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*expands to provide
new resources | 9*

WHY WE'RE HUNGRY FOR
THE *THE HUNGER GAMES*
29

**Pastoral Perspectives with
Jack Glasgow | 30**

**Redeeming Faith
and Sports | 36**

Nurturing
FATHTM
BIBLE STUDIES
for adults and youth
JUNE lessons inside

17

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PERSPECTIVE

Collaboration is key to success **9**
John Pierce

'... In fact, we have to serve' **14**
Colin McCartney

The significance of Adoniram Judson **33**
Richard V. Pierard

Seminary education takes on new forms **35**
Heather Entreklin

IN THE NEWS

Dalai Lama wins Templeton Prize **10**

Report: Church giving on the rebound **11**

Denominational power, growth of Christianity in different regions of the world **12**

Mississippi, Vermont at opposite ends of religious spectrum **13**

Vatican wants to revive church's role in fighting Mafia **37**

FEATURES

Vincent Harding: 'Keeper of a story' **5**
John Pierce

Pastoral Perspectives from Jack Glasgow **30**

The poor among you **42**
Ken Camp



'A little help from our friends' **15**

40
Morrow's
'Mother Superior'



Cover photo: By John Pierce. *Baptists Today* is expanding its publishing efforts during this growing season.

Quotation Remarks	8
Editorial	9
Reblog	15
Classifieds	16
In the Know	16
Media	29
Baptists and the Civil War	34
Lighter Side	38

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‘Loving respect, *clear disagreement*’

Vincent Harding brought Martin Luther King Jr. and Clarence Jordan together to discuss their different approaches to a common goal

ATLANTA — Martin Luther King Jr. and Clarence Jordan used different means toward the same end: racial equality.

King orchestrated mass boycotts to cripple economic systems and raise awareness of the injustices against African Americans. Jordan suffered the brunt of boycotts launched against his interracial farming community in Southwest Georgia — along with direct acts of violence.

At Jordan’s request, mutual friend Vincent Harding brought the two together in Albany, Ga., in 1961 to discuss their difference perspectives.

Suprisingly, this quiet but spirited meeting of two Georgia-born Baptists — with strong devotion to breaking down human barriers of discrimination — has remained little known. But Harding recalled that meeting and other events from the Southern freedom movement in a March interview with *Baptists Today* at the Atlanta University Center.

HEADED SOUTH

A careful historian, Harding recalls the events going back more than a half-century with caution but surprising clarity. At age 81, he confesses that some of things he witnessed and some events he has written about over the years may blend together.

But a memorable trip from Chicago to the South in 1958 — in which he first met King and Jordan, separately — is quite clear.

While studying at the University of Chicago, Harding was part of a pastoral team in the “experimental, interracial” Woodlawn Mennonite Church — where bright, young and idealistic members liked to talk about the struggle for racial equality. They were mostly students or recent graduates of the University of Chicago or the Mennonite Biblical Seminary.

Eventually, the conversation shifted to:



Historian, biographer and activist Vincent Harding, in an interview with *Baptists Today*, tells of a little-known meeting he arranged for Clarence Jordan to share with Martin Luther King Jr. his opposition to boycotts.

“Why do we keep talking about this? Maybe some of us should just see what happens if we did this in the South.”

Harding described himself and his peers as “kind of crazy anyway.” So five young men — three white, two black — piled into an old station wagon and headed for Little Rock where desegregation battles had made the news.

Some might call them an early version of “freedom riders,” said Harding. But “Christian riders” would be more fitting, he said, as their faith in Christ clearly drove their mission.

After moving through Arkansas and Mississippi, the young men headed for Southern Alabama to a Mennonite camp. Finding interracial housing in the South at that time was very difficult.

BEDSIDE MEETING

None of the five had ever met King, though Harding recalled having heard the rising civil rights leader speak to a large gathering in

Chicago. But on this September day in 1958, they decided to give it a try.

“It didn’t make sense to be on our kind of journey, to be in Alabama and not try to make contact with him,” Harding recalled his band of brothers saying to one another.

To his surprise, a bank of phone books in Mobile had the phone number listed for the pastor’s home in Montgomery. Coretta Scott King answered.

“Martin had been stabbed by a deranged woman in Harlem on a book-signing tour,” said Harding, an event that hadn’t registered with him at the time of his call. “He had gone home to recover.”

Coretta said she was uncertain if Martin would be able to meet with them, but for them to come on by. So they drove to Montgomery. Upon their arrival, Coretta went back to the bedroom to tell her husband about the young Mennonites. She reported back that “he’d be very glad to see you.” With King in his pajamas and robe, the five young men from Chicago

gathered chairs around his bed and made a “wonderful first connection.”

Harding recalled being impressed by King’s “tremendous sense of humor.”

“He kept congratulating us on the great feat of being able to get through Mississippi alive.”

Harding said they talked about what King was trying to do in Montgomery and what they were trying to do in Chicago. They asked King about his hope for the South as a whole.

After about two hours, the men were leaving when King looked at Harding and his friend Ed Riddick and said: “You guys are Mennonites; you know about this matter of nonviolence. We need you. You ought to come down here and work with us sometime.”

ON TO KOINONIA

Clarence Jordan’s interracial and controversial farm outside of Americus, Ga., was a certain destination for the wandering Mennonites — though Harding doesn’t recall how they first learned of Koinonia Farm.

“Clarence and Koinonia represented the same kind of commitment to Christian brotherhood and sisterhood — and we would find a welcome place there,” said Harding.

So they pointed the station wagon toward Southwest Georgia.

“Sometime after we left Montgomery, it may have been our next stop ... we got to Koinonia and got to meet Clarence,” said Harding. “As you can imagine, we had many wonderful conversations.”

Also memorable, Harding said, was being assigned to a house near the entrance to Koinonia — where evidence of bullets having been fired into the house remained on the wall just above his bed.

For Harding, that initial visit in 1958 “was the beginning of a long relationship with Clarence and Koinonia.”

OFF TO ATLANTA

A couple of years after his Southern adventure with friends, Harding and his new bride Rosemarie moved to Atlanta as representatives of the Mennonite Service Committee. With the Georgia capital as their base, they would travel all over the South and relate to a variety of individuals and organizations to further the cause of freedom.

Their commitment, said Harding, was to find “where the way of love can take us in the midst of social struggle.”

A real estate agent helped them find a 12-room residence that would become the Mennonite House in which the Hardings would provide hospitality and out of which they would

Vincent Harding: ‘Keeper of a Story’

By John Pierce

ATLANTA — Vincent Harding is revered for both his work as a civil rights activist and his excellent writings on the subject including biographies of his friend Martin Luther King Jr. Students of the freedom movement know that he drafted “A Time to Break Silence,” King’s famous speech in opposition to the Vietnam War, delivered at Riverside Church in New York City in 1967.

Born in Harlem, Harding attended New York Public Schools and earned a history degree from the City College of New York in 1952. The following year he graduated from Columbia University with a master’s degree in journalism.

He served in the U.S. Army from 1953-1955 before earning an M.A. in history at the University of Chicago in 1956. After his sojourn to the South, he received his Ph.D. in history from the University of Chicago in 1965.

His long and distinguished teaching career included Iliff School of Theology in Denver where he taught from 1981 until his retirement in 2004. He is currently doing research and teaching at Morehouse College in Atlanta.

Yet Morehouse students who are privileged to hear Harding today are in for more than a strict history lesson. Harding resists the traditional language of the civil rights era, he said, because he doesn’t want them to assume the struggle is over.

“I refer to what we were going through at that time as part of the ongoing, never-ceasing struggle for the expansion of democracy in America,” said Harding in a March interview with *Baptists Today*.

carry out their mission. Unknown to them at the time, Martin and Coretta King lived just around the corner. Their friendships with the Kings grew.

Harding said King asked the young Mennonite couple to help in various efforts of the freedom movement. Two specific requests were to be involved in non-violence training and to identify white persons who were sympathetic to the freedom cause but might fear making direct contact with King or local movements. Desegregation efforts in Albany, Ga., were of particular interest at that time.

So Vincent and Rosemarie gladly took the

At age 81, and with many participants in and eyewitnesses to the struggles of the ’50s and ’60s no longer around, Harding said “there is clearly a sense of being a keeper of a story.” But he wants to do more than share historical facts.

“My deepest intention is not simply to pass on the story of that which took place before they were born,” said Harding, “but to encourage them to understand why they need to know that story in the light of what they are planning for their own lives in the future.”

He reminds young students that it’s only been about 60 years that this country has been committed to building a multiracial democracy — and that “when it comes to building a democracy, we are still a developing nation.”

So there is a bigger question to be considered, he said: “How do you help train and nurture and develop younger people to become the experts on the building of a multiracial, compassionate democracy that can call on the resources of the Kings and the Clarences and the Fanny Lou Hamers to help them to understand that this is an ongoing work — and that nothing was completed in 1960 or 1970 or whenever, but that the work continues?”

Helping young people who have always enjoyed so many rights and privileges to see their roles in the ongoing struggle for freedom and equality is not easy, he confessed.

“That’s so hard for young people of this generation who are used to having things up and out and finished,” he said. “I enjoy the struggle with them — but it is a struggle.”

So Harding just keeps recalling the old African-American song that says: “Freedom is a Constant Struggle.” **BT**

charge whereby a “strange black Mennonite couple” would talk with white Southerners “especially on the grounds of their Christian faith” — and encourage them to take a stand based on faith rather than politics.

Harding said the struggle was “not just the cause of black people, but the cause of justice and democracy — and, of course, the cause of a Christian way of life.”

MORE CLARENCE

“Whenever we were operating in South Georgia, we wanted to spend some time with Clarence at Koinonia,” said Harding, who

Clarence Jordan Symposium 2012

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often took Mennonite House groups down for visits as well.

So before going to Albany to build the local support that King had requested, the Hardings went to Koinonia. Clarence expressed concerns about the strategy of using boycotts against stores and institutions that would not open their doors to African Americans.

"As Clarence talked with Rose and me, he asked if there was any way in which we could arrange for him and Martin to talk together about his hesitations — growing, for one thing, out of his own experience there at Koinonia with boycott as a weapon."

Harding said Jordan knew firsthand of the capacity of boycotts to do harm and he didn't think such actions were consistent with Jesus' call to love your enemies and not return evil for evil. So Harding promised Jordan that he would try to bring the two together to discuss his concerns.

"I knew that Martin would be very glad to meet Clarence in light of Clarence's own history," said Harding. "Both of them were Baptists; they had much in common."

ALBANY MEETING

Things were heating up in Albany when King arrived in December 1961. He didn't have time to go to Koinonia, but asked if Jordan might come to Albany, Harding recalled.

Clarence and Koinonia partner Con Browne were welcomed to the Albany home of physician and civil rights leader W.G. Anderson to meet with King. The mutual affection was obvious, said Harding, describing both King and Jordan as "full of grace."

Yet "Clarence quickly moved to the direct concern that he had," said Harding.

While he doesn't recall the full conversation in detail, Harding said King listened intently and said he understood Jordan's concerns. However, King felt that the use of nonviolent protest and boycotts was a right and effective strategy.

"They engaged each other with loving respect and clear disagreement," said Harding. "For those things to go together is a great gift."

Harding said he does not believe his two friends ever met again, but that Koinonia opened its community often to others working in the Albany movement.

COMPARE, CONTRAST

King and Jordan had similarities and differences said their mutual friend. "Both had developed a really impressive capacity to listen."

By the time they met in Albany in 1961, King had become a world-known figure, said Harding, and had much experience communicating in public and with the media. Jordan's work — as a writer and teacher — was done more quietly.

The two, he said, were "operating on absolutely different scales." Yet, both ministries were needed, he added: intimate relationships and work within the larger community.

"They both enjoyed people," said Harding. But as King's fame grew, casual relationships became more difficult due to "people wanting to get a piece of him."

Both of his friends shared a tremendous sense of humor, said Harding, although Jordan's was better known.

"Clarence was probably more of a storyteller," said Harding, who quickly added that King had gifts in that area as well.

Harding said he finds it fascinating that both were Georgians and Baptists — with roots in their native South where storytelling is common.

CHRISTIAN DISCIPLES

In the early '60s when Harding moved to the South, he discovered that the term Southerner "only meant white people." But some African Americans in the movement — Julian Bond being one of the first, he recalled — began to identify themselves in that way, said Harding.

Southern roots and Baptist upbringings are not what Harding remembers most about the commonality shared by his two friends, however.

"They both were men who took Jesus absolutely seriously," said Harding. "That was obviously one of the major grounds on which they could stand for their conversation. They both were convinced that the path of discipleship was their path and that was the way they wanted to go."

And their disagreements over methodologies, the noted historian added, fit well within the great tradition of Christian disciples since the time of Christ.

The two Baptists of the South with deep Christian commitments to the value of all persons — and a willingness to risk their lives for such a cause — died a year and a half apart: King from an assassin's bullet at age 39 in April 1968 and Jordan from a heart attack at age 57 in October 1969.

Yet their witnesses still bear light — and their shared mission continues. **BT**

Point person

Baptist minister settles into role as religious freedom ambassador

WASHINGTON — Nearly a year into her stint as the State Department's point person on religious freedom, Suzan Johnson Cook has traveled to eight countries and seems to have moved beyond questions about her lack of diplomatic experience.



“I had to certainly learn the culture of the State Department,” said Johnson Cook, the Obama administration’s ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom, in a recent interview, “but I was not foreign to the issues.”

She was in Abuja, Nigeria, not long after bombs killed dozens attending Christmas Day Mass. And she’s been to Assisi, Italy, where she participated in an interfaith gathering organized by Pope Benedict XVI. But she still has many countries on her to-do list, including some of the State Department’s hot spots.

Her initial plans for a February visit to China, which is designated as a “country of particular concern” for its religious freedom record, were halted when China denied her visa.

“We look forward to traveling and looking at a mutually agreeable time when it works for China and it works for us,” she said, not addressing criticism that the incident made her office look weak.

“But we continue to press even before the visit. We’re concerned about religious freedom efforts there, particularly registration of churches, the number of immolations that have happened.”

From her top-floor corner office in the State Department, the first African-American woman to hold the post works with a 16-person team, who kept the office running during a long vacancy and Johnson Cook’s own on-again off-again confirmation process.

“I got to believe that she will be a quick study, but still you’ve got a very complicated culture and not a whole lot of time,” said Robert Seiple, the first ambassador to hold the

post, who has met with Johnson Cook a couple of times.

In a bureaucracy where office real estate carries political significance, some observers question why Johnson Cook’s office is placed within the department’s Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, and how much access she has to Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton.

“I can’t respond to everybody on the outside,” said Johnson Cook, who noted that she traveled to Istanbul with Clinton last summer. “What I can say is that on the inside I have access, and the system works, and the structure works.”

Religious freedom activist Thomas Farr, who was troubled about her lack of foreign affairs experience when she was appointed, now says, “I think she’s done a pretty good job under difficult circumstances.”

The office of the mother of two teenage sons is decorated with family mementoes, including her father’s Bible on which she took the oath of office. On the walls are photos of her with Clinton in front of Istanbul’s famous Blue Mosque and officiating at Coretta Scott King’s funeral as four U.S. presidents looked on.

The former New York Baptist minister promotes interagency attention to religious freedom, works with U.S.-based groups that are concerned with religious freedom, and co-chairs the State Department’s new Working Group on Religion and Foreign Policy.

“It may not be the first time it’s ever happened, but it’s the first time that it’s institutionalized,” she said of the group that was launched last fall. “You see government and civil society beginning to work together.”

Bill Vendley, a senior adviser to the working group, said Johnson Cook is helping to refocus the department’s engagement with religious communities to address not only religious freedom and counterterrorism but also human rights and reducing violent conflicts.

“This is repointing the oceanliner,” said Vendley, secretary general of the New York-based Religions for Peace, “moving the ship of state, recalibrating its compass bearing vis-à-vis religion.”

Some religious leaders say Johnson Cook’s previous role as a minister has prepared her well to be a public defender of religious freedom.

“Just listen to her and hear her speak and if you find a problem with her in terms of diplomacy, something is wrong with you,” said Neville Callam, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance. “If you find deficiencies in her fervor for religious freedom, you must be blind or deaf.”

Nina Shea, director of the Hudson Institute’s Center for Religious Freedom, praises the reports on international religious freedom that come from Johnson Cook’s office. But she also has concerns.

Shea thinks its work on the so-called “Istanbul process” to address intolerance and discrimination against religion has inappropriately given the Organization of Islamic Cooperation an opportunity to claim it is partnering with the United States.

“It’s strengthening their position,” said Shea, who just concluded her term as a commissioner with the independent U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. “It’s not strengthening ours.”

Johnson Cook said the process is led by the U.S., not the OIC. After hosting a December meeting in Washington that continued the process, Johnson Cook said she looks forward to sending a list of best practices on to the United Nations.

“I don’t take full credit for that,” she said. “I think that I came in ... on a pendulum that’s been swinging and now we’re able to really put some action and get some traction on some of these issues.” **BT**

quotation remarks

“We wanted to show that movies about the faith struggle that millions of Americans deal with don’t have to be cheesy.”

—Author Donald Miller whose 2003 book *Blue Like Jazz* was adapted for the big screen (Washington Post)

“There’s always going to be someone who wants to put you out of town. Then there are our own up-and-down opinions of ourselves. But when you let Jesus show you who you are, no one’s flattery will puff you up — and no one’s criticism will throw you down.”

—Pastor Julie Pennington-Russell of First Baptist Church of Decatur, Ga., speaking to a women-in-ministry conference at Baylor University in March (Baylor Communications)

“I think family-run ministries are fabulous, but they have to be placed in proper governance.”

—Robert A. Schuller, 57, blaming sibling rivalry for the demise of the Crystal Cathedral founded by his father Robert H. Schuller (RNS)

“[W]e could purchase or rent, or we could even move into a renovated big box store like an old Walmart.”

—Executive Director Robert White on the possible sale of the Georgia Baptist Convention’s six-year-old suburban Atlanta headquarters built for \$43.5 million with a current debt of \$26 million (Christian Index)

“We actually voted a Baptist Sunday school teacher out and voted a former principal Hollywood actor in who really understood the times.”

—TV evangelist James Robison, on the Richard Land Live radio program, offering hope for reviving the Religious Right that he helped bring about in 1980 (ABP)

“As one plunges deeper into the partisanship of America’s culture wars, external facts seem to matter less than one’s hope that their side is winning. When people hear Christians speaking foolishly about political realities, should we not expect them to tune us out when we speak about the Gospel? If they see the irrationality of Christian partisanship, how can they expect anyone to believe other incredible claims about God and Jesus?”

—Jonathan Merritt, author of the upcoming book *A Faith of Our Own: Following Jesus Beyond the Culture Wars*, and son of former Southern Baptist Convention president James Merritt (HuffPost)

“The name Houston and the name Baptist are somewhat limiting to a national Christian university. ... That’s why we are considering changing the name.”

—Houston Baptist University board member Ray Cox Jr. (Houston Chronicle)

“We have seen ourselves up close and decided we can do better ... Turning religion into shouting matches and rampant bigotry doesn’t pass any gospel sniff test.”

—Religion News Service columnist Tom Ebrich

“We are excited about our future. We are moving forward.”

—Shorter University President Donald Dowless after an independent survey showed 89 percent of faculty has “no confidence” in his leadership of the Georgia Baptist Convention school (Rome News-Tribune)

“To eat hastily and thoughtlessly, without pausing to give thanks for all the work and care that is concentrated into the food on my plate, is a kind of arrogant forgetfulness of my ... absolute dependence on the people whose hands touched my food before I did.”

—Pastor Guy Sayles of First Baptist Church of Asheville, N.C., who once was a summer farmhand (EthicsDaily.com)

“We must concede that hyperbole and cousin hysteria are not helpful in the search for solutions to church-state clashes.”

—Aaron Weaver, a doctoral candidate in religion, politics and society at Baylor University, who blogs at *thebigdaddyweave.com* (Baptist Studies Bulletin)

“In every service this Sunday we’re going to have the countdown clock and reveal a page showing 52 Sundays, then we’ll rip [it] off and show 51.”

—Pastor Robert Jeffress on the one-year countdown that began on Easter Sunday toward completion of the new \$130 million building project including a new sanctuary for First Baptist Church of Dallas (WFAA)

“We pray for our Baptists and other Christian churches that in this situation they may be able to continue their witness to Christ, the Prince of Peace.”

—A statement expressing “grave concerns” about Syria from the European Baptist Federation that includes the Syrian Baptist Convention with 13 churches totaling 600 members (ABP)

Nurturing Faith expanding, offering new resources

Nearly one year ago, this news journal began providing the Nurturing Faith Bible Studies in the center spread. Response to the excellent lessons by Tony Cartledge and the supplemental materials has been superb.

What began as an idea — rooted in both observations from congregational life and confirming survey results — became a reality in a short time. So today a growing number of adult and youth Sunday school classes — as well as other weekly groups — are benefiting from these studies.

The concept was to make better use of the space in the center of the news journal and to provide the printed format for lessons that many desired. On the other hand, multiple (and free) teaching resources are placed online — including a video overview by Tony, a suggested teaching plan by educator Rick Jordan, and lots of insightful background material.

David Cassady and Jeremy Colliver adapt

these lessons specifically for youth, and Kelly Belcher gives a children's perspective on the biblical texts.

Good feedback from users of these studies has helped us to make improvements along the way. We are nimble and can make changes quickly to the online delivery and print layout.

As we rolled out the Nurturing Faith Bible Studies during a five-state tour last year, online editor Bruce Gourley made the comment that Nurturing Faith, like those who use the Bible studies, has the capacity to grow. Indeed it does.



So less than a year after launching the new Bible studies, *Baptists Today* is expanding its publishing efforts in a close working relationship with Faithlab. Together we have formed a team of writers, editors, designers and marketers with vast experience in every aspect of publishing.

The result will be new high-quality church resources using the latest in publishing

technology.

First, *Baptists Today* returns to book publishing (something it did many years ago). Several titles will be available in June, with many others coming out in the months ahead. These will be available either in print or as downloads to e-readers at nurturingfaith.net.

Second, an excellent church-based, graded Sunday school curriculum for children has been acquired and will be carefully crafted into Nurturing Faith for Children. We expect to have it available to churches by the end of this year.

Third, many other resources are at various stages of development. These include additional Bible study materials, as well as resources for women's groups and young adults.

Our commitment to providing a uniquely independent, national news journal is not weakened by this expanded publishing venture. In fact, Nurturing Faith has resulted in unprecedented growth in circulation.

And the revenues from publishing Nurturing Faith resources will support the news journal and the development of future resources for churches and individual Christians seeking a growing faith. **BT**

Collaboration is the key to success

While we cherish the autonomy afforded to *Baptists Today*, we do not work in isolation. The key to every successful aspect of our publishing efforts is collaboration.

Recently a group of Baptist leaders invited me to share my understanding of partnership. Here are the criteria of collaboration.

The first is **competence**. We look for self-starting, committed partners whose gifts match well with ours. Together we are able to accomplish things neither could do alone.

The second is **trust**. It doesn't take long

to discover those with whom you can have honest relationships. This is essential to healthy, productive collaboration.

A third criterion is **mutual benefit**. Working together should benefit both partners — and more importantly the churches that we are committed to serve.

Currently, Nurturing Faith has found such formal support and collaboration from Faithlab, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, CBF of North Carolina, CBF of Georgia, CBF of Alabama, and the Baugh Foundation. Other groups work hand-in-hand — guided by these principles — in specific projects.

The good question that leads to healthy collaboration is: What can we do better together?

And none of our efforts to provide *Baptists Today* and the growing Nurturing Faith resources would be possible without the faithful and ongoing support of the many individuals who give generously to these efforts.

Thank you!



Support the growing mission of *Baptists Today* at 1-877-752-5658, baptiststoday.org/donate or P.O. Box 6318, Macon, GA 31208-6318.

‘My little service to humanity’

Dalai Lama wins Templeton Prize for work on science, religion

NEW YORK — The Dalai Lama is best known for his commitment to Tibetan autonomy from China and his message of spirituality, nonviolence and peace that has made him a best-selling author and a speaker who can pack entire arenas.

But somewhat under the radar screen, the Tibetan Buddhist leader and Nobel Prize laureate has also had an abiding interest in the intersection of science and religion.

That interest won Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama, the 2012 Templeton Prize, a \$1.7 million award that is often described as the most prestigious award in religion.

The Dalai Lama is the highest-profile winner of an award that in recent years had been given to physicists and theologians not well known to the general public, but earlier had been given to the likes of evangelist Billy Graham and the late Mother Teresa.

“With an increasing reliance on technological advances to solve the world’s problems, humanity also seeks the reassurance that only a spiritual quest can answer,” said John M. Templeton Jr., the president and chairman of the Pennsylvania-based John Templeton Foundation and the son of Sir John Templeton, who founded the prize in 1972.

“The Dalai Lama offers a universal voice of compassion underpinned by a love and respect for spiritually relevant scientific research that centers on every single human being.”

For his part, the Dalai Lama, in a video statement released during a live webcast announcing the prize, struck a modest note. He said he was nothing more than “a simple Buddhist monk,” despite the 2012 Templeton or his 1989 Nobel Peace Prize.

The Templeton honor, he said, was “another sign of recognition about my little service to humanity, mainly, nonviolence and unity around different religious traditions.”

The Templeton Foundation noted that the Dalai Lama has long had an interest in a variety of scientific subjects, including astrophysics, behavioral science, neurobiology and quantum mechanics.

As one example, the Dalai Lama helped initiate a “Science for Monks” program, based at Buddhist monasteries in India. The program hosts Indian and Western scientists who wish to explore possible connections and overlaps between science and Tibetan Buddhist traditions.

In turn, the program also provides education in scientific inquiry to monks interested in biology, chemistry, cosmology, mathematics, physics and quantum mechanics.

In its announcement, the foundation noted “the rigorous commitment of Buddhists to meditative investment and reflection similarly follows the strict rules of investigation, proof and evidence required of science.”

But the Dalai Lama also has been involved in many academic conferences on science and religion. Some of these have resulted in best-selling books such as *The Art of Happiness*, *The Universe in a Single Atom*, and *The Dalai Lama at MIT*.

Aside from the “Science for Monks” program, the foundation noted that the Dalai Lama co-founded the Colorado-based Mind & Life Institute in 1987, dedicated to “collaborative research” between science and Buddhism.

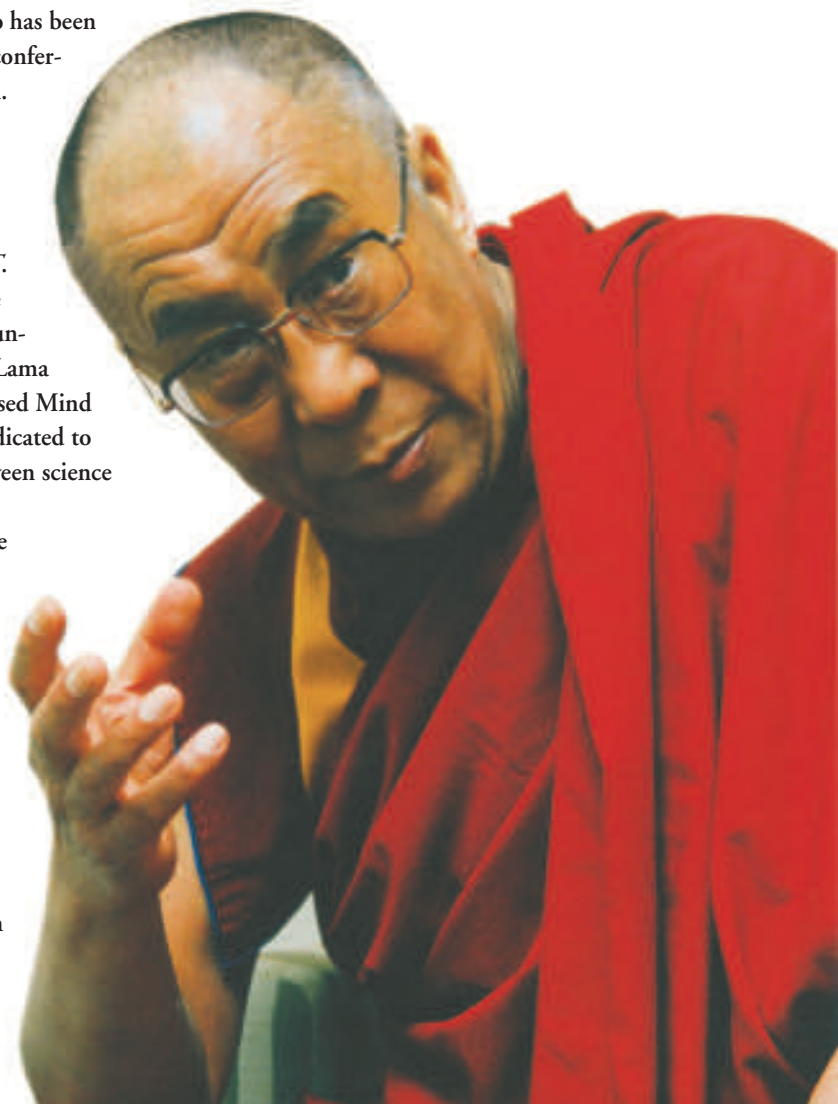
Among other things, the institute hosts conferences focusing on contemplative science, consciousness and death, and destructive and healing emotions.

Another institution formed with the Dalai Lama’s collaboration is Stanford University’s Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education.

In his recommendation to the awards committee, Richard Davidson of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, wrote: “More than any other living human being, His Holiness the Dalai Lama has served humanity to catalyze the advancement of ‘spiritual progress’ and to help us all to cultivate a better understanding of the spiritual dimensions of human experience.”

The Templeton Prize — the world’s largest annual monetary award given to a single individual — will be presented to the Dalai Lama at a May 14 ceremony at St. Paul’s Cathedral in London.

The Dalai Lama becomes the second Templeton Prize laureate who has also won the Nobel Peace Prize. Mother Teresa won the first Templeton, in 1973. Six years later, she received the Nobel Peace Prize. **BT**



Welcome upswing

Report says church giving on the rebound

Annalisa Musarra
Religion News Service

WASHINGTON — The recession and a sluggish recovery have made for a lighter collection plate in recent years, but a new study shows that giving to U.S. congregations bounced back in 2011 as the economy improved.

According to the fourth annual “State of the Plate” survey released March 27, 51 percent of churches last year saw an increase in giving, up from 43 percent in 2010 and 36 percent in 2009.

The national survey, sponsored by MAXIMUM Generosity, *Christianity Today* and the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA), asked more than 1,360 congregations of different sizes to report on their donations and budgets.

“This has been the worst season of our lifetime in declines in giving,” said Brian Kluth, founder of MAXIMUM Generosity and the “State of the Plate” research. But 2011 “is the first time we’re seeing an upswing after three very hard years.”

The increase seen in 2011 was most noticeable in the most mega of megachurches: 86 percent of churches with more than 10,000 congregants saw the greatest rise in giving, compared to 39 percent of churches with fewer than 100 people that saw an increase.

Still, nearly one-third (32 percent) of churches said giving was down in 2011 — although a smaller share than the 39 percent of churches that reported a decline two years ago, according to the survey.

The survey included small and large churches, although more than half had fewer than 250 members. Respondents included mainline Protestant, evangelical, Pentecostal and nondenominational congregations; just one percent were Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox.

Church leaders attributed the reversal in fortunes to better attendance, which was reported by half of the churches surveyed. Many others also cited their efforts to address giving and generosity with the congregation.

In addition, according to the survey, 51.3 percent of churches enjoyed a bigger budget, with extra money going to pay raises (40.3 percent) and missions (36.5 percent), among other priorities.



A shift away from “envelope packets” toward electronic giving — such as using cell phones, online donations and lobby kiosks — changed the way churches received donations in 2011, a trend that has accelerated in the past four years, according to report.

The survey also showed churches in the past year have tried to be more transparent with their finances: 92 percent make their financial statements available by request to members, and 89 percent do the same for their annual budgets.

The majority of churches “really do desire to handle their finances with integrity and they use financial best practices that ensure that integrity,” said Matt Branaugh, the editorial director for *Christianity Today’s* Church Management Team.

“If you handle your finances with this kind of integrity up front,” he said, “then people will respond.” **BT**

A shift away from “envelope packets” toward electronic giving — such as using cell phones, online donations and lobby kiosks — changed the way churches received donations in 2011.

Churches lost \$1.2 billion in recession

WASHINGTON (RNS) — Even as membership remains relatively stable in U.S. churches, the effects of the recession caused contributions to drop by \$1.2 billion.

According to the *2012 Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches*, the almost \$29 billion contributed by church members represented a 2.2 percent decrease in terms of per capita giving.

The \$1.2 billion decline in 2010 was nearly three times as large as the \$431 million in losses reported in 2009, and “provides clear evidence of the impact of the deepening crises in the reporting period,” the *Yearbook’s* editor, Eileen Lindner, wrote.

The *Yearbook* is produced annually by the National Council of Churches and is considered one of the most authoritative sources of church membership. The 2010 figures, released in March, were collected from 228 U.S. denominations in 2011.

The Roman Catholic Church (No. 1) and the Southern Baptist Convention (No. 2) continued as the nation’s largest church bodies in 2010, and both posted a decrease of less than 1 percent, the fourth year in a row of declining membership for Southern Baptists.

Overall, total membership in the top 25 largest churches declined 1.15 percent, to 145.7 million. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, though still in the top 10, reported the sharpest decline in membership, dropping 5.9 percent to 4.3 million members. **BT**





Baptists Today is a member of the North American Baptist Fellowship, a regional body of the Baptist World Alliance. Participation in and coverage of global Baptists are made possible through a gift to *Baptists Today* from Charlotte and Roy Smith of Winston-Salem, N.C.

Major shifts

Denominational power, growth of Christianity centered in different regions

FALLS CHURCH, Va. — Christian leaders shouldn't think only about how Christianity is changing the world, but also about how the world is changing Christianity.

That is according to Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, recently retired as general secretary of the Reformed Church in America, speaking before a North American Baptist Fellowship meeting March 8-9 in Falls Church, Va.

Drawing largely on statistics garnered from the *Atlas of Global Christianity* compiled by Todd Johnson and Kenneth Ross, Granberg-Michaelson pointed to major shifts in global Christianity from 1910 to 2010, and noted challenges and opportunities resulting from the changes.

The most apparent change is geographical. In 1910, the vast majority of Christians were in the northern hemisphere, in Europe and America. Today, the rapid growth of Christianity in Africa, Latin America, South America, and China has shifted the global center of Christianity from near Madrid, Spain, to somewhere near Timbuktu, in Mali, Africa.

This geographical gap brings with it a number of tensions, Granberg-Michaelson said. Though the population of the Christian world has shifted to the south, financial resources and denominational power remain in the north.

Leaders in the global north may still think they are able to shape the future of world Christianity, but that is becoming "more and more a spiritual and practical illusion," said Granberg-Michaelson. Major denominations still have their headquarters in northern cities, most of them very expensive places to live, but the majority of Christians live in much poorer conditions in the global south.

The geographical divide is compounded by a theological gap, Granberg-Michaelson said.

The modern Pentecostal movement was

virtually unknown in 1910, but now 25 percent of global Christians are Pentecostal or charismatic. That movement's emphasis on immediate experience is what detached the church in the global south from missionary control and shifted it to indigenous leadership, Granberg-Michaelson said.

The growth rate among Pentecostals, charismatics and similar independent groups is nearly five times the rate of other groups. Brazil, for example, has the largest number of both Catholics and Pentecostals in the world.

The distance between mainline churches and southern movements is getting wider in terms of spirituality and personal experience, and that gulf is the most serious challenge facing the unity of Christianity today, Granberg-Michaelson said. The gap has to be bridged if we are to offer the world a witness that is unified.

Churches in the north major on tradition based in creeds and confessions, and hold to the concept of a broad universal church, but the global south features highly creative indigenous expressions of Christianity. There, expressions of faith can be highly sectarian and actively compete against other traditions, tribes and cultures.

There is very little sense of a universal church and virtually no participation in traditional ecumenical expressions. This leaves Christians in the global south vulnerable to beliefs and expressions that are far beyond orthodoxy, or even deemed heretical by those rooted in the historical church, Granberg-Michaelson said.

"These differences cry out for our attention," he said, "because the spiritually fervent churches of the south need the rich tradition of the north, and churches of the north need the fervency of the south."

Granberg-Michaelson also pointed to an

institutional divide, as the church becomes more fractured along denominational lines. Citing the late David Barrett, who kept track of such things, he said the world has at least 38,000 denominations, with one count now over 43,000. This is while the World Council of Churches has just 349 member bodies.

"The changing dynamics in global Christianity are rapidly outpacing the ability of traditional groups to respond," he said.

He pointed to a new organization called the Global Christian Forum that is attempting to bring together a more representative group of leaders from world Christianity. The effort is still small, fragile and under-funded, he said, but has begun to show promise as a means of facilitating greater unity.

Granberg-Michaelson pointed to two other growing divides. One is generational, as younger Christians rely more heavily on the immediacy and connectivity of social networks for information about faith. This tends to undermine authoritative institutions as reliable sources of truth and values, he said.

"The emerging generation is less concerned about dogma and more concerned about spirituality," he said. "They thirst for more immediate spiritual communities."

Finally, Granberg-Michaelson said, the church is challenged by a trend in which Christians shaped by the global south are migrating into the global north, bringing their experience and understanding of Christianity with them.

The big question, said Granberg-Michaelson, is: "How do we navigate this changing scene in the context of local ministry where we are?"

There are no easy answers, he suggested, but one thing is clear: "We can't grasp the love of God by just loving those who are like us or agree with us." **BT**

Mississippi, Vermont at opposite ends of religious spectrum

WASHINGTON — If you're searching for the most religious Americans, head to Mississippi. And if you want to visit the least religious state, it's Vermont.

According to a new Gallup Poll, 59 percent of residents in the Magnolia State were considered "very religious," with almost 90 percent of the state affirming that religion was an important part of their daily life.

Vermont came in as the least religious state, reporting that only 23 percent of the residents were listed as "very religious" and more than half — 58 percent — were considered nonreligious.

The more than 350,000 adults in the U.S. and the District of Columbia interviewed in 2011 by the Gallup Daily tracking survey were asked if religion was an important part of their daily life and how often they attended religious services.

Based on those responses, residents were

categorized as very religious, moderately religious or nonreligious, said Frank Newport, editor-in-chief of the Gallup Poll.

Many of the "most religious" states are in the Bible Belt, including Alabama (56 percent), Louisiana (54 percent), Arkansas (54 percent) and South Carolina (54 percent), but heavily Mormon Utah ranked second overall, at 57 percent.

In general, New England and the West tended to be the least religious, with all six New England states scoring in the bottom 10. Following Vermont, those states included: New Hampshire (23 percent); Maine (25 percent); Massachusetts (28 percent); Alaska (28 percent); Oregon, Nevada and Washington (all 30 percent); Connecticut (31 percent); and Washington, D.C., New York and Rhode Island (all tied at 32 percent).

While New Hampshire and Vermont tied at 23 percent in the "very religious category," Vermont (58 percent) had a higher share of nonreligious than New Hampshire

(52 percent).

Gallup researchers found that overall, more than two-thirds (68.4 percent) of Americans were classified as very or moderately religious, with eight out of the 10 most religious states located in the South. But the differences in religiosity varied across the nation.

Newport said he believed the findings reflect the "culture in the states." For example, Mississippi has the country's highest percentage of African-Americans, who are known for being the most religious group.

"Most people say that's the reason why the state is the highest," he said, "but even people in Mississippi with no religious identity are more religious than people in Vermont who are religious."

The total sample of 353,492 citizens selected at random for the poll, conducted through landlines and cell phones, had a margin of error of plus or minus 1 percentage point, with some states having a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percentage points. **BT**

Overall, more than two-thirds of Americans were classified as very or moderately religious.

Communication is Key

a conference from the Center for Congregational Health

Healthy church strategies for email, websites, social media, and personal & congregational communication



In this one-day conference, we will discuss internal communication skills: person-to-person, congregation & staff, feedback, and more - all as the congregation relates to its own members. And we will share external communication skills: websites, social media, print media, email newsletters, policy, caution and more - all as the congregation relates to its community.

Locations **New York, NY - May 15**
 Georgetown, KY - May 22; Nashville, TN - May 23; Knoxville, TN - May 24
 Birmingham, AL - June 7; Atlanta, GA - June 8
 Pasadena, TX - June 15; Waco, TX - June 18; Fort Worth, TX - June 19; Dallas, TX - June 25

Time 9 am - 3 pm (optional tutorial is available from 3-4 pm)

Cost \$125/person (lunch included). Group of 3+ from same congregation/staff*, \$100/person.

The internal communication skills will be led by either Dr. Bill Wilson, President, or Dr. Chris Gambill, Manager, Congregational Health Services. The external communication skills portion will be led by Natalie Aho, Communications Specialist.



Register at www.healthychurch.org or *with Robin Danner at 336.716.9722; congreg@wakehealth.edu.



— that call for taking Jesus seriously

‘We are ready to serve; in fact, we have to serve’

By Colin McCartney

Last month Tony Campolo wrote a column titled “The Next Generation Speaks,” in which he shared the purpose of this new series. I consider it a great privilege to share the story of God enfolded in the lives of our next generation. I hope you pray for these young people, as they are a big part of the shaping of things to come.

I am involved in a ministry where we train young emerging leaders in missional leadership through apprenticeship in urban churches. Our goal is to develop a movement of “Red Letter Christians” who seek to live out the words of Jesus highlighted in red in certain versions of the Bible.

To them, “Jesus is Lord” means they will be involved in spirited action especially in the lives of the poor and oppressed. Due to the nature of my ministry I have the privilege to speak, mentor and coach many young adults in “red letter” ministry.

Recently I met with two young leaders who were interested in joining our apprenticeship program. As we sat down to simmering cups of java and fresh-baked muffins, I asked them the standard questions we are all familiar with:

“How did you become a Christian?”

“What gifts and talents do you possess?”

“How did you hear about this ministry?”

They responded to these simple questions with simple answers. Then I asked my favorite question:

“Why do you want to work at Connect Ministries? This isn’t a comfortable place to serve. You’ll be working in some dismal places full of hurting people. There will be times when you’ll go without sleep and good food and you will have to deal with some very exasperating

people. There is nothing glamorous here, just hard and often frustrating work.”

They responded to my tough question by saying:

“We are tired of doing what we are told good Christians are supposed to do. We don’t want to do typical, safe church stuff. We want to do Jesus stuff. We want something different, new and unique. We want to be put into situations where God has to come through, and to be stretched in our faith. We just want to lay our lives on the line for Jesus by serving the poor and oppressed.”

At this point in our conversation I felt compelled to test their answer by redirecting our conversation back onto the difficulties of starting a ministry in broken-down, desolate church buildings located in rough urban communities. I told them we will start off with no resources, no money and perhaps no place for them to even lay their heads. (I am serious about this — as of now we do not have guaranteed accommodations for our apprentices.)

While speaking, I stared them straight in the eyes to look into the window of their souls. What I saw was inspiring. I discerned a sense of restless excitement stirring in their spirit. When I was finished challenging them again, they both smiled ear-to-ear grins and blurted out:

“This is exactly what we want to do with our lives! We want to be stretched. We want to depend on God for our very breath. We are even willing to live on the streets if need be. We are ready to serve; in fact, we have to serve.”

These young people remind me of the great

Freedom Riders of the early 1960s — young people, black and white, who took to the buses to defy the racist policies of the segregated South.

Church history informs us that the majority of the revivals were started through young people. In the Old Testament we read of young radicals such as David, Samuel, and don’t forget Daniel and his three buddies Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. In the New Testament God chooses a teen mother to birth the Son, and Bible scholars tell us that the disciples were young people (with Peter being the only exception).

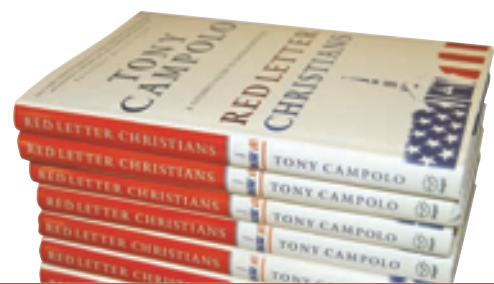
There seems to be a universal and timeless drive in the souls of young people everywhere to do something heroic with their lives.

Echoing the two young folks in the coffee shop, the collective passion in many hearts of the upcoming generation is: “We are ready to serve; in fact, we have to serve.”

Let’s give our young people a platform to try and do great things through the power of our great God. Let’s provide opportunities for them to serve their way. Let’s dream with them as they take risks for a greater good. **BT**

—Colin McCartney is the founder of Connect Leadership Ministries and UrbanPromise Toronto.

“There is **nothing glamorous** here.”



EDITOR’S NOTE:

Often we limit our hearing to voices similar to ours. This new column allows for other, usually more-youthful voices to speak about faith and the living out of Christianity in contemporary times. Writers will come from various backgrounds and church experiences. This series is provided in partnership with the Red Letter Christians Fellowship (redletterchristians.org).

A little help from our friends

Reblog

By Tony W. Cartledge

The dog and I were out for a back-roads ramble during a family visit in Georgia when we ran across the goat.

I heard him before I saw him, though his cry was pitifully small for a big billy. I suppose he was tired: at some point he had stuck his head through the hog-wire fence of his pasture, and couldn't get it back.

This is an occupational hazard for goats hemmed in by hog wire: the 4-by-5-inch rectangles are large enough for a curious goat to push its head through, but too small to allow those splayed-out horns back inside.

I learned this as a boy when my father fenced in a mostly wooded lot behind our house and populated it with goats. Our billy goat (who was ingeniously named "Billy") thought the grass in a neighboring pasture was far tastier than our fare. Many days, when I got



off the school bus, I'd hear him bleating from the back of the pasture, and it was my job to go and rescue him.

Working an ornery goat's head back through the hog wire often entailed skinned knuckles, and I was glad when we finally turned Billy into barbeque.

So, when the dog and I saw the goat, I couldn't just let him stand there crying. We

Selections from recent blogs at baptiststoday.org

tramped through some poison oak to where the rambunctious billy stood pinned with his feet two or three rungs from the ground. I tied the dog to a signpost, and then gingerly worked the goat's horns back through the fence.

Once free, he shook his head for a moment to get his bearings and then gamboled off to join the nannies, free at last.

All of us, at times, find ourselves in tight spots that could be physical, but are more often financial, emotional, relational or spiritual.

Those times remind us how much we need other people in our lives. A helping hand, a compassionate ear or an encouraging word can often be the difference between staying stuck and moving forward.

We get by with a little help from our friends. **BT**

Bowl me over; I didn't know that

By John Pierce

Somehow I missed it — despite my best efforts to keep up with the various shifts in American church culture.

USA Today reports that church bowling alleys are becoming less common now. But that's not the shock to me. Rather, I didn't know they ever were common.

Perhaps that's because their prevalence is beyond my most-familiar denominational traditions and geography. But for whatever reason, I missed it like a 7-10 split.

Church softball I know well. My favorite personal experience was on a modified fast-pitch team in Durham, N.C., in 1979. And I have fond youthful memories of my home-church team (Boynton Baptist) playing on the old field at Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church in Ringgold, Ga.

Church softball leagues, for the uninformed, allow for shared prayers for safety and a positive Christian witness before the games in which players and coaches yell at each other and threaten the umpires more than in industrial leagues.

Of course, there are basketball leagues and other recreational options in most

churches as well. These are positioned in church budget meetings as providing Christian fellowship and attracting prospects who will likely improve the team's winning percentage and tithe.

Going bowling is something many church groups do as well. But I've never seen a bowling alley in a church basement.

Decades ago I discovered the indoor and highly competitive game of Dartball. The multicolored corkboards with a baseball diamond design occupied many small-church basements in rural North Carolina. Banquets were held at the end of season to recognize the best of the dart-throwing Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, etc., to toe the line.

But bowling alleys in churches?

According to *USA Today*, it's been going on for a long time. St. Ann Catholic Church in Peoria, Ill., installed a four-lane alley in the basement in 1945. And Milwaukee once had 13 church bowling alleys.

However, times are changing. Church bowling alleys — which I didn't even know existed — now barely exist. They are disappearing fast, according to this news story.

Neil Stremmel, of the U.S. Bowling Congress, was reported as saying there are

probably fewer than 200 church bowling alleys left now. Two hundred?

If someone had asked me to guess how many churches in the U.S. have bowling alleys in their basements, I might have said three — just because churches do lots of things I've never thought about. Bingo, yes. But basement bowling alleys?

Perhaps I have been too ethnocentric. But sometimes it's hard to get past one's own cultural experience where the greatest church sporting event of all took place in the basement fellowship hall when lining up for a covered-dish dinner. The fried okra and homemade chocolate pies only lasted so long. **BT**



Robert Evan Davis, former executive director of Christian higher education for the American Baptist Board of Educational Ministries, died April 6 at age 90.

Fred DeFoor Jr. received the Order of the Silver Crescent from the State of South Carolina in recognition of his 25 years as minister of music at St. Andrews Church in Columbia. The congregation feted him with a trip to New York, letters of gratitude and an anthem to be composed by Milburn Price.

Don Kirkland will retire yearend after 16 years as editor of *The Baptist Courier*, the newspaper of the South Carolina Baptist Convention. He joined the staff in 1974 as assistant editor.

Jeff Mathis is pastor of First Baptist Church of Sylva, N.C., coming from First Baptist Church of Chattanooga, Tenn., where he was associate pastor for six years.

Rob Nash, CBF missions coordinator for the past six years, will become professor of missions and world religions and associate dean of theology at McAfee School of Theology of Mercer University, effective June 30.

David Stuart will retire May 27 after 38 years as minister of music at First Baptist Church of Jasper, Ga.

Andi Thomas Sullivan is executive director of His Nets, a Christian response to the global malaria epidemic. The non-profit organization that she co-founded with her father provides long-lasting insecticidal bed nets to families primarily in Sub-Saharan Africa. A graduate of Furman University and Mercer's McAfee School of Theology, she is the daughter of former Baptist missionaries T and Kathie Thomas. **BT**

Help your church come together around the Bible! **Gather 'Round: Hearing and Sharing God's Good News** is the Bible story-based curriculum that connects church and home. Gather 'Round nurtures children, youth and their families in becoming followers of Jesus—exploring their faith and putting it into action. Find sample sessions, Bible outlines and more at gatherround.org. Order a free preview pack today!

Pastor: First Baptist Church Rutherfordton, a 400-member congregation in the foothills of western North Carolina, seeks a full-time pastor. Requirements include accredited seminary education, ministry experience and strong relational skills. This church values traditional worship, affiliates with CBF and SBC, and affirms women in ministry. Submit résumés by June 15 to pastorsearchfbc@yahoo.com, or to Pastor Search Committee, First Baptist Church, P.O. Box 839, Rutherfordton, NC 28139.

Associate Pastor for College Students and Young Adults: The University Baptist Church of Baltimore, Md., a congregation located near the Homewood campus of the Johns Hopkins University and affiliated with the CBF, seeks an associate pastor for the ministries to college students and young adults. Applicants must have a master's degree from an ATS-accredited seminary or divinity school. Musical ability is preferred with experience in the conduct of contemporary worship. For complete job description and application procedure, please email inquiries to staff@ubcbaltimore.org.

Minister of Youth: Inman First Baptist Church (IFBC) of Inman, S.C., is seeking a full-time minister of youth. IFBC is a CBF/SBC congregation of approximately 350 active church members, and affirms women in ministerial and church leadership positions. A Master of Divinity degree and previous experience are preferred but not required. Candidates must have strong youth

leadership and communication skills and work well with parents, committees and church staff. Address questions to the senior pastor, Paul Moore, at (864) 472-9069 or pgmoore@ifbc.net. Submit résumés to pgmoore@ifbc.net or to Inman First Baptist Church, 14 N. Howard St., Inman, SC, 29349.

Minister to Students: First Baptist Church-St. Clair Frankfort (fbcfrankfort.org), affiliated with the CBF, is seeking a part-time minister to students. Candidates must be able to continue the development of existing programs/activities and create and implement new programs/activities designed to promote the spiritual and social development of students in grades 6-12. Résumés are being received through May 15 at First Baptist Church "At the Singing Bridge," Attn: Student Minister Selection Committee, 201 St. Clair St., Frankfort, KY 40601.

Minister to Children: First Baptist Church, Lumberton, N.C., is seeking a full-time minister to children to lead a ministry that will foster children's relationships with God and others and welcome them and their families into the life of the church. Candidates must have at least a bachelor's degree in education, human services, religion or a related field, and managerial or internship experience in a church setting and give evidence of a personal call to ministry. Résumés and inquiries will be accepted until May 31 at Personnel Committee, First Baptist Church, P.O. Box 938, Lumberton, NC 28359.

Pat Anderson to lead during CBF transition

ATLANTA (ABP) — The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's officers and personnel committee have chosen former CBF moderator Pat Anderson of Florida to serve as the interim executive coordinator, beginning July 1.

Anderson will assume the interim role as Daniel Vestal retires on June 30. He was part of the initial movement to establish the CBF, and the 1995 national moderator.

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Florida was organized in the Anderson home in 1990, and he served as coordinator until 2002 when he joined the national CBF as missions advocate.

Anderson will begin work at the Fellowship on June 15 in order to overlap

with Vestal ensuring a smooth transition.

The son of a Southern Baptist pastor-evangelist-director of missions, Anderson was born in Florida and earned a bachelor's degree from Furman University, a master of divinity degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and a doctorate in criminology from Florida State University.

He was a professor of criminology at Florida Southern College, retiring as professor emeritus in 2011. He has been a bi-vocational pastor and interim pastor in several churches.

Currently serving as the editor of *Christian Ethics Today*, Anderson has also written several books. **BT**

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 A King to Fight Our Battles — 1 Samuel 8:4-20
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Popular Bible teacher and writer **Tony W. Cartledge** writes each of the weekly Bible studies in *Baptists Today* (beginning on page 18). Themes are based on selected texts from the Revised Common Lectionary.

These lessons — found exclusively in this Nurturing Faith section of *Baptists Today* — form the foundation for the teaching resources for all age groups. **Each class participant should have a copy of *Baptists Today* with these lessons in hand.**

Christian educator **Rick Jordan** of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina provides a teaching plan for each lesson, available at nurturingfaith.net. His FIT FAITH approach to teaching allows for class engagement with the biblical texts as well as with one another.

The Youth Lessons — found on pages 22-23 — build off of Tony's Bible studies and direct these biblical truths to the daily lives of students. Curriculum developer **David Cassidy** writes the youth lessons in the news journal, and student minister **Jeremy Colliver** provides the online teaching guides for each lesson found at nurturingfaith.net (or linked from baptiststoday.org).

Thanks sponsors!

These Bible studies for adults and youth are sponsored through generous gifts from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (Bo Prosser, Coordinator of Congregational Life) and from the Eula Mae and John Baugh Foundation. Thank you!

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Psalm 29

June 3, 2012

○ Worship the King

Have you ever lived through a tornado, a hurricane or even a severe thunderstorm that lingered overhead? Major storms are both fearsome and dangerous. Lightning, wind, flooding or a combination of all three can wreak widespread destruction, and there is nothing we can do to stop them. Huddling against the forces of nature, we can feel very small: severe storms are the most powerful things we will ever witness.

It should come as no surprise, then, that the ancients would associate storms with the power of the gods. Polytheistic cultures usually identified one member of their pantheon as being in charge of the weather. Baal, particularly attractive to the Israelites, was the Canaanite storm god. In ancient statues and images, Baal is often pictured with a lightning bolt in his hand. ☩

The people of Israel did not hold to a pantheon of separate gods in charge of storms, fertility, war, justice and other things commonly deified in polytheistic societies. In their view, Yahweh was Lord over everything.

Still, at different times, Israelite poetry might emphasize one aspect of God's power as a way of praising that divine attribute, or proclaiming the fullness of God's might. Such is the case with Psalm 29. ☩

A call to worship (vv. 1-2)

The context of the psalm is clearly worship, and we might imagine a priest or designated singer standing before the



congregation on a Sabbath or festival day, leading the people in a song of praise.

In the opening verse, the psalmist calls not only the gathered congregation to worship, but also dares to address the divine council, inviting the heavenly court to join in Israel's praise, ascribing glorious attributes to Yahweh. ☩☩

Notice the pattern: Three lines begin with the same word, "Ascribe," leading to the more forceful call to "worship" in line four. The word translated "ascribe" is a fairly rare synonym for the more common word meaning "to give." In this context, it has the sense of "grant," or possibly even "hail" (Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms* [Norton & Co., 2007], 99). The word translated "worship" literally means "to bow down" or "to prostrate one's self." ☩

And what is it about Yahweh that we should recognize? "Glory and strength," and "the glory of his name." The root meaning of the word for "glory" is "heaviness," which leads to the concepts of abundance, glory

or majesty. "The glory of his name" suggests "the majesty of the LORD's reputation" (NET).

To worship the LORD "in holy splendor" could possibly mean "in holy attire," suggesting that one be properly dressed for the occasion. The prior emphasis, however, has been on God rather than the worshiper, so the phrase more likely refers to God's splendor, beauty or majesty, indicating that one is to worship the LORD who is clothed with holy splendor. In Ugaritic, the term may mean "vision" or "appearance," which suggests a third option: "to worship the Lord in a vision of holiness."

A God who speaks with thunder (vv. 3-9)

With v. 3 the psalmist praises God's "voice" that is heard in thunder, first "over the waters ... over mighty waters." On the most obvious level, one thinks of a thundercloud building offshore, visible for a great distance, booming over the ocean waves before washing ashore. Land to the east of

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Israel is mostly desert, so thunderstorms in Israel typically come from the West, sweeping in from the Mediterranean Sea.

Readers might also imagine the large Sea of Galilee (13x8 miles) as the locus of a storm. Storms on the Sea of Galilee – located at 700 feet below sea level – can produce huge waves and frightful conditions (witness the disciples' fear in Luke 8:22-25).

The verse may have a more metaphorical intent, however: the ancients thought of the sea as the great waters of chaos that had to be restrained by the gods. In one Canaanite story, for example, Baal does bloody battle with Yam, the god of the sea, to overcome him.

The scriptures acknowledged Yahweh's power to control the seas, especially in creation, where God's spirit brooded over the waters (Gen. 1:2), created a dome-like "firmament" to separate the waters above from the waters below (Gen. 1:6), then drew limits for the waters under the sea so that dry land might appear (Gen. 1:9-10).^U

So, while v. 3 may carry the visual image of a thunderstorm blowing in from the sea or a lake, it is also freighted with a reminder that Yahweh alone controls the waters of chaos and brings order to the world.

The power of Yahweh's thundering voice is the subject of vv. 4-9. The cedars of Lebanon were known for their towering strength, yet Yahweh's voice has the power to snap them like twigs (v. 5). Anyone who has observed the aftermath of a tornado, hurricane or even a severe thunderstorm has seen tall trees twisted and splintered.

The cedars of Lebanon give way to the mountains of Lebanon in v. 6, along with Sirion, an alternate name for Mount Hermon, a northern peak from which the headwaters of the Jordan River flow. The writer draws on the imagery of large trees on the mountains shifting and dancing in the storm wind, making it appear that the entire mountains are moving. Thus, he compares the boisterous mountains to playful young bovines that skip and play.

Thunder is the sound that lightning makes, so it is not surprising that the psalmist connects God's thundering voice to "flames of fire" (v. 7). The NRSV's "flashing forth" fails to capture the full impact of the verb, which normally means "chops" or "hacks," and could be translated as "the LORD's shout strikes with flaming fire" (NET). This appropriately recalls the image of a fearsome lightning strike that accompanies the thunder.

When thunder and lightning are booming overhead, the very ground seems to shake. Thus the uninhabited wilderness, lacking large trees, simply "shakes" in response to the LORD's resounding voice (v. 8). Since previously mentioned locations (Lebanon, Sirion) were beyond the northern reaches of Israel, the wilderness of Kadesh probably refers to an area in the north. Some argue, however, that the writer has in mind the southern wilderness of Kadesh, more commonly mentioned in the Old Testament. If that is correct, the psalmist's intent would be to portray the mighty storm as sweeping across the entire nation, from its northernmost to the southernmost extremities.

The translation of v. 9 presents us with a conundrum, though it is clear that the author's purpose is to further illustrate God's power as seen in the storm.^U Though scholars may quibble over the precise translation of certain phrases, the overriding imagery is clear: God's thunderous voice overpowers both land and people, leading all who worship to say "Glory!"

Note how the worshipers' shout of "glory" in v. 9 harks back to the call to ascribe to God "glory and strength" and "the glory of his name" in vv. 1-2.

**A closing word of praise
(vv. 10-11)**

The final two verses bring the psalm

to an end with a concluding blessing or affirmation from the worship leader. The subject of each of the four lines is Yahweh. The first two lines declare that Yahweh sits over the flood, as king forever.

There is no Hebrew referent for "enthroned" – the text simply says that Yahweh "sits" both over the flood and as king. To "sit as king" is to sit on a throne, however, so it is not a great stretch to translate the phrase as "sits enthroned" in both lines, as the second is parallel to the first.^U

The final stanza is written as a simple affirmation in Hebrew, as reflected in most modern translations. Curiously, the NRSV translates the two verbs as precatives, as a twin entreaty asking God to give strength to the people and bless them with peace.

While this may make interpretive sense, there is no firm grammatical justification for it. The verbs can be translated as an ongoing action or as a future one, but the psalmist reveals no doubt that the Lord who rules the forces of nature will grant strength to God's people and bless them with peace.

How do we read this psalm today? Some might see in it a promise that the all-powerful God will provide perfect protection for those who trust, but if so, they miss the point. The psalm reflects the setting of a frightening storm – an awe-inspiring manifestation of God's power over creation, even the destructive forces of nature.

God's people will experience storms. The psalm itself is evidence of that: the worshipers knew exactly how troubling it could be to endure a violent storm. They also knew what it was like to face storms of hunger and oppression, of heartache and sorrow, of crime and punishment.

The psalmist knows this, and he declares that through all the storms of life, we can trust in the God whose power extends over all, the God in whom we can find strength to endure the fiercest of storms and yet experience the blessing of peace. **BT**

Bible Study

1 Samuel 8:4-20

with Tony W. Cartledge

June 10, 2012


A King to Fight Our Battles

Leaders are important. Whether we think of organizations such as the church, businesses with many employees, or entities as large as a nation, good leaders are essential for growth and health.

In the midst of a long election season, as Americans prepare to choose leaders ranging from county sheriff to the nation's president, our text draws us back to Israel's first foray into kingship. What did the people hope to accomplish? Why did they want to have a king – and how would it turn out?

We'll discuss these and other questions over the next several weeks, as we devote eight lessons to texts from the narratives of 1-2 Samuel. Although the stories may seem "long ago and far away," we will discover they raise timeless issues that continue to touch human life.

The elders' desire (vv. 4-6a)


As portrayed in the Bible, Israel lived in a covenant arrangement with God, with the 12 tribes functioning as a loose federation governed by God. Ideally, the Israelites had no king other than God, whose divine leadership was mediated through the inspired judges: we might call it a "theocracy." 

Samuel is regarded as the last of the judges, but he also served as Israel's primary priest, and was known as a prophet. Though he rarely left the territory of Benjamin and Judah, Samuel is described as having been highly regarded by all the tribes, at least as their spiritual leader.

Additional background information online where you see the "Digging Deeper" icon



Tintoretto, *The Conversion of Saul*, c. 1545.

But who would lead when Samuel died? Samuel's sons proved to be shy-sters, unworthy of the elevated names Samuel had given them.  As Samuel grew old, a group of tribal leaders, generally referred to as "the elders of Israel," came to him with an observation and a request:

"You are old and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations" (v. 5).

The elders' request seemed eminently reasonable. The tribes were scattered across a large area, bound only by a loose federation. There was no central government, no standing army, no system in place to protect the borders. Meanwhile, peoples such as the Philistines to the west and the Ammonites to the east had strong leaders who commanded well-equipped armies. If the tribes of Israel were to survive, the elders could argue, they would need a strong leader with the authority to conscript an army, tax the people to equip the troops, and lead the nation's forces

against its enemies.

All human reason, then, pointed toward the clear logic of calling out a king, but Samuel took immediate offense: "the thing displeased Samuel" (v. 6a). The old prophet/priest/judge saw no need to challenge the theocratic ideal that Israel should be ruled by Yahweh alone, with judges or prophets mediating God's instructions and a faithful priesthood as the guardian of the law.

In Samuel's mind, God had proven quite capable of calling out divinely inspired judges to lead the people in times of national emergency. Had not Samuel himself proved to be an effective leader as prophet, priest and judge? Had not God responded to Samuel's prayer and delivered Israel from the Philistines in the battle of Mizpah (1 Samuel 7)? The author sees the issue through Samuel's eyes, and Samuel seems to have regarded the elders' request as a personal rejection that failed to appreciate his leadership as God's spokesman.

The prophet's warning (vv. 6b-18)

The story suggests that Samuel broke off the interview without giving an answer, retiring to take his concerns to God in prayer (v. 6b). We might surmise that Samuel would have expected God to be equally upset and to unleash some sort of punishment on the upstart elders, but the response is more complicated than that.

God recognized, as Samuel did, that the people had rejected the ideal of divine leadership for the earthly model of kingship. Even so, God offered comfort to the vexed prophet, reminding him that “they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them” (v. 7).

The Israelites had a long history of rebellion, God reminded him, from the days they emerged from Egypt to the present, forsaking Yahweh for other gods and forsaking God's chosen leaders for their own ideas.

Knowing the elders' determination to choose a different path, God instructed Samuel to “listen to their voice” and give them a king – but not without a severe warning of what it would cost them in freedom, property and people (v. 9).

Since Samuel opposed Israel's demand for a king, his warning emphasized the negative aspects of kingship as seen in the daily lives of the people. 📖 First, he said, the king would conscript both sons and daughters from the families of Israel. Young men would be taken from their chores at home and trained for the military. Other sons would be assigned to work in the king's fields or to manufacture weapons, armor and chariot equipment for the army. Whatever their assignment, the young men would be removed from their fathers' control and put under the leadership of royal commanders or supervisors (vv. 11-12).

Daughters, likewise, would be subject to a levy, put to work in support of the king's palace as “perfumers, cooks, and bakers” (v. 13). 📖 No doubt there would have been limits as to how many

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children could be conscripted and to the length of their service – conscripts for temple construction worked month-long rotating shifts (1 Kgs. 5:13-14) – but Samuel had no interest in tempering the warning: his emphasis was on what the king would take.

The king's acquisitions would go beyond human capital to include tangible property. Samuel insisted that the king would confiscate “the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards” for royal use in support of his “courtiers” (v. 14). 📖

Their demands would go beyond property, however. Samuel claimed that the king would also require a flat tax of 10 percent from the agrarian population's produce, specifically grain and wine (v. 15), to support the administration.

Stretching out the specifics for maximum effect, Samuel added a warning that male and female servants, in addition to “the best of your cattle and donkeys,” would be taken from landowners and put to work serving the government (v. 16).

As if a tax on grain and wine were not enough, Samuel promised that a tenth of all the food-producing cattle and flocks would be taken, concluding “and you shall be his slaves” (v. 17). The final phrase, literally “you shall be servants for him,” was a reminder that the king would demand obedience and the people would have to answer to him. 📖

Having painted such a disheartening picture, Samuel predicted the end result of Israel's call for a king: “you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the LORD will not answer you in that day” (v. 18). 📖

The people's choice (vv. 19-20)

In so many words, Samuel was issuing an advance “I told you so,” and

warning the elders that there would be no sympathy for them when life under a king made them regret their choice and come crying to God.

The people, however, paid no heed to Samuel's warning (v. 19). Their expression of determination to have a king reinforced their logic in wanting a king “so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles” (v. 20).

The Israelites were quite aware that neighboring nations profited from having a centralized government under an inspiring military leader who led his own troops into battle. Having a king made perfect sense to them.

Samuel could see only the negative side of kingship, but the elders refused to hear anything but the positive aspects. Samuel saw Israel's demand for a king as sinful rejection of God's way, while the people saw it as a realistic need for changing times. 📖

Perhaps the most amazing thing about this passage is the surprising grace, flexibility and generosity of God. As the story unfolds, the Lord perceives that the people have rejected “Plan A,” but instead of writing them off, God remains faithful and assents to “Plan B.”

God knew that a king who followed God's way could be an effective leader who would bless the nation, but the concentrated power of kingship could also pose grave danger in the hands of a wicked king.

There was potential for good or bad – as there had been all along. God chose not to give up on the Israelites. Like a loving parent who works hard to relate to his or her children on their own level, God was willing to meet the people of Israel where they were and to work with them in whatever way was possible.

Many years later, the gospels attest, God would go to even greater lengths to meet humankind on our own plane of existence. Through the incarnation of Christ, God came to us, loved us, redeemed us, and taught us what it means to live in the one kingdom that ultimately matters: the kingdom of God. **BT**

Youth

June 3 — June 24, 2012

Youth lessons are made possible through the generous support of the Eula Mae and John Baugh Foundation.

The Voice

What might the voice of God sound like? In movies, James Earl Jones and Morgan Freeman have been used for that voice. Some people thought it was an enigma that Alanis Morissette was cast as God in the movie *Dogma*. Seeing who will play the role of God or provide “the voice” of God can be intriguing. The psalmist of Psalm 29 takes a very different route by comparing the voice of God to powerful forces in nature.

The psalmist begins his “song” with instructions of what to do with the psalm: “Ascribe to the LORD.” Instead of ascribe, a better word for us might be “give.” Worship is about giving to God, so this is a psalm of worship. What are we to give in worship glory, strength and holy splendor?

With the directions given, the psalmist moves into the heart of the psalm — beginning each new stanza with “The voice of the Lord...” You can almost hear, and most certainly feel, the cadence of the worship leader calling out the stanzas. Each new stanza suggests a comparison between God and one of the forces of nature that surround the people. God is more powerful than the waters of the seas, could break cedars and oaks, and act like flames of fire. The psalmist cries out that this is one mighty God.

The psalmist ends this song about might and power with a word that God will bless the people with peace. Though the storms of life will come, the hearer of this psalm finds peace knowing that God is greater.

JUNE 3

Think About It:

The psalmist used powerful images from nature to describe God to the people because they were a people of the land. What images might be used to describe the power of God to our current world?

Make a Choice:

The psalmist never claimed that God will take away the storms of life, but showed that God can give us peace while in them. You can choose to take the peace God provides or choose your own comforts. What do you rely on during the storms in your life?

Pray:

God, we ask for your peace when we are not at peace and life's storms rage around us.

Change at the Top

The passage for today reminds me of what sometimes happens after a meeting of players in professional sports. The players don't like the direction the team is headed, so they gather together to make sure they are all on the same page: “It's not our fault; it is the fault of the coach.” To rectify the situation, the owner of the team sees that the coach has lost control of the team and fires the coach.

In our text for today, the elders gather together and determine that Samuel's sons are not as adept at being judges as Samuel. The 12 tribes loosely joined together under Samuel want to be united under one king after Samuel is gone. Samuel isn't thrilled with their decision, so he goes to the LORD in prayer to figure out what needs to be done.

In response to Samuel's prayer, God tells Samuel to give the people what they want, because it isn't Samuel that they are denying, but God. So Samuel returns to the people and tells them exactly what God has told him and the grim future that will lie ahead if they choose to have a king. It's similar to when your parents let you do something you really want to do, but they know you will regret later.

Hearing Samuel's warnings, the group gathers again. When they come out of their meeting, they tell Samuel: “We've heard your warnings, but we still want a king.” You can see Samuel shaking his head as he goes to the LORD to report what the group has told him. The LORD says to let them have their king.

JUNE 10

Think About It:

God meets people where they are, even when they go wrong. God can bring good even out of greedy choices his people make. What is a poor choice you have made that God has redeemed?

Make a Choice:

We make choices daily. These choices often boil down to choosing whether or not to follow the will of God. What goes into the choices you make on a daily basis?

Pray:

Ask that you might make choices that lead to building up the kingdom of God in all you do.

David Cassady and Jeremy Colliver



Redo!

On the playground you might call a "redo" when you aren't happy with how you played the first time and you know you could do better. In golf you can take a mulligan. In video games you can go back to a checkpoint. Some gracious teachers will even let you redo an assignment or retake a test. In our passage for today, God also calls for a redo.

Remember the setting for today's passage: The leaders ask Samuel for a king. Samuel warns them what it will be like to have a king. God tells Samuel to give the people what they want. Samuel anoints Saul as the king. Saul turns out to be a terrible king — so terrible that God says, "I am sorry to have made Saul king."

Samuel is disappointed with the choice

of Saul as king. God asks Samuel how long he is going to grieve over Saul and then tells him the fix to his situation will be found at the house of Jesse. So Samuel takes his horn of oil and travels to Jesse's house.

When Samuel arrives, Jesse parades all of his sons out for Samuel. God tells Samuel not to look outwardly, but at the heart of each son. Not one of the sons that Jesse introduces to Samuel is the one God has chosen, so Samuel asks if there is another. Jesse sends for David from the field.

When David arrives, God tells Samuel this is the one he is to anoint. With the anointing, the spirit of the LORD comes upon David from that day forward. God has led Samuel to a wonderful "redo" for the situation.

JUNE 17

Think About It:

The spirit of the LORD rested on David from the day of his anointing forward. What might it be like to know that the spirit of the LORD rested with you?

Make a Choice:

If you read 1 Samuel 13, you will see that the new king from the house of Jesse would in fact be "a man after his (God's) own heart." How does your heart strive for God?

Pray:

Ask God to help you recognize his Spirit residing with you, seeing that God is with you.

It's Complicated

Check out the Timeline for some of your friends on Facebook. If you were to describe what you read on Timeline, the easiest way to describe it might be "complicated." The passage for this lesson serves as a kind of timeline for Saul, and in particular focuses on his relationship with David.

As the passage begins, Saul is elated with David because David has returned with the head of Goliath. Saul captures the momentum of David's victory and keeps him in his service, not even letting him return to his father's house. Saul continues to use David as a war hero, sending him into battle, and each time David returns the victor. It is also during this time when Saul's son Jonathan and David are bound together. Jonathan covenants with David to be in his service.

The act of Saul's own son covenanting with David along with the mounting heroics of David (that the people notice) begin to change Saul's favor of David into envy. Saul turns into a crotchety king; he's finished with David. It looks like envy, but the text reveals it is an evil spirit from God that has taken hold of Saul. This turn of Saul's character causes Saul to throw a spear at David two times — trying to pin David to the wall. It doesn't work, so Saul removes David from his presence and makes him the leader of armies again.

With David at a safe distance again, Saul is in awe at the man David has become. The people are falling in love with David as well, because he is the one who is leading their victories.

JUNE 24

Think About It:

It couldn't be easy for Saul, knowing that the people loved David more than him. How do you think that complicated the relationship between Saul and David?

Make a Choice:

We can choose to be like Saul and abuse the powers God has granted us or be loyal to God as David was. How do you live so that you choose the path of David instead of the path of Saul?

Pray:

Ask that you might live a life loyal to God, avoiding envy and jealousy.

Bible Study

1 Samuel 15:34-16:13

with Tony W. Cartledge

June 17, 2012

A King in Waiting

Have you ever made a decision that you later regretted? Few of us could answer “No” to that question. We’ve all made choices we wish we could change.

Can you imagine, however, that God could make a decision and later regret it? The biblical writers believed it happened.

The first occurrence is found in Genesis 6, just before the story of the flood. When God saw that humans had grown so wicked that “every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually” the narrator says, “the LORD was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart” (Gen. 6:5-6).

Such regret led God to intentionally “hit the delete key,” as one of my favorite preachers once described it.

Today’s lesson poses a similar conundrum, though on a more individual scale: What would God do about Saul?

Saul’s rejection (15:34-35)

Last week’s lesson (1 Samuel 8) detailed how the elders of Israel asked for a king, and why Samuel opposed the idea. God instructed Samuel to grant the people’s request, but not before warning them of the consequences of their actions.

Samuel’s warning dealt mainly with the king’s ability to conscript men and women for royal service, to seize private land for his own use, and to demand taxes needed to support the new government.

Samuel did not mention the



possibility that the king would prove to be an abysmal failure.

To reinforce his theological agenda, the narrator highlights Saul’s failures while minimizing his successes. The record does mention significant accomplishments for Saul: 1 Sam. 11:1-11 describes a resounding victory over the Ammonites, for example, and a short summary in 1 Sam. 14:47-48 says Saul “did valiantly” in striking against the Ammonites, the Edomites, the people of Zobah, and the Philistines, saying “wherever he turned he routed them.” When David composed an elegy for Saul after his death, he credited Saul with enriching the nation, presumably through plundering others he had defeated (2 Sam. 1:24).

The narrator, however, is more interested in Saul’s deficiencies. In the story describing how Samuel first anointed Saul, his servant appears to be more on top of things than he (1 Sam. 9:1-10:13). After Samuel chose Saul by lot and proclaimed him king, we are told that some people refused to support him (1 Sam. 10:27). Samuel once told Saul

not to go into battle before he came to offer sacrifices, but then Samuel delayed so long that the soldiers started deserting. In desperation, Saul offered the sacrifice himself, earning a tongue-lashing from the old priest, who said God had rejected him and would choose “a man after his own heart” (1 Sam. 13:8-15).

The final straw fell when Samuel instructed Saul to engage the Amalekites, a tribal people who often troubled the Israelites, and to exterminate them completely. Saul won a resounding victory, but left many Amalekites alive, including the king. Samuel was so perturbed that he raged at Saul again (1 Sam. 15:22-23), refused to accept Saul’s plea for forgiveness, and insisted that God would tear the kingdom away and give it to “a neighbor of yours, who is better than you” (1 Sam. 15:28).

One might be tempted to think that Samuel, who opposed the notion of kingship from the start, would have found some satisfaction in the king’s disappointing performance. The text insists, however, that Samuel grieved over Saul, using an intensive form of


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the verb “to mourn” (15:35a).

While Samuel expressed sorrow over Saul, we are told, Yahweh regretted having chosen Saul: “And the LORD was sorry that he had made Saul king over Israel” (15:35b, NRSV). 

Samuel’s commission (16:1-5)

Saul failed and Samuel grieved, but God knew that life must go on – a lesson that all people who face loss or disappointment must learn. The text assumes that God spoke to Samuel on a regular basis, and vv. 1-3 record an active conversation between the two.


With a verbal kick in the pants, Yahweh told Samuel to stop crying over Saul and travel to Bethlehem, where God intended to identify a certain son of Jesse — presumably a “man after God’s own heart” — so Samuel could anoint him as the next king (16:10).

For Samuel, however, there was a problem: the old king was still alive and well — and probably steaming over the public berating Samuel had given him. While Saul’s popular support lay among the northern tribes, Bethlehem was in the territory of Judah, where the populace was more suspicious of the king.

Thus, Samuel expressed dismay. He knew that if Saul heard he had gone to Bethlehem, the king might think Samuel was fomenting rebellion against him, and have him killed. To ease Samuel’s fear, Yahweh told him to take a young heifer with him: if anyone questioned his motives, he could insist that God had sent him to offer a sacrifice. Neither King Saul nor the people of Bethlehem could argue with that (16:2).

Samuel obeyed, and as he approached Bethlehem, he learned that the local elders were just as suspicious of him as Saul might have been. Perhaps they feared that Samuel had come to spy out the land or report unfriendly activities to Saul. Thus the first question of his “welcoming committee” was “Do you come peaceably?” (16:3-4).

With his excuse for travel standing calmly at the end of a short halter, Samuel insisted that he had peaceful

intentions, having come to offer a sacrifice. He invited all of the elders to go and ritually consecrate themselves, then return to share the sacrificial meal with him. 

Whether the elders returned or not, we do not know: they disappear from the story. Only Jesse and his sons remain, and Samuel consecrated them personally (16:5).


David’s selection (16:6-13)

The narrator takes clear delight in the unfolding drama of how David was chosen as the next king. As Jesse brought his sons forward, oldest first, Samuel appeared to have thought his job was done. Eliab, whose name means “My God is Father,” was so impressive that Samuel surmised “Surely the LORD’S anointed is now before the LORD” (16:6).

Perhaps Eliab was physically impressive – but that had not helped Saul, who was notably tall (1 Sam. 10:23-24). God was judging by different standards, and Samuel was just learning to understand. “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature,” the Lord said to Samuel, “because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart” (16:7).

Eliab was not chosen, despite his firstborn status and his impressive appearance. Nor was the next son, Abinadab, or the next one, Shammah. Samuel watched Jesse parade no less than seven sons before him without so much as a holy poke in the ribs to indicate God’s choice (16:8-10).


Knowing that he had followed God’s instructions to the letter, Samuel pressed Jesse, asking if he had brought *all* of his sons to the sacrifice. When Jesse admitted that he had left the

youngest son to care for the sheep, the old prophet angrily instructed him to send for him, and refused to let anyone sit down while they waited for his arrival (16:11). 


As scowling Samuel, Jesse, his sons, and the heifer wait, the reader also waits. While skillfully building suspense, the narrator also leads us to imagine that David might be inordinately small or ugly, since God had insisted that outer appearances didn’t matter. We are surprised, then, when David appears and the storyteller gushes at how handsome he is.

David’s complexion was ruddy, the author tells us, suggesting he had fair skin that allowed one to see a blush in his cheeks. Then he adds that David had beautiful eyes, and was handsome (literally, “a good appearance,” 16:12a).

The young man’s appearance was only a bonus, however. There was something special *inside* of David that only God could see, and so Samuel sensed God’s direction: “This is the one: arise and anoint him!” (16:12b).

We may imagine how Samuel drew out a polished ram’s horn filled with olive oil mixed with aromatic spices, and poured it over David’s head so that it ran through his dark curly hair, cascaded down his face, and puddled in the folds of his tunic. 

As the anointing oil brought a shine to David’s face, the text suggests an inner glow was emerging in David’s heart: “The Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David,” the narrator says, “*from that day forward*” (v. 13). Years would pass before David would become king indeed, but God’s Spirit would be with him every step of the way.

We learned in 1 Sam. 13:14 that God intended to choose a new king after God’s own heart. Later, Paul insisted that David fit the bill (Acts 13:22). 

Think for a bit about the implications of that phrase. What do you think it means to be a person who is “after God’s heart”? How do you see this illustrated in young David’s life?

And do you think others would ever apply that description to you? **BT**

Bible Study

1 Samuel 17:57-18:16

with Tony W. Cartledge

June 24, 2012

Up and Down, In and Out

Relationships: it's hard to live without them, but sometimes it seems hard to live with them, too. We've all known what it is to be in a relationship that shifts from warm to cool, or hot to cold, from comfortable to awkward.

David was amazingly gifted with relationships. Saul, sadly, was not. There were times when Saul loved David, and times when he hated him. There were times when he admired him, and times when he feared him. There were times when Saul wanted David close, and times when he wanted him dead.

Saul drafts David (17:57-58; 18:2, 5)

Careful readers of 1 Samuel may note that the narratives occasionally appear choppy and repetitive. For example, 1 Samuel includes three different accounts of how Saul met David, all apparently for the first time. This is probably due to the biblical editor/author's intertwining of multiple source documents, including some that told the same stories from different perspectives. 📖

Our text for today follows on the heels of David's victory over Goliath. Abner, Saul's military commander, brought David (still carrying Goliath's head) to the king. When Abner presented David to Saul, he was introduced for the third time (17:57-58).

Saul was so impressed with David that he took him into his permanent service "and would not let him return to his father's house" (18:2). Unlike the account in 16:14-23, these verses say nothing of what Saul might have



felt about David. His decision seems to have been a practical matter: we learned in 14:52 that "when Saul saw any strong or valiant warrior, he took him into service."

Drafting Goliath's conqueror would have been a no-brainer, and David proved so successful in battle that Saul "set him over the army" (18:5, NRSV). This probably suggests a division of troops rather than the entire army, but clearly earned Saul praise for having made an excellent choice. 📖

Jonathan loves David (18:1, 3-4)

Chapter 18 begins a thematic section that extends through the remainder of 1 Samuel, a galloping sequence of stories that chronicle Saul's love-hate relationship with David. Much of the section finds Saul in pursuit of David, while his valiant and loyal subject relies on both wits and relationships to stay alive. 📖

The first verse is written, however, as a continuation of the previous chapter: "When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved

him as his own soul" (18:1). 📖

This is a bit awkward, for we know nothing of previous contact between David and Jonathan. Was Saul's son so taken with David on the basis of his victory over Goliath alone, or did the two of them have more of a history? The text implies that it happened quickly, "When David had finished speaking to Saul."

The word translated as "soul" appears three times in a single verse. The Hebrew term is *nephesh*, and it is not equivalent to the Greek notion of the soul as something entirely separate from the body. Hebrew thought was more holistic and did not distinguish between a physical body and a spiritual soul: the term *nephesh* referred to a living person's entire being. 📖

Jonathan's feelings and actions toward David were not improper, but they did have serious political implications. The text declares that Jonathan and David made a covenant bond with each other, which Jonathan marked by giving to David his own robe, his armor and even his weapons (18:3-4). This covenant gift of his royal regalia seems to be an obvious symbol of Jonathan's

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willingness to hand over to David even his right to the throne after Saul's death.

Word of this bond would surely have gotten to Saul, whose paranoia would have seen it as a conspiracy against him. Indeed, the Hebrew word used to indicate that the souls of Jonathan and David were "bound" together (*qashar*) can also mean "conspired."

David and Jonathan did not in fact conspire against Saul, but the king had reason to be wary of David, for it would soon become obvious to all that David would make a more effective king than Saul.

Israel admires David (18:6-7, 16)

Initially, it was a feather in Saul's cap that "all the people, including the servants of Saul" approved of his decision to set David over the "men of war" (18:5), but Saul's pleasure quickly foundered on the shoals of David's rousing success.

David was not only a brave and brilliant military leader, but also charismatic and, as we recall from 16:12, good looking. He became immensely popular with the people, especially so with the women who traditionally came out to greet victorious soldiers as they came through towns and villages on their return from battle.

As David and Saul traveled together on their return from the battle in which David had killed Goliath, the women sang "Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands" (18:7). This may have become a traditional chorus, sung whenever David returned from the various forays on which Saul had sent him: even the Philistines knew of it (1 Sam. 29:5).

Why did David become so popular? It was because he was doing what the people had sought a king to do: "to go out before us and fight our battles" (8:20). The final verse in today's text echoes that same language, and not by accident:

"But all Israel and Judah loved David; for it was he who marched out and came in leading them" (18:16).

While Saul sat in the palace and gave orders, it was David who led the people into battle and fought on their behalf. Saul had the crown and the title, but it was David who acted like a king.

Saul fears David (18:8-15)

Saul knew this, of course. He could see the tide of popular opinion turning toward David. Imagine how he would have responded upon hearing the women sing "Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands!" While both figures were hyperbolic, the 10:1 ratio clearly portrayed David as more heroic than Saul. The disparity was not lost on the king, who responded with anger and suspicion (18:8a).

Saul appears to have assumed that David's personal achievements and public acclaim would fuel royal ambitions. Projecting his own insecurity onto David – who had shown nothing but loyalty to Saul – the king asked, "What more can he have but the kingdom?" (18:8b).

Like any good storyteller, the narrator does not *tell* us that Saul was suspicious, but *shows* us by describing his actions: "So Saul eyed David from that day on" (18:9).^U But Saul did more than keep a close watch on David: he tried to kill him. Rather than capitalizing on David's success, Saul sought to eliminate him as a rival. Twice in a day, the narrator says, the king "raved within his house" and threw his spear at David as he played the harp for him (18:10-11).^U David managed to dodge both attempts.

The narrator is careful to say that Saul's raving attempts at murder occurred after "an evil spirit from the LORD rushed upon him" (for more on this, see "The Hardest Question" online). It's almost as if the author is torn between whether to blame Saul altogether, or to ameliorate his guilt by

pleading diminished capacity: Saul was angry and suspicious on his own, but only tried to spear David when the evil spirit came upon him.

The reference to the evil spirit coming upon Saul recalls 16:13-14, where we were told that God's spirit had been withdrawn from Saul, even as it rushed upon David. This is further reflected in 18:12, which tells us that Saul feared David because he knew this had happened.

Saul distanced himself from his imagined foe by putting David in charge of a thousand-man division and then sending him into battle (18:13). The king may have had an additional motive in this, hoping that David would die in battle — a strategy spelled out in more detail a short time later (18:25).^U

Saul's plan backfired, however. David obeyed Saul's orders and led his troops into dangerous battle, but always marched back in victory with an even bigger reputation and the people ever more enamored with him. Saul could only "stand in awe" before David, but "all Israel and Judah loved David" because he was the one who acted like a king (18:15).

What might this text say to modern readers? It is unlikely that we will lead troops into combat or make kings insecure with our sterling reputations, but we all know how self-focused jealousy and backstabbing practices can threaten both personal relationships and larger organizations. Should we pattern our behavior after Saul's mistrusting abuse of power, or his brave subject's loyalty?

In Saul and David we also see a clear contrast between one who bears the name, and one who does the work. Most people who gather for Bible study are known by the name "Christian." Are we any more faithful in living for the kingdom than Saul was in living as king?

[For further reading: Tony W. Cartledge, *1-2 Samuel* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), 205; Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), 141; P. Kyle McCarter, *I Samuel* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1980), 280.] **BT**

Adventures with LULER the Hound



Kelly Belcher

I

Imagine you are going for a mountain hike with your dog Luler, and you get lost as night is falling. You come upon a group of campers around a warm fire, but they do not speak English; they speak a different language and you can't understand them. You feel frustrated, alone, and a little bit scared. But then Luler barks, runs around the campers, and one by one, they laugh and pet her, smiling, giving her belly scratches as she prances among them. You realize they are friendly, and it's safe to stay with them. What a relief!

The strangers gathered at Pentecost suddenly felt connected by God's spirit just like this. The Spirit gave them the great idea that they were not separate, but one. It's as if dancing light bulbs appeared over their heads. It was such a good idea!

The last Sunday of May was Pentecost Sunday, a word that means "50" because it's 50 days after Easter. Now we are in the season of Pentecost, the last of the six seasons of the church year. The next season, Advent, won't start until December 2.

The Bow-Wow

Luler says to spend Pentecost sharing the great idea. Welcome newcomers, new neighbors, new students and strangers at church by showing hospitality.



The Idea Box

Memorize the six seasons of the church year:

- 1 Advent
- 2 Christmas
- 3 Epiphany
- 4 Lent
- 5 Easter
- 6 Pentecost



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Suzanne Collins
The Hunger Games

By Dick Staub, RELIGION NEWS SERVICE

Why we're hungry for *The Hunger Games*

The Hunger Games has sold 26 million copies and is the first young-adult book to sell a million copies on Kindle. When it was released in theaters on March 23, the film version broke box office records for a new non-sequel release.

People who know only the basic plot are asking why the series is so popular. *The Hunger Games* is, after all, a dark story set in a post-apocalyptic future, featuring 24 teenagers who are released into the wild with a mandate to kill or be killed until just one is left standing.

Like characters in reality TV, these killer teens are televised for the entertainment of an elite and pampered audience. A game master introduces dramatic elements — forest fires, mutant attack dogs — to keep the games exciting. Bets are placed on winners and losers, and sponsorships are provided for the audience's favorite teenage warriors.

These gladiatorial games are the invention of a tyrannical government that seeks to suppress any attempted uprisings within a war-ravaged North America, where the hard labor of citizens on the outskirts sustain the pampered lifestyle of the capital city.

The Hunger Games books are wildly popular — and controversial. The American Library Association ranks it fifth on the list of most banned books for 2010, mostly because of parental complaints that the books are sexually explicit and violent.

Author Suzanne Collins said she conceived of *The Hunger Games* one night as she flipped television channels from teenagers on a reality TV to teenagers serving in the Iraqi war. She couldn't shake this jarring juxtaposition.

So does the popularity of *The Hunger Games* offer good news for those of us concerned about American civilization and the younger generation? I say yes, for a few reasons.

First, *The Hunger Games* is a morality tale



Effie Trinket (Elizabeth Banks, left) and Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence) in *The Hunger Games*. Photo credit: Murray Close

that's being devoured by a generation raised on situation ethics. The cynical citizens of the capital say, "May the odds be ever in your favor" about a game in which the odds are 24 to 1 that you will be killed.

Neither Katniss Everdeen the heroine, nor Peeta Mellark, her teammate, wants to take human life, and as the last two survivors, both seek an alternative to killing the other. In the end, both eschew their self-interests by helping each other.

Second, *The Hunger Games* celebrates the heroic efforts of a few who inspire hope for the many. Like the young Theseus in Greek mythology, who overthrew decadent political and religious powers to establish Athens, underdogs Katniss and Peeta set out to beat the system.

They raise hope in the enslaved districts and concerns in the capital. President Snow warns the game master, "Hope, it is the only thing stronger than fear. A little hope is effective, a lot of hope is dangerous."

Third, *The Hunger Games* is a searing, angry commentary that exposes our entertainment culture as a diversion from the injustices and superficiality of contemporary life. Like

Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, *The Hunger Games* reveals the dark side of a society whose minds and consciences are numbed by amusements.

Before it collapsed, the Roman Empire offered the spectacle of humans killing humans in Coliseums. Ironically *The Hunger Games* movie puts viewers in the stands of today's Coliseum, the movie theater, as we are amused by a story about a sick culture whose entertainment mirrors our own.

As one character says, "If no one watches, then they don't have a game."

Finally, *The Hunger Games* is a love story for a generation trying to distinguish between love and friendship. *Harry Potter*, *Twilight* and now *The Hunger Games* each feature a triangle of friends in which friendship and romance become intertwined, and the central character must make a choice for love. It's all juvenile fiction, but it makes you think. The themes are big and dark, and the stakes are high — something like real life. **BT**

—Dick Staub is author of *About You: Fully Human and Fully Alive* and blogs at dickstaub.com.

“We stay focused on the church being about three things: reaching persons with the gospel, helping Christians grow, and doing the work of the Kingdom of God.”

Pastoral *perspectives*

ZEBULON, N.C. — Jack Glasgow came to Zebulon Baptist Church east of Raleigh in 1977 as assistant pastor for youth and education. He has served as pastor since 1981.

An Atlanta native, he received a degree in economics from Georgia Tech before attending Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

He served as the moderator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in 2009-2010, and is a current member of the CBF executive coordinator search team.

BT: How would you briefly describe your leadership style as a pastor?

Glasgow: First, I would describe my leadership style as evolving and flexible. It has evolved because people and times change. It is also flexible because persons and groups respond very differently to varying leadership styles.

In my early ministry, much of my leadership had been shaped in the management courses I took at Georgia Tech and in classes [taught] by Dr. Bob Dale at Southeastern Seminary. Also, I was taught by a good mentoring pastor, Dr. Charles Edwards.

Those learned and observed principles and strategies were helpful, and so much still applies to my ministry today.

In later years I have gained greater wisdom about and the capacity for adapting my leadership style to fit the situation and personalities involved. But there remain certain tendencies that characterize my leadership style.

One is collaboration. I enjoy leading groups in the church to think of ideas and possibilities. I am at my best at a white board

From Jack Glasgow

Zebulon Baptist Church,
Zebulon, N.C.



putting up ideas that come from a group and then helping the group clarify priorities and plan strategies for implementing those priorities.

I also try to lead by building consensus for ideas. I have learned to resist my own need to make everyone happy and instead simply try to build strong and supportive consensus for what we will do.

My spiritual gift that really defines my approach to ministry is exhortation; I use that gift as a leader to encourage persons in the church to be committed to spiritual growth and effective ministry.

Finally, I try to lead by example. Through hard work, commitment, enthusiasm and passion for ministry I hope to inspire and encourage others. I believe these four words — collaboration, consensus, encouragement and example — best describe my leadership style.

And I have a growing awareness that the leadership required to lead a congregation is different than the leadership required for effective staff leadership. I am not sure we have recognized this difference enough in

congregational life.

As a result, we have some pastors who are great at leading the staff and use the same leadership approach in leading the laity with much less success. We also have leaders with great instincts for congregational leadership who use the same leadership style with the staff with poor results.

It seems the very recognition that leading a congregation and its laity and leaders is quite different from leading a staff of ministers and support personnel could prove helpful in improving pastoral leadership.

BT: Can you identify a couple of the biggest challenges in pastoral ministry today and share how you and your congregation are facing them?

Glasgow: One great challenge is the budgeting of resources. The economic and cultural realities of our time have left only a handful of congregations flush with resources.

Most are dealing with economic realities that force them to make choices between ministry programs and missions, between local missions and missions abroad, between funding mission work done by your own members and mission work done by ministry partners, between improving facilities or living with what you have, and between employing more staff ministers and interns or saving those funds for ministry and mission expenses.

Our congregation is responding to this challenge by taking it head on, by talking about our priorities, by being balanced in our conversations so that we can see both sides of an argument for funding, by encouraging our current generation to grow in their stewardship of resources and in their generosity while at the same time challenging the widespread materialism and self-centeredness of our culture.

We stay focused on the church being

EDITOR'S NOTE:

In this new series, experienced pastors are asked the same seven questions about the important and sometimes misunderstood work they provide in congregational leadership and care. The monthly feature is designed to help pastors learn from one another and to give others greater insight into the multi-faceted work of pastors in changing times.

about three things: reaching persons with the gospel, helping Christians grow, and doing the work of the Kingdom of God. If we stay true to those things, we can present a case for giving that people will believe in and support. and we will find a way to allocate those gifts in a manner that strengthens the congregation and the work of the church in the world.

The second challenge is simply to help Christians grow their faith. The functional or practical atheism talked about today is real.

Persons believe in God, they want to believe in God, they try to be “good Christians,” and they go through all the motions of church life. But, so many experience an emptiness that is pervasive and too often uncomfortable to talk honestly about in the church.

A real sense of experiencing the presence of God escapes so many Christians. The church has to help.

Our church identifies seven “roots” of spiritual growth: Bible study, worship, prayer, Christian friendship, ministry and service, stewardship, and faith sharing. We are continually trying to help pilgrims on the spiritual journey to strengthen their root system to experience authentic growth that comes from God at work in their lives.

I am not interested in investing my life in a ministry that only desires to get people to come to church and say they believe in God. I want their experience to be real and relational.

I want to help them to live out that kind of vibrant faith of encounter with a holy God. That is increasingly a challenge, but it is a challenge worthy of our best efforts.

BT: What do you know now that you wish you had known earlier as a pastor?

Glasgow: I started my work at Zebulon Baptist 34 years ago while a seminary student as a half-time associate minister with responsibilities in youth and children’s ministries, education and pastoral assistance. I loved those youth and my work with them.

Four years later I became the pastor, and for most of the next 20 years or so left youth ministry in the hands of capable staff ministers. I still loved the youth, but spent most of my time with adults.

In the last several years I have changed that approach and have become much more hands-on in working with youth. The benefits have been remarkable. The youth see me very much as their pastor and friend. They teach me so much about pop culture, post-modernity and about their generation. And the church senses that the more I engage with the youth, the more my own vitality as a Christian and preacher seems increased.

I believe we made a mistake to move youth ministry to a peripheral concern of pastors. I respect the role youth ministers play in the church, but I now see a need to pastor youth and children just as much as adults. I believe this shift is important in helping the church become more relevant to the lives of younger generations. I just wish I had come to this awareness sooner.

BT: Are denominational identity and engagement important to you? To your congregation? How do you engage with other churches, and what value does that bring?

Glasgow: Those who know anything about me know that denominational identity is important to me and to Zebulon Baptist Church. The church has wanted me to be involved in the leadership and work of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship as much as possible.

Several laypersons have been effective leaders in CBF life in North Carolina and on the national level. Our introductory material given to prospective members makes it known that we are committed to participation in the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Identifying with CBF has been helpful to our congregation. In worship style, ordination, calling practices and so many other aspects of church life, Zebulon Baptist Church is quite different from most Baptist churches in our area. Our affiliation helps to explain that difference to our community.

CBF is important to us because we want to be connected to a global mission endeavor. The stories of life-changing, life-giving ministry that come from CBF missionaries and volunteers inspire our congregation and link us to the mission field through our praying and our giving. And, we enjoy the fellowship experienced in our gatherings with CBF Baptists. In recent years

connection to the Baptist World Alliance grows in its importance to our church family.

Locally, intentional partnership with Zebulon First Baptist Church, a predominantly African-American congregation, has meant much to our church family. Through joint Operation Inasmuch ministry and joint women’s ministry, a strong bond of friendship has been forged in the last decade that is good for our churches and a good witness to our community. We are comfortable partnering with a broad ecumenical community locally. This willingness has surprised some who were not accustomed to as much openness and acceptance from a Baptist congregation.

BT: How do you keep a balanced life that allows for personal time and study while being accessible to your congregation?

Glasgow: Truthfully, not very well sometimes. There are some long hours worked. There are times when studying takes place in the late hours of the night rather than during normal work times.

Yet, I don’t want to sound like I am complaining. I want members to call on me when they need me. And, I recognize how hard my members work at their jobs, yet faithfully attend church on Sundays and Wednesdays and attend deacon meetings or engage in committee work or other volunteer ministry.

Being a graduate of Georgia Tech my college friends are engineers, scientists, managers and architects. They work incredibly hard at doing their jobs well.

I do take more time now for walking and rest in the mornings since ministry requires night and weekend work. So I often start my day with enjoying the newspaper and coffee, breakfast and devotional with my wife Barbara (who is our minister of music and senior adults) and a three-mile walk together before I get to the office. I have learned that since I know I am often going to finish my work late, I at least can start the day at a slower pace.

We love going to local high school events, support Georgia Tech and East Carolina sports, go to Hurricanes hockey and Mudcats baseball, see movies almost every off day, enjoy Broadway theater, shop, and go to restaurants. Life is really good.

BT: Every church member knows exactly the right time for scheduling worship and the proper format of the service. The problem, of course, is that these are as different as the people. How do you, as a pastoral leader, plan worship with such varied expectations?

Glasgow: Thankfully that is not a big problem for us at Zebulon Baptist. Worship is well attended and appreciated by members and guests alike.

It is liturgical worship. It is evangelical. We sing hymns. We intersperse other forms of music. We work hard on our worship. It is creative and dynamic.

Our musicians are wonderful, and our choir is faithful and terrific. The architecture of the worship space supports the worship style. The laity worship teams are helpful and collaborative and do a great job of improving the aesthetic dimensions of worship in each liturgical season.

We have a blue team for Advent and Christmastide until Lent begins, a purple team for Ash Wednesday through Pentecost Sunday, and a green team for the remainder of the year in ordinary time. We share suggestions for change with those teams, and they work through the process of making worship decisions well.

We believe we worship well at Zebulon Baptist Church in a style that is right for our congregation. Yet we keep trying to improve our worship but remain true to our style and readily admit we can't be all things to all people.

Sunday nights and on Wednesday nights



in the summer we experiment with less formal styles of worship and have some fun with that — more contemporary style worship in the fellowship hall, outdoor worship in the courtyard, emergent worship ideas especially in special services at Thanksgiving and on Maundy Thursday.

BT: What keeps you coming back for more?

Glasgow: Love and belief. I love the church, Zebulon Baptist Church, but also all churches of different shapes and sizes, denominations and worship styles. Ask me to preach a revival or lead a deacon retreat or teach a Bible study, and it won't take me long to love your church too.

I love the Lord and am so very pleased to have been called to ministry. Teaching and preaching do not get old for me — even though I have done it in the same place for more than 30 years. Advent and Christmas, Lent and Holy Week and Easter, All Saints Day, homecoming, ordinations, baptisms and

“I am not interested in investing my life in a ministry that only desires to get people to come to church and say they believe in God. I want their experience to be real and relational.”

communion — they never cease to amaze me and inspire me.

I love people, and love helping them at key life moments. Strange as it may seem, I love the funerals. I am sad for the grief of family and friends and am as angry as anyone when circumstances of a death are cruel and unfair. Yet, to have the privilege to weave a human story with the God story of our faith in such a way that seems seamless to comfort the grieving and bring smiles and tears all at the same time is to stand on holy ground.

I believe in what I do. From my baptism at Moreland Avenue Baptist Church in Atlanta to my ordination at Briarlake Church to my ministry here, I have believed in the goodness and grace of God in Christ. I have believed in the church — its worship, its fellowship and its mission.

God still blesses me with testimonies of persons whose lives have been touched by the ministry of the church — a sermon that spoke to a heart or mind, an act of kindness that made a difference in a life, a word of grace and forgiveness that healed a broken person. That keeps me coming back. **BT**



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The significance of **Adoniram Judson** in his day and ours

Adoniram Judson is remembered as the first American Baptist missionary. Born on Aug. 9, 1788, into the home of a Trinitarian Congregationalist minister in Malden, Mass., he was a precocious boy who learned to read at age 3, did well in the schools he attended, and even mastered Latin and Greek.

After his father relocated to a church in Plymouth, Adoniram entered Rhode Island College (now Brown University) in 1804. Three years later he graduated as the class valedictorian, had a dramatic faith experience, and in 1808 enrolled in Andover Seminary.

There he met some Williams College men who in 1806 had pledged themselves to foreign missions at the legendary “Haystack Prayer Meeting.” They formed a group to promote missions and persuaded the evangelical Congregationalists at their 1810 meeting in Bradford to create a missionary support society known as the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM).

Since funds to support missionaries were lacking, Judson was sent to London to seek help from Congregationalists there but to no avail. Then the board received a large bequest from a woman that enabled the sending of some Americans to India.

Five of the men were duly commissioned at a celebrated service at Tabernacle Church in Salem on Feb. 6, 1812, and part of them sailed from Philadelphia and the other from Salem. The day before the service, Adoniram married the teacher Ann Hasseltine (1789-1826), and on Feb. 19 — together with Samuel and Harriet Newell — they left Salem for India.

Knowing that he would have to explain his position on baptism to the great British missionary William Carey, he and Ann engaged in intensive Bible study during the long journey. They concluded that believer’s baptism by immersion actually was the correct view and they should become Baptists.

Upon arrival they had the British Baptist

William Ward re-baptize them by immersion and resigned from the ABCFM since that was not the Congregationalist stance. Denied admission to British India, they went to Burma and arrived in Rangoon on July 13, 1813.

American Baptists created a board in the following year to support the Judsons, and they officially became the first Baptist missionaries from the United States. Both Adoniram and Ann were gifted linguists, and they quickly learned the language and engaged in translation work.

He created a grammar and ultimately translated the entire Bible into Burmese (1834). He also preached and wrote tracts in the language, and in 1819 experienced the first convert.

Ann demonstrated extraordinary skills as well. She studied Thai and translated Matthew into the language of Siam, assisted her husband by translating Daniel and Jonah into Burmese, and wrote a history of the American Baptist mission to the Burmese Empire while on home leave in 1823. Her published correspondence helped stimulate missionary interest among American Baptists.

During a 21-month Anglo-Burmese war Adoniram was imprisoned, only surviving because of Ann’s resourcefulness in bringing food and negotiating with officials for better treatment. She died soon after his release in 1826. In spite of her short life, many scholars see her as the most influential missionary woman in American history.

After the war ended, reinforcements arrived, most notably George Dana and Sarah Boardman and Jonathan and Deborah Wade. Judson moved the center of the work south to Moulmein, where he continued to write and preach and founded the first permanent church in Burma (1827).

His associates launched the work among the tribal Karens, one of the most noteworthy Baptist endeavors in Burma.

Boardman succumbed to tuberculosis in 1831, but Sarah continued his work. Adoniram married her in 1834, and five of their children lived to adulthood.

He then turned to the task of a Burmese dictionary, while she did translation work of her own. In 1845 her health failed and he took her to the United States for treatment, but she died en route. During his furlough he was hailed everywhere as a hero.

He also married Emily Chubbock (1817-54), a teacher and writer who returned to Burma with him. He finished the dictionary in 1849 and died the next year at age 61 of a respiratory condition.

Judson was the archetypical pioneer missionary who emphasized Bible translation as the key to evangelism. He inspired generations of Americans to volunteer for foreign service, and his exemplary ministry was the taproot for Baptist missionary interest.

Churches and colleges took the Judson name, e.g., Judson College in Alabama, a women’s school named after Ann Judson, and Judson University in Illinois. Parents named their children after him, the best-known example being Adoniram Judson Gordon (1836-95), the eminent Boston preacher, educator and missions figure.

Burmese Christians today view Judson with high esteem and honor his memory. Let us do likewise. **BT**



—Richard V. Pierard is professor of history emeritus of Indiana State University and a member of Providence Baptist Church in Hendersonville, N.C. This commentary is based on an essay prepared for the bicentennial commemoration of American overseas missions held in February.

BAPTISTS AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

White Southerners cheer as Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson troubles Union forces in Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley. Jackson, while attending a Baptist congregation during his young years, came to appreciate the Bible and, in particular, studied the military actions in the Old Testament. Now, he is a warrior for God’s Confederacy.

Meanwhile, Union General David Hunter — from Hilton Head, S.C., overseeing the United States military presence in the Deep South — issues an order stating that persons “heretofore held as slaves, are therefore declared forever free.”

U.S. President Abraham Lincoln, privately contemplating the emancipation of African slaves but sensing the time is not quite ripe, promptly rescinds Hunter’s act. Attending a Primitive Baptist church during his young years, Lincoln had been influenced by the congregation’s anti-slavery stance. Now, the President awaits a more opportune time to make his own public statement. That time will come a mere four months hence.

Meanwhile, Massachusetts-born politician and Union General Benjamin Butler — graduate of a Baptist college, where he studied to be a minister but instead became a lawyer — is in charge of the federal occupation of New Orleans. This month he issues an order targeted at southern women, declaring that any woman who insults or shows contempt for any U.S. soldier or officer shall be treated as a prostitute. White Southerners do not appreciate such insolence, and give Butler the nickname, the “Beast of New Orleans.”

At the same time, martial law and the suspension of the writ of *habeas corpus* in the Confederate capital of Richmond is upheld by Confederate attorney general Thomas Watts, a prominent layman of Montgomery, Alabama’s First Baptist Church.

Baptist influence thus quietly lurks beneath the surface of major civil war figures



on both sides of the great conflict.

Meanwhile, active Baptists this month are not hesitant to voice their opinions about the seemingly perilous state of the Confederacy. Samuel Boykin, editor of Georgia Baptists’ *Christian Index* newspaper, offers a prescription for Southern salvation:

For the true life of a nation is its religion; and to preserve purity, sanctity, vitality in its religion, by the punishment of a nation, is the dictate of the loftiest wisdom God chastises the nations of His love, lest they forget Him.... As a people, have we not been proud, boasters, forgetful of God, seekers of pleasure, laying up for ourselves treasures on earth rather than in heaven?... SuffICIENT for us is it, that our land is swept by the tornado of war; that our households are made desolate; that sorrow, suffering, want and fearful anxiety, have taken their abode near each hearth-stone beneath our fair skies. God grant that we may speedily see that it is our own sins for which we are being punished; that God is calling us out to turn from our evil ways that He may without His hand; and that it becomes us to repent in sack-cloth and ashes, and return to our first love, and do our first works.... We must return to the Lord ... with renewed trust in the all-sufficing righteousness of our Redeemer.

150 YEARS AGO

May 1862

We must have more personal holiness, more zeal for good works, more liberality in Christian enterprises, more of the spirit of Christian brotherhood, and a greater regard for eternal things... Then will God bless us, and stay this cruel war, and change our mourning into rejoicing. Then will the Sun of His loving mercy beam forth gloriously over our land, and cause peace, prosperity and happiness, to reign supreme.

A writer in North Carolina’s *Biblical Recorder* newspaper expresses gratitude that “Southern preachers,” despite condemnation by northern heretics, have “been true to the South.”

They have dared to be patriotic and friends of liberty, not only in heart and sentiment, but also in word and action. With ... few exceptions ... they have stood by their country and their people through these trying times ... have not only declared the duty of Christian freeman, but shown by their example ... [and] have supported their government and their rulers.

Two worldviews are thus juxtaposed. One is hurtling toward a public political declaration that slavery is against the will of God and antithetical to just government. The other is more confident than ever that African slavery is God’s will for the human race, a will so great that God himself is momentarily punishing his chosen nation in order to better effect his will in the future. In this latter world view, blessed are the white ministers of the Southern Gospel who remain faithful to the mission of God’s Confederacy. **BT**

—For a daily journal along with references to source material, visit civilwarbaptists.org.

Surprising change

Seminary education, like the church, takes on new forms

By Heather Entrekin

Walking into a classroom to meet 11 members of a new Doctor of Ministry cohort in Yangon, Myanmar (formerly, Burma), I was startled to be the only woman in the room. And that wasn't the only surprise.

The temperature was about 100 degrees. Jets landing at a nearby airport and construction workers outside an open window periodically drowned out my lecture.

Far from home and what Central Baptist Theological Seminary's founders imagined in 1901, this is not your father's seminary education. But 11 Christian pastors in the Buddhist country of Myanmar entering the joint D.Min. program of a Kansas-based seminary and its partner school in Yangon are an illustration of a surprising change.

At Central we have learned, and continue to learn, that the seismic cultural shifts threatening our institutions have potential to crack open space for the Holy Spirit to bring new life. In our seminary the changes are profound.

Instead of a stately, residential campus where students settled for three years with young families while Dad earned his divinity degree, students of all descriptions and life stages commute to a lean, modern main campus. But just as many rarely or never set foot on the Shawnee, Kansas campus, taking classes taught in churches and at distant sites, even Myanmar, and online.

Ranging in age from 23-69, with women numbering about half the enrollment, most students come to seminary already active in ministry or balancing other full-time occupations. To meet these needs, almost all courses are taught on weeknights and weekends.

While some students come from main-line traditions and plan to serve established congregations, many are new to Christianity

or bring dramatically different concepts of church. They are gathering vibrant congregations in tattoo parlors and coffee shops or around the dinner table at a different home every week. Worship time is as likely to be a Thursday night as a Sunday morning.

These innovative leaders of the emerging church take courses few seminaries would have recognized a generation ago: entrepreneurship, missional church, conflict management, technology of communication, family systems, mentoring and adaptive change. The curriculum is as new and evolving as the church must be.

The seminary also serves congregations directly. Church members who will never seek ordination look to us for leadership skills, theological training, assistance in financial management and spiritual formation. For them, Central designs short-term foundational certificate programs or portfolios of knowledge.

We welcome students from cultures and traditions that stretch us into new expressions of God's hospitality. Korean students, immigrants from Burmese refugee camps, pastors leading minority churches in Myanmar, and African students contribute to an unexpectedly rich rainbow of races, theologies and denominations in our midwestern seminary.

This is not to say that a seminary preparing leaders for a church not yet imagined abandons all principles and practices of the past. At its core, Central continues to ground students in gaining knowledge and learning skills. But more than acquiring information, a seminary must teach students how to orient themselves socially, theologically and biblically.

The ancient texts and spiritual practices of our ancestors in faith continue to guide us. But there is something beyond even

knowledge and skills that the church-to-come requires of its leaders if it is to witness to the presence of God among us. In truth, the church has always needed leaders like this — women and men of imagination, improvisation and integrity whose lives are centered in the grace of God.

It comes through humility. Faced with the same corrosive results of massively changing culture that threaten the church, Central's leaders have learned the humility that is a "trustful unknowing," in President Molly Marshall's words.

"It is a willingness to confess what you don't know, to realize that nobody is sufficient for work like this apart from the graceful presence and power of the Spirit," she says.

As we continue to learn that lesson, we discover that doors open to new ways of doing ministry, understanding scripture, articulating theology and inviting others into the reign of God. It happened in the stifling classroom in Yangon, in the country we used to call Burma, where Christians are a tiny, persecuted minority and women have the fewest opportunities of all.

After the first class, I learned that the applications of two women pastors had been rejected because they did not meet all admissions criteria. It grieved our Myanmar faculty colleagues who share Central's commitment to gender equality. But I knew that exceptions were possible, and our colleagues knew that remedial work could be done. In the end, against the odds, the two women pastors joined the D.Min. class in Yangon.

Trusting in God to provide and realizing our own insufficiency, we are making room for God's Spirit to form and shape us, and our students, in ways we could never imagine. **BT**

—Heather Entrekin is Des Peres associate professor in congregational health and director of the Doctor of Ministry program at Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Shawnee, Kan.



Faith and sports have long history together

“Tebowism” has reminded the world that sports and religion have been twins for athletes since the ancient Greek games and even before.

A myriad of books on the subject have been published in the last 10 years with Mercer University Press leading the way with a series that includes Steven Overman’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Sport*.

The most creative effort is William V. Baker’s *Playing With God: Religion and Modern Sport* (Harvard Press, 2007). The best and most recent critique of the subject is Shirl Hoffman’s *Good Game* (Baylor University Press, 2010). All these books bring forward a wide range of views and approaches to sports and religion.

One vivid part of this history involves what has been called “muscular Christianity,” although “muscular” expressions of other faiths are evident as well.

Here I explore one piece of the history of muscular Christianity because it is so vivid in its message and involves what I have called “the best kept secret in New York City about religion and sports.” It involves a stained glass



bay of windows in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine (Episcopal) that has been in place since 1948. To my knowledge there is only one other such set of windows in the world — in Leon, Spain (Cathedral de Santa Maria de Regia deLeon).

The marriage of religion and sports — designated as “muscular Christianity” — arose in England in the mid-19th century and urged a healthy diet, nurture of healthy muscles, and a joy in sports as related to religion. Proponents called for value, dignity and humanness in religion and sports.

William Thomas Manning (1866-1949) of Northampton, England, came to the United States in 1882 and was Bishop of New York from 1921 to 1946. Manning was converted to the essence of muscular Christianity and believed that sports were just as important as prayers.

As early as 1928 he saw to the “formal assignment” of a sports bay of stained glass windows in the cathedral. By 1948 the bay of windows was in place. Manning had raised more than \$12 million for this bay by holding horse shows and special events in Yankee Stadium.

He justified the bay of windows by affirming that it would be a witness against wrong-minded Puritan “Blue Laws” — and it would say that God is indeed interested in games and pleasures, and become a symbol of the place of youth in the life of the church. It would honor great athletes who represented sporting ideals such as Hobe Baker, Walter Camp, Christy Mathewson and Bob Wrens.

Hubert’s Bay was dedicated to St. Hubert (656-728), the patron saint of hunters and also of animal protections.

The beautiful bay of stained glass windows is the first on the left as one enters the nave. Twenty-eight modern sports are depicted along with a few (six or seven) from the Bible

such as Jacob’s wrestling match with the angel and David with his slingshot.

Football, baseball and basketball players are presented in uniform along with a myriad of minor and major sports including tennis, fencing, archery, fishing and golf. Manning was pleased to see the stained glass windows in place before he died as a more-than-vivid reminder of his understanding of sports and religion.

While Tebowism reminds us in a rather simple way of some of Manning’s commitments, the gods of commercialism and “win at any cost” attitudes have negated the heart of Manning’s dream. We see cheap advertisements of faith and a flood of vivid refutations of the idea that sports builds character.

Exploited by capitalists and those in the non-play world, we seem to be destroying the inherent spirit of sports. In their recent writings William Baker (*Playing With God*) and Shirl Hoffman (*Good Game*) give ample suggestions for a helpful reformation of sports that will recover “our spiritual centers of gravity,” as Hoffman urged.

Standing in awe before the sports bay recently, I envisioned a truly religious dimension of sport and was reminded of the excellent description given by George Leonard in *The Ultimate Athlete*:

- One who joins body, mind, and spirit in the dance of existence;
- One who explores both inner and outer being;
- One who surpasses limitations and crosses boundaries in the process of personal and social transformation;
- One who plays the larger game, the Game of Games with full awareness, award of life and death and willing to accept the pain and joy that awareness brings;
- One who, finally, best serves as model and guide on our evolutionary journey.

Today as never before, we need to add a truly religious dimension to sports, for the heart and essence of sports is being destroyed by commercialism and idolatry. **BT**

—George H. Shriver is professor emeritus of history at Georgia Southern University where he taught from 1973-1999. He also coached the women’s tennis team for 10 years and served as a tennis official.



TOO TIMID? Vatican wants to revive church's role in fighting the Mafia

VATICAN CITY — Vatican officials in March traveled to the island of Sicily, the heartland of the Mafia, to promote the church's role in fighting organized crime.

The Vatican says it wants to show that the best way to respond to the Mafia is through the promotion of a "culture of dialogue and legality."

The "Courtyard of the Gentiles," a Vatican-sponsored initiative aimed at bridging the gap between Christian and secular culture, organized the two-day event in Palermo, Sicily's main town.

The agenda included a speech by Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, president of the Pontifical Council for Culture, and a roundtable with priests, prosecutors and Mafia experts.

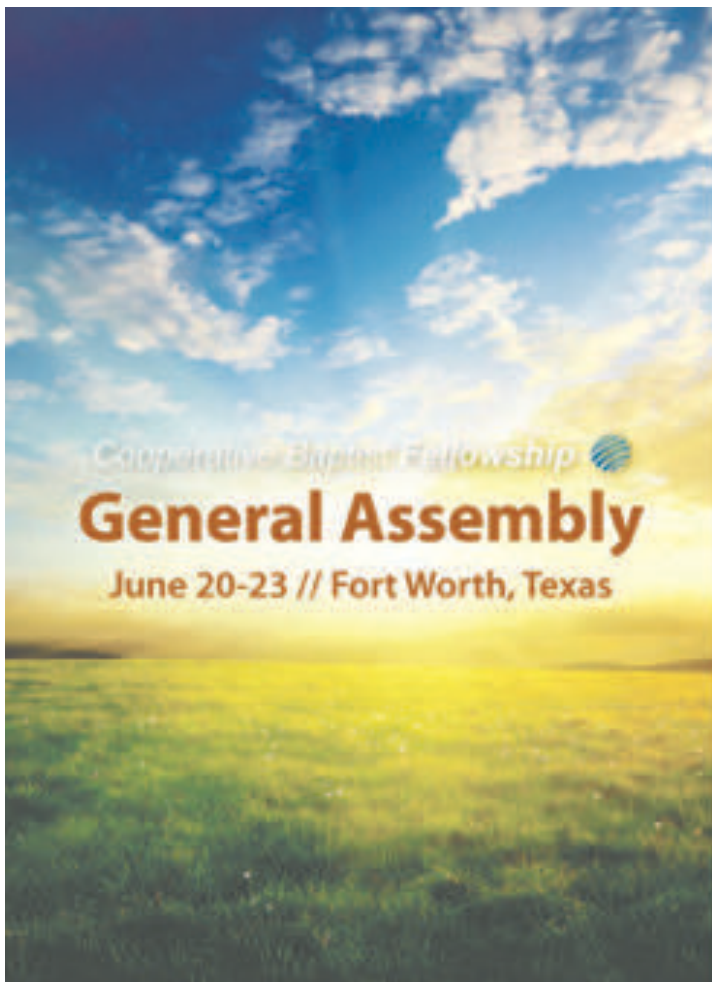
The conference ended Friday night, March 30, with an interfaith festival on the steps of Palermo's cathedral, organized by the grassroots anti-Mafia movement "Addio Pizzo."

The Catholic Church in Italy has often been accused of being too timid towards the Mafia.

Event organizer Bishop Antonino Raspanti admitted that the church "has not condemned strongly enough," the Mafia in the past. But "things have changed," he said, and there is no doubt that the "Mafia is anti-human and anti-religious." **BT**

"[The] Mafia is anti-human and anti-religious."

—Bishop Antonino Raspanti



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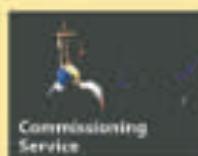


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By Brett Younger

Looking for the lighter side

Twelve years ago, the editor asked me to contribute three times a year to a new column for *Baptists Today* called “The Lighter Side.” (It later became four times a year, then 12, then six, and now it’s back to 12.)

This is my 100th “Lighter Side” column. I know this because a collection of these columns is being put together through *Baptists Today’s* expanding Nurturing Faith publishing efforts. It will even be available in ebook — and I’m not sure what that is. (My one disappointment is the contract stipulates that I only get 50 percent of the profits from movie rights and action figures.)

I’ve been thinking about titles for the book that aren’t quite right: *The Lighter Side — Greatest Hits 2000-2012* or *The Lighter Side — Volume 1* or *Living on the Lighter Side* or *Lighten Up* or *Columns I Wish Were Funnier* — or one that might help it sell: *Pulitzer Prize-Winning Columns*.

I’m sure that my editor meant “lighter” as in “not serious.” “Not serious” is a fine goal, but writing this column has done surprising things for me.

Because I write this column for *Baptists Today*, I learned that Johnny Cash, the Sundance Kid, and Queen Latifah (think of her as G.A. Queen Latifah-with-a-Scepter) were Baptists. When I heard that the Georgia Baptist Convention was kicking out a church for having a female pastor, I didn’t think — as I would have before having this column — “Why are Baptists stupid?” but jumped straight to “Why don’t we kick out all women who wear ‘braided hair, or gold, or pearls?’” (1 Tim 2:9).

I have learned to look for the shining lights in Christ’s church, gracious women who wish Miss Manners had written Romans, the painter at my parents’ church who put a hint of kudzu in the baptistery, the good church people who made me drive home barefoot after preaching at their church because they thought

someone in Liberia needed my shoes more than I do.

I have learned to look for the bright lights in ministry: the kind of preachers whose nurseries run out of space nine months after they preach on the Song of Solomon; ministers who speak on war, abortion, and the presidential campaign and have everyone shouting “Amen”; ministers who may initially be distracted during worship (“Why does the Lord’s Prayer sound like the voice on my GPS?”), but who end up with “I can’t believe what saints I get to serve.”

When I joined the Former Pastors’ Club, this column led me to make a list of what I missed — baptizing young Christians, senior citizens who ask me to pray with them, and free parking at the hospital.

My light, bright family has been the victim of many columns. I’ve written about the day I met Carol (she was scooping butter pecan for new seminary students; I got in line even though I prefer chocolate).

I would not have been a chaperone at Graham’s sixth grade dance if I wasn’t sure I could get a column out of it. (I was kind to shout loud enough for his friends to hear, “I wish your father was here.”) When Caleb needed a driving instructor, I agreed because I could write about it: “For future reference, the



brake is the one on the left.”

When Carol and I spent our 25th wedding anniversary in separate rooms at a monastery, my disappointment was tempered by Carol’s assurance that people would laugh at my frustration.

My pathetic attempts at athletics seem less agonizing when I write about them “The key to my success is not running fast or far.” This column inspired me to admit that “Gyms contain little oxygen, and the line between warming up and tiring out is now non-existent.”

When I played basketball at youth camp, my pain was tempered by the understanding that I could write about it: “I conserved energy by taking the elevator instead of the stairs and lying down in the shower.”

Because I write this column, I took notes during a trip to Israel: “Have you seen any of these in your town: The Church of the Adolescent Jesus, The Church of the Flagellation, or The Church of Our Lady of the Spasm?”

I took notes at a Jimmy Buffett concert: “Jimmy claimed the pope came to a concert, blessed the cheeseburgers and told Jimmy he had long been a parrothead.”

I took notes at the International Biscuit Festival (which I would never have attended if I did not write this column): “BYOB — Butter Your Own Biscuit.”

When you write a column called “The Lighter Side,” you end up looking for light. I have been given a good gift. **BT**

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

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Nurturing Faith Bible Studies are supported by gifts from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the John and Fala Mae Daugh Foundation. Nurturing Faith Publishing is a subsidiary of Baptists Today Inc.

Morrow's 'Mother Superior'

MORROW, Ga. — Sarah Brown Withers teaches the Faith Sunday school class at First Baptist Church of Morrow, Ga., south of Atlanta. Some of these more-seasoned women in the church have a nickname for her: “Mother Superior.”

It is a term of endearment, however. In addition to her excellent Bible teaching, Sarah ministers to her class members in dozens of ways throughout each week.

Her constant care led class members in 1996 to request that the congregation license Sarah as a minister so she could conduct funerals and weddings for their families. Over the years she has officiated at 45 funerals and 20 weddings across the Southeast.

TOUGH START

Sarah Teresa Brown was born in Southwest Atlanta in 1931. Her father died when she was just 6, and Sarah and her mother moved in with an aunt and uncle. Then at age 8, she lost her mother as well.

Sarah continued to live with her aunt and uncle who were unprepared for parenting and not involved in church. She was lonely.

But as Sarah recalled: “Across the street from our house lived a wonderful family called Baptists.”

She found family and increased faith in historic Gordon Street Baptist Church, led for many years by much-beloved, Scottish-born pastor D.J. Evans.

“They were a wonderful loving family who taught me love and about Jesus Christ who became my Savior and Lord,” she recalled. “At last I knew why I was born. My purpose for living was to tell others of this wonderful love so beautifully demonstrated by my church family.”

Sarah was totally immersed in the Gordon Street church throughout her childhood and youth including mission programs for girls and women and all musical programs of the church.

With few financial resources, she planned to attend Georgia State University in Atlanta and work at night. But her pastor learned of her desire to attend Baptist-related Mercer University in Macon and drove her down to assemble enough financial aid and work scholarships to make that happen.

There she met a bright, young ministerial student named Harold Withers, who first

Sarah Withers

rules many hearts with caring ministry



Jack Harwell and Sarah Withers

became her study partner and then her husband. After graduation they moved to Louisville, Ky., where Harold attended Southern Baptist Theological Seminary while Sarah taught school.

MULTITASKING

Her award-winning career as an educator continued throughout Harold's 40 years of ministry in seven First Baptist churches in Georgia: Reidsville, McRae, Fort Valley, Waycross, Forsyth, Powder Springs and Forest Park.

In each of these county-seat towns, in addition to her teaching career, Sarah was a vital part of the congregation and a mother to two daughters and twin sons. Directing youth choirs was one of her specialties. Also she led several professional education and civic groups, and took advanced studies in math, reading and educational supervision at five different colleges.

Such multitasking has continued throughout Sarah's life. At the Morrow church she has been a deacon for many years, including two terms as chair. She has served on the missions committee for 10 years and chaired two pastor search committees. She sings in the adult choir, and her oldest daughter, Joy Brown, is the church's longtime organist.

Outside her own congregation, Sarah has served as a Mercer trustee and a mentor for McAfee School of Theology students. She coordinates an annual prayer retreat and has led numerous mission trips for girls.

RECOGNITIONS

Mercer honored Sarah with the Louie D. Newton Award in 2001 and with an honorary doctor of humanities degree in 2002. Also in 2001, Baptist Women in Ministry of Georgia named her the Distinguished Church Woman of the Year.

“I never aspired to be a church staff member,” said Sarah. “I just wanted to be a good pastor's wife and help young girls reach their potential in Christian growth and community service. Thus, I have always been involved in Baptist Women in Ministry groups, though never an official ‘minister.’ So that award is special to me.”

In a recommendation letter, George Balentine, former pastor of First Baptist Church of Augusta, Ga., and former president of Shorter College, wrote: “Sarah represents the highest caliber of servanthood and churchmanship of any person I know.”

STILL ON MISSION

In recent years Sarah has been involved with an effort to raise monies for Baptist Medical & Dental Mission International, based in Hattiesburg, Miss. She serves as “manager” for musicians and friends Joan Godsey and Hugh Waddy, whose concerts benefit this mission cause.

While Sarah has been recognized for her many gifts as an educator, minister and mission advocate, she has never sought the spotlight. Yet she is an advocate for truth and justice. When I was an editor, some of the noblest letters I ever published came from Sarah Brown Withers.

More than anything else, Sarah invests in being a true friend to many. Last August, when Sarah celebrated her 80th birthday, 12 different groups threw her birthday parties.

Her beloved Sunday school class had to wait until two weeks after the big day to have their own celebration. But, then, they are the ones who get by with calling her “Mother Superior.” **BT**

—Jack Harwell provides pastoral care on the staff of First Baptist Church of Morrow, Ga. He is editor emeritus of *Baptists Today*.



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The poor among you

DALLAS — They gather at dawn at day-labor centers or designated parking lots where contractors hire workers. Some stop on their way to pick up a cheap breakfast taco at a convenience store, buying their meal from an employee earning minimum wage. At the store, they wait in line with members of a crew purchasing gas for the mowers and trimmers they will use to cut the grass of other people's lawns.

They are the working poor — people who may work more hours a week than the average salaried employee, but they do it at a cobbled-together assortment of part-time jobs without benefits.

Some find themselves trapped in the situation because they lack the education or technical skills to find a better job. Others lost salaried positions due to economic recession and are working part-time or temporary jobs to try to make ends meet.

LIVING IN POVERTY

Ron Sider, founder of Evangelicals for Social Action, sees that situation — coupled with the United States' deficit and a growing gap between the rich and poor — as a justice crisis.

"Minimum wage doesn't get a person even close to the poverty level. People ought to be able to work their way out of poverty," Sider, professor at Palmer Theological Seminary in Wynnewood, Pa., said in an interview.

But more Americans live in poverty today than at any time in more than 50 years, according to the U.S. Census Bureau and the National Bureau of Economic Research.

"The richest nation in human history now has the highest poverty level of any Western industrialized nation," Sider writes in his new book, *Fixing the Moral Deficit: A Balanced Way to Balance the Budget*.

DIFFICULT CHOICES

Poverty forces some individuals and families into making tough decisions, said Jeremy Everett, director of the Texas Hunger Initiative, a program of the Baylor University School of Social Work in partnership with the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission.

"Often, people find themselves having

to choose between paying the rent, the light bill and the water bill or paying for groceries. For the elderly, it may be a choice between the mortgage and medication," Everett said.

Some even find themselves living on the streets, noted Jimmy Dorrell, founder and executive director of Mission Waco/Mission World, a Central Texas-based ministry focused on community transformation.

"We have folks in our shelter who had never been in one and never imagined themselves there," Dorrell said. "Minimum-wage jobs, especially 29-hours-a-week jobs without benefits, can't come close to paying the bills. The growing unskilled workforce has few living-wage job choices."



GROWING NUMBERS

Underemployed or unemployed victims of recession, together with the ranks of the working poor who have been unable to rise above poverty, have forced growing numbers to rely on government welfare.

Nearly 15 percent of all Americans — a record 45.7 million people — now participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as food stamps.

"Many people who never thought they would have to rely on federal safety net programs to help make ends meet do now — and without these programs, many more Americans would have fallen into poverty and hunger in this last recession," said David Beckmann, president of Bread for the World, a Washington, D.C.-based Christian advocacy group.

"You also have to consider how low the federal poverty line is — \$23,000 per year is too low for most two-person households to live

comfortably in America, let alone a family of four."

Neither SNAP benefits nor refundable tax credits — like the Earned Income Tax Credit or Child Tax Credit — factor into poverty figures in the U.S. Census, he added.

"If they were, the data would show that these programs lifted 9.3 million people above the poverty line in 2010. These programs can mean the difference between getting by and going hungry for poor families — whether newly or generationally poor," Beckmann said.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

Some Christians fail to consider the plight of the poor because they don't recognize the emphasis Jesus placed on concern for one's neighbor and compassion for the vulnerable, Everett observed.

"Many Christians are not well-versed in what Jesus had to say about the poor," Everett said. "Caring for the poor is intrinsic to our calling as Christians. Every person is created in the image of God, and that means we are all interconnected."

Some reserve their compassion only for the few whom they consider worthy of assistance, he added.

"There's no such thing as the deserving poor and the undeserving poor. Jesus didn't say, 'Whatever you did for the least of these my brothers — when they deserved it — you did it to me,'" Everett said.

HARSH REALITIES

Others insist the poor simply should take more initiative and pull themselves up by their own bootstraps, Dorrell noted.

"Some continue to blame the poor for their own harsh realities and point to the rugged individualism of my grandpa, who brought himself up without any help," he said.

That attitude finds its most extreme expression in the libertarian views advanced by mid-20th century writer Ayn Rand, who believed each person should pursue his or her own self-interests, not sacrifice for others, Sider noted in an interview.

"It's astonishing to me that any Christian

would embrace a philosophy that says we have no responsibility for our neighbors,” he said.

MORE THAN CHARITY

Other Christians take seriously biblical teachings about compassion for the poor and vulnerable. They operate food pantries, volunteer at homeless shelters, support free or reduced-price medical clinics and work on Habitat for Humanity projects to build homes for low-income families.

But for all their efforts, they hardly make a dent in the problem of poverty. Charities nationwide provide only about 6 percent of the assistance that government programs for the poor provide, Bread for the World reports.

Five federal programs — SNAP, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Earned Income Tax Credit, Supplemental Security Income for the disabled and Medicaid — cost about \$485 billion in 2010.

“If the 325,000 religious congregations in the United States wished to take over these programs, each congregation would need to add about \$1.5 million to its annual budget,” Sider writes in *Fixing the Moral Deficit*.

Christians should lead by example in meeting the needs of the poor, but they cannot

do it by themselves, Everett noted.

“The church should lead the way, but the church cannot do it alone. Churches developed the hospital system to care for the sick. They led the way in creating hospitals. But if only churches ran hospitals today, we wouldn’t have enough to care for everybody,” Everett said.

“In terms of responding to poverty, the church should lead the way, but Christians should use their influence to get others involved — to bring government, the nonprofit sector and the private sector to the table.”

BIBLICAL JUSTICE

Christians need to move from concern about the poor to hungering for biblical justice, Sider said. In Scripture, justice means more than procedural fairness in the courts; it also means fair access to society’s productive resources so people can earn their own way, he said.

“Biblical justice rejects the Marxist idea of equal outcomes just as it rejects limiting justice to fair procedures. But it does demand equality of opportunity up to the point where everyone has access to productive capital so that, if they work responsibly, they can enjoy an adequate income and be dignified members of society,” Sider writes.

Biblical justice also means protecting the interests of the vulnerable, he added. While Sider believes the current national deficit is “intergenerational injustice” and wants to see the government move toward a balanced budget, he warned against politicians who “want to balance the federal budget on the backs of the poor.”

Beckmann agreed, noting that “cutting the amount of money dedicated to programs that help hungry and poor people make ends meet would not make as big a difference to the budget deficit as it would to low-income families.”

Sider and Beckmann urged Christians to create a “circle of protection” around governmental programs that are vital to poor people and advocate for their interests.

“It is sometimes a challenge to understand the importance of advocacy when addressing these issues, but we need to change the politics of hunger if we want to create more widespread and lasting change,” Beckmann said. “With the stroke of a pen, decisions are made that affect millions of lives and redirect millions of dollars.” **BT**

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

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