

The Alabama Baptist

Toll free 800-803-5201
www.thealabamabaptist.org

December 14, 2023

Vol. 188, No. 49
Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



Merry CHRISTMAS

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

Top row (l to r): Susan Stevens, Debbie Campbell, Dianna Cagle, Tim Childers, Robin McCall, Hannah Pruitt, Daniel Gilliland, Grace Thornton, Deb Lowery, Jennifer Davis Rash. **Middle row (l to r):** Shawn Hendricks, Maggie Evans, Carrie Brown McWhorter, Jessica Ingram, Amy Hacker, Lauren Grim, Trennis Henderson, Pam Henderson. **Bottom row (l to r):** Pam Holt, James Hammack, Sarah Gill, Thomas Felder, Annette Brown.

SPOTLIGHT SPONSOR ...

The Baptist Foundation
Is your church earning 5% on its savings?



Aging well & retiring well

Huntsville's Mount Zion 'Esther' Sunday School class keeps members active

In the Oct. 5 issue of The Alabama Baptist, you mentioned coverage related to helping with the transition to the retired season of life. I'd like to share what we have done in our Esther Sunday School class at Mount Zion Baptist Church in Huntsville to improve the social life for our retired seniors.

When we had a new member, Lynda Thornton, come to our Sunday School class, she stated she was having a difficult time finding any time to be with other adults. Her husband, Lee, had dementia and she could only be away from home when she hired a sitter to stay with him. One member in our class, Liz Cole, organized a domino game time and invited a few in our class to come so Lynda could be with friends. From that first game, our Sunday School class began meeting every Thursday at 1 p.m. at my house to play games.

One of our members, Cathy Overton, raises chickens, and she brings a dozen eggs to give away to the first winner each week, so we "play for eggs."

One member is in charge of scheduling the refreshments for each week. We've learned new recipes from this special time. Each week, the giggling and laughter reminds one of the teenage years when we had spend-the-night parties.

We limited the group to just our class because of the space needed at the two tables and extra card table. When another friend wished to come, we invited her to come see the procedure that we used so she could duplicate the activity at her house for her class.

Our teacher, Pam Early, has



Members of the Esther Sunday School class at Mount Zion Baptist Church in Huntsville end up laughing a lot when together.

helped us improve our prayer life by setting us all up on a group text so we can share updates and needs with each other as well as remind each other of the various upcoming activities.

Other ways we've improved the social life for our class members:

- ▶ We eat out together each Sunday after church.

- ▶ We celebrate birthdays every two months and pay for the birthday ladies' meals with our class treasury.

- ▶ We have parties around various holidays and even had a watermelon seed-spitting contest one summer.

- ▶ Member Trudy

Adams likes to read and often brings missions books for us to also read. Others share jigsaw puzzles and fresh vegetables.

- ▶ I keep the class directory up to date and include a picture and

background information about each person.

- ▶ We send cards and make phone calls to our members and other church members.

- ▶ We encourage class members to be involved with church activities and ministries such as attending the Tuesday Bible study, participating in the senior adult trips, helping with the youth Wednesday night worship time, serving as substitute Sunday School teachers, participating in the churchwide exercise program, singing in the choir, visiting nursing homes or checking on the lonely, sick and hospitalized church members through the Home Touch ministry.

Missions projects

- ▶ Our class pools our money to purchase large items for missions projects.

- ▶ We encourage each other by sharing articles and photos.

- ▶ Two of the younger members of our class continually teach others about features on their cell phones.

Mildred Haga

Mount Zion Baptist Church
Esther Sunday School class



Photo courtesy of Mildred Haga
Pam Early (left), teacher of the Esther Sunday School class, shows Vivian Mason some cell phone features.

The Alabama Baptist

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

(ISSN 0738-7741; USPS 011-080)

© The Alabama Baptist, Inc.

is published weekly except for one week in July and December by The Alabama Baptist, Inc., at 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209. Phone: 205-870-4720. Statewide phone: 800-803-5201.

Website: www.thealabamabaptist.org

Email: news@thealabamabaptist.org or subscribe@thealabamabaptist.org
Periodicals postage paid at Hattiesburg, Miss.

ANNUAL TAB SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Includes print, digital, app and full web access

Group Rate per subscriber per year — \$16.25

Individual — \$34.95 per year

JENNIFER DAVIS RASH
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Carrie Brown McWhorter
Content Editor

NEWS SERVICES

Baptist Press (BP)
Religion News Service (RNS)
Morning Star News (MS)

POSTMASTER

Send address changes to:

The Alabama Baptist
3310 Independence Drive
Birmingham, AL 35209

ADDRESS CHANGE

Send old and new addresses, and name of church to:
Subscription Department
3310 Independence Drive
Birmingham, AL 35209
Allow two weeks.

To the best of our knowledge, all of the ads in The Alabama Baptist represent legitimate companies and offerings. However, one should always exercise normal business caution in responding to ads.

Full member of Alabama Press Association

Accredited member of Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability



'Nation's Top Regional Christian Newspaper'

1999, 2004, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2022 as judged by Associated Church Press, Baptist Communicators Association, Evangelical Press Association or Religion Communicators Council




The crossword puzzle
can be found on page 15.



Rashional Thoughts

By Jennifer Davis Rash
President and Editor-in-Chief

 jrash@thealabamabaptist.org

 [@RashionalThts](https://twitter.com/RashionalThts)

Our experience with anticipation differs but our urgency should not

Some dear friends are currently traveling on a much-anticipated international trip, and I'm looking forward to hearing all the stories and seeing the photos when they return.

They've been planning and preparing for the trip for several months now and are so very grateful for the opportunity.

While a few stressful moments have surfaced, such as weighing the odds of whether it would be safe to travel right now, most of the time since they decided to go has been focused on an excited anticipation.

Another dear friend is almost paralyzed with anxiety as she anticipates her first Christmas season without her husband.

Thinking ahead about it crushes her heart, and she's not sure how she will navigate it all.

While anticipation is the common denominator between my two sets of friends (who don't know each other), I've been thinking about how their expectations of what lies ahead — their anticipation — is so vastly different based on their situations.

It also helps me better understand why there are varied responses to the growing number of chaotic situations taking place around the world, especially the horrific Oct. 7 attack on Israel by the terrorist group Hamas.

I'm not attempting to debate how we can be fully supportive of Israel while also being concerned for the Palestinian people who are not part of Hamas.

And I'm confident it would be impossible to find Hamas supporters among Alabama Baptists, so it seems we all can find common ground regarding maintaining support of Israel alongside sincere concern for all who are suffering in the region.

While we do need to educate about the seriousness of the conflict in the Middle East, what I'm referring to when I say different responses is how Christians think about living through an "end times" experience.

What if all that is happening right now means we are the ones to journey through what is outlined in Scripture as the end?

Anxious or excited?

I've noticed many seem to be anxious of the anticipated coming days rather than excited.

It may be that in some cases, we are already grieving what we've lost or will lose. It most

definitely could be a fear of torturous situations, and that's very understandable.

However, I wonder if it's possible to trade the anxiety for genuine excitement.

Scripture and our faith tell us that for those of us who know Jesus personally and have submitted our lives to Him, we will get to live with Him forever in heaven. Each day takes us one day closer to that reality.

For me, reading Revelation 21 and 22 always helps when external situations become tense. God with us — Immanuel — and His promise of no more pain, no more mourning and all tears being wiped away brings me peace and comfort in the difficult moments.

It's fair to be sad about a coming day when we will miss out on the parts of this life we love, but more than that we seriously should be concerned about those who do not yet understand.

Rather than surfacing as fear or disappointment, our anticipation of the coming days should resonate as an urgency to spread the Word and share the only Hope that will matter in the end.

... And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then He said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

REVELATION 21:3-5

Your Voice



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

Time for an Advent-ure: What can you share?

By Karen Moore

karenmooreauthor.com

For those who celebrate Advent, the theme this year is share, share, share! It is an awesome theme for the Christmas season and one that inspires the heart. What do we mean by the word “share” that could make this season merrier for those around us? Here are a few thoughts.

You can share:

► The Christmas spirit, the sense that hope fills the air, with something mysterious, something wonderful. Our minds are awed by the idea of shepherds who were astonished by the glorious sight of angels as they proclaimed that the Son of God,

the Redeemer of all humankind had been born.

They were amazed at the sight of angels, and so are we as we try to imagine it. It’s the story of love that we’ve heard every year since we were born, the one that still captivates us and gives us a desire for good to win out over suffering, and for joy to permeate every sweet soul. It’s our chance to share the Light of the world.

Attitude of Christmas

► The attitude of Christmas, the one that makes us feel more loving and giving and generous. We look for ways to give to community services, and volunteer in soup kitchens and

nursing homes and homeless shelters.

It’s our opportunity to be grateful for the abundance that blesses our lives every day and open our hands and hearts to those in greater need than we are. It’s a chance to pray for people who seldom have anyone to lift them up into the ever-faithful presence of God. It’s music that fills our souls with delight and carols that we love to sing over and over again. It’s an attitude of sharing.

► The symbols of Christmas that decorate our homes, reminding everyone that we still believe in the beauty of Christmas. It’s sharing gifts of love with those around us, and baking cookies that make every one smile. It’s Santa and reindeer and little faces anticipating the big day. It’s a feeling that only comes once a year.

Chances are, you know a few people who have lost their Christmas spirit and mumble a few “humbugs” as they go through the season. They imagine it to be some kind of re-tailer’s holiday, some opportunity for endless charities to ring your bell.

It could be that of course, if we let it be that, but it can be so much more. It can be the sweetest memory of childhood, the miraculous story of courage, the simple reflection of all that it means to spread joy and love. It’s all up to you, of course. God did His part. He sent a gift of love that exists for all eternity.

With a little Christmas Spirit, we can return the favor. Let the advent-ure of sharing begin!

There are many issues that can divert our attention from the Great Commission and support of our missionaries. We have a great and mighty God who is at work all over the world. Let’s join Him in what He is doing and make it a priority to pray for and support our missionaries.

Rick Ellison

Director of missions
Baldwin Baptist Association

Don’t lose sight of the majesty of the incarnation this Christmas. Amid the hustle and bustle of the season, make sure you stay focused on Jesus, the ultimate fulfillment of God’s promises, our King in a stable, our Savior born as the heaven’s sang.

Jessica Ingram

“Re-experiencing Advent”
the-scroll.com

When Christmas comes, may it be a reminder of His presence. And when the holiday concludes, may the Lord keep His presence on the forefront of our hearts and minds so much so that we approach New Year’s differently than the world around us. Let’s plan and pray and think and hope with the presence and glory of God in full view.

James Hammack

“God with us forever”
the-scroll.com

Letters to the Editor

The article on dysautonomia in the Nov. 30 edition was not an article I expected to find in TAB. Thank you for sharing it.

Four generations of my family have suffered from this rare condition. It took my daughter’s diagnosis journey of 12 years and total disability to put all the pieces of the puzzle together and receive effective treatments. She is now 25 years old, happily married and truly blessed by God.

Through her struggle with this condition, we came face to face with Psalm 34:19. That verse helps us understand that God

doesn’t promise to always remove the storms from our lives. He does promise He is always with us, even in the midst of the storms of life. As a result, we have learned to use our faith to dance in the rain. We enjoy life where we are because God is there too!

COVID-19 has made this condition very common. It is good for churches to know that invisible conditions exist and learn to do church, missions and worship with adults and children with very real issues.

Robin Crowe

Montgomery

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“You shall call His name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.”

LUKE 1:31a–32b

The proper response when we hear of a wealthy person making a generous contribution to a person or cause is not “I wish I had that much money,” but “I wish I had that much to give.”

As believers, we wrestle with two sobering questions. One, am I faithful now with what God has given me? And two, could God trust me with a larger sum of money if he gave it to me?

Pastor Michael J. Brooks
Siluria Baptist Church
Alabaster

“The Church cannot rely upon the state or federal government to solve the foster care crisis in our nation. Churches must lead the charge in responding to the plight of the fatherless and should also be actively involved in strengthening families, combating substance abuse, reducing poverty and otherwise eliminating the need for children to be in need of out-of-home placements,” said **Rod Marshall**, president of the Alabama Baptist Children’s Homes & Family Ministries.

Your house or apartment is a resource that God has entrusted to you. You and your home can be a gospel outpost, a place where Jesus’ love is displayed. Imagine your home being the place where neighbors say, “That’s where I learned about and accepted Jesus.”

@ArtRainer
X (formerly Twitter)

When everything comes together, it’s a beautiful moment of honest worship to God.

Kristian Stanfill
Worship leader, singer/songwriter

God says He has the plans. Don’t go looking for the plan, look for God. When you seek God with all your heart, you will discover His plan for your life.

@drtonyevans
X (formerly Twitter)

“Discipleship begins in the home, and it must be intentional. Parents cannot begin too soon to teach their children a biblical worldview. ‘D-Life for Families’ is a very simple, practical and biblical tool to assist them with this,” said **Bill Wilks**, pastor of NorthPark Baptist Church in Trussville, and founder of D-Life.

Give Jesus every bit of your life. He will do more with it than you could even dream.

@DanielRitchie
X (formerly Twitter)

With all the demands of life it can be easy to become bombarded by messages of who we should be and who we’re not. When we submit ourselves to God in prayer, we’re reminded that He is greater, and we are a part of His sovereign plan.

@karaaubrey
Instagram

“People are [spiritually] lost and need to understand the love that

God has for them. This is a spiritual fight — the very presence of light searching to repair the darkness,” said **Ken Felix**, senior pastor of Bethel Evangelical Baptist Church in Miami, Florida, and president of the Southern Baptist Convention National Haitian Fellowship.

The gospel is not simply good advice, nor is it good news about God’s power. The gospel is God’s power to those who believe. The place where God has supremely destroyed all human arrogance and pretension is in the cross.

— D.A. Carson

@PastorOnTheFly
X (formerly Twitter)

Great preaching seeks to create a place where the meaning of the text, the meaning of the truth of the text and the meaning of a person’s life, converge.

@DrDavidLAllen
X (formerly Twitter)

The influence of Christmas

For at least 18 centuries, Christmas was seldom celebrated outside the Christian church. It is just in the past 200 years that there has been a growing recognition of the sacred day in the secular world.

Today, Christmas is by far the most celebrated and popular holiday around the world.

Even in the Muslim strongholds of Dubai or Indonesia and in predominantly Hindu India, Christmas decorations and yuletide music — even the exchanging of gifts — are widely seen and heard during this joyous season.

While secular additions to Christmas, such as decorated trees, were banned, even criminalized, in 17th century England and some American colonies, the tide began to change in this country with the popularity of such literary works as Charles Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol,” Washington Irving’s “The Keeping of Christmas at Bracebridge Hall” and “The Book of Christmas” in the 1800s.

Alabama became the first state to make Christmas a legal holiday in 1836. By 1907, every contiguous state had followed when Oklahoma proclaimed the day a legal holiday.

Christmas is still a sacred day commemorating the beginning of the fulfillment of God’s promise of everlasting love and eternal peace.

It is best expressed in the Bible passage found in John 3:16–17: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”

—Submitted in December 2022 by **Adon Taft**, a long-time reporter with *The Miami Herald* and a Baptist lay leader, who died Oct. 15, 2023, in Birmingham



3 stories you should know



Photo by Carrie Brown McWhorter/The Alabama Baptist

Speaker and author Rosalie Hunt portrays Lottie Moon, namesake of Southern Baptists' annual offering for international missions, Dec. 3 at Golden Springs Baptist Church in Anniston. Hunt, a missionary kid to China herself, also spent 30 years on the missions field, serving with her husband, Bob, in eight countries across Asia (including China, Taiwan and Myanmar). Her latest book is "Lottie Moon and the Silent Bell" and is available at rosaliehallhunt.com. (TAB)

Baptist teams continue providing meals in Israel

Texas Baptist Men teams continue to serve meals in Israel as the war between Israel and Hamas continues into its third month.

Nine volunteers from Texas and one from North Carolina prepared and served 1,300 meals Nov. 29 near the Egyptian border, said Gary Finley, TBM's volunteer coordinator in Israel.

Since the Oct. 7 Hamas attack and the beginning of the war, TBM and Israeli volunteers have served more than 100,000 meals using equipment designed by TBM.

"God has positioned TBM, through its established relationships, to provide an amazing level of support to anyone in need as this war unfolds," said John-Travis Smith, TBM associate executive director, who coordinates TBM ministry in Israel. (Baptist Standard)

Gaines says cancer has spread to lungs

In a Dec. 7 video update, Steve Gaines said further tests show his kidney cancer, announced in November, has spread to his lungs.

Gaines, a former Southern Baptist Convention president and former pastor of Gardendale First

Baptist Church, appeared in the video with his wife, Donna.

They plan to share another update in January.

Gaines is pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church near Memphis, one of



GAINES

the largest congregations in both the SBC and the Tennessee Baptist Convention.

Read more at thebaptistpaper.org. (The Baptist Paper)

Persecuted church

18 Christians killed, 25 others abducted in Nigeria

ABUJA, Nigeria — The violence against Christians in Nigeria — which has continued for many years — claimed 18 lives in three states during October and left at least 25 others captive.

Nigeria has led the world in the number of Christians killed for their faith or kidnapped, according to Morning Star News.

The following details are from recent Morning Star News reports:

► Oct. 17: Dr. Stephen Angbas, head of Angbas Hospital in Lafia, was slain in a machete attack in Nasarawa State. Angbas was ambushed and killed, and his motorcycle driver, Mikailu Dahiru, was seriously injured.

► Oct. 29: Six Christians were killed in two villages in Benue State by Fulani herdsmen. Ten

other Christians were slain earlier in October.

► Oct. 31: One Christian was killed, two were injured and 25 were kidnapped in a raid upon Ungwan Baka village in Kaduna State. Fulani herdsmen are suspected in the attacks.

Nigeria is No. 6 on Open Doors' 2023 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.



Unsplash.com

Ugandan man sets wife on fire for becoming a Christian

KAMPALA, Uganda — A Ugandan woman suffered serious burns when her husband set her on fire for becoming a Christian.

Hajara Namwase, 32, a mother of three young children, was hospitalized in Kampala, Uganda, receiving treatment for third-degree burns, Morning Star News reported.

Namwase put her faith in Jesus Christ on May 3 and regularly attended small group fellowships with a friend. Namwase's Muslim husband, Musa Kalele, was on a business trip to South Sudan at the time.

After a group meeting Oct. 17, Namwase said she went to her home in Kenkebu village in Budaka town to find that her husband had returned.

Kalele covered her with sheets, doused her with fuel and ignited her. Neighbors rescued the woman and took her to a hospital in Mbale.

A week later, Namwase was transferred to a Kampala hospital for special care, reported Morning Star.

Alabama news

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

► **Barry Cosper**, Bessemer regional director for the **Birmingham Metro Baptist Association**, has retired. Cosper and his wife, Cathy, were recognized at the recent BMBA Missionary Appreciation Banquet held Nov. 30. Cosper's 51-year ministry began when he was called to preach at age 14 and to his first pastorate at age 20. A graduate of Samford University, Southern Seminary



Facebook photo

and New Orleans Seminary, Cosper has served numerous churches and was the associational missionary strategist for Bessemer Baptist Association before it merged with Birmingham Baptist Association to form BMBA. Pastor Morris Johnson, BMBA moderator, presented the Cospers with a plaque during the banquet in appreciation of their service.

► **Church on the Bluff, Hoover**, kicked off its 125th anniversary celebration with an ice cream social Oct. 7 followed by a special service Oct. 8. Joyce Peters, a commissioner of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented a plaque to Tony Barber, pastor. Steve Yarbrough, a former minister of music, led the singing and Mark Busby, a former youth pastor and an IMB missionary for 32 years, brought the message and began his sermon by playing the banjo and leading the congregation in singing "When the Saints Go Marching In" and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot." Many former members were present for both events.



Photo courtesy of Joyce Peters

COFFEE ASSOCIATION

► **Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, Enterprise**, celebrated its 150th anniversary Oct. 22. The service began with a duet by Justin Mills,



Photo courtesy of Ellen Dewberry

music minister, and his daughter, Haley. Roger Richards, former interim pastor, was the guest preacher. Historical presentations were made by Ellen Dewberry (left) of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission and Jud Waldrop (not shown), the association's director of missions, to Mount Pleasant pastor Karl Hudson (right).

ESCAMBIA ASSOCIATION

► **Huxford Baptist Church** celebrated its 125th anniversary and homecoming Oct. 8 with



Photo by Lonette Berg

two special services, one at 11 a.m. and an afternoon service following lunch. Special guest preachers were Tom Perdue and Kenny Aman. Special music was provided by Kay Mason, Kenny Aman and the children. Brenda Coker (pictured), church clerk, accepted the plaque from the Alabama Baptist Historical

Commission to have on display at the anniversary celebration.

ETOWAH ASSOCIATION

► **Sibert Baptist Church, Attalla**, celebrated its 75th anniversary Oct. 1. Craig Carlisle (right), the association's director of missions, brought a greeting to the church.

A plaque was presented to the church and Sammy O'Dell (left), pastor, by Wendell Dutton (center), commissioner of the Alabama Baptist



Photo courtesy of Wendell Dutton

Historical Commission. Special music was provided by The Stephens gospel trio from Tuscaloosa and also Bart Gunter, minister of youth. The church history was read by Jannie Smith, church clerk.

MONTGOMERY ASSOCIATION

► **First Baptist Church Montgomery** rededicated and celebrated 100 years of Stakely Sanctuary on Nov. 12. The sanctuary, named for former pastor Charles Stakely, was originally dedicated Nov. 11, 1923, after 18 years of debt-free construction. It was the worship center until completion of the new sanctuary in 2004. It was re-



Submitted photo

cently refurbished after being damaged in an arson attack. Frank Stakely, descendent of Charles Stakely, gave a presentation, as did Basil Manly IV, descendent of Basil Manly, pastor during the 1860s. Neal Hughes, DOM for Montgomery Baptist Association, provided greetings, and Ralph Foster (right) of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission presented a special commendation to pastor Mark Bethea (left).

RUSSELL ASSOCIATION

► The music ministry of **Summerville Baptist Church, Phenix City**, will present "Glory Touching Earth" Dec. 17 at 10:30 a.m. EST. A multigenerational Christmas choir and various ensembles will lead in worship. Steve Pace is minister of music, and Robb Goodman is pastor.

WEST CENTRAL ASSOCIATION

► **Faith Chapel Baptist Church, Marion**, celebrated its 75th anniversary Oct. 15 with congregation singing plus a solo by Belinda Davis, minister of music, and another solo by Meghan Skiebe, a member of Summerfield Baptist Church. Testimonies were shared along with a reading of the church's history. Joyce Peters,



Photo by Joyce Peters

a commissioner of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented a commemorative plaque to the church. Standing with the plaque are (l to r)

Judy Robertson, pastor Lloyd Stockman and Barbara Wallace. Both ladies grew up in the church. Special guest Lee Tate, West Central's associational mission strategist, brought the message.

WEST CULLMAN ASSOCIATION

► **Mount Nebo, Cullman**, celebrated its 100th anniversary Oct. 22. Special music was provided by Emily Whittle, April Cason, Abigail Roy and Chasity McRae; a piano solo by Josh White; The Nebo Mountainair's praise team; and congregational hymns led by Darryl Moses, minister of music.

Four former pastors and Justin Olvey (right), the association's director of missions, were guest speakers. Joyce Peters (left), a commissioner of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented a plaque to the church and pastor Gary Waddell (center).



Photo courtesy of Joyce Peters

— Correction —

In the Dec. 7 edition, Plainview Baptist Church in East Cullman Association was incorrectly reported as in the process of being dissolved. The church currently in discussions related to being dissolved is Plainview Baptist Church in Coosa River Association. We apologize for the mix up.

God's power and authority

Matt Mason points Pastors Conference attendees to resolute truths of Psalm 2

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Matt Mason said he doesn't remember a lot of the questions he was asked when he was interviewing to be the pastor of The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham. But he does remember the hardest.

"(A church member asked,) 'What's your biggest fear about stepping into the role of senior pastor here at Brook Hills?' And I said, 'I'm afraid I'll lose my joy,'" he recalled.

Up until that point, Mason had served as a worship pastor — he'd been serving in that capacity at Brook Hills for the three years prior. He said even through the difficult times, God had kept his joy buoyant. But he knew the weight of the senior pastor role could be different.

"I don't want to lose my joy, because the Book of Hebrews says a joyless pastor is no benefit to the church," he said. "And I've seen a lot of joyless pastors."

'Resituate our refuge'

As Mason told that story at the Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference on Nov. 13, he said he imagined if all the pastors in the room talked long enough and got vulnerable enough, he was sure they would learn some of the things that made each other's hearts heavy.

He pointed toward Psalm 2 as holding truths that could hold them all up in the storm and help them keep their joy. The vision of Jesus on the throne changes everything for a pastor, he said.

"Ministry offers us daily opportunities to choose the wrong refuge," Mason said. "If we want to stay in it, brothers, we need to continually



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist
Matt Mason, pastor of The Church at Brook Hills, preaches on the sustaining power of God during the third session of the 2023 Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference at Taylor Road Baptist Church on Nov. 13.

resituate our refuge. That's what Psalm 2 does."

He offered four ways to internalize the passage in their hearts and lives.

1. See the fall.

The first three verses remind pastors that it's a hostile world, Mason said. "You work at the most dangerous intersection on the planet — where the truth of what God has revealed collides with what fallen man worships. Psalm 2 says to you, brothers, 'Do you feel the resistance? Then you're in the right place.'"

That's where Kingdom work happens — where God begins working redemption, Mason said. "Psalm 2 says you're not crazy if it's hard. You're right where you belong. This is where the assignment put you."

This passage has been bringing

hope in the context of ministry for centuries, he noted. In Acts 4, the New Testament church connected the resistance that they faced in the world with the words of Psalm 2.

"They saw the opposition to

Christ's rule as the fulfillment of this ancient psalm," Mason said.

"They connected endurance in gospel ministry amid pushback to this song about God's rule over all nations written thousands of years earlier."

As the apostles went from town to town, they preached that Jesus rules. Jesus told them that ministry was going to be hard because the world also hated Him, Mason said.

But the psalm doesn't stop there.

2. See the throne.

"After the war room strategiz-

ing, we're immediately made aware of the One enthroned in heaven," Mason said. "Right after we hear that the kings of the earth take their stand, we're told that the kings of the earth cannot succeed."

'Up and out'

When pastors get their eyes up and out where they belong, it motivates the day-to-day grind of ministry, he said.

"You can't stop this thing — Jesus is behind it," Mason said. "He's at the Father's right hand."

The truth of God's power and authority to direct history into His good purposes is the stuff of endurance, he said. "It's the stuff of us being sustained in ministry."

3. Hear the plan.

Psalm 2 shares God's plans for His Son — that the nations will be His.

"The doctrine of Christ's ascension is fuel for perseverance," Mason said. "Psalm 2 says He who sits in the heavens laughs, and the New Testament comes along and says He who sits in the heavens has a name — Jesus Christ."

This is the place where pastors should resituate their refuge, he said.

4. Bow the knee.

In verse 3, readers listened to earth's kings, but in verse 10, they're preaching to them, Mason said. "We say, 'Hey, we see what you're doing,' but instead of plotting an overthrow that's going to fail, do this — be wise, serve with awe, rejoice with trembling and pay homage to the Son."

Heaven's news in this psalm changes the way pastors see earth's kings, Mason said. "We see the nations rage ... but we also see this sovereign God who's exalted to the throne and no one can stop Him, and so we rejoice."

To view a gallery of photos from Matt Mason's session at the 2023 Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference, visit tabonline.org/Matt-Mason.

Partnerships proving vital to future work

Prison ministry. Sports ministry. Developing national missionaries. The dreams discussed around the table were big.

International Mission Board missionaries Matt and Gretchen Clay saw the passion rising as the group of pastors and lay ministers figured out ways to introduce their North African neighbors to the gospel. But the Clays didn't have the resources to invest at the deep level needed by their brothers and sisters in Christ.

They knew who could, though. The missionaries called their partnering churches in Florida — Fruit Cove Baptist Church and Aspire Church — and asked for help in mentoring and empowering these believers to multiply and plant new churches.

Multiplying

"I think the direction we are going to see global missions moving is to partner more with the global church to mobilize workers and increase momentum," Gretchen explained about the need for help in this ripening harvest field of North Africa. "Using U.S. fellowships along with national partners is a way to multiply the work force."

Just thinking about how much the national churches have matured and grown through the years gets Gary Webber, Aspire Church senior pastor, excited. He remembers when no one in this area was even interested in Jesus, let alone sharing the gospel. To see churches request training and be equipped to multiply and reach the lost is something they've prayed to happen for years.

Pray for these partners as they seek to take the gospel to areas previously untouched by the good news of Jesus Christ. (IMB)

GOD'S MISSION

Pacific leader speaks for women's physical, spiritual needs

EDITOR'S NOTE — Baptist World Alliance is a global community of 51 million Baptists from 176,000 churches. Under that umbrella, BWA Women provides support for missions and ministries in seven continental unions representing more than 150 countries. This is the seventh in a series of eight stories about leaders in each region, the challenges they face and the way they see God working through women across the globe.

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

The Pacific region can be tumultuous, from its weather to civil unrest, but the challenges provide ample opportunities for ministry, according to Elissa Macpherson, president of Baptist Women of the Pacific, part of Baptist World Alliance Women.

"We have had a tsunami hit Tonga, a devastating cyclone in Vanuatu and social unrest and ensuing violence in Papua New Guinea during their elections," said Macpherson, who has led the group since 2019. "These events directly affect the women I serve."

BWA Women's Pacific region consists of Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Papua, Tonga and Vanuatu.

Macpherson is from Australia and loves the variety of tasks that this role involves. She spends her days keeping in touch with the four other BWP committee members, who are from Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Australia and New Zealand, as well as with BWA leaders.

She learns the needs of the women in her region by attending conferences and meetings.

"It forges powerful relationships in the Lord," she said.

Though the internet isn't reliable and communication is a challenge,



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

"It's all about love, the beginning and the end. My life goal is to breathe in His love and breathe out His love through my actions," says Elissa Macpherson, president of Baptist Women of the Pacific, part of Baptist World Alliance Women.

each day Macpherson checks the news for events relevant to the ministry.

Part of Macpherson's ministry is to use the political arena and relationships with presidents and other

leaders to lobby for the women living there. She requests policy change which improves the lives of those living in unjust circumstances, tackles issues relevant to the Pacific and increases foreign aid to countries in need.

Reliable internet isn't the only challenge in the Pacific. It also has some of the highest rates of domestic violence in the world. Macpherson became part of a team of women who created standagainstDV.net and the Australian-based saferspace toolkit.com.au to assist in equipping churches and communities.

High mortality rates

Another big need has been addressing the high infant and maternal mortality rates in Papua New Guinea.

"We have supported the Baptist Union of Papua New Guinea with their Village Health Volunteer Program, which equips village women to ensure better birth outcomes," Macpherson said.

Life-changing tasks

Working on such life-changing tasks can be difficult. Macpherson recognizes how important it is to spend time on her own physical and spiritual health.

"It's a matter of balance," she said. "I am also doing postgraduate studies in theology, so that's both a challenge and an asset in my work. I also have a personal speaking and writing ministry. I love movies, reading, eating out and being with friends."

Isaiah 43:4 and Song of Solomon 1:2 help Macpherson tackle these responsibilities.

"It's all about love, the beginning and the end. My life goal is to breathe in His love and breathe out His love through my actions," she said.

Most of all, she loves being inspired by the "extraordinary women in disguise as ordinary women."

To find out more about BWP, go to bwawomen.org and find this region in "Continental Unions" under the "About Us" tab.

'KEEP WORKING'

AAAF banquet reminds African American pastors 'we can do more together'

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

D'Linell Finley says not to listen to anybody who tells you to sit down. "We're working to finish the unfinished; there's still a lot to be done," he said as he spoke at the Alabama African American Fellowship banquet Nov. 13 at First Baptist Church Montgomery. "Jesus will sit you down when He's ready, and until He calls you, just keep on working."

Finley, pastor of Southlawn Baptist Church in Montgomery, shared a message from Philippians 1:6 at the banquet, challenging pastors to cling to the hope and strength of Christ as they labor to finish the unfinished task.

'Keep working'

"It's time for God's people to start working, to keep working, to realize that those around you are counting on you, that they are looking to you to be an example," Fin-

ley said. "Let's labor to finish the unfinished because our community is a starving community, not only for food but for the Word of God."

They need somebody to love them, meet their physical needs and tell them there is hope, he said.

"God is not through with me yet, and He's not through with you yet," Finley said. "So you need to start working. Start laboring. Look at

what you can do to make a difference."

Terrence Jones, one of AAAF's co-coordinators and pastor of Strong Tower at Washington Park in Montgomery, said the "reason why we have this little fellowship and the reason why we are trying to encour-

age African American pastors to spend time with one another [and] don't get so bogged down in your own locations, is because we can do more together than we can on our own."

The banquet was AAAF's second annual gathering.

During the meeting, Devins Jack-



Photo by Grace Thornton/The Alabama Baptist

D'Linell Finley, pastor of Southlawn Baptist Church in Montgomery and adjunct professor at Alabama State University, shares with those at the National African American Fellowship Dinner at FBC Montgomery Nov. 13.

son, pastor of The Body of Christ Church in Huntsville, also shared a testimony from a recent missions trip to Central Asia.

During the trip, a group of African American pastors went with Scotty Goldman, director of the office of global missions at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Mis-

sions, to visit an African American missionary with the International Mission Board.

"This experience helped heighten my senses to the need among missionaries and being willing to support them for the work that they do," Jackson shared via video during the banquet.

To view a gallery of photos from the Alabama African American Fellowship banquet, visit tabonline.org/2023-AAAF-Banquet.

Allen urges church leaders, members to be aware, involved

By Michael J. Brooks
The Alabama Baptist

Local officials need and want to hear from pastors whether controversial issues are flaring or not.

That was the message Alabama Secretary of State Wes Allen shared with those gathered at a Nov. 14 lunch meeting sponsored by Alabama Citizens Action Program.

"Get to know them so you can pick up the phone and talk to them," Allen said. "The city council

and the county commission in your area make important decisions. And many of them are on trajectory to higher office, so getting to know them helps you to speak truth when necessary and perhaps have greater influence later."

Serving, teaching

Allen, elected to the state office last year, previously served as Pike County probate judge and as a member of the Alabama legislature.

He is a member and a men's Bible study teacher at

First Baptist Church Troy. He was introduced by his pastor, Ross Lankford.

Pastors especially should not "downplay" their influence, Allen said, suggesting church leaders can encourage those in their congregations "to register to vote and vote."

"We speak into our culture through our vote, and Christians must engage in this civic responsibility. The phrase, 'vote your values,' may be trite, but it is, nonetheless, true," he said.

Allen said Christians also

are called to pray for elected officials at all levels.

Pray for leaders

"Paul is clear in 1 Timothy 2 that Christians pray for 'all those in authority.' We must be faithful to pray for local, state and national leaders," he said. "We pray for their wisdom and protection as they represent the people."

Running for office is also an option, he said, because "we need people of faith to commit to campaigns for office and ensure our voice is heard."

Greg Davis, president and CEO of ALCAP, reiterated the importance of advocating for moral issues like gambling and alcohol sales as he updated attendees on current issues ALCAP is following.

That's why the mission of ALCAP remains vital, he said.

"There are a number of Christian lobbyists in Montgomery, but ALCAP represents churches."

For more information about ALCAP, go to alcap.com.

Is it the 'most wonderful time' of year?

By Art Werry
Baptist State Convention of Michigan

If we take our role as Christ's ambassadors seriously, we should make sure we aren't so caught up in our own celebration of the holidays that we miss ministering Jesus' love to those who are seriously hurting around us.

Here are a few simple suggestions that can help.

First, open your eyes. Those who are hurting or lonely are there, often right in front of us, but we can be too busy doing Christmas that we do not even see them. Do not assume that those with a "Bah! Humbug!" demeanor prefer to be that way.

Open your heart

Second, open your heart. Yes, our Christmas list is usually cram packed with more than enough chores and responsibilities for us to do. But busyness is no excuse for us to neglect our responsibility to love our neighbor as ourselves. Make room in your heart to love someone who may have no one else to share the joy of the season.

Third, open your circle. Hurting people will not come to us and ask if they can crash our Christmas party. Often, they will need more than one invitation. Don't be afraid to be persistent. No one wants to feel like they are an imposition, so do your best to convey a "the more the merrier" attitude.

Get out of the comfort of your own Christmas bubble and go share the joy of the season with someone who may be feeling truly miserable today.

Let's not settle for mere Christmas wishes when so much more is needed. God came near when Immanuel entered our desperate situation. We can do no less for the hurting people around us today.

Christmas message

Tips for communication as your church prepares services

By Mark MacDonald
BeKnownforSomething.com

There are many Christmas communication tips we can learn from the nativity passages in Scripture. Let's look at some verses in Luke and Galatians to identify three foundational communication aspects that helped the Christmas story break through with the expectation of a Savior born to bring salvation to a very dark world.

Our churches need divine communication assistance to interrupt this noisy holiday season and have the world hear the real meaning.

As you prepare your services, learn from these Christmas communication tips, so you can bring a strong gospel message to your community that desperately needs the Light, now and throughout the year.

1. Clarity of message. In the Nativity story, the message of hope and salvation is delivered with utmost simplicity and clarity. For example: "But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you; He is the Messiah, the Lord'" (Luke 2:10–11).

Apply this principle to your church communication efforts. Whether it's through your sermons, website, social media or emails, ensure your messages are clear and understandable. Avoid unnecessary jargon and communicate in a way that resonates with your audience.

Be straightforward

Think about what your congregation needs to hear and present it in a straightforward manner. And be careful you don't make your mes-



Unsplash.com

sage too long. Editing helps ensure only the essentials are included.

2. Use multiple channels. The nativity story unfolds across various locations, from the humble stable to the fields of the shepherds, and even to the palaces of wise men. This teaches the importance of utilizing multiple channels for communication. For example: "When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.' So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger" (Luke 2:15–16).

Your church's message shouldn't be confined to just one platform. Embrace a multichannel approach as one of the Christmas communication tips, leveraging your stage, website, social media channels and newsletters to reach different segments of your audience. This ensures your message is heard and

understood by a broader spectrum of your audience where they are and when they need your message.

3. Timing is everything. The birth of Christ occurred at a pivotal moment in history, fulfilling prophecies and bringing hope.

For example: "But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship" (Gal. 4:4–5).

Be in tune

Similarly, consider the timing and relevance of your message. Align your content with the current needs and concerns of your congregation and community.

Whether it's addressing contemporary issues or providing timely spiritual guidance, being in tune with current events and timing enhances the impact of your communication. Speak to their felt needs at the right time, and it should ensure their attention.

UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Bivocational ministers' retreat set for Feb. 9-10

Maybe you're a bivocational minister who faces the Monday morning blues. Maybe you struggle to find a rhythm of rest.

Or maybe you could use some tools for preparing a sermon in the midst of your busy schedule.

At the Bivocational Minister/Spouse Retreat, you can hear talks on these topics and more. The retreat, set for Feb. 9-10 at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega, will offer a time of spiritual inspiration, fellowship, encouragement and instruction.

"I want each pastor to take home practical ideas he can use to carry out his local ministry assignment," said Ken Allen, director of the office of LeaderCare at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

Allen will lead sessions along with Rob Jackson, director of the SBOM office of church health, and

To register, visit leadercareal.org/bivoretreat or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



Sammy Gilbreath, retired director of the SBOM office of evangelism.

Page Hughes, a well-known speaker and teacher, will also speak to pastors' wives.

The retreat starts Feb. 9 at 4 p.m. and ends Feb. 10 at 12 p.m. The cost is \$40 per couple or \$30 for single occupancy.

To register, visit leadercareal.org/bivoretreat.

DNA Annual Gathering

If you're a church staff member who leads your church's Sunday School, discipleship or education ministries, please join us at the Discipleship Network of Alabama's Annual Gathering.

The gathering will be Jan. 18-19 at Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Birmingham from 1 p.m. on Thursday to 12:30 p.m. Friday.

Ken Braddy, director of Sunday School and network partnerships for Lifeway, will lead on the topic of Small Groups and Sunday School: Building Your Ministry.

"I believe in God's ability to

transform people through His Word," Braddy said. "I believe that discipleship happens best in community. Sunday School and small groups are the perfect places for believers to grow together."



BRADDY

The gathering's schedule includes presentations, question-and-answer sessions and opportunities for networking.

The cost is \$79 through Dec. 15, \$89 through Jan. 13 and \$99 the week of the event.

The recommended hotel is Embassy Suites in Hoover on Highway 150.

To register, visit disciplealabama.org/2024.

Lass WORDS

BY KEN LASS
The Alabama Baptist



DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

Reading Between the Lines

I am in the middle of a mission to read through the Bible. Doing so every couple of years is good for the soul.

If you've done this, you have no doubt realized that some parts of the Bible are easier to engage with than others. I enjoy relearning the unfolding of Christian history in accounts such as Genesis, Exodus, Judges and the Samuel and Kings books.

But then I reached 1 Chronicles. I have to confess: I was starting to glaze over.

The first 12 chapters are a tedious litany of genealogy and army counts from Adam to David. There are hundreds of odd-sounding names rolling on through 19 pages of small print.

Why is it important?

I was fighting the temptation to skip over it. I couldn't help wondering why it is important for me to know that Heber fathered Japhlet, Shomer and Hotham, and Japhlet fathered Pasach, Bimhal and Ashvath and so on. Besides, didn't we cover a lot of this in 1 and 2 Samuel and Kings?

So I sought out a little background information. The research reminded me that the Chronicles were written after the exile of the Jews. As new generations were allowed to return to their homeland after many decades away, the Chronicles served to reeducate the people as to their heritage and the identity and providence of the one true

God. It also laid out the lineage that would lead to the promised birth of the Savior.

For the people, it restored their purpose and hope.

Laying the groundwork

Ah, the little light bulb in my small brain clicked on. Chronicles can and should still do this for us. In fact, it should be even more meaningful to us.

We have the advantage of knowing the Savior has indeed come. Here is the generational documentation that laid the groundwork for it. The Israelites of the fifth century B.C. only had the promise. We have the reality. We can experience forgiveness of sins. We have purpose in life. There is a Higher Power who loves us despite our faults.

So it turns out there is a reason we should know that Elpaal fathered Eber, Misham, Shemed, Beriah and Shema, because eventually we get to Jesus.

In a way, those first chapters of Chronicles are kind of an index of the Bible story. It's just in the middle of the book instead of at the end.

I guess the Great Author knows exactly what He's doing.

MEET THE AUTHOR

Ken Lass is a retired Birmingham television news and sports anchor, and an award-winning columnist for numerous publications and websites.

Grateful for the opportunity

Lonette Berg to retire after leading the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission for 17 years

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Lonette Berg said she remembers hearing the words come out of her mouth before she could stop them.

“One of my best friends in the world was Dr. Frances Hamilton,” Berg said. “I was her student assistant in college; she was a professor in the history department, and I was a history major.”

During that time at Samford University, Hamilton “became like my second mama,” Berg said.

And years later — as Hamilton was serving as director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission and Berg was in a successful career as an attorney — the two had lunch.

Hamilton was worried her assistant was moving, and Berg heard herself say if that happened, she would come work for Hamilton again.

Just a few weeks later — in August 2003 — Hamilton cashed in on that offer. Berg served as her special assistant until Hamilton retired at the end of 2006, and then Berg took her place as executive director.

Now 17 years later, she’s retiring

and grateful for the opportunity.

Over the years, Berg spent a lot of time driving to churches all over Alabama collecting their records to be microfilmed and preserved in Samford’s Special Collection. She also led workshops on how to archive materials, collect oral histories and celebrate church anniversaries.

On the road

Then she attended those anniversaries to present churches with commemorative plaques and certificates in honor of those milestones.

Berg did those things so many times that she put more than 460,000 miles on her last Honda, and she already has more than 250,000 on her current one.

And along the way, she told stories — lots and lots of stories.

Stories of God’s faithfulness matter, and the next generation needs them, she said. “I always try to call people to remember that church history is God’s story, it’s His story.”

Berg is passionate about preserving that and passing it along.

“When we preserve and share the history of a church, association, state convention or entity, we’re continu-

Lonette Berg (left) presents a plaque to Brian Frost, pastor of Fairview Heights Northside Baptist Church in Anniston in celebration of its 75th anniversary Sept. 18, 2022. Berg has driven all over Alabama to present churches with commemorative plaques and certificates in honor of major church anniversaries.



Photo courtesy of Lonette Berg



Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist

Wendy Westerhouse joins Lonette Berg (right) for the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission report during the 2023 Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting.

ing that important work of recording for the future about God and his work in our world,” she said.

Debbie Campbell, who chairs the ABHC board, said Berg is “an example of a true servant leader in everything she does, whether it is picking up and preserving boxes of historical records from a church or sharing inspiring and often funny stories about church life.”

Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said Berg’s dedication to the cause of “helping Alabama Baptists stay in touch with our past so that we might be better prepared for the future is priceless.”

“Lonette is a vivacious and energetic person who draws people to her as she works with them in local churches. She is so meticulous in the way she does her work, and it is demonstrated by how her efforts make such a difference in the lives of people,” he said.

When Berg leaves at the end of

the year, she will leave ABHC in the hands of Wendy Westerhouse, executive director-elect, who has been serving alongside her since July.

Plans for the next season

In retirement, Berg is looking forward to moving back to east Tennessee with her husband, Steve, to spend more time with their daughter, Elizabeth, son-in-law, Jonathan, and three granddaughters.

But she said she will miss her Alabama Baptist friends.

“Alabama Baptists have been so good to me. I’ll miss telling stories, and I’ll miss listening to them,” Berg said. “To me it’s a gift when someone is willing to share that part of their life with you, and it gives me the opportunity to tell them thank you for what they’ve done and how they’ve been faithful.”

EDITOR’S NOTE — To read this article in its entirety, visit tabonline.org/Lonette-Berg.

UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Youth ministry leaders invited to Conclave '24

Are you involved in leading youth ministry in a staff or volunteer capacity?

We would love to see you at Youth Ministry Conclave, an annual leadership event in cooperation with eight state conventions.

Each year, Conclave serves as a training event for youth pastors, leaders and volunteers. Corporate worship, breakout sessions and networking are designed to equip and rejuvenate your youth ministry team.

The event will be held Jan. 18–20 at Chattanooga Convention Center in

To register, visit ymconclave.org or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



Chattanooga, Tennessee.

The speakers are:

► Ben Trueblood, director of student ministry for Lifeway with 20 years of

student ministry experience.

► Erik Reed, founding and lead pastor of The Journey Church in Lebanon, Tennessee.

► Grant Skelton, author and next gen director for Q Ideas.

► Tate Cockrell, associate professor of counseling at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Join us at Conclave 2024 as you discover limitless call, limitless mercy and limitless possibilities as you lean into the power of our limitless God.

To register, visit ymconclave.org.

Bible skills for kids, youth

Everyone can benefit from learning more Bible skills, especially at a young age.

The “Can You Hear Me?” Bible Skills and Drills event will offer a chance for kids and youth to learn better Bible-handling skills, whether they’re participating in Bible drill or not.

The event — set for Jan.

27, 9 a.m.–2 p.m., at Shades Crest Baptist Church in Birmingham — will provide them with the opportunity to learn about God’s Word and how to use it in their lives.

The theme “Can You Hear Me?” comes from Proverbs 8:33. Children in grades 3–6 and youth through high school are invited to attend along with their leaders.

Two tracks will be provided at the event:

► One for those interested in preparing to participate in Bible Drill.

► One for those interested in learning God’s Word and developing great Bible skills.

The cost is \$20 per person, which includes lunch.

To register, visit kidzlinkal.org/events.

Student Missions Weekend shows youth future missions possibilities

Student Missions Weekend is a great time for guys and girls in grades 7–12 and their leaders to bond while serving and learning about missions together. The weekend — set for Jan. 12–13 at WorldSong

Missions Place in Cook Springs — includes Bible study, worship and fun camp activities. Students will learn what missions opportunities are available for them in their next phase of life.

The weekend starts Friday

at 8 p.m. and concludes Saturday at 3 p.m.

The cost for early bird registration (before Dec. 15) is \$55 per person. The standard cost (before Jan. 8) is \$65.

To register, visit alabamawmu.org/smw.

SCWC annual contest open for submissions

The 2023 SCWC Notable Book Awards competition, sponsored by the Southern Christian Writers Conference, is now open for submissions.

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

Deadline is Dec. 20

Three finalists in each category will be announced on Jan. 13, with winners announced in a

formal ceremony on Feb. 9, 2024. The deadline to enter a book in the competition is Dec. 20.

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

“We wanted to do something to recognize quality books that have been written and published,” she said. “There are a lot of wonderful books being written today, and we want to draw attention to them.”

Submission guidelines and categories are available at tabonline.org/book-awards-23. (SCWC)

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

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR
Silver Run Baptist Church in Seale, Alabama, located in rural Russell County, is seeking a bivocational pastor that the Lord would have to serve here. Resumes may be sent to: P.O. Box 8, Seale, AL 36875, ATTN: Kenny Harris.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR
New Life Baptist Church located in Bay Minette, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational pastor who unashamedly preaches the Word of God. Please email resume/profile to: newlifebaptistbmal@gmail.com or mail to: Pastor Search Committee, 15011 Glasgow Lane, Bay Minette, AL 36507.

WORSHIP LEADER/ MINISTER OF EDUCATION
First Baptist Red Bay, Alabama, seeking full-time worship leader/minister of education. Apply by resume to: 602 4th St. SE, Red Bay, AL 35582.

TRAVEL/VACATION

LOG CABIN RENTAL
Lake Guntersville area, beautiful view and fully furnished. Discounts to ministers. Log on to www.paradisevista.net to see pictures. Call for reservations at 205-540-3600.

BUSINESS

FOR SALE NEW & USED STAIR LIFTS

Lift chairs, power wheelchairs, car lifts, scooters and walk-in tubs. We service Alabama. 1-800-682-0658

SIGNS

CHURCH SIGN

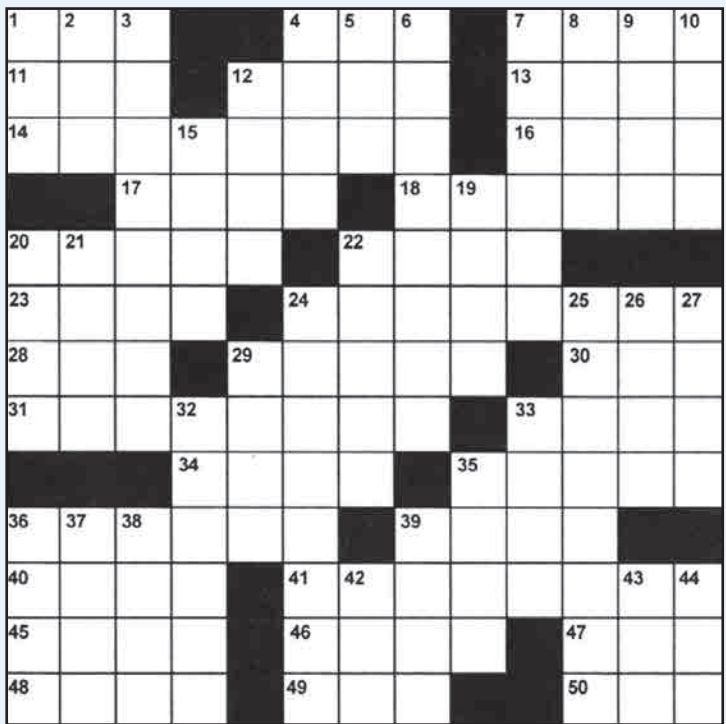
Signs are your first impression. What kind of impression is your church sign making? Call us to replace/update yours with either digital or traditional. Statewide since 1994. 1-800-729-6844 or 205-664-0955. www.reliablesigns.com

CHRISTIAN crossword

WORD search

ACROSS

- 1. Enemy.
- 4. ___ shalt thou serve. (Deut. 10:20)
- 7. Beno, and Shoham, and Zaccur, and _____. (1 Chron. 24:27)
- 11. All the rivers ___ into the sea. (Eccles. 1:7)
- 12. Provoked the ___ One of Israel unto anger. (Isa. 1:4)
- 13. The city had no ___ of the sun. (Rev. 21:23)
- 14. One who decrees.
- 16. Urn.
- 17. The Pharisees began to ___ him vehemently. (Luke 11:53)
- 18. Happenings.
- 20. Thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but _____. (Gen. 17:15)
- 22. Every one beareth _____. (Song of Sol. 6:6)
- 23. Anab, and Eshtemoh, and _____. (Josh. 15:50)
- 24. The slothful man ___ not that which he took in hunting. (Prov. 12:27)
- 28. Unit of weight.
- 29. A distinct type.
- 30. Born.
- 31. Etched.
- 33. The bright and morning _____. (Rev. 22:16)
- 34. To whom be glory for _____. (Rom. 11:36)
- 35. Thou art _____. (Ps. 139:8)
- 36. Thou shalt not make unto thee any ___ image. (Ex. 20:4)
- 39. The fathers have eaten a ___ grape. (Jer. 31:29)
- 40. The desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the _____. (Isa. 35:1)
- 41. The biology of heredity.
- 45. A thought.
- 46. Ages.
- 47. Until the day that ___ entered into the ark.



By Evelyn M. Boyington Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing

- 22. A powder used in copying processes.
- 24. Hath greatly offended, and ___ himself upon them. (Ezek. 25:12)
- 25. And ___ into the sepulchre, they saw a young man. (Mark 16:15)
- 26. ___ their claws in pieces. (Zech. 11:16)
- 27. Behold, ___ I am. (1 Sam. 12:3)
- 29. Wherefore God also ___ them up to uncleanness. (Rom. 1:24)
- 32. He to whom the Son will ___ him. (Luke 10:22)
- 33. The Lord ___ him in. (Gen. 7:16)
- 35. Thou sawest the feet and _____. (Dan. 2:41)
- 36. Forbidding.
- 37. Jehu ___ in a chariot. (2 Kings 9:16)
- 38. Am I a ___ ___, or a whale? (Job 7:12; 2 words)
- 39. Catch.
- 42. Airport code to Erie, Pennsylvania.
- 43. Pigeon sound.
- 44. ___ thine house in order. (Isa. 38:1)

DOWN

- 1. We have walked to and ___ through the earth. (Zech. 1:11)
- 2. ___ Father which art in heaven. (Matt. 6:9)
- 3. Ye have in heaven a better and an ___ substance. (Heb. 10:34)
- 4. Sharpening stone.
- 5. French island.
- 6. I come quickly; and ___ is with me. (Rev. 22:12; 2 words)
- 7. ___ to themselves instruments of music. (Amos 6:5)
- 8. Lima or snap.
- 9. They ___ not day and night. (Rev. 4:8)
- 10. March date.
- 12. For the Lord most ___ is terrible. (Ps. 47:2)
- 15. Esrom begat _____. (Matt. 1:3)
- 19. Clamp.
- 20. Satisfy.
- 21. And ___ they tell him of her. (Mark 1:30)

- ANOINTED
- BETHLEHEM
- BRANCH
- COMING
- COVENANT
- DAVID
- EARTH
- EGYPT
- ELIJAH
- EVERLASTING
- FORESHADOW
- IMMANUEL
- JUDGMENT
- KING OF KINGS
- LAMB
- LIFE
- LION OF JUDAH
- MESSENGER
- MESSIAH
- PROPHECY
- PROSPER
- REDEEMER
- REIGN
- REJECTED
- RIGHTEOUSNESS
- ROOT
- SAVIOR
- SERVANT
- SUFFERING
- TRUTH

H A J I L E C O V E N A N T G
K K I N G O F K I N G S T P K
R T R U T H L P L R Y B R M K
L O D D C R M I E J R K E G K
I M I A L M W M F A L S P N T
O Z P V G Z E R N E S N J I L
N B J I A E Y C M E L J T R W
O Q R D D S H B N E U Z Y E O
F R L E N E V G U D H M C F D
J I R W G N E N G E B B E F A
U G C Y N R A M T A H L H U H
D H P O G M E R Q R B T P S S
A T G W M N L J Y T L F O D E
H E P I T I I T E H M M R E R
H O T O O R N T T C E M P T O
J U B C N A P G S H T X D N F
J S F M V N N R E A M E B I N
Q N R R A M M L O N L F D O L
L E E M N L H P R S M R T N N
L S B H N T M T P R P K E A C
B S Y R E I G N J G V E N V J
B G L B H A I S S E M W R J E

“Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord, “that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.”

Reginald Calvert



Charles Carter



Jamie Dew



Rick Lance



Matt Queen



Herb Reavis



FREE ADMISSION 2024 State Evangelism Conference



January 28-29

**Sunday-5:30 pm, Monday-8:30 am
First Baptist Church, Pelham**

An annual statewide event for encouraging and equipping believers to **make a difference** through evangelism. *No admission fee. No registration required. Alabama WMU will have a gift for all ministers' wives.*

evangelizeAL.org/sec

MATT QUEEN will be teaching a session on "Getting to the Gospel" (in our conversations).

FREE MONDAY LUNCHEON with a keynote message by Herb Reavis.



Alabama Baptist
STATE BOARD OF MISSIONS

This conference is made possible by gifts of Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program.

You Gotta' Hear This!



Finding humor in the everyday moments

When Pigs Fly

By Barbara Eubanks
The Alabama Baptist

The phone rang early on a Saturday morning — the only day we had the luxury of sleeping late because of our work schedules and Christmastime church activities.

I heard a gruff voice ask a series of questions before I could even answer the first. “What are y’all doing today? Are you going somewhere? Are you going to be at home for a while?”

Shocked by her rudeness and abrupt manner and still irritated by being awakened so early, I answered the last question. “Yes, we will be home for a while.”

Low expectations

“Okay, then. I’ll be there in a few minutes.” I thought she was coming to air her complaints about the church or about us. Pastors and wives are conditioned to expect the negative when a church member wants to come by.

She soon arrived and backed her car up to the garage door. Steve and I went out to greet her.

She hopped out of the car and asked, “Them boys of yours around to help me unload this meat?” To our surprise, she had brought us a whole hog she had raised on her farm and slaughtered. “I knew it took a lot to feed them teenage boys of yours, and I wanted to do something for my pastor’s family.”

As an adult, I understand more fully the verse, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:

36) than I did as a child. Receiving gifts from unexpected people tends to make me feel uncomfortable and unworthy.

Good advice

My dad gave me some good advice when my husband, Steve, entered the ministry: “Barbara, you need to learn to accept gifts gracefully. Sometimes people feel they have little to contribute to God’s work, and their gift to you is the only way they know.”

If I had thought for a minute that this crusty woman was coming to gift us, my sarcasm would have said, “Yes, when pigs fly.”

But this experience reminded me of two things: Be careful about judging by outward appearance, and all good things come from the Lord, even if delivered by the unexpected.

“... Don’t judge by a man’s face or height, for this is not the one. I don’t make decisions the way you do! Men judge by outward appearance, but I look at a man’s thoughts and intentions” (1 Sam. 16:7).

MEET THE AUTHOR

Barbara Eubanks of Albertville is an author, conference speaker, Christian humorist and retired English teacher. She is the widow of Baptist pastor Steve Eubanks.



New residence halls, more parking planned for Samford

At its December meeting, the Samford University board of trustees unanimously approved the first phase of Samford Horizons, a long-term campus master plan that is based on the university’s strategic plan, Fidelitas.

The new projects include a new residence hall for first year students, two new residence halls for upper division students and approximately 600 new parking spaces.

The campus master plan includes potential improvements that respond to the university’s sustained growth in enrollment and anticipate an eventual population of approximately 7,500 total students including 5,000 traditional undergraduates, with approximately 75% residing on campus.

The current Horizons plan is a comprehensive update of the university’s 2017 campus master plan and a direct response to the goals outlined in the strategic plan.

Construction on the projects in this first phase will begin immediately and is scheduled to be completed by the fall 2025 semester.

The university’s soon-to-be largest residence hall will feature 513 beds in single and double suite-style configurations and will be located north of the university center and south of Lena Vail Davis residence hall.

Combined with Mamie Mell Smith and Vail residence halls, the three-building complex will form

Samford’s freshman commons and house all first-year students.

Also included are two new upper division residence halls, totaling 140 beds, to be located just east of the Tri Delta house in the west campus residence halls area.

The new parking spaces will be added onto an existing parking deck.

The new facilities, which will total an estimated \$188 million in costs, are announced on the heels of other campus projects either recently completed or currently under construction. This past summer, the university’s cafeteria received major renovations, and the university’s new recreation, wellness and athletic complex is expected to open in the fall next year.

Additionally, major campus renovations in the last five years related to academic or learning facilities have totaled \$30 million.

Land suit resolved

In other news, a 12-year legal battle over ownership of a former fraternity house and the land it sits on ended in Samford’s favor Dec. 4.

The Alabama Supreme Court declined to hear the appeal alum James L. Hart filed after Jefferson County Circuit Judge Jim Hughey III dismissed the case in September 2022.

Hart claims Samford seized property it did not own. To read the full story, visit tabonline.org. (Compiled from news reports)



Photo courtesy of Samford University

New residence halls and additional parking spaces are part of a capital campaign approved this month by trustees of Samford University. The new facilities are needed to accommodate anticipated growth over the next few years.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For December 17

Explore the Bible

By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D.

Executive Director of the Center for Christian Calling, University of Mobile



THE FIRST SIN Genesis 3:1–7, 21–24

Theologians debate Adam's federal headship versus natural headship. Populists argue that the first sin was not forbidden fruit, but some salacious "forbidden fruit" (of a sensual nature). The plain message of the narrative though is that the first couple disobeyed God through her being deceived and his disregard for God's warning.

Tempted (1–5)

Sometimes meanings of words are lost in translation. In biblical Hebrew, there are several personal pronouns translated to the one English word "you": masculine singular, feminine singular, masculine plural and feminine plural. When we read "you" in our Christian Standard Bible translation, which original word is it representing?

The Elizabethan (or Jacobite) English of the King James Version records the temptations from the serpent with the word "ye." That's "y'all" in Alabama.

Most English translations provide a footnote indicating the "you" in the temptation is plural in the original. While the serpent approached Eve, the temptations were directed to both Adam and Eve.

The serpent directed their attention to the fruit forbidden by God. Systematically, the tempter questioned God's message, then His meaning and ultimately His motive. He knew that humanity was created in God's image, so his claim that they would be like God was a lie — they were already more like God than he was!

His half-truth was that they would know (become intimately acquainted with) evil.

Fallen (6–7)

If the wording in Genesis 3:6 sounds familiar to Christians, it should. The temptations faced in the Garden are echoed throughout Scripture. David faced them in 2 Samuel

11, and Jesus faced them in the wilderness. First John describes love for the world as including the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and pride (2:16). Eve was deceived with these in Genesis 3:6, David surrendered to them in his relationship with Bathsheba and Jesus withstood these temptations in Matthew 4 (and parallel passages).

Adam willingly ate of the forbidden fruit. His act was outright disobedience to the expressed will of God, and it invited judgment. Adam's sin broke the world. It fractured

his fellowship with God, his understanding of himself, his relationship with Eve (and later, with his children) and his relationship with the world he was supposed to steward.

God's judgment on sin may come immediately, or it may result in intermediate consequences, but ultimately

it leads to death. "When sin is fully grown, it gives birth to death" (James 1:15).

Grace Found (21–24)

In the intervening passages, God asks questions and then He issues sentences. When God asks questions, it is not because He is uninformed. Instead, God offers opportunities for the guilty to confess their crimes and plead for His mercy. Adam, where are you? Eve, what have you done? God was not unaware.

Life gets hard when we disobey God. Adam, your labor is going to get wearisome, and you will be accountable to Me. Eve, your labor will be painful, and you will be accountable to your husband. Ground, you will produce twisted and painful vegetation. Serpent, your seed will be defeated by her Seed.

Fig leaves could not cover their sin, and they will not cover ours. It took animals dying to clothe Adam and Eve. It took the Lamb of God being crucified and rising from the dead to conquer sin and death for everyone who believes.

"God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us in knowing good and evil.'"

Genesis 3:22

Bible Studies for Life

By Bobby McKay

Pastor of New Liberty Baptist Church in Morton, Mississippi



THE LOVE EXPRESSED IN GOD'S NAME Psalm 103:1–5, 8–13, 17–19

Knock-knock, Who's there? Luke. Luke who? Luke through the peephole and find out! Yes, it's a corny joke, but aren't most knock-knock jokes? When I read Psalm 103, the one repeated word is "Who." When I consider the greatness and attributes of God, who can compare? No one, that is who.

In His love, God provides what we desperately need. (1–5)

To understand the context of this psalm, it is important to remember these writings are the result of David's love for God and God's love for him. When David considered the ways and generosity of God, his expressions of love soared.

David will not "forget all His benefits." David recognized the source of his blessings and quickly praised the Father. It is good for us to recall the fact that God's love for us is not based on what we do, but rather, who He is.

David gives us a small inventory of God's actions when he writes, "Who pardons all your guilt, heals your diseases, redeems your life from the pit, crowns you with favor and compassion, satisfies your years with good things."

When the temptation comes to self-loathe or have a pity party, stop and ponder how involved and intimately God cares for you. There is nothing we lack spiritually that He has not provided.

In His love, God extends to us compassion, grace and forgiveness. (8–13)

Have you noticed everyone

desires justice except when it comes to them? If God were to bestow upon us what we deserved, no one would ever see heaven or experience His blessings.

Because God is love, He is also compassionate. We do not worship an angry Father, but a gracious One.

I was blessed to have had an amazing dad, but I do realize not everyone shares my experience. No matter how great or how unhealthy your relationship is with your dad, it pales in comparison with the love the Heavenly Father has for you as His child. His love is eternal and unconditional.

In His love, God never abandons His people. (17–19)

Not only is God's love eternal and unconditional, but it also cannot fail.

Others can hurt us and as a result, our feelings toward them may change. This is not so with God. We can only love Him because He first loved us. He is not driven by emotions or feelings. His very essence is love, and we are the beneficiaries of His grace.

As Christians, our confidence is not found in our ability or performance, but in His gracious and timeless love.

Because of His great love for us, we should desire to know Him and acknowledge Him in every facet of our lives.

Obedience and faith are not obstacles; they are opportunities for joy and worship of the One who loves us the most.

Knock-knock! Who's there? God. God who? God loves you!

"But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children, to those who keep His covenant and remember to do His commandments."

Psalm 103:17–18

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Blair Moore
The Alabama Baptist

Entrusted Hope Ministries releases Christmas children's book

A new children's book featuring a loveable pup, a playful kitten and a heartfelt holiday challenge is coming out just in time for Christmas.

"Jack and Theo: One More Stocking" has more than a good message. It has a spiritual message.

As the story begins, Jack, a yellow lab, is snoozing beneath his stocking by the fireplace but wakes to a curious "Meow!" A beautiful, golden kitten, alone in the cold, peers through the living room window. Jack barks to alert Nana of their visitor. She welcomes the kitten inside and names him "Theo," which means "gift from God."

True hospitality

Even though their furry guest makes mischief — like climbing to the top of the Christmas tree and toppling the whole thing over — Nana shows Theo true hospitality and the love of Christ.

That evening, she gathers her grandchildren and fluffy friends around the Christmas tree to read the story of Esther. Nana hangs one more stocking on the mantle — right beside Jack's — to show Theo that he is welcome in their home and their family. The story ends with the challenge to hang one more stocking



Photos courtesy of O'Shea Lowery

The real Jack (left) is a rescue who joined the Davis family eight years ago. Lisa Davis said he's a precious dog who is always happy. The real Theo (right) lives at veterinarian Sonya Bryan's animal hospital.

for someone in need this year.

"One More Stocking" was written by author and speaker O'Shea Lowery. Lowery serves as executive director of Entrusted Hope Ministries, publisher of the book. In a world where children are bombarded with concepts that go against God's ways, Lowery's heart was stirred to create a book for children with a good, wholesome message — something that teaches principles found in Scripture. "One More Stocking" is Lowery's picture book debut.

"I didn't want a book with just a good message. I wanted one that teaches a biblical principle," Lowery said. "I want people to know about Jesus and His love."

And while the story itself is fictional, the illustrations of Jack and Theo are based on real pets. Jack is

the beloved pup of Lowery's friend Lisa Davis. Theo the cat belongs to veterinarian Sonya Bryan, a friend of Lowery's who financially backed the publication of "One More Stocking" through a donation to Entrusted Hope Ministries.



Bryan was inspired to get involved in the project in part by her love of reading to her now-grown daughter who was born blind.

"We read books every day from age 0 to 7 — probably hundreds of books over the years — up until she could read braille books on her own," Bryan said. "It was always hard to find good books with meaningful life lessons and good Christian messages that were interesting and fun."

Bryan saw that "One More Stocking" had not just one but many positive messages.

"It teaches children that they are not alone and are loved by God," Bryan said. "It teaches them to be kind and to help one another and to be kind to animals, which obviously resonates with me since I am a veterinarian."

Real 'characters'

The real Theo lives at Bryan's animal hospital.

"He was an orphaned kitten that we knew had a little something special about his personality, so we decided to keep him," Bryan said. "He meets and greets our clients, and he has a special sense of when other animals need extra love and support."

As for Jack, he's a rescue who joined the Davis family eight years ago. Davis said he's a precious dog who is always happy.

"He thinks everybody likes him — and they do," she said. In fact, the bestselling homemade item at the Davis family's grocery store is Jack's Trail Mix, which is advertised as a party food because Jack likes to party. "He likes everyone being around," Davis said. "And he loves a big crowd."

Lowery said her greatest hope for the book is that families will accept the challenge to welcome someone lonely into their homes this Christmas and show them the love of Christ by hanging up one more stocking.

She encourages readers to pray and ask God who their "Theo" might be.

"If even one family takes the challenge, it will make a difference in someone's life."

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.

To purchase a copy of "Jack and Theo: One More Stocking," visit [Lulu Bookstore](#), [Amazon](#) or [Books-A-Million](#).

HOSTED CHURCH

Need a Website?
We Have You Covered.

Hosted Church is a premium one-stop shop for your church or nonprofit to quickly get up and running without sacrificing quality and functionality.

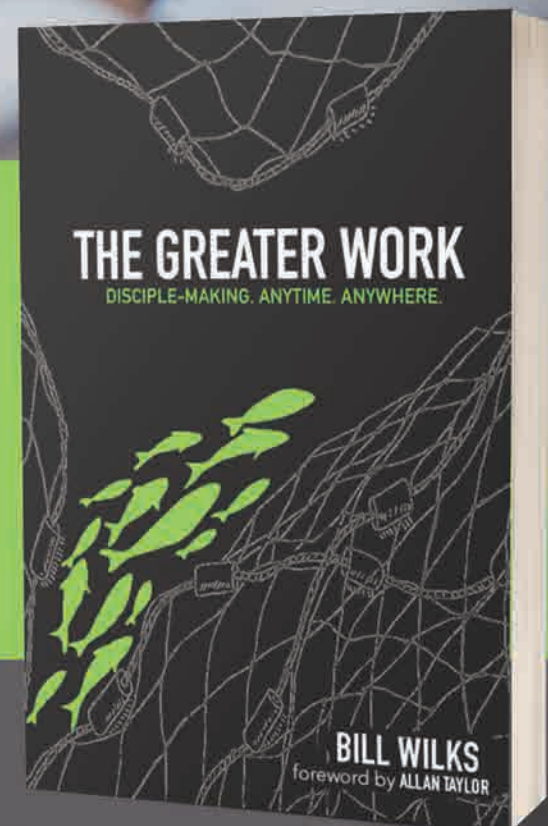
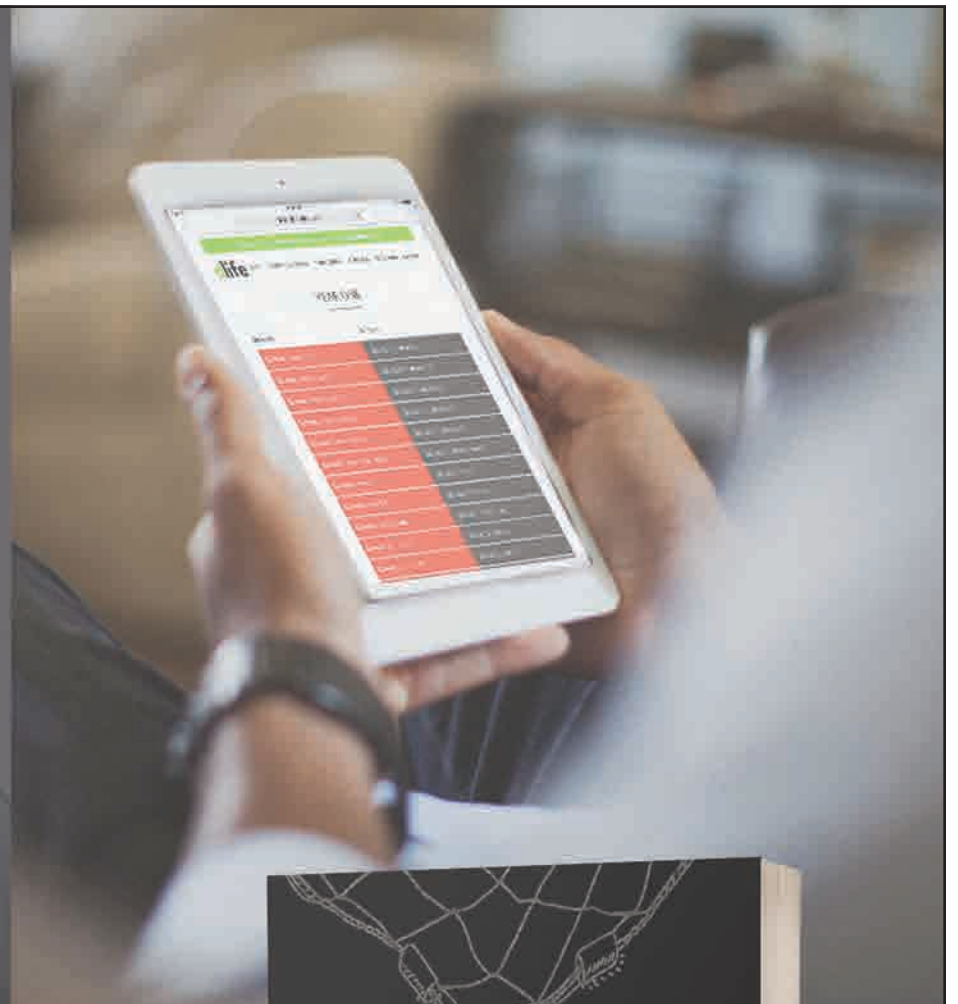
hostedchurch.com



Hosted Church is an extension of TAB Media Group and is dedicated to helping small to medium churches.

d+life

Living the D-Life means living a lifestyle of disciple-making. Think about it. What if you could successfully equip and empower everyone in your ministry for a lifestyle of disciple-making? What if everyone embraced disciple-making as a way of life instead of a program of the church? This would be a game changer and this is the purpose of D-Life. D-Life is a simple, biblical, missional, and reproducible process for equipping every believer for a lifestyle of disciple-making.



**IRON
STREAM**
MEDIA

d+life
Bible Study

888.811.9934

www.livethedlife.com

Authors: Dr. Bill Wilks & Dr. John Herring

**Disciple-Making.
Anytime. Anywhere.**

‘Bridge builder’

By Macala Mays

Baptist Resource Network of Pennsylvania/South Jersey

Campus ministry in Philadelphia sharpens focus on international students

Rebekah Gullledge arrived in the city of brotherly love this past summer to serve on the campus of Drexel University with Baptist campus minister Brian Musser. Specifically, she was brought on to minister to international students.

Drexel University alone is home to 50 different nations and roughly 100 different people groups. For Gullledge, it's a dream come true.

Ever since she was a little girl, Gullledge recalls viewing missionaries as “superheroes,” and the missions field as a giant she couldn't touch. But in late high school she felt a call.

“I was praying, and I finally surrendered my future to God, which was something that was really scary for me. [But] that's when I felt called to be a missionary,” she said.

After finishing high school, Gullledge read every missions book she could get her hands on and talked to every missionary she could find. With no real missions field prospects, she applied to the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

Life-changing moment

On her first day there, she found herself walking into the Baptist Campus Ministry, a visit that would change the trajectory of her life.

“They introduced me to Conversation Club, which was an international student outreach. They introduced me to BCM leadership and to something called Nehemiah Teams, which is a 52-day long missions opportunity,” Gullledge noted.

This one-day interaction led Gullledge to a multitude of opportunities, including two terms with



REBEKAH GULLEDGE
Photo courtesy of the Baptist Resource Network of Pennsylvania /South Jersey

Nehemiah Teams, during which she served in Romania, Indonesia, Czech Republic and Thailand.

“As I've been on those trips, and having done a little bit of international student work in America, I started to realize what it's like to be an international student — how lonely it is and how disconnected people feel from their families and their friends and their culture,” Gullledge noted.

Starting to relate with international students more and more, Gullledge couldn't help but think about the different nations she could be reaching if she was back in America.

“There were moments overseas where I was just thinking [that] I could be reaching people from 50 different nations right now if I were

still in America, but overseas I'm here reaching out to one people group,” she said.

That growing passion led her back to America and, eventually, to Philadelphia.

TO READ MORE
STORIES LIKE
THIS ABOUT
PENNSYLVANIA/
SOUTH JERSEY
BAPTISTS, VISIT
BRNUNITED.ORG.

“God has used the online platform of me Googling things to lead me to the right places,” she said. “I Googled Baptist campus minister in Philadelphia, and I found one name and that was Brian Musser.”

“Brian is the only Southern Baptist campus minister connected to the Baptist churches here in this part of Philadelphia, and there's one on the outskirts of Philadelphia. So 300,000 students and two campus ministers.”

With a high volume of students, many nations present and few workers, it was a no-brainer for Gullledge

to follow God's lead to Philadelphia. But little did she know that God was already opening doors for Musser to reach the nations at Drexel.

“[Musser] has all these open doors to different parts of the campus, specifically with international students,” Gullledge noted. “But international student ministry is time consuming, energy consuming, life consuming — it's not a side job. So he was not able to fully step into that role because he has the whole campus to take care of. But I can.”

Looking ahead

For two years, Gullledge will spend time building relationships with international students at Drexel and a local community college, facilitating fellowship and ministry.

In the near future, Gullledge hopes to start a conversation club for international students; host a survival night, which would equip international students with basic skills for navigating life in America; and connect international students with churches in the area that speak their native language.

Understanding the role of a campus minister as a “bridge builder” between churches and campuses and then churches and students, Gullledge said one of her goals will be to connect international students to churches with ties to their native lands. Those relationships, she believes, can be the key for that student understanding the gospel or growing in their faith.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story was originally published by the Baptist Resource Network of Pennsylvania/South Jersey.

UNFORSAKEN MINISTRY



Walking with those in addiction and their families through the journey of recovery.

EMAIL: glenn@unforsakenministry.org

WEBSITE: unforsakenministry.org



“Sports with a Twist” is a community outreach ministry designed to attract neighborhood kids throughout the summer. A recent crowd favorite involved playing several fast-paced games of human foosball.

Photo by Pam Henderson/The Baptist Paper

SPORTS WITH A TWIST

By Trennis Henderson

The Baptist Paper

NJ church engages kids through high-energy ministry

Whether leading neighborhood kids in a rousing game of balloon basketball, noodle hockey or human foosball, Fellowship CrossPoint Church’s “Sports with a Twist” community outreach ministry is laser focused on intentional evangelism and discipleship.

“Our mission here at CrossPoint is that we connect people to the love of Jesus and then help them live on gospel mission,” explained pastor Brennan Coughlin. The church’s rapidly expanding kids ministry is a prime example of that vision in action.

Sports with a Twist is held each Monday evening throughout the summer at a local park in Chester-

field, New Jersey. The fast-paced evening of games and Bible stories attracts dozens of kids from the surrounding community.

Human foosball was an overwhelming crowd favorite during a recent gathering. The makeshift life-size foosball field featured pool noodles strung on ropes across the “table” with kids holding onto the noodles and shifting from side to side while kicking soccer balls to try to score or block goals.

Shouts of excitement and surprise mixed with laughter through-

out the friendly, frenzied competition. After the final match, the kids quickly gathered for an interactive Bible story about the Good Samaritan, complete with a dramatic reenactment and small-group discussion.

“A big part of what we’ve been doing is really engaging our community by engaging the children of our community,” Coughlin said, “and it’s just been a joy to see that.”

Sports with a Twist is just one example of CrossPoint’s ministry strategy. The church also hosts CrossPoint Kids

“WE ALL HAVE AN IMPACT TO MAKE FOR THE KINGDOM.”

PASTOR BRENNAN COUGHLIN
FELLOWSHIP CROSSPOINT
CHURCH IN CHESTERFIELD,
NEW JERSEY

Club every other Sunday night during the school year and recently launched a weeklong summer Kids Adventure Camp as a way to invest even more deeply in the lives of area children and their families.

Rapid growth

The rapid growth of CrossPoint’s kids ministry over the last couple of years also has been fueled through a partnership with the Baptist Resource Network of Pennsylvania/South Jersey. BRN has helped fund the church’s summer internship program and leadership development efforts through State Missions Offering gifts.

Buff McNickle, BRN’s director of compassion ministries, describes Pastor Coughlin as “an incredible leader.”

Coughlin’s “focus on identifying



Photo by Trennis Henderson/The Baptist Paper

Elementary and middle school students attending “Sports with a Twist” gather for an interactive Bible story. Summer intern Julianne Albrecht (standing, left) said the stories feature “a very welcoming, easy-to-follow-along” storying method to help capture the students’ attention.

and investing in that next generation leader has been the key to the Kingdom movement they are seeing in their church and their community,” McNickle affirmed.

“It’s ministries like this that help other churches see the potential of reaching their community,” he added. “It takes an outside-of-the-box mentality to engage the lost in our community. Creative approaches like Sports with a Twist help churches see that trying something new and different can be successful.”

Coughlin is quick to affirm BRN’s ministry partnership as well. As a New Jersey church planted less than a decade ago, “our partnership with the Baptist Resource Network has really been a game changer for us,” he shared. “As we’re investing in our young people, they’re then turning around and investing in children, discipling children.”

Julianne Albrecht, one of CrossPoint’s summer interns, also is a local elementary school teacher who is spending her summer serving her home church.



Photo by Pam Henderson/The Baptist Paper

Brennan Coughlin, pastor of Fellowship CrossPoint Church in Chesterfield, New Jersey, said the church’s mission is to “connect people to the love of Jesus and then help them live on gospel mission.”

“It’s been a really cool opportunity to use my skill set from teaching and then transfer that over very applicably to our church,” Albrecht said.

Leading the Sports with a Twist Bible stories each week, she noted, “We do that through a storying method where it’s a very welcoming, easy-to-follow-along method that we use.”

She said each Bible lesson also includes “some sort of gospel-centered aspect to it as well, giving a

child who may not know the Lord a chance to speak up and let a leader know that they’d like to know more.”

Ruth Hueber, CrossPoint’s outreach director, is enthusiastic about the church’s commitment to an ef-

fective, engaging kids ministry.

Working with the interns, fellow staff members and volunteers to coordinate the growing ministry effort, Hueber said, “I have the privilege of helping kids understand who Jesus is and how they can be connected to Him.”

Reaching children

“I met Jesus when I was young,” Hueber reflected, “and it was really important to me that kids have an opportunity to hear about who Jesus is in a language that they can understand.”

One of the church’s ongoing goals is to get more and more kids involved in Kids Club, she said.

“That’s our most formative discipleship program where kids are going to be challenged to memorize Scripture, challenged to live missionally and challenged to be discipled as well as disciple younger kids,” she explained. In the meantime, such programs as Kids Camp and Sports with a Twist will continue to attract area youngsters in safe, inviting settings.

Noting that various studies indicate the vast majority of Christians come to faith in Christ before age 18, Hueber emphasized how evangelizing and discipling children and youth is “one of the most fruitful

places to be serving in ministry.”

Ben Burlaga, CrossPoint’s ministry resident, leads the church’s youth ministry and connections ministry but also is actively involved in a variety of children’s ministry projects.

“The cool way these things interact is eventually kids ministry becomes youth ministry,” he pointed out. “We’re raising up and giving opportunities for our youth to serve and make an impact in the kids ministry.”

With CrossPoint’s combined focus on intentional discipleship and leadership development, Burlaga said, “I think that intentional discipleship begins from the top down. ... I want to be used by God to hopefully bring that same kind of idea to the youth and kids that I’m serving.”

‘Engage your community’

For churches throughout New Jersey and beyond, Pastor Coughlin urged, “You can engage your community. You can begin to do children’s ministry. You can begin to reach out to people.

“Regardless of the size of your church,” he concluded, “we all have an impact to make for the Kingdom” — even if it starts with noodle hockey or human foosball.



Photo by Pam Henderson/The Baptist Paper

CrossPoint staff members and volunteers work together to set up activities for the church’s weekly “Sports with a Twist” community outreach ministry at a local park.

“IT TAKES AN OUTSIDE-OF-THE-BOX MENTALITY TO ENGAGE THE LOST IN OUR COMMUNITY.”

BUFF MCNICKLE, DIRECTOR OF COMPASSION MINISTRIES, BAPTIST RESOURCE NETWORK OF PENNSYLVANIA/SOUTH JERSEY