

BAPTISTS Today

Soul food

Families nourished
by dinner night
out page 4

MULTI-SITE NEW
BAPTIST COVENANT
EVENT SET FOR
NOVEMBER page 10





Stirring the Heart...

Master of Divinity

Offering concentrations in:

- ◆ **Biblical Studies**
- ◆ **Christian Education and Formation**
- ◆ **Missiology**
- ◆ **Pastoral Care and Counseling**
- ◆ **Pastoral Studies**



For more information, please go to
www.gardner-webb.edu/divinity or call 704.406.3205

*Stretching the Mind,
Stirring the Heart,
Serving the Church*

Faith ◆ Service ◆ Leadership

**Gardner Webb
University**

"To serve churches by providing a reliable source of unrestricted news coverage, thoughtful analysis, helpful resources and inspiring features focusing on issues of importance to Baptist Christians."

BAPTISTS Today

An autonomous national Baptist news journal

Former, current pastors can make healthy handoffs

By Bill Wilson

8

Chinese connection made in Missouri

By Robert Hamblin

12



"A rabbi, an imam & two preachers go on a trip ..."

By Elizabeth Evans Hagan

34

Cover photo by John Pierce
Members of a Dalton, Ga., congregation serve up more than food.

Story on page 4

John D. Pierce
Executive Editor

Julie Steele
Chief Operations Officer

Jackie B. Riley
Managing Editor

Tony W. Cartledge
Contributing Editor

Bruce T. Gourley
Online Editor

David Cassidy
Church Resources Editor

Steve DeVane
Contributing Writer

Vickie Frayne
Art Director

Jannie Lister
Office Assistant

Kim L. Hovis
Development/Marketing Associate

Bob Freeman
Development/Marketing Associate

Walker Knight **Jack U. Harwell**
Publisher Emeritus Editor Emeritus

Board of Directors

Gary F. Eubanks, Marietta, Ga. (chairman)
Kelly L. Belcher, Spartanburg, S.C. (vice chair)

Z. Allen Abbott, Peachtree City, Ga.
Jimmy R. Allen, Big Canoe, Ga.
Nannette Avery, Signal Mountain, Tenn.
Thomas E. Boland, Alpharetta, Ga.
Huey Bridgman, Columbus, Ga.
Mary Jane Cardwell, Waycross, Ga.
Robert Cates, Rome, Ga.
Jack Causey, Statesville, N.C.
Anthony D. Clevenger, Pensacola, Fla.
Kenny Crump, Ruston, La.
David Currie, San Angelo, Texas
James M. Dunn, Winston-Salem, N.C.
R. Kirby Godsey, Macon, Ga.
Ben Gross, Chattanooga, Tenn.
Leslie D. Hill, Lexington, Ky.
Michael M. Massar, Tyler, Texas
J. Thomas McAfee, Macon, Ga.
Michael G. Queen, Wilmington, N.C.
Lee Royal, Greensboro, N.C.
Mary Etta Sanders, Dalton, Ga.
Charles Schaible, Macon, Ga.
Macon Sheppard, Folly Beach, S.C.
Walter B. Shurden, Macon, Ga.
Charlotte Cook Smith, Raleigh, N.C.
David M. Smith, Houston, Texas
Leo Thorne, Valley Forge, Pa.
Sarah Timmerman, Cairo, Ga.
David Turner, Richmond, Va.
Clement H. White, St. Petersburg, Fla.
Winnie V. Williams, Seneca, S.C.

Baptists Today (ISSN 1072-7787)
is published monthly by:
Baptists Today
P.O. Box 6318
Macon, GA 31208-6318

Subscription rates:
1 year, \$20 2 years, \$35
1 year groups of 25 or more, \$18
1 year groups of less than 25, \$20
1 year Canada, \$35
1 year foreign, \$50

Periodical postage paid at Macon, Ga.
31208 and additional mailing offices

POSTMASTER:
Send address corrections to:
Baptists Today
P.O. Box 6318
Macon, GA 31208-6318

(478) 301-5655
1-877-752-5658
www.baptiststoday.org

© 2011 *Baptists Today*.
All rights reserved.

PERSPECTIVES

- > Getting free from frustration7
By John Pierce
- > Gaustad kept us reminded of 'Roger's crazy ideas'17
By John Pierce
- > Unlike Ford, Edwin Gaustad knew the value of history17
By James M. Dunn
- > Bell on Hell18
By Leroy Seat
- > 'A Decade of Promise' — a decade later25
By Walter B. Shurden
- > Is cooperative missions dead?26
By Mark Wingfield

IN THE NEWS

- > Host churches sought for New Baptist Covenant II10
- > Craddock commends good starts for ministers, churches11
- > New Bible museum to feature significant artifacts16
- > News Digest14,15,24
- > Expanded, newly designed *Baptists Today*36
coming in June; May tour set
- > New online teaching resources coming next month37

FEATURES

- > Baptists and the Civil War: May 186130
By Bruce Gourley
- > Langdons answer six questions about CBF31
- > The Pickin' Preacher33
By John Pierce
- > Musical, politicians put Mormons in spotlight38

IN EVERY ISSUE

Quotation Remarks	6	Classifieds	23
Editorial	7	Lighter Side	28
Bible Studies	19	Reblog	29
In the Know	22	Media	32

Soul food

Families nourished by dinner night out

DALTON, Ga. — About every other Tuesday the fellowship hall of the First Baptist Church of Dalton, Ga., looks especially hospitable. Tables are set, affirming messages roll quietly across a screen, and Jane Jarrett faithfully provides soft piano music.

There is no program — but a clear purpose: to provide a good meal and an enjoyable night out for families who otherwise might not have such an opportunity.

“Soul Food” is a dream turned reality for Gail Duke who found her fellow church members and ministers eager to pitch in to provide such hospitality for the working poor in a community hit especially hard by the economic downturn.

“They come as families and we feed them here,” Gail said of the simple, but effective event that occurs on the first, third and fifth Tuesdays of each month.

Balloons, banners and birthday cakes on this particular evening mark the celebration of three years for “Soul Food.” Children with icing on their fingers finish their hearty meals and head over to tables where teens engage them in face painting and balloon art.

It is apparent that more is being fed than empty stomachs.

“The stories are amazing,” said Gail, during a rare break from moving table-to-table to greet families and to invite them to complete a survey that will help volunteers know what other services might be helpful.

Some of that is already taking place. One Sunday school class assisted those needing help with tax return preparation. And a “Soul Food” children’s choir is being formed.



Church members Lori Lowery and Tim Rogers, editor of the local newspaper, serve guests attending the three-year-old “Soul Food” dinner at First Baptist Church of Dalton, Ga.

SERVING HANDS

Gail credits the church’s kitchen staff and many volunteers with the enthusiasm that continues to grow after three years. Seven teams work the kitchen, serving line and tables on a rotating basis.

For some church members, their turn doesn’t roll around often enough. Betty and Charles Langford showed up even though it wasn’t their turn to serve.

“It’s addictive,” said Betty. “You get to know the people.”

Pastor Bill Ireland, who came to the church after “Soul Food” was already going strong, said it takes no motivation from him or other ministers. He might offer a suggestion or give feedback to an idea, he said, “but mostly I get out of the way.”

Twice a year, when the weather in North Georgia is especially good, the dinner moves outdoors and becomes a cookout.

GETTING STARTED

While attending a Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Georgia meeting, Gail heard someone from another congregation talk of serving “the working poor” and was intrigued.

Various programs fed homeless persons regularly, she knew. But Gail wondered if



Scott and Kerri went to “Soul Food” for a meal and found friends, work, a place to live and a church home.

there were families in Dalton who scraped to get by and could use a night out on occasion. On the drive back from the meeting she filled the ears of her then-pastor Bill Wilson with her growing plan.

“The church was doing renovations,” said Gail, who served on the missions committee at the time. “So I stayed quiet for a little while.”

Soon afterward, her proposal was well received and a planning committee was formed. The first dinner was set and flyers were placed in the city schools — although most promotion was by “more word of mouth,” she said.

Thirty-five persons attended the first dinner. Now anywhere from 250-450 people attend regularly — causing the kitchen crew to show great flexibility.

“They feel loved here,” she said of many families who return repeatedly. “They keep saying they are welcomed here.”

FAMILIES, FRIENDS

Some of the attendees are day laborers who find “spotty work,” said Gail. Others face particular challenges that squeeze their resources.

At the first “Soul Food” dinner, a 10-year-old girl rode several blocks on the back of her ailing mother’s wheelchair so they could enjoy the meal with others. Gail recalled the tenderness the girl showed in carefully removing corn from the cob and feeding it to her mother.

When the woman went into the hospital, the girl called the church because she knew they cared. When her mother died, church ministers and members were there to help. The now-young teen continues coming to the Tuesday dinners.

Gail said she gets “sweet little notes — especially at Christmas” from families showing appreciation for “Soul Food.” But the real rewards are in their stories.

And some of the families are engaging in First Baptist in other ways beyond the meal. Gail’s husband, Tommy Duke, believes that helps the congregation as well as the families.

“We say we are diverse, but we’re not,” he said of the prominent church. “This is possibly a way to get us more diversified.”

SCOTT AND KERRI

One couple showed up for a meal nearly three years ago and ended up with both a steady job and a new church family.

Scott and Kerri moved to Dalton to live with his sister after he lost his job — and eventually their home — in a neighboring town. His sister told them about “Soul Food,” so they stopped by.

Meeting Gail and Tommy Duke began opening much-needed doors, they said.

“We needed the meal,” said Scott, point blank. But he said they found much more.

“And we started going to church here,” Kerri added.

The Dukes introduced Scott and Kerri to fellow church members George and Phyllis Sutherland who had a farm with an empty trailer on it. They asked Scott and Kerri if they might be interested in moving in there and doing some work on the farm.



“They said we could move in anytime we liked,” Kerri recalled. “So we got some stuff and moved in (that night).”

Scott built a reputation for being hard working and soon was picking up odd jobs all around.

“Gail and Tommy helped us out by giving me work when I didn’t have work,” he said gratefully. “They’ve been a real blessing to us.”

Scott and Kerri said they endured “a couple of rough years” and fear that would have continued had they not made their way to First Baptist for dinner on a Tuesday night.

“It seemed like everything was pulling against us for about two years until we met this church,” said Scott.

BEYOND TUESDAYS

Now they come to the church on Sundays as well — and Scott reports to work there on weekdays. When the church had an opening on its maintenance staff last December, hard-working Scott’s application rose to the top.

“‘Soul Food’ has helped a lot of people,” said Scott. “It helped us for awhile.”

Out of gratitude, Scott and Kerri return whenever “Soul Food” dinners are held at the church. They are a source of encouragement and hope to others who are going through challenging times. And they enjoy the meal.

“We don’t need the food now, but Gail won’t let us come and not eat,” said Scott. “She’s got a heart that is so big.” **BT**



MORE THAN FOOD — Gail Duke hands out surveys to determine other ways in which church members can assist their neighbors living on very limited means.

Quotation

“ remarks ”

“The entrance exam for Christianity is admitting you are a failure.”

—*J.R. Briggs, a blogger and pastor of the Renew Community in Lansdale, Pa., who organized the Epic Fail Pastors Conference in April (RNS)*

“The Two Rivers Baptist Church name has been drug through the mud for the last several years. I’d even go as far to say that it’s been drug through the sewers.”

—*Executive Pastor Len Taylor on the renaming of Two Rivers Baptist Church, one of Nashville’s largest Southern Baptist congregations, as The Fellowship at Two Rivers following a long power struggle that resulted in a lawsuit (The Tennessean)*

“Our church has a whole new life and spirit than in recent years. We wanted our name to reflect that.”

—*Pastor Kevin Lund on the decision of Holladay Baptist Church, a Southern Baptist congregation in Utah, to change its name to Risen Life Church (Salt Lake Tribune)*

“A healthy society seems to arise when free people can earn a living and find joy and purpose in the life they earn; when going off to work is balanced by coming home to love; when diligence and daydreaming are both valued...”

—*Religion News Service columnist and Episcopal priest Tom Ehrlich*

“I learned about civil dialogue at my family dinner table.”

—*R. Marie Griffith, new director of Washington University’s John C. Danforth Center for Religion & Politics in St. Louis, who grew up in First Baptist Church of Chattanooga, Tenn., where her parents, Nan and Charlie Griffith, remain active lay leaders (St. Louis Beacon)*

“Sadly, charity does nothing to address the deeper issues of poverty, which are systemic. Charity is maintenance. What is needed is justice.”

—*James Evans, pastor of First Baptist Church of Auburn, Ala. (ethicsdaily.com)*

“I was the prodigal son ... but I came back ... You start thinking about what is important.”

—*63-year-old rocker Alice Cooper telling TV host Joy Behar of his return to the Christian faith about 20 years ago (CNN)*

“Beyond religion it’s the same philosophy for any theme day: give fans a chance to enjoy baseball with their group...”

—*Oakland A’s Steve Fanelli on Jewish Heritage Night that offers a team yarmulke and admission for \$26 (USA Today)*

“The magic of parables is that they give us a glimpse of the transcendent from the lens of the ordinary.”

—*David Garland, New Testament scholar and dean of Baylor’s Truett Seminary, speaking at Wayland University (Baptist Standard)*

“The point was to get more people to be like Chuck.”

—*Chip Mahon, a board member for Charles Colson’s various ministries including the Centurions, a program designed to pass along the 79-year-old felon-turned-evangelical’s understanding and practice of Christianity to younger handpicked leaders (Washington Post)*

“When I speak about living in a multi-cultural environment, stripping Christianity of its American biases, and developing a global worldview, (college) students look at me like I am an alien. It is mind-warping to realize there are committed Christians in other places who experience life differently than you do.”

—*President Jeff Iorg of Golden Gate Baptist Seminary, advocating at least two mission experiences for Christian teens (BP)*

“Are Christians called to change to world? Unequivocally, yes. This is, sometimes. Well, sort of ... In a sense, transforming the world is Jesus’ job. We’ve got a bad record. Some of the worst stuff we’ve done has been in the name of changing the world.”

—*Bishop Will Willimon of the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church, speaking at Baylor University’s Truett Seminary (ABP)*

“There are three key components of being a Baptist as I have known it. Giving in to being loved, giving in to the demands of love and giving back because of love.”

—*Church historian Walter B. Shurden in giving the Baptist Heritage Lecture Series at Campbellsville University in Kentucky*

“The new model is you don’t provide the housing and you provide more financial aid.”

—*President Ron Crauford on Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond’s plan to relocate after “the orderly selling of the campus” that includes dorm space and apartments (Richmond Times-Dispatch)*

editorial

Getting free from frustration — by seeing what we are supposed to see

By John Pierce

Seeking personal appeasement — i.e., wanting everything done our way — may be a greater obstacle than all others that churches face today. Yet changing firmly held, personal perspectives is a major challenge.

A needed and intentional shift in perspectives may only come through awareness and conviction. Instead of working so hard to get our way in every situation — and becoming frustrated when it does not occur — we must work harder to get past our frustration to see what matters more than personal appeasement.

This needed perspective jumped out to me from a comment Texas Baptist lay leader Ella Prichard made privately about her experience with a small, multi-cultural congregation.

She said: “I get frustrated with the lack of organization, deferred maintenance, music that is not always to my taste — and then, again and again, I see God at work changing lives in the most spectacular way and I feel like I’ve had a glimpse of the Kingdom of God.”

Indeed our tendencies are to see that which frustrates us — the condition or design of the building, the appearance of some attendees or the choices made by worship leadership — and to be blinded to the presence and movement of God in broken lives.

The greater tragedy is that our frustrations

and distractions often become distractions and frustrations for others who are seeking a divine encounter. However, the needs for worship, community and transformation far exceed the matters that cause our frustration.

Admittedly, needed shifts in perspectives are not done in a moment. They are learned over a period of time — often while countering relapses.

The starting point is confession. We must acknowledge our tendency to see what displeases us first — and our failure to move on to those genuinely more important matters to which we have been blinded.

It’s a learned perspective — one many of us are still trying to learn. It is an approach not unlike my own tendency to see what needs to be done rather than what good things have been accomplished.

This spring I completed some outdoor projects that had been on my “to do” list for a while: repainted a fence and arbor, and planted about two-dozen shrubs and vines. Stone planting areas were created to grow flowers and vegetables this year.

Despite all of this work, my tendency is

to pull into the driveway or walk outside and notice first and foremost that a bench still needs a fresh coat of paint and a new shrub row needs to be installed along the driveway.

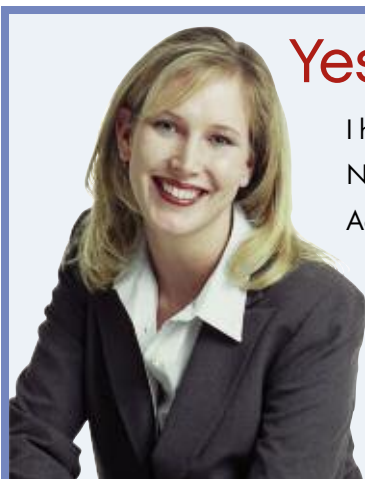
My attention on these few yet-to-be-finished projects often keeps me from enjoying the beauty of the many completed ones. It is a matter of focusing on the wrong things.

Likewise, we can engage in church life with our attention aimed at those matters that will often cause frustration: musical styles and other elements of worship planning that differ from our taste, the look and behavior of others who have come to church, or the physical setting that we think could be improved.

Getting stuck on these points of frustration leaves no room for giving proper attention to our own personal spiritual transformation and to seeing the joy in others finding meaning and purpose in life.

Perhaps the starting place when feeling frustrated by “the way things are going” is to explore what might be going on within our own lives.

A change in perspectives may be needed more than a change in worship styles, an organizational restructuring or a fresh coat of paint on the walls. We just might get a glimpse of the Kingdom of God — if we look in the right places. **BT**



Yes! I want to subscribe today

I have enclosed a check in the amount of \$ _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Church _____

Please fill out this form and return it to *Baptists Today*, P.O. Box 6318, Macon, GA 31208-6318

print subscription

1 year \$20

2 years \$35

online subscription

1 year \$15

2 years \$25

BAPTISTS
Today

A healthy handoff

Building crucial relationships between former, current pastors

The transition from one pastor to the next is a precarious handoff.

Too often, the exchange is bungled and the ministers and local church suffer from a litany of bruised feelings, resentment, wounded ego and crippled ministry.

I regularly talk with current and former pastors, as well as their spouses and children, who express deep hurt and regret about the way a pastoral transition has taken place. There is a better way because I had a ringside seat for a transition that went well.

My late father, Bill Wilson Sr., was the founding pastor of a church in Brentwood, Tenn., and after 20 years as pastor, left to work for the state Baptist convention. His successor, Mike Glenn, walked into a situation filled with both opportunity and peril.

Over the ensuing 20 years, the church has relocated, grown exponentially and thrived. These two men and their families managed this precarious situation with grace, humility and wisdom.

The result is a congregation that continues to live into its remarkable story with vigor, health and passion. Brentwood Baptist Church today is a congregation 8,000 strong, with an amazing story of growth and innovation.

Space for the new pastor

Mike and I spoke recently about his relationship with my father. Mike regularly and publicly affirms my father's ministry and insists that when he does so, he is affirming the church itself and the fact that its past is inextricably linked to both present and future.

One factor that helped the transition at Brentwood was that, during Mike's first five years as pastor, my father did interims, preached other places and attended a church plant. That time away gave Mike space to become the pastor.

Eventually, Mike and the church called

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article is part of a yearlong series titled "Transitions: Helping churches and church leaders in changing times," provided through a partnership between *Baptists Today* and the Center for Congregational Health (www.healthy-church.org) based in Winston-Salem, N.C.

my father and mother back on staff as co-ministers of missions. Upon their return, Mike saw the congregation begin to enjoy the warm relationship between my father and himself.

"People loved the fact that the former and current pastors were good friends," said Mike. "He never missed a chance to brag on me, and I never missed a chance to say how much he meant to me. He never tolerated criticism of me from others, even when it was deserved."

Over the years, Dad became Mike's counselor, prayer partner and encourager. Mike, never threatened by the respect and affection the congregation had for my father, even channeled it in positive ways.

"One time, in the midst of a church-wide crisis," he explained, "the anxiety in a large meeting was very high. At a critical moment, I told the congregation that the first thing I had done upon discovering the problem was to go to Bill Wilson (Sr.) for counsel and advice. When I said that, you could feel the tension ease and the whole church exhale. His voice of wisdom, earned over the years, was invaluable to me."

Mike maintains that part of the strong growth and health of Brentwood Baptist has to do with how he, my father and the congregation managed that handoff from founding pastor to successor. I believe their individual ego strength and maturity were critical as the two of them modeled a healthy transition that perpetuated a healthy church culture.

Later, in my own career, I was blessed to succeed Billy Nimmons at the First Baptist Church of Dalton, Ga., following his retirement. He was always gracious and generous with his support and encouragement, which

coupled with his undying love for the congregation, helped make our remarkable work there possible.

Another story of a successful transition involves Michael Lea of the First Baptist Church of West Jefferson, N.C., who followed Pastor Emeritus Ken Morris, when he retired after 33 years there. Michael entered the situation with eyes wide open: "I knew that Ken could be my greatest threat or my greatest ally."

Before coming in 2008, Michael discussed the transition process with the search committee and then spoke to Ken both by phone and in person. He was reassured of a healthy handoff, and said of Ken recently, "He has been my greatest asset."

Healthy boundaries

Before Michael entered the picture, Ken prepared the congregation to love another pastor. He reminded them on numerous occasions that he was retiring because he wanted to, and he announced his intention to fully support the new pastor.

Ken stayed out of the search process, and was often absent from the church during the two-year interim between his retirement and Michael's arrival. Like my father, Ken served other churches as he transitioned away from pastoral leadership of his long-time congregation.

Serving as an interim pastor for two churches outside the county helped him separate. "That feeling that I belonged to another church helped me feel that not all of my roots were at First Baptist," he said.

Today he calls Michael his pastor and friend. When Ken is asked to do a funeral, he requests that the family go through Michael. Then he lets Michael assign him a role. If Ken visits church members in the hospital, he goes as a friend — not a pastor — and tells them, "Michael will take good care of you."

Trust and respect

Like the friendship between Mike and my father, Michael and Ken's relationship is one of trust and open communication.



“Ken has provided a great deal of leadership here by saying to people, ‘Michael is our pastor now; let’s ask him,’ or ‘let’s look to him for leadership at this time,’” Michael explained.

On the other hand, Michael understands that many in the church have a rich history with Ken, so they want him to be involved in funerals and weddings. The two have proactively avoided triangulation.

When someone mentions Michael to Ken, Ken responds with how fortunate he is to have Michael as his pastor. When someone mentions Ken to Michael, Michael responds with a narrative description of the great pastoral leadership that has brought the church to this point.

The respect between former and current pastor is clear. Ken refuses to serve on committees or teach Sunday school, but he stays involved in music at the church and occasionally volunteers in the library. Michael invites Ken to meetings of the larger staff.

“This is Christ’s ministry,” Michael insisted, “not Ken’s or mine.”

A healthy handoff between former and current pastors never just happens. It

One factor that helped the transition at Brentwood was that, during Mike’s first five years as pastor, my father did interims, preached other places and attended a church plant. That time away gave Mike space to become the pastor.

requires careful planning and sustained effort.

How can we manage this pivotal transition in a way that is healthy and promotes growth for all concerned? What follows is sound advice from Mike, Ken and Michael.

To read more about the ways former pastors can leave well, and to read the full interviews with Mike Glenn, Michael Lea and Ken Morris, visit

healthychurch.org/threshold or cntr4conghhealth.wordpress.com. **BT**

—Bill Wilson is president of the Center for Congregational Health (www.healthychurch.org) based in Winston-Salem, N.C.

Advice for incoming pastors:

1. Do not rush the transition.
2. Recognize the principle of different gifts for different times, which allows you to bless your predecessor without reservation.
3. Be respectful of and sensitive to the history and culture of the church.
4. Honor your elders.
5. Watch your territorial language. Remember that it is Christ’s church, not yours or your predecessor’s.
6. Leave your ego at the door.
7. Work to build trust with the former pastor and congregation.

Advice for former pastors:

1. Work to find interests and an identity apart from being pastor of that congregation.
2. Tell the congregation that you are no longer the pastor, and believe it yourself.
3. Show support and confidence in the church and in the new pastor and pastoral staff.
4. Set boundaries around funerals, weddings and hospital visits.

For outgoing and incoming pastors:

Model health, even if it is not reciprocated.

In your own words

“We chose to advertise for our associate pastor position in *Baptists Today* and received over 50 applications from all over the Southeast... [W]e have filled that position and are very pleased with the results. Your office was very professional and efficient in getting our information out.”

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
BOONE, N.C.

Looking for a Good Example?

The Bible is a rich source of good examples of people living out their faith. *Profiles in Character* provides 15 Bible studies of women and men in the Old Testament.

Log on to
www.baptistwaypress.org

and see all the study materials from BaptistWay Press®—more than 40 studies for adults plus FREE materials for all ages and in 7 languages.

Call 1.866.249.1799 to order or for a FREE sample today!
Or e-mail baptistway@texasbaptists.org

BAPTISTWAYPRESS®
BaptistGeneralConventionOfTexas



Host churches sought for multi-site event

New Baptist Covenant organizers planning Nov. 17-19 gathering

ATLANTA — Three years after the Celebration of a New Baptist Covenant drew 15,000 persons from various Baptist groups to Atlanta, a second major event is being planned for mid-November with large church-based gatherings to be held across the nation.

The major sessions will originate at the Atlanta gathering and be beamed to the various locations. Hosts in each location may provide additional programming and will coordinate ministry opportunities to close out the event.

“This will be quite a different format than before,” former President Jimmy Carter told a group of about 25 Baptist leaders he summoned to the Carter Center April 4 to hear a report on the first-stage planning and to offer suggestions.

Carter said holding the meetings in churches in various cities will reduce overall costs and permit more people to be involved than the single large gathering held in Atlanta in 2008. All participants, he said, will be “bound electronically and through the Spirit of Christ.”

Longtime Baptist leader Jimmy Allen, who spearheaded the planning of the earlier event, will do so this time along with David Key, director of the Baptist studies program at Emory University’s Candler School of Theology. Emory is providing office space for the planning, and Mercer University is managing the finances.

Allen and Philadelphia pastor William Shaw, former president of the National Baptist Convention Inc., will co-chair the event with Carter serving as convener.

Organizers admitted that the time frame is short for planning such a major event and requested help in securing host churches in various cities and contributions to cover costs. Interested persons may contact organizers at

newbaptistcovenant@emory.edu. Updated information will be posted at www.newbaptistcovenant.org.

Shared programming via satellite from the Atlanta site will begin on Thursday evening Nov. 17 and conclude on Friday evening Nov. 18. Two prominent African-American Baptist preachers, National Baptist Convention of America president Stephen Thurston and Progressive National Baptist Convention president Carroll Baltimore, will speak. Additional program personalities and plans will be forthcoming.

Saturday, Nov. 19, will be devoted to ministry in various settings where participants gather. The overall theme of the meeting will



David Key (left), director of the Baptist studies program at Emory’s Candler School of Theology, is working with Jimmy Allen (center) to organize the New Baptist Covenant II that is set for Nov. 17-19 in various cities around the U.S. In convening the second major event, President Jimmy Carter said Baptists from diverse backgrounds have a chance to build on past successes coming out of the 2008 celebration.

again be tied to Jesus’ call in Luke 4:18-19 to “proclaim the release of the captives, and the recovery of sight for the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed...”

Carter suggested Saturday ministry activities should better acquaint Baptists with the poor in their communities as well with persons in prison.

“I’ve been praying a lot about this,” said Carter, noting the increased number of persons being held in correctional facilities and the large percentage that are African American, Hispanic or with mental incapacities. “One of the worst blights on American society is the people we have in prison.”

As governor of Georgia, Carter said he and leaders of neighboring states sought to reduce prison populations while retaining those who should be incarcerated. Now, he

said, the receipt of funds for retaining prisoners has become an incentive to keep prison facilities full.

“I think there’s some wonderful things we might do on that one subject,” Carter said.

Building homes through Habitat for Humanity and making poor families aware of resources available to them are other possible projects he mentioned. Carter said his own congregation, Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, Ga., has made an intentional effort to become better acquainted with the poorest persons in their community.

Allen added that the Saturday ministry events at the conclusion of New Baptist Covenant II should be groundwork for ongoing ministries and not something “just for a day.” “How can we do something in a day that accelerates something down the road?” he asked.

Organizers are seeking to form volunteer task forces to plan and implement the various aspects of the three-day, multi-site celebration.

While four regional New Baptist Covenant gatherings were held in the intervening years, Carter said holding the second major event three years after the large Atlanta gathering in 2008 has historical precedence. The Triennial Convention (1814-1845), the first national Baptist group formed in the U.S., met on that schedule before

dividing North and South.

“Three years is the target we set,” Carter told *Baptists Today* news journal. “That’s why we’re having it in November.”

The 2008 meeting, Carter said, broke down racial barriers and brought Baptists from different backgrounds together. “This will give us a chance to build on these past successes.”

Carter said he hopes a large and widely diverse crowd of Baptists will gather in each of the various locations.

“This is not an exclusive group,” he said. “All Baptists who believe we are saved by the grace of Jesus Christ are welcomed to come.”

Wrapping up the planning session, Carter, 86, said the bringing together of oft-divided Baptists for worship and service is important to him. “This is a very high priority in my life.” **BT**

Craddock commends good starts for ministers, churches

ATLANTA — “I hope we get rid of lots of things,” said famed preacher Fred Craddock as part of an April 12 inaugural convocation sponsored by the Center for Teaching Churches, a new Lily-funded initiative of Mercer University’s McAfee School of Theology that assists graduates and churches with transition into congregational ministry.

Craddock, the retired preaching professor from Emory University’s Candler School of Theology who has made rare public addresses in recent years due to health concerns, identified a few practices that he believes should be removed from congregational life: “Condescension in the pulpit. Talking about rather than to each other.”

In a sermon based on Luke 4:16-30, Craddock said he would like to see the distance between theological education and churches collapse.

“Get rid of not letting the churches get in on our education,” said Craddock, noting that too many ministers withhold “the good stuff” of theological insight and give their congregations “the same old boiled peanuts.”

“You should share the best of your scholarship,” he said. “... You don’t save the good stuff for your colleagues.”

Craddock said the name given to the new program, Center for Teaching Churches, could be understood in two ways — with the church either doing or receiving the teaching. Such “intentional ambiguity” fits well with the writings of Paul, he noted, with translations often giving a footnote to explain a possible second meaning.

“Paul could do that intentional ambiguity to a tee,” said Craddock. “Paul wants to make it clear that we are ... partners in the gospel. And he strains the language to make that happen.”

Commending greater imagination in the task of preaching, he affirmed: “I can tell you, there’s a lot of good stuff in the Bible.” **BT**



Fred Craddock (left) with Dean Alan Culpepper of Mercer’s McAfee School of Theology

N.C. journalist DeVane now writing for *BT*

Steve DeVane is the new part-time contributing writer for *Baptists Today*. He will provide North Carolina-based stories for both the national and N.C. editions of the news journal.

DeVane lives in Lillington, N.C., and is a staff writer for *The Fayetteville Observer*. A graduate of Campbell University and Southeastern



Steve DeVane

Seminary, he was managing editor of the *Biblical Recorder*, the historic newspaper of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina newspaper, from 1997-2009.

He won the Frank Burkhalter Award from the Baptist Communicators Association. It is the association’s top prize for news writing.

DeVane is a deacon, member of the contemporary praise band and chair of the denominational relations committee at Memorial Baptist Church in Buies Creek, N.C. He and his wife, Cherry, have three children. **BT**

Holy † ☪ ⋄ 🧘 ॐ!

“LIKE ANY REALLY GOOD book, Kirby Godsey’s book will raise some serious questions for his readers. However, there can be no doubt that in a society that is increasingly pluralistic, this book will contribute much to interreligious understanding.”

TONY CAMPOLO
Professor Emeritus, Eastern University

Is God a Christian?

R. KIRBY GODSEY

f t in

isgodachristian.com

Mercer University Press (mupress.org), HC \$19.95; eBook available
Available on Amazon, B&N.com and your favorite bookstore.



Longtime missionaries to Taiwan and China, Ina and Ron Winstead (center), now enjoy the company of Chinese students and professors visiting Southeast Missouri State University. They are helping these international guests to connect with the First Baptist Church of Cape Girardeau, Mo., where they receive a warm welcome and a better understanding of the Christian faith.

The Chinese Connection

Former missionaries to China now witnesses to Chinese in Missouri

CAPE GIRARDEAU, Mo. —Ron and Ina Winstead retired in 2001 after 30 years of missionary service in Taiwan and China and returned to their native Missouri. They looked forward to joining a church, spending time with children and grandchildren, and settling into a leisurely pace for their golden years.

But the Lord had other ideas.

The Winsteds bought a home in Jackson, Mo., not far from the Missouri Bootheel where they grew up, and they joined the Cape Girardeau First Baptist Church, where their son-in-law, Mike Shupert, is pastor and their daughter,

Brenda Shupert, participates in the music and education ministries.

The Winsteds and Shuperts became a ministerial team, as they had been years earlier in Taiwan, when Mike and Brenda served for two years with the Winsteds on the mission field.

At the Cape Girardeau church, Ron, who had taught Bible classes in Chinese seminaries, quickly signed on as a Sunday school teacher and leader of a Wednesday night Bible study group. Ina joined the choir and volunteered to coordinate the Wednesday night church dinner and other fellowship activities. In 2008 she was ordained as a deacon.

But the Lord still had more plans in store for them.

Cape Girardeau is the home of Southeast Missouri State University, which numbers among its 11,000 students more

than 200 from China, the largest number of Southeast Missouri students from any country outside the United States.

Since 2005 the university has had student exchange programs with two Chinese universities — Sichuan Normal University, in Chengdu, and Hunan Normal University, in Changsha — whereby Chinese students spend up to two years in Missouri.

In addition, since 1989 Southeast Missouri State University has owned a world-class collection of William Faulkner books, manuscripts and documents, thereby attracting scholars from all over the world to visit its Center for Faulkner Studies to study and conduct research on the Nobel Prize-winning author.

Chinese literary scholars are greatly interested in American authors, especially Faulkner, and each year two or three

Chinese professors spend from three to 12 months studying in the Faulkner Center.

With this ever-increasing influx of Chinese students and professors to the Southeast campus, quite a few of these visitors come to First Baptist Church, where they are welcomed by a friendly congregation — and surprised to be greeted by a Chinese-speaking former missionary. On a given Sunday as many as 10-12 Chinese attend the morning worship service, and several of these also regularly participate in Dr. Ron Winstead's Sunday school class.

"For 30 years we traveled 10,000 miles to China," Ron notes. "Now the Chinese travel 10,000 miles to us." He adds, joyfully, "The Lord truly does work in surprising and miraculous ways."

Pastor Mike Shupert said he is thrilled by the church's relationship with the Chinese visitors.

"Our church community has embraced this Chinese connection with open arms and adopted these individuals as part of our fellowship," he said. "Some of the Chinese come initially to practice their English language skills, to learn about American and Heartland culture, and just to observe a western Christian worship experience. But they quickly become a part of our church family, and some of them become Christians."

Some also become church workers, singing in the choir, reading Scripture (sometimes in their native language) and giving their testimonies in worship services, helping in Vacation Bible School, and taking their turns with other church members in working in the kitchen.

The growing presence of the Chinese contingent in the church's worship services has led a number of local Chinese Americans to attend the church. Ron and Mike have performed baptisms and wedding ceremonies among this group, and one of those baptized served for a time as the church pianist.

In addition to interacting with the Chinese visitors to the church, Ron leads a Chinese-language Bible study every Saturday night that is held at the Baptist Student Center on the Southeast campus. Those involved are also invited to participate in mission activities and other programs sponsored by the campus ministry.

"Knowing Chinese Christians reminds us that the Kingdom of God is bigger than the local church and does not end at a national boundary, ... and that's a truth all Christians need to recognize."

Ina, a former teacher, serves as a friendly counselor and "American Mom" for many of the Chinese visitors. One of those visitors, Ginny Su, had worked with the Winsteads and other Cooperative Baptist Fellowship personnel in Nanning, China, during the last five years of the Winsteads' tenure in China and subsequently came to the Faulkner Center as a visiting scholar.

Ginny's daughter, Wendy Tang, is now a student at Southeast Missouri and an active member of the First Baptist congregation.

"We try to provide a home away from home for all of the Chinese scholars and students," said Ina.

Visitors are very grateful for the friendly reception they receive from the Winsteads.

"The Winsteads are a perfect couple," said Xiumei Wang, a visiting professor from Jinan. "They are so considerate, so knowledgeable in the Bible and so faithful to God. With their help, my life here is colorful and interesting."

Professor Tingting Zhu, from Nanjing, said: "I'll always remember those Saturday evening Bible studies with the Winsteads who so patiently answered all the inquiries I had. They are just the most gentle people I've met in my life."

In recent months three of the students and two of the visiting Chinese professors at the Faulkner Center have accepted Christ and been baptized during their stay in Cape Girardeau. The baptismal services were conducted in both English and Chinese, with Ron handling the Chinese portion of the ordinance.

Another visiting student has returned to China while considering full-time Christian service, and another professor

accepted Christ but has to be a "closet Christian" back in China, since, as a college administrator, he is required to be a member of the Communist Party and is prohibited from participating in public worship services.

Internet connections enable church members to maintain contact with their Chinese friends once the latter have returned home. They exchange emails, family photographs and updates on their Christian experiences.

One convert wrote that the nearest Chinese church to her is an hour away, and that she has to arrive early to get a seat at the worship service. Those who are late must crowd into the church and stand for the entire service.

"Knowing Chinese Christians reminds us that the Kingdom of God is bigger than the local church and does not end at a national boundary," Winstead said, adding, "and that's a truth all Christians need to recognize."

Both Ron and Mike envision further growth among the Chinese and Chinese Americans attending First Baptist and the Baptist Student Center Bible studies.

"We have a steady stream of Chinese coming through our church and the perfect resource people to minister to their needs and share the love of Christ with them," said Mike. "We would be happy to see the numbers increase to the point that we could sustain an alternate Chinese-language service."

The Winsteads believe that God has a plan for every individual's life — and sometimes a change of plan as a person moves from one phase of life to another. For even back in the United States, they are still Chinese missionaries.

Ron adds: "God is up to something big in China, and we are grateful for the opportunity to have a small part in his work there through these scholars and students who return to China with at least a better understanding of the Christian faith, and for some a commitment to Christ as Lord." **BT**

—Robert Hamlin is a poet, the director of the Center for Faulkner Studies and English professor at Southeast Missouri State University, and a deacon at First Baptist Church of Cape Girardeau, Mo.

Chaplains offered exit plan after gay ban repeal

WASHINGTON (RNS) — The Army has started training chaplains on the repeal of the ban on openly gay military members, saying those who are unable to follow the forthcoming policy can seek a voluntary departure.

“The Chaplains Corps’ First Amendment freedoms and its duty to care for all will not change,” reads a slide in the PowerPoint presentation, released to Religion News Service March 24. “Soldiers will continue to respect and serve with others who may hold different views and beliefs.”

Critics familiar with the Army presentation, however, say the military is essentially telling chaplains who are theologically conservative that they are not welcome.

“U.S. Army now warning chaplains: If you don’t like the homosexual agenda, get out!” reads a headline on the website of

Mass Resistance, an anti-gay group based in Waltham, Mass.

President Obama signed a law repealing Don’t Ask/Don’t Tell last December, but the new policy will not take effect until 60 days after Obama and military leaders are assured that it will not harm military readiness.

Lt. Col. Carleton Birch, a spokesman for the Army chief of chaplains, said about half of the military service’s 2,900 chaplains had received the training, which started in February and was expected to conclude in April — and that only one Army chaplain has left the service over the pending repeal.

“Our training is an opportunity for our senior chaplains to have an honest and open conversation about the repeal policy, its effects on them and their ministry,” Birch said. “And it’s going very well. ... In no way are we giving the message, shape up or ship out.”

Schuller says he wouldn’t have OK’d church’s gay covenant

(RNS) — Crystal Cathedral founder Robert H. Schuller said in March he never would have approved a recent covenant that choir members were asked to sign urging them to be Christian and heterosexual.

“I have a reputation worldwide of being tolerant of all people and their views,” Schuller told *The Orange County Register*. “I’m too well-educated to criticize a certain religion or group of people for what they believe in. It’s called freedom.”

The covenant describes choir members as people who confess Jesus as their savior, consider the Bible “authoritative and infallible,” and understand the cathedral’s position that marriage is “between one man and one woman.”

Schuller told the newspaper he agrees with the covenant’s stance on homosexuality but “that doesn’t mean that we are going to start a crusade against homosexuals.”

In a statement on its website, the Southern California church, now led by his daughter and senior pastor Sheila Schuller Coleman, described the covenant as an attempt to explain expectations of ministry leaders. It apologized to those that might be hurt by its language.

Millionaire buys paintings so church can keep them

CANTERBURY, England (RNS/ENInews) — A self-effacing multimillionaire has become a local hero after buying a series of 17th-century religious paintings and then donating them back to the Church of England in a bid to help boost art tourism.

Jonathan Ruffer, 59, paid 15 million pounds (about \$21.3 million) for a series of paintings of the biblical patriarch Jacob and his sons by Spanish artist Francisco de Zurbaran, according to ENInews.

The eight-foot paintings, completed between 1640 and 1645, have been housed at Auckland Castle, the official residence of the Anglican bishop of Durham, since 1756, after a bishop bought them for a little less than 125 pounds (about \$200).

Earlier this year, the managers of the Church of England’s £5 billion investment portfolio proposed selling the paintings at auction in hopes of using the proceeds to fund church ministry in poorer parts of England.

Thousands of people in northeast England signed a petition asking that the paintings remain at the castle, and supported a campaign organized by Member of Parliament Helen Goodman to keep them in Britain.



Ruffer, who co-founded the successful Ruffer Investment Management in 1994, stepped in to buy the paintings. Talks have started between the National Trust, a British historic preservation charity, and the Durham County Council to open the castle to greater public access. Civil leaders hope the ongoing presence of the Zurbaran paintings will boost tourism.

More U.S. colleges adding Muslim chaplains

ITHACA, N.Y. (*USA Today*/RNS) — When Jainal Bhuiyan attended Cornell University, he and his fellow Muslim students were mentored and led in religious prayers by a collection of Muslim professors, graduate students and staff.

“That was our network that filled the void,” said Bhuiyan, 28, and now senior vice president at the New York investment bank Rodman & Renshaw.

Cornell soon could join the growing ranks of universities with full-time Muslim chaplains working alongside the Christian and Jewish chaplains already common on college campuses. Bhuiyan and other Muslim alumni have created the Diwan Foundation, which launched last month to raise money to establish such a position at Cornell.

No one keeps official numbers, but more than 30 Muslim chaplains work on college campuses or at private high schools around the nation, most of them part time, said Tahera Ahmad, who started at Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill., last fall as associate chaplain and the university’s first Muslim chaplain.

Report: Small churches feeling financial squeeze

(RNS) — Almost all U.S. churches witnessed a change in the financial giving they received in 2010 compared to 2009, with smaller churches feeling the squeeze but larger churches faring relatively better, according to a new report.

Only 12 percent of churches reported unchanged giving from 2009, according to the State of the Plate survey released March 30, while 43 percent of churches experienced a giving increase and 39 percent reported a decrease.

Smaller congregations were more likely to see a decrease in giving, said Matt Branaugh, an editor at Christianity Today International, which helped gather the data for the State of the Plate for the past two years.

The report found that about 40 percent of churches with fewer than 249 attendees experienced a drop in giving. Only 29 percent of megachurches, with an average weekend attendance of more than 2,000, reported a decrease in giving, according to the report.

Study suggests young adults can get fat at church

(RNS) — Thou shalt not serve pizza?

Young adults who regularly attend religious activities are 50 percent more likely to become obese when they reach middle age than their nonreligious peers, a new study shows.

Based on their findings, researchers at Northwestern University's medical school think congregations should be a focus in the fight to prevent obesity.

"It's possible that getting together once a week and associating good works and happiness with eating unhealthy foods could lead to the development of habits that are associated with greater body weight and obesity," said Matthew Feinstein, the study's lead investigator and a fourth-year student at the school.

The research, released in March, marks the first time a longitudinal study of obesity has been linked to religious involvement, the university said.

The study, which tracked 2,433 people for 18 years, compared men and women who attended a religious activity at least once a week to those with less participation. It found that young adults ages 20 to 32 with normal weight who were frequent attenders were 50 percent more likely to be obese in middle age.

The researchers noted that their findings do not indicate that people with significant religious involvement are likely to have worse health overall than nonreligious people. For example, religious people, who often smoke less than nonreligious people, generally live longer.

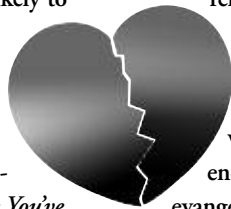
Christians question conventional wisdom on divorce stats

(RNS) — It's been proclaimed from pulpits and blogs for years — Christians divorce as much as everyone else in America. But some scholars and family activists are questioning the oft-cited statistics, saying Christians who attend church regularly are more likely to remain wed.

"It's a useful myth," said Bradley Wright, a University of Connecticut sociologist who recently wrote *Christians Are Hate-Filled Hypocrites ... and Other Lies You've Been Told*. "Because if a pastor wants to preach about how Christians should take their marriages more seriously, he or she can trot out this statistic to get them to listen to him or her."

The various findings on religion and divorce hinge on what kind of Christians are being discussed. Wright combed through the General Social Survey, a vast demographic

study conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, and found that Christians, like adherents of other religions, have a divorce rate of about 42 percent. The rate among religiously unaffiliated Americans is 50 percent.



When Wright examined the statistics on evangelicals, he found worship attendance has a big influence on the numbers. Six in 10 evangelicals who never attend had been divorced or separated, compared to just 38 percent of weekly attendees.

Wright questions the approach of The Barna Group, evangelical pollsters based in Ventura, Calif. David Kinnaman, Barna's president, said the statistical differences reflect varied approaches, with Wright looking more at attendance and his research firm dwelling on theological commitments.



Jethro James

Crime-fighting pastor gets carjacked

NEWARK, N.J. (RNS) — A prominent pastor who's been recognized for his efforts to combat violence in Newark, had his truck stolen as he opened the church parking lot for Bible study

Wednesday evening March 16.

"That is the last thing I would have expected, especially with all the folks I've helped in this community," said pastor Jethro James of the Paradise Baptist Church.

Last December, James helped organize a summit of law enforcement officials, politicians and citizens to discuss a recent increase

of gun violence and carjackings. At that time, James was concerned that parishioners, especially those from outside the city, would be fearful of attending church services.

James said he was pushed to the ground as he got out of his car to unlock the gates of the church parking lot. He turned around to see two men, between the ages of 16 and 25 get into his truck, back up and take off with smoking tires.

James said he was not injured, but was stunned and disoriented. "If they are going to carjack me at a church, what will happen next. God forbid something will happen on a Sunday morning."



Biblical treasure trove

New Bible museum coming to D.C. will feature significant artifacts

WASHINGTON (RNS) — A new multimillion-dollar, high-tech, interactive museum of the Bible was announced amid 130 artifacts of the Good Book at a private exhibition at the Vatican Embassy in late March.

The exhibit was a sample of Jewish, Roman Catholic and Protestant treasures from the future museum's 10,000 manuscripts and texts, one of the world's largest biblical collections.

Some were as old as pages of the gospel in the Aramaic of Jesus' time; as political as the only Bible edition ever authorized by the U.S. Congress; as treasured as first editions of the majestic King James Version (KJV), displayed near the king's own seal.

These will form the basis for "a public museum designed to engage people in the history and the impact of the Bible," said museum sponsor Steve Green, an evangelical businessman and owner of the Oklahoma City-based craft chain Hobby Lobby.

The Green family has amassed the world's largest collection of ancient biblical manuscripts and texts including his favorite: the 1782 Aitken Bible authorized by Congress.

While the location, architecture and even the museum's name are still in the works, 300 highlights of the Green Collection will go on tour beginning at the Oklahoma Museum of Art on May 16. The traveling exhibit, called *Passages*, will move to the Vatican in October and New York City by Christmas.

The announcement was made at the Vatican Embassy to highlight Catholic contributions to the best-loved English text, the 400-year-old KJV, which draws about 80 percent of its majestic language from an earlier translation by a Catholic priest.

Meanwhile, scholars at 30 universities worldwide are burrowing into rare texts from the collection and pioneering technology that enables them to bring out the ancient words in the most faded and printed-over manuscripts, said Scott Carroll, director of the collection and research professor of manuscript studies at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

Carroll's primary focus has been finding and authenticating ancient manuscripts that



Using a new technology developed by The Green Collection in collaboration with Oxford University, scholars have uncovered the earliest surviving New Testament written in Palestinian Aramaic found on recycled parchment under a layer in this rare manuscript called the Codex Climaci Rescriptus. Religion News Service photo courtesy of The Green Collection.

can deepen — or alter — "our understanding of the word of God. The Bible didn't come from the sky as tablets handed to Moses on Mount Sinai and then wind up in a hotel desk drawer," Carroll said.

"The Bible is not in a lockbox. It changes across time," he said, pointing to the earliest known manuscript fragment of Genesis, a section of the Dead Sea Scrolls, a Jewish Torah (the five books of Moses) from the time of the Spanish Inquisition, and more.

Passages will also address the dramatic struggles behind the texts, as translations are a matter of life, death and eternal fate to believers. The illustrated frontispiece of one King James Version shows the king flanked by people who would be burned at the stake within 10 years. However, Green and Carroll say their museum, opening by 2016, has no theological agenda.

"Think of the great new science museums that take you inside how things work, or the Folger Library's public and scholarly center for Shakespeare," Carroll said. "This will be our approach to the Bible. It's a museum, not a ministry." **BT**

Highlights of the Green Collection include:

- The Codex Climaci Rescriptus, one of the world's earliest surviving Bibles. Using a new technology developed by the Green Collection in collaboration with Oxford University, scholars have uncovered the earliest surviving New Testament written in Palestinian Aramaic — the language used in Jesus' household — found on recycled parchment.
- One of the largest collections of cuneiform clay tablets in the Western Hemisphere.
- The second-largest private collection of Dead Sea Scrolls, all of which are unpublished and likely to substantially contribute to an understanding of the earliest surviving texts in the Bible.
- The world's largest private collection of Jewish scrolls, spanning more than 700 years of history, dating to the Spanish Inquisition.
- Previously unpublished biblical and classical papyri, including surviving texts dating to the time of the now-lost Library of Alexandria.
- The earliest-known, near-complete translation of the Psalms to (Middle) English.
- A number of the earliest printed texts, including a large portion of the Gutenberg Bible and the world's only complete Block Bible in private hands.
- Early tracts and Bibles of Martin Luther, including a little-known letter written the night before Luther's excommunication.
- Numerous items illustrating the contribution of Jews and Catholics to the King James translation of the Bible and other historical effects.

"The Bible didn't come from the sky as tablets handed to Moses on Mount Sinai and then wind up in a hotel desk drawer."

Gaustad kept us reminded of ‘Roger’s crazy ideas’

By John Pierce

When news came that respected historian and author Edwin Gaustad had died (on March 24), my first thought was that we had lost one of our finest observers of religious life in America. My second thought was about the many jewels that can be mined from his wonderful biography of Roger Williams

Those not attuned to reading biographies, especially about historical figures, may be unconvinced. But I assure you that this book will be an enjoyable and enlightening read.

The freedoms we cherish and seek to preserve in this nation did not just pop into the heads of our founders when they sat down to draft a constitution.

They were hammered out in a struggle against controlling powers — by those like Williams who founded Rhode Island as a refuge of religious freedom for Jews, Quakers, Baptists and other suspect groups as well as those of other or no faith. He also led in the

founding of the First Baptist Church in America and Brown University in Rhode Island.

One spring Sunday evening in 2006, I spoke to the historic Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Macon, Ga., on “Roger’s crazy ideas.” It was my way of sharing some of the



jewels from Dr. Gaustad’s fascinating biography of Williams.

It was also my attempt to show — as Gaustad did so well — how the widely-held understandings of individual and religious freedom that we embrace today were once minority opinions and outlawed practices. Getting a hearing for unfettered religious liberty came at a cost, one that Williams and others such as Obadiah Holmes (who was beaten by Massachusetts authorities for his illegal Baptist religious practices) were willing

to pay.

Among the “crazy ideas” advocated by Roger Williams were that faith is an individual choice that cannot and should not be coerced by government and that there should be room for dissent and diverse opinions without repression.

(Also Williams made a pretty good case for the unpopular idea that baptism should be reserved for professing believers.)

So I honor the memory of Dr. Edwin Gaustad, 87, a fine Baptist scholar who taught at Shorter College in Georgia (1953-1957), the University of Redlands in California (1957-1965) and the University of California at Riverside, where he retired in 1989 and was named professor emeritus.

And I highly recommend for your reading his book, *Liberty of Conscience: Roger Williams in America*. After reading it, I hope you have the chance someday to stand in sight of the much-oversized statue of Williams on a hillside overlooking Providence, R.I., and thank God for Roger’s “crazy ideas.” **BT**

Unlike Ford, Edwin Gaustad knew the value of history

By James M. Dunn

“History is more or less bunk,” said Henry Ford in 1916. Edwin Gaustad’s life refutes the nutty notion of a man who *did* know how to make cars.

History was simply the jumping-off place from which Gaustad flung himself into a long and productive career as scholar, historian, writer, teacher and activist. For him, history has not been “just the facts” or flights of fantasy and spin. He did history with flesh on the bones.

A good example is found in a Gaustad lecture, “Religion, The Constitution, and the Founding Fathers,” delivered as the Whitworth-Muldraw Lecture at Shorter College in 1987.

At the beginning of the War of 1812, Congress passed a resolution calling on President James Madison to set aside a national day of prayer. In his lecture Gaustad unpacked Madison’s reasons why religious or civil religion should not be handed down from government leaders —

or as Gaustad put it, “why presidents should not be popes.”

The five reasons included that “a declaration of a religious day... can never be anything but a mere recommendation, and an advisory government is a contradiction in terms,” and that such proclamations “seem to imply and certainly nourish the erroneous idea of a national religion.”

Gaustad understood profoundly the history and meaning of the separation of church and state. His humility, humanity and humor came through also in his activism.

After Supreme Court decisions in 1962 and 1963 struck down government-sponsored public school prayer, the Religious Right sought political opportunity and President Reagan played politics by often saying “God has been banned from the schools.”



Some politicians took up the fight. A member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Oklahoma, Ernest Istook, took it upon himself to rewrite the First Amendment. His version was to replace the marvelous economy of Madison’s 16 words with more than 70.

Gaustad sent a postcard to the Baptist Joint Committee saying, “It seems that Istook is Mistook.” Promptly a BJC intern had hundreds of buttons made that boldly read ISTOOK IS MISTOOK!

The buttons took Capitol Hill and beyond by storm. Who would have suspected America’s leading colonial historian as the ultimate source for the cheeky slogan?

Ed Gaustad was a historian for all seasons. And, no, Henry Ford, history is not bunk. **BT**

—James M. Dunn, former executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, teaches at Wake Forest Divinity School and serves on the Baptists Today Board of Directors.

guest commentary

Bell on Hell

By Leroy Seat

Rob Bell is a pastor and a best-selling author. *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*, his latest book published in March, has created a lot of discussion, not only in Christian circles but also in the secular world.

The *Wall Street Journal* published a review of Bell's new book in its March 18 issue, and he was also interviewed on *Good Morning America*, *Morning Joe*, and other TV programs.

Bell (b. 1970), a graduate of Wheaton College and Fuller Theological Seminary, is the founding pastor of the Mars Hill Bible Church in Grand Rapids, Mich. His first book, *Velvet Elvis* (2005) was a bestseller, and the week after his new book was published it debuted on the *USA Today* "Top 150" at number 15. It was also as high as number four among all books sold on Amazon.com.



Much of the interest in, and criticism of, Bell's book is because of what he says about hell. He thinks there is a hell, but his understanding of hell is quite different from the traditional idea held by most conservative/evangelical Christians and by most Catholics.

Bell views hell primarily as the suffering people experience now because of the bad choices they, or others, make.

From the very beginning of his book, Bell calls into serious question the idea that "a select few Christians will spend forever in a peaceful, joyous place called heaven,

while the rest of humanity spends forever in torment and punishment in hell with no chance for anything better" (p. viii).

"Hell" is the title of Bell's third chapter, and there he acknowledges that "God gives us what we want, and if that's hell, we can have it." This is due to "the freedom that love requires."

Eric Rust, one of my seminary professors, used to say that hell is "love's rejection of the rejection of love."

The lack of love, among other things, often creates hells for others now. And Bell observes, "Often the people most concerned about others going to hell when they die seem less concerned with the hells on earth right now, while the people most concerned with the hells on earth right now seem the least concerned about hell after death." Bell prefers the latter position.

After posting much of what is in this article on my blog and putting a link to it on Facebook, I received the following comment from an American friend who has long lived in Japan: "I find the whole issue of what is hell as being rather remote from the concrete situation we face in post-3.11 Japan."

He concluded, "Reading your post this time around made me think of how parochial theological debates can appear when transferred to another living, social context."

I responded by saying, "Of course that is part of Bell's point: since many people like those in northeast Japan are going through 'hell' now, that is the kind of thing we Christians ought to be interested in rather than being so concerned about the fate of people after death, which we may not have the correct view of anyway. And he is probably right."

Not surprising, some conservative/fundamentalist Christians have staunchly criticized Bell's views on hell and related matters. One of the strongest criticisms came from R. Albert Mohler Jr. His blog posting on March 16 was a strong repudiation of Bell's ideas.

As for me, I am favorably impressed with Bell's book. At the very least, it gives us a lot that we need to think about seriously and to discuss widely.

I wondered, though, why he did not deal with the position known as annihilationism. I write about that idea and other matters related to hell in my book, *The Limits of Liberalism*.

I first heard about annihilationism during my seminary days, mostly from Dale Moody. No doubt partly because of his

influence, I came more and more to embrace that view, which is also linked to belief in "conditional immortality."

That means that everlasting life is conditional, dependent upon receiving God's salvation, and that those who do not attain everlasting life experience everlasting death. The former means continued existence with God; the latter means the complete cessation of existence.

This position is far more consistent with the biblical view of God, and a reasonable view of God, than the traditional doctrine of hell on the one hand or belief in universal salvation on the other. It does not embrace the harshness of the traditional view, but still it takes sin and its consequences much more seriously than the position held by most Christian liberals. **BT**

—Leroy Seat is a retired missionary to Japan who lives in Missouri and blogs at www.theviewfromthisseat.blogspot.com.



2011 Bible Studies

These lessons follow the adult Formations studies from Smyth & Helwys Publishing www.helwys.com

June 5, 2011

Listening in community

Acts 15:1-2, 6-21

Maybe you are preparing to attend within the month a large Baptist gathering of messengers at a convention or general assembly, where amid the education and worship sessions, a vote on a particular issue will be called in a business meeting. If you have never participated in such a gathering, you have missed feeling the greatest sense of Christian communal love and grace possible for a human. You've also missed being disappointed and stunned by the abject failure of people you admire to enact what was desperately needed.

Within our churches' histories we can read accounts of votes taken on particular issues, such as whether to ordain a woman, which went favorably one year and the opposite way when another vote was taken within a few years' time. Why would we ever imagine we Baptists could decide an issue once and for all time? Free faith groups are apt to revisit issues as times change and ideas progress.

The issue reconsidered in today's Scripture is whether to include Gentiles as baptized Christian believers without requiring concurrent circumcision. On one side of the debate are conservative pharisaical Jews converted to Christianity, who do not believe conversion mitigates their requirement to keep Mosaic Law. These folks had scripture and tradition on their side when they taught at Antioch that Gentile converts to Christianity were required to be circumcised to keep Jewish law as well.

So Paul and Barnabas and other representatives, including Peter and James, are sent to take up the other side of the debate and to clarify that the conservatives do not speak for the leaders in Jerusalem. Christians there are remarkably harmonious in their agreement about Gentile inclusion. The ones advocating circumcision are a small group.

Discuss: When have you been surprised to learn an issue was being reconsidered that you had thought was resolved? Do we tend to keep issues constantly unresolved by avoiding the practice of healthy confrontation?

This issue was thought resolved way back in Acts chapter 11, but in light of the Judaizing band's insistence on Gentile circumcision Peter makes a case from his experience with Cornelius. He recalls his vision of the great sheet lowered from heaven that included all animals fit to eat, convincing him there were no foods and metaphorically no people unqualified for God's kingdom. All are acceptable to God because God sees the heart of people and doesn't need to see them jump through legal hoops to prove their faithfulness. The crux of Peter's assertive argument is the bane of the existence of establishment-loving traditionalists everywhere: personal experience to the contrary.

Peter uses very strong words — "putting God to the test," which would have been interpreted as a shameful lack of trust to the legalists — in describing the refusal to see uncircumcised Gentiles as qualified fellow Christians. When he refers to the yoke of law as a burden even Jews can't bear, he implies that not only is the law unnecessary for the salvation of Gentiles, but it is also unnecessary for the salvation of Jews. This would have been a difficult revelation for those listening who had already undergone the circumcision.

After Paul and Barnabas confirm Peter's speech with their own experiences, the next section of the passage is the witness of James, a second member of the official Jerusalem delegation, who is not identified by the writer as Jesus' brother. James provides the second half of the one-two punch in their argument: he backs up Simon Peter's experience of inclusiveness with Scripture, citing Amos 9. He explains that God's acceptance of those who do not follow the Law is nothing new. He cites the pharisaical Christians' own prophetic

LESSONS FOR: Sunday, June 5-26, 2011

Written by Kelly Belcher,
a minister living in
Spartanburg, S.C., and
vice chair of the Board of
Directors of Baptists Today



scripture to support a new and opposing tradition.

Discuss: Think of a time your own experience changed your mind about an issue. Have you ever chosen a course against strong opposition because your experience differed from that of people you trust? How has this occurred in the history of your family, of your church, of Baptists?

The final part of James' speech seems to undermine what he has just said. He places four legal requirements other than circumcision on Gentile converts: They must avoid idolatry, unacceptable sexual practice, eating blood (kosher meat was drained of blood), and eating a strangled animal (similarly improperly prepared). These restrictions were the typical Mosaic requirement of all aliens, and anyone familiar with Jewish practice would have known them already. But this distinction drawn between Jewish Christians and Gentile ones is deflating in light of the more universal message of salvation he has just preached. Scholars suggest that James was hoping the new converts would do what the Jews do and avoid pagan practices, and in this way he was placing them all in the same category as fellow non-pagans.

Notice in the debate in this passage the way each side had a voice in the argument, the assumption that they lived together in community with each other regardless of their disagreement, the lack of vilification on either side, the accountability they took, the care with which they discussed traditions sacred to others, and their desire to be inclusive of one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Discuss: Why do we have so much trouble with other people getting salvation from our God? Why do we resist the grace that goes to those who are different from us? Can you think of someone who belongs in a category very unlike your own, and imagine passing a communion plate and cup to that person?



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 or call 1-800-352-8741

June 12, 2011

Listening to circumstances

Acts 16:6-15

Have you found that when you have a cumbersome or dreadful task at hand, you can find lots of other worthwhile things to do instead? It's amazing the amount of work you can get done in the service of avoiding that one burdensome task. Even when the priority task is desirable and not a burden, we can allow ourselves to become distracted from it by other perfectly worthy work that just gets in the way. According to Luke, the Holy Spirit didn't allow this to happen to Paul.

The exact route of this part of Paul's second missionary journey is a bit confusing according to writers of commentaries. Going in a northwesterly direction, Paul must have traveled through Asia Minor (today's Turkey) in order to reach Mysia there. The conclusion is that God's spirit prevented Paul's preaching in Asia even though he was present there.

Some conclude the forbidden area was around Ephesus, south of where the port city of Troas was located. It was in Troas that Paul dreamed of the Macedonian man urging him to come and preach there. The Holy Spirit did not allow Paul to be distracted from the goal: getting across the Aegean Sea and furthering the spread of the gospel into Greece and "to the ends of the earth." He was not even allowed by the Spirit to be distracted by doing more perfectly good preaching in other places.

Discuss: On church committees, among deacons, in ministry teams, in political life or in our personal lives, can you discern a time you have been distracted from difficult goals by other tasks, even worthy ones? When have we gotten ourselves weighed down with complexities that do not further our priority mission? How could we change things if we listen to the Holy Spirit and free ourselves?

You might notice in the Bible version you are reading that between verses 8 and 10 the pronoun changes from "they" to "we." These "we passages" are one reason scholars have wondered if the writer of Luke and Acts was personally present with Paul on his trip to Philippi. Commentaries say the use of "we" can also be a literary device used to lend credence to the tale, or it could be the sign of an eyewitness account by someone other than the writer of Luke-Acts. The nominative plural was a common way of narrating stories of sea voyages as well. Or maybe the Luke-Acts

writer had access to a diary or log from one of Paul's travel companions.

How long did the trip take? The travelers could have taken a day sailing to Samothrace, an island about halfway to the mainland of Macedonia, so that Paul's entire trip across the Aegean Sea could have been accomplished within two days if sailing conditions were favorable. Once landfall was made at Neopolis, it was another 10 miles inland to Philippi, the target city. Scholars propose that from there he went to a creek named Crenides, a few miles outside Philippi, a distance of travel allowed within the Sabbath laws, looking for a place to pray and also to preach.

We have no clue why Paul might have thought there would be a synagogue at the river, but there is a bend in this river whose banks create a little natural amphitheater. There was a Sabbath group gathered there, where Jewish worshippers might have gone from the city for privacy for lack of a synagogue, so Paul spoke to the women.

Discuss: From Baptists' earliest days mission has been our priority. Many people have gone to considerable lengths to get the gospel to new listeners, and Paul's journeys are our leading example. But mission means more than field personnel and clergy. As Baptists, we confess that we are priests as believers. Most of us have not had a dream such as Paul's. How do you discern the ways you have been compelled by the Spirit to go or do something particular, to find your direction, or to choose one path over another? What would you say is the mission of your life so far? Can you see ways the Spirit has not allowed you to be distracted from your calling?

Lydia was a seller of purple cloth, dyes and textiles from an area noted for this industry, Thyatira, within the region that bore her name. Purple was a rare dye color and difficult to produce — from marine snails — thus its association with royalty and the wealthy, who could afford it. Purveyors of purple could become well-heeled merchants themselves, movie-star posh and upper-crust. Scholars say Lydia would have been influential politically and socially. She had a house large enough to invite Paul and his entourage to stay with her later, and an inclination to hospitality that marks magnanimity and faith. Don't we all wish for exactly her sort of potential church member? She was not Jewish, but she was familiar with Jewish custom and belief and open to listening.

Lydia and her household were baptized immediately upon her confession after hearing Paul preach. Our modern individual identity differs from that of the ancients, who identified themselves collectively along family lines and who followed the head of the household naturally as part of the group. It seems random, but because of their presence in the home of a convert, they too were baptized into Christian discipleship.

Discuss: In the recent movie The Adjustment Bureau, the characters' small, random and unimportant choices are seen to have disproportionately huge effects later. What circumstances caused you to become a disciple of Christ? What small decisions did you make that led to that event, which might have easily been different? What role does random circumstance play in the salvation history of God's people? How have your decisions been shifted individually because you were part of a larger faith group?

June 19, 2011

Listening through creation

Acts 17:22-34

In the discipleship class taught to our church's sixth graders as they move from the children's department into the youth group, we begin a theology lesson by discussing how they would explain their God, their Christ, and their way of worship to the inhabitants of a planet in a galaxy far away. We can ask the same question now: If you disembarked from the space ship and met intelligent beings unlike humans, how would you go about sharing the gospel? Would you want to know about their worship first?

This information could win you valuable common ground on which to base your witness. If scientific progress allows, perhaps one day humans will find themselves in this situation. We will meet fellow children created in the image of God, our own siblings, and together we will ponder life, saving grace, and the Spirit of the God to whom we all belong.

Paul found himself in this situation constantly as he does in the present discourse, which ranks as one of the climaxes of his missionary preaching. Though Christian mission and witness was a pretty new thing in the world, Paul was sensitively skillful in preaching to people groups he hoped to win with the gospel, as portrayed by the writer of Acts. In Athens, Paul stands to speak before the meeting of the council Areopagus, because



Hellenistic orators typically would stand. He begins his presentation with ideas that are common between Greek philosophical monotheism, his own Jewish tradition and the new Christian gospel he brings — ideas that scholars note are similar to writings of Euripides and Seneca.

Discuss: As living witnesses to Christ, we must take Pauline-like care so that we might share a gospel without becoming overbearing to the point of losing our audience. Have you been the object of overbearing witnessing? Or when in Rome, trying to do as the Romans do, have you been frustrated by cultural differences and found yourself at a loss to bridge them?

Paul presents a challenging idea in the kindest way he can. Scholars are not clear whether there actually existed in Athens an altar “to an unknown God.” There is some literary, but no archaeological, evidence to indicate such a thing. There could have been an altar erected that was never dedicated to a specific god, or there could have been many that the writer of Acts has compressed into one for the purpose of Paul’s speech. Paul uses the altar to his advantage to appeal to the Athenians that, ironically, they do know who God is, so having that altar is beneath their intelligence.

He shares the concept of God as creator, common to Christian and Greek thought, to explain that something made by humans — shrines — could never contain God. God does not need anything, and when Paul preaches this his Athenian listeners might have heard echoes of Greeks such as the Stoic philosopher Zeno. The Greek word Paul uses to say that we seek after God carries the connotation of someone stumbling and feeling around in the dark to find something. God is always hoping that humans will want to find God.

But the highlight of this speech is the memorable theological gold nugget of verse 28: “In God we live, and move, and have our being.” Stunning and beautiful in its profound simplicity, this idea has become the underpinning for much Christian theological thought. As Paul was saying it, scholars suspect the Athenian audience might have recalled similar words from Epimenides of Knossos, a 6th-century BC philosopher, or Seneca’s idea of God in us, with us, and within us. When Paul alluded to Greek poets, they might have remembered a poem much like Paul’s speech by Aratus of Soli.

Discuss: God cannot be contained by anything human-made, not even an idea. Yet do we

in all our Baptist glory tend to believe we have cornered the market on the truth about God?

Scholars trace as a common theme within the book of Acts the ignorance we humans suffer. Paul points up this ignorance now and warns his listeners that God has heretofore pardoned our ignorance, but now God will judge the world “by the man he has appointed.” Though Jesus goes unnamed either by the preacher or the writer of Acts, the allusion to resurrection does cause immediate concern among some of Paul’s listeners. This is a new idea with no matching Greek thought to back it up. This sounds like pure, radical Christianity. Some of them rejected it out of hand. Some of them were open to hearing more. And some of them eventually believed and became converts.

Most of us must hear an idea more than once for it to sink into our awareness. Marketing experts say a person must encounter an idea seven times before it becomes a solid part of knowledge. You probably hear your minister announce the budget and finance meeting slotted for Wednesday night at 7:30 in the fellowship hall for weeks ahead of time, so she can make sure you will remember. North Americans live in a culture saturated by Christianity from the time we’re born. If any of us had heard the gospel only one time, chances are good we would be like most of Paul’s audience and would not have taken the opportunity to discern the truth of Christ.

Discuss: Do we ever sneer at other people’s religious ideas? Have you suffered the sneers of others? Have we been guilty of a patronizing or condescending stance toward those with unusual faith stories to tell? Will we make more disciples by arguing them down or by inspiring people in a way that takes their own ideas into consideration, as Paul did?

June 26, 2011

Listening to God’s Word

Acts 18:24-28

Paul’s second missionary journey is ending, and his third one is beginning during the period Luke describes when Priscilla and Aquila meet Apollos at Ephesus. He is a Jewish convert from Alexandria, the cosmopolitan city known as a seat of learning because of its extensive library with valuable holdings. Though Apollos is a person of culture, Luke indicates that he possesses a partial under-

standing of the faith, knowing only the baptism of John.

Scholars explain that this could refer to a water baptism rather than the accompanying Spirit baptism of true Christianity. That would mean Apollos had not received Christian baptism; but scholars note that none of those in attendance at Pentecost are said to have been baptized either, and they did fine receiving the Spirit and comprehending Christian faith. Luke confirms that Apollos was filled with the Spirit even though he knew only John’s baptism, so we may surmise that a little information was enough to convict Apollos.

Though his understanding is accurate — he has obviously received instruction previously — and he has an energetic attitude, Priscilla and Aquila determine that Apollo needs a better understanding of Christian faith, and they undertake to teach him. Exactly what was comprised in their lessons is not clear; perhaps it was information about baptism. Luke is clear that both Priscilla and Aquila served as teachers for Apollos, which stands in direct contrast to the prohibition against women teaching men from 1 Timothy. The lessons he learns at the feet of these two equip him to be included as an official teacher in the Christian church.

Luke does not give a reason for Apollos’ decision to go to Achaia, which is modern Greece. Scholars note some textual evidence that there were natives of Corinth visiting in the congregation at Ephesus, who heard Apollos preaching and invited him to travel to their home. Luke tells us they wrote a letter recommending him, which he carried.

Discuss: North Americans send mission field personnel around the globe, and we are thrilled to receive them from the same places. Why aren’t we satisfied to preach in our own backyards, and avoid all this traveling? Is it easier to hear the gospel with fresh ears from the perspective of someone new?

The job of preaching and converting new disciples had to be a daunting prospect for all of these people. Armed only with snail mail, ancient modes of conveyance and their own wits, the earliest Christian field personnel realized right away an important fact about faith: it is learned in the context of a personal relationship. From the Jerusalem Christians to Paul, to Priscilla and Aquila, to Apollos, to the believers at Corinth, the Word from the beginning was spread one person at a time. The Holy Spirit is a pretty good travel agent.

in the know

Keeping up with people, places and events

Sylvester T. Acevedo, a former commissioned missionary for American Baptist Home Mission Societies, died March 27 at age 92.

Ka'thy Gore Chappell is leadership development coordinator for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina. Earlier she had served as associate vice-president for advancement and community life at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond and in ministerial positions at Forest Hills Baptist Church in Raleigh and the First Baptist Churches of Cary and Asheville.

Hannah Ruth Marshall Coe was ordained to ministry March 20 by First Baptist Church of Athens, Ga. She was active in the church during her childhood and youth and served youth ministry internships during two summers. After graduating from Berry College in 2008, she became full-time youth minister and a student at Mercer's McAfee School of Theology.

Ken Giacometto will retire Dec. 31 as president of Green Lake Conference Center in Wisconsin. He has led the America Baptist retreat center for 18 years.

Jerry F. Jackson, president of Chowan University from 1989 to 1995, died April 2. He had also taught at Campbell University in Buies Creek, N.C., and served in administra-

tion at Wingate University and with the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Gustavo Parajón, former American Baptist Foreign Mission Society missionary who served in Nicaragua, died March 13 at the age of 75 in Managua, Nicaragua.

John Peterson, a former vice president of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), died on March 22. He was pastor of the Alfred Street Baptist Church in Alexandria, Va., from 1964 until his retirement in 2006.

Charles Douglas West was honored April 2 at First Baptist Church of High Point, N.C., during a celebration of his retirement after 50 years of ministry in North Carolina and Virginia. He served with Buncombe Baptist Association in his hometown of Asheville as well as several congregations. Also, he has been an active missions volunteer and a reserve chaplain in the U.S. Air Force.

Advertising ministry positions
in *Baptists Today* opens the
right doors.
jackie@baptiststoday.org

A GIFT TO
Baptists Today
HAS BEEN RECEIVED
IN HONOR OF ...

Randall Lolley
From William H. Crouch Jr.

A GIFT TO
Baptists Today
HAS BEEN RECEIVED
IN MEMORY OF ...

William Greenhaw
From Barbara Carp

welcome

NEW GROUP SUBSCRIBERS

**First Baptist Church
Eatonton, Ga.**

Keithen Tucker, interim pastor

**New Haven Church
Lawton, Okla.**

Jonathan Blose, pastor

**Sugar Land Baptist Church,
Sugar Land, Texas**

Phil Lineberger, pastor

BIBLE STUDIES

When I was about 10 years old I went with my family, all life-long church members, to the city coliseum to attend an evening of the Bill Glass Crusade. We sat near the top of the arena, and from that vantage point the gathering of thousands of people in front of the giant dais was an impressive sight to behold. To a 10-year-old it looked like a big deal for a very important person.

At the end of the long passionate sermon, as the invitation was given and the music swelled, I was suddenly compelled to go. I don't know what it was. I had to go down there and answer the call to believers. For some reason my parents allowed me to get up alone and walk past them, down the

steep steps, past the partition gate and up the endless aisle to the front, where I and a sea of other people were received by volunteers. Backstage the gospel was shared briefly to confirm my profession of faith, there was prayer, and then I left with my parents. It felt good, but I never did get to meet Bill Glass.

The traveling evangelist can bring just the right culminating moment for a person who has internalized the gospel already, when it is the week-in week-out ministry of the church that has brought her to that moment. Perhaps this is a good way to understand Apollos, who wanted to preach in Greece, and of whom the writer of Acts says that "he spoke with great fervor" and "he was a great help to those who by grace had believed." We must all remember that, when belief comes, it always comes by grace regardless of the

talent of the preacher.

Discuss: The exact reasons we perceive who Christ is, discern a Spirit moving us, and become capable of answering are a mystery. Can you remember, as the hymn "Amazing Grace" says, the hour you first believed? What was it that caused conviction in you? Have there been multiple occasions of conversion for you?

Sources

Baird, William. "The Acts of the Apostles." *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*. Abingdon Press, 1971.

Chance, J. Bradley. *Acts*. Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2007.

Dillon, Richard J. and Joseph A. Fitzmyer. "The Acts of the Apostles." *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*. Prentice-Hall, 1968.



could you
forgive?

KIM PHUC was nine years old when she was burned by napalm during the Vietnam War. This award-winning photograph of Kim is evidence of civilian suffering and war's cruelty toward children. Despite years of painful burn therapy, Kim found the strength and spirit to forgive those responsible for this napalm attack and to work for world peace and healing. Hear Kim tell her story as part of a week that will also include workshops, worship, music, programs for children and youth, and a supportive and loving group of people with whom to share it all!

Rob Voyle | Michael Blair | Angela Yarber | Stan Dotson | D. E. Adams

SO
YOU
MUST **forgive**

a conference for peacemakers

July 4 - 9, 2011

Eastern Mennonite University
Harrisonburg, VA

www.bpfna.org/conference



Baptist Peace Fellowship
of North America

Senior Pastor: First Baptist Church of Morehead City, N.C., located on the central coast, is seeking a senior pastor. Accredited seminary or divinity school graduate and at least 5 years pastoral experience are required. Our church is dually aligned with CBF and SBC, and associated with BSCNC and Atlantic Association. We have a strong committee structure with each chairperson participating on the church council. The deacons work closely with the pastor to provide spiritual leadership and to minister to all members. Current average attendance is 282 in worship and 211 in Sunday school. Send résumé by May 30 to: Pastor Search Committee, 810 Bridges St., Morehead City, NC 28557, or fbcmoreheadcity@gmail.com.

Pastor: Beaver Dam Baptist Church is a historic church at the heart of a small, rural community in western Kentucky. BDBC is widely known for both its music ministry and youth ministry, led by two full-time ministers, and a growing Christian education ministry, including a preschool and K-6 elementary school. In 2010, BDBC contributed more than \$100,000 to local, state and international missions, with \$660,000 in undesignated receipts. BDBC affirms the 1963 *Baptist Faith and Message*. For more information, or to submit a résumé, please contact: BDBC Pastor Search Committee, P.O. Box 242, Beaver Dam, KY 42320, or bdbcpssc@gmail.com.

Annual Conference

"Baptists and Education"

DALLAS BAPTIST UNIVERSITY, DALLAS, TEXAS, MAY 19-21

Name _____

Position _____

Institution _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

FEATURED SPEAKERS:

- Loyd Allen (Mercer U)
- Bill Bellinger (Baylor U)
- Brad Creed (Samford U)
- Sherilyn Emberton (East Texas Baptist U)
- Sheila Klopfer (Georgetown College U)
- Gail Linam (Dallas Baptist U)
- John Ragosta (U of Virginia)
- Stephen Stookey (Dallas Baptist U)
- Mark Tew (Howard Payne U)

Registration Fees:

- Fellowship of Baptist Historians Meeting **\$20**
- Individual Society Member **\$75**
- Member and Spouse **\$110**
- Individual Non-member **\$85**
- Non-member and Spouse **\$130**
- Student (School ID required) **\$50**

Total enclosed \$ _____



Mail registration form and check to: Baptist History and Heritage Society, 151 Broadleaf Dr., Macon, GA 31210
Online/credit card registration, program and lodging information: <http://www.baptisthistory.org>

July 19-20, 2011 - Church Music Conference

Oasis

RENEW FOR THE JOURNEY

Join

David Schwoebel, Pepper Choplin,
Terry Taylor and Mark Edwards at
OASIS and be **REPLENISHED,**
RENEWED, and **REFRESHED.**

—Dan Ridley, Oasis Coordinator
Minister of Music, Hayes Barton Baptist Church, Raleigh, NC

For more information and registration, go to:
<http://divinity.campbell.edu/Oasis/Home.aspx>

Adventists grow as other churches decline

(RNS) — Rest on the Sabbath. Heed Old Testament dietary codes. And be ready for Jesus to return at any moment.

If these practices sound quaint or antiquated, think again. They're hallmarks of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the fastest-growing Christian denomination in North America.

Newly released data show Seventh-day Adventism growing by 2.5 percent in North America, a rapid clip for this part of the world, where Southern Baptists and mainline denominations, as well as other church groups are declining.

Adventists are even growing 75 percent faster than Mormons (1.4 percent), who prioritize numeric growth.

For observers outside the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the growth rate in North America is perplexing.

"You've got a denomination that is basically going back to basics ... saying, 'What did God mean by all these rules and regulations and how can we fit in to be what God wants us to be?'" said Daniel Shaw, an expert on Christian missionary outreach at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, Calif. "That's just totally contrary to anything that's happening in American culture. So I'm saying, 'Whoa! That's very interesting.' And I can't answer it."

Despite its North American roots, the church is growing more than twice as fast overseas. With Saturday worship services and vegetarian lifestyles, Seventh-day Adventism owns a distinctive niche outside the Christian mainstream. But being different is turning out to be more of an asset than a liability.

Methodists shun the bottle, open conversation

(RNS) — Pastor James Howell knew he had a problem on his hands when several teenagers arrived at a church dance drunk and had to be taken from the church by ambulance for treatment for alcohol poisoning.

So starting in 2009, he urged his flock at Myers Park United Methodist Church in Charlotte, N.C., to give up drinking for Lent and donate the money they would have spent on booze to a "spirit fund." The church has raised more than \$34,000 for local substance abuse programs, and seven parishioners have sought treatment for alcoholism.

"It isn't that alcohol in and of itself is bad; Jesus drank wine," he said. "We emphasize the role it plays in our lives."

Unlike prohibition-minded Mormons or Catholics who belly up to the bar at a Friday fish fry, Methodists — the nation's second-largest Protestant denomination — have a more ambiguous stance. Now, the denomination's General Board of Church and Society is



following Howell's lead and has been pushing a church-wide Alcohol Free Lent campaign.

For decades the church strongly supported temperance. The father and son who founded the Welch's grape juice company weren't only good Methodists, but also savvy businessmen who saw a huge market in pushing juice for Communion to temperance-minded churches.

In the years since, Methodists have trended toward a more liberal stance. While the UMC still encourages abstinence, in 2008 the church's Social Principles were revised to allow for "judicious use with deliberate and intentional restraint, with Scripture as a guide."

"This is a campaign that opens the doors to conversation, a way to talk about alcohol, about drinking, its impact on young people, on our own perspectives and to dialogue about what that means for us as a church today," said Cynthia Abrams, who works on alcohol, addictions and health care issues for the Washington-based UMC social policy agency.

Shakespeare's Globe Theatre reads KJV Bible over Holy Week

LONDON (RNS/ENInews) — William Shakespeare's Globe Theatre marked the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible with a cover-to-cover reading between Palm Sunday and Easter Monday.

Twenty actors took part, reciting all 1,189 chapters of the historic Bible in the theater built as a replica of the place that saw many of Shakespeare's greatest plays.

"Four hundred years ago, a set of church scholars sat in Stationer's Hall by St. Paul's Cathedral and put the finishing touches to the King James Bible. Across the river, a set of playwrights, Shakespeare foremost amongst them, entertained a town," artistic director Dominic Dromgoole told ENInews leading up

to the observance. "The playwrights listened to the clerics in church, the clerics sneaked in to listen to the plays in the theater. Between the two of them they generated an energy, a fire and wit in the English language."

The theater's 2011 season will also include the story of the creation of the King James Bible in the play *Anne Boleyn*, by Howard Brenton. The story looks at the legacy of King Henry VIII's second wife, who conspires with the exiled William Tyndale to make England Protestant forever.

Starting 70 years after her death, the play examines how King James united England's religious factions with a common Bible, and the debt he owed to Anne.



Most Americans don't blame God for disasters

(RNS) — We may never know why bad things happen to good people, but most Americans — except evangelicals — reject the idea that natural disasters are divine punishment, a test of faith or some other sign from God, according to a new poll.

The poll released March 24, by Public Religion Research Institute in partnership with Religion News Service, was conducted a week after a March 11 earthquake trig-

gered a tsunami and nuclear crisis in Japan.

Nearly six in 10 evangelicals believe God can use natural disasters to send messages — nearly twice the number of Catholics (31 percent) or mainline Protestants (34 percent). Evangelicals (53 percent) are also more than twice as likely as the one in five Catholics or mainline Protestants to believe God punishes nations for the sins of some citizens.

guest commentary

‘A Decade of Promise’ — a decade later

By Walter B. Shurden

Editor’s note: In June 2001 Walter B. Shurden gave an address titled “A Decade of Promise” during the 10th anniversary banquet of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship held in Atlanta. With CBF’s 20th anniversary celebration to be held next month, this brief excerpt from that earlier address is offered here. The full address may be read at www.baptiststoday.org/promise.

What many have said about our struggle is true. It *was* a power struggle. If, however, that somewhat crass interpretation is the only spin put on the story, you miss the essence of the story.

It was not only a struggle for the gold and the silver and the artifacts of imperial denominational power. It was also a struggle for principles.



I have heard many calls in the last 10 years admonishing us to forget the past, to stop fighting the fundamentalist-moderate war, to cease bashing the fundamentalists. And, believe me, I understand fully that call.

But my fear is that if we forget the struggle, we may forget the *reasons* for the struggle. The Passover and July 4 and Bastille Day are not observed annually in order to bash the Egyptians and the British and the royalty; they are days to recall the price people paid for the struggle of freedom.

If it were only a struggle for buildings and offices and endowments, surely we must forget that. If all we were discussing was who was to be in charge — sure, that’s petty and somewhat sinful stuff — *unless* who is in charge also has something to do with principles espoused. And I contend that it was a struggle for principles, and we will forget that at our peril.

One of those principles was gender equality. That was not simply a bid for power; it was then and it is now a moral issue. And in the words of James Carville, that wholly objective and nonpartisan political pundit, “We’re

right and they are wrong!”

Mark my words. One day the Southern Baptist Convention will apologize to women. They will apologize to women for some of the same reasons that they and all the rest of us had to apologize to African Americans. They will apologize to women for the same reasons that some of us have had to apologize to women.

Another principle for which we contended was the equality of the laity. That was not simply a bid for power; it was a serious theological issue. In terms of the Baptist vision of Christianity, we’re right and they are wrong.

The Priesthood is universal; it belongs to all believers. Baptists never, ever intended to be clergy-dominated people. After working with some of the gifted laity of CBF for the last 10 years, one understands why.

Another of the principles underlying much of the controversy was the nature and mission of the church of Jesus Christ. The Kingdom of God is not solely about handing out tracts or personal witnessing, but it is certainly about some of that; but the Kingdom of God also has to do with the struggle for justice and mercy and peacemaking as part of the mission of the church. And many of you came to CBF because you understood the mission of the church to include, not exclude, acts of mercy and justice.

Yet another principle in contention was the nature of biblical truth — its breadth and depth. We were saying, “Our little systems have their day, they have their day and cease to be, they are but mere broken lights of Thee, and Thou, O God, art more than they.” They were saying, “We have the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” And we are right and they are wrong.

These principles, for which many of you ... contended, made it a decade of promise for us. But we have our sins, too. And our sins — real sins not feigned sins, sins we have committed and sins we omitted — do not permit smugness or arrogance on our part.

Repentance toward God, not contempt toward others, is our needed response.

... I am calling on us to confront our own inward primitivism, our own thorny self-serving aspirations to control in however so subtle ways. You and I have not yet begun to live out the radical meaning of Baptist freedom under the Lordship of Christ as it relates to our individual lives, our local churches or CBF. We yet have work to do.

As our great-grandchildren look back on us from the vantage point of the year 2101, the cardinal question will not be: did CBF live and survive? The only important question is: did the principles endure? **BT**

—Church historian Walter B. Shurden is the author of many books including *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms*. In retirement he wears the title of Mercer University’s Minister at Large.

**BAPTISTS
AND THE
CIVIL
WAR**
in their own words

www.civilwarbaptists.com

A day-by-day account of the Baptist experience during the Civil War era

A project related to the 150th anniversary of the American Civil War

Created by Bruce Gourley, online editor of *Baptists Today*, executive director of Baptist History & Heritage Society, and author of *Diverging Loyalties: Baptists in Middle Georgia During the Civil War* (Mercer University Press, 2011).

guest commentary

Is cooperative missions dead?

By Mark Wingfield

Cooperative missions among Baptists is on life support, and I know why. But first, a true confession. Somewhere around 1983, when I was a student at the University of New Mexico and a member of a Southern Baptist church in Albuquerque, I threatened to leave my single adult Sunday school class. In the mind of this lifelong Baptist boy, something so dreadful, so unimaginable was happening that I could no longer stay in the class in good conscience.

The offense? Our teacher was planning to stop using the Sunday School Board curriculum and instead use literature from a para-church organization. Which one, I can't recall now; perhaps it was Navigators or Campus Crusade.

This story seems laughable today, which indicates how far the landscape has shifted in nearly three decades. After all, I'm a minister at a Baptist church that not only has abandoned what once was the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board but hardly uses denominational literature at all. And we're considered traditionalists in most other ways.

As a Baptist teenager in the 1970s, I remember vividly hearing about the dangers of the "para-church movement" as a threat to our denominational identity and unity. Campus Crusade, Navigators and the like were considered competitors to the "official" ministries of Southern Baptists. Cooperative churches supported denominational agencies and programs and looked with suspicion on non-denominational programs that weren't part of our officially sanctioned whole.

The news flash for 2011 is that the para-church movement has won the day. That is, in fact, old news.

So why are Baptists willing to admit this in every area except global missions? Both Southern Baptists and Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Baptists still want us to behave like it's 1961, not 2011.

I'll confess that I'm guilty of this longing for the missions past. It was just so much easier to have a fully prepackaged missions

program to promote in our churches, with our own roster of missionary all-stars who became role models for our children — not to mention the power of a unified cooperative missions funding mechanism.

So what's gone wrong today? Why is the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship gasping for air to keep its not-a-denomination denominational mechanism funded?

Four explanations come to mind, and all are united around one word: "disconnect."

First, there's a disconnect between the old days and the modern days. Remember when flying an airplane was exotic? In those days, international travel was rare, and the world seemed larger than one could imagine.

We could "see" other countries only through missionary slide shows and *National Geographic* magazine. Because we could not go, we sent our money, blindly perhaps, to the general bucket of missions for others to determine how best to apply it.

Today, more than a few members of most Baptist congregations have traveled to parts of the world that once were considered exotic mission fields. And most of us get on airplanes as easily as we used to get on church buses. One of my 18-year-old sons has been on 14 airplane flights in the past nine months, including two international trips.

It's hard to remember a time before CNN, but the reality of 24-hour cable news has changed not only our view of the world but also the reality of the world itself. Consider the live images of the Japanese earthquake and tsunami as evidence. Faced with these changes, what church among us is going to welcome a missionary with a slide show?

Most every Baptist church today has at least a few members who have served as international mission volunteers. Most also have personal ties to anywhere from one to

10 missionaries serving on foreign fields. Because of this wider vision of the world, church leaders aren't as willing to commit tens of thousands of missions dollars to "cooperative" missions causes they've not handpicked.

You can argue all you want that undesignated giving managed by experts in missions is the most efficient way to ensure equity in our global work, but efficiency and reality don't live on the same continent anymore.

Few denominational entities are flexible enough to allow the kind of *à la carte* funding most churches want to offer today, and so churches are left to make up their own plans, to the detriment of the denominations.

This is where the para-church ministries won before the battle ever started. They are specialists, not generalists, which makes them perfect for *à la carte* funding.

If you care about evangelism on college campuses, you might support Campus Crusade. But if you don't support Campus Crusade, you're not going to defund an orphanage in Asia.

Second, there's a disconnect between the aspiring influencers and the funders.

Faced with this new world, a younger generation of leaders within the CBF has advocated new models of mission strategies. That's not necessarily bad, except that it has created a gulf between their vantage point and what pushes the buttons of an older generation, the one that still is most likely to fund the missions enterprise.

A few years ago, based on a motion from the floor of a general assembly and without broad input from its churches, the CBF radically altered its missions strategy to follow the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations.

Nothing is wrong with those goals, but to most of us older than 40, the immediate question was, "Could CBF not come up with its own mission goals?"

I recently tried to explain this turn of events to a longtime friend who once was a



Baptist, now is a Methodist and currently works for a government-funded agency working with the Millennium Development Goals. She was dumbfounded and confused.

I'll speak confessionally again at this juncture to say I've been like this friend. I have not been able to figure out how to convey to my own congregation a cohesive and compelling story about CBF missions. It did not seem right to say, "Give to the Offering for Global Missions so we can support the goals of the United Nations."

Yet that was the only message we were given by CBF. There was no other compelling, cohesive vision as with the founding days, when CBF charted a clear territory working with unreached people groups. That was a compelling story we could tell in our churches that moved people to give, pray and go.

It was simple, like the message of a para-church ministry because, in those days, CBF *was* a para-church ministry.

That leads to the third problem, a disconnect between CBF's infancy and young adulthood. Like many others still active in Baptist life today, I was physically present at the creation of CBF. I remember why we formed this new organization.

The initial reason was simple: missions. Churches and individuals disaffected by the SBC wanted a way to channel their missions giving that would not be controlled by the fundamentalist takeover of the mother ship.

Once that snowball got rolling down the hill, however, it picked up other laudable causes: theological education, Baptist history and heritage, resourcing for basic church programming, social concerns, and so forth. While still claiming to be not a denomination — and therefore more like a para-church movement — the CBF was drawn increasingly into satisfying constituents who wanted to replace wholesale the denomination they had (sort of) left behind.

Unfortunately for CBF, this drama has played out at a time when denominational structures of all types have been losing relevance nationwide.

Here's an illustration from the other side of the coin. In addition to CBF, our church affiliates with a state entity, the Baptist General Convention of Texas. The BGCT was a behemoth of a denominational bureaucracy long before CBF ever existed. Although a state entity, it was larger than a number of other national denominations.

A few years ago, I had the unfortunate experience of serving on the BGCT's Future Focus Committee, a group that was supposed to craft a new strategic vision for the convention's future, one that acknowledged the declining revenues and changing expectations of churches.

In two years of work, we accomplished precious little because those of us who argued for simplification of missions, scaling back and sharpening the focus were simply beat down by the bureaucratic powers that be. Again, getting past the all-things-to-all-people model that so well worked in 1961 was more change than the institutional leadership could bear. And so we kicked the can down the road a bit farther.

But through this experience, I did learn the fourth disconnect that afflicts not only the CBF and the BGCT but all denominational structures.

Joining the denominational bureaucrats in their opposition to streamlining were the representatives of small churches. The denominational structures are perceived differently by leaders in smaller churches than by leaders in larger churches that are more self-sufficient.

At its best, a denominational structure evens the playing field by bringing churches of all sizes together on a shared mission. What has evolved instead in Baptist life is a kind of welfare state. It's not that larger churches are personally helping smaller churches by being on mission together, but that larger churches are expected to feed the finances of the denominational machines that in turn individually resource the smaller churches.

So while from a larger church perspective, I may say, "Streamline the structure and focus only on a targeted missions program," leaders of smaller churches may respond, "But who are we going to call for help with Sunday school training and pastor search committee support and deacon training?"

What no one is acknowledging is that the Internet works just as well in a small church as a large church. We all have access to the same resources, and we all may be as puzzled by how to sort through the array of options.

What if CBF, for example, could become a reviewer and recommender of resources rather than trying to recreate what others already are doing better? That would help churches small and large.

What's missing in today's Baptist life is the ability of denominational structures to serve as connectors rather than direct providers. One of the strengths of the para-church ministries has been that they are equippers and connectors more than paid doers.

This image came home to me recently when visiting the Georgia Aquarium in Atlanta. This magnificent place is the world's largest aquarium, with more than 8.5 million gallons of marine and fresh water housing 120,000 animals of 500 species.

The aquarium was made possible by the vision and lead gift of an individual donor, Bernie Marcus, co-founder of The Home Depot. His \$250 million gift lit the fire, but that alone was not all that was needed for the aquarium to open debt-free in 2005. Marcus used his gift and influence to leverage contributions from others who had specialized resources.

For example, how do you move four gigantic whale sharks from Taiwan to Georgia and keep them alive? It turns out, you call UPS. Marcus presented to UPS a challenge they were eager to meet, doing what they do best. And so special crates were created, planes were committed, and the seemingly impossible became possible through a strategic partnership in which UPS *donated* the equivalent of \$200,000 in services.

On my visit to the aquarium, I talked with one of the 2,000 volunteers who staff the place. He said Bernie Marcus was a genius at creating partnerships and leveraging resources. That's probably why this volunteer and his peers save the aquarium more than \$400,000 annually in personnel costs.

What would it look like for an organization like the CBF to overcome its disconnects by instead becoming an expert in connections? Might there be a future for a denominational hub that operates more like an old-fashioned switchboard than a vending machine? This would be a leaner enterprise that could put more money toward missions — the founding purpose.

I think people and churches would give to such an enterprise — and give not only their money but also their time, knowing someone is sounding a clear call to which they can march. **BT**

—Mark Wingfield is a longtime Baptist journalist who now serves as associate pastor of Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas.

the lighter side

Pomp and circumstances

By Brett Younger

For the next few weeks people with last names like mine will be wondering why alphabetical order is so popular. We are about to begin graduation season. Ivy League schools will have ex-presidents, Nobel laureates and European heads of state giving their graduation speeches. Major college football powers get billionaires, TV anchors and *American Idol* winners. Baptist colleges get unknown novelists, retired astronauts and Baptist preachers.

Commencement speakers try to say something memorable. Graduates hear that there is happiness waiting for them and there is danger waiting for them. They need to embrace the old values and throw out the old values. The world needs more poets and dreamers, and the world does not need any more poets and dreamers.

If you have a high school graduation on your calendar and have not been to one lately, brace yourself. You may be surprised to see a sign over the entrance that says, “No noisemakers. No balloons.” You may naïvely think, “That’s unnecessary. No one would

Churches have almost come to blows over whether God is better heard in an organ or a guitar.

bring noisemakers or balloons to a solemn ceremony like graduation.” You will be wrong. The metal detector will also be a clue that this is not your father’s graduation.

The gym, which is normally the home for less rowdy events like basketball games, will be filled with signs celebrating Victoria, Teddy, Luz, Doogie, Little Jelly and a host of other 18-year-olds. Try not to sit behind someone with a banner. The students, even the ones wearing sunglasses indoors at eight at night, will be better behaved than the parents who scream through the choir’s anthem.

The person seated directly behind you will have a special talent for ear-piercing whistling. This is a skill he loves to share. Someone you will wish ill will bring a plastic clapper — which is even more irritating than the air horns and cowbells. You will imagine how bad it would have been if they had

allowed noisemakers.

As the graduates’ names are called, spectators will shriek, screech and squeal as though they are shocked to hear their loved one’s name called, as though their child is the next contestant on *The Price is Right*.

It will not be a bad graduation, but it may not be exactly what you would have chosen. At the last few graduations I attended, I have felt like an old man. Back in my day there were more men in suits and ties than baseball caps and earrings. We waited quietly for the first strains of “Pomp and Circumstance.” The students acted as though they were not surprised to have graduated.

We listened solemnly as the speaker droned on about how the word commencement means to begin and so this is not the end of something but the beginning of a life-long journey, a time of marching to the beat of our own drummers, taking the road less traveled, lighting candles rather than cursing the darkness, and following our hearts. We applauded politely at the end. The ceremony was dignified, serious and meaningful in its way. Shouting may be a fun way to celebrate a graduation, but it is not the way some of us best experience important rites of passage.

In a couple of weeks my son Graham will graduate from Davidson College. My guess is that it will be a fine ceremony — less serious than I might choose and less jubilant than Graham might want. While I am sitting quietly giving thanks for the end of this season of tuition bills — Caleb is a high school junior, call if you have an extra scholarship — I hope I will remember that solemnity and joyfulness are both good gifts of God.

Churches have almost come to blows over whether God is better heard in an organ or a guitar. Sometimes worship is fast and loud — a fine way to celebrate God’s goodness. At other times, worship is solemn and thoughtful — also a fine way to celebrate God’s goodness. Some of us feel like God whispers more than God shouts. Maybe that is worth shouting about. **BT**



Ties that bind — and those that just hang in the closet

By John Pierce

www.baptiststoday.org/johndpierce-blog

Neckties serve no important function — like belts. At mealtimes, they are eager targets for the slightest stray drop of salad dressing, gravy or barbecue sauce.

Perhaps that's why we see fewer of them worn in professional work environments on weekdays and in churches on Sunday. Unlike some who get enraged over this fashion shift, I do not have a strong opinion on the matter. But, as usual, I have some observations.

Finding that uniquely attractive, silk tie among the ugly ones on a sales table has long been an enjoyable discovery for me. And since my student days of selling men's clothing, I have sought to tie a good knot and to match ties properly with dress shirts.

There are a lot of mismatched ties and just plain ugly ones around. And it's easy to tell which guy chose to wear a tie and which one did so under pressure.



Most offensive are polyester or pre-tied ties. (Law enforcement officers get a pass on the clip-on versions since wearing your own noose when apprehending a criminal is unwise.)

While alert to gender inclusion and equality, this is a male issue. But then it is not an issue for many male ministers or other professionals. They have simply decided to not wear ties with as much conviction as others wrap them around well-starved white shirts on a regular basis.

Once tie-wearing was a common and expected part of church attendance for men — and even boys, who thought their mothers were secretly trying to choke them on the first day of every new week. Yet, today there are churches where open-collared shirts are commonplace and the presence of a dimpled double-windsor knot is as rare as a perfect attendance pin.

Often the churches that I visit have a mixture of styles with some attendees and ministers in traditional coats and ties while others require less change time before hitting the links after the last Amen. Congregations in warmer climates sometimes announce a “no ties between Memorial Day and Labor Day” policy. In others, the suggestion is not needed to be heeded.

During the late '80s and early '90s, when supervising seminary interns, I would tell the males: “Professionalism is not wearing a tie, but knowing when to wear a tie.”

Now I'm as confused about the subject as anyone. Going into professional settings today requires asking the youthful question of a colleague or peer: “What are you wearing today?”

Personally, I have learned to go with the flow. Dressing in a formal or informal way depends on the daily schedule. Perhaps all of this is just a natural result of increased individualism.

Many years ago I had a friend who didn't dress as formally on a daily basis as most of his colleagues. Seeing him in a tie one day caused me to inquire — and to discover his unique fashion philosophy.

“I wear a tie when meeting with someone who thinks he's important,” he said. Then after a pause, he continued: “And I wear a coat and tie when meeting with someone I think is important.”

Since no suit or sports coat was in sight, I followed him a bit to see which office door he entered. **BT**

No going back

By Tony W. Cartledge

www.baptiststoday.org/cartledge-blog

A student stopped by my office to talk about reading the Bible — go figure.

He was dealing with a question that divinity school students often face: once you've learned to dig beneath the surface and read the Bible with an academic eye, how do you go back to reading the Bible devotionally?

How do you sit through a Sunday school class in which the curriculum or the teacher (or both) uses proof texts

for doctrinal instruction but ignores important questions about the text?

We agreed that reading the Bible devotionally may be different, but certainly remains possible. Having some understanding of context, form and the nuances of language can make devotional reading a richer experience, if anything.

But how does one find enjoyment in a Bible study class where critical insights or hard questions are either unwelcome or simply not understood? Does one speak up at the risk of alienating the teacher or fellow class members, remain silent and frustrated, find another class?

My philosophy has always been to teach Bible studies the same way I

teach in divinity school: with all the honesty and insight I can muster. I have found that folks generally appreciate the opportunity to learn new things, explore different approaches and ask hard questions of the text.

Starting with the June issue, *Baptists Today* will be providing new Bible study resources that will make such encounters with the text available to classes anywhere. I'll be spending a lot of time writing Bible studies suitable for use by Sunday school classes or other groups.

We hope you'll consider letting *Baptists Today* help you “dig the Bible” as you might not have done it before. You may not want to go back. **BT**

BAPTISTS AND THE CIVIL WAR

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Hostilities now official, the month of May is occupied with preparations for coming battles. North and South, war is the talk of the citizenry rural and city.

The uncommitted Border States remain critical to the fortunes of both the United States and the Confederate States. Nowhere are citizens more divided than in Kentucky.

Pulpits and churchyards are not unaffected by the war talk. On the first Sunday of the month, members of Kentucky's Old Cane Spring Baptist Church (located in Madison County, south of Lexington) gather for a day of worship and fellowship. A participant records the day's events:

Old Cane Springs appeared to be a God-fearing and God-loving community. There was preaching at the Cane Spring Church as usual. Rev. William Rupard, a young Baptist preacher from Clark County, had been engaged as minister. The first Sunday in May was expected to be a big day, and the usual preparations were made to entertain those attending who might live at a distance. Lambs, pigs, and chickens had been slaughtered by the dozens, and when the congregation began to assemble, it was evident that no unnecessary preparation had been made.

In a very short time the church was filled with ladies, except the "amen corner" and the extreme rear of the church. The yard was about as full as the church. Men gathered in various parts of the yard, and as one passed among them he heard nothing but war and preparation for war being discussed ... The opposing views of the North and South were freely advocated and it was evident that the peace-loving and law-abiding citizens of Old Cane Springs and vicinity were ready to take up arms in defense of one or the other of the sections.



150 YEARS AGO

May 1861

When the services were over, those who had heard the sermon came out either lauding or condemning the preacher, who had spoken of the people of the South as Rebels, bent on dissolving the Union of the States. His utterances on this point were soon known by the crowd on the outside, some of whom received them with condemnation while others approved; and excitement ran high. One man said in a loud voice, "No more of his preaching for me. No true preacher knows anything in his pulpit but Christ and Him crucified."

Most all of the members who owned slaves were grievously offended at the preacher's remarks. Major C. F. Burnam, an attorney from Richmond, who was present, congratulated the preacher on his defense of the Union. His statement, however, was overheard and caused him to be condemned as much as the preacher.

... Men of the community were fast taking sides and excitement ran high. Those with much property and many

slaves sympathized with the South, while most of those with small homes and no slaves were for the North.

Meanwhile, in St. Louis, Mo., the Second Baptist Church is divided. In late April, the church's pastor, Dr. Galusha Anderson, had preached the first pro-Union sermon in the Border State city.

Church members in the weeks following take sides on the issue, as some southern sympathizers in the city resort to violence. A church window is broken and a deacon shot.

One city newspaper editor writes scornfully of Galusha's sermon under the headline, "The Devil Preaches at Sixth and Locust."

Galusha remains resolute. Some families leave the church never to return, although in the coming years the church emerges stronger than ever.

Southward, the Southern Baptist Convention convenes in Savannah, Ga. The "lawless reign of terror at the North," delegates proclaim, are waging "a warfare of savage barbarity, to devastate our houses and hearths with hosts of ruffians and felons."

Southern Baptists pledge to fight back. Summoning "every principle of religion, of patriotism, and of humanity," messengers pledge their "fortunes and lives in the good work of repelling an invasion designed to destroy whatever is dear in our heroic traditions; whatever is sweet in our domestic hopes and enjoyments; whatever is essential to our institutions and our very manhood."

Therefore, "we commend to the churches represented in this body, that they constantly invoke a holy and merciful God to cover their [soldiers] head in the day of battle, and to give victory to their arms."

At the same time, Southern Baptists remain committed to evangelizing their slaves. "There is no class of people among us that more sincerely appreciate the efforts of our missionaries than the slaves that work our soil. Let us, then, give them the pure Word of Life that has elevated them so far above the condition of their race in the mother land." **BT**

For a daily journal along with references to source material, visit www.civilwarbaptists.com.

SIX QUESTIONS

about the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

Editor's note: This is the first in a series of articles in which various participants respond to the same six questions from Baptists Today Editor John Pierce about their involvement in and understanding of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship that is celebrating its 20th anniversary in June.

Deane and Bert Langdon

met in junior college following his service in World War II. A year later they married and transferred to Oklahoma Baptist University where Bert sensed a call to ministry. He was ordained by First Baptist Church of Wynnewood, Okla.

Following graduation from Golden Gate Seminary in 1955, Bert became associate pastor at 12th Avenue Baptist Church in Sacramento, Calif., and then pastor.

Later he spent 28 years as an associational missionary for the Pacific Southern Baptist Association through the California Southern Baptist Convention and the SBC Home Mission Board.

After retiring in 1988, he served two years with the European Baptist Convention as treasurer and interim pastor



of three churches in Germany.

Deane spent 46 years writing curriculum materials for the Baptist Sunday School Board/LifeWay and led teacher training conferences in all states west of Texas and in Canada and Europe. She also edited a news journal for European Baptists.

The Langdons live in Lompoc, Calif., enjoy travel and have found “special joy” in leading worship services aboard cruise ships. **BT**

BT: What was your first experience with CBF?

Bert: I first attended the 1990 meeting [that led to forming of CBF]. I have only missed one meeting since. That was the one at Greensboro, N.C.

Deane: We attended the [first assembly] in Atlanta in 1991. I'm not sure how we received information about the meeting. We had returned from serving almost two years in Europe with the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board. [The SBC] de-funding the seminary in Switzerland was a pivotal issue that caused us to look at some alternatives.

BT: What is it about the CBF that caused you to get and remain engaged?

Deane: The open attitude and willingness to struggle with finding some ways of cooperating with integrity in sharing our faith and relating to fellow believers with respect.

Bert: They are affirming and accepting. I respect the fact that everyone can have an opinion and not be criticized or put down. I don't have to use the same words that someone else uses to express my faith and opinions.

BT: What was a significant “CBF moment” for you?

Deane: I guess when I realized that those

whom we saw as leaders were seemingly not involved in “building a kingdom” around themselves.

BT: How do you explain CBF to others?

Deane: This is sometimes difficult. I do not want to “explain CBF” as an organization which “is against whatever.” CBF is involved in offering help for churches and individuals who are trying to learn to live as Jesus taught in Matthew 25.

Bert: I live 125 miles from the nearest CBF church, so am an associate member of a Methodist church. They accept that, and I don't have any explaining to do.

I have breakfast with the ROMEOS (Retired Old Men Eating Out) every Tuesday. The other six or seven are all members of our former Southern Baptist church. I mention meetings that I attend. We don't get into differences.

BT: What are the biggest challenges facing CBF at age 20?

Deane: Of course, the present economic climate is a huge challenge. (I served on the CBF Coordinating Council finance group when things were great.)

One big challenge is finding ways to tell our story to some people in Baptist churches who choose to react to circumstances rather

than think. I do not believe that we should deliberately attempt to “steal churches,” but I think that perhaps some church members operate out of habit rather than thinking through their choices.

I wish we [Baptists] could find a way to become less judgmental about some issues. Where does teaching biblical values leave off and becoming legalistic with the right to tell everybody else how to live pick up?

Bert: New church starts, especially in the West, so that we can reach unreached people, and finances are generated.

BT: What hopes do you have for the Fellowship's future?

Bert: I will be glad to see it grow number wise and, as a result, be able to have more field representatives to reach around the world. And we need to continue inter-

faith relationships with other religious groups.

Deane: We would hope that starting some CBF churches in the West could become a goal. Bert and I are really past the age for that kind of assignment.

Again, finding ways of telling our stories to people who need to know about a loving, accepting, open place where they can learn to become better followers of Christ. We are still learning. **BT**



Fed up with Hollywood, churches make their own films

YORBA LINDA, Calif. — This year's Oscars may have been passed out, but for some churches across the country the major motion picture season was just getting started.

Frustrated with the movies Hollywood has been releasing, more and more congregations are making their own feature films.

One is Friends Church in Yorba Linda, a Quaker congregation with an evangelical megachurch worship style where members are finishing production on a film called *Not Today*.

"I still hear people say it in the church, 'What are we doing? We're making a movie? What are you talking about?'" Jon Van Dyke, Friends Church's media director, told the PBS show *Religion & Ethics News Weekly*.

Van Dyke is director of *Not Today*, which tells the story of a spoiled young American who goes on a partying trip to India and gets pulled into the search for a little girl sold to human traffickers. The film was partly shot in India and centers around Dalits, the so-called "untouchables" on the lowest rung of the traditional caste system. Friends Church connected with Dalits during mission trips.

"I had never heard of the Dalits until I went to India," said Brent Martz, producer of *Not Today* and pastor of creative ministries at Friends Church.

Friends Church committed to help free Dalits who had been trafficked and to build 200 schools for Dalit children. And, because the congregation is in the backyard of Hollywood, members decided to make a movie as well.

"It wasn't just to make a movie, because we're not in the movie business; we're a church," said Matthew Cork, the congregation's lead pastor. "But as a church, we do have an obligation and a responsibility to tell the message, and we believe that this was the best way for us."

Some experts question whether this is something local churches should be doing.

"I guess I have an outdated notion that churches are there to inspire parishioners to



then go and do things, in whatever genre, whether it's politics, or media or whatever," said Mark Joseph, a film producer with the MJM Entertainment Group who writes about religion and pop culture.

"I'm not sure about church as film studio or church as commercial enterprise," he said. "But that's, I think, the danger down this path."

The church filmmaking trend began at Sherwood Baptist in Albany, Ga., where associate pastors and brothers Alex and Stephen Kendrick have released three feature films since 2003. They are finishing the fourth one, *Courageous*, about policemen struggling to be good fathers.

In Sherwood films, volunteer church members make up nearly all the cast and crew and do everything from catering to building sets. Sherwood teamed with Provident Films, a division of Sony, and found a very receptive audience. Their third film, *Fireproof*, starring Kirk Cameron, was made on a \$500,000 budget, and it took in more than \$33 million at the box office, making it the highest-grossing independent film of 2008.

Sherwood films have a specific message, and making their own movies allows them to express it. The films have an overtly

Christian tone, and the upcoming *Courageous* continues that.

Sherwood's efforts have inspired other congregations.

"You've got these church media directors and their pastors going, 'Hey, why can't we do that?'" Joseph said.

At Calvary Church of the Nazarene in Cordova, Tenn., optometrist David Evans wrote and directed the church's annual passion play for 15 years. He says after watching *Fireproof*, he came away believing Calvary should make a film too.

"I realized that God had been preparing us for the last 15 years to do something far greater than we could ever imagine, and that's what set off the course of actions for me to begin writing the basic story of *The Grace Card*," he said.

The Grace Card, which Evans also directed, is a story about forgiveness and racial reconciliation. Although many in the cast are Calvary Church members, the film stars Academy Award winner Louis Gossett Jr., and it has several Hollywood partners, including Samuel Goldwyn Films.

"We want, number one, for God to be glorified through this movie," Evans said. "We want to plant seeds that result in people demonstrating forgiveness and extending grace. That's something we all need to do on a larger scale."

At Friends Church, filmmakers said they tried to incorporate their characters' faith into the story in a natural way.

"This isn't a Christian movie," Martz said. "It's a movie about human trafficking that happens to be (seen) through the experience of a couple of Christians who are really struggling to live a good Christian life."

Friends Church intends to deliver Hollywood quality with *Not Today*, and they have an advantage over other churches. Director Van Dyke spent more than 22 years working in Hollywood, and other church members are in the business as well.

He says it's important the film, which the church hopes to release early next year, not be perceived as a "B" movie.

"Clearly, there's tons of talent in the church, so why are we making crappy home movies? I mean ... Hollywood should be following us. They should be going, 'Wow, look what the church is doing.'" **BT**

The Pickin' Preacher

Alabama pastor finds joy, new contacts through musical avocation

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — Every minister needs a constructive way to deal with stress. Gary Furr went back to a tried-and-true approach from his youth.

“About 30 minutes with a guitar will get anything out of you,” he said with a smile.

Around Birmingham, Furr is known as the longtime, strong-voiced pastor of Vestavia Hills Baptist Church, a congregation that enjoys a scenic view of the city each time they gather. But in recent years, his musical roots from the hills of North Carolina have been showing through more.

“I grew up in a musical family,” said Furr. “I was playing ‘Orange Blossom Special’ before I was 16, and writing my own songs.”

His Uncle Paul was a fiddle player, and his dad — with whom he still picks guitars — enjoyed playing with Gary and his brothers. So bluegrass music around the house was a familiar sound, and the talent came naturally.

A few years ago, however, Gary brought his picking and singing out more publicly with the formation of an acoustic-bluegrass band called Shades Mountain Air. Unlike the band he formed in college — that lasted one week — SMA has staying power.

The group performs in a variety of settings from universities to music festivals. Gary said joining talents with Nancy and Greg Womble was easy and enjoyable.

“The first time we ever played together was on stage,” he noted.

Ministers need an outlet away from congregational demands. So in the mid-’90s, Furr decided a return to his musical roots was the one for him.



Shades Mountain Air is an acoustic-bluegrass band that recorded a self-titled CD in 2000 and another, *Sky's A Clearing*, in 2004. The group has performed on college and university campuses as well as at churches, coffee houses, festivals and conventions. Members (left to right) Greg Womble (banjo and vocals), Don Wendorf (mandolin and hammer dulcimer), Gary Furr (guitar and vocals) and Nancy Womble (bass and lead vocals) recently welcomed fiddle player Melanie Rogers to the band. Fans whose musical tastes range from Bill Monroe to James Taylor will find something to their liking in SMA's unique style, said Furr. Photo by Butch Oglesby of Blue Moon Studios. Used by permission.

“I stopped playing golf and started cruising music stores,” he recalled.

He met talented people from various backgrounds and, in turn, found ministry opportunities that would have never been discovered in his usual pastoral activities.

“It's its own little world,” said Gary of Birmingham's music community. “I get to know people that I'd never get to meet as a preacher in a suit.”

For example, one music store owner, with no church connection, asked Gary to conduct the funeral for his mother. “I've found you can be a pastor everywhere you go,” he said.

And what does the Vestavia congregation think about having a publicly pickin' preacher?

“The church has not only allowed me to do this, but are proud of it in a weird way,” he said gratefully.

When granted a sabbatical a few years ago, Gary grabbed his guitar and headed to Nashville. He spent time with seasoned songwriters exploring the similarities in their craft to that of sermon preparation and preaching.

“You paint a picture that the listeners can fill in,” said Furr. Whether crafting a

sermon or a song, the communicator asks: “What's the hook?” The message, he said, cannot be heard unless you get the listener's attention.

Therefore, he thinks his work at songwriting has positively impacted his preaching ministry. But he cautions against allowing a needed outlet to consume too much of a minister's time.

“It can become obsessive,” he confessed. “You have to keep it in balance because it's a very consuming kind of thing.”

But when kept in balance, he said, his musical interests positively impact all aspects of his life and ministry.

His increased interest in music has also enriched his family ties. He and his father spent a week together at a “guitar camp” in Maryville, Tenn. And Gary said he and his dad never leave each other's company — whether his parents have come to Birmingham or he is visiting them at their Atlanta area home — without picking a tune together.

“It's just been life giving for me,” said the pastor who finds more balance when his preaching and other pastoral duties get mixed in with a little picking. **BT**



A JOURNEY, NOT A JOKE — “My journey to the Holy Land began like the start of a bad joke,” said Baptist pastor Elizabeth Hagan (second from left), shown here with (left to right) her husband Kevin Hagan, Rabbi Rob Nosanchuk, Pastor John Moyle and Imam Yusuf Saleem. A highlight of her pilgrimage in diversity, said Hagan, was a visit with children in a poor Palestinian town on the border with Syria. The Virginia clergy brought gifts and joy to a community that had been vandalized recently. .



Many expressed amazement that an imam, a rabbi and a couple of pastors could get along and serve others together.

‘A rabbi, an imam and two preachers go on a trip ...’

Israel journey reveals challenges, opportunities of diversity

Diversity: it’s something most of us say we support and want more of in our lives. Most of us desire racial diversity, ethnic diversity and cultural diversity in our churches, and will do most anything to diversify our membership, our staff or our denominational offices.

Such an “I want more diversity” motto has long been at the top of my vision for life and ministry. Before seminary, I taught 5th grade in an inner-city school and went on service trips throughout Africa and Asia.

I am currently the pastor of a church that considers itself theologically diverse and multicultural in membership. Yet during a recent 10-day pilgrimage to Israel, I learned that I’m only just beginning to understand the scope, cost and sacrifices of what diversity truly means.

My journey to the Holy Land began like the start of a bad joke. A Reform rabbi, a Muslim imam, a non-denomina-

tional evangelical pastor and a Baptist pastor get together and decide to go on a trip.

Planning for this adventure began two years ago, when Rabbi Rob Nosanchuk from the synagogue in Reston, Va., attended an interfaith clergy meeting with a great idea. Rabbi Rob and his good friend, Imam Magid of the Adams Center in Sterling, Va., desired to go on an interfaith delegation of peace and reconciliation to Israel.

“Would any Christian clergy be interested in participating in the group?” he asked.

I was intrigued from the beginning. I knew this would be unlike the typical Holy Land tour.

A shared goal

The goal of our trip was twofold. First, we would travel together as clergy to holy sites in Jerusalem and throughout the Galilee

region that were esteemed in each of our religious traditions. We would seek to experience the spirituality of one another’s traditions and learn from each other’s experiences.

Second, we would intentionally engage the Israeli and Palestinian conflict from the perspective of as many viewpoints as possible. We would travel both with a Jewish Israeli guide and a Muslim Palestinian guide, and share in as many home meetings as possible in both the nation of Israel and the Palestinian territories.

Our experience with diversity began with an unexpected openness to the movement of the Spirit. What excited us most as we began the trip was the anticipation of seeing our “own” sites.

Though never spoken aloud, most of us assumed that we’d just “bear with” the visits to sites of faith traditions outside our own. Yet, as we opened our spirits, God gave us exactly what we did not expect: As we each let go of our own preconceived notions about this experience, God met us each in the most unlikely of places.

Through human lens

One of the most powerful days for the rabbi came in Ramallah, a thriving Palestinian town near PLO headquarters

that was a site visit unheard of for a Jew. Yet, for the rabbi, seeing the Palestinians through a human lens, rather than one stemming from political propaganda, birthed in him deep compassion for people living lives far closer to his own than he expected.

The imam, a Muslim convert from Christianity with a Baptist pastor for a father, tapped into deep joy at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, a site many Christians believe is the location of Jesus' burial. As he remembered his parents' witness, their strong faith, and what his first pilgrimage to Israel would have meant to them, he felt at home in a way he had never known before.

For the other pastor and myself, it was the Western Wall — the site believed to be the remains of Solomon's temple — that captured our attention in a way that no Christian site did.

As we prayed on our respective sides of the wall with men and women from all languages, nations and faiths, we were in a state of awe. For when the Spirit shows up, our individual words aren't enough. We were glad to have our colleagues from other traditions join in our prayers.

In each of these instances, we found that experiencing diversity often meant being uncomfortable, yet going with it because the Spirit was present there.

Sharing pain with others

Diversity, as we experienced it, also required willingness to witness others' pain. On the fourth day of our journey, we traveled from Jerusalem to Hebron, the city of Abraham and the Tomb of the Patriarchs.

Each of us was eager to visit this holy place together as children of Father Abraham and of Isaac and Ishmael.

Hebron, however, met our peace-making efforts with less than enthusiastic support. On several occasions our van was searched at security checkpoints with scrutiny. Even though we were American tourists, the Muslims in our van signaled trouble to the guards.

Then, at the Tomb of the Patriarchs, we found that we would have to use separate entrances. From an overlook on a balcony, I saw my dark-skinned Muslim friends being harassed, searched carefully, and endlessly interrogated. Our treatment

was separate and not nearly equal.

After reuniting outside the Tomb, we set out to walk around the town but quickly learned there were more rules for our diverse group. A large dividing barricade was placed in the middle of the street, with the narrow portion on the side of the road for Muslims by foot only and the wide portion of the road reserved for everyone else.

My heart ached for the brokenness in Hebron — brokenness that affected both the city and the tourists. I could only imagine what horrible flashbacks the imam was having to a horrible time of inequality during his formative years. Here he was in Israel, being persecuted in a similar way — this time for his religion.

Shared beauty and joy

Yet diversity, as we experienced it, also became a moving experience of beauty. On the last day of our adventure, we traveled to a poor Palestinian town on the border with Syria to spend time with a group of children who were deemed lower class by their society because of their darker skin.

Before visiting this elementary school, we learned that its facilities had recently been vandalized. The children were left without many necessary materials, and fear had gripped the neighborhood.

As we offered small gifts of soccer balls, Hula Hoops and painting supplies we had purchased, joy beamed from the children's faces and their laughter became contagious.

After spending the afternoon teaching games and organizing art projects, we were told countless times by school officials and even the mayor of the town that such

expressions of happiness had not been seen among the children for a long time before our coming.

Many expressed amazement that an imam, a rabbi and a couple of pastors could get along and serve others together. In that moment, beauty flooded all of our souls as our trip drew to an end. The message resounded clearly: Yes, God was present among us.

Daily diversity

Back home in Reston, Va., as I serve my church and seek to lead them in gospel-centered ways, diversity's call continues to challenge me.

I can no longer simply be friends with people who are just like me. Our church cannot, either.

I can no longer avoid the discomfort, misunderstandings and extra time that diverse friendships take to bring about. Our church cannot, either.

I can no longer be limited by what I have known of God in my past, for the Spirit might be leading me into what cannot be imagined now in the present. Our church cannot hold on to such a past, either.

There is so much more of God to experience if time, space and energy are given to the difficult practice of diversity. It is my prayer that we, as God's church, will not just give lip service to being shaped by diverse voices, but in openness of God's Spirit, learn to embrace one another in all of our brokenness and beauty. **BT**

—Elizabeth Evans Hagan is pastor of Washington Plaza Baptist Church in Reston, Va.



We found that experiencing diversity often meant being uncomfortable, yet going with it because the Spirit was present there.

Coming in June!

An expanded, newly designed Baptists Today

When the June issue of *Baptists Today* lands in your hand, you will see and feel **SOMETHING DIFFERENT**. But don't be alarmed: you are simply getting **MORE THAN BEFORE**. The expanded, newly designed news journal will have all the features of the current publication along with new Bible studies and other resources for churches — and a fresh look. Expect it to be noticeably different, yet recognizably *Baptists Today*!

WHAT'S THE SAME?

The mission of *Baptists Today* remains unchanged: to provide churches with a reliable source of unrestricted news, analysis and features about relevant issues.

As always, the news journal enjoys **unthreatened autonomy** and editorial freedom that is boldly protected by an independent Board of Directors.

The focus of *Baptists Today* is broad, not limited by state or convention lines. Attention is given to the larger Baptist family.

The qualities that have made *Baptists Today* unique for 28 years will remain unchanged.

So what's new?

Thanks to helpful feedback from readers, a long creative process and the generous support of friends, the June issue will have a fresh look and feel.

Most noticeably, the publication will have an **updated design** with full color and more pages of content.

An expanded new center section titled **"Nurturing Faith"** will feature Bible studies written by Dr. Tony Cartledge — as well as other church resources. Extensive teaching materials will be provided online, including lesson plans by Rick Jordan of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina.

Studying the Bible with Dr. Tony W. Cartledge



Starting in the June issue (with lessons that begin in July), *Baptists Today* will provide weekly Bible study lessons written exclusively by contributing editor Tony Cartledge and sponsored by CBF Congregational Life.

Dr. Cartledge, who also teaches at Campbell University Divinity School, has a scholar's mind, a pastor's heart and a writer's pen. His ability to provide solid biblical scholarship with practical applications of faith has long been appreciated.

These lessons for Sunday school classes and other weekly Bible study groups will follow the biblical texts found in the Revised Common Lectionary. Unique and abundant teaching resources (such as video overviews, lesson plans and commentaries) will be easily accessible online at the *Baptists Today* web site.

Group or bulk subscriptions to *Baptists Today* will provide a full year of high-quality Bible studies from a trusted source with a Baptist perspective — along with relevant news, analysis and features.

Baptists Today goes on tour

The news journal staff will hit the road May 23-26 to introduce the redesigned, expanded publication, with stops in Atlanta, Birmingham, Huntsville, Chattanooga, Knoxville, Asheville and Greenville. (See tour schedule on opposite page, or updated information at www.baptists.org.) Additional tours and special events will follow soon in many other cities.

PREVIEW THE NEW BAPTISTS TODAY!

Big Launch Party

featuring singer/songwriter Pat Terry

Sunday, May 22, 7 p.m.
Cox Capitol Theatre
382 Second Street
Macon, Georgia

Food, fun and a sneak preview of the new *Baptists Today*. Bring a group from your church.



PREVIEW THE NEW BAPTISTS TODAY!

FAITH ELEMENT BIBLE STUDIES FOR YOUTH

Sponsored by the Eula Mae and John Baugh Foundation, these new weekly Bible lessons will be produced in partnership with David Cassady and Faith Lab. Video and other teaching aids will be available online at no extra cost.

PLACE YOUR SUBSCRIPTION ORDERS NOW

Individual subscriptions are \$20 for one year and \$35 for two years.

Group orders (to different mailing addresses) or **Bulk orders** (to a single address) are just \$18 each for a full year (minimum of 25).

To order, visit www.baptists.org or call 1-877-752-5658.

New online teaching resources coming next month

Lesson plans, videos, commentaries to be part of 'Nurturing Faith'

When the newly redesigned and expanded *Baptists Today* arrives in June, it will carry Bible studies by Tony Cartledge as well as lessons for youth and children. And teachers of these lessons will find abundant and easily accessible resources at www.baptiststoday.org.

One helpful resource will be printable weekly lesson plans written by Rick Jordan as part of an ongoing collaboration between the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina and *Baptists Today*.

"Those who attend Sunday school or other Bible study groups have different interests," said Jordan, church resources director for CBFNC. "Some want to build relationships while others want in-depth Bible study and

others want to be challenged to intersect the Bible with their daily lives."

To those ends, Jordan has developed FIT — a model for teaching that begins with an interactive exercise to create *Fellowship*, then moves into the *Information* stage of biblical exploration and concludes with a *Transformational* experience.

"When the students leave the classroom, they know something about each other they didn't know before, they've gained some important biblical knowledge they didn't have before and



Rick Jordan



David Cassady

they are challenged to live in a different way than before," said Jordan.

A former pastor and church educator, Jordan (rjordan@cbfnc.org) is also available to lead retreats or other events for teachers, deacons or other church leadership.

The new Bible studies in the "Nurturing Faith" section of *Baptists Today*, as well as the online resources, are being coordinated by *Baptists Today's* church resources editor, David Cassady, an experienced Christian educator and curriculum developer.

"I'm excited about the way this new curriculum both offers solid printed materials and innovative online resources," said David, who is also president of Faith Lab, which provides media services to churches and church-related groups and is developing the Faith Element Bible studies for youth.

"My hope is that churches will find it to be a fresh and relevant way to enhance learning and help persons grow in faith," he added. **BT**

THE ROLL-OUT TOUR — MAY 23-26

Baptists Today editors to preview newly designed, expanded news journal

Get an early look at the NEW *Baptists Today* with its fresh design and expanded church resources including new Bible studies by Tony Cartledge as well as lessons for youth and children.

Discuss these added features in the news journal and abundant online resources with *Baptists Today* editors John Pierce, Bruce Gourley and David Cassady.

Additional events will be scheduled in other locations in the months ahead. Please invite *Baptists Today* to your area.

Monday, May 23

ATLANTA, GA — A luncheon hosted and sponsored by Bo Prosser, Coordinator for Congregational Life of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. No charge. 11:30 a.m. at the CBF Resource Center, 2930 Flowers Rd., South, Atlanta. Email Christa at cfsameni@thefellowship.info for reservations.

BIRMINGHAM, AL — A dinner coordinated by Alabama Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Details, including reservation information, will be posted at www.alabamacbf.org when completed.

Tuesday, May 24

HUNTSVILLE, AL — A luncheon coordinated by Alabama Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Details, including reservation information, will be posted at www.alabamacbf.org when completed.

CHATTANOOGA, TN — A 6:30 p.m. dinner hosted by First Baptist Church of Chattanooga at 401 Gateway Ave. No charge. (See *Baptists Today* contact information below for reservations.)

Wednesday, May 25

KNOXVILLE, TN — An 11:30 a.m. luncheon hosted by Ball Camp Baptist Church at

2412 Ball Camp Byington Rd. No charge. Call the church at (865) 693-1641 for reservations.

ASHEVILLE, NC — Regional preview presentation sponsored by the Western North Carolina Baptist Fellowship and hosted by First Baptist Church of Asheville, 5 Oak St., at 6 p.m. in the chapel. (Those wishing to come earlier for the \$6 fellowship meal may make reservations by calling the church at [828] 252-4781 or online at www.fbca.net.)

Thursday, May 26

GREENVILLE, SC — A noon luncheon hosted by Pelham Road Baptist Church at 1108 Pelham Rd. (See *Baptists Today* contact information below for reservations.)

INFORMATION: This schedule is being updated at www.baptiststoday.org as plans are completed. Unless otherwise noted, please contact the *Baptists Today* office at jannie@baptiststoday.org or 1-877-752-5658 to attend one of the tour events that includes a meal. Please identify the city in which the lunch or dinner will be held. **BT**

On stage

Musical, politicians
put Mormons in
American spotlight

Book of Mormon *musical called surprisingly sweet*

NEW YORK (RNS) — A Ugandan villager in a new Broadway musical offers a plaintive love song about paradise — and the object of her yearning is none other than Utah's capital.

"Salvation has a name — Salt Lake-y City," croons Nabalungi (played by Nikki M. James) in *The Book of Mormon*, at the Eugene O'Neill Theater.

The lyrics are ironic, of course, as is much of the story written and directed by *South Park* creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone, in conjunction with Robert Lopez, who helped compose the award-winning musical *Avenue Q*.

Sure enough, the production is bawdy and irreverent. Many believers would see it as a blasphemous assault on scriptures, much like the pair's animated TV series. But the satire and tone were not as hostile as many Mormons feared.

"I was expecting to be offended," said Anne Christensen, a 22-year-old LDS New Yorker, "but was pleasantly surprised by how incredibly sweet it was."

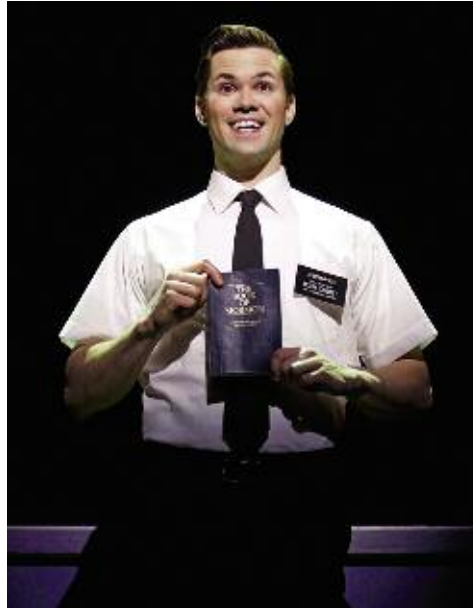
Her mother, Janet Christensen, added: "It's not G-rated, but they treated us with affection. And they did their homework."

The play is a story about faith and doubt, with actions and themes that will be familiar to most Utahns, no matter their religious tradition.

The set includes the outside frame of an LDS temple, with a spinning Angel Moroni on top. There are brief appearances by LDS Church founder Joseph Smith, his successor, Brigham Young, *Book of Mormon* figures Mormon and Moroni, and Jesus himself.

The main characters, though, are LDS missionaries in white shirts, ties and those ever-present nametags.

The first scene shows about a dozen missionaries happily ringing doorbells and claiming all answers "are in the book," holding up copies of *The Book of Mormon*.



***The Book of Mormon*, opened March 24. Somewhat surprisingly, the satirical musical is getting rave reviews from Mormons, but not everyone is amused. Religion News Service file photo courtesy Joan Marcus.**

For the next two hours, these young men sing about temptation, sexuality, guilt and fear, and about believing sometimes-ludicrous doctrines. They deal with differences and egos and doubt.

One mismatched pair, Elder Price (played by Andrew Rannels) and Elder Cunningham (played by Josh Gad), is sent to Uganda, where AIDS has decimated the population and the locals believe having sex with a virgin is the only cure. A local warlord is threatening to attack and circumcise all the women.

Price, a by-the-book leader who thought Orlando, Fla., would be a perfect place to do his two-year stint, is convinced that he can change the world by baptizing the most people. He is confident and cocky.

Cunningham, a geeky but eager misfit, just wants to be liked. He hasn't actually read the Mormon scripture but loves the stories of *Star Wars* and *Lord of the Rings* and mixes them into his preaching.

In one powerful number, "I Believe," Price belts out a string of peculiarly Mormon teachings — that ancient Jews sailed to America, that God lives on a planet called Kolob, that in 1978 "God changed his mind about black people" and that the Garden of Eden was in Jackson County, Mo.

Later, Price begins to doubt those stories, which triggers a "spooky Mormon hell dream," in which he sees serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer and Genghis Khan, among other figures. Price is also haunted by two giant cups of coffee, which is prohibited by the church's health code.

That leaves Cunningham, who has a "problem" with lying, alone to convert the Ugandans and leads directly to some hilarious antics and miscommunication.

Chris Bono, a spokesman for the producers, said that "this is not just a spoof of Mormons, and it's not cynical."

In response to media requests before the musical's preview, the LDS Church released the following: "The production may attempt to entertain audiences for an evening, but the *Book of Mormon* as a volume of scripture will change people's lives forever by bringing them closer to Christ."

Parker and Stone have said they love Mormons "and it showed," said Graceann Bennett, a Mormon from Chicago. "It was like loving teasing. I don't think you could get to that sweetness in today's world without a serious dose of irreverence."

Bennett especially liked the fact that the characters were "real Mormons," not fringe groups such as polygamists. There was not a single mention of plural marriage, "Big Love," Mitt Romney or Proposition 8. And, though there is a glimpse of "Mormon underwear," there are no jokes about it.

"Americans think Mormons are all the same," Bennett said. "This shows diversity and that Mormons can grow and change in their faith." **BT**

Will high-profile politicians help or hurt Mormons?

SALT LAKE CITY (RNS) — Amid the prospect of presidential runs by Jon Huntsman Jr. and Mitt Romney, reporters were bombarding the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints with calls about the potential candidates and their Mormon faith.

So much so, in fact, that the Utah-based LDS Church decided it needed to reiterate its longstanding stance of political neutrality.

“The church is strictly neutral in matters of party politics and will not comment at all on the personalities and platforms of candidates, whether or not they are members of the church and irrespective of their party affiliation,” the church said in a statement released in February.

The novelty of two high-profile Mormons possibly competing for the nation’s highest office guaranteed the 14 million-member faith group a place in the national spotlight. But experts are divided about whether that would help or hurt the church.

“In the long run, it would be good for the church,” said David Campbell, a political

scientist at the University Notre Dame and a Mormon.

“It would mean we were entering the mainstream of American society. After all, we would have not just one but two candidates — plus Harry Reid (the Senate majority leader, a Democrat from Nevada).”

Campbell and co-author Robert Putnam of *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, ranked Mormonism among the nation’s least-popular faiths.

Romney’s first run at the White House “did not change attitudes toward Mormons, either among those who liked him or didn’t,” Campbell said. “Attitudes about Mormonism were fixed.”

John Green, an expert in religion and politics at the University of Akron in Ohio, said: “If we have two Mormon candidates in the race, (Mormonism) becomes less of an anomaly. You may see somewhat greater acceptance (of

Mormons) on the part of the general public.”

Yet he said the same underlying attitudes that created difficulties for Romney remain:

white evangelical Protestants — a force in the GOP — view the Mormon doctrines with suspicion and its missionaries as “competitors” for converts. Such evangelicals are especially influential in states such as South Carolina, Georgia and Florida, Green said, and would pose a large hurdle for any Mormon candidate.

Kelly Patterson, a Brigham Young University political scientist, is more optimistic about his church and possible Mormon candidates.

“The second time around, it won’t be as important,” he said of the earlier scrutiny given to Romney’s Mormon faith. “Clearly, with some elements of the Republican Party and the media, there is a level of familiarity and understanding of Mormonism that didn’t exist in the 2008 cycle.” **BT**



Jon Huntsman Jr.



Mitt Romney



2011 CBF General Assembly

June 22-25
Tampa, Fla.

God’s mission, your passion:
Celebrating our 20-year journey toward faithfulness

Highlights include:



CBF 20th Anniversary Dinner Party with Molly Marshall and Ken Medema, Wed., June 22



Inspiring Evening Worship, Thurs. and Fri., June 23-24



Essentials Conference ministry workshops, Fri. and Sat., June 24-25



Global Missions Commissioning Service, Thurs., June 23



Golf with Fellowship Baptists, Tues., June 22

Plus: Leadership Institute on “Prophetic Preaching for Anxious People”
Tampa Sessions for college students, Ministry Resource Fair, Children’s and Youth Assemblies, music by Ken Medema and featured speakers Pam Durso, Molly Marshall and Kyle Reese

Learn more and register for free: www.thefellowship.info/assembly or (800) 352-8741

BAPTISTS Today

P.O. Box 6318
Macon, GA 31208-6318

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. • Bayshore Baptist Church, Tampa, Fla. • Boulevard Baptist Church, Anderson, S.C. • Broadmoor Baptist Church, Baton Rouge, La. • Brunswick Islands Baptist Church, Supply, N.C. • Central Baptist Church, Richmond, Va. • Chadbourn Baptist Church, Chadbourn, N.C. • Church in the Meadows, Lakeland, Fla. • College Park Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla. • Covenant Baptist Church, Gastonia, N.C. • Crozet Baptist Church, Crozet, Va. • Cullowhee Baptist Church, Cullowhee, N.C. • Druid Hills Baptist Church, Atlanta, Ga. • Emerywood Baptist Church, High Point, N.C. • Fellowship Baptist Church, Fitzgerald, Ga. • Fernwood Baptist Church, Spartanburg, S.C. • First Baptist Church, Abilene, Texas • First Baptist Church, Ahoskie, N.C. • First Baptist Church, Anderson, S.C. • First Baptist Church, Asheville, N.C. • First Baptist Church, Augusta, Ga. • First Baptist Church, Bladenboro, N.C. • First Baptist Church, Cape Girardeau, Mo. • First Baptist Church, Carolina Beach, N.C. • 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, Eatonton, 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, N.C. • First Baptist Church, Marietta, Ga. • 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, Orangeburg, S.C. • First Baptist Church, Pensacola, Fla. • First Baptist Church, Rome, Ga. • First Baptist Church, Rutherfordord, N.C. • First Baptist Church, Sanford, N.C. • First Baptist Church, Savannah, Ga. • First Baptist Church, Spruce Pine, N.C. • First Baptist Church, Tifton, Ga. • First Baptist Church, Wilmington, N.C. •

First Baptist Church, Winston-Salem, N.C. • Franklin Baptist Church, Franklin, Va. • Grace Fellowship Baptist Church, Meridian, Miss. • 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. • Jersey Baptist Church, Linwood, 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. • Maranatha Baptist Church, Plains, Ga. • Millbrook Baptist Church, Raleigh, N.C. • Mount Zion Baptist Church, Macon, Ga. • National Heights Baptist Church, Fayetteville, Ga. • New Haven Church, Lawton, Okla. • Northminster Baptist Church, Jackson, Miss. • North Stuart Baptist Church, Stuart, Fla. • Oakmont Baptist Church, Greenville, N.C. • Pintala Baptist Church, Hope Hull, Ala. • 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. • Sugar Land Baptist Church, Sugar Land, Texas • St. Matthews Baptist Church, Louisville, Ky. • Tabernacle Baptist Church, Carrollton, Ga. • Trinity Baptist Church, Cordova, Tenn. • 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. • Winter Park Baptist Church, Wilmington, N.C. • Woodmont Baptist Church, Nashville, Tenn. • Yates Baptist Church, Durham, N.C. • Youngsville Baptist Church, Youngsville, N.C. • Zebulon Baptist Church, Zebulon, N.C.

For as little as
\$450 a year
your church can be
better informed, too!*

** (Minimum 25 subscriptions at \$18 each). Just send a list of names and addresses, along with a check, to: Baptists Today, P.O. Box 6318, Macon, GA 31208-6318. (For more information, call toll-free 1-877-752-5658.)*