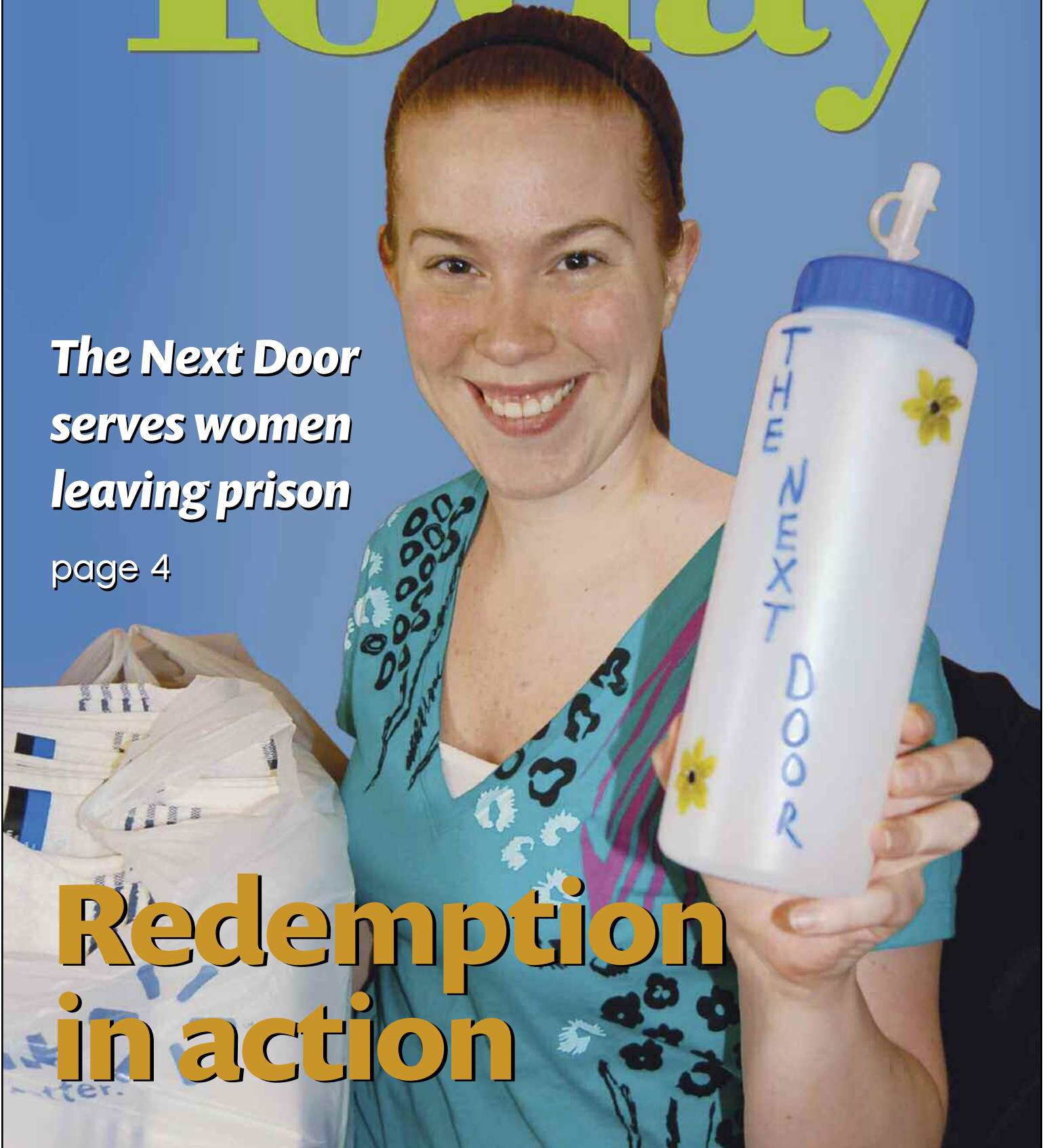


# BAPTISTS Today

***The Next Door  
serves women  
leaving prison***

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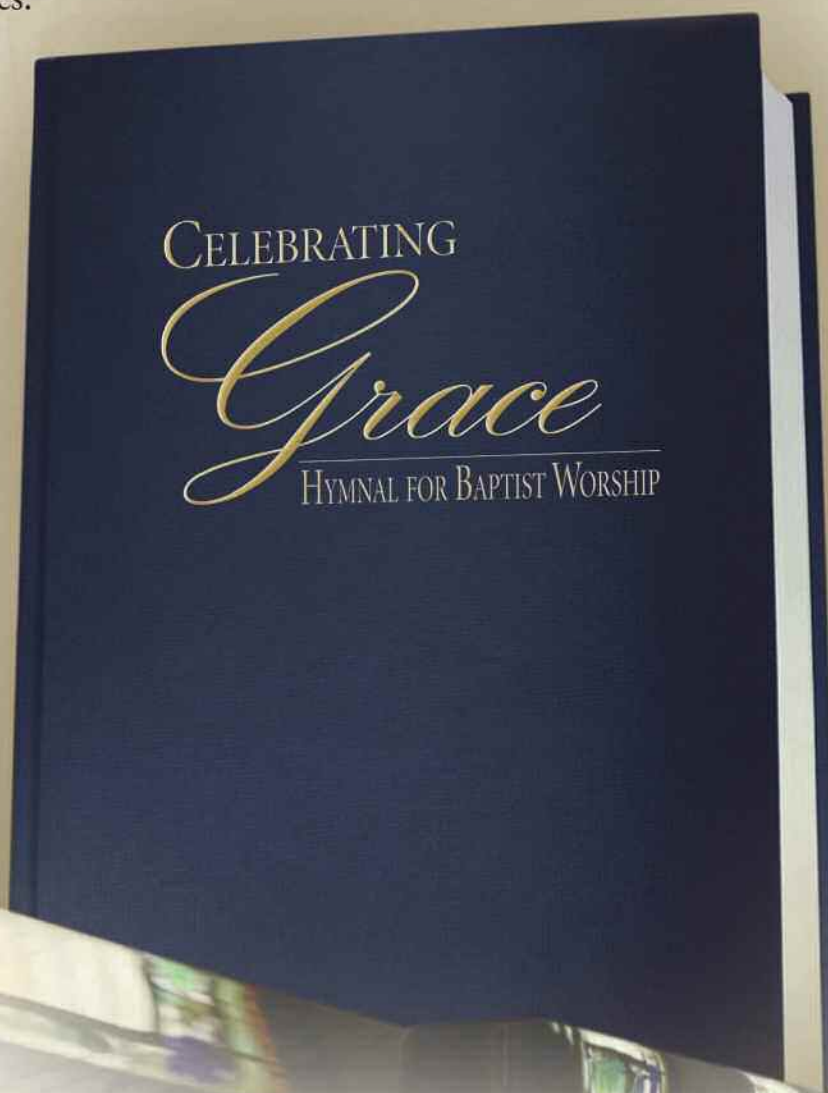
**Redemption  
in action**



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**8** Why is the pastor taking a sabbatical?  
By Amy Butler



Photo by John Pierce. Volunteer Coordinator Mary Rufener shows some items given by a church group to The Next Door, a faith-based program for female former inmates started by Nashville's First Baptist Church.

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The Next Door residents, Tina (foreground) and Diana, search for job information on shared computers. Right side: CEO Linda Leathers (left) and founding board chair Andrea Overby give leadership to this faith-based program for former inmates.

# 'Redemption in action'

## Faith-based program serves women coming out of prison

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — It's a dangerous mix: a vacant building, a revealing community assessment and the faith of some self-described "wild-praying women."

**T**he outcome, in downtown Nashville, is a place of redemption and redirection for women coming out of prison.

"We are seeing amazing things happen," said Linda Leathers, chief executive officer of The Next Door and former singles minister at Nashville's First Baptist Church.

The Next Door offers a compassionate, yet structured and effective six-month residency program that greatly increases the odds for women to chart a better course in life after incarceration. The program's name came to church member Andrea Overby's mind after hearing a warden describe the experience of releasing an inmate through the prison's last door after completing her sentence.

"We felt like we were following God's leading," said Andrea, the first Board chair, tireless fundraiser and all-around volunteer for The Next Door.

### BUILDING ON PRAYER

The rundown, inner-city building across the distant parking lot from Nashville's First Baptist Church was not the kind of place to catch someone's attention, much less one's imagination.

But it caused a stirring within Linda, although the congregation had decided to lease the building for commercial purposes. To her, it looked like a ministry opportunity in waiting.

"Linda was convinced and convicted it should be used for something good," said Andrea. "... She asked the pastor if the women in the church could pray about its use."

As most ministers know, neither turning down such a request nor underestimating its potential is wise. Soon Linda and Andrea watched the persistent prayers of four grow to 12 and then 100 "wild-praying women."

Convinced that some vital ministry need could be met through the decaying, four-story building in downtown Nashville, the women took the practical step of doing a community needs assessment.

First, they considered daycare programs for children or seniors but found the building unsuitable for those purposes. Then the

assessment revealed a clear answer to their prayers.

"We heard that the biggest need in the community was for women coming out of incarceration," said Linda. "God really began to transform our thoughts."

She described the call to create this new ministry as "a stirring" among the women who had prayed for a higher purpose for the building.

"There was some hesitation on the part of the church at the beginning," said Andrea, describing questions about liability and other concerns that were raised before congregational leaders "saw the vision."

The Next Door Inc. was formed as a non-profit, charitable organization and First Baptist agreed to lease the building for \$1 per year. Funds were raised for a top-to-bottom renovation.

The facility provides a secure place and effective program for up to 52 participants at a time. Women scheduled for release from prison get on a waiting list to enter the program.

Volunteers and in-kind gifts came from many sources such as Longhorn Steakhouse, which provided the well-equipped commercial kitchen.

## BEYOND THE BAPTISTS

Today, 58 Nashville-area congregations with various denominational affiliations support the faith-based program, Linda said with appreciation.

“It started with First Baptist Church; they birthed us,” she said. “But it couldn’t be (done by) just one church, but the bigger community.”

The assessment had revealed gaps in the services provided to women coming out of incarceration. Without addressing such issues as addiction, trauma, lack of job skills, and emotional and mental health needs, these women would often return to the environments and behaviors that had put them in prison. The return rate was very high.

“It’s intimidating,” said Linda of a woman’s experience of coming out of prison. “But by providing services and safe housing with loving people, transformation occurs.”

Staff and other resources were needed to serve these women well. After becoming executive director, Linda began to recruit others such as Cindy Sneed, the clinical coordinator, to address the needs of residents. They began to compete for grants and to find other ways to fund the program.

“God has brought us pretty far, pretty fast,” said Andrea of the expanding program.

Since May 2004, more than 650 women have completed the six-month residency program. Linda said that 99 percent arrive with an addiction to some illegal substance and 88 percent state a trauma (some form of abuse) in their background that was never treated.

The drug abuse, said Linda, is usually an effort to cover the shame and guilt that come from abuse. The program is designed to address those issues as well as to offer practical help with gaining employment and reuniting with family.

A spiritual emphasis through Bible study and prayer is offered but not forced, said Linda, who unapologetically defined The Next Door as “a Christ-centered organization.”

## CHANGING LIVES

Linda admits that she and others who launched The Next Door didn’t know much about the world of female inmates at the beginning.

“But after you see the darkness, then you can see the transformation,” she said.

Jessica, who now works at The Next Door, said the program meant so much to her that it’s hard to describe. Going from a life on the street — filled with drugs and crime that led to imprisonment — to a place of hope was remarkable.

“In prison, I had an encounter with the Lord,” she said. The Next Door’s program gave her the opportunity to redirect her life in a way that was consistent with her new commitment.

“The people here show you so much love,” she said, “... and give you self-esteem.”

This month, Jessica will move to Knoxville to serve as a house monitor at the newly opened site where others coming out of prison can experience similar changes.

“This program has meant so much to me that I want to share with others,” she said. “They’ve opened so many doors for me.”

Current and former residents often speak of their experiences in terms of a fresh start — and they express gratitude for the services provided.

With five years of productive living since leaving prison and entering The Next Door program, Shelia refers to herself as “one of the miracles” that resulted from the faithfulness of “the wild-praying women of First Baptist.”

With “God’s help and the outstanding staff,” Shelia said her life has been completely redirected from crisis to wholeness.

“The Next Door is just as the name states,” she said. “It is the next door to a lifesaving, spiritual awakening, emotional healing, Christ-centered program.”

Frank Lewis, pastor of Nashville’s First Baptist Church, said he never tires of hearing testimonies of changed lives as a result of this ministry.

“We often talk about the gospel’s ability to transform a life,” he said. “The Next Door gives us a chance to see that transformation in action.”

The impact of the program is seen most clearly in the way these women live afterward. Statewide, it is estimated that 65 percent of women released from prison will return. Yet 90 percent of those completing the residency program at The Next Door break the cycle of returning to prison.

However, transformation that occurs

## NOT SO DIFFERENT FROM US

Andrea Overby told of the time Linda Leathers was invited to speak to a statewide gathering of the Woman’s Missionary Union (WMU) at First Baptist Church of Nashville. She was to share about the work of The Next Door in serving women coming out of incarceration.

Linda talked about how these women were not so different in their needs as many with whom we worship every Sunday. She talked about how drug addiction and abuse are present — though often hidden — among those who attend church and are seen as prominent in our communities.

To make her point, Linda paused in her address and asked that the current residents of The Next Door program stand and come forward. Women scattered throughout the sanctuary began to rise from the pews and make their way to the front.

Surprise was on the face of many in attendance, said Andrea, when realizing that someone with whom they had chatted and worshiped had recently been released from prison.

Perhaps it should be less surprising, Linda noted, since the great majority of those entering the Tennessee Prison for Women self-identify as “Baptist” on the intake form.

“I think society in general is taking away the stigma of helping those with mental health concerns or drug addiction,” Andrea said hopefully.

She described the time she spends in prayer and meditation each week with women at The Next Door as “delightful.”

“A lot of them have a very generous sense of humor,” said Andrea. “But when they start sharing, they have great needs.”

Linda said the focus of those who work or volunteer at The Next Door is not on what crime a person has committed in the past but on what hopeful future lies ahead.

“The offense is not the issue,” she said. “It’s what they want to do after the offense.”

So from the time an inmate is picked up at the prison gate until completion of the six-month program at The Next Door, she hears the consistent message of a better future.

“It’s been the greatest adventure of my life,” said Linda of The Next Door. “... There is nothing like seeing the life of a woman transformed — and we see transformation daily.”



## GIVE GIFT CARDS

The Next Door welcomes women coming out of prison into a safe environment that provides the services needed for a brighter future. Upon arrival, these women also need some basic provisions.

“Who wants used towels if you’re fresh out of incarceration?” asked C.E.O. Linda Leathers rhetorically — adding that having personal items, rather than institutional ones with numbers, communicates a new start.

To help, send \$25 or \$50 gift cards for Wal-Mart or Target to: The Next Door, P.O. Box 23336, Nashville, TN 37202.

## VOLUNTEER

Those living in or near Nashville, Knoxville or Chattanooga may volunteer in a variety of ways (front desk hostess, prayer partner, dinner assistant, transportation provider, etc.). For details, visit [www.thenextdoor.org/volunteer.asp](http://www.thenextdoor.org/volunteer.asp).

In Nashville, contact Volunteer Coordinator Mary Rufener at (615) 251-8805 ext. 208 or [mary@thenextdoor.org](mailto:mary@thenextdoor.org). The first step for new volunteers is to attend an informational tour held on the first Monday (6:00-7:15 p.m.) or the third Saturday (10:00-11:15 a.m.) of each month.

## OTHER WAYS OF GIVING

There are many ways individuals, Sunday school classes, women’s groups and congregations can share in the redemptive work of The Next Door, a 501(c)3 non-profit, faith-based organization that serves women coming out of the criminal justice system.

For information on providing financial support, contact Kim Williams, director of development, at (615) 251-8805 ext. 210 or [kim@thenextdoor.org](mailto:kim@thenextdoor.org).

A “wish list” of non-cash items needed (such as clothing and office supplies) is available from Mary Rufener at the contact information above.

through The Next Door is not just for the residents, said Andrea.

“It’s changed my life as well as hopefully those women we serve,” she said. “When I get to know these women, and see where they come from and their determination, and knowing their obstacles, it’s inspiring to me and makes me realize my blessings more.”

She added: “Being here points me toward what God is doing.”

## AN EXPANDING MISSION

These visionary, dedicated Christian leaders are not resting on their successes, however. They are eagerly expanding to meet the additional needs of women leaving incarceration.

For example, they discovered that women coming out of the six-month residency program were having difficulty finding safe, affordable housing for them and their children.

“Our women are so courageous,” said Linda. “They have been through hell on earth; ... they want to be good moms.”

So in 2007, a closed apartment building in Nashville was secured and opened as the Freedom Recovery Community to provide secure, long-term housing.

“It’s a gated community,” said Andrea with a smile.

“And a great place for women and their children,” said Linda, noting that family reunification is an important need for those completing the post-prison program. “When

a woman left our program, she wanted to regain custody of her children.”

The program has been honored statewide and nationally for the services provided to women.

“Faith-based to us means our motivation is faith,” said Andrea. “But we run this as a business.”

The Nashville-based program has been so successful that The Next Door is expanding to two east Tennessee cities. The program in Knoxville opened in February with office space provided by the First Baptist Church there. The residential program in Chattanooga will begin in the spring.

Having three locations will enable many women coming out of prison in Tennessee to be closer to family and work opportunities in the communities where they will ultimately live, said Linda.

“The whole emphasis here is on helping them to believe that life can be different,” said Linda. “... They know we want nothing from them except for them to be their very best.”

An emphasis on grace and forgiveness helps these women learn that they don’t need to be defined by their past, she said. Linda added that while churches give much to provide these programs there are lessons to be learned from the residents as well.

“There are not a whole lot of masks here; it’s raw,” she said. “Women here admit they have needs and ask for help. Wouldn’t that be a great environment in our churches?” **BT**



Volunteers like hostess Gaye Waggener (right) are vital to serving residents, said executive director Linda Leathers (left).

# editorial

## Male aggression goes beyond doctrinal concerns

By John Pierce

**T**here is a hostility among some male Baptist leaders toward female ministers and those who support them that deserves to be identified as such. It is more than the affirmation of a doctrinal position; it is male aggression.

To suggest that all Baptists who interpret the Bible to limit women's leadership in the church and home are hostile would be grossly unfair. They are not.

Yet some reveal uncharitable, overreaching acts of aggression toward women and should not be allowed to hide behind a flimsy veil of so-called biblical fidelity.

Even a novice in the behavioral sciences knows that aggression is a response to threat. What do these men find so threatening about gifted women who respond to a call to fields of ministry once dominated by if not exclusively held by men?

In November 2008, the Georgia Baptist Convention (GBC), meeting in annual session, approved an Executive Committee recommendation to reject funds from churches considered out of step with the convention's beliefs. The vaguely worded motion was targeted at and applicable to the First Baptist Church of Decatur, Ga., a congregation that called a female pastor in 2007 but made no big deal about it.

However, some of the brethren (Baptist pastors who had assumed previously unknown denominational power through the fundamentalist takeover) were unsatisfied with the Convention's softer approach to rejection. They wanted harsher treatment.

So, for yet another year, Georgia Baptist leaders readied for round two — although the Decatur congregation and pastor Julie Pennington-Russell simply turned the other cheek to the actions against them. The convention's two-punch punishment greatly outweighed the perceived "crime" — of an autonomous Baptist congregation calling a female pastor.

Yet the burning desire to drive out all perceived doctrinal impurities can take on a hostile tone. And elevated testosterone can easily exceed rational thought and behavior.

In recent years, Southern Baptist leadership has been clear in affirming a doctrinal position that restricts the pastorate to men. Yet there is a big difference between believing the Bible calls for such hierarchal structures and showing anger toward those who might not share that interpretation.

Only the most diminutive theological mind would elevate a doctrinal position on gender restrictions — which even their own leadership has trouble applying beyond the senior pastor role — to the level of Christian orthodoxy.

Male aggression is the only possible explanation for such angry, punitive behavior. Yet, this is but one example.

An editorial I wrote a few years ago, titled "Tuesday afternoon worship," was based on my then-8-year-old daughter pretending to lead worship in a vacant sanctuary while her sister took piano lessons. Unlike some of my opinion writing, it was a more personal account — not a rant.

However, I did mention being pleased that my daughters have never experienced Baptist settings in which females were restricted from places of leadership.

The editorial had been out a long time when I received a strongly worded, highly critical letter from a Southern Baptist pastor. A woman, who visits homebound members of his growing church, had read, liked and innocently shared the column with him.

Though unlikely aware of his condescension, he labeled her as an "unsuspecting church member" who does not realize what she is reading. It was the first of several

comments that denigrated women.

But, lucky for her, this male pastor was there to protect her from my stealth "neo-orthodoxy" rooted in my daughter's desire to have church on Tuesday afternoon. He admitted to being "upset" by my writing, and launched into an unsought analysis of the "current state of (my) spiritual affairs."

He shamed me for confessing to not always giving my best attention to worship and worried about the tragic influence my unfaithfulness might have on "some undiscerning little ol' lady" who read my editorial or on my own daughter.

He urged me to get my daughter into a different church, although he does not know her or the congregation in which she is involved — except for my brief description that the church "does not erect a roadblock" between females and the pulpit.

I am sure that is what set him off. For he revealed more of his sexist perspective by expressing shock that my wife or secretary had not previewed and halted my writing — as if I have a "secretary" or as if my wife (with her own profession) is somehow involved in my daily work.

My response was not a foolish attempt to counter any of his charges. Rather, I thanked him for writing and expressed gratitude for the freedom to express myself about the challenges of faith.

Then I assured him that my rejection of the fundamentalism and related sexism exhibited in his letter was intentional — and, to my mind, not a departure from the Christian faith and the best of the Baptist tradition.

Like the men seeking stronger ways to express their anger toward a congregation with a female pastor, his emotion and language suggested a hostility greater than a mere difference over a point of doctrine. It is male aggression that masquerades as biblical allegiance.

Chill, brothers, chill. **BT**



*Editor's note: This is the third in a yearlong series of articles on "Healthy ministers for healthy churches," produced in partnership with the Center for Congregational Health and supported by a gift from Henry V. Langford.*

# Why is the pastor taking a sabbatical?

By Amy Butler

*"There are times when our calls must be reissued, if you will; times when we will need to reassess our call to serve in a particular setting to discover what God has in mind for us and for those who called us. Many pastors and congregations would like to stay together for more than the typical few years and need to find a way to do so that is healthy and strong. A sabbatical can provide the time and space to reassess the call to a renewed life in the same place."*

—Melissa Bane Sevier

When looking for a pastoral position I called respected pastors and friends who had gone through the process of finding a church to pastor. I asked: What are the most important things I should be talking to search committees about?

I assumed there would be much discussion about theology, worship, preaching and church structure, but hadn't given much thought to what I might need from a church to do a good job as its pastor. How fortunate I was, then, to have colleagues who told me: "Talk with the search committee about sabbatical."

While not every church has a sabbatical policy or has even considered the idea, colleagues told me over and over that before accepting a position, I should make sure the church has a sabbatical policy in place. If it doesn't, ask for a commitment that the church will commission a study and then adopt a policy within the first year of your pastorate.

My listening was not without doubts. Frankly, I wanted to be a pastor, and if digging in my heels about a sabbatical policy would decrease my chances of getting a shot, well, then, I had no interest in bringing it up.

I had so much energy and enthusiasm to pour into a new opportunity, and was anxious to test-drive all the great ideas learned in seminary and as an associate pastor. I felt optimism and hope for the future of the church.

I couldn't even imagine feeling tired, needing rejuvenation, longing to rediscover my calling. Though I heard what my colleagues said, a conversation about sabbatical with a search committee seemed rather premature and maybe even a little bit presumptuous.

Then I met Calvary. There is no real way to describe the experience of talking with the search committee. It was almost like falling in love.

Committee members asked great questions that showed they had given the process deep thought. When I asked them questions they gave answers that made my heart beat with excitement. When they talked about the church I could hear enthusiasm and energy in their voices.

Their ideas about faith and life in Christian community were ones I felt passionate about. When they talked about where they wanted to go as a community, I felt myself really wanting to go with them.

When it came time to talk about the specifics of my employment, the search committee gave me a copy of Calvary's very detailed personnel manual, which covered a wide variety of topics — but did not mention sabbatical.

I wondered if I should bring it up. All those doubts resurfaced, but the advice of my colleagues also kept coming to mind. Without exception, pastors whose ministries I admired and hoped to emulate repeatedly emphasized:

"Make sure the church has a sabbatical policy in place."

So, I raised the issue with the search committee. The members didn't seem offended, but a little puzzled.

I soon learned that the church had only experienced sabbatical in times of great desperation or crisis. If the pastor wasn't performing up to expectations, or attendance was down, or people were unhappy, then the church sent the pastor on sabbatical.

It seemed nobody had thought of sabbatical as a regular, healthy practice both for the pastor and the congregation. Yet, they were open to working on a sabbatical policy and agreed to have a policy in place before my first year ended.

The personnel committee took on the task. The members collected information from churches they admired, read the expressions various congregations took, and wrote a policy that was added to our personnel manual.

The process was very straightforward and almost boring, it was so administrative. Neither the personnel committee nor I really felt the importance of what we were doing. We were busy being church together, not thinking about what our lives would be like several years down the road.

Now having just returned from my first sabbatical after seven years at Calvary, I am deeply relieved to have listened to my colleagues. At Calvary, sabbatical changed from a last resort strategy to an exciting opportunity for me and for the congregation.

When time came to start thinking about sabbatical, Calvary took a series of intentional steps to prepare. The pastoral relations





committee, a charged with the care of the pastor, worked with the deacon worship committee to plan the three months in worship.

Thoughtful attention was given to who would fill the pulpit during sabbatical. Worship was planned to mirror the simultaneous experience of sabbatical. Our staff planned worship around different Sabbath practices, inviting members of the congregation to find opportunities for experiencing sabbatical themselves.

In the months leading up to sabbatical, church leadership facilitated several “Calvary Conversations.” We had lunch together after worship, sat in a big circle, and talked about our questions and concerns.

There was no agenda for such conversations; they were just forums to discuss sabbatical. Some had questions about why pastors get to take sabbaticals when, say, lawyers don’t, resulting in interesting conversation about the life and work of the pastorate.

Some had practical questions about how work around the church would get done in the pastor’s absence. Others used these forums to raise concerns and worries like, “What will I do if I need a pastor while Pastor Amy is gone?”

The church compiled a booklet titled, “Sabbatical: Everything You Always Wanted to Know.” The resource was specific to Calvary and to this sabbatical experience, answering questions as broad as, “What is sabbatical?” and as specific as, “Who will be preaching each week of sabbatical?”

We encouraged the congregation to use this brochure as a personal guide to sabbatical. Many people reported that they found the resource handy and helpful, and its production helped legitimize the claim that the congregation had an important part to play in the experience.

A church health consultant was invited to the final “conversation” to make a short presentation about sabbatical and to offer encouraging words to the congregation.

My last sermon before sabbatical was titled, “Dear Calvary,” in which I shared my hopes for the congregation during this time. The congregation shared a blessing for my family and me, written by the pastoral relations committee, at the end of the service.

My colleagues were right when they encouraged me to make sure sabbatical was part of my relationship with Calvary. Sabbatical was a gift to me as a pastor, an opportunity to, as Eugene Peterson writes, “maintain the central springs of compassion

and creativity” that the work of the pastorate requires.

The folks at Calvary would tell you they received benefits from sabbatical as well. They learned, if they didn’t know already, how incredibly talented they are. A healthy faith community isn’t dependent on the presence of one particular leader. They heard different voices and empowered different leaders. They got a rest, too.

Now we’re back together, and it’s true that absence makes the heart grow fonder. We missed each other, which reminded us of

why we continue to take on the challenge of following Jesus together.

Part of our answer to “Why is Pastor Amy taking sabbatical?” is that we hope to have many years of ministry together ahead of us. I still have trouble looking that far ahead, but I agree with my colleagues that a richer life together is made possible because of the gift of sabbatical we gave each other. **BT**

—Amy Butler is pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Washington, D.C.

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# Pastor with another job

## John Lummus balanced dual careers for decades

CUMMING, Ga. — John Lummus, now 84 and widowed, warmly remembers the Sunday when one of his two children asked: “Where are we going to church this morning?”

It was a valid question, for Lummus then served as pastor of three churches — each meeting just one Sunday a month.

Bivocational ministry has its own terminology. These were “quarter-time” churches, meaning they met monthly — typically one out of four Sundays. “Half-time” churches met on either the “first and third Sundays” or “second and fourth Sundays,” giving a pastor the opportunity to serve two congregations simultaneously.

A “full-time church,” in the language of bivocational ministry, refers to a congregation that meets for worship every Sunday. It does not mean that the pastor is fully funded by the church as the only means of employment.

Lummus, a retired educator, had a long career in bivocational ministry in North Georgia with all kinds of arrangements. He served 23 terms as pastor — including returning for a second time to a previously-served congregation on six occasions and a third time to four churches.

No wonder his children needed a little information on Sunday mornings about their destination.

As a youth, Lummus walked to Sunday school at a nearby Methodist campground where a trustee at the denominational-affiliated Reinhardt College helped him enroll on a work scholarship, at age 16, that involved washing dishes “three times a day everyday.”

“I was washing dishes when I heard Pearl Harbor had been attacked,” he recalled.

During a campus revival, Lummus felt a call to ministry that he resisted until “I learned I couldn’t win.” Bivocational ministry was the only form familiar to him.

“I didn’t know of a single church at that time having services [every Sunday],” he said. “Most were having one service per month.”

After three years in the Navy during World War II, Lummus was called to his first pastorate — Hightower Baptist Church in Cherokee County, Ga. — as a single, 21-year old. He served the part-time church from 1946-1951 — and returned on two other occasions from 1967-1970 and 1981-1983.

As a single pastor, he proposed to Lois Burris, but admits to forming the question a little differently. The two had just witnessed a public family fuss, when he asked Lois: “Do you think we can live together without doing that?”

Through 57 years of marriage, Lummus said his wife was a great asset to his ministry and carried more than her share of the family load while he had two careers and completed degrees in education at Oglethorpe University and the University of Georgia.

Stories flowed freely from his many years of serving small, rural congregations.

“Most of the time, [salary] was never mentioned” when asked to serve a church, he said. One paid him \$25 a month plus an overcoat for Christmas.

Typically, quarter-time churches held their monthly business conferences on the Saturday before Sunday worship. The pastor was expected to deliver a sermon on both occasions. So it was a full weekend commitment.

Lummus said he was fortunate throughout his career to work in school systems where his supervisors were flexible when pastoral emergencies arose. And, likewise, the congregations he served knew his time with them was limited.

“They just didn’t expect as much from the pastor,” he said. “A lot of the visitation we know now was limited, and lay leadership, deacons, provided administration.”

Lummus served a congregation in Forsyth



County, Ga., when racial tensions rose over an incident that resulted in a major civil rights march in 1987. “We had some bigots in the county,” said Lummus honestly, who was part of a group that met several times to defuse the tensions and find resolutions.

“It was interesting and challenging, and wasn’t all peaceful,” he said of the meetings between local leaders and civil rights activists led by Hosea Williams. “But I thought, we can’t have a fight.”

Lummus said he was relieved when, at one meeting, “we all ended up laughing.”

During the summers, when school was out, Lummus was often enlisted to preach revivals. For six or seven weeks, he would preach in morning and evening services each day that would culminate in a Sunday baptism service.

One pastor who couldn’t swim recruited Lummus to help with an outdoor baptism.

“I told the big boy being baptized that the spring water was so cold that if I get you down, you will get up.”

The rural pastor did venture into Atlanta when the Buckhead Baptist Church asked him to fill the pulpit for several Sundays. After one service, a deacon asked him if he’d consider being the pastor.

“He said: ‘We’re just a bunch of country folks who’ve moved into town. We need a country preacher — and you’re about as country as I’ve ever seen.’”

“I said: ‘I consider that a compliment,’” Lummus recalled with a big smile. **BT**

Editor’s note: In the February issue, Dennis Bickers, Southeast Area Resource Minister for the American Baptist Churches of Indiana and Kentucky, noted that bivocational ministers come from many different backgrounds with a wide range of experience. Two examples are featured here: a retired Southern Baptist pastor in North Georgia and a minister among Japanese people in South Carolina (on page 11).

# 'just ministry'

Pastor serves Japanese, other internationals in S.C.

**A**NDERSON, S.C. — When Japanese Baptist pastor Aki Shigemi decided to complete his seminary work at Gardner-Webb University's divinity school, someone described the typical town in the southern U.S. as "one store, one gas stand and seven churches."

That is exactly what he found, he said, upon arriving in the quaint college town of Boiling Springs, N.C.

After completing his M.Div. degree, Aki and his family moved to Anderson, S.C., where he and his wife, Yoko, a hospital chaplain, lead a ministry to internationals at Boulevard Baptist Church. Additionally, he works full time as a mental health counselor and serves as part-time pastor of three Japanese congregations.

During his 13 years in upstate South Carolina, Aki has watched the number of Japanese decrease due to textile companies moving to "China, China and China." However, his commitment remains strong to serving business leaders and students who come to the state from Japan.

The three congregations — in Greenville, Anderson and Columbia — meet one Sunday each per month. The fourth Sunday provides a chance to worship with the Boulevard congregation and to give attention to the international ministry there.

"I started ministry with Japanese, but day by day the Japanese population decreased," he said of the work at Boulevard where he and Yoko keep an office. "So we just extended our ministry to internationals."

Aki has also helped build a close relationship between Baptists in Japan — where he once served as a pastor — and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) where he serves as coordinator of the Asian Network.

"Aki Shigemi has worked tirelessly to connect CBF and the Japan Baptist Convention in a vital partnership," said Rob Nash, CBF global missions coordinator. "We are hoping and praying for individuals in CBF churches who sense God's call to work and minister alongside our Japanese brothers and sisters in sharing Christ with the Japanese people."



Last summer, representatives of CBF and the Japan Baptist Convention signed a formal memorandum of understanding.

"Relationship means both ways," said Aki of what he hopes will be a mutually beneficial partnership. One idea, he said, is to have short-term missionaries go from the U.S. to Japan and to have Japanese students come to the U.S. — where they would relate to Japanese business leaders.

Sometimes American missionaries have exploited the Japanese people, said Aki. Therefore, a "50/50 relationship" is needed to create trust. He sees his role as a "bridge" between the convention and the fellowship.

"I'm bivocational," said Aki, who can really count more than two jobs and gives most of his vacation time to serving through CBF.

Aki wants Baptists across the U.S. to see the importance of ministry with internationals even when in places where the numbers may seem limited.

"We can do foreign missions in our churches," he said, noting that persons from 16 countries attended a recent international banquet at Boulevard.

"It's a good example," he said. "Because Anderson is not so international."

Aki said he is eager to talk with congregations that want to reach out to internationals and need direction for getting started.

"We have a big task, a big responsibility to carry on the gospel in our communities,"

said Aki, noting that immigrants and international visitors often "have no chance to hear of Jesus Christ" unless churches establish good relationships with them.

Even for Japanese who are interested in Christianity, he explained, the church can be "scary if they have no background." He compared the experience of coming to a Baptist church on one's own to "a Christian knocking on the door of a Buddhist temple in Japan."

Aki said his own experience — of a dramatic conversion from Buddhism to Christianity in Japan — is very different from that of his son, who was raised in church. Most Japanese Baptists have had an experience more like his own.

"To become Christians, Japanese need two things," he said, "a Bible and a suitcase." By the latter he means that conversion leads to separation from family.

"I became a Christian when I was 26," said Aki of his life-changing decision some three decades ago that impacted family and vocational life.

His new faith would not permit him to attend services that elevated war heroes to worship status. And since Christmas is not a national holiday in Japan, he was expected to work.

As a native of Nagasaki, he knows the destructive force of war. Christians in Nagasaki taught him the importance of working for peace.

"I saw many ruins destroyed by an atomic bomb," he said. "At the Catholic cathedral, an angel statue's face was burned out."

Visitors from the U.S. don't stay long at the cathedral, he said, because it "is not a good monument for the American people."

"It's very difficult to make peace, but I'm always thinking about it," he said. "Peace-making means to know each other; it's on the individual level."

Aki urges American Christians to reach out to those in their communities who come from around the world. For creating friendships, he said, is the best route to peace.

"I don't even like to say 'international ministry,'" Aki said. "It's just ministry." **BT**



# Preservation or interference?

## Church-state battle brews over shuttered churches

When a church is deemed no longer viable and is ordered to be closed, who gets to decide what happens to the building?

Catholic dioceses in Ohio and Massachusetts are resisting moves by local officials to apply landmark designations to shuttered churches saying such moves raise issues of religious freedom and expression.

Landmark advocates, meanwhile, say they are preserving the historic character of neighborhoods — a concern that isn't always shared by bishops preoccupied with more immediate needs, like shrinking budgets and dwindling numbers of priests.

Last December, the City Council in Springfield, Mass., voted unanimously to designate Our Lady of Hope Catholic Church as a historic district. Built in 1925, the Italian Renaissance-style church boasts the tallest bell tower in Springfield, and state Rep. Sean F. Curran, a parishioner and a supporter of the historic designation, told the *Springfield Republican* that “it is a building worth saving.”

Then in early January, the city's Historical Commission recommended that a second church, Immaculate Conception, also be named a historic district. In response, the Diocese of Springfield filed suit to stop the designation, accusing lawmakers of acting out of “unnecessary haste” and “political expediency.”

Landmarking church buildings over the objection of church leaders is “a serious threat to our ability to control church buildings, including very clear religious symbols — a control which protects our religious freedom and expression,” diocesan spokesman Mark Dupont said in a statement.

The four-county diocese has announced plans to shutter about one-fourth of its 101 churches.

“The population has fallen by one-third in our diocese as the industrial base has declined,” Dupont said in an interview.

“The bishop is determined to right-size the diocese in terms of parishes and not over-extend our priests,”

The legal dispute represents a new wrinkle in traditional church-state disputes. The designation for Our Lady of Hope covers the exterior — including statues and crosses — and the government has no right telling churches what to do with such religious items, Dupont said.

“If we don't defend this right,” he added, “every city and town could tell churches what they can and can't do.”

A similar fight has already erupted in Cleveland, where church leaders plan to close

comment on the idea.

Robert Tayek, a spokesman for the Diocese of Cleveland, said interior landmarking “raises a bigger question” under the First Amendment than the already contentious fight over preserving a church's outward appearance.

The diocese believes there is a precedent in law that “internal facets of a church cannot be controlled by government or legislation.” Such moves are “nothing short of an attempt to exert direct governmental control over the very symbols and elements utilized by the church in its most sacred and defining act of worship: the Mass,” he said.

Once a building is landmarked, changes to the exterior — and sometimes, the interior — must be approved by a local authority. Dupont said the diocese has successfully found reuse for many of its former churches, including as affordable housing and artisan galleries. Some have been sold to other denominations and remained worship spaces. Ironically, Dupont said, landmarking would discourage developers from finding such creative new uses.

Avoiding the confrontational nature of landmarking is part of the mandate of Partners for Sacred Places, a Philadelphia-based organization that gathers denominations, architects and community leaders to explore new uses for churches.

“We are about making the most of these great old buildings and finding a smooth transition to a use that

keeps the public value,” Executive Director Robert Jaeger said. In a Partners project in Detroit, for instance, a former church became a Polish history center.

Everyone agrees that a church closing is an emotional issue, even for those who may not have worshipped there. But church leaders say their eyes remain focused on eternal things, not brick-and-mortar structures.

“There are moments, memories, rites of passage at that location that provoke a lot of emotion,” Tayek said. However, he added, “Our faith goes far beyond buildings. The faithful are part of the household of Jesus Christ.” **BT**



**The Diocese of Springfield, Mass., has filed suit against the City Council after lawmakers voted unanimously to designate Our Lady of Hope Catholic Church as part of a historic district. The diocese is planning to close the church. Religion News Service photo by Mark M. Murray/*The Republican*.**

about 50 churches due to shifting demographics, financial pressures and shortages of priests. In March 2009, the Cleveland City Council moved to landmark not just the exteriors, but also the interiors, of shuttered churches.

“I will not stand for stained-glass windows to be boarded up,” said Councilwoman Dona Brady. “And many churches have built-in icons. These have got to stay there.”

U.S. Rep. Dennis Kucinich (a former mayor of Cleveland and two-time presidential candidate) even suggested the city should use the power of eminent domain to acquire closed churches. City officials declined to

# Quotation

“ remarks ”

“Nothing is gained and much is lost when political or religious discourse descends to a level of insult and invective. ... We have to work at offering thoughtful alternatives, expressed with civility and respect.”

—John M. Buchanan, editor of *Christian Century*

“Jesus knew something about ... those who used the authentic faith of others for personal or political gain. Wolves, Jesus called them, dressed like sheep.”

—Jim Evans, pastor of First Baptist Church of Auburn, Ala., on the annual and inaccurate predictions of Pat Robertson (*ethicsdaily.com*)

“A world frightened by tsunamis, global warming, swine flu and 9/11 needs to know the hope of Christ. It is still the privilege of the church to announce this good news.”

—Randel Everett, executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas (*Baptist Standard*)

“Whatever technology that’s in front of us always challenges us. Our parents thought we listened to the radio too much.”

—Jesse Rice, author of *The Church of Facebook: How the Hyperconnected Are Redefining Community* (RNS)

“I can tell you without equivocation there is no group of people out there more eager and willing to heap scorn on someone they (often mistakenly) see as unfriendly to them than ... Christians.”

—Conservative radio talk show host Neal Boortz (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*)

“Considering the times we live in, people are looking for something to believe in.”

—Film analyst Scott Mantz of *Access Hollywood* on the success of films such as *The Blind Side* which featured a Christian family (*USA Today*)

“I think you’ll find that many of them are really struggling — in their families, in their personal lives, in their health and in their theology.”

—Randy Strash, strategy director for emergency response at World Vision, on the impact on the aid workers in Haiti (RNS)

“You have to tell yourself, let’s keep going.”

—Gary Philoctère, CARE Haiti’s assistant director of programs, during the early days of recovery from the devastating earthquake (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*)

“But there is a sort of ‘judgment’ in the catastrophe in Haiti if by ‘judgment’ one means awakening to what is most vital and precious in life, and striving to reorder one’s life accordingly.”

—Pastor Bob Setzer of the First Baptist Church of Christ in Macon, Ga., writing in his church newsletter about Pat Robertson’s “well-deserved drubbing” for equating the Haiti earthquake with God’s judgment

“This is a serious concern to me and the other commanders in Iraq and Afghanistan.”

—Army Gen. David Petraeus on the now-halted practice of a Michigan defense contractor stamping Bible references on combat rifle sights made for the U.S. military (*Washington Post*)

“We can either say, ‘Oh, gosh, unity is too hard,’ or, ‘This is precisely the time to bear witness that God is a source of reconciliation that can hold us together despite our differences.’”

—Michael Kinnamon, general secretary of the National Council of Churches, on whether Christian unity is possible amid great diversity (RNS)

“I am, at heart, a centrist evangelical... We are to be about healing, not division. We are not to be subservient to ideology, but above it.”

—Former National Association of Evangelicals lobbyist Richard Cizik on his current involvement in the New Evangelical Partnership for the Common Good (*Newsweek*)

“I have one regret about the inauguration. There I stood with 2 million people in my congregation, and I couldn’t figure out a way to take up a collection.”

—Civil rights veteran Joseph Lowery who gave an usual benediction at President Obama’s inauguration last year (RNS)

“Rather than encourage young adults to use computers for exploring human knowledge and resolving human problems, we encourage an estimated seven hours a day of texting and gaming, as if multi-tasking during class and manual dexterity in virtual combat were critical skills.”

—Religion News Service columnist Tom Ehrlich

“Definitely. That’s a given there.”

—Former Ku Klux Klan imperial wizard Johnny Lee Clary when asked if he is the only former Klansman to be ordained to ministry in the predominately black Church of God in Christ denomination (RNS)

# The next 400 years

## Martin Marty takes a stab at the future of Baptists

By Ken Camp  
*Associated Baptist Press*

WACO, Texas — Nobody can predict with certainty what the next 400 years hold for Baptists — or for any religious denomination — church historian Martin Marty told a January gathering at Baylor University.

But Marty, professor emeritus at the University of Chicago Divinity School and longtime *Christian Century* columnist, offered general observations based on history and trends as he spoke on “The Future of a Denomination: Baptists in the Next 400 Years.”

Marty characterized denominations — as distinct from a single state church — as a “four-century-old Anglo-American invention” and noted Baptists were “present at the creation.”

While some observers ask if denominations in their present form are dead or dying, Marty asserted that “structurally, functionally, something would likely fill its role.”

What’s true for denominations in general undoubtedly would prove true for the Baptist movement, he suggested, but he cautioned against making confident predictions. He cited a line from a speech by Abraham Lincoln: “If we could first know where we are, and whither we are tending, we could better judge what to do and how to do it.”

“This means cautious projection and the describing of alternative scenarios for life in the future,” he said. “The latter must relate to the Baptist visions and embrace of Christian faith, hope and love. Praxis follows.”

Marty offered a series of “where-and-whither” questions followed by “what-and-how” application on a variety of subjects:

- **Identity.** Regarding the essence of the distinctive Baptist tradition, Marty confessed, “I have not found the essence of Baptisthood.”

However, he suggested, a clue to the historically central feature of the Baptist movement lies in its name.



Martin Marty

“Believers’ baptism by immersion was the most visible mark of being a Baptist,” he said, pointing to its “branding” nature. But the commitment to following religious convictions and living those convictions out with integrity preceded the mode and method of baptism. Separatists and others “backed into” their understanding of believers’ baptism, he asserted.

“It was so exceptional, unsettled and branding that it became central to the story and provided the name,” he said.

Marty observed less attention today is given to the meaning of believers’ baptism among Baptists — particularly as it relates to daily living and ethics — than in some places and times. He also pointed to a decline in baptisms, even in congregations where attendance has increased.

- **Community and autonomy.** Baptists long ago “took the risk” in terms of emphasizing individual decision-making in matters of religion, Marty noted. However, he added, historic Baptist convictions about soul liberty and soul competency have been balanced by “the integral tie to community in voluntary association.”

The challenge for the future lies in the “pick-and-choose” nature of individualized spirituality that does not find direction from a religious community, he asserted.

- **Church polity.** Observers of church life recognize that regardless of a denomination’s official polity — hierarchical, episcopal, presbyterian, congregational or whatever — “the local wins out,” Marty observed, and “Baptists should be theologically most ready to profit from the trend.”

At the same time, individual Christians, churches and denominations have unprecedented capacity to be involved with other Christians globally through communication technology, he added. Through the Internet, “distance has disappeared,” he noted.

- **Church and state.** In some circles “long-held Baptist views on separation of church and state have appeared to be compromised or obscured — or even abandoned,” Marty said.

“The moral crisis, the security crisis, the pluralism crisis — all have led some to conclude we are so far gone that even Baptists have been willing to call on the state to help us do our work,” he said.

How Baptists (as well as what Marty called “Baptist-like traditions”) respond to church-state issues in the future has fateful consequences for their witness in society, he observed.

- **Peoplehood.** Baptists, like other Christians, tend to congregate and allow their lives to be shaped to a large degree along lines of social class and race, Marty noted. “Some largely white Baptist groups do better than others at reaching beyond historical bounds, but all confess that they have a long way to go,” he said.

The role of women in the church — particularly in the clergy — remains a crucial issue with which Baptists likely will grapple in the future, he noted.

- **Witness and pluralism.** Few Baptists waver in devotion to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, Marty said, but they struggle with how that faith relates to other world religions.

“We can’t settle for a casual universalism that says we’re all in different boats headed toward the same shore,” he observed.

At the same time, some Baptists want to avoid holding to the kind of exclusiveness that would cause non-Christians to write them off as narrow bigots more focused on “denouncing each other than hearing each other,” he said.

- **Sex.** Baptists’ responses to issues such as abortion, contraception and homosexuality do not relate specifically to Baptist history and impulses — except the Baptist tendency to fight — Marty observed.

- **Conflict.** “Baptists, as creative dissenters, were born in conflict and produce conflict,” he said. But Baptists also possess the capacity to provide “a rich and warm home,” he added. “And there are plenty of biblical texts to find direction for that.” **BT**

—Ken Camp is managing editor of the *Baptist Standard* in Texas.



# New 'first-ever consensus' statement on religious expression is affirmed

By Bob Allen and Robert Marus  
*Associated Baptist Press*

WASHINGTON — A diverse group of leaders who often find themselves on opposite sides of the contentious battles at the intersection of church and state joined forces Jan. 12 to unveil an unprecedented consensus statement aimed at advancing public understanding of — and preventing needless controversy over — the legal issues around religious expression in the public square.

“In a free society, there will always be conflicts of principle and of interest,” said E.J. Dionne, a *Washington Post* columnist and Brookings Institution fellow who moderated a panel discussion featuring some of the document’s drafters. “But there are useful conflicts and useless conflicts.... Today’s document sets its face against useless arguments.”

Led by Wake Forest University Divinity School’s Center for Religion and Public Affairs, the document does not advocate a particular direction for future legislation and case law in regard to religious expression. Instead, it outlines what experts in church-state relations agree that the law currently says in an effort to stave off needlessly divisive debates and lawsuits.

The project evolved from a 2005 meeting in which experts, discussing several earlier joint statements that helped advance public understanding of rules governing religion in public schools, suggested a similar consensus document on what the law says about religious expression in the wider public square. Areas addressed include religion and politics; religious gatherings on government property; holiday or seasonal religious displays on government and private property; government-paid chaplains; and religion in the workplace.

“While this diverse group often disagrees about how the law should address legal issues, the drafters agree in many cases on what the law is today,” said Melissa Rogers, director of the Wake Forest center and a former general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty.

Fellow document drafter Colby May, senior counsel for the conservative American



Signers of the document include (L to R): Shabbir Mansuri of the Institute on Religion and Civic Values; Isabelle Kinnard Richman of the First Freedom Center; Charles Haynes of the Freedom Forum; E.J. Dionne of the *Washington Post* and the Brookings Institution; Holly Hollman and Brent Walker of the BJC; Melissa Rogers of Wake Forest; Marc Stern of the American Jewish Congress; and Rich Foltin of the American Jewish Committee. (Photo by Cherylyn Crowe/BJC)

Center for Law and Justice, agreed. “What really brought us together is our shared conviction that religious liberty and the freedom of conscience are in fact fundamental — they are inalienable rights for all people,” he said.

The statement’s signers represent a wide swath of American religious life. Baptists supporting the project include Richard Land of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission as well as Brent Walker and Holly Hollman of the Baptist Joint Committee — two organizations that often find themselves on opposing sides of church-state debates.

Groups represented by other document drafters include the American Civil Liberties Union, the American Jewish Committee, the Islamic Networks Group, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and the Sikh Council on Religion and Education.

“If experts like this can agree on what the law is, I think it commands our attention,” Rogers said.

Rogers and other drafters of the document said the legal rights and responsibilities regarding religious expression in public life are often poorly understood, and the statement is an attempt to remedy that problem.

“I do hope this document will help us to have a more productive discussion,” she said.

The signers said they hope that their attempt to describe current law as accurately as possible will play a positive role in future debate. “That certainly will not end our debates, but it will help make them more

productive,” the document says.

Charles Haynes, one of the driving forces behind the document’s creation as well as its predecessor statements on religion and schools, is senior scholar at the Freedom Forum’s First Amendment Center in Washington. He said he hopes the document will be used by public officials, employers and private groups the same way that the earlier statements on religion in public schools have been used by school boards, administrators and teachers.

“The consensus on what the law requires on key issues involving religion in public schools ... has helped transform how many public schools apply the First Amendment,” he said. “Common ground reached on a national level frequently allows local communities to adopt policies and practices that enjoy broad public support.”

He noted that many policies on religion produced by state boards of education and school districts in the past decade quote verbatim from the earlier consensus statements — and that they have repeatedly helped defuse situations that otherwise would have exploded into litigation.

“Based on the track record of these past agreements, I am convinced that this new joint statement, covering a wide range of issues, can and will play a significant role in preventing litigation and promoting civil public discourse,” Haynes said.

Rogers said the next phase of the project is disseminating the document to public officials and others who could use it. **BT**

# Scaling back

## IMB deals with fewer dollars, missionary unrest

By Tony W. Cartledge  
*Contributing editor*

RICHMOND, Va. — Declining income has forced leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention's International Mission Board (IMB) to scale back the number of missionaries on the field, virtually suspending two popular short-term programs.

That, along with ongoing conversations that encourage career missionaries to consider moving from established fields to unreached people groups, has sparked unrest among some missionaries.

Following a record Lottie Moon offering of \$150.4 million in 2007, the IMB set an ambitious \$170 million goal for 2008. The offering, however, fell to \$141.3 million in 2008, more than \$9 million less than the previous year and \$29 million below the goal. Projections for the 2009 offering, which had a \$175 million goal, are not yet available.

With fewer dollars available, the number of missionaries on the field is expected to drop by hundreds. The missionary count in June 2009 was 5,656. That number was down to 5,512 by November, and is expected to fall to 5,000 sometime in 2011, according to IMB spokesperson Wendy Norvelle.

The reductions will come through normal attrition and the conclusion of short-term appointments. No career missionaries are being recalled, Norvelle said. The decline will come as many of the 1,200 short-term missionaries currently serving

reach the end of their terms, along with retirements among career missionaries and fewer new missionaries being sent.

The Masters program, through which persons above age 50 could be appointed for two- or three-year projects, has been largely suspended, Norvelle said, except for some who are partially self-funded or whose assignments have particular strategic significance. Previously, people appointed through the Masters program could often have their contracts renewed for an additional year at the time.

Some who have served under the Masters program for a number of years complained of being "recalled" when their contracts were not renewed this year, and of receiving insufficient funding to ship their belongings home. Norvelle said the IMB provides furnished housing for short-term missionaries, and a standard amount for shipping personal effects back home.

If missionaries choose to buy additional furnishings or goods that run the shipping cost higher than the allotment, she said, they are responsible for the difference.

The IMB has also suspended new appointments through the International Service Corps, except for a limited number of students in Southern Baptist seminaries who are enrolled in "2+2" or "2+3" programs that combine two years of classroom studies with two or three years of missionary experience. The number of two-year Journeymen (singles or childless couples under 26 years of age) will also be reduced, Norvelle said.



Jerry Rankin

Some career missionaries have complained of a new strategy in which they are being pressured to abandon fruitful areas of work in order to target unreached "people groups," a concept that denotes a population sufficiently isolated by language, culture or geography so that the gospel would not naturally spread to them. Reaching new people groups has been part of the IMB's vocabulary and goals since the 1980s, though there has been more emphasis on evangelizing new people groups in recent years.

Norvelle said IMB leaders typically engage in ongoing conversations with missionaries as their terms expire, and challenge them to prayerfully consider if their current location or focus is the most strategic place they could serve in advancing the gospel. Missionaries are not required to relocate against their will, she said, though there is no guarantee that mission strategists will continue funding all positions and programs currently in place.

IMB president Jerry Rankin addressed critics, including some missionaries, in his remarks during the Jan. 18-19 meeting of the IMB's governing board in Rockville, Va. Rankin, who announced last September that he will retire on July 31, 2010, had noted then that changes were afoot: "For the second time in my tenure we are implementing a radical paradigm shift in organization and strategy," he said.

Rankin sought to dispel what he described as "prominent myths" that "create misinformation and distort perceptions" about IMB strategy and work, according to an IMB press release.

Arguing against the notion that "evangelism and missions are one and the same," Rankin said church members cannot just

With fewer dollars available, the number of missionaries on the field is expected to drop by hundreds.

The missionary count in June 2009 was 5,656. That number was down to 5,512 by November, and is expected to fall to 5,000 sometime in 2011.

assign the mission task to an “elite few” professionals, and that those professionals cannot be concentrated exclusively in the most responsive areas.

The IMB “could probably double the number of reported baptisms each year by concentrating our missionary force in a handful of open and responsive countries,” he said, “but that would hardly be fulfilling God’s mission, as it would result in multitudes never hearing the Gospel.”

Responding to critics of the IMB’s emphasis on “Church Planting Movements” that work mainly through the cultivation of lay-led house churches, Rankin denied that the focus is just another mission program or strategy, calling such charges “a blatant misrepresentation of the work of God.”

Some missionaries prefer a strategy of slower growth in which indigenous believers are mentored and trained before being put in positions of church leadership. Rankin called the advocating of slower growth “appalling,” saying “It is a matter of pride to assume that an almighty, sovereign God is dependent on the human instrumentality of educated, mature Western missionaries to teach and train and lead before [local believers are] qualified and capable of sharing their faith with another.”

Rankin has often cited his burden for the IMB to reach all peoples, frequently in the context of citing Jesus’ statement in

Matthew 24:14 that “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to the nations, and then the end will come” (NIV).

Some critics charge that the Greek word *ethnē*, normally translated as “nations,” has been wrongly interpreted to mean “people groups,” and say Rankin’s missiology is driven by his eschatology and a desire to hasten the return of Christ.

Rankin insisted that such a strategy “has never been voiced or intimated by me or anyone responsible for strategic leadership” at the IMB. “Yet it continues to be voiced by critics of our passionate devotion to what our Lord has mandated us to do.”

The time of Christ’s return “is in the Father’s hands,” said, Rankin, also telling the board: “My frequent use of Matthew 24:14 is simply to glorify God that this prophecy is being fulfilled as the Gospel is being proclaimed among all peoples and nations.”

Critics who disagree with the IMB’s movement from established educational or social ministries to more direct evangelism, and who fear that its partnership with mega-churches reflects a lack of interest in smaller churches also came under fire, as Rankin accused them of perpetrating a “myth” that “advocating a certain priority or objective nullifies or excludes others.”

“Such reasoning is illogical and so far

from the truth as to be ludicrous,” he said, “were it not representing the perception of so many, even among some of the ranks of our missionaries.” The popular complaint does not reflect misunderstanding, but “an intentional way of holding on to a narrow, personally convenient position,” Rankin charged.

Tempering his remarks, Rankin concluded that IMB leaders “must do a better job of communication” and “be sympathetic and patient with those who resist change” while not being deterred “from moving forward in the task our Lord has committed to us.”

The desire to improve communication with supporters is reflected in a new public relations initiative. The organization has not changed its name, but the IMB logo has become “imb connecting.” The new insignia, already reflected on the website ([www.imb.net](http://www.imb.net)), will appear on all new printed materials beginning in February, according to Norvelle.

“We exist to serve the church,” she said. The logo change is part of “being more intentional about saying to churches that we’re here to serve you as you fulfill the great commission.”

Rankin has served for 17 years at the helm of the Southern Baptist overseas mission program which he entered in 1970 as an appointed missionary to Indonesia. **BT**

## Texas congregation gives entire offering to Haiti relief

By John Hall

AMARILLO, Texas (ABP) — One Baptist congregation is putting ministry to the hurting in another part of the world ahead of its own financial woes. Paramount Baptist Church in Amarillo, Texas, gave \$63,100 to Texas Baptist Men for disaster-relief work following the Jan. 12 earthquake in Haiti.

The congregation sent its full weekend offering to Texas Baptist Men despite running \$140,000 behind its annual budget.

Pastor Gil Lain said the congregation has been going through a sermon series about living passionately. “Part of living

passionately is doing something drastic,” he explained.

So, the congregation decided to take drastic action to make a difference in the lives of Haitians.

About half of the congregation is trained to serve with Texas Baptist Men disaster relief. They gave to the men’s organization because they knew the money would help people who are hurting, Lain said.

TBM is seeking to send 5,000 water filters to Haiti. Each filter will provide clean water for a family of four.

“Even though times are tough, people still have giving hearts,” Lain said. “They

want to take care of people. I think that’s a picture of Christianity.”

TBM Executive Director Leo Smith said Paramount Baptist Church’s generosity was an answer to prayer. TBM needed \$63,000 to pay for the 5,000 filters before the congregation’s gift.

“God met the financial need for water filters for Haiti through the faith and obedience of Paramount Baptist Church in Amarillo that gave TBM their entire Saturday evening and Sunday morning offering, amounting to \$63,000,” Smith said. **BT**

—John Hall is the news director for the Baptist General Convention of Texas.



2010

# The Resource Page

... creative and practical ideas

Brought to you this month  
by Kathy Pickett



## Christian education: Engaging different learning styles

For me, sitting through a 45-minute lecture without an opportunity to respond in a learning environment is torture. Even worse is the expectation that I will sit still and pay attention without taking notes or doodling. I know for some learners a lecture meets their preferred learning style. However, in today's over-stimulated world even those who are verbal learners may become uninterested without additional learning tools and methods available.

Christian educators are tasked with encouraging and nurturing learners toward a greater understanding, knowledge and experience of God. Therefore, we must plan and implement a variety of ways to engage a diversity of learning styles.

There are many ways to approach this task, and Barbara Bruce, writing in several books, including *Start Here: Teaching and Learning with Adults* (Discipleship Resources, 2000), focuses on Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences to help Christian educators develop teaching and learning techniques with a broad level of appeal. They are, briefly:

**Verbal/linguistic learners** enjoy words in prose and poetic forms, stories, word games and puzzles, and definitions.

**Logical/mathematical learners** like lessons to be orderly and practical with facts, information, details, and logical relationship between ideas. They appreciate timelines, forced-choice activities, problem-solving games and case studies.

**Visual/spatial learners** can do what they can see. Patterns, shapes and colors are part of their thinking. They like to draw, use graphics, videos, pictures, maps and other visualizing activities such as guided imagery.

**Musical learners** employ sounds, rhythms, tones and melodies to help recall other informa-

tion and to convey meaning. They appreciate background music during a lesson, use lyrics to explain or illustrate a biblical text, memorize a passage or other information using a familiar song tune, and relate to experiences of God evoked through music.

**Bodily/kinesthetic learners** like to manipulate objects and to move around, even if it is just to stretch. They are not always good sitters, preferring activities such as role playing, dancing, relays and sculpting.

**Interpersonal learners** appreciate the social aspect of learning. They may be more aware of the personal and social dimensions of a Bible story or theological construct or dilemma. It's not just a puzzle or a problem to be solved, but something that has an effect on a real person.

**Intrapersonal learners** appreciate having solitary time to process what they take in. They prefer "reading the directions" without a lot of group interference or process or instruction. Self-knowledge is a key tool to making decisions.

### Resources

- Bruce, Barbara. *Our Spiritual Brain: Integrating Brain Research and Faith Development*. Abingdon Press, 2002.
- Hynson, et al. *The Ministry of Christian Education and Formation: A Practical Guide for Your Congregation*. Discipleship Resources: 2003.
- [www.businessballs.com/freepdfmaterials/free\\_multiple\\_intelligences\\_test\\_young\\_people.pdf](http://www.businessballs.com/freepdfmaterials/free_multiple_intelligences_test_young_people.pdf)
- [www.gbod.org/education/wetntk\\_teaching.html#ways](http://www.gbod.org/education/wetntk_teaching.html#ways)
- [www.helwys.com/learningmatters/lm\\_pages/adult\\_archives/adltarchv\\_saywhat.html](http://www.helwys.com/learningmatters/lm_pages/adult_archives/adltarchv_saywhat.html)
- [www.nationalministries.org/discipleship/docs/DCE\\_Teaching\\_Does\\_Not\\_Equal\\_Talking.pdf](http://www.nationalministries.org/discipleship/docs/DCE_Teaching_Does_Not_Equal_Talking.pdf)
- [www.thefellowship.info/Resources/Church-Resources/](http://www.thefellowship.info/Resources/Church-Resources/)
- [www.upperroom.org/bookstore/](http://www.upperroom.org/bookstore/)

### How to engage learning styles

- Recognize yourself as a nurturer of learning rather than the authority.
- Seek to understand the personal learning styles represented in your group as well as your own.
- Practice a partnership style of teaching and learning, knowing you will learn something from the experience as well.
- Take time to step outside and experience God's learning environment. (What sights and colors do you see? What smells do you sense? What songs do you hear?) In your teaching plans include opportunities to understand, know and experience God in these ways.
- Have the group take a learning-style profile assessment and discuss together how best to meet the group's diverse needs.
- Together with your group create goals and rules for group learning-style success.
- Provide markers, pens and paper for note-taking.
- Hang visually interesting and relevant maps, posters and pictures in the room.
- Plan response time in your learning session; 20 minutes without group interaction is too long.
- Divide large groups into small discussion groups.
- Vary teaching methods; make use of technology, movies, PowerPoint, the Internet, etc.
- Offer opportunities for self-expression through the arts, poetry, drama, dance and music.
- Use the "think and do" method of learning; plan a missional activity relevant to your lesson and do what you have learned.
- Create a centering space using candles, relevant objects and fabric.
- Ask individuals in the group to plan and lead experiential activities.

Engaging learners through their personal learning styles may seem overwhelming and chaotic at first. You may experience a few people doodling; others might stand at the back of the room while another sits quietly taking it all in. What you will also experience is a learning environment filled with renewed energy and learners better engaged in the process of understanding, knowing and experiencing God. **BT**

**THE RESOURCE PAGE** is provided by the Congregational Life office of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in partnership with *Baptists Today* and for those dedicated lay leaders working in the educational ministries of local churches. This month's page was written by Kathy Pickett, pastor of congregational life at Holmeswood Baptist Church in Kansas City, Mo. Resource Page Archives are available at <http://www.thefellowship.info/Resources/Church-Resources/Baptists-Today-resource-page>.

# 2010 Bible Studies

These lessons follow the adult Formations studies from Smyth & Helwys Publishing ([www.helwys.com](http://www.helwys.com))

March 28, 2010

## A Song of Despair

Psalms 22:1-10, 14-15, 19-21;  
Mark 15:33-39

Elton John is correct: Sad songs say so much.

A friend of mine recently confided that she prefers music composed in a minor key. I assume this is because it speaks to and connects with the thread of melancholy that is woven into her life. I feel the same way. Happy songs are a dime a dozen. Their lilt and lyric may or may not move my emotions on any particular day. But a sad song ... a well-written sad song in a minor key ... has the ability to touch the deepest recesses of my life. It addresses grief and sadness and fear. A sad song can say much.

Sad songs are windows to the soul.

It doesn't matter if it's Chopin's haunting "Prelude in E Minor," Alanis Morissette's angry "You Oughta Know," "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry" by Hank Williams or the ever memorable Robbie Hart (played by Adam Sandler in *The Wedding Singer*) singing "Somebody Kill Me" (after being dumped by his girlfriend), sad songs are a window to the depths of the soul.

Of all the Psalms that rest in the middle of our Bibles, one of the easiest for me to hear in a minor key is Psalm 22. The psalmist has moved beyond melancholy; this is despair. The feelings that have bounced like echoes in the cavern of his soul have been captured and placed on papyrus. The Psalm is a window to the forsakenness, loneliness, self-deprivation and pain he has held within. How long has he felt this way? I do not know. But the feelings finally come forth — are made visible — in the safe context of a sad song ... a window to the soul.

Years ago, rock icon Alice Cooper recorded an album titled *Alice Cooper Goes to Hell*. Music critics loved the rock opera. Religious critics disdained the confessional —

somewhat autobiographical — tunes. I often wondered what prompted such intense disclosure from the rock star. Years later, when Alice Cooper experienced his own spiritual awakening, it became obvious he had previously spilled forth the angst of his life in the safety of a song. Sad songs — even when uncomfortable to the listener — are windows to the soul.

Sad songs are also windows to the world.

Tucked between the personal melancholic measures of Psalm 22 is the psalmist's particular perspective on the world. The suffering psalmist seems to think everyone else is doing just fine. Ancestors were always delivered. Others who cry out are always heard and saved. Everyone else is "held" by God. But the psalmist is void of salvation and just barely clings to hope.

The feelings conveyed in a sad song are not always an accurate depiction of others, but they are an accurate reflection of our perspective with regard to others — however skewed it may be. Coveting has often been described as "one person comparing their insides to another person's outsides." While it may appear that others carry no pain and despair, that which is hidden from our eyes is certainly seen by God. Our pain often prompts us to hold a skewed view of others, a view that drives us further into our own despair.

Christ gives us permission to sing sad songs.

At the lowest moment of Jesus' life, Psalm 22 found its way to Jesus' lips. By simply humming the first verse of this tune, Jesus identified with all humanity. He gave us permission to feel — and express — what we feel with no fear of guilt or shame.

A private part of my heart rejoices in the fact that Jesus chose to voice this song at his death. Legend and myth have perpetuated too many martyrs going to their death with victorious songs and speeches pouring forth in the final moments of life. I'm not always able to muster that level of moxie. There are days when I feel forsaken, lonely, beat down and

LESSONS FOR:  
Sunday, March  
28-April 25, 2010

Written by Jim Dant,  
pastor of Highland Hills  
Baptist Church, Macon, Ga.



fed up. Being forced to sing a happy song — or having my faith questioned because I choose to sing a sad song — would only make me feel worse. But being allowed to sing a sad song provides me the opportunity to speak honestly with God and encourage the repressed population of my peers to do the same. It is a vivid reminder that those who only sing happy songs are giving attention to neither the breadth of biblical psalms nor the breadth of their own human experience.

Jesus doesn't mind me singing in a minor key. Because Jesus knows sad songs say so much.

*Discuss: What sad songs particularly move you? How do you feel when you hear them? What memories or moments do they invoke? How often does your worship include time for the expression of lament and sadness? How does it (or might it) offer this space?*

April 4, 2010

## A Song of Life

Psalms 118:1-2, 14-24; 1 Peter 2:4-7

I've heard it said that we live life forward and understand life backward. Or, expressed another way, hindsight is 20/20. Many (maybe even most) of life's circumstances can only be given relevance and meaning after the passing of time.

Psalm 118 is a song of victory. While no specific enemy and no specific battle is mentioned, verses 14-16 make it clear that Israel was in a post-war moment ... and they were winners. In verses 19-20, gates are opened before them — a typical symbol of conquering. The Israelites were finally a people who had access. They were a people to be respected. They were a people who could legitimately take their seat among the power structures of their world. This was a major turning point in Israel's self-awareness.

I call this a turning point, because it had not always been this way for the people of



Cooperative Baptist Fellowship provides these Bible study resources to church leaders through this supplement to *Baptists Today*. For more information on how CBF is "serving Christians and churches as they discover their God-given mission," visit [www.thefellowship.info](http://www.thefellowship.info) or call 1-800-352-8741.

Israel. In the Book of Genesis, they are just a family — one family among all the families of the world. And by the end of Genesis, they are a needy family. Jacob (Israel) and his kids and grandkids have moved to Egypt because of a famine.

As the Book of Exodus begins (four centuries later), the size of the family has grown, but by then they are slaves. From the end of Exodus to the end of Deuteronomy, they are homeless, wandering nomads. The ensuing books of their history are hardly flattering either.

In Joshua, they are less than thorough in their conquering of Canaan. In Judges, they exist as a loose confederation of tribes governed by a host of less-than-admirable judges. In the Books of Samuel and Kings, a monarchy is established, they fall into civil strife, are eventually overrun by Assyrians and then Babylonians. As their history continues, the Persians, Greeks and Romans eventually conquer them. These chosen people had a tough time validating their chosen-ness in the world! They just didn't seem to "belong."

But somewhere along the way, there was a victory. The psalmist penned these words about the turning point that had been accomplished that day: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone." At the time, Israel probably didn't know that this particular victory would change their sense of self-awareness and purpose, but the psalmist — years later, when hindsight was 20/20 — wrote this song about Israel's turning point. We live life forward, but we understand life backward.

The life, death and resurrection of Jesus were turning points for our world. Not everyone saw it at the time. His neighbors in Nazareth missed the significance of his life. After all, they quipped, "Isn't he just Joseph and Mary's kid?" His disciples could barely muster the faith of a mustard seed in his presence. The multitudes were, at best, fickle in their following. And no one — even after being told it would happen — expected him to be crucified!

Those who knew him best seemed to agree on one thing: Jesus didn't "fit" in the rubric of this world. He didn't "belong." And yet, follow his story after the great victory of resurrection and it's easy to see how Jesus fit into the plan of God for the salvation of the world. Peter — years after the crucifixion, when hindsight was 20/20 — would use the words of Psalm 118:22 to describe Jesus ...

a cornerstone, rejected by mortals but precious in God's sight.

We all have turning points in our lives. It's those moments when our uniqueness suddenly makes sense. We may have been teased, misunderstood and ignored for a lifetime based upon some distinct characteristic of our selves. But then one day there is a victory. Our distinctiveness makes sense in the big picture of life.

My children were fans of *Sesame Street* when they were younger. As a result, I saw my fair share of episodes. One of my favorite sketches was titled, "The King Has a Problem." In this sketch, the king has dropped his crown and it has rolled under a sofa. He calls the most talented persons in his kingdom to retrieve it. The fastest person couldn't help. The strongest person couldn't help. The wisest person couldn't help. His finest musicians couldn't help. In the end, a very short little girl who served as his maid was the only person small enough to crawl under the sofa and retrieve the king's crown. Having been teased or ignored her whole life, on this particular day the uniqueness of her life made sense.

Today's text ends with the exclamation, "This is the day that the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." We've generically used this phrase to refer to every day of life. We've turned it into a song to be sung on any day. But for Israel, it was a phrase that celebrated a particular day — a day when their uniqueness was validated in the world. When those days come for us — when life and the circumstances of life come together in a way that makes sense — we can proclaim with the psalmist, "This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." Life is good.

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April 11, 2010

## A Song of Praise

Psalm 150; Jude 24-25

I have two images floating in my mind: the little drummer boy and Neil Peart's drum kit. Most of you are probably familiar with the little drummer boy. While not in the biblical text, he shows up every Christmas to play a song for the little Lord Jesus ... who was asleep on the hay ... until the little drummer boy showed up. Within the context of that popular percussive Christmas carol, everyone is bringing beautiful gifts to the baby Jesus. The little drummer boy, however, has no gift

to bring. He decides, therefore, to tap out a simple "pa rum pum pum pum" rhythm on his single snare for the newborn. The mother Mary gives an affirming nod, all the animals keep time, and the baby Jesus responds with a smile. It's a simple moment of praise.

In contrast, there is Neil Peart's ever-evolving drum kit. I was not at the Nativity, but I did attend Rush's 30th Anniversary Tour in August of 2004. Neil Peart was poised behind one of the largest drum kits ever assembled on a concert stage. The kit included: 1 kick drum, 8 tom toms, 3 snares, 11 cymbals, and 5 electronic drum pads with multiple possibilities built into each. There were a host of smaller percussive instruments attached to the kit, and everything was enhanced by a spectacular light display, etc. This was not a "simple" gift for the ticket holder. It was the height of drum-ness. Both images are valid expressions of praise. And both are present in Psalm 150.

Praise can be simple.

Psalm 150 is a simple psalm. In length, it is comparatively short. The average psalm is about 16 verses long, with the longest (Psalm 119) weighing in at 176 verses! Psalm 150 is also simple in its structure. Rather than employing the acrostic nature of some psalms (each line intentionally beginning with a particular letter) or employing complex triplicate rhythms, Psalm 150 has two simple stanzas with the typical couplets used in Hebrew poetry. The point is simply this: The psalm is simple. At face value, it is the "pa rum pum pum pum" of the Book of Psalms. But sometimes the best praise is simple praise.

Several years ago, the church I was serving as pastor presented its annual Christmas music extravaganza. Each year it seemed to get bigger and bigger — more voices, more instruments, more bathrobe-clad teenagers. The presentation was building to its predictable post-crescendo climax, when everything slipped into a quiet calm. A small child stepped to center stage and quietly sang — with no instrumental accompaniment — "What can I give him poor as I am? If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb. If I were a wise man, I would do my part. But what can I give him? I'll give him my heart." Pa rum pum pum pum. Praise can be simple.

Praise can be robust.

While compact in its length and limited in its verbiage and structure, Psalm 150 is packed with praise.





The psalmist purposefully uses the word praise (*hallelu* in Hebrew) over and over again. It is a command that exists in every verse of this psalm. The writer is packing the psalm with praise until it bursts. And with this packing come two very natural crescendos ... we feel the pregnant compression!

In verses 1 and 2, there is the crescendo from earth to heaven. Praise starts in God's sanctuary (probably a reference to the temple) and broadens into the firmament — the very realm of heaven. The praise begins with a focus on the definable "deeds" of God, but it cannot be limited to these finite experiences. It broadens into the "surpassing greatness" of God. The praise is robust; it cannot be restrained.

This same lack of restraint is seen in creation's specific expressions displayed in verses 3-6. An ever-increasing mass of instrument and movement and voice is called upon to swell into symphonic praise of God. And while we've attributed the names of modern instruments to the unidentifiable Hebrew instruments mentioned in this text, it's obvious — this is one big drum kit!

As a high school student, I attended a band camp at Northeast Louisiana University. Also attending the camp were dozens of other young musicians from the tri-state area: Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi. The schedule allowed time for sectional rehearsals — woodwinds, brass, percussion. Full rehearsals provided opportunity for participants to practice corporately under the disciplined direction of a trained conductor. But the highlight of the week (at least for me), were the informal jam sessions on the lawn at night. Five or six budding musicians would gather. In a few moments, a few more would join. The number would quickly burgeon from 10 to 20 to 50. It was a chaotic cacophony of poorly tuned instruments blowing our best renditions of Casey Kasem's latest top 40 hits. To the passerby it probably sounded ridiculous, but it was all for the love of music.

John's vision of heaven, as recorded in Revelation 5, is a bit more polished. Beginning with 24 elders, the crowd around the throne builds to "myriads of myriads" of voices around the throne. It is Psalm 150 beautifully imaged — robust praise!

*Discuss: In what ways do you exhibit both simple and robust praise to God in your life? How does the worship of your church offer opportunity for both simple and robust praise?*

April 18, 2010

## A Song of Joy

Psalm 30; John 16:20-22

I'm not sure what prompted Hy Zaret to write the classic lyrics of "Unchained Melody," but this song — written in 1955 and recorded by the Righteous Brothers in 1965 — has become one of the most recorded and performed songs in history. For Zaret, it was probably a proclamation of deep love for the one he loved. Scores of courting couples have since claimed it as their own — "that's our song." My parents-in-law recently celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. The guitarist paused and allowed the crowd to make their musical requests. My father-in-law raised his hand and asked, "Can you play 'Unchained Melody'? That's our song." He did.

For my wife and me, it was Lionel Richie's 1981 hit "Endless Love" — the title song of a movie by the same name. I'm not sure who Lionel Richie had in mind when he wrote it, but every time I hear him sing it, I'm reminded of my wife. It's our song.

The generations to come will glean their songs from the current array of hits. Whether it's "Smile" by Uncle Kracker or "Falling for You" by Colbie Callait or "My Boo" performed by Usher and Alicia Keys, couples will have "their songs." And regardless of the particular personal prompts that served as a muse for the composer, listeners will take the song, apply it to their loves and longings and make it theirs.

Originally, Psalm 30 was a very personal song of joy. It was written, by the psalmist, after a grave illness — a near fatal illness. The writer describes his soul as being "drawn up," "brought up from Sheol," "restored to life" and rescued from "the Pit."

At some point, however, the fever broke, strength was regained and the life he thought was ebbing away was restored. Where there is great fear, there is also great prospect for relief. When our hopes are realized amid deep darkness, there follows great joy. This transformation from the worst to the best is shared in multiple lines throughout the psalm: "I cried to you for help and you healed me" (v. 2), "Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning" (v. 5b), "You have turned my mourning into dancing" (v. 11a), "You have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy" (v. 11b).

A very vivid and personal recovery from pain prompted the psalmist to burst forth and express his joy in song. But, as is the case with all good music, it finds its way into the ears and hearts of alert listeners. It becomes applied to the circumstances of their lives. It becomes "their song."

Psalm 30 became a psalm of the people of Israel. Over time, this very personal psalm was adopted and adapted by the Israelites for their corporate worship. Rather than simply being a song to convey joy over the recovery of one person's illness, it became a song that celebrated Israel's recovery from national calamity and pain.

We rarely pay close attention to the superscriptions that begin many of the Psalms. The superscription of Psalm 30 says, "A song for the dedication of the temple." This has been changed in some modern translations in order to better reflect the content of the psalm. The later superscription reads, "Thanksgiving for recovery from grave illness." The earlier "temple" superscription, however, is the one found in the Hebrew text and better reflects the purpose of this psalm's inclusion in Israel's collection of worship prayers.

No one knows for sure how old this psalm might be. But because of its superscription, Israel may have sung this song as early as the days of Ezra when the temple was rebuilt after the Babylonian Exile. The joyful song of a recovered soul may have become the worship song of a recovering community. More likely, this superscription refers to the later rededication of the temple in 164 BC. After a successful Jewish revolt against the Romans — led by Judah Maccabee — the temple was rededicated. This event is celebrated today on the Feast of Hanukkah, and the reading of Psalm 30 is a traditional part of that celebration.

Psalm 30 was originally written as one person's joyful celebration of life restored, but Israel made it "their song." It expressed the corporate joy they experienced in their deliverance from Babylonian Exile and later from Roman rule.

Each hymn in our hymnal has a story. Some personal event, thought or feeling prompted the lyricist to pen the words we sing today. Many of us, however, have made these songs our own. We connect them to meaningful moments and events in our lives and faith experiences.

*Discuss: What hymns or spiritual songs have you made your own? What do you think prompted the composition of the song? How have you related it to your life?*

April 25, 2010

## A Song of Trust

Psalms 23; Hebrews 13:20-21

My family has been riddled with addictions. My parents and siblings have struggled with substance abuse. It's even touched my immediate family in recent years. Fortunately, those I love most have chosen the path of recovery. They've chosen life rather than death.

The struggles of my family have driven me into the rooms of Al-Anon. This program — closely related to Alcoholics Anonymous — provides hope and help for the family members of alcoholics. Regular meetings, based upon the 12-Step philosophy, help families find serenity while their loved ones are struggling for sobriety — or not. In fact, we welcome one another by affirming "... it is possible for us to find contentment, even happiness, whether the alcoholic is drinking or not." However, it is a common observation among the attendees of Al-Anon: It's a lot easier to be serene when the alcoholic is not drinking!

It's a lot easier to be "spiritual" when life is moving smoothly. In my personal faith pilgrimage I've found that when life is good, faith is easy. When life is hard, faith has to be exercised. Or, as is subtly expressed in Psalm 23, when life is easy we talk *about* God. When life is hard, we tend to talk *to* God.

Talking about God is the most comfortable form of faith speech. Anyone can do it. I hear God talked about in coffee shops, on television programs, in lecture halls, at the beauty shop, in the grocery store aisle, on the subway, and yes, even at church.

For the psalmist, talking about God seemed easy. He identified God as a shepherd and then delineated all the good shepherding qualities God displays. God is a shepherd. He provides a place to rest. He provides food and

water. He provides guidance and direction for life. The psalmist is comfortable talking about God and those attributes of God that resemble a shepherd.

Since we assume the writer of this psalm is young David the shepherd, it makes perfect sense. He sees in God those attributes that establish a basis of trust in the life of any good shepherd. The attributes seen in God provide a foundation for trusting God. And since these attributes aid David's trust of God, then it stands to reason they should be shared with others so that their trust in God might be nurtured. Alas, David talks *about* God.

But as I've said, we all tend to talk about God. It's the most comfortable form of faith language. We find those attributes in God that comfortably correlate with our experience of life and we savor them. They enhance our trust in God — at least, during the good days. On the worst days, however, talking about God may not be adequate. Our cherished attributes of God may be questioned when life takes a terrible turn. On those days, it's imperative that we talk to God.

Talking to God is the more intimate form of faith speech.

It doesn't take a rocket scientist (or a high school English teacher) to note the shift in pronouns that occurs between verses 3 and 4. We often miss it, however, because the Psalm is so familiar. We barely listen to subtle nuances that move us from comfortable distance to much needed intimacy. In the first three verses of this familiar psalm, God is being talked about in third person. This is indicated by the psalmist's usage of the third-person singular pronoun "he." *He* makes me lie down ... *He* leads me beside ... *He* restores ...." But in verse 4, the psalmist is no longer speaking about God; he's speaking to God. This is indicated by his usage of the second-person personal pronoun "you." *You* are with me ... *You* prepare a table ... *You* anoint ...."

When enemies abound and death surrounds the psalmist, the comfortably affirmed attributes of God fall short. He shifts from talking about God to talking to God. He shifts from knowing about God to knowing God. Mental assertions give way to relational connections. While attributes may provide a foundation for trust, true trust is forged in relationship.

I trust my best friend. Even prior to meeting her, I was well aware of her impeccable reputation. Common acquaintances often made affirming comments with regard to her integrity, honesty, kindness, morality and other virtuous qualities. I had observed her from a distance. Having served on councils together and shared time in learning environments together, I observed all these attributes to be true. Prior to meeting her, I would have described her as a trustworthy individual. But my personal trust in her is not founded upon the assertions of common acquaintances or upon these objectively observed attributes. My trust in her, as a friend, is founded upon hours of conversation. It has been forged in the fire of shared ideas, shared pains, shared joys, shared frustrations — hours and hours of shared conversation that have been held in sacred trust. I trust her because I know her. I do not trust her because I know *about* her.

Talking *about* God is a noble and worthy practice. It's how we shape and share our faith. But talking *to* God is the more intimate form of faith speech. It's these conversations in which our faith is forged.

Psalm 23 is a song that speaks *about* God and *to* God.

*Discuss: What songs are sung at your church that speak about God and that speak to God? Which do you prefer and why? How are each a crucial part of faith development? Do you tend to speak to God or about God more? Why? BT*



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University Baptist Church of Chapel Hill, N.C., is seeking a full-time **minister of music**. A full job description is available at [www.ubc-ch.org/position.pdf](http://www.ubc-ch.org/position.pdf).

First Baptist Church of Reidsville, N.C., a church of about 250 in regular Sunday attendance, is in need of a **minister of music**. First Baptist Church is associated with the Southern Baptist Convention and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Candidates should have at least a bachelor's degree in a music-related field, experience in leading and directing choral groups and ensembles, and adhere to the fundamental truths of the Christian faith. The successful candidate will be expected to lead in both traditional and contemporary worship styles. Candidates should submit résumés to: Music Minister Search Committee, First Baptist Church, 409 S. Main St., Reidsville, NC 27320.

Wake Forest Baptist Church, a dynamic CBF-affiliated church of more than 900 members in Wake Forest, N.C., is actively seeking a **minister of youth and missions** as part of a multi-staff team. This position will primarily oversee a vital, growing youth ministry averaging 50-60 weekly. This position also includes responsibilities of overseeing the church's mission efforts. A seminary or divinity school degree and a minimum of two years experience are required. Submit résumés to: Minister of Youth and Missions Committee, Wake Forest Baptist Church, 118 E. South Ave., Wake Forest, NC 27587.

## Albert Reyes named as president of Buckner International

DALLAS (ABP) — Leaders of the Texas-based Baptist social-services agency Buckner International have elected Albert Reyes to become the sixth president in Buckner's 131-year history.

Reyes has directed the agency's flagship division, Buckner Child and



Albert Reyes

Family Services, since 2007. He replaces Ken Hall in a planned transition. Hall will assume the title of chief executive officer for Buckner, but Reyes will report directly to

the organization's board of trustees. He is the first non-Anglo to serve as Buckner's president since it was founded in 1879.

"Dr. Reyes brings the perfect mix of vision, passion and intellect to the task, especially at this point in the history of Buckner," said board chairman Scott McIlveene, according to a press release. "We are uniquely poised as a ministry to move forward like never before, thanks to tremendous work of Buckner's previous five presidents."

Reyes said he understands "that with such a great honor come great challenges and opportunities." He added: "The orphans, vulnerable children, families and elders served by Buckner depend on us to make their lives better."

He will administer Buckner's nearly \$100-million annual budget, while overseeing the daily operations of more than 1,300 employees worldwide. Those operations include work through Buckner Children and Family Services' domestic and international programs and Buckner Retirement Services' seven elder-care communities in Texas.

A former pastor in Texas, Reyes was president of Baptist University of the Americas in San Antonio prior to coming to Buckner. **BT**

## in the know

*Keeping up with people, places, and events*

**Jamye Duncan** is minister of children and families at Statesville (N.C.) First Baptist Church.

**John W. Eddins Jr.** died Feb. 6 in Kill Devil Hills, N.C., at age 84. He taught theology to thousands of Baptist ministers and educators at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (1957-1993) and Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond (1994-2001).

**Ron Grizzle** is director of the newly formed McAfee Center for Teaching Churches at Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology in Atlanta.

**C.B. "Bill" Hogue** died Jan. 26 in Brownwood, Texas, at age 82. He was executive director emeritus of the California Southern Baptist Convention, a former vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention Home Mission Board

(now North American Mission Board) and a former vice president of the Baptist World Alliance.

**Pauline Rhodes Oates**, the widow of Wayne E. Oates, died Jan. 31 at age 90.

**Brad Smith** is pastor of Rosalind Hills Baptist Church in Roanoke, Va.

**Renita J. Weems** is vice president of academic affairs at American Baptist College. She has taught at Vanderbilt University and Spelman College.

**Jamie Williford** is minister to students at West Main Baptist Church in Danville, Va.

**Donn Wisdom** is minister of music and worship arts at Trinity Baptist Church in San Antonio, Texas, coming from Wieuca Road Baptist Church, where he served as minister of music since 1987. **BT**



# Faith groups want health care reform

By Adelle M. Banks  
*Religion News Service*

WASHINGTON — As Capitol Hill appears politically paralyzed over health care reform, the prescription from many faith leaders is firm: don't abandon ship.

"The faith community has worked for decades for comprehensive health care reform and this last year ... many of them have put aside other policy priorities to take this over the finish line," said Linda Walling, executive director of Faithful Reform in Health Care, an interfaith coalition of more than 70 groups. "We would be very, very sad if we can't finish it."

So, her Cleveland-based organization has kept up its grass-roots advocacy, with members of the California Council of Churches preaching sermons, Quakers sending letters to newspaper editors and Reform Jewish teens lobbying on the Hill.

"Turning back now could mean justice delayed for another generation and an unprecedented opportunity lost," reads a letter the coalition sent in late January to members of Congress.

President Obama heard from another group of religious leaders, including a third of his Advisory Council on Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, on the day he delivered the State of the Union, during which he urged congressional Democrats to not "run for the hills."

A letter organized by Faith in Public Life used similarly urgent language: "Letting this lifeline lapse for so many Americans now would be a failure of historic proportions," wrote the signers.

Kristin Williams, spokeswoman for the Washington-based group, said the religious

leaders were trying to curtail the despair that rose on Capitol Hill as Democrats lost their filibuster-proof majority in Congress with Republican Scott Brown's Senate victory in Massachusetts.

"There's certainly been a lot of uncertainty on Capitol Hill this week and I think this letter was really intended to cut through the uncertainty and to make it clear that this isn't about politics," she said. "This is about real Americans."

Many of the messages from faith leaders landing in Capitol Hill mailboxes preach a politically pragmatic message — some health care reform is better than no health care reform at all.

"The implication here is that there's a wide range of policy that ... the liberal and moderate faith-based community would find acceptable and that the big fear is that it will just collapse and nothing will get done," said John Green, director of the Bliss Institute of Applied Politics at the University of Akron.

But the influence of these groups is uncertain "because it's unclear what form the bill might take," he said.

Religious conservatives, meanwhile, are clearer about their desire to restart the process.

"It is time for the president and the Congress to start over on health care and to address real and serious needs for true health care reform in a broad-based, bipartisan, issue-by-issue strategy instead of trying to cram

down the throats of the American people a one-size-fits-all, government takeover of one-sixth of the economy," said Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, in Baptist Press.

A Jan. 20 *USA Today*/Gallup Poll found that 55 percent of Americans think the president and fellow Democrats should suspend work on the current bill and weigh alternatives.

Even faith leaders who are calling for immediate action have issues they consider deal breakers.

"We want health care, but we want it to be done the right way," said Richard Doerflinger, the chief spokesman for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops on its anti-abortion public policy.

In a January letter to the House of Representatives, the bishops conference wrote that Congress should not "abandon this task" but also cited their "moral criteria" for health care — including affordability for all, a ban on federal funding of elective abortions, protection of conscience rights of Catholic employers and health care workers, and access to health care for immigrants.

"Although political contexts have changed, the moral and policy failure that leaves tens of millions of our sisters and brothers without access to health care still remains," wrote the three bishops who chair committees on domestic justice, anti-abortion activities and migration.

Likewise, Walling said members of her coalition who worked especially hard on specific issues such as the public option might pull their support if it fails to make the final bill.

"We're not willing to settle for just anything," she said. **BT**



Richard Land



Richard Doerflinger

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# 'Coming out of the woodwork'

Online archive opens work of Reformed theologians

By Paul R. Kopenkoskey  
*Religion News Service*

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. — Some surprises started unfolding when a team of Calvin Theological Seminary professors and graduate students recently launched the Post-Reformation Digital Library.

Chief eye-openers included successfully tracking down rare Reformed theologians' manuscripts once thought lost.

Another revelation: 16th-18th century theologians and philosophers were brutally honest about their doctrinal positions and emotions, including the well-known Reformer John Calvin, who pushed the boundaries of good taste in a sermon about rowdy adolescents.

"We've got things coming out of the

woodwork that (were) lost for centuries," said Todd Rester, a doctoral student who served on the project's six-member editorial board.

Google Books, the Internet Archive and digital libraries in Europe and North America already had the documents scanned and online, Rester said. Calvin's site makes tracking down these original writings easier by bringing them all under one online roof.

Working under the direction of Richard Muller, professor of historical theology at the seminary, the site required two years of work to complete and features a finding list of research libraries, scholarly initiatives and other sources.

The bibliography is organized alphabetically by authors' names, which take users to digital versions of their works.

The site is not simply an archive of Reformers' works, but also those of their influencers.

There are links to Reformed, Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Anabaptist, Arminian-

Remonstrant and Socinian-Unitarian thinkers as well as secondary sources.

The site is intended for scholars, students and the inquisitive who previously were unable to travel to university libraries in Europe or were unwilling to wait six months to check out a book.

Documents once thought vanished include a profession of faith from John Calvin's successor, Theodore Beza.

There is a link to manuscripts arguing against allowing pianos and pipe organs in Reformed church services because they were considered too ostentatious.

And there's a sermon by John Calvin, who compares unruly teens to "little turds," Rester said.

The site raises the research bar for students who once were able to get away with writing academic papers based primarily on local sources, said Jordan Ballor, a member of the project's editorial board and a doctoral student in moral theology. **BT**

## Mennonite college opts to play national anthem

By Daniel Burke  
*Religion News Service*

In a break with the past, a Mennonite college in Indiana will play an instrumental version of the national anthem before athletic events despite the song's "militaristic" lyrics.

Goshen College in Goshen, Ind., is owned by Mennonite Church USA, an historic peace church that advocates nonviolence. But in deference to its increasingly diverse student body and to visitors, the college will begin playing "The Star-Spangled Banner," Goshen administrators said in a statement.

"Playing the national anthem has not been among Goshen College's practice primarily because of our Christ-centered core value of compassionate peacemaking seeming to be in conflict with the anthem's militaristic language," said Goshen President Jim Brenneman, and a special advisory council, in a statement.

Brenneman said playing the anthem "in no way displaces any higher allegiances,



including the expansive understanding of Jesus — the ultimate peacemaker — loving all people of the world," the statement said.

The Mennonite Church USA does not have an official position on playing the anthem and its half-dozen colleges and universities have differing policies, according to Goshen, which was founded in 1894. In the 1970s, the school debated whether to fly an American flag, later deciding to fly one beside the United Nations standard.

Goshen administrators said playing the anthem will "open new possibilities" for students and faculty to "publicly offer critique — if need be — as citizens in the loyal opposition on issues of deepest moral conviction, such as war." **BT**

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# guest commentary

## Four films you might not see — but should

By Dick Staub • Religion News Service

**P**ARK CITY, Utah — The Sundance Film Festival facilitates epiphanies. After only one day I could already feel, in the words of Carole King, the earth move under my feet and the sky tumbling down, all because of four simple little student films.

An epiphany is a sort of hit-you-over-the-head moment, a “sudden, intuitive perception of or insight into the reality or essential meaning of something,” is how the dictionary puts it. Usually it’s “initiated by some simple, homely, or commonplace occurrence or experience.”

In each of these low-budget films, the central character faces a life-changing situation that triggers an epiphany.

*On the Road to Tel-Aviv*, by Israeli Khen Shalem, tells the true story of passengers boarding a bus to Tel-Aviv who balk at sharing the ride with a Palestinian woman they believe may be a terrorist. If you were an Israeli Jew, would you board a bus with an Arab woman carrying a gym bag?

*Kavi*, by Gregg Helvey, tells the story of an Indian boy forced to work as a modern-day slave in a brick kiln. He must choose to either accept what he’s always been told, or fight for a different life.

*Desert Wedding*, by Alexandra Fisher, tells the story of a pampered bride who is inconvenienced by tragedy on her perfectly planned wedding day. If you’ve ever been disturbed by the superficiality of reality TV shows featuring brides planning the perfect, extravagant,

expensive wedding, this one’s for you.

Oscar Bucher’s *Waiting for a Train: The Toshio Hirano Story* is the engaging and heart-felt true story of Japanese emigrant, Toshio Hirano, whose young life was transformed when he heard Jimmy Rodgers singing “Waiting for a Train.” He buys a guitar, travels to America, rides a bike through Appalachia and spends the rest of his life singing country music.



These may be low-budget student films, but they’re grabbing attention. If these four are any indications, it seems that many young filmmakers are being pushed to focus their efforts on meaningful films with big themes of redemption, dignity, tolerance, equality, diversity, hope and triumph of the human spirit.

All four films won laurels at the Angelus Film Festival, a student film festival that honors budding filmmakers who explore and respect the dignity of the human person. And the sponsors of the awards know talent when they see it: these are the same people who gave James Dean his first acting credit (in 1951’s *Hill Number One*) and George Lucas his first crew job, in a 1963 film (*The Soldier*) that also starred a very young William Shatner.

The Angelus awards are sponsored by

Family Theater Productions in Hollywood, whose more than 800 radio programs and 83 TV specials have featured the likes of Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra, Bob Hope, Lucille Ball, Henry Fonda, Rosalind Russell, Jack Benny, Barbara Stanwyck, Helen Hayes, Ronald Reagan and Shirley Temple.

Which Hollywood media mogul founded Family Theater Productions? It was actually a poor Irish Catholic priest, Patrick Peyton, who came to the U.S. in 1928 and was ordained a Holy Cross priest in 1941. Even without any experience in show business, Peyton became a media pioneer by his vision — and by recruiting the best writers and actors in Hollywood to entertain, inspire and inform families with alternative, yet mainstream, programming.

The four films were shown this year at an “off-Sundance” (think “off-Broadway”) mini-festival that brings together theology students and aspiring filmmakers who all share Peyton’s vision of creating artistically excellent films to help humans discover our common ground.

The four films all have something in common, but so do their viewers: they want to see films that inspire epiphanies. The appeal is simple. They’re the kind of movies the world hungers for, because they encourage the human decency we so desperately need. **BT**

—Dick Staub is the author of *The Culturally Savvy Christian*.

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## guest commentary

# If you're going to preach, be like Buster

By Jim Evans

**M**y grandfather never owned a Bible. In fact, he could not read. He never attended a church, didn't sing any hymns and never prayed — out loud anyway.

He also seemed to have a certain contempt for preachers. Although he never said directly, I got the idea Grandpa had encountered some of the less savory from among God's anointed.

Someone, in the name of Jesus, had really done a number on him. When he was told I was planning a career in the ministry, he sent for me.

"Don't do this," he practically begged. There was real pain in his voice. "Preachers are parasites. They live off other people. Can't you find honest work to do?"

I tried to explain to him about a sense of the presence of God. I talked to him about having a calling and a desire to help people. But I could tell he was unconvinced.

Finally, after it was clear I would not change my mind, Grandpa said, "Well, if you are determined to be a preacher, try to be like Buster."

I don't know if that was his given name or a nickname picked up from childhood. In fact, I never even knew his last name.

Buster was a bootleg preacher who didn't have a regular church. He preached wherever he had opportunity. He would hold forth on front porches, from the back of pick-up trucks and, in one bizarre incident, in the produce section at the grocery store.

His message was always the same: "No matter what you have done or how bad you have been, God loves you anyway."

But it was not his preaching that Grandpa admired. Buster was a perennial do-gooder. One day he would be at the nursing home playing his banjo and singing off-key to delighted residents. The next day he was painting stripes on a bumpy patch of asphalt so kids from a poor neighborhood could play basketball.

One Friday night he kept an old drunk



from going to jail. He convinced the deputy that he would personally see the man home and keep him off the roads.

Buster was a hero of sorts to a small group of thrown-away people he knew and took care of. My Grandpa was one of them.

"If you can be a preacher like Buster, then I guess it will be all right," Grandpa told me. "Buster is the salt of the earth."

I suspect Grandpa did not realize he was quoting from the Bible. What irony.

An illiterate, non-church-going preacher-hater, not aware he was using Scripture to praise a self-made holy man. But he knew what he knew.

Buster was salt of the earth as far as Grandpa was concerned. And Buster's special saltiness managed to ingrain itself into the heart of that gruff old man I loved.

It turns out that even the biblically illiterate know the real thing when they see it. **BT**

—Jim Evans is pastor of the First Baptist Church of Auburn, Ala. This column appeared at [www.EthicsDaily.com](http://www.EthicsDaily.com) and is used by permission.

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# the lighter side

## The world's best temp job

By Brett Younger

I was a pastor for 22 years, then (while working weekdays as a professor) a guest preacher for a year and a half, and now — thanks to the gracious people at First Baptist Church, Dalton, Ga. — I am an interim pastor. My friends have suggested I am working my way up the ecclesiastical ladder. I am learning that the differences in these three jobs are subtle, but significant.

For instance, pastors have file cabinets filled with years of sermons. Interims have a set of sermons for each season of the church year. Guest preachers have a file marked “Sermon.”

Pastors work hard to plan the worship service. Interims try to fit what the staff has planned. Guest preachers try to remember to e-mail their sermon title.

Pastors rotate their Sunday best. Interims have a couple of choices. Guest preachers go to the cleaners every four churches.

Pastors fill in when Sunday school teachers call in sick. Interims go to Sunday school assemblies to get a donut. Guest preachers get to church halfway through Sunday school.

Pastors have their own parking spot. Interims try to avoid parking in someone else's spot. Guest preachers park across the street.

Pastors know all the children's names. Interims know the staff's children. Guest

preachers wish the children would be quiet during the sermon.

Pastors try to make improvements between the 8:30 and the 11:00 service. Interims show off the names they have learned. Guest preachers look for coffee.

Pastors know who not to hug. Interims hug everyone who looks like they might want to be hugged. Guest preachers shake hands.

Pastors pay when they go out to eat. Interims never pick up a check. Guest preachers order off the dollar menu at the drive-thru.

Pastors try to keep things moving in the right direction during deacons' meetings. Interims sit in the back. Guest preachers watch television.

Pastors go to the hospital each Monday. Interims go to the hospital when a deacon is ill. Guest preachers do not know where the hospital is.

Pastors worry about the church's budget. Interims tell the church to worry about the church budget. Guest preachers forget that churches have budgets.

Pastors go on mission trips to underprivileged areas. Interims praise church members who go on mission trips to underprivileged areas. Guest preachers go to Florida.

Pastors find that Holy Week is the busiest time of the year. Interims feel like they are pastors again at Easter. Guest

preachers don't have an Easter sermon.

Pastors' families feel like everyone is watching. Interims introduce their families at Easter. Guest preachers call their spouse on the way home.

Pastors think they have to fix mistakes the last pastor made. Interims try to fix problems before the next pastor arrives. Guest preachers make jokes about the pastor being at the beach.

Pastors have messy offices. Interims have several books on the shelf. Guest preachers have the aforementioned file marked “Sermon.”

When I was growing up, evangelists offered invitations to “full-time Christian service.” It sounded right. “Part-time Christian service” does not seem like much of a commitment. Now I am not so sure. Maybe there is something to be said for “part-time Christian service.” Being an interim seems like fun.

Pastors, interims and guest preachers have different jobs, but they all have the joy and responsibility of standing before God's people and saying, “I've been listening for God's word and this is what I think I heard God say.” **BT**

—Brett Younger is associate professor of preaching at Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology.



Illustration by Scott Brooks

## That's the Spirit!

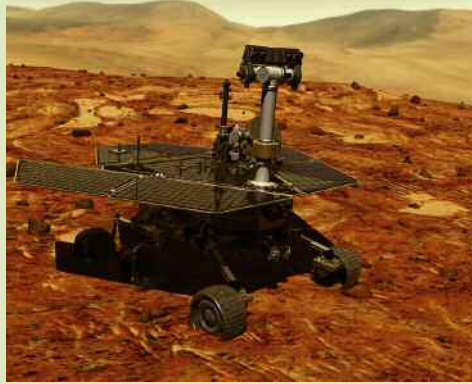
By Tony W. Cartledge  
Posted Jan 25, 2010  
[www.tonycartledge.com](http://www.tonycartledge.com)

It's been a year and a half since I've mentioned Spirit and Opportunity, two mechanical rovers that celebrated their sixth anniversary on Mars in January.

Six years — imagine that. When launched, NASA scientists hoped the rovers would hold up for three months in the harsh conditions of the cold and dusty Martian landscape — but six years later, both are still sending new findings back to earth.

The solar-powered rovers have proven to be an engineering marvel, so durable that NASA has had to scramble more than once to get funding renewed for a project that no one thought could last for so long — but when you've got really smart robots loaded with scientific equipment sitting on another planet, it's hard to imagine that scientists would not continue to explore.

Thus far, the rovers, sent to different parts of the planet, have traveled for miles. They have climbed hills taller than the



Statue of Liberty, and crawled through craters to explore layers of the crusty surface. They have drilled into rocks and analyzed their mineral composition, while keeping an eye on the weather and even photographing a Martian dust devil. They've found convincing evidence that water was once abundant on the red planet's surface, and can still be found.

After six years, the rovers aren't as healthy as they once were. Spirit has been forced to drive backward since 2006, when one of its six wheels stopped functioning.

For the past 10 months, it's been stuck in a sandy spot on the edge of a small crater. But even when stationary, the little rover that could is still making scientific discoveries.

I don't know how much longer the rovers will continue their amazing run, but I'll keep a hot link to their website on my toolbar for as long as they do. They remind me of the unsung heroes who make churches work: the lady who's worked in the nursery so long that babies she once kept are now bringing their grandchildren to her, or the man who volunteered 40 years ago to stay behind to turn off the lights, adjust the thermostats, and lock up the building — and is still doing it.

Every church has its faithful members who cook the fellowship breakfast and count the money and teach the senior adult Sunday school class — enduring folk who get little recognition but keep on keeping on.

You know who those people are. I hope you'll send them a note this week, or give them a hug, and thank them for making the church wheels keep on turning. **BT**

## Questions about the movies

Why do people still go to movie theaters? That question has been on my mind for a while.

Is it an affinity for over-priced junk food? Crying babies or yakking teens? Air-condition overload or floors glazed over by cola and fake butter?

As an occasional movie-goer, I'm unsure of the appeal. Not since Joaquin Phoenix had me rocking to "Get Rhythm" in *Walk the Line* have I been wowed by a theater visit.

But there is something appealing since people keep going to see movies in theaters despite the fact that thousands of films are available at home through cable and satellite television and video distributors like Netflix and Blockbuster.

In a *New York Times* article dated Feb. 28, 2009, Martin Kaplan, director of the Norman Lear Center for the study of entertainment and society at Southern Cal, described the experience as

something akin to communal escapism.

"It's not rocket science," he said. "People want to forget their troubles, and they want to be with other people."

So is there something to the theater experience beyond simple entertainment that cannot be found in

the front of a large-screen, hi-def TV at home? Is it the even bigger screen and louder sound? Or a sense of community? A shared narrative?

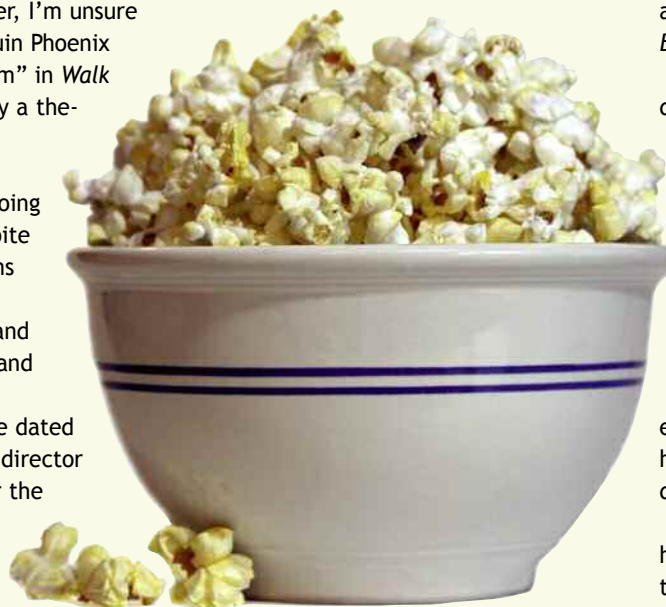
Kyle Matthews (a singer, songwriter and minister in Greenville, S.C.) and I touched on this topic briefly following the interview about worship for the February issue of *Baptists Today*.

We wondered about, but didn't explore deeply, the continued appeal of the shared movie experience. But I would like to know more.

Another intriguing question to me is what church leaders might learn from the movie theater experience. Does the church have something to offer those seeking a place to deal with "their troubles" and "be with other people"?

It would be easy to label one as simple entertainment and the other as having a higher purpose. But that would end the digging too soon.

Other dynamics seem to be at work here. But, then, I often have more questions than answers. **BT**



# the media shelf

Reviews by Jackie Riley

## Not Alone

Encouragement for Caregivers

Nell Noonan

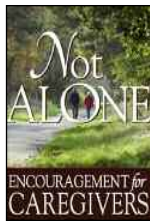
According to research, 50 million people in the United States are caring for a family member or close friend. Many of these caregivers are retirees caring for elderly parents. Others are baby boomers and/or those of the “sandwich generation.”

Caregivers often fail to care for themselves both physically and emotionally. Their labor of love can leave them feeling isolated, sad, cheated of personal needs and angry.

Research even tells us that caregivers lose an average of 10 years of life expectancy.

Nell Noonan, a long-time religious and public educator who expresses herself beautifully, knows the life of caregiving well.

Speaking from her experience as a “healthy spouse of a chronically ill mate,” she



offers honest and heartfelt reflections to encourage fellow caregivers on what she considers a “spiritual pilgrimage.”

Her 150 daily devotionals are short and concise (1-2 pages each), which will appeal to caregivers with limited time for reading. Each one has a scripture reading and focus verse, a personal experience from the life of the author or another person, and a prayer.

\$20.00 / hb / 320 pp / Upper Room Books / ISBN 978-0-8358-9982-6 / www.upperroom.org

## Does It Make Sense to Pray for Healing?

James O. Morse, M.D.

Does prayer actually make a difference? Would recovery occur without it? These and other questions are fodder for personal or group reflection based on Dr. Morse’s discussion of miraculous healing versus convictions regarding what God can and will do to help.

“Asking God today to heal miraculously a condition for which an effective remedy is as close as the nearest pharmacy seems a little like asking him to feed us miraculously while the grocery shelves are still full,” the former medical missionary contends.

Dr. Morse approaches his subject in a balanced manner, giving attention to what the Bible tells us about sickness and death as well as sickness and healing. He also compares attitudes of major world religions toward the causes of sickness and suffering.

Chapters on “New Testament Healing in Modern Times,” “Praying without Medicine” and “Praying with Medicine” raise good questions. Likewise, Dr. Morse’s eight categories of beliefs on miraculous healing and his concluding remarks on the will of God are worth consideration.



\$10.00 / pb / 108 pp / jomorse333@sbcglobal.net

## A Harpist’s Garden (CD)

Jan Hill

Jan Hill dreamed of playing the harp as a child. That dream was not realized until she had nearly completed a 40-year career as a Baptist missionary to Southeast Asia — and was 60 years old.

She was a quick study, rising to the professional ranks through instruction received from performers such as Greg Buchanan. Today, she entertains in a variety of venues and also provides musical therapy to hospital patients.

In her new CD, Hill shares “songs and hymns from my heart to yours.” Played in clear, precise and soothing tones, these offerings will lift the listener to an ethereal plane. Most of the hymn selections are rendered as medleys, and create a sense of nostalgia. Music appreciators of all ages will be inspired by the ministry of the “harpist’s garden.” **BT**



\$13 (includes shipping) / janharpist@gmail.com / 449 Skyview Ln., Lexington, KY 40511

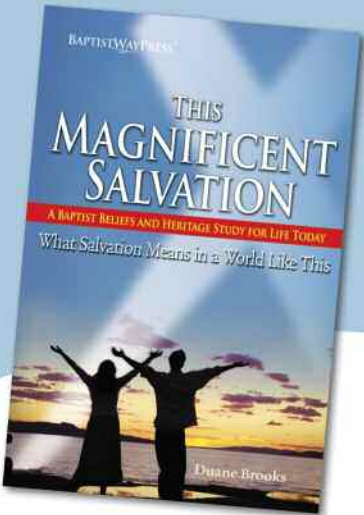
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# Book reveals, provides hope for Liberia

By John Pierce

Pastor Michael Helms has a special place in his heart for the people of Liberia in general and for one young Liberian Baptist leader in particular. Olu Menjay, a college student when he and Helms first met, has returned to resurrect a school and to help restore his homeland following a devastating 15-year civil war.

*Hoping Liberia: Stories of Civil War from Africa's First Republic* (2009, Smyth & Helwys) is on one hand an informative and inspiring account of persistent faith in challenging circumstances. On the other, it is an opportunity to assist in hopeful happenings today.

Proceeds from the book, along with additional donations, will go to the Bricks for Ricks Liberian Housing Foundation, founded in 2008 and managed by the Woman's Missionary Union Foundation, to help relocate refugees of the civil war and to assist in the education of young Liberians at Ricks Institute.

A native Alabamian who has served three Georgia pastorates, Helms was surprised to hear a familiar Southern idiom — the interchanging of the words “hope” and “help” — while visiting Liberia. It led him to title his book, *Hoping Liberia*.

When visiting with a team from his former congregation, Trinity Baptist Church in Moultrie, Ga., Helms heard his friend Menjay — now principal at Ricks Institute — thank them “for coming to Liberia and *hoping* us...”

“When someone says, ‘Help me,’ it’s a way of saying, ‘Unless you help me I’m without hope,’” writes Helms. “When someone says, ‘Hope me,’ it’s a way of saying, ‘The way you give me hope is by giving me some help.’”

While Helms gives excellent historical context for understanding the challenges faced by modern Liberians, it is the hopeful ongoing story of Menjay — a product of Baptist missions — that glows from the pages. This bright young man — educated at Truett-McConnell College, Mercer University, Duke Divinity School, Boston

University and the University of Wales (where he earned a doctorate through the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague) — had plenty of vocational options.

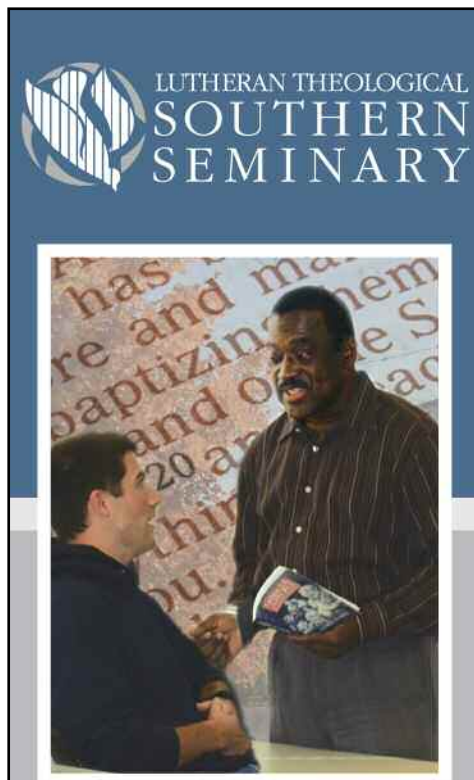
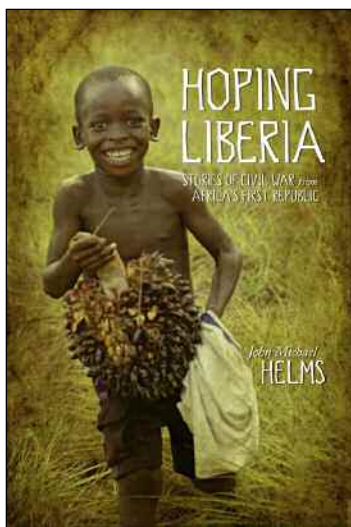
Yet he returned to war-torn Liberia to lead the resurgence of a once-prominent boarding school. His first strategic decision was to “cut the grass” that reached above his head and to help relocate refugees forced to hole up on the decimated campus.

With the *help* of many people — including numerous Baptist groups from the U.S. — the Ricks Institute is now providing needed education — and *hope* — to young Liberians.

“Hope is like currency,” writes Helms, now pastor of the First Baptist Church of Jefferson, Ga. “We can invest hope and watch it multiply with interest for future generations, or we

can run a hope deficit that future generations will have to pay.” **BT**

*Hoping Liberia: Stories of Civil War from Africa's First Republic* is available from Smyth & Helwys at 1-800-747-3016 or [www.helwys.com](http://www.helwys.com). For information on the ongoing work at Ricks Institute, visit [www.ricksonline.org](http://www.ricksonline.org).



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## guest commentary

# Lottie Moon legacy not captured in Texas

By Catherine B. Allen

*(Editor's note: Catherine B. Allen, author of The New Lottie Moon Story, has maintained relationships in Pingdu, China, since 1987. This commentary is in response to Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's recent acquisition of materials from a home in Pingdu where pioneer Baptist missionary Lottie Moon once lived.)*

I am deeply sad to think that Baptists from the U.S. would remove any part of the Lottie Moon legacy from China. It seems a desecration to me.

One thing I have learned from 23 years of observing the legacy of Lottie Moon and other missionaries in China: It survives. It thrives.

An amazing amount of physical Christian heritage has been miraculously preserved there, without intervention visible to a foreign eye. If we foreigners leave historical artifacts in China to the rightful heirs — the Chinese — they seem to make the highest and best use of them.

Christ's name is honored, and Lottie Moon is not forgotten. It is always a temptation for us American tourists to pilfer chips of history, but we risk doing harm we do not recognize.

Yet, some good can come in this sad removal. Southwestern Seminary will now be exhibiting evidence that proves the power of God to work through women as preachers and pastors. The experience in Pingdu from Lottie Moon's era until the present is a fine case study in the value of women in Christian ministry.

If Southwestern leaders have academic integrity or spiritual sensitivity, their exhibition must feature the independent, inspired, pioneering, creative nature of Lottie Moon's actions in Pingdu. When she pushed back the outer limits of a woman's missionary role in that day, she perfectly met the opportunity at hand.

She was a model of cross-cultural witness. The little house from Pingdu is a good way to demonstrate some of the ways in which she planted an enduring church.

Did Southwestern's emissaries take time



**Lottie's legacy:** On behalf of Mountain Brook Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala., Catherine Allen presents a commemorative Chinese Bible to Pastor Wang Xia of Pingdu Christian Church during a building dedication in 2006. The congregation is carrying on the mission work begun by beloved Baptist missionary Lottie Moon (1840-1912).

to know and show respect for the woman who is now the pastor of Pingdu Christian Church? This is the very congregation Lottie Moon established. It has endured. It has a wide network of home congregations.

What a heroine of faith Lottie Moon was and is! What a heroine is today's pastor in Pingdu. What examples for any pastor anywhere on earth today.

How beautifully both women have pastored the people who lived in and around the Lottie Moon cottage in Pingdu. Urban renewal may have cleared the old neighborhood, but a great church continues its transforming commission.

Care was taken to relocate the congregation in an advantageous new building and to upgrade living conditions for the parishioners. Pastor Wang has been baptizing at least 200 people per year, and she is a wife and a mother.

She cares for a flock of thousands of people and equips leaders for numerous branch congregations. I am eager for Southwestern to spotlight the model of women pastors who are willing to pump a bicycle 60 miles to officiate at the Lord's Supper in rural villages, to care for the sick, and to preach the Gospel in all conditions.

The Lottie Moon legacy lives vibrantly in Pingdu today. Any Christian who worships anywhere in the region is kneeling upon the foundation she laid through divine wisdom

and courage.

Can the Lottie Moon legacy thrive as well at Southwestern Seminary?

In the first announcement about the haul from Pingdu to Fort Worth, seminary president Paige Patterson revealed his intent to promote his particular theological bias. Personally, I do not believe a word of the claims Dr. Paige Patterson has been making about Lottie Moon for years.

I do not find proofs that she rejected Crawford Toy in marriage because of theological liberalism. Anyway, the claims are irrelevant to the meaning of Lottie Moon.

If Miss Moon rejected marriage to Toy, it was because God had a higher calling for her in Pingdu and environs. She took her cues from God rather than men. She submitted to no one but God. Thus she carried forth the burden of the entire Southern Baptist mission effort.

Southwestern Seminary is now custodian of some rubble upon which Lottie Moon once preached Jesus, while her true, living legacy replicates itself in China. The stones in Fort Worth will cry out a message the seminary has officially rejected. Ye who have ears, listen to what the Spirit says! **BT**

—Catherine B. Allen is former associate executive director of Woman's Missionary Union, an auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention.

# Waving the freedom flag

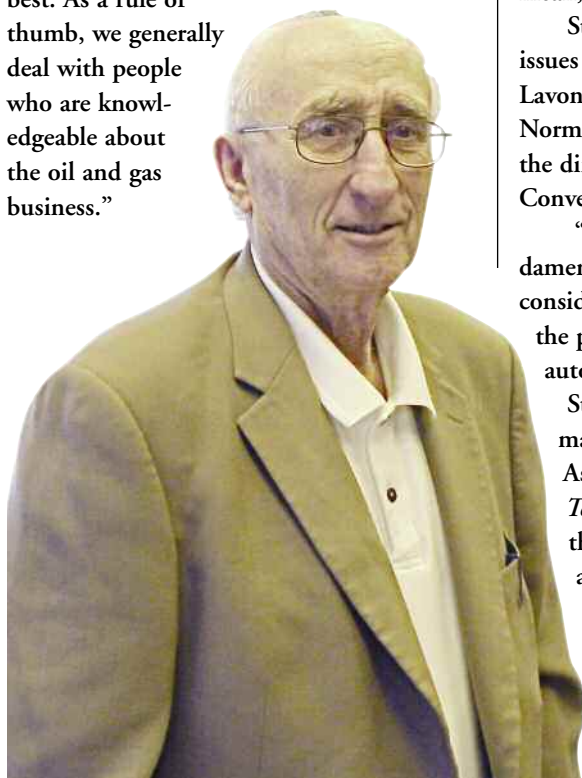
Bob Stephenson serves with integrity, persistence

**N**ORMAN, Okla. — Bob Stephenson has spent his life beating the odds. In both of his chosen professions as a professional baseball player and as a petroleum exploration geologist, the odds for failure are high.

“In baseball, a player who hits .300 is considered a star hitter. But he fails seven times,” he said. “If you can discover oil or gas in two of ten test wells, you’re a great oil finder, but you still fail eight times. I’ve been in two businesses where the majority of time you face failure. But you can’t get knocked down and not get back up because sooner or later, if you stay with it long enough, you’ll get rewarded for it.”

Stephenson’s wife once asked how he and his business partner could ask people to invest in a prospective oil well and then tell them that it was a dry hole.

“It’s very simple,” he remembered telling her. “My partner and I both believe we’re pretty good geologists, and we use all the data we’ve got. We interpret it to the best of our ability, and the maps that we make are our best interpretation. People trust our integrity that we have done our best. As a rule of thumb, we generally deal with people who are knowledgeable about the oil and gas business.”



Integrity and persistence are major qualities of Stephenson’s character. They were engrained in him while growing up in the small town of Blair, Okla., where his parents had a modest cotton farm. In 1946, he received a baseball scholarship to the University of Oklahoma, where he majored in geology. After graduating in 1950, he signed with the St. Louis Cardinals and played six years of professional baseball, spending the 1955 season as a shortstop for the Cardinals.

In 1957, he left baseball for the oil and gas exploration field with Pure Oil Company, which became Union of Cal. In 1965, he and fellow geologist Ray Potts co-founded Potts-Stephenson Exploration Company, known as PSEC, a partnership that spanned 40 years until they sold the company.

The characteristics that made him successful in his professional life have also been instrumental in his 30-year effort to preserve the historic Baptist principles that guide his own life. “I tell people I used to be a pretty decent guy, but when I got involved in this Baptist battle, I became a mean, old man,” he laughed.

Stephenson became involved in Baptist issues in the early 1980s, when his pastor, Lavonn Brown of First Baptist Church of Norman, began expressing concern about the direction the Southern Baptist Convention was moving.

“I saw this new organization of fundamentalists completely changing what I considered to be basic Baptist principles: the priesthood of the believer and the autonomy of the church,” he explained.

Stephenson’s footprint has been left on many Baptist organizations including Associated Baptist Press, *Baptists Today*, the Baptist Joint Committee, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and Texas Baptists Committed. He founded Mainstream Oklahoma Baptists.

After joining the Board of Directors of Associated Baptist Press in 1993, he later became

associated with *Baptists Today* and the Baptist Joint Committee.

“Those three organizations are the basis for the moderate movement,” he said. “Associated Baptist Press is a resource for newspapers across the nation. The Baptist Joint Committee has been a watchdog in Washington for a number of years, not only for Baptists, but for other religions too. And *Baptists Today* provides readers both sides of the issue. Together, they connect Baptists to each other.”

Stephenson said he has been disappointed by how few Baptists know what actually occurred within the SBC in the 1980s.

“What happened at the Southern Baptist Convention was a huge shift, and it should have been more openly touted by pastors,” he said. “... Baptists have a right to know, and the pastor and other people have the responsibility to inform them whether they want to know or not. Once they have heard both sides, then they can make their decision, but an informed one.”

Staying informed is why Stephenson has been a longtime subscriber of *Baptists Today*. He feels the monthly news journal plays a key role in Baptist life.

“To be a good journalistic publication, you’ve got to have complete and total freedom to print what you want to print and not what somebody else wants you to print,” he explained. “When I read *Baptists Today*, I know I’m reading the truth as far as those people who wrote it know it. It would be a major loss if we lost that Baptist voice.”

In a 1999 *Mainstream Messenger* newsletter, Stephenson wrote, “I believe that no Baptist should ever have reason to be afraid to stand up for what she or he believes — freedom is certainly something worth defending.”

The 81-year-old continues to defend the freedom that historically belongs to Baptists. “If I believe in something, I will fight to the end to defend it,” Stephenson said. “I may lose — I don’t win all the battles — but I still go into battle with my flag waving proudly.” **BT**



# Young preachers

First-of-a-kind festival includes many Baptists

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Snow and ice did not stop 92 young people from 21 states — representing 41 schools and a variety of Christian denominations — from coming to Louisville, Ky., for the inaugural Festival of Young Preachers in January.

**T**hese young people, ages 16 to 28, were brought together by a common calling.

“I’ve always been hesitant to call myself a preacher,” said Mary Alice Birdwhistell, a student at Baylor University’s Truett Seminary. “At the end of the day it was so refreshing to be part of such a diverse group of people who came together to preach, to learn and to encourage one another.”

The Festival was sponsored by the Academy of Preachers, an initiative designed to identify, network, inspire and support young people who sense a call to Christian preaching. The Academy was launched in 2009 through the vision and leadership of Dwight A. Moody, who now serves as executive director.

“There was no national organization for young preachers,” Moody explained. “For future farmers, actors and athletes there are opportunities in school and out of school for young people to cultivate their interest and

test their talent, but there was nothing for young preachers. I began to think about what an initiative with that mission might look like.”

The resulting initiative was the Academy of Preachers.

“This academy has the potential to shape an entire generation of preaching in America,” said Craig Dykstra, vice president of the Indianapolis-based Lilly Endowment, which provided funding to the Academy.

Shortly after its launch in January 2009, the Academy began working to attract and connect young people from across the country. Last summer, the Academy hosted a preaching camp — the first of its kind — for a select group of students who gathered for several days of instruction, peer review and guidance to become more effective preachers.

The Festival of Young Preachers was the Academy’s public, cornerstone event. Nearly a quarter of the students who participated represented the Baptist denomination. They came from a variety of institutions including Morehouse and Georgetown colleges, Southern Baptist Seminary, McAfee School of Theology and Truett Seminary.

Mike Fuhrman, dean of the School of Ministry at Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Mo., recruited four students from Washington, Kansas, Texas and Missouri. He attended as mentor to these students.

Festival preachers were to be sponsored by either a congregation or educational

institution. In addition, they were to be accompanied — and introduced — by their preaching mentor.

The student preachers were instructed to select one of four sermon themes for their message: the birth of Jesus, the life of Jesus, the death of Jesus or the resurrection of Jesus.

Lee Huckleberry, pastor of the Howard Park Christian Church in Clarksville, Ind., coordinated the registration and assignments of the young preachers to one of four preaching venues over the course of the event.

“By far the majority of the students preached on the life and ministry of Jesus,” said Huckleberry. “The most popular text was the call to discipleship found in Mark 8. This inaugural Festival has been an eye-opening and enlightening experience. We look forward to welcoming these bright young minds to the second annual Festival of Preachers.”

Festival participants received inspiration and encouragement from seasoned ministers during the event. Kyle Idleman of Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Brad Braxton, formerly of Riverside Church in New York City, and Stephanie Paulsell from Harvard Divinity School spoke during daily plenary sessions.

“As one of only 19 women to preach at the event, I was intimidated,” Birdwhistell said. “However, I left the Festival with a newfound sense of confidence. I don’t consider myself to have been one of the best



preachers at the Festival. However, I do have a new sense of enthusiasm and confidence that perhaps preaching is at least part of what God is calling me to do.”

Birdwhistell was one of two young preachers to receive scholarships, in memory of Kentucky Baptist preacher T.L. McSwain, for bringing the largest entourage of supporters. Adam Kilchenman, a student at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, was the second recipient.

Sarah Lewis, a student at Multnomah Seminary in Portland, Ore., won a third scholarship prize for having traveled the furthest distance to the Festival from her home in Seattle.

Responses to the Festival were overwhelmingly positive.

“I explained to the residents at the nursing home that I had been at a ‘revival’ for young preachers,” one young preacher wrote after returning to Prestonsburg, Ky. “It was a word I thought they could understand, but it turned out to be a very accurate

description of the event!”

Katie Beachy, a high-school student who had attended the Festival with a great deal of hesitation, walked the aisle of Middletown Christian Church in Louisville the Sunday morning following the Festival and surrendered to the ministry.

Plans are already underway for the 2011 Festival of Young Preachers, which will once again be held in Louisville. Students will be asked to prepare sermons based on the Ten Commandments.

This summer, three preaching camps will be held in Richmond, Ind., Nashville, Tenn., and Atlanta.

“We expect twice as many people, twice the quality of preaching and twice the inspiration at the 2011 Festival,” said Moody. **BT**

—For more information, visit the Academy of Preachers online at [www.academyofpreachers.net](http://www.academyofpreachers.net). The full sermons of the 92 young preachers can also be viewed online at [www.youtube.com/academyofpreachers](http://www.youtube.com/academyofpreachers).



Young preachers (opposite page, left to right) Roger Jasper, Terrell Crudup and Josh Pennington, talking with organizer Dwight Moody, participated in a preaching festival as did Mary Alice Birdwhistell. Photos by Kate Bringardener.

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# Study finds abstinence-only programs effective in delaying sex in teenagers

By Bob Allen  
*Associated Baptist Press*

PHILADELPHIA — A new study by University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine says that abstinence-only sex-education programs are effective in getting some pre-teens to delay having sex.

The study, which appeared in the Feb. 1 edition of *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, divided 662 African-American students in grades 6 and 7 into classes held on Saturdays in four public schools.

Students were randomly assigned to classes using abstinence-only, safe-sex and comprehensive sex-education approaches, while another group received general education about health issues not related to sex.

After two years, researchers found that 33 percent of teenagers in the abstinence-only group reported sexual activity, compared to 52 percent of those taught condom use and 42 percent of those instructed in both approaches.

Researchers said they found no significant differences among the groups of the numbers of youth using condoms when they eventually did become sexually active. A common criticism of abstinence-only programs is that they discourage condom use and thereby actually may contribute to teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases in those who break purity vows.

The abstinence-only program used in the study did not suggest delaying sex until marriage, a feature of faith-based programs like the Southern Baptist Convention's popular True Love Waits used by an estimated 2.5 million teenagers and college students since 1994.

After declining for more than a decade, teen pregnancy rose 3 percent in 2006, according to recent figures released by the Guttmacher Institute. At the same time teen births grew by 4 percent and teen abortions by 1 percent.

Observers expect the new study to reignite the policy debate over funding of sex education in public schools.

Doctors involved in the study warned that public policy should not be based on the findings of a single study, and lawmakers should not selectively use scientific literature to formulate policy to conform policy to their preconceived views.

"Policy should not be based on just one study, but an accumulation of empirical findings from several well-designed, well-executed studies," the study's lead author, psychologist John B. Jemmott III, said in a statement.

The study did not use a moralistic tone or portray sex in a negative light, but encouraged abstinence as a way to eliminate the risk

of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.


Jemmott said the study indicated that such programs can be effective in persuading youth to delay their first sexual encounter until they are older, when they are more mature and better equipped to resist peer pressure and understand the negative consequences of having sex. **BT**

Register online today!

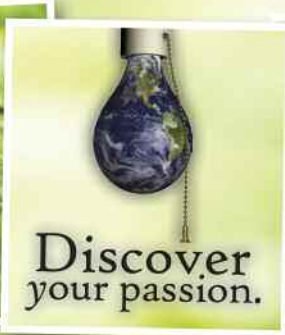
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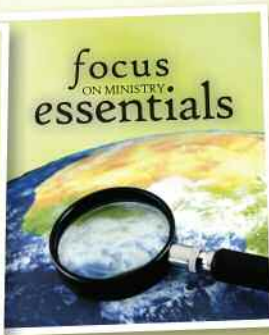
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Pre-register by April 15 to be entered in a raffle to win a free two-night stay in the host hotel at CBF's 2011 General Assembly in Tampa, Fla. (Raffle drawing will be held during the Assembly. Must be present to win.)

# Have you read...?

Three books to share with others

Name three books, other than the Bible, that you would highly recommend. This is not an attempt to determine (subjectively) the greatest or (objectively) the top-selling books.

**R**ather, it is a way of sharing with others some reading — of any genre — that has been enjoyable and helpful. To get started, and to provide an example of the preferred format, my own contributions are below.

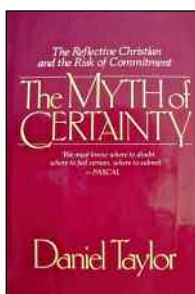
For those who follow instructions better than examples, here are some suggested guidelines: Give the complete title and author, along with a publisher and date. Then offer no more than four sentences about each book to explain its essence — and to express why you found it interesting and/or helpful.

Selected entries — sent to editor@baptiststoday.org — will be shared in *Baptists Today*. Remember: these are not critical reviews, but brief personal reflections and suggestions.

*The Myth of Certainty: The Reflective Christian and the Risk of Commitment*

By Daniel Taylor (1986, Jarrell, now in paperback from InterVarsity)

As a young adult I found myself identified and affirmed by Taylor's description of a "reflective Christian" as a "stone-turner" who is "sensitive to and fascinated by the complexity of things."

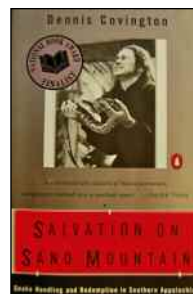


An easier read than Leslie Weatherhead's *The Christian Agnostic*, this book by an insightful English professor likewise reminds us that faith, by its very definition, excludes certainty. Yet he warns of being mired in endless cycles of reflection without action.

*Salvation on Sand Mountain: Snake Handling and Redemption in Southern Appalachia*

By Dennis Covington (1995, Penguin Books)

This well-written book by a gifted journalist, Baptist and thrill-seeker takes readers into a world known by few and understood by perhaps fewer. The real-life characters found in this subculture — like end-time evangelist Charles McGlocklin of New Hope, Ala., and Kentuckians Elvis Presley Saylor and Gracie McAllister — are simply fascinating.

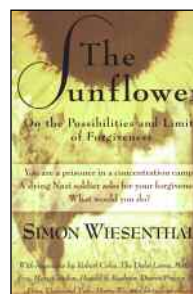


Considered "too worldly because she believed in doctors," Gracie skipped snake handling one July due to snakebites during that month the two previous years — deciding to "just handle fire and drink strychnine" instead. The writer concluded: "Good idea, ... it always pays to be on the safe side."

*The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness*

By Simon Wiesenthal (2nd edition, 1997, Schocken Books)

This book raises a question that cannot be easily or fully answered: whether forgiveness does or should have limits. The author was a young Jew imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp when summoned to the bedside of a dying Nazi soldier wanting to confess his sins and seek forgiveness.



Wiesenthal left in silence but continued to wrestle with the question, as do others enlisted to write responses from various faith perspectives. So will the reader long after putting the book away. **BT**

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# ‘Forgive us’

## Christians often struggle with radical forgiveness

SAN MARCOS, Texas — At just age 8, Chris Carrier was abducted, stabbed multiple times with an ice pick, shot in the left temple at pointblank range and abandoned in the Florida Everglades. Miraculously, he survived — although blinded in one eye.

**B**ut what happened two decades later may be even more miraculous. A police officer involved in the criminal investigation found the primary suspect, David McAllister — who never was convicted of the attack on Carrier — by then bedridden and blind in a nursing home. After the policeman told him he no longer needed to fear punishment, McAllister confessed to the crime.

When Carrier met the man who kidnapped and assaulted him 22 years before, he told McAllister he had long ago forgiven him. In the week that followed, Carrier visited McAllister daily and ultimately led him to faith in Christ.

Carrier credits his ability to forgive his attacker to the faith commitment he made to Jesus Christ at age 13.

“That’s when my security issue was settled,” he said. Before he accepted Christ as Lord and Savior, Carrier confessed, he lived in fear, not knowing where his attacker was or when he might strike again. But that changed when he placed his trust in Jesus Christ.

“There’s no fear factor any more,” he said. “If Jesus is my Lord, what do I have to fear? Security’s no longer an issue.”

### MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

But a former youth minister with whom Carrier reconnected to make the visit to McAllister challenged him to move beyond

forgiveness. He urged Carrier to attempt reconciliation with his attacker, who had at one time been dismissed from a job by Carrier’s father.

Through his faith, Carrier saw himself as no different from McAllister — a man who apparently carried out a grudge against a father by attacking his son. Likewise, Carrier saw himself having been in rebellion against God the Father and guilty of the crucifixion of the Son of God.

But from his cross, Jesus asked God to forgive those who crucified him. In Carrier’s mind, he could do no less.

“It has to be bigger than forgiving because it makes me feel good about myself or forgiving in order to have closure,” he said. “It’s a calling to be involved in what 2 Corinthians 5 calls ‘the ministry of reconciliation.’”

Today, Carrier — a Bible teacher and interim campus minister at San Marcos Baptist Academy in San Marcos, Texas — volunteers in prison ministry. During weekend events, he spends the first couple of days just building relationships with inmates, who often tell him they are “too bad, with no chance of forgiveness.”

After he builds a rapport with the prisoners, then Carrier tells his story.

“I’m able to tell them miracles happen, and they have happened over and over in my life,” he said. “The greatest miracle is that God gave me the chance to go to the man [who assaulted Carrier] ... and say, ‘I want to be your friend, and I want that friendship to be eternal.’”

But if forgiveness is at the heart of the gospel and all Christians are called to a ministry of reconciliation, why is Carrier’s experience the exception rather than the norm?



Chris Carrier

### FUZZY UNDERSTANDING

Some theologians suggest many Christians struggle with forgiveness and reconciliation in interpersonal relations because they fail to grasp exactly what those concepts mean in terms of their relationship to God.

Varied views on Christian forgiveness came to light recently when veteran television journalist Brit Hume spoke on the *Fox News Sunday* program about whether Tiger Woods could recover from the revelations of his marital infidelity.

“He’s said to be a Buddhist. I don’t think that faith offers the kind of forgiveness and redemption that is offered by the Christian faith,” Hume said. “So, my message to Tiger would be, ‘Tiger, turn to the Christian faith, and you can make a total recovery and be a great example to the world.’”

Those comments by Hume — who reportedly made a deep faith commitment to Christ following his son’s suicide 11 years ago — prompted a firestorm. Some comments focused on the appropriateness of the remarks, or the chosen platform for delivering them, or whether Hume accurately portrayed Buddhism.

But the second-generation fallout of the controversy — the comments made about the comment — caused some Christians to raise concerns about a perceived cheapened view of God’s forgiveness that portrays it as a free pass based on easy belief.

For example, conservative commentator and provocateur Ann Coulter called Christianity “the best deal in the universe.” Crudely summarizing the incarnation and atonement, she concluded: “If you believe that, you’re in.”

### UNDERSTANDING DISTINCTIONS

Coulter’s explanation illustrates the muddled understanding many Christians have regarding the related — but not synonymous — subjects of forgiveness, grace, repentance,

reconciliation and redemption, some theologians insist.

God's forgiveness of sinners is not based on anything humans do but on what God already has done, said Randall O'Brien, author of *Set Free by Forgiveness*.

"Contrary to popular opinion, forgiveness precedes repentance," said O'Brien, president of Carson-Newman College, a Baptist school in Jefferson City, Tenn. "Repentance is the result of God's forgiveness — not the cause of it. God does not love and forgive us because we repent. We repent because God loves and forgives us. That's the radical gospel of the cross."

Jesus demonstrated unconditional love on the cross when he prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Nobody had repented of his involvement in his crucifixion before Jesus freely forgave, O'Brien noted.

But God's universal forgiveness of sinners does not mean universal salvation, redemption and reconciliation, he explained.

"Forgiveness is a necessary but insufficient condition for reconciliation," said O'Brien. "Reconciliation is always conditioned upon the response of the forgiven."

What's true in the relationship between God and sinful people also holds true in human relationships, he explained.

"Forgiveness is a one-way street. Reconciliation is a two-way street," he said.

Jim Denison, theologian-in-residence at the Baptist General Convention of Texas, agreed.

"Forgiveness makes reconciliation possible but does not ensure that it is achieved. Both parties must be willing to restore their relationship before reconciliation is accomplished," Denison said.

The example of Christ — and the grace Christians receive from God — demands action on the part of the person who has been hurt, O'Brien insisted.

"The victim has the task of initiating reconciliation," he said. "That sounds crazy. But it's the gospel."

## OFFENSES NOT EXCUSED

Forgiveness does not "look the other way" and pretend no harm as been done, O'Brien added. It does not minimize the damage caused or the offense committed.

"Forgiveness is not a substitute for judgment. Forgiveness is judgment. It is saying, 'I

judge you guilty, but I forgive you anyway,'" he said.

Forgiveness involves choice — choosing not to punish an offense, Denison observed.

"It is not pretending that the person was not harmed or excusing harmful behavior. When a governor pardons a criminal, she does not deny the reality of the crime, but rather chooses not to inflict the punishment prescribed by the law. God forgives our sin in the same way and calls us to treat others as he treats us," Denison said.

Forgiveness does not mean enabling future bad behavior or imperiling innocent people. O'Brien cited the example of a woman who has been physically abused by a spouse. Forgiveness does not mean placing oneself — or others who are vulnerable — in a position that facilitates future abuse.

"Forgiveness is not a synonym for foolishness," he said. "We're not called to cast our pearls before swine. We're not called to put our own safety or health — or that of our children — on the line."

## FORGIVE AND FORGET?

When God forgives sinners, he "will remember their sins no more," according to Jeremiah 31:34. But some Christian theologians and mental health professionals question whether that is either possible or advisable for human beings.

"God possesses the ability to forget all he forgives.... Such capacity is beyond most humans," Denison said.

Denison points to the example of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, who offered a prayer of forgiveness for people who were beating him to death with stones.

"Had Stephen survived the stoning he forgave, it is unlikely that he would have forgotten the experience," he said.

Psychologist Dan McGee, who administers counseling services for ministers for the Baptist General Convention of Texas, agreed.

"I doubt that Jesus forgot his excruciating suffering and death by Roman crucifixion, perhaps the most humiliating and painful means of dying ever conceived by depraved minds," McGee said. "However, most of the pain we experience at the hands of others, friend or foe, is not the result of willful intent to harm us."

McGee recalled a personal experience, when he asked a friend how a former colleague could be so cruel in his behavior

toward people with whom he had worked. His friend advised him not to take it personally and said, "When people are motivated by fear, they will run you over with no thought of the body count in their wake."

"I discovered that it is far too egocentric of me to think they did what they did with my demise in mind," McGee said. "What I am able to do in [Christ's] strength is remember, not forget."

"Remember that what they did makes some kind of sense to them, and try to understand the circumstances they were dealing with to behave as they did. And when I find myself in such circumstances, think carefully of the impact my behavior could have on those God loves."

## HEALING POWER

Forgiveness liberates the person who does the forgiving, O'Brien stressed.

"To refuse to forgive is to live life backward," he said, noting the person who rejects the possibility of forgiveness can become "a pain junkie" who draws his or her identity from the hurtful experience.

"Only forgiveness sets us free to a brand-new future. The only thing harder than forgiving is the alternative of living in bitterness."

Forgiveness possesses healing power for the person doing the forgiving, and it holds the potential of broader healing through reconciliation, McGee noted.

"Forgiveness is always appropriate because of what non-forgiveness does to us and what grace expressed has the potential of doing for those who have harmed us," he said.

"Forgiveness frees up the energy it takes to bear the burden of anger indefinitely. Psychologists know that anger suppressed — conscious blocking — or repressed — unconscious blocking — creates and sustains depression."

But at the relational level, reconciliation moves to the next level, he added.

"Forgiveness is the healthiest response, but reconciliation is a celebration," McGee said. "And there is no bond as tight as that one that emerges from two friends, lost in conflict, recovering through reconciliation." **BT**

—Ken Camp is managing editor of the Baptist Standard in Texas. John Hall of Texas Baptist communications contributed to this story.



## What do these churches have in common?

Through group subscriptions to *Baptists Today*, they keep up with the latest issues facing Baptists.

Ardmore Baptist Church, Winston-Salem, N.C.  
Boulevard Baptist Church, Anderson, S.C.  
Broadmoor Baptist Church, Baton Rouge, La.  
Brunswick Islands Baptist Church, Supply, N.C.  
Chadborn Baptist Church, Chadborn, N.C.  
Church in the Meadows, Lakeland, Fla.  
College Avenue Baptist Church, Lenoir, N.C.  
College Park Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla.  
Covenant Baptist Church, Gastonia, N.C.  
Cullowhee Baptist Church, Cullowhee, N.C.  
Druid Hills Baptist Church, Atlanta, Ga.  
Edenton Baptist Church, Edenton, N.C.  
Emerywood Baptist Church, High Point, N.C.  
Faith Baptist Church, Georgetown, Ky.  
Fellowship Baptist Church, Fitzgerald, Ga.  
Fernwood Baptist Church, Spartanburg, S.C.  
First Baptist Church, Ahsokie, N.C.  
First Baptist Church, Aiken, S.C.  
First Baptist Church, Anderson, S.C.  
First Baptist Church, Asheville, N.C.  
First Baptist Church, Cape Girardeau, Mo.  
First Baptist Church, Carolina Beach, N.C.  
First Baptist Church, Carrollton, Ga.  
First Baptist Church, Chattanooga, Tenn.  
First Baptist Church, Clemson, S.C.  
First Baptist Church, Columbus, Ga.  
First Baptist Church, Commerce, Ga.  
First Baptist Church, Conway, S.C.  
First Baptist Church, Dalton, Ga.  
First Baptist Church, Forest City, N.C.  
First Baptist Church, Fort Myers, Fla.  
First Baptist Church, Frankfort, Ky.  
First Baptist Church, Gainesville, Fla.  
First Baptist Church, Gainesville, Ga.  
First Baptist Church, Gastonia, N.C.  
First Baptist Church, Greenville, S.C.  
First Baptist Church, Greenwood, S.C.  
First Baptist Church, Griffin, Ga.  
First Baptist Church, Hawkinsville, Ga.  
First Baptist Church, Huntsville, Ala.  
First Baptist Church, Jasper, Ga.

First Baptist Church, Lexington, N.C.  
First Baptist Church, London, Ky.  
First Baptist Church, Lumberton, N.C.  
First Baptist Church, Macon, Ga.  
First Baptist Church, Madison, Ga.  
First Baptist Church, Madison, N.C.  
First Baptist Church, Marion, N.C.  
First Baptist Church, Mocksville, N.C.  
First Baptist Church, Morganton, N.C.  
First Baptist Church, Morrow, Ga.  
First Baptist Church, Mount Olive, N.C.  
First Baptist Church, Murfreesboro, Tenn.  
First Baptist Church, New Bern, N.C.  
First Baptist Church, Orangeburg, S.C.  
First Baptist Church, Pensacola, Fla.  
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First Baptist Church, Savannah, Ga.  
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First Baptist Church, Tifton, Ga.  
First Baptist Church, Wilmington, N.C.  
First Baptist Church, Wilson, N.C.  
First Baptist Church, Winston-Salem, N.C.  
Forest Hills Baptist Church, Raleigh, N.C.  
Franklin Baptist Church, Franklin, Va.  
Grace Fellowship Baptist Church, Meridian, Miss.  
Greystone Baptist Church, Raleigh, N.C.  
Haddock Baptist Church, Haddock, Ga.  
Hendricks Avenue Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Fla.  
Highland Hills Baptist Church, Macon, Ga.  
Highland Park Baptist Church, Austin, Texas  
Holmeswood Baptist Church, Kansas City, Mo.  
HomeStar Fellowship, Raleigh, N.C.  
Johns Creek Baptist Church, Alpharetta, Ga.  
Kathwood Baptist Church, Columbia, S.C.  
Knollwood Baptist Church, Winston-Salem, N.C.  
Lakeside Baptist Church, Rocky Mount, N.C.  
Lakeview Baptist Church, Camden, S.C.  
Lexington Avenue Baptist Church, Danville, Ky.  
Lystra Baptist Church, Chapel Hill, N.C.

Millbrook Baptist Church, Raleigh, N.C.  
Mount Zion Baptist Church, Macon, Ga.  
National Heights Baptist Church, Fayetteville, Ga.  
New Heights Baptist Church, Macon, Ga.  
Northminster Baptist Church, Jackson, Miss.  
North Stuart Baptist Church, Stuart, Fla.  
Oakmont Baptist Church, Greenville, N.C.  
Peachtree Baptist Church, Atlanta, Ga.  
Providence Baptist Church, Charlotte, N.C.  
Providence Baptist Church, Cookeville, Tenn.  
Providence Baptist Church, Hendersonville, N.C.  
Pullen Memorial Baptist Church, Raleigh, N.C.  
Reynoldson Baptist Church, Gates, N.C.  
Rock Falls Baptist Church, Orrick, Mo.  
Rolling Hills Baptist Church, Fayetteville, Ark.  
Rolesville Baptist Church, Rolesville, N.C.  
Second Baptist Church, Liberty, Mo.  
Second Baptist Church, Memphis, Tenn.  
Second Baptist Church, Richmond, Va.  
Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church, Atlanta, Ga.  
Shades Crest Baptist Church, Birmingham, Ala.  
Smoke Rise Baptist Church, Stone Mountain, Ga.  
South Main Baptist Church, Houston, Texas  
St. Andrews Baptist Church, Columbia, S.C.  
St. Matthews Baptist Church, Louisville, Ky.  
Tabernacle Baptist Church, Carrollton, Ga.  
Tabernacle Baptist Church, Raleigh, N.C.  
The Memorial Baptist Church, Greenville, N.C.  
Trinity Baptist Church, Moultrie, Ga.  
University Baptist Church, Baton Rouge, La.  
Vineville Baptist Church, Macon, Ga.  
Watts Street Baptist Church, Durham, N.C.  
Wieuca Road Baptist Church, Atlanta, Ga.  
Wingate Baptist Church, Wingate, N.C.  
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