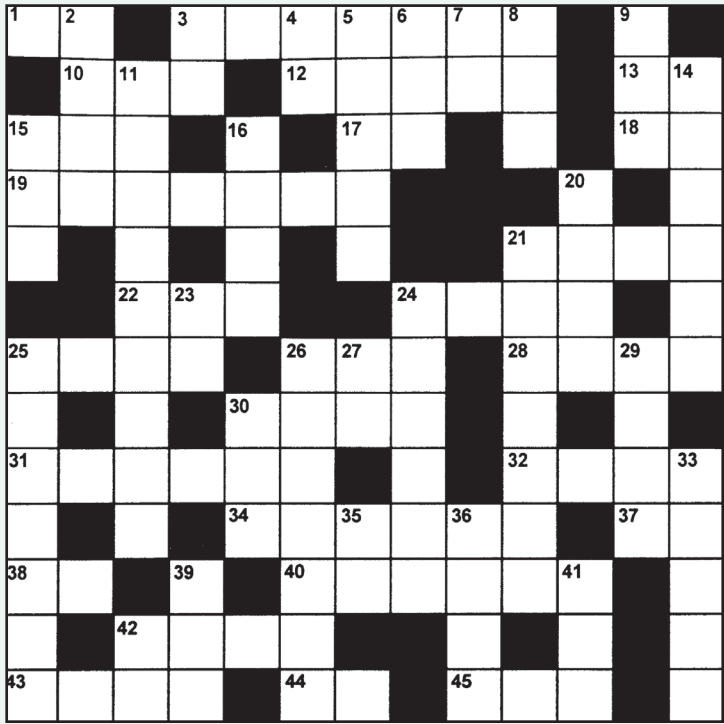
Photo courtesy of Jamie Lay

A Nov. 30 storm caused extensive damage to Howardtown Baptist Church in the west Alabama community of Tibbie. The EF3 tornado moved the columns on the front porch, peeled back the roof on the sanctuary and blew the roof off the Sunday School wing.

CHRISTIAN crossword

ACROSS

- 1. Los Angeles. (abbr.)
- 3. [Paul] came to _____. (Acts 18:19)
- 10. National Basketball Association. (abbr.)
- 12. To make joyful.
- 13. 3.14159265.
- 15. Tool for weeding.
- 17. This is the way, walk ye in _____. (Isa. 30:21)
- 18. Even ____ Christ forgave you. (Col. 3:13)
- 19. They ... traveled as far as ... _____. (Acts 11:19)
- 21. Ehud the son of _____. (Judg. 3:15)
- 22. Distress signal.
- 24. ____ not.
- 25. Where is the king of ... ____? (2 Kings 19:13)
- 26. Ready ... also to ____ at Jerusalem. (Acts 21:13)
- 28. Cast ____ between me and Jonathan. (1 Sam. 14:42)
- 30. Catholic service.
- 31. Over the brook _____. (John 18:1)
- 32. Jacob ... called Rachel and _____. (Gen. 31:4)
- 34. Mistreat.
- 37. You. (biblical)
- 38. ____ of the Chaldees. (Gen. 15:7)
- 40. Intending after ____ to bring him forth. (Acts 12:4)
- 42. ____ came out to meet [Barak]. (Judg. 4:22)



Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

- 43. Holland cheese. many ____ in his life.
- 44. God ____ loved the world. (John 3:16)
- 45. An unruly crowd.
- 20. We would call Samson a ____.
- 21. Shall Christ come out of ____? (John 7:41)

DOWN

- 2. Unknown author. (abbr.)
- 3. Each. (abbr.)
- 4. Art Thou ____ that should come? (Matt. 11:3)
- 5. Strong men ____ and Semachiah. (1 Chron. 26:7)
- 6. Jesus ... wearied ____ thus on the well. (John 4:6)
- 7. Western state. (abbr.)
- 8. All flesh shall _____. (Luke 3:6)
- 9. A relaxing pool.
- 11. Now Philip was of _____. (John 1:44)
- 14. Belonging to Abraham's son.
- 15. ____ is the father of Canaan. (Gen. 9:18)
- 16. A person may have
- 23. Exclamation.
- 24. Porcius _____. (Acts 24:27)
- 25. To make part of a group.
- 26. Belonging to the man who did not fear the lions.
- 27. Exists.
- 29. Used to carry other objects.
- 30. Mother.
- 33. Belonging to Canaan's son. (Gen. 10:15)
- 35. South America. (abbr.)
- 36. Out of the ____ of Jesse. (Isa. 11:1)
- 39. Take ... a ____ for a burnt offering. (Lev. 9:2)
- 41. Adam's ____.
- 42. Yes in German.

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

Book awards competition accepting submissions

The 2022 SCWC Notable Book Awards, an annual competition sponsored by the Southern Christian Writers Conference, are now open for submissions.

The awards recognize outstanding published work by Christian authors during the previous year and include categories for both self-published and traditionally published works of fiction, non-fiction, children's and young adult books, devotionals and e-books.

Three finalists in each category will be announced Jan. 14, with winners announced in a formal ceremony Feb. 4, 2023. The deadline to enter the competition is Dec. 28.

Southern Christian Writers Conference coordinator Cheryl Wray said the awards, which debuted in 2018, offer a unique way to recognize authors.

"We wanted to do something to recognize quality books that have been written and published by both traditional publishers and authors themselves," she said. "There are a lot of wonderful books being written today, and we want to draw attention to them."

Encouraging writers

Wray's organization, which works in partnership with TAB Media, was founded in 1991 as a way to educate and encourage writers of faith throughout the Southeast. Its book awards extend that goal of encouraging writers.

"This is our way of validating authors' calls from God to serve and witness

through their writing," Wray said.

All Christian authors are encouraged to enter, and membership in the Southern Christian Writers Conference is not required.

Books are judged by SCWC staff members and professionals in each contest category. Winners receive a cash prize, certificate and marketing kit. All finalists and their families are invited to attend the SCWC Notable Book Awards Ceremony.

The following rules apply to all entrants:

► Books must have been published in 2022.

► Books don't have to be published by a religious publisher, but they should be inspiring and reflect a Christian mindset.

► Books can be entered in any of these categories: fiction (traditionally published), fiction (self-published),

nonfiction (traditionally published), nonfiction (self-published), devotional (any type of publisher), children's/young adult (any type of publisher) and e-book.

A submission fee of \$10 must be included with each entry. Email scwritersconference@gmail.com to get information on how to pay by Venmo, PayPal, credit/debit card or check.


If you're submitting an e-book, email a link to the e-book or a PDF copy to scwritersconference@gmail.com.

If you're submitting a printed book, mail a copy to SCWC, P.O. Box 3057, Hueytown, AL 35023.

Please include the following information with your correspondence: name, email address, phone number and category entering. (TAB)



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Ken Sande

Churches can aid in adoptive and foster care

By Yvette Hammett Hull
The Alabama Baptist

For a church considering a foster care/adoption ministry, more than passion is required.

It takes focus, strength and commitment from church members and trauma-informed training that teaches participants how to love children where they are and understand what they have experienced, according to a recent webinar.

Send Relief partner Carly Souza has adopted six children. She and fellow adoptive parents Shane and Kasi Pruitt recently hosted an open conversation entitled “When Kids Need a Home: How You and Your Church Can Help.” Pruitt serves as the national next gen director for the North American Mission Board.

The webinar focused on how the church can come alongside children who need stable, loving homes.

Many ways to serve

Thousands of children are awaiting foster or adoptive parents, but it is important that everyone is on the same page about the ministry, the hosts insisted, or it will not be successful.

The foster care and adoption process usually starts with loss and trauma, so it is dangerous to go into such a ministry thinking it is all “unicorns and rainbows,” they added.

Difficult but right

But God calls Christians to difficult situations, so just because it is difficult does not mean it is not God’s will.

There is trauma, they acknowledged, but there also is redemption.

Church leaders can help equip people for the work. Part of that is loving the children and their parents where they are.

One of the first steps should be trauma-informed training, available through Send Relief and other organizations.

There are reasons children act out, often related to the trauma they experienced with their biological families. To love them the way they need to be loved and lead them to love Jesus requires education.

Trauma-informed training helps everyone involved understand children’s behaviors.

Foster care and adoption ministry does not mean



NAMB photo

Shane and Kasi Pruitt are advocates for foster and adoptive families. Thousands of children in the U.S. are awaiting foster or adoptive parents, but it is important that everyone is on the same page about the ministry, the Pruitts say.

everyone has to get in line to bring children into their homes. There are many ways to serve, the webinar hosts said.

There are always needs to be met and a need for more help.

For example, a mechanic might offer to change the oil in the car of a single parent who is fostering or has adopted.

Another idea is to champion a family in the church that has chosen to foster or adopt by offering a meal once a month, babysitting or mowing the lawn.

Prayer is the most important aspect of a foster care/

adoption ministry — for the children, for families caring for them and for the families that no longer have their children, the webinar hosts said.

Understanding loss

The loss and trauma the children and families feel is deep, and it can be difficult for some children to accept love, kindness or steadiness.

People often expect children to be thankful they were placed in foster care or adopted, but the children have lost their biological family.

Prayers are needed for healing and for an openness to accepting God’s love and kindness.

Church members and friends can reach out to foster or adoptive parents and ask what would be helpful for them.

Send Relief has resources to help a church build a care community.

Seeing a whole communi-

ty reach out in love and support helps bring healing to children who are in loving foster or adoptive homes.

Send Relief has coaches available to connect groups to an existing foster care/adoption ministry or to help start one in the local community.

Find out where the gaps in services and help are in your community and find ways to fill them, webinar hosts suggested.

Coaches can help

Trained Send Relief coaches are available to walk churches and individuals through the process too.

Trust-Based Interventional Training offers help for caregivers of children who have faced abuse, neglect or other trauma, including church volunteers.

Go to sendrelief.org/projects/family-advocacy-ministry to learn more about Send Relief’s Family Advocacy Ministry.

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For December 18

Explore the Bible

By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D.

Dean of the Center for Christian Calling, University of Mobile



I WILL RAISE John 2:11-23

John's Gospel account presents select supernatural signs which highlight the divinity of Jesus, the incarnate Word. This week's passage focuses on the cleansing of the temple. John places the event near the outset of Jesus' ministry.

In the account, Jesus uses the cleansing of the temple as a bridge to predict His resurrection.

Glory Shown (11-12)

John clearly indicates his purpose for including the miracle of water to wine: "Jesus did this, the first of His signs, in Cana of Galilee. He revealed His glory, and His disciples believed in Him."

By revealing His glory, Jesus was demonstrating His divine nature. His disciples previously put their trust in Him based on the written word, but His signs gave evidence He was the Living Word.

They left the hills of Galilee and returned home to Capernaum on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Evidently they only remained for a few days before their pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the annual Passover celebration. They would make their way south down the Jordan valley, cross over the river not far from Jericho and ascend the hills toward Jerusalem.

Worship Expected (13-17)

For centuries prior to the incarnation, Jewish pilgrims trekked to Jerusalem to worship in the temple.

In the first temple period, corporate worship ceased until reformers like King Josiah reestablished temple rituals. Prior to the Babylonian exile, priests compromised their covenant to lead worship exclusively to Yahweh.

As a result, Levites and laymen alike worshipped Canaanite deities and astronomical constellations on the temple grounds. Jeremiah confronted these compromises and warned about the ensuing exile.

Postexilic Jerusalem had its share of compromise too. Priests compromised the temple, intermarrying with unbelieving families in the region and allowing Tobiah access

to the storehouse area previously reserved for Levitical tithes (Neh. 13:7-8).

According to the postexilic books, men divorced their believing Jewish wives for unbelieving Gentile wives, withheld their tithes and dishonored the Sabbath.

After the northern kingdom of Israel was scattered and many Judahites continued living in Mesopotamia, travel to Jerusalem became more challenging.

It was more convenient for Jews to buy their animals for sacrifice in Jerusalem than to transport them on their pilgrimage from Persia, Babylon, northern Africa or southern Europe. The court of the Gentiles on the temple grounds became the marketplace for sacrificial animals.

Instead of being a place to welcome dialogue between Jews and God-fearing Gentiles about the one true God, the court had become a flea market.

Temple taxes required Tyrian shekels as payment, so Levitical currency traders provided a service for travelers coming from long distances. The problem was that space dedicated to the glory of God and the worship of His name was seen as a business where priests were bankers and the worship center smelled more of dung than of incense.

Sign Remembered (18-23)

Jesus was infuriated by what He saw, so He overturned the tables at the currency exchange and freed the animals to run throughout the temple grounds. In response, Jewish men asked for a sign to account for His behavior.

"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will restore it." They responded incredulously, knowing Herod's expansion of the temple grounds was a multigenerational project. They missed His point.

The incarnate Word who tabernacled among them would be put to death, but He would rise three days later.

Only after the Resurrection did the disciples understand that the "temple" was His body.

Bible Studies for Life

By Tyshawn Gardner, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Biblical and Religious Studies, Samford University



LOVE IN PLACE OF FEAR 1 John 3:13-18; 4:14-18

We can know and experience love because of Christ. (3:13-18)

No power is stronger than love. The joy of family, the beauty of marriage and the warmth of friendship are all rooted in love.

We know and experience love because of Christ. Apart from Him, it is impossible to know the depths of love.

God's love is revealed to us through His Son, Jesus Christ. God sent His Son into a fallen world to save humanity.

When we confess that Jesus came into the world as Savior and confess Him as our personal Savior, we experience and become aware of God's love. God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, lives in us to remind us of God's love. He comforts us and leads us into God's truth.

When we know God's perfect love for us, fear flees. Love drives out our fear of people, circumstances, the future and even death.

Martin Luther King Jr. spoke of healthy fears and abnormal fears. Sometimes fear is a healthy emotional response that causes us to seek safety when danger is lurking or to make changes to unhealthy conditions. However, when we have God's love in us, fear no longer paralyzes and controls us.

God's love is in us because God remains in us. (4:14-16)

God's love towards us is not a one-time transaction. He constantly reminds us of His love because He lives in us. He remains in us because His Spirit is in us.

The Holy Spirit is our constant companion and ever-present reminder of God's love.

In our fallen world, evil constantly tries to find its way into our hearts

and lives. When we are filled with God's love by being filled with the Holy Spirit, His love seals every opening and prevents evil in our lives.

God's love leads us to seek out and meet the needs of those around us. His love is freely given to us, and we are called to love freely.

Love is best expressed in actions and deeds. Like Christ who loved us by giving His life on the cross, our love drives us to meet needs where others live, work, worship and play.

His love overflows, leading us to powerful and effective deeds for those who live in poverty and lack.

God's love in Christ met our deepest need, the need to be rescued from our sins.

We cannot save people from their sins, but we can meet their needs when we are motivated by God's love.

God's love gives us confidence and dispels our fear. (17-18)

God's love enables us to be overcomers and conquerors in the face of our most challenging circumstances.

Empowered and enlightened through His love, we can be confident in our ability to overcome sin and evil in our world.

For centuries, division has stained the church and the nation. Lives have been lost, and the cost of division has been incalculable.

While fear divides, displaces and creates detachment, love unites us. Just as God's love in Christ brings us near to Him, only our love for each other will unite us.

Love is greater than fear. God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of love, power and a sound mind. His love is universal and we are to fill the world with it, just as He fills us with His love.

"Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth."

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Tracy Riggs
The Alabama Baptist

Sidewalk Prophets singer publishes 'The Luckiest Star,' shares journey of writing

Sometimes a person can live the kind of life others only imagine, yet have other dreams waiting for God's timing.

That was the case for Dave Frey, lead singer of the contemporary Christian group Sidewalk Prophets. He is about to start his 20th year with the band, and during that time the award-winning group produced four major studio albums, five No. 1 hits and eight Top 5 songs.

However, Frey has had another dream most of his life — to write a book. Now, after four years of writing, Frey is set to release his first children's Christmas book, "The Luckiest Star."

'Pretty surreal'

Frey said writing the book made him "realize how blessed I am to do what I do, but also [to] be able to call myself an author now ... it's pretty surreal that this has happened."

"The Luckiest Star" is based on the Sidewalk Prophets' song "Hey, Moon," written about 10 years ago. Both projects came out of Frey's love of all things Christmas.

"I always cite 'Hey, Moon' as one of my faves mostly because it just meant Christmas," he said. "I love celebrating the birth of Jesus.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Reviews of films, books, music or other media that appear in TAB are intended to help readers evaluate current media for themselves, their children and grandchildren in order to decide whether to watch, read or listen. Reviews are not an endorsement by the writer or TAB Media.



Photo courtesy of Sidewalk Prophets
Dave Frey, lead singer of Sidewalk Prophets, says parenthood provided the motivation he needed to accomplish a lifelong dream of writing a book.

I love the family, the gifts and all those things. And now I have a 2-year-old son, so it means even more.

"Even before I had a wife, before I even met my wife, when we wrote that song [I thought] 'I'd love to write a Christmas song that I could someday sing to my kids, if I have kids.'"

Ben McDonald, a former member of Sidewalk Prophets, came up with the idea. He proposed writing a song from the perspective of the moon talking to the star of Bethlehem about the night Jesus was born.

It quickly became a fan favorite

and the band is asked to play it throughout the year.

Close to heart

"Now here I am, a dad of a 2 1/2-year-old and not only do I get to sing this song to him, but I get to read a book inspired by the song to him," Frey said.

The idea for the book also came from McDonald, the "engine of the band" and "the idea guy," according to Frey.

"The book shifts perspective to the star just trying to find his place and what he was made for," Frey explained. "There's a lot of books talking about who you are and that

you're special. I wanted to make sure [my book's message was], 'God made you special.' Even when people see the things you do as flaws, maybe [that's something God wants to use for Himself.]"

Frey said his son is tender-hearted, silly and laughs a lot. Those traits might be accepted in a 2-year-old "but the older you get, the more the world seems like it wants to pull that out of you."

God's timing

Frey applied the idea: "What if we wrote it from the perspective of a little star trying to find its place?"

It took four years, three writers and an illustrator — with a pandemic thrown in — before they felt the book was ready to share.

"Finally, after four years of revising, kind of forgetting about it for a year and then coming back to it," Frey recalled, "I think we got it to where we thought, 'Oh man, this gives me goosebumps when I read it.'"

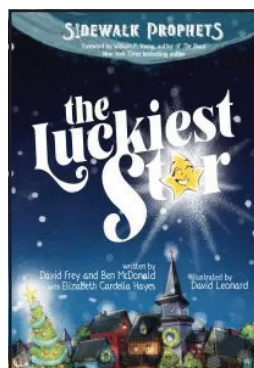
And though it was something Frey wanted to do for years, he is content that it was God's timing.

"I don't know that it would have been the book it is, would have been complete, without me having a son," he explained.

"Time and experiences have led to this moment."

Frey now has the song and book he wanted to one day share with his child, and he's using both to teach his son the real reason for Christmas — Jesus.

"The Luckiest Star" is available at sidewalk-prophets.myshopify.com/collections/the-luckiest-star.



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The Alabama Baptist

Developing cultural awareness

By Sharon Mager

Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware

Church partnership impacts two communities

The Garden Church in Baltimore, Maryland, and Covenant Church in Shepherdstown, West Virginia, don't have a lot in common.

One is an inner-city church, and the other serves in a small-town area filled with commuters of Washington, D.C. But the two congregations are connected through a strategic partnership.

Interestingly, both churches have senior pastors who share the same name — Joel.

Joel Kurz is pastor of The Garden Church, and Joel Rainey is pastor of Covenant Church.

Rainey said he emphasizes global awareness and wants Covenant Church members to experience and be aware of the culture and environments outside of their own. "It's really easy to isolate," he acknowledged.

Making disciples

Referring to the partnership, Rainey said, "I've known Joel (Kurz) since 2008, and I love what he does."

"I was in the early conversations that gave rise to One Hope (a ministry of The Garden Church)."

One Hope is church based and



Photo courtesy of Joel Kurz

Joel Kurz (center), pastor of The Garden Church in Baltimore, Maryland, led a team from his church to Covenant Church in West Virginia.

church centered with the goal of making disciples through building healthy churches in America's poorest neighborhoods.

Covenant members, mostly teens with some adults, have been spending time in the summers at The Garden Church helping with Bible clubs and building relationships.

"They spend the other half of the time learning about urban poverty from some brilliant minds

such as Stephanie Greer (a life coach for One Hope)," Rainey said;

Kurz noted, "Covenant Church sees inner-city missions as part of [its] missions strategy."

"They came on as core partners with One Hope to do that."

They've been giving, and they've been coming to help."

He's grateful for Covenant's support. "We've had the opportunity to have a couple of teams from Covenant over several visits to run outreach for youth and camps through The Garden Church," he said.

Kurz said he has wanted the relationship to be two-sided, and part of the goal has been to de-

velop "a real partnership — to become sister churches."

"This was the first year we sent a team to Covenant," Kurz added. "It's cool that our church has been the recipient and now was able to go to one of our partner churches and help them."

"This summer, we helped with their Vacation Bible School 'Splash Bash.'"

"We also gave out backpacks and helped with a back-to-school event at a housing project Covenant Church has adopted."

Cross-cultural experience

"For our team, it was a great cross-cultural experience in a very different context," said Kurz, noting they realized that brokenness is everywhere.

"It's not just a Baltimore city problem."

"There are issues of addiction, cycles of poverty and violence. To be able to reach out to communities to meet a real need is sweet, and we plan to continue the partnership."

Rainey pointed out, "There are

marked differences between the West Virginia panhandle and inner-city Baltimore, but some of the same dynamics. Over there, it's crack. Here, it's heroin."

Anyone who believes the gospel, Rainey said, knows

that the root of the brokenness and darkness is sin in the world.

"We may apply the gospel in different ways," he noted, "but at the heart, it's the same gospel."

**"WE MAY APPLY THE GOSPEL IN DIFFERENT WAYS,
BUT AT THE HEART, IT'S THE SAME GOSPEL."**

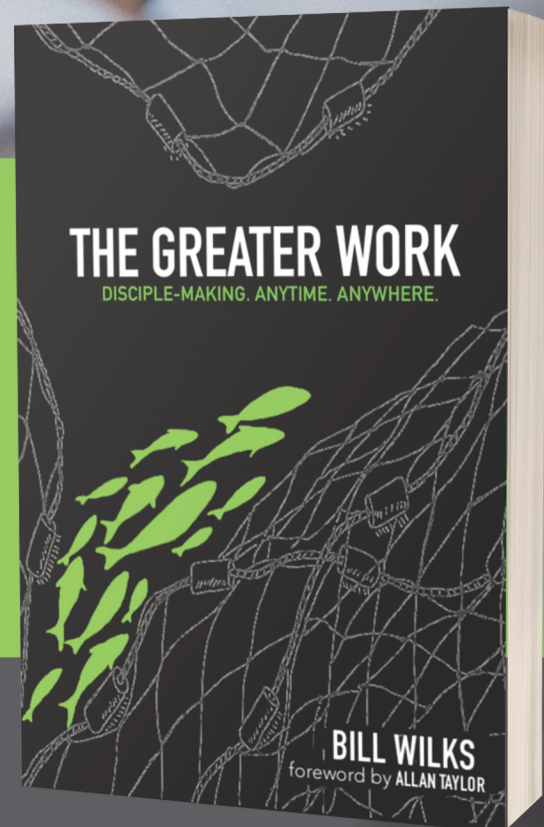
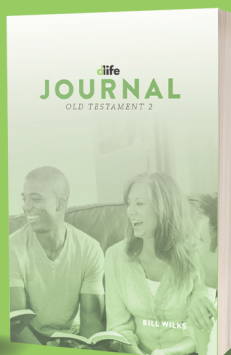
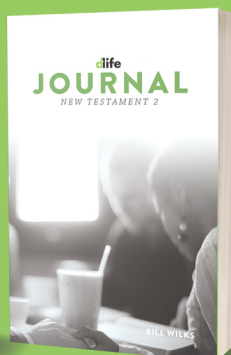
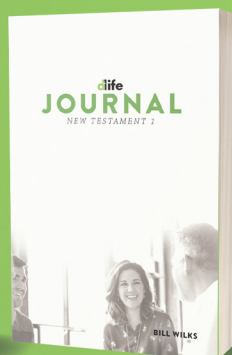
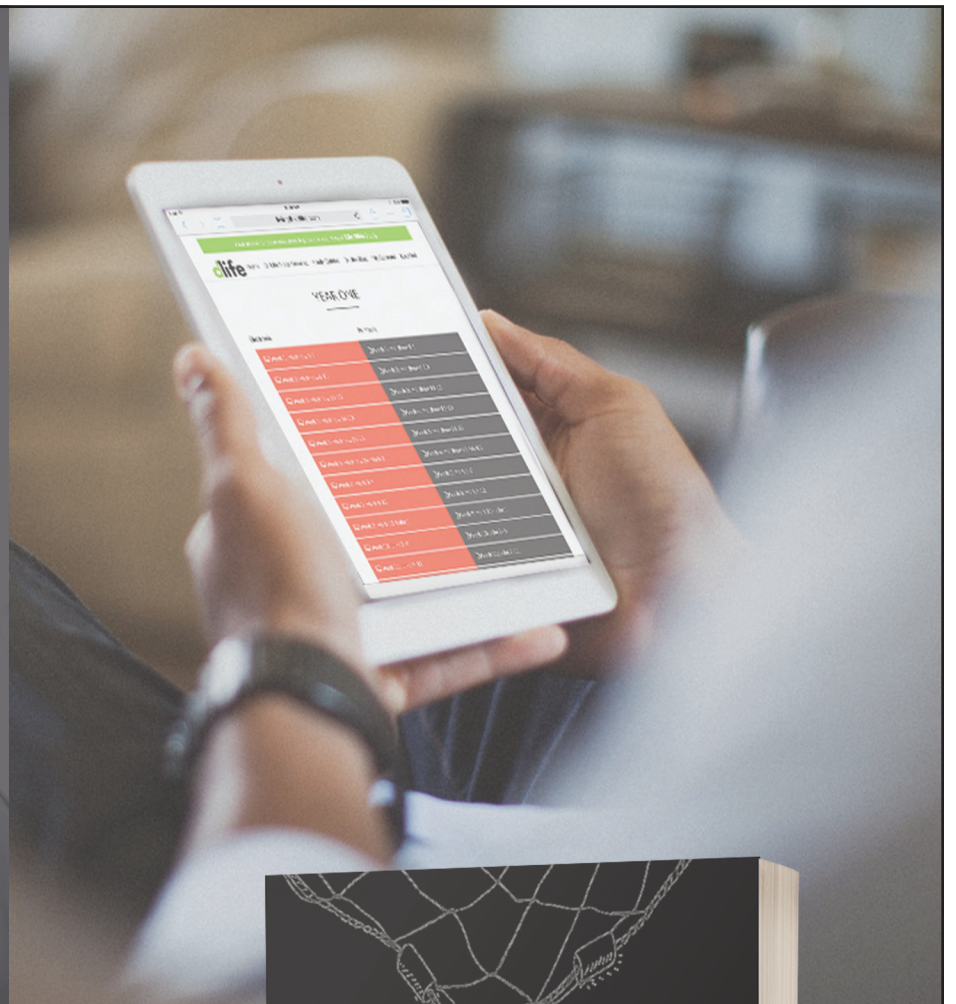
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‘A blessing’

By Grace Thornton
The Baptist Paper

Cross Walk to Life staff member says God put pieces in place for ministry

After Ana L. Uribe got married, the couple’s path took them all over the place — from Houston, Texas, to Las Cruces, New Mexico, to Germany and then to Alabama.

But in 2020, the couple couldn’t shake the feeling that God wanted them to retrace their steps.

“We felt God keep moving our hearts to move back to Las Cruces, but there were no jobs for my husband,” Uribe said. “So we said, ‘If God wants us to go back, He will open doors.’ And He sure did.”

Uribe’s husband was offered a good job at the place he used to work, and they rejoined the church they had been a part of there, Iglesia Bautista Buenas Nuevas (Good News Baptist Church). But not long after they moved back, a tragedy happened — the pastor and his wife both died of COVID-19.

Uribe said her husband knew instantly that the call to pastoral ministry he had been running from for a while had finally caught up to him.

“That was the feeling God had placed in our hearts to come back to Las Cruces,” she said.

He became the church’s pastor, and Uribe led the women’s ministry.

Heart for women

She revived Mujer Virtuosa (Virtuous Woman), a ministry that she started when they lived there 12 years before. It is a monthly breakfast where she invites women from all walks of life to hear the gospel, find community and talk through any life issues they might be facing.

Uribe’s heart was in this kind of ministry. And it wasn’t long before

an opportunity came along to do more of it — as administrative assistant for Cross Walk to Life, a Christian Women’s Job Corps site that offers women the opportunity to reach their full potential and improve their circumstances through job and life skills training.

Serving the community

“I got hired and started working there part time,” Uribe said, noting she appreciated that one purpose of the ministry was to serve the large Hispanic community there.

Her fluency in both languages made her a perfect fit, along with her technology skills and heart for the ministry, said Carol Gilliland, director of Cross Walk to Life.

“We need someone who is good with technology and has good office skills so she can take care of the necessary things to make the

ministry run smoothly,” Gilliland said. “She’s a whiz-bang at it.”

In the time Uribe has been there, she’s helped draw more women to Cross Walk to Life by networking in Spanish on Facebook.

She’s also taught classes in English and Spanish in addition to organizing the ministry’s schedule, creating newsletters and taking care of other logistics.

In September, she started teaching a new class on money management that the women requested.

“She’s a blessing from God,” Gilliland said. “She’s very gifted, and she’s helped us reach people. She’s the glue that holds us together.”

The funding for Uribe’s role comes from a site grant from the WMU Foundation’s CWJC/CMJC Endowment, something Gilliland says she’s grateful for.

“I love what God has done at

Cross Walk to Life through her help,” Gilliland said.

Uribe said she’s thankful for the way God has moved everything around to get her and her husband — along with their two sons, who are now teenagers — in the right place and provide what they needed to get there.

“It’s been a great experience,” she said.

Grateful

Many of the women now go to her church also, and one of Cross Walk to Life’s participants who had no previous experience with computers became the church secretary after graduating from the program. Uribe is grateful to see those kinds of stories.

“It’s been a blessing all around to be a part of this community and the women that we’re serving,” she said.

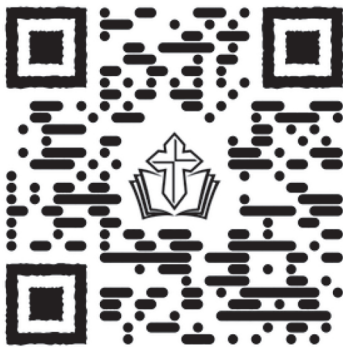


Ana L. Uribe (left), administrative assistant for Cross Walk to Life, and volunteer Peggy Meeks (right) pose with some of Cross Walk to Life’s spring semester 2022 graduates.

Photo courtesy of Cross Walk to Life

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Always True to the Word

‘Gospel hooks’

By Sarah Alexander
International Mission Board

Everyday conversations spark opportunities to share Christ in Central Asia

Daily conversations hold possibilities for sharing the gospel in Central Asia — and International Mission Board missionary Josh Oakes is looking for each opportunity.

Small talk about the weather? Josh will introduce God as the Creator and Sustainer of life.

A comment about politics? Josh sees an open door to talk about the fallenness of man and our need for a Savior.

Day to day Josh uses what he calls gospel hooks to start spiritual conversations.

Turning quickly to deeper topics, he listens to discern whether the person is searching for truth or is closed and uninterested. In this way, he is using the gospel as a filter to determine where God is working in people’s hearts.

Gospel hooks vary depending on cultures.

Missionaries who live and serve among the lost learn the culture and develop long-term relationships with the people. This presence leads to an understanding of how the gospel can best be shared with a particular people group.

Best approach

“Different people think about anthropology or factors like age or gender as whether or not this person is going to be interested in the gospel, but what we have found is what Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 2:15–17 is the best approach,” Josh said.

“We want to smell like God — to be the aroma of Christ to everyone. For those we smell like life to, then they are going to want to be around us more. When we smell like death, they are going to distance themselves.”



IMB photo

A group of Zaza men sit and chat after a wedding celebration. The men often gather and visit throughout the day of the wedding at the home of the groom. The Zaza are a people group who live in Turkey.

Toward the end of the pandemic, Josh’s readiness to seize opportunities using gospel hooks started a spiritual conversation with a man named Good News.

Names provide a great opportunity in Central Asia for launching into deeper topics, because they usually have special meaning.

Josh began telling the man that gospel translates to good news — the term Christians use for describing the gift Jesus gives to us.

Meanwhile, two more men walked into the room.

The first man’s name was Abraham, and the second man’s name meant salvation.

“I laughed and told them that it seemed like God was wanting me to share something very important with all of them,” he said.

The men seemed interested, so Josh explained the meaning of their names. Their names reminded him of the good news that a descendant of Abraham came to earth, providing salvation for the world by giving His life as a sacrifice for sin.

At just that moment, a man

named Hussein walked in the door.

“I froze and told the other men in the room that Hussein was an Arabic name so I didn’t know what it meant,” Josh said.

“They laughed and said they didn’t know if it connected with the message I was sharing with them or not.”

‘Jesus’ sent him

Hussein looked confused, but then he turned to the man named Good News and said that he had come to this office because Isa (the Arabic rendering of Jesus and a common name in Central Asia) had sent him.

“The men in the room then all looked at me surprised. Isa had told Hussein to go to the office of Good News to ask a question while Abraham and Salvation were there hearing the gospel!” Josh explained.

While none of the men immediately responded to the gospel message, Josh believes God orchestrated these events.

“Five men heard the gospel that day, and one of them asked if we could exchange phone numbers. Praise the Lord!” Josh said.

Leading a team in evangelism and church planting, Josh encourages his coworkers to be ready at any moment for opportunities to talk about Jesus.

He believes the more they speak of Him, the more readily they will be able to discern where to invest in deeper relationships.

“Time is our most valuable resource, so we want to be intentional to engage in these spiritual conversations,” Josh added.

EDITOR’S NOTE — Some names have been changed for security reasons.

“WE WANT TO SMELL LIKE GOD — TO BE THE AROMA OF CHRIST TO EVERYONE.”

JOSH OAKES
IMB MISSIONARY