

The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



Photo by Grace Thornton/The Alabama Baptist

Serving well

Misty Pollard (second from left), VBS director at Glory Baptist in Winfield, and other volunteers decorate for the church's farm-themed VBS.

VBS ignites ongoing outreach to children and families across the state

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Misty Pollard has been involved in Vacation Bible School as a volunteer for a long time, but this year, it hit differently. A few months ago, she gave her life to Jesus for the first time.

"I've helped with VBS in the past and done the crafts part of it," Pol-

lard said. "I was always excited for the kids, but I knew something was missing."

About 20 years ago, she and her husband had gotten in the habit of taking their young children to church regularly, and as they left church one Wednesday night, he told her the sermon had hit him straight in the heart.

"Our preacher at the church we were attending at the time came to

our house later that night, and after we listened to him, I just kind of followed my husband's lead as he accepted Jesus into his heart," Pollard said.

'Something was missing'

But she said something felt off for the next two decades.

"I knew something was missing; my life wasn't connecting the way it should be," she said.

Then in May, as she listened to Thomas Hyche — her pastor at Glory Baptist Church in Winfield — "the lightbulb went off."

"Jesus was tugging hard," she said. "That sermon spelled it out loud and clear. At that time I knew that's what had been missing the past 20 years. I had thought I was saved, but I wasn't."

And as Hyche gave an invitation (See 'Through,' page 10)

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The crossword puzzle
can be found on page 15.

Piedmont native Childers joins TAB Media Group

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

When Tim Childers was a kid growing up in Piedmont, he rode his bicycle around selling Grit newspapers for a quarter each.

“It was a weekly newspaper that came out and had a lot of human-interest stories, farm stories, folksy stories and recipes,” he said.

He has fond memories of that experience, and now decades later, Childers is continuing that adventure in getting the news out by joining the TAB Media team as an advertising representative.

He said he’s excited about helping The Alabama Baptist and The Baptist Paper share what God is doing in a trustworthy and relevant way. He’s also excited to be back in his home state.

“Alabama Baptist blood runs through my veins,” Childers said. “I went to Royal Ambassadors camp and was really active in RAs, and I served on the board at Shocco.”

Shift into ministry

After graduating from Samford University, Childers worked for a while in the business world, then shifted into ministry. He earned a master of religious education from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and served in various

staff roles in churches in Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and Tennessee, including as pastor of College Heights Baptist in Gadsden (1993–1997) and First Baptist Sylacauga (2007–2011).

He retired at the end of July from the pastorate of GracePointe Marietta Baptist Church in Georgia.

Susan Stevens, TAB Media’s director of advertising, said she’s excited Childers is joining the team.

“As a retired pastor, his knowledge of Baptist life and relationships with Alabama Baptists make him a great fit,” she said.

Childers also has stayed connected to the publishing and business world over the years. After his time with FBC Sylacauga, he and his wife, Debbie, owned Coastal Christian Magazine in Destin and Panama City, Florida, for a season. Then after moving to Georgia, he started a local directory of Christian businesses.

He has written one book — “The Secret Place: 31 Devotionals from Psalm 91” — and is currently writing his second book, which will be published later this year.

Debbie is a well-known Christian humorist, speaker and author.

The couple plans to join Valley View Baptist Church in Leeds.

To contact Childers, email him at tchilders@thealabamabaptist.org. He is also available to preach.



CHILDERS

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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

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OPINION

RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

By Jennifer Davis Rash, President and Editor-in-Chief



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Process matters when making wide-ranging decisions

Ever wonder how the guitarist and drummer know how to play their parts alongside the pianist as you sing along on Sunday mornings?

How about those playing the clarinet, flute, saxophone or trumpet in the church orchestra? How do they know when to come in and which notes to play?

How do they know when to breathe in deep to hold those whole notes or scatter out those eighth notes?

In some cases, the minister of music, orchestra director and/or others assisting with the church's music ministry know how to write out each of those parts.

Arranging the music

In many cases, however, the sheet music handed to the musicians providing the background for our joyful noises to the Lord came from the resource LifewayWorship.com — at least when playing songs out of the Baptist Hymnal.

You can get an arrangement or just the chords for any instrument in any key and written in a style easier for instrumentalists to play.

The limited arrangement options from other resources are many times in keys too high for congregational singing.

The resources through LifewayWorship.com also offer song mapping where you can transition smoothly from one song to the next.

“No one else does that,” explained Karen Gosselin, coordinator of worship resources for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

“LifewayWorship.com is unique in what it provides and would cripple many churches without it,” she explained.

When Lifeway president Ben Mandrell paused the recently announced decision to eliminate LifewayWorship.com, Gosselin and her counterparts across the nation breathed a sigh of relief.

It's not a permanent decision but it does provide the opportunity

for Lifeway leaders to better care for, resource and hear from those depending on Lifeway's service in this area.

We at The Alabama Baptist understand difficult financial decisions must be made sometimes, but we commend the Lifeway leadership team for realizing — and owning — the misstep of the process in this case.

The quick decision by Mandrell to pull back when the misstep became apparent provides a lesson for all of us.

A few takeaways:

1. When the service we provide is trusted and considered part of the family, feedback may be rare.

That could lead us to believe our audience wouldn't miss us if we were gone, but the opposite is likely true.

We are an assumed part of the family and sometimes family is taken for granted, so a difficult situation should be communicated clearly and before it becomes a crisis.

2. For the areas in which we choose to participate, we should let those who serve us know why we are part of their world and why they matter.

A quick note, call or face-to-face mention of appreciation and even suggestions for improvements truly make a difference for those working to serve us. Let's not take them for granted, and let's not assume it's a one-way transaction.

3. Constant complainers become white noise, but those who allow the ones chosen for various positions to do their work with a bit of grace and understanding are heard when they speak up.

If we try to listen more than talk, seek to understand all aspects of the role, support the work being done and affirm the people involved, then our concerns should be taken seriously when a situation outside our comfort level surfaces.

Mandrell and the Lifeway Worship team heard the pleas that came with the recent announcement and are working to find an appropriate path forward.



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist

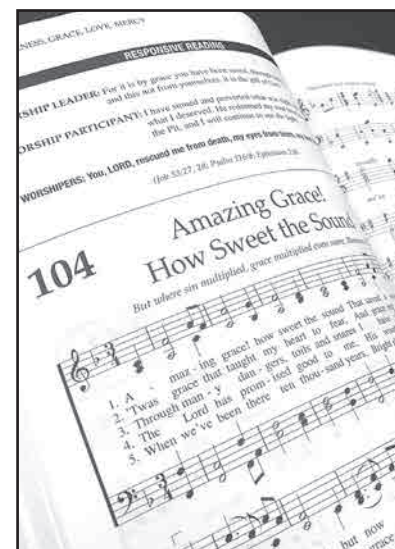


Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist

Your Voice



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

'Reorganized religion' requires redemptive response

By **Trennis Henderson**
The Baptist Paper

Why don't people go to church? Because they're dead."

That unsettling quote, shared by author Bob Smietana during a keynote session of the recent Baptist Communicators Association annual workshop, is a stark reminder of how an aging population is impacting American congregations.

As more and more faithful church members graduate to heaven, fewer and fewer members of younger generations are taking their place in the pews (or folding chairs).

Smietana, a national reporter for Religion News Service, led the BCA

session on "Reorganized Religion and Today's Christian Communicator." It played off of his recent book, "Reorganized Religion: The Reshaping of the American Church and Why It Matters," released last year by Worthy Publishing.

'Different universes'

Sharing statistics contrasting the Silent Generation's Christian identity and church attendance to that of Millennials, Smietana said, "America's grandparents go to church; their grandkids do not. America's grandparents are white and Christian; their grandkids are not."

"These two groups of older and younger Americans live in what are

essentially different universes when it comes to race and religion," he added, "with different expectations of what the world should look like and who should be in charge."

We all are familiar with organized religion and sometimes even disorganized religion. But what about reorganized religion? It's a matter of recognizing and responding to the changing landscape of religion and society in healthy, redemptive ways that help the church both survive and thrive.

Citing a recent Pew Religion survey that found the percentage of self-identified Christians had dropped from 78% in 2007 to 63% in 2021, he said that number is projected to plummet below 40% by 2027.

Closer to home, he noted Southern Baptist church membership declined by more than 2 million during that same time frame.

"If you are doing more funerals than weddings," Smietana pointed out, "your religious group is probably declining."

One paradox — which he described as "the 'Walmarting' of churches in America" — is that while most churches are small, most people attend large churches (those with 250-plus in attendance).

A major challenge with that trend, he warned, is that in larger churches, participants typically "go less, give less, participate less."

A side effect of declining wor-

ship attendance in the majority of churches, Smietana added, is that "the people doing the work in your congregation are really tired."

With many evangelical churches "filled with old, conservative, married people," he said that means

young, liberal singles typically don't feel included or welcome. The same is true across ethnic, political and socioeconomic lines.

When "churches tell people they hate them" by their words, actions and attitudes, "they will believe you and not come," Smietana cautioned. One pivotal concern is: Will churches simply write

off those with whom they differ or actively seek ways to connect with and minister to them in the name of Christ?

Despite such overwhelming issues, Smietana affirmed that churches frequently find effective ways to navigate challenge and change.

Smietana's book offers encouraging examples of churches that help their neighbors, comfort the grieving, visit the sick, laugh and rejoice together and pick up one another when they fall. "They keep the faith when all seems lost," he wrote. "The question is: Will churches and other religious institutions choose to live?"

One key, he suggested, is to steadily practice one's faith amid today's rapidly changing world. That definitely is a redemptive response worth pursuing.



HENDERSON

The value of friendships

How do you compare the worth of objects to the value of people? It is impossible, but many people try to do it.

Fathers value jobs and work more than wife and kids. Teenagers value their electronics more than their parents.

What is more important anyway? Is it the possessions we can hold in our hands or the people we have in our hearts? I choose the latter.

I am more blessed by those friends and family that surround me than by the size or beauty of any building.

I have long said that God's best blessings are not the possessions we own, but the people we cherish.

I cherish God's great blessings that are found in my relationships.

Pastor Gary Fisher

South Roebuck Baptist Church
Birmingham

It is imperative that we surround ourselves with godly people who will do life with us and who will point us toward our Savior.

O'Shea Lowery
Dallas, Texas

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

EDITOR'S NOTE — Trennis Henderson is regional correspondent for The Baptist Paper.

“God will open doors as believers allow Him to work.”

MARK JOHNSON

Assistant professor of evangelism and pastoral ministry, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

“We don’t know why God permitted this to happen right now, but we do believe He’s given us a job to do. Pray for the church there in the midst of it all,” said IMB worker **Meg Brown** on efforts to assist refugees impacted by the conflict in Sudan.

“The lesson in that is God uses whatever you have, whatever you’re interested in. It makes a difference in the world in church context. Whatever your hand finds

to do, do it with all your might and to the glory of God,” said **Andrew Dyer**, pastor of Corinth Baptist Church in London, Kentucky, on ministering to others through pickleball.

“Johnny Cash transcends genres. ... You’re looking at a guy who was a Christian and was really outspoken about his faith, and yet was so ubiquitous and had so much influence and was able to speak into so many people’s lives,” said **Brent**

McCorkle, who wrote the music for the film “Johnny Cash: The Redemption of an American Icon” and co-directed this year’s box office hit “Jesus Revolution.”

“I have no clue what’s next in my life. But one thing God’s shown me all along the way, man, is He is for me. He’s not against me,” said football analyst **David Pollack**, in response to losing his job at ESPN during a recent round of layoffs.



Chitchat

What people are sharing on social media

In Him we have HOPE, so repeat after me: “Wherever my feet go, blessings flow. Walking in the favor and guidance of Jesus Christ, I am confident that His blessings accompany me every step of the way. I delight in His Word and seek His

presence, knowing that He orders my steps and leads me to prosperity. Let His favor and blessings come forth in every aspect of my life, bringing glory to His name.”

@wildcontagioushope
Instagram

To the individual with gender confusion, we owe patience, kindness, and gentleness.

But to the institutions aiding and abetting their deception we owe opposition.

@blondeorthodoxy
Katie McCoy
Twitter/X

Take heart! God has been preparing you for years for what he knew you would be facing today!

Richard Blackaby
Facebook

If you linger near sin, you will fall in. The time to flee is now.

@pastorjgkell
Twitter/X

You don’t overcome sin by thinking about sin. You overcome sin by thinking of the One who washed you clean.

@DerwinLGray
Twitter/X

Response: Trends in church music

As a longtime church organist, I served under some wonderful ministers of music and worked with some of the finest musicians in the Southern Baptist Convention.

I have always believed that music used prior to the sermon should lead members of the congregation to prepare their hearts for worship in order to hear what God has for them.

I am an advocate for hymns built on Scripture and theology that speak to the heart and lives of the worshipper. Congregations are starving for hymns that mean something to their lives and bring their heart and mind closer to God.

I believe even young people are hungry for congregational music that has meaning and raises their level of worship.

My heart breaks that young people are no longer being trained as church musicians.

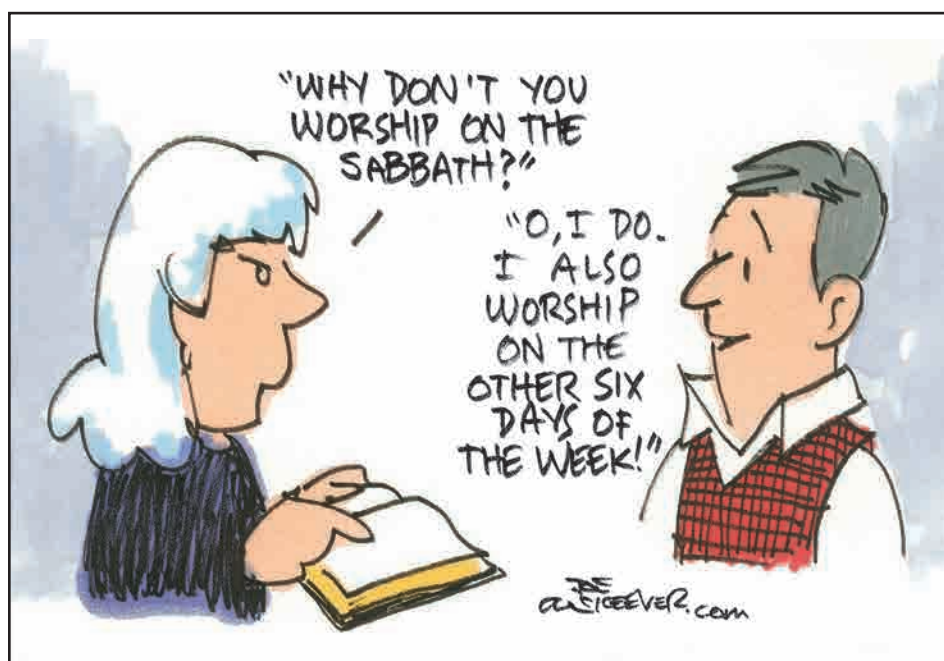
I think our seminaries are doing the local churches, most of which are not large congregations with full-time ministers and classically trained musicians, a great disservice.

I’m afraid that unless seminaries better teach the truth of worship music and its place in the lives of its congregation, there will no longer be new worship hymns, congregational hymns sung during worship services or even worshippers.

People ask why church attendance is in decline. I fear this is one of the reasons. Why should lost people attend a church that is just like what they live with every day?

Iris L. Anderson
Retired organist
Dauphin Way Baptist Church, Mobile

EDITOR’S NOTE — Written in response to the article “What trends in church music are you seeing?” in the July 20 issue of *The Alabama Baptist*.



3 stories you should know



Photo courtesy of Kentucky Today

Alpha Pregnancy Care Center in Hopkinsville, Kentucky, is taking steps to serve vulnerable women and infants by pursuing a Safe Haven Baby Box. A baby box is a safety device that allows mothers to anonymously and securely surrender an infant less than 30 days old, automatically terminating their parental rights if they express no intent to return. The box, once installed, will be monitored daily by the city and fire department/EMS. (Kentucky Today)

'Sound of Freedom' film finds box office success

Amid a slate of summer blockbusters, a movie highlighting the battle to rescue children from human trafficking, continues to be a box office success.

"Sound of Freedom," released July 4, is based on the story of Tim Ballard, a former U.S. government agent who founded an anti-trafficking organization. The film has been a hit with viewers and critics, earning a 99% audience score and a 74% approval rating on Rotten Tomatoes.

The film also has faced criticism related to its perceived political perspective, but Mira Sorvino, a lead actress in the film, said it is "not a political movie." Sorvino, who serves as a Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes, said the film should compel viewers to join the fight to end human trafficking. (TAB)

Lifeway worship website to remain live for now

Lifeway Christian Resources has postponed its decision to discontinue lifewayworship.com.

Ben Mandrell, Lifeway president and CEO, said the postponement allows more time for Lifeway "to listen, allow for dialogue and find out how we can best support churches' digital worship music needs."

"We should have invested more time to listen ... provide more notice of the impending change and partner with those who rely on this tool every week," Mandrell said.

Lifeway leaders plan to meet with music ministry leaders across the nation in the coming weeks to consider options. While no new selections will be added during this time, the existing digital music files remain available for access and downloading, according to a July 21 Lifeway statement. (TAB)

Persecuted church

Christian in Pakistan charged with blasphemy after posting Bible verses

LAHORE, Pakistan — Outrage over a social media post resulted in one Christian being charged with blasphemy and dozens of Christian families fleeing their village.

Morning Star News reports that Haroon Shahzad posted 1 Corinthians 10:18–21 on Facebook on June 29 at the beginning of the Muslim festival Eid al-Adha.

The festival involves killing an animal and sharing the meat in remembrance of God providing a lamb for Abraham to sacrifice instead of his son.

Some Muslims took offense, and on June 30, mosque leaders called for a protest in Chak 49 Shumaali village in Punjab province.

Sargodha District police went to the village

to protect as many as 300 Christian families living there. While police presence did deter attacks, most of the Christians fled, fearing the situation might escalate.

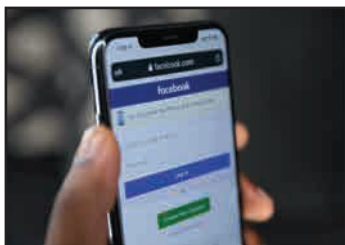
Police charged Shahzad under Sections 295-

A (outraging religious feelings by insulting religious beliefs) and 298 (hurting religious sentiments).

Shahzad was granted pre-arrest bail and was taken

into "protective custody" July 4, an attorney told Morning Star.

Pakistan is No. 7 on Open Doors' 2023 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.



Unsplash.com

Indonesian congregation continues decade-long effort to secure permits

EAST JAKARTA, Indonesia — A church building sealed by government entities in March for lack of proper permits was unsealed June 26.

Morning Star News reported church leaders of the Palsigunung congregation of the Indonesian Christian Church in East Jakarta had tried since 2012 to secure the necessary permits but were refused. Officials with East Jakarta's city planning office have said that despite the recent action, the congregation cannot meet in the building until a "change of use" is granted for the structure. Church leaders say they will apply soon for that change.

Indonesia is No. 33 on Open Doors' 2023 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.

Alabama news

BETHEL ASSOCIATION

► **Brandon Burroughs** is the new pastor of **Pine Hill Baptist Church**. He previously served as pastor of County Line Baptist Church, Trafford. Currently, Burroughs is an undergraduate student at New Orleans Seminary. He and his wife, Heather, have two daughters.



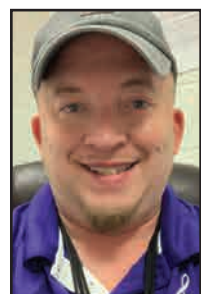
BURROUGHS

COOSA RIVER ASSOCIATION

► **Phillip Owings Jr.** is the new interim pastor of **Mount Vernon Baptist Church, Sylacauga**.

DALE ASSOCIATION

► **Matt Scott** is the new pastor of **Providence Baptist Church, Clayhatchee** (near Daleville). His wife Stephanie will be teaching fifth grade in the area and his son Davis is a student at Southern Seminary's Boyce College.



ADAMS

► **Travis Adams** is the new minister of music of **Pinckard Baptist Church**. Adams previously served as worship pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church, Midland City. He also serves as the band director for Geneva County High School and Middle School. He holds a bachelor's

degree in music education from Troy University. Chris Woodall is pastor.

DEKALB ASSOCIATION

► **Rainsville First Baptist Church** will have revival services Aug. 13–15 with Scott Price, pastor of Fellowship Chapel Church, Bristol, Virginia, preaching each service. Worship begins Sunday at 10:15 a.m. and nightly Sunday through Tuesday at 6:30. Child care for preschoolers will be provided. David Cofield is pastor.



PRICE

NORTH JEFFERSON ASSOCIATION

► **Glennwood Baptist Church, Morris**, celebrated its centennial anniversary May 28



Photo courtesy of Joyce Peters

with almost 100 in attendance. Pastor Tim Thompson (center) brought the message. A former pastor, David Bays, and his wife, Dot, were recognized.

Bays served as pastor for 19 years, the longest tenure of any pastor of the church to date. Joyce Peters (left) with

the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented a plaque, and Steve Loggins (right), the associational missionary, also was present and shared during the worship service.

ST. CLAIR ASSOCIATION

► **Allen Bain** is the new pastor of **Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, Pell City**. He previously served as pastor of Pleasant Valley Baptist Church, Pell City. He and his wife, Kathie, have two adult sons.

He holds degrees from the former Southeastern Bible College, Birmingham, and Andersonville Baptist Theological Seminary, Camilla, Georgia.

► **Eden Westside Baptist Church, Pell City**, was recognized for its 75th anniversary by the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission on April 22. A commemorative plaque was presented by commissioner



Submitted photo

Bridgett Junkin (left) to Jacky Connell (right), senior pastor.

► **St. Clair County Baptist Association** invites all area churches to bring their students to Youth Night of Worship Aug. 9 at Mount Pisgah Baptist Church, Cropwell. This free event kicks off at 6 p.m. with music by Rush of Fools followed by guest speaker Jay Stewart, state missionary and former pastor of Ashville First. For more information, contact Chris Sanford, 205-525-5273, or associational missionary Danny Courson, 256-872-2713.

SOUTHEAST ALABAMA ASSOCIATION

► **Jonathan Woodham** is the new worship pastor of **Bethlehem Baptist Church, Midland City**. He previously served as worship and children's pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church, Hartford. A graduate of Auburn University, Woodham holds a master's in church music from Southeastern Seminary. He and his wife, Katie, have two boys. Paul Edenfield is pastor.



WOODHAM

SULPHUR SPRINGS ASSOCIATION

► **Good Hope Baptist Church, Dora**, celebrated its bicentennial anniversary May 7. Special music was provided by the gospel quartet Awakened, and pastor Kerry Turner (left) brought the



Photo courtesy of Lonette Berg

message. Lonette Berg (right), executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, and Jay Stewart, Alabama Baptist state missionary, made special presentations. The celebration concluded with lunch and afternoon singing featuring Awakened.

TUSKEGEE LEE ASSOCIATION

► **Jessica Keyes** is the new children's ministry director of **First Baptist Church Reel-town**. Previously she served as the youth director, 2017–2020. A graduate of Troy University, Keyes is an elementary school teacher at Oaks School, Opelika. She and her husband, Kevin, have two boys. Timothy Smith is pastor.



KEYES



ROBINSON

► **Jodie Robinson Sr.** is the new pastor of **Salem First Baptist**. A graduate of Florida Baptist Theological College (now The Baptist College of Florida), he has served as pastor of churches in Alabama, Arkansas, South Dakota and Florida. He and his wife, Anita, have one adult child.

WEST CENTRAL ASSOCIATION

► **Newbern Baptist Church** celebrated its 175th anniversary April 22. Associational missionary Lee Tate brought greetings, and Tom Stacey, former director of missions, was the guest preacher. Special music was provided by the Mennonite choir from the Newbern area, and pastor Roger Harper and his mother, Cathy. The church was presented with a commemorative plaque by Anna Speir, a commissioner of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. John Nicholson, pastor of Siloam Baptist Church, Marion, was among the special guests. Jambalaya was served in the Community House following the service.



Photo courtesy of Anna Speir

EDITOR'S NOTE — Please send news items to news@thealabamabaptist.org. Submissions that include the following information are greatly appreciated:

- complete details of the event, celebration or honor;
- at least one high resolution photo of the event or honoree;
- the name and phone number of a contact person at your church.

Changing ‘the cycle of poverty’

Alabama native seeks to make a difference, brighten children's future in Romania

By **Lizzy Haseltine**

The Alabama Baptist

It's common for hungry children to beg for food on the streets of Targu Mures, Romania.

Seeing the need firsthand, Alabama Baptist Jeremy Woods and his wife, Magda, started Potter's House Ministries. The nonprofit organization is working to make a Kingdom difference in the lives of Roma children and families, one of the largest minorities in Romania.

“We believe that every child deserves a loving and supportive home environment, and we are dedicated to providing that,” said Woods, who moved to Romania in 2015 and started the ministry just before the pandemic. The organization desires to offer a wide range of services, from after-school care and food distribution programs to job preparation for parents, and it's currently raising support to build children's homes.

Nomadic background

“There are lots of hardships that the Roma face in Romania,” said Woods, noting the difference in the terms “Roma” and “Romanian.” The Roma are an ethnic group with a nomadic background.

According to Woods, they traditionally marry very young at the age of 12 or 13 and have large families. Often in financial hardship, many of the children don't attend school and are sent out on the streets to beg for food and clothing.

“A lot of mothers abandon their babies at the hospital,” Woods explained, adding that Romania's government has closed most of its orphanages and only has children's



Photo courtesy of Jeremy Woods

Jeremy Woods and his wife, Magda, moved to Romania in 2015 and started Potter's House Ministries. The nonprofit organization is working to make a Kingdom difference in the lives of Roma children and families, one of the largest minorities in Romania.

homes. One family-style home can hold far fewer children than an entire orphanage, meaning there's a significant need for more children's homes in Romania.

“Our children's homes will be Christian-based and will provide a safe and nurturing space for these children to grow, learn and thrive,” Woods said.

Potter's House Ministries plans for each home to have two parents, a social worker and a psychologist. The parents will serve as caretakers and create a loving environment for the children.

A social worker will help the kids navigate any challenges of

growing up and help them adjust to their new home. The psychologist is to ensure the children have emotional support. The children will also receive an education.

“I want to see a generation of Roma children that goes to school and is able to change the cycle of poverty,” Woods said.

The goal to give children a brighter future is personal for Woods.

Born and raised in a Christian home in Huntsville, Woods is the oldest child in his family.

“By the time I was around age 4, my parents had three other children, and all three of them had

died,” Woods said, his voice choking at the memory.

His parents fostered 10 children in their home while Woods was between the ages of 5 and 10 years old. They adopted his younger brother and sister.

“It was a big part of my growing up,” said Woods. After accepting Christ as his Lord and Savior, Woods went on several missions trips, including one with Madison Baptist Association to Romania three years prior to his move.

Open eyes

Living in the country long term has really opened his eyes to its needs — and his heart to the Roma.

He hopes to get Potter's House Ministries' after-school program up and running again, which shut down due to the pandemic. It included a meal and Bible study for children, along with helping them with schoolwork.

And even on the day they talked with The Alabama Baptist, Woods and his wife bought groceries for a young mother who was begging on the street while holding an infant. It's just part of fulfilling their calling and honoring God's heart for widows and orphans, they said.

As Psalm 68:5 says, “Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation.”

Prayer requests

How you can pray:

► Pray for health and strength. The Woods family has three small children and has recently battled sickness and health issues.

► Pray for provision, that God would help provide the \$6,000 monthly cost needed to start and run each children's home.

WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT POTTER'S HOUSE MINISTRIES?

Your support can help make a difference in the lives of Romanian children. Visit pottershouseministries.org/donate.html



Photo courtesy of Shocco Springs

Campers enjoy some outdoor water fun at Camp Happy Days at Shocco Springs. The free overnight camp ministers to kids 9–13 years old who have had some involvement in the past or present with DHR.

‘Worthy and deserving’

Camp Happy Days celebrates 36 years of bringing smiles to children in foster care

By Laurie Mullinax
Shocco Springs

About 100 campers gathered July 14–17 at Shocco Springs for Camp Happy Days, a free overnight camp for kids 9–13 years old who have had some involvement in the past or present with DHR.

Thirty-six years ago, representatives of the Clarence Horne Estate approached the late George Ricker, Shocco’s director at the time, seeking a partnership to provide a Christian camp experience for children who would not otherwise have that opportunity.

Originally, Horne’s gift through The Baptist Foundation of Alabama was a parcel of property upon which he wished to establish and maintain a boys’ camp in memory and honor of his father, John E. Horne.

After obtaining legal clarification, TBFA was allowed to sell the property and use the funds in ways that honored Horne’s original intentions.

The resulting partnership is Camp Happy Days, an annual camp for foster children and their adopted, foster and biological siblings, primarily funded by the Horne Estate and facilitated by Shocco Springs staff and volunteers from various churches.

In the beginning, camp attendees were recruited from local communities, but eventually the Alabama Department of Human Resources became the main source of camper prospects.

Through the years, the camp has adapted to the times and the changing needs of the kids. But what has

remained the same is that the kids have fun, learn about Jesus Christ and are lovingly cared for by trained staff and volunteers.

‘Coming together’

Shocco’s Blaire Butler, director of CHD, leads the planning and facilitating of the event. “This is a beautiful picture of the Church coming together to be the hands and feet of Christ to minister to these kids,” she said. “I’m grateful for the opportunity to serve in this way.”

Scott Prater has served as camp pastor for more than 20 years and brings staff and youth volunteers from his church, FBC Jacksonville/Eagle Point, to help. This church also makes sure every camper receives a Bible.

Don Scrivener brings a student group from Denman Avenue Baptist Church in Lufkin, Texas, each year.

In addition to working at the camp, they donate water bottles and drawstring backpacks for each camper.

While on campus, the kids experience a wilderness hike, rock climbing, pool and lake activities, mini golf, basketball, ropes courses, Bazooka Ball, Gaga Ball and arts and crafts.

Each camp activity is designed to give camp counselors positive interaction with campers and opportunities to point the children to Jesus.

Every year there are numerous children who come to know the Lord as Savior.

“God is saving precious children who are carrying more weight than their shoulders and hearts should ever have to bear,” said Tara Stracener, one of 56 CHD staffers and a former Shocco staff member. “They are finding out that God loves them

and that they are worthy and deserving of good things.”

There is intentionally little talk about DHR and the difficult situations the children have experienced. Instead, the campers are immersed in fun, exciting camp activities that will form happy memories and open their hearts to learning about the love of God.

‘For the kids’

Volunteer Alyssa Prater Cochran said, “We do this for the 12 year old that finally gets to relax and enjoy herself for a few days because when she is back home, she lies awake, scared, wondering what’s next.”

“We do this for the brother and sister that are separated in foster care and their only chance to see each other is at camp for a few days. We do it for the kids that feel alone, unloved, unwanted and unseen.”



Children, many of whom are in foster care, attend Camp Happy Days at Shocco Springs.

Photo courtesy of Shocco Springs

‘Through the roof’

VBS ‘is a great opportunity to show how much Jesus loves us and model how to share the gospel in a fun and exciting way’

(continued from page 1)
for all who wanted to give their lives to Christ to raise their hands, he watched as Pollard — the church’s VBS director for this year — lifted her hand in the air.
“She had served at another church faithfully for 20 years, helping lead VBS, but she had never gotten

saved,” he said. “Now you can just tell the difference, and her excitement for VBS is through the roof.”
Pollard said it’s like the weight of the world is off her and a new peace has taken its place.
“It’s the most wonderful feeling, and now I want to tell everybody,” she said.

She sees VBS with fresh eyes. Instead of just focusing on making it a fun week for the kids in the craft room, she sees the purpose that’s been there all along — to introduce children to the love of Jesus and the gospel message clearly and early.

Sharing Jesus
“As a little girl, I didn’t get to experience VBS; we weren’t in church, Pollard said. “Now I love VBS. I want to reach out to all the kids and for them to know Jesus as soon as they can. I want them to know how wonderful it is; I just can’t explain it except that it just is.”
This summer, she dove into helping Glory Baptist prepare for its one-day VBS July 29, which had a farm theme with a petting zoo and a variety of stations designed to share the gospel through stories.



Facebook photo
Mountain Hill Baptist Church in LaPine



Nances Creek Baptist Church in Jacksonville



Facebook photo
Dawson Church in Birmingham hosted 1,543 preschoolers and elementary students during its June 5–8 KidLife week. It was the state’s largest VBS, according to Patty Burns, VBS strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

“I’m ready,” Pollard said a few days before the event. “I can’t wait to see what God’s got planned for us.”

Patty Burns, VBS strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said though VBS season is still going, she’s heard stories all summer of churches working hard to use VBS as a way to reach their communities with the gospel.
She’s been especially encouraged by the stories she’s heard from rural churches across the state.
“What excites me about that is that they don’t say, ‘We don’t have enough kids to do Bible school.’ Instead, they’re seeing VBS as a way to get more children into their

church,” Burns said. “They’re using it as an outreach event.”

Gum Springs Baptist Church in Hartselle — a congregation that averages around 50 on Sundays — is one of those.
Tammy Winton, the church’s VBS director, said they only had two or three children and a couple of junior high students who attended the church regularly before VBS.
“We knew our limited resources, and we prayed for God to send us people we could serve and serve well,” she said.

And when it came time for VBS — held in the evenings the second week of July — they had 41 enrolled, including 15 junior high students.
“I don’t know where they came from; God just sent them to us, and



Facebook photo
FBC Decatur

we adjusted our classes to have a ‘teens’ class instead of a fifth and sixth grade class,” Winton said. “It’s a good start to a youth group.”

Gum Springs also made the fifth night a family night, and a lot of the parents came, she said.
“We’ve already had one mom come to Sunday services since then,” she said. “And we’ve got a plan to go and visit the nine kids who made decisions to follow Christ.”

They’re hoping to reach the kids and reach the parents through them, Winton said, kind of like how Pollard and her husband were drawn into the church through their kids’ involvement initially.

With VBS igniting this kind of on-going outreach to children and families, Burns said the stories don’t end when VBS does.



Photo courtesy of Tammy Winton
Gum Springs Baptist Church in Hartselle

After the last churches wrap up their Bible school events in the next couple of weeks, she’ll start to get reports of what happened all over the state this summer —

the SBOM created their own form this year to collect data from Alabama Baptist churches through email.

Those numbers are important to help with VBS planning for future years, and they’re worth celebrating, she said — but even those won’t tell the ongoing story of the impact that’s made.

VBS “is a great opportunity for the church to show how much Jesus loves us and model how to share the gospel in a fun and exciting way,” Burns said.

To request a VBS report form for your church, email pburns@alsbom.org.



Facebook photo
Flint Hill Baptist Church in Bessemer



Facebook photo
A missions team from Pickens Baptist Association leads VBS during a trip to Honduras.



Photo courtesy of Taylor Road Baptist Church
Taylor Road Baptist Church in Montgomery made state and national headlines when a rogue cow showed up on campus June 20 during the second night of Vacation Bible School.



Facebook photo
FBC White Plains in Anniston

Famous Christians from previous centuries

Heroes of the Faith

Baptist pioneer Mary Webb founded first female missionary society in the US

Mary Webb (1779–1861) was a Baptist pioneer who founded the first female missionary society in the United States.

Born on March 12, 1779, in Boston, she was the daughter of Samuel and Margaret Webb. She contracted a deadly disease when she was 5 years old. Miraculously, she recovered, but she was crippled and confined to a wheelchair. She accepted her disease cheerfully.

Her father died when she was 13. Because they were in dire financial need, she and her mother ran a school in their home.

A neighbor, Thomas Baldwin, pastor of Second Baptist Church Boston, took an interest in the family and especially Mary. She began attending his church and started studying the Bible. When she was 19, she made a public confession of faith and was baptized.

Plan to help

Webb read a missionary sermon based on 2 Chronicles 15:7: “Be ye strong therefore, and let not your hands be weak: for your work shall

be rewarded.” She told her pastor about a plan to help the missionary cause. He encouraged her to pursue her dream.

In 1800 at the age of 21, Webb founded the Boston Female Society for Missionary Purposes with a group of 13 women. She served as the society’s secretary and treasurer for 56 years.

Influential

Because of Webb’s influence, more than 200 missions societies were formed all over America. She couldn’t travel to help them, but she wrote thousands of letters of encouragement and advice.

In 1803, she assisted in establishing the Female Cent Society and in 1811, the Children’s Cent Society.

The goal was for each member to give 1 cent a week to missions. She also encouraged women to give \$2 each year to support home and international missions and the translation and publication of Bibles.

Second Baptist Church established a Sunday School in 1816. Webb served many years as a superintendent.

Her many other benevolent activities included efforts to raise money to educate poor young ministers, clothe needy children, provide a day care for children of working mothers, begin a Sunday School for impoverished children and start the Penitent Females’ Refuge to rescue prostitutes from the street.

On May 24, 1861, Webb died of breast cancer at the age of 82. She is buried in Woodlawn Cemetery in Everett, Massachusetts.

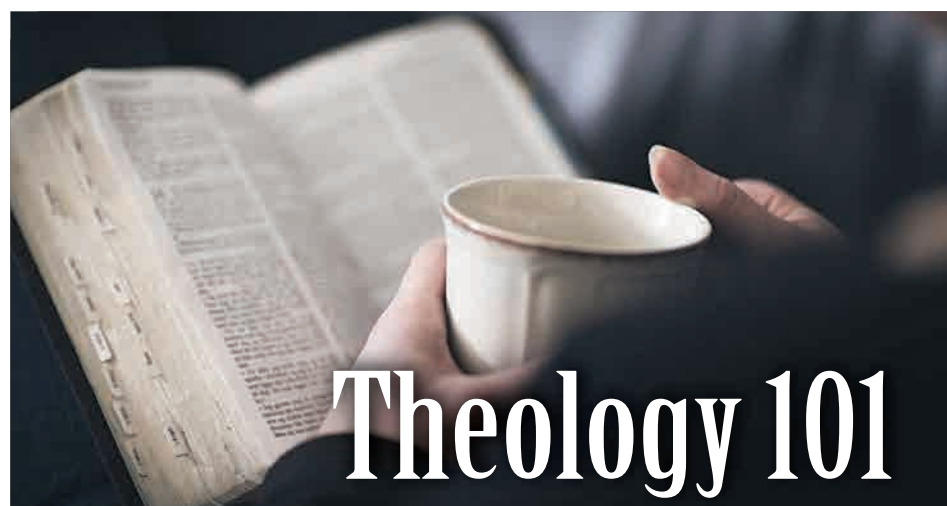
A marker was erected next to her grave in August 1988 by American Baptist Women and Woman’s Missionary Union of the Southern Baptist Convention.



By Joanne Sloan

Joanne Sloan, a member of First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, has been a published writer of articles and books for 30 years. She has a

bachelor’s degree double majoring in history and English from East Texas State University (now Texas A&M–Commerce) and a master’s degree specializing in English from the University of Arkansas (1978).



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Justification

What is Justification?

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.

The Alabama Baptist

This week, we begin to think about salvation in terms of justification.

Romans 3:26–28 tells us that God is “the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” and “a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.”

Romans 5:1 adds, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

What are we to draw from these and other passages about the meaning of justification?

We might put it like this: Justification is God’s immediate response to a repentant sinner who trusts Christ in which God chooses to view our sins as forgiven and to view Christ’s perfect righteousness as credited to us, thereby declaring for time and eternity that He counts us righteous in His sight.

Being at its heart a legal action on God’s part, justification is an analogy that draws its meaning from a court of law.

Verdict rendered

When all the evidence has been presented, a verdict is rendered. The result of that verdict determines the accused person’s legal standing in the eyes of the law — either innocent or guilty.

We call a verdict of innocence an acquittal, or a release from all charges against the accused person. As believers in Christ, we Christians stand before God as sinners who have been acquitted. God has declared us “not guilty.”

The penalty that belongs to a guilty person will not be imposed. The amazing thing about this analogy is that we, as sinners, are in fact very guilty.

All have sinned; none are innocent. The heart of the gospel is that Christ has taken our guilty verdict upon Himself so that God, the righteous judge, might declare us innocent.

The Bible calls this being justified before God.

Fully accepted

Not only does justification mean that we are acquitted of all charges along with their rightful penalty, but it also means that we are fully accepted into right standing before God.

The dark cloud of divine condemnation has been lifted. God has credited Christ’s perfect righteousness to our account.

When we think about being justified with God, we rightfully hold in mind the twin ideas of “acquitted” and “accepted.”

Henceforth, God views us as fully pardoned, just as if we had never sinned at all. He also reinstates us to His favor and privilege. In short, He fully accepts those whom He fully acquits.

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.



MAKING A POSITIVE IMPACT

Christian clubs in Alabama schools fortify beliefs amid pressures

By Erin Roach
The Alabama Baptist

Jason Gaston began following Jesus in eighth grade, but then he met obstacles common to public school students when it came to living out his faith.

“You get saved, and you probably do well for a couple of months ... but then pressure, temptation, the reality of sin starts to be there. You start to get your priorities mixed up,” said Gaston, a recent graduate of Baker High School in Mobile.

Gaston floundered until some life-changing moments pushed him back to Jesus and prompted him to be more intentional about reaching out to his peers at Baker.

“I wanted to find the Christians who were living the right life, and I wanted them to know we don’t have to be alone in this fight. We’re not supposed to be,” he said.

Gaston saw a need for a network of believers in his high school to encourage one another in the right direction. “When you get a bunch of students in a room, you realize how unhealthy theology and views have crept into our students’ hearts and minds,” he said.

Need for community

Considering the need for accountability and community, Gaston started The Way, a student-led Bible study group meeting once a week on Wednesdays and gathering for other events throughout the year.

The main goal of the club is to be a community where students can be honest with each other as they strive toward Christlikeness.

“We want to pray for one another and encourage and look at Scripture together and struggle with questions and ideas,” Gaston said.



Photo courtesy of Jason Gaston

The Way, a student-led Bible study group at Baker High School in Mobile, hosts worship nights and other special events throughout the year.

It’s important that the group is led by students, Gaston said, because while it’s encouraging for adults to invest in youth, “it piques my interest more when I can ask, ‘Why are these students invested in something? Why are my buddies so interested in this guy named Jesus?’”

Student-led clubs are able to reach people in different ways than adult-led clubs, Gaston said, in part because of the level of vulnerability.

“I think it allows for more difficult conversations, conversations that need to be had but that aren’t being had because of the barrier of having to put a show on for an adult, or it’s just too awkward or something like that,” Gaston said. “We’re able to do that when we have someone who spends a lot of time in Scripture and is mature and close

with God. If we don’t have an answer, we can look together.”

Gaston is now headed to William Carey University in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, to follow a call to ministry, so The Way will be led by another student. In addition to the weekly meetings during the school

year, the group went to school sporting events together, attended Winter Jam, hosted a worship night in May and sometimes had a game night with pizza

at a local church.

“I can think of three or four people who have come up to me or texted me to say thank you for starting The Way because they were in my boat,” Gaston said. “They were alone, they felt so lost and they didn’t know where to turn. The encouragement and the Scripture we’d

been studying had been so helpful to them. I truly believe this club is here for a reason, and God is working through it.”

Christian clubs are not exclusive to high schools. Alabama has several chapters of Discovery Clubs, which are after-school Bible groups held in public elementary schools in Birmingham and surrounding counties. They meet for one hour each week and impart truth that can impact children for a lifetime.

Building a foundation

“Children are exposed to things at a much earlier age now,” said Rachel Moore, director of Discovery Clubs. “With the prevalence of social media and outside nonbiblical influences vying for their attention, we need to help instill a strong Christian foundation as early as possible before the world can influence them toward a secular mindset.”

Since many school-age children are in families who do not attend church, Discovery Clubs may be the only biblical education they have the opportunity to receive “before they have to face this fallen world in which we live,” Moore said.

Discovery Clubs are approved in 22 schools so far for this fall, and they typically have around 60 classrooms reaching about 1,300 students.

“This fall will mark Discovery Clubs’ 20th school year as a ministry,” Moore said. “In that time, we estimate we have reached almost 20,000 individual students — in a classroom at their own elementary schools — with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

“We are privileged to be able to show the love of Jesus to these kids each year and to make a positive impact on their lives.”

For more information about how to volunteer with Discovery Clubs, visit discoveryclubs.org.

UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Week of Prayer focus set for Sept. 10-17

This year marks a significant anniversary for Alabama Baptists. On Oct. 28-29, 1823, a group of 15 men and women gathered at Salem Baptist Church near Greensboro to organize the Alabama Baptist State Convention. A nearby historical marker notes, "They met to promote missions, education, and closer cooperation among Baptists of Alabama."

Throughout these 200 years, Alabama Baptists have not only maintained an unwavering commitment to these priorities but also to praying fervently for missions and missionaries. And while we have much to celebrate, there remains

For more information, visit myers-mallory.org/ give or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



an unfinished gospel task before us that demands our greatest efforts.

The Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering was launched in January 2016. Gifts are received throughout the year, with a special emphasis

coinciding with the Week of Prayer for State Missions, Sept. 10-17.

The offering is meant to complement vital giving through the Cooperative Program and helps support the Great Commission Ministries of Alabama WMU, Disaster Relief, Church Planting, Partnership Missions and Church Revitalization.

We invite you to join us in boldly praying for these five strategic ministries and to prayerfully consider your gift to the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering.

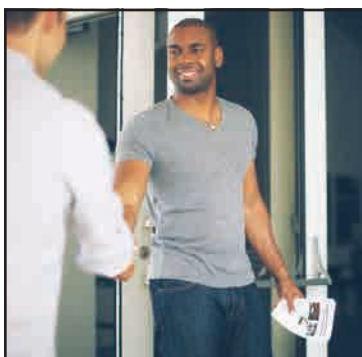
As we build off our past and step into our future, know that your gifts provide resources to help Alabama Baptists to carry the life-changing power of the gospel to our local communities and beyond.



Alabama WMU



Disaster Relief



Church Planting



Partnership Missions



Church Revitalization

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

FULL-TIME 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 by Aug. 31.

PASTOR

Mount Hebron East Baptist Church, Eclectic, Alabama, located in a growing rural setting near Lake Martin, is in search of a full-time pastor. Please email inquiries/resumés to: mhebc1896@protonmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Adellum Baptist Church, small church in Andalusia, Alabama, seeking bivocational pastor. Send resumés or inquiries to: cappsy@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

South Hamilton Baptist Church in Hamilton, Alabama, is prayerfully accepting resumés, for a God-led bivocational pastor. South Hamilton Baptist Church has a traditional Sunday morning Sunday School and worship time as well as a Bible study on Wednesday evenings. To submit a resumé please email: southhamilton@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

New Providence Baptist Church, 53080 Rabun Road, Bay Minette, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational pastor. Please send resumé to: Search Committee, P.O. Box 503, Bay Minette, AL 36507 or email to: arlene@pfefferflooring.com.

OTHER POSITIONS

PREGNANCY CENTER DIRECTOR —

FULTONDALE, ALABAMA Sav-A-Life, Inc. is looking for a full-time center director for its Fultondale location (just north of Birmingham). This team member will manage all routine operations of the pregnancy center in an efficient, effective and professional manner. The

center director trains and manages all staff and volunteers in the implementation of necessary programs, scheduling and meets with clients. Applicants need a bachelor's or master's degree, preferably in a helping field, or need related equivalent experience if no degree. To learn more or to apply, please send a cover letter and resumé to info@savalife.org. No phone calls please.

TEACHERS

Marion Academy Early Learning Center is urgently seeking full-time teachers to fill positions for their toddler and pre-k classrooms. If you are interested and would like more information regarding these positions, please contact the main office by phone at 334-683-8204 or email at maoffice@marion-academy.com.

SIGNS

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CHRISTIAN Crossword

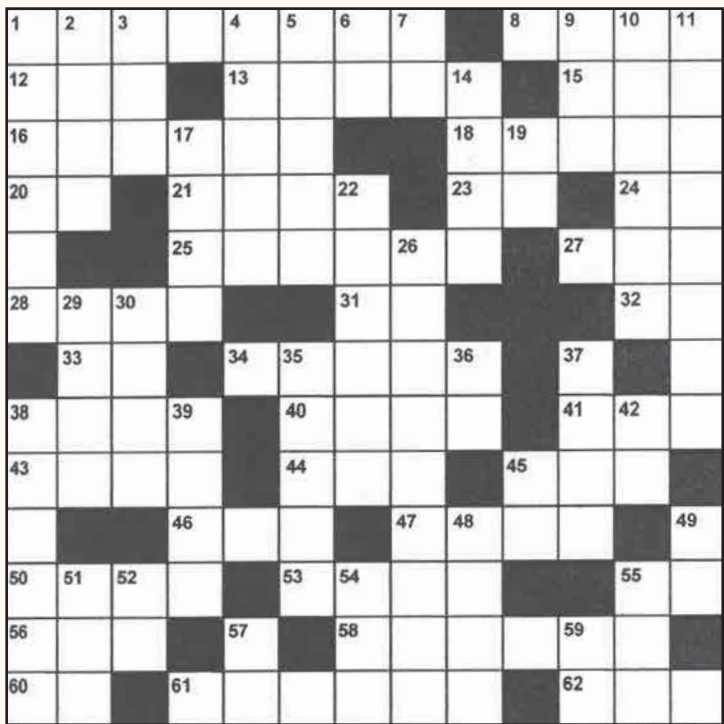


UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

ACROSS

1. ____ and honor are her clothing. (Prov. 31:25)
8. And ____ gave names to all. (Gen. 2:20)
12. United States of America. (abbr.)
13. Save the beast that ____ upon. (Neh. 2:12; 2 words)
15. Casteth forth his ____ like morsels. (Ps. 147:17)
16. He must ____ his own family well. (1 Tim. 3:4 NIV)
18. I will ____ in the house of the Lord. (Ps. 23:6)
20. Mister. (abbr.)
21. Blessed be the Lord God of _____. (Gen. 9:26)
23. Id est. (abbr.)
24. Each. (abbr.)
25. ____ shall be ____ for the congregation. (Num. 19:9; 2 words)
27. Greater love hath no _____. (John 15:13)
28. I will give you ____ in due season. (Lev. 26:4)
31. Mom.
32. There should be time ____ longer. (Rev. 10:6)
33. ____ forth.
34. He shall eat at my _____. (2 Sam. 9:11)
38. Second letter in the Greek alphabet.
40. Roebuck, and the fallow. (Deut. 14:5)
41. And ____ did that which was right. (1 Kings 15:11)
43. ____ and his wife hid themselves. (Gen. 3:8)
44. Internal Revenue Service. (abbr.)
45. Passed through the ____ Sea. (Heb. 11:29)
46. Id, ____ superego.
47. Bass horn.
50. Is the seed yet in the ____? (Hag. 2:19)



By Pamela Jensen Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

53. They lightened the _____. (Acts 27:38)
55. ____ apple.
56. The ____ of violence is in their hands. (Isa. 59:6)
58. To ____ with oil.
60. To ____.
61. ____ are created equal. (2 words)
62. Atomic Energy Commission. (abbr.)

DOWN

1. As snow in _____. (Prov. 26:1)
2. Former emperor of Russia.
3. He ____ to meet them. (Gen. 18:2)
4. In my prayers ____ and day. (2 Tim. 1:3)
5. Canst thou speak ____? (Acts 21:37)
6. Ye shall observe ____ do. (Deut. 12:1)
7. Hand, head. (abbr.)
9. Thou shalt surely _____. (Gen. 2:17)
10. He wrapped it in ____ linen cloth. (Matt. 27:59; 2 words)
11. A dark pigmented cancer.
14. To delete.
17. There is ____ not unto death. (1 John 5:17; 2 words)

19. ____ will shew the interpretation. (Dan. 2:4)
22. For the body is not one _____. (1 Cor. 12:14)
26. All the coasts of ____? (Joel 3:4)
29. And the ____ arose. (Job 29:8)
30. Ninth letter in the Greek alphabet.
35. Good-bye in Spanish.
36. Emergency Room. (abbr.)
37. International Atomic Energy Agency. (abbr.)
38. A tree of tropical Africa.
39. People shall answer and say _____. (Deut. 27:15)
42. South Dakota. (abbr.)
45. Symbol for rubidium.
48. I set my king ____ my holy hill. (Ps. 2:6)
49. ____ the seventh day. (Gen. 2:2)
51. An expert.
52. Route. (abbr.)
54. ____ is the father of Canaan. (Gen. 9:18)
55. I ____ no pleasant bread. (Dan. 10:3)
57. Symbol for aluminum.
59. Symbol for sodium.

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

One Day Training set for Aug. 12

Are you a new missions leader who would like some guidance or a seasoned leader who would like fresh ideas and new resources?

One Day Training, provided by Alabama Woman's Missionary Union, can provide all of that. The training, set for Aug. 12 at the SBOM in Prattville is for teachers and leaders of women's ministry and children's, youth and adult missions programs as well as WMU leaders and

To register, visit alabamawmu.org/onedaytraining or scan the code with your smartphone's camera.



other general leaders. To register for the training, visit alabamawmu.org/onedaytraining by Aug. 7.

Get Acquainted Day

Are you new to Alabama or new to your church staff? Or would you just like to learn more about ministry and missions partnerships?

Get Acquainted Day is the perfect chance to find out how the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions can partner with you to fulfill the Great Commission. Hear about all the ministries, meet

your state missionaries and tour the SBOM facility in Prattville. You'll also receive a report with information about the people who live within a five-mile radius of your church.

Get Acquainted Day is free and will be held Sept. 7, 9:30 a.m.-3 p.m., with lunch provided. To register, visit alsbom.org/gad.

Request your 2023-24 Resource Directories

This FREE 16-month calendar (Sept. 2023-Dec. 2024) has State Board of Missions events and emphases already printed with plenty of room for you to add your church's events. It also includes a listing of ministries and services. Please limit 20 copies

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4 practical tips for editing your church's online content

By Mark MacDonald
The Alabama Baptist

As communicators, we all need to give our communication a final edit to calm messaging and give information without wasting people's time.

Do you create church content? Here are four practical editing tips every church must practice regularly:

1. Know who your communication is intended for. Always understand who needs your information.

You may have to stereotype the group that's receiving it or segment the group and communicate differently to each group.

If most in that group don't need to hear it, it may be wise to communicate it differently or not at all. Decide why they need the content. What do they want? Are you fixing something? Are you giving them a new process?

Avoid generalizations with content. Tell them as quickly as possible about the promise or intent of the content, and then remind them a few times throughout the content, depending on length.

2. Decide one thing you want them to do. After promising a solution, lead them quickly to the requirement — the call to action.

Try to have one action. If there are secondary things you must add, do it in a secondary way.

The more you want them to do, the less likely they'll do any of it. Create the hierarchy for them.

3. Remove details that aren't part of the decision. Often people creating content are thinking about all the logistics surrounding an event, such as the room it'll happen in, the amount of times it's occurring and



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the contact person. Most of those details don't help people decide if they'll participate.

Edit the content to include benefits and a strong call to action. Get a person's attention by mentioning why they need the content and then provide a solution. Keep it as short as possible.

4. Direct interested people to the regular, trusted

source for details. Your church needs to have that one spot where everyone can discover all the details — when needed. It must be trusted and accurate or people will resist it.

Many churches used to use a printed bulletin, but now most prefer the website. Just make sure it's well done, thoroughly edited and easy to navigate.

Social media channels are

an alternative location to direct people, especially those who aren't on your church email list.

Remember that everyone has access to a website but only a small number will have your bulletin or an app.

A good piece of church content following these editing tips needs to be in the proper website area so it's discoverable by the community and your congregation.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Mark MacDonald is a speaker, consultant, author, church branding strategist and executive director of Center for Church Communication, empowering churches to become known for something relevant (a communication thread) throughout their ministries, websites and social media. His book, Be Known for Something, is available at BeKnownBook.com.

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Natural way of learning

How oral Bible stories are reaching ‘everyday people’ around the world

Riding home on the subway, Patrick Stein casually looked around at fellow passengers.

Two things stood out: First, as a 50-something, he was probably one of the oldest commuters. The median age in this North African city was 26. Second, everyone had earbuds and stared at their phones, each person in their own private world.

The International Mission Board missionary silently wondered what it would take to get people as interested and engaged in Bible stories. As the train clanked along, an idea took shape. Why not create oral Bible stories to put on phones? Because people listened to their phones with headphones or earbuds, no one would know what they were listening to — creating a natural level of privacy in this Muslim-majority region.

For months, Stein’s team of veteran missionaries and local believers had prayed strategically for the Holy Spirit to show them a way to reach their city in a new way and the answer came on this train ride.

“We looked at prayer as kind of a walkie talkie in the time of war. It was like we prayed, ‘Hey, we need fire power right there,’” said Stein, remembering how they pinpointed prayers to needs and watched God powerfully respond. “We prayed specifically for a way to share Bible stories in a language the everyday person could understand.”

The local Bible, Stein explained, is written in a local dialect no one speaks. In this city of millions, even people who read well use an English Bible because it’s easier to understand.

More than a decade of living in this culture made Stein aware that



IMB photo

The median age of the population in many cities in North Africa is 26. One of the best ways to reach this generation is through digital evangelism. It’s a natural segue into a real-life relationship with Jesus.

using either of these Bibles wasn’t the way to go anyway.

While many in the city are literate, Stein’s team understood the natural way of learning for most is still orally. Plus, if they wanted to reach the “everyday person” selling a soft drink on the side of the road, paper wasn’t going to work.

Promised Savior

It took two years for the team to create “50 Story Together Bible Stories” in the local modern language with a story arc called “The Promised Savior.” Each story points to Jesus whether it is from the Old Testament or Revelation.

“We have a story team made up entirely of national believers who craft the stories in a simple, clear and understandable way,” Stein said. “We used professional actors to record them because we wanted [to be] engaging and to draw people in.”

The two-minute stories — available as video or audio — are used for evangelism and discipleship and downloaded from a website. Stephens Amani, a local pastor, has used this method for sharing the gospel.

As he explained the simplicity of the story arc leading to Jesus, he smiled and added it is an easy way to bring people to the King of kings.

“This is something very easy to use and people really like it,” Amani said. “People are sharing it on social media with each other.”

Moving the stories to social media was a natural extension of the project.

In a region where Christians are often persecuted, it provided another layer of privacy for evangelism. A story could be posted so anyone can watch it. Then, a person can ask questions via the

comments. Many have no one they can safely ask questions to about Christianity.

On the other end of the social media is a team of trained local believers. Stein said there are a lot of trolls just fishing for an argument or to find the identity of Christians. The local believers have learned how to sift through the noise and find the person who is truly seeking the Lord.

‘Worth the risk’

“Using social media like this to spread the gospel isn’t 100% fool-proof,” Stein said, noting there’s always some risk in this region when sharing the good news. “The local believers decided spreading the gospel is worth the risk.”

A heart or sad face emoji on a post can lead to a gospel conversation that changes a life for eternity. One man saw an advertisement for the Jesus stories on social media. He began to engage with local believers online, asking them deeper questions.

“Then it came time to meet in person,” Stein said, explaining that the purpose is to take those seeking the truth from online to a face-to-face encounter. “This man met with our national partner, heard the gospel and became a follower of Jesus. He is now being discipled using the 50 stories.”

“This is just one story of how this Story Together Bible Stories project has been instrumental in being a first contact with the Word of God,” he added.

EDITOR’S NOTE — Some names have been changed due to security concerns. This story was originally published by the International Mission Board.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For August 6

Explore the Bible

By Jay T. Robertson, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Systematic Theology, University of Mobile



SPEAKS Jeremiah 36:19–31

The events of Chapter 36 took place in the fourth year of King Jehoiakim's reign. It was the 23rd year of Jeremiah's ministry and the year Babylon established its dominance in the region by defeating Egypt in battle at Carchemish. It was at this critical time that the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah.

Delivered (19–21)

The Lord instructed Jeremiah to write on a scroll all the words he had spoken to the prophet since the beginning of his ministry to the present (627–605 B.C.). Jeremiah dictated the messages to his secretary Baruch, who carefully copied them on a scroll (v. 4).

Jeremiah then commanded Baruch to take the scroll on a certain day of fasting and read it to the crowd that would be present.

Baruch read the scroll at the temple in the ninth month of the fifth year of Jehoiakim's reign, almost a year later. No explanation is given for the lapse of a year from the writing of the scroll to the time it was read.

When the king's officials heard what Baruch did, they had him read the scroll to them. When they heard what he read, they notified the king and warned Baruch and Jeremiah to hide because they knew the king would be angry. Their concern was not unfounded. They knew Jehoiakim had sent men to Egypt to hunt the prophet Uriah, who had prophesied against Jerusalem and fled for his life. When apprehended, Jehoiakim had Uriah executed.

Destroyed (22–26)

King Jehoiakim had his servant Jehudi read the scroll to him. As Jehudi read three or four columns at a time, the king used a scribe's knife to cut off that section and then throw it into the fire, until the

entire scroll was destroyed. In addition to showing his contempt for Jeremiah's messages, Jehoiakim may have believed he could destroy the power of the prophecy by destroying the scroll.

Jehoiakim's father — King Josiah — upon hearing the word of God, had torn his clothes and called his people to repent (2 Kings 22:11).

King Jehoiakim and his attendants responded with defiance and indifference. Although God had given Jehoiakim one more opportunity to hear his word and repent, he once again rejected God's word.

King Jehoiakim refused to listen to the pleas of Elnathan, Delaiah and Gemariah not to burn the scroll. By challenging the king, they were putting their lives in danger. Their courageous action ought to inspire believers today to stand up and speak out for God's word.

King Jehoiakim then ordered his son, Jerahmeel, along with Seraiah and Shelemiah, to seize Baruch and Jeremiah. The earlier concern of the officials for the safety of the two men was justified. The king was not satisfied with destroying the scroll. He wanted to destroy those who were responsible for it. God, however, hid his men.

Replaced (27–31)

After the king had burned the scroll, the Lord instructed Jeremiah to take another scroll and write on it all the words contained on the first scroll and other messages not included on the first one. Jeremiah was also commissioned to tell King Jehoiakim he would have no heir sit on David's throne and that "his corpse will be thrown out to be exposed to the heat of the day and the frost of the night." Every word of judgment previously pronounced would fall on Jehoiakim's descendants, his servants, the residents of Jerusalem and the people of Judah.

"Now after the king had burned the scroll with the words that Baruch wrote ... the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah."

Jeremiah 36:27

Bible Studies for Life

Roy Ciampa, Ph.D.
Armstrong Chair of Religion, Samford University



SET APART IN THE WAY WE THINK Romans 12:1–5, 9–13

Throughout Romans, Paul points out the relationship between the mind and the body, with the corruption of the mind leading to the abusive use of the body. (See especially Rom. 1:18–31 and 3:9–20.) Here, Paul explains how Christ's transformation of our minds impacts that relationship in terms of the use of our bodies and our attitudes toward the whole body of Christ, to the glory of God.

We can be set apart with a renewed mind. (1–2)

Paul says we should live in light of "the mercies of God." The mercies of God that he has in mind include all that he has told us about God's mercy throughout chapters 1–11 of Romans, with the term "mercy" being especially prominent in chapters 9 and 11 as ways of talking about all the blessings God has given us in Christ. In light of all of that, we should present our bodies as living sacrifices since that is our "true worship." Paul had spoken in general about how we "present" the parts of our bodies as tools for wickedness or as slaves to impurity in Romans 6:13–19.

The renewing of our minds leads to transformed thinking and transformed behavior.

Those conformed to this age "use their tongues to deceive" (3:13), while those who have been transformed by the renewing of their minds use their tongues to "give praise to God" (14:11).

Those of this age have "vipers' venom ... under their lips" and have mouths "full of cursing and bitterness" (3:13–14), while those transformed by Christ confess Christ with their lips and mouths (10:9–10).

The wicked have feet that are "swift to shed blood" (3:15), while the redeemed have beautiful feet

that bring good news to others (10:15) and that will be used to crush Satan (16:20).

A mind renewed by Christ results in transformed thinking and transformed living, seen in the ways believers use and refrain from using their bodies.

We are to be set apart in the way we think about ourselves. (3–5)

The grace of God transforms the ways we think about ourselves and about others. God's grace, shown to us in Christ, teaches us to be honest and humble in our self-assessment rather than puffing ourselves up in our own eyes or the eyes of others). That same grace shown in Christ reminds us that we are not islands but are parts of the larger body of Christ and, as in any body, all the parts are needed and connected to the others.

This is a Christ-centered way of thinking about ourselves and others.

We are to be set apart in our love and attitude toward others. (9–13)

The proper use of our bodies mentioned in the earlier verses reminds us that we are all part of one body in Christ. These truths are applied in concrete ways in this section, where Paul describes various behaviors that are all reflections of the sincere and consistent love that Christ modeled for us and seeks to replicate within us. Loving also entails honoring others, diligence, fervent service, hope-filled joy, patience, persistent prayer, generosity, hospitality and Christlike responses to any persecution.

Transformed minds lead us to promote godliness in our bodies and grace in the wider body of Christ. This is reflected in a loving, Christlike attitude toward those around us, in all circumstances.

*"Do not be
conformed to
this world, but be
transformed by
the renewal of
your mind."*

Romans 12:2a

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Songwriter David Leonard finds inspiration in honesty

A lot of plans were interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, but singer/songwriter David Leonard found inspiration in the knowledge that God is the ultimate planner.

Leonard's album "Plans" and the title single are both about trusting God no matter what.

"This new record ... spun out from the pandemic and the future ... what I feel ... is coming, and whether or not I feel like the Lord has plans for myself and my family," Leonard said.

Leonard started playing guitar at 15 years old. His father was leaving his job at a college to pastor Leonard's home church.

His father asked him to lead worship at one of his last campus events before he left. The song "Good Lord" came from that night.

Time of learning

He recalled, "I was singing Matt Maher's 'Lord, I Need You' and out of that song a spontaneous moment happened, which is special because I'd never written a song that was birthed out of the same place that taught me how to lead worship. It was really cool to have it come out of that moment and space."

That time of learning has led to



DAVID LEONARD

Photo courtesy of David Leonard

over 20 years of leading worship, songwriting and performing.

When he was a teenager, his parents thought that his playing was "fun" but felt that he should figure out a different career for his life.

As Leonard headed into his 20s, their attitude changed, and they supported his pursuit of a music career.

"I still remember that switch. It happened probably when I was 19 or 20. I think I'm still blown away that I get to do this for a living.

I never thought that I'd be 40, still living in Nashville and doing this thing. But I'm grateful I am," he said.

Leonard's first experience with a group of musicians was a band he formed — Jackson Waters. He later performed with NeedtoBreathe and then performed as one-half of the duo All Sons & Daughters.

This collaborative attitude resulted in winning a GMA Dove Award as producer and creative partner in The

Creak Music. His worship songs include "Christ Be All Around" and "All the Poor and Powerless," but his most impactful and widely recognized worship song is "Great Are You Lord."

David Leonard's current tour runs through Aug. 25. Go to davidleonardmusic.com to find out more.

Leonard said about his songs, "Each one has sentimental value, for sure. I'm probably most well known by a worship song that [a couple of friends and I] wrote called 'Great Are You, Lord.' That's really been a beautiful song in church, and [people

have] connected with it.

"I'm so thankful. Any time people want to sing your song, it's pretty special, so I'm grateful that they have taken it on as their own," he revealed.

It wasn't until 2019 that Leonard started working on solo projects. He quickly released "The Wait" and "The Wait: Silence the Noise," a live version of songs from "The Wait."

Between 2019 and 2023, Leonard released a couple of EPs and some

singles. In March, the album "Plans" made its debut.

Leonard's songs have one thing in common — they come from where he is in his own life.

"I try to write honest songs. Songs from where I am in life and what's happening in my family, what's happening around me. I just try to be really honest, and hopefully that breeds honesty and vulnerability which allows people to know that they're not alone in how they're feeling," he explained.

Leonard recently toured with Katy Nichole and CAIN. He's excited to get back on the road.

"It's always fun just to play a song and see how people connect with it," he said. "[Touring] is high energy and heart moments. It's all around a good time."

Leonard added that there is never a dull moment around Katy Nichole and CAIN.

"It's always a fun time — getting to be with them," he said.

Leonard's hope is that his songs are relevant to all people — whether the person listens to a song by streaming it or by hearing it at a concert.

True honesty

"I write from a spiritual side because that's a part of my life, but my hope is that people can find hope in these songs whether they are believers or nonbelievers. I've found that true honesty is really the thing that connects all of us," Leonard said.

"All of us are looking for something real. Unbelievers are looking for people to be real with them," he continued. "The hope is that we can go out there and do that on the road and do that through these songs.

"I think that everybody's just looking for connection."

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.

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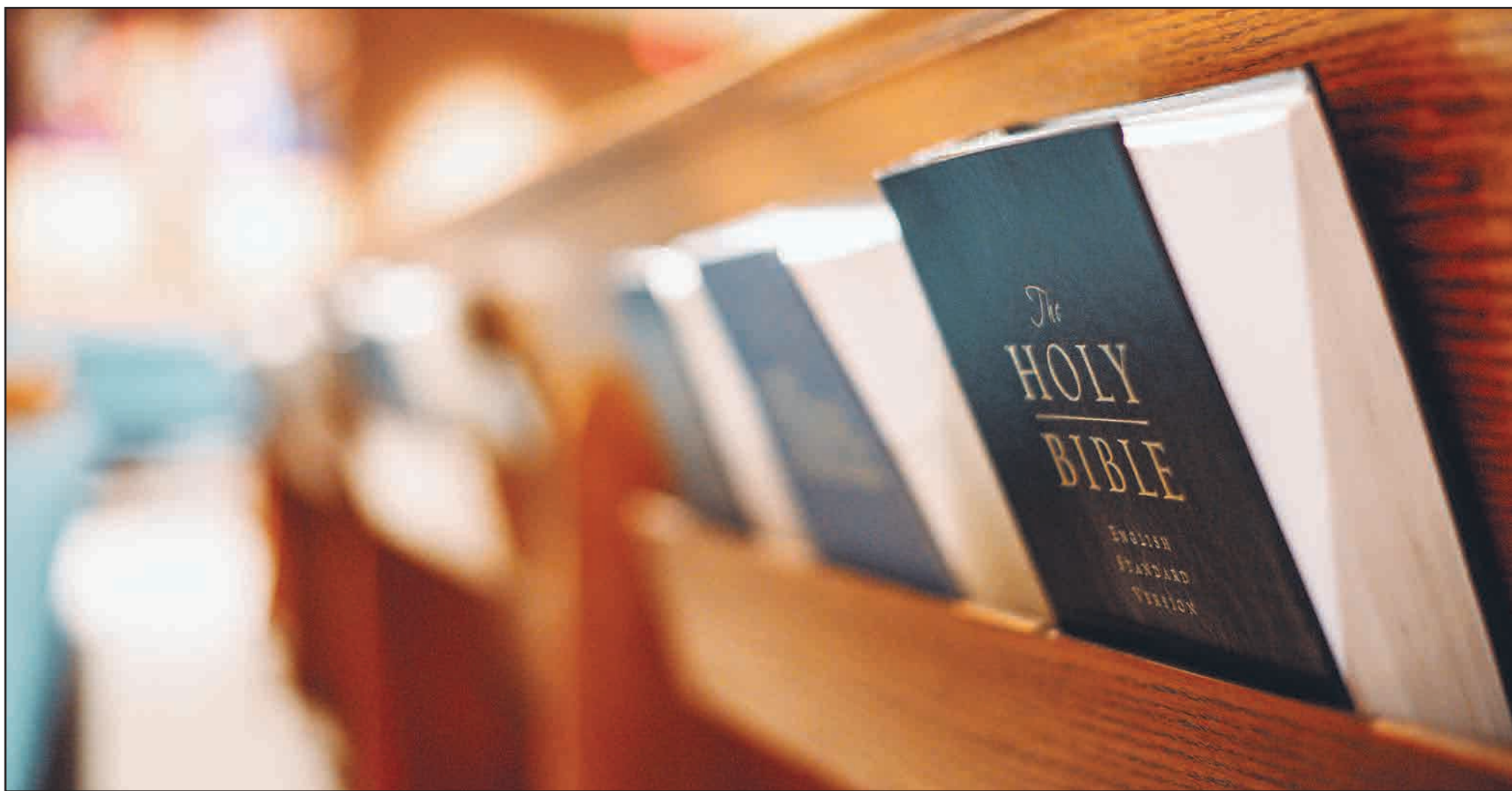


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5 ways to make a visitors card count

By Mark MacDonald

The Baptist Paper

When someone visits your church, you need to have a church visitors card available. Be aware though that many guests will not want to complete a visitors card on their first visit. Here's why: We live in a skeptical culture where a visitor doesn't want to be identified until they feel ready, and that can take several visits.

When a visitor feels ready to be considered a guest who is seeking more information, a church visitors card is the perfect way to do it. Gone are the days when a pastor asks visitors to raise their hands or stand up — that is cringeworthy now. People want anonymity until they need something or want to take a next step.

Have your visitors cards readily available in the pew or chair area, at a guest center or as a digital form on your website.

Here are 5 ways to improve your church visitors card:

1. Keep it short.

The longer your visitor card is, the less likely it will be filled out. Consider the minimal information you need now. You can always add to their information later as you build their church management database entry. Some digital forms let you do that automatically.

2. Make it digital as well as printed.

Don't assume someone will want to fill out a form with a pen. Most will have an automatic field response on their digital devices that allows them to complete the form quickly (so you can ask a bit more perhaps). Digital forms also eliminate transcription errors. For those reasons, you should promote a digital church visitors card. However, a printed card can act as a visual

reminder. The card should include a QR code that leads to a digital form on your "about" or "new?" webpage as well as space for those who want to manually write in their information. Be sure to have a pen nearby.

3. Have a call to action.

When you request information, remember it costs a guest a lot to fill it out, even if it's just the cost of giving you information. Therefore, lead them to something that's of value for submitting the card. Reward them in some way — with information a visitor may need, a usable gift or a way to step into a discipleship journey toward salvation, baptism or church membership.

4. Explain how the information will be used.

Always disclose why you're collecting information and what you'll do with it. Be brief and be honest. Every person wants to protect their

privacy. Assure them you'll protect it.

5. Use the information.

Don't ask for personal information unless you plan to use it. And when you do collect the church visitor card data, be sure to use it — perhaps for analytics, follow-up or valuable guest demographics. If you really don't need the information to improve your first impressions or responses or to help your guest feel honored, then don't ask for it.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Mark MacDonald is a communication pastor, speaker, consultant, bestselling author, church branding strategist for BeKnownforSomething.com and executive director of Center for Church Communication, empowering 10,000+ churches to become known for something relevant (a communication thread) throughout their ministries, websites and social media. His book, *Be Known for Something*, is available at BeKnownBook.com.

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The Wellness Kitchen

"Nature is God's Wellness Kitchen where Food is Medicine."

By Pat Terry
The Wellness Kitchen

GRILLED SAVOY CABBAGE SALAD WITH BUTTERMILK DRESSING

Makes 4 servings

INGREDIENTS:

1 head savoy or napa cabbage	1 teaspoon freshly grated lemon zest
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil	2 tablespoons lemon juice, fresh preferred
1 tablespoon kosher salt	1 tablespoon chives, finely chopped (more if desired for topping)
2 jalapenos	1/3 cup crumbled blue cheese or Gorgonzola
1/2 cup buttermilk	4 slices cooked bacon, crumbled (optional)
1/3 cup plain Greek yogurt, full fat	
1/4 cup mayonnaise	

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Remove any damaged outer cabbage leaves. Cut the head of cabbage in half through the stalk and then cut each half into 3 even wedges for a total of 6 wedges. Lay wedges on a sheet pan. Pour olive oil over wedges, then sprinkle with the kosher salt. Leave on counter for up to 12 hours, but at least 1 hour — the longer the better.
2. Preheat or prepare grill to medium-high, including an area for indirect heat. (Heat to one or both sides but no heat on food.)
3. For the dressing, grill jalapenos over medium-high heat until blistered and black, turning often. This takes about 5 minutes. They will begin to soften. When done, let cool slightly. Wearing disposable gloves, stem, peel, seed and chop the peppers. Place in a medium bowl.
4. To the peppers, add the buttermilk, yogurt, mayonnaise, lemon zest, lemon juice and 1 tablespoon of chives. Mix well. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Chill until ready to serve.
5. When the grill is ready, place the cabbage wedges over medium-high heat, turning several times until charred on the edges as desired. Move to indirect heat to finish cooking. Wedges should be crisp and tender in 15–20 minutes.
6. Pour dressing over each wedge and sprinkle with crumbled cheese. Add more chives and the bacon if desired.

Adapted from hummingbirdthyme.com

What's in season right now? Savoy cabbage!

By this time of the year, farmer's markets are in full swing all over the country. One of the early favorites is savoy cabbage. If there were a cabbage beauty contest, savoy would win hands down! With dark green frilly and crinkled leaves, loosely bound around the small head, this cabbage is milder, sweeter and more tender than its cousins.

The savoy variety seems to have been developed in the Savoy region of France in the western Alps along its borders with Italy and Switzerland. Because of the darker green of the leaves, this cabbage is higher in beta carotene than either red or green head cabbage. As with all cruciferous vegetables, this cabbage is also very high in other vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients.

Peak time: Year-round, but fresh from gardens in late spring, early summer and fall.

Average price: \$1.13 per pound

Nutritional highlights: Because of the darker green color of savoy cabbage, it is higher in vitamin A from beta carotene. In addition to beta carotene, this cabbage is rich in lutein and other phenolic compounds.

These compounds, in addition to a high amount of vitamin C, make savoy cabbage an excellent source of antioxidants and other anti-cancer properties. It is an excellent source of vitamin K and a very good source of vitamins B6, folate and other B vitamins.

It is a good source of calcium and magnesium. The unusual webbing of the leaves makes savoy cabbage an excellent source of dietary fiber.

Because of the nutrient and phytonutrient density of this cabbage, it is anti-inflammatory, helps boost the immune system, improves digestion, protects your heart, lowers cholesterol and maintains bone health.



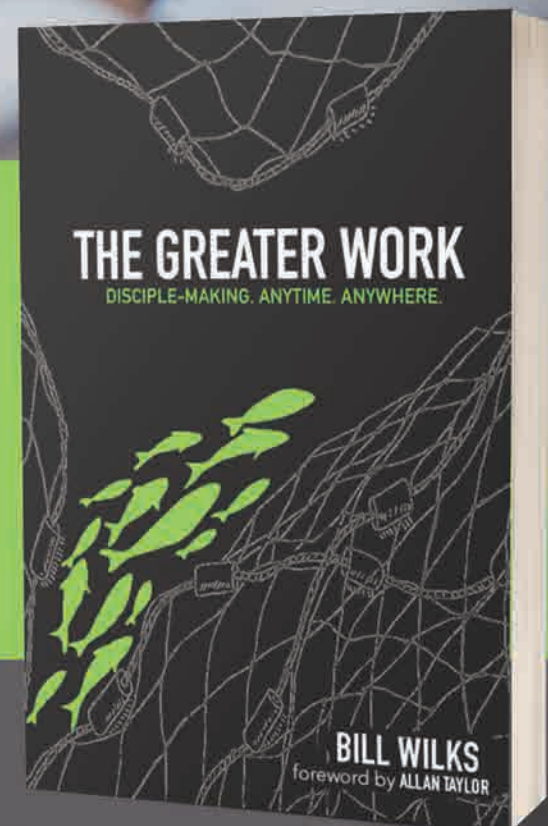
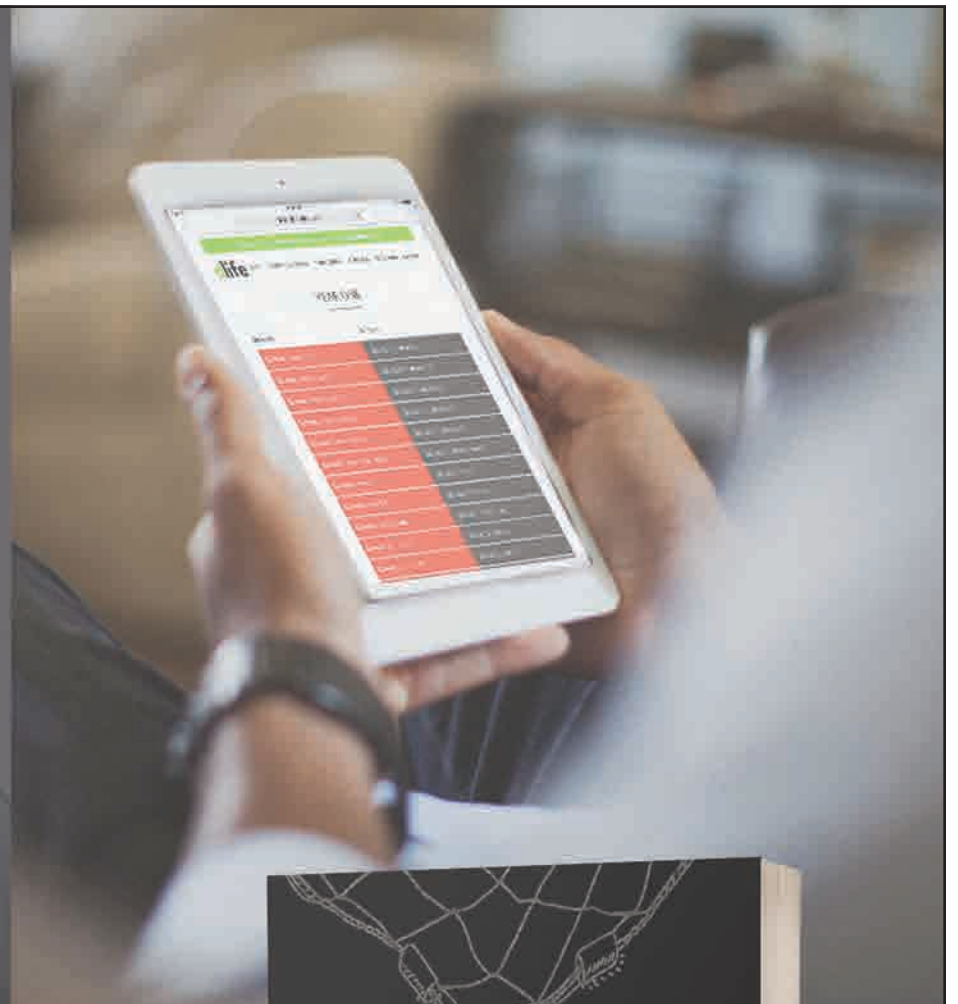
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Pat Terry started The Wellness Kitchen as a way to share the knowledge she's acquired over the 30 years she served as a professor of nutrition and dietetics at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama. Prior to her work at Samford, Terry was the first nonclinical dietitian appointed by the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention to serve overseas. Visit her website at thewellnesskitchenrd.com.



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Raising awareness

By David Dawson
Baptist and Reflector

Husband's death sparks new calling for TN pastor's wife

Eric McLemore was senior pastor of Northside Baptist Church in Milan, Tennessee, for six years. He died Feb. 17 at 34 years old.

"Stress was definitely at the center of it," said his wife, Leah McLemore, a registered nurse. "It takes such a toll on our bodies and most of the time, we don't even realize what it does and how it's affecting us."

Yes, there were other factors involved, she said, but the foremost cause of his death was a bleeding ulcer that was exacerbated by the pressures and constant weight of being in the ministry.

Promoting change

Leah is now doing her part to raise awareness among pastors about the dangers of emotional exhaustion and stress.

Leah recently spoke at the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board's directors meeting in Franklin, where she shared her husband's story and encouraged those in the room to be intentional about finding ways to decompress and to restore themselves, mentally and physically.

As she embarks on this new calling, Leah said her main objective is to encourage pastors to seek help when they need it. She said she plans to emphasize the importance of pastors having outlets where they can decompress and get reenergized.

Leah noted her husband had recently found just such an outlet. Last summer, he joined a group of about a dozen pastors for an "Off the Grid" trip on the Appalachian Trail.

"Off the Grid" is a TBMB-sponsored ministry that provides pastors, staff members and lay leaders an opportunity to enjoy a time of fellowship and outdoor adventure through

a variety of different activities.

Leah felt so strongly about the positive impact of the "Off the Grid" trip that she felt inclined to mention it to TBMB executive director Randy C. Davis the day after Eric's funeral.

"When (Davis) called to check on us, he asked if there was anything he could do for us," Leah said. "I said, 'Well, yes, actually there is. Please continue the Off the Grid ministry, and please continue to encourage pastors to be a part of it.'"

In recent months, the McLemore family had been dealing with a series of major blows.

His mom was fighting a battle with cancer, which had just returned for the third time in two years. His sister-in-law was diagnosed with multiple myeloma and was going through a transplant. And one of the McLemore's best friends — Emily Glisson, the children's director at Northside — had also recently been diagnosed with cancer.

Challenges

Eric, meanwhile, was dealing with ongoing liver issues caused by a virus he contracted while doing missions work in Brazil in 2013. It didn't help matters when both Leah and Eric caught COVID-19 in 2022.

In mid-February, Eric got sick again. He died in the hospital on Feb. 17.

"When the doctor came to me and told me Eric had a large ulcer — and that they couldn't get to it — I knew

that was directly tied to stress," Leah said. "Like I said, we had been managing the other things. But not that."

Just a few days later, McLemore found herself leading a prayer at her husband's funeral.

McLemore said she believes that pastors who are dealing with stress and fatigue are often reluctant to admit their struggles.

Recent research confirms her assessment:

Barna Research, for instance, has done a number of studies on this topic in the past two years, and have found that an overwhelming amount of pastors struggle with the stress of the job.

Most state conventions provide outlets for pastors in those situations. For instance, in addition to the "Off the Grid" project, the TBMB also offers "Shepherd Care" — a ministry focused on the spiritual, emotional, physical and

financial health of pastors, ministry leaders and their dependent families.

The ministry was launched by the TBMB in early 2021 to assist pastors as they emerged from the dark season of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since then, it has continued to be a resource that meets an ongoing need. Through this program, the TBMB has provided full or partial payment for nearly 200 counseling sessions.

Central theme

Leah said if there is one central theme to the message she wishes to share with pastors, it is this: "You are not alone."

"When you feel responsible for someone's eternity, that is an incredible amount of pressure," Leah said.

"And, on top of that, I think the fact that pastors are basically always on call is one of the toughest things," she added. "As a nurse, I have a high-pressure job, but when I clock out, I'm done for the day. Eric never felt that way. With cell phones being what they are, there's almost never a time when someone can't be reached. So, people expect their pastor to always be available."

Leah said social media adds yet another level of anxiety to a pastor's role.

"If someone gets upset about something, they just get on social media and blast the pastor and they tag the church in the post. It's almost like people forget that pastors are human, too."

By sharing her story, McLemore said she hopes she can help pastors and staff members overcome some of these hurdles.



Photo courtesy of Baptist and Reflector

The late Eric McLemore, who was senior pastor at Northside Baptist Church in Milan, Tennessee, stands with his wife, Leah, and their three daughters: Virginia, age 9, Layla, 7, and Lottie, 4.

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