

BAPTISTS Today



Pastoral Pairs

Couples sharing ministry roles

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Street Question

'Where did Baptists get their name?'

By Carol Crawford Holcomb

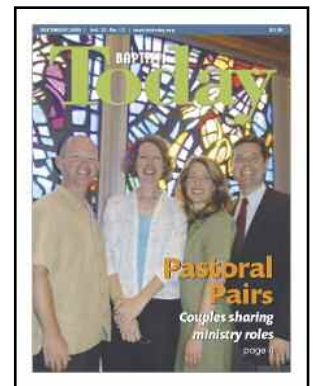


Photo by John Pierce. (Left to right) Jeffrey and Tonya Vickery and Lisa and Dean Allen share the pastorates of Cullowhee Baptist Church in western North Carolina and Fernwood Baptist Church in Spartanburg, S.C., respectively. Their friendships go back to college days in South Carolina.

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A conversation with
Mercer president
Bill Underwood

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Some married couples such as (left to right) Russ and Amy Jacks Dean, Lisa and Dean Allen, and Jeffrey and Tonya Vickery share pastorates of Baptist churches and believe this model of ministry will continue to grow.

pastoral pairs

Married couples sharing pastorate provide new model

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — After nine years of sharing a pulpit and other pastoral duties, Russ and Amy Jacks Dean can't imagine doing ministry any other way.

"We've done different (ministry) jobs in the same church, the same job at different churches, and now share a job together," said Russ. "For us, by far, the best world is clergy couple ministry."

The Deans proposed the unique pastoral arrangement to the search committee of Park Road Baptist Church in Charlotte nearly a decade ago. In hand they had a listing of six areas of pastoral responsibility — worship planning, administration, outreach, pastoral care, missions and spiritual nurture — as spelled out by Bill Hull, theologian in residence at Mountain Brook Baptist Church in Birmingham, where Russ was serving on staff. They indicated which three of these areas were best suited for each of them.

MAKING THEIR CASE

The Charlotte church had indicated they were open to either a male or female pastor. The

Deans sent a letter making a case for both.

"Imagine that you had a pastor whose strengths and studies had been devoted to pastoral care *and* whose interests and concentration were in organization and administration," the letter proposed. "Imagine that you had a pastor whose preaching style was pastoral and relationally-oriented *and* whose method was more given to an intellectual approach of ideas and concepts.

"Imagine that your pastor had the ability to counsel with women when the empathetic ear of another woman was needed *and* to hear men's concerns as only another man could (or, on the other hand, to hear concerns as someone of the opposite sex).

"Imagine that your pastor could participate in marital counseling, perform marriages *and* lead family seminars and workshops with a more holistic understanding of people's lives... Imagine that you had a pastor who, literally, could attend two committee meetings simultaneously!"

The search committee agreed to an initial conversation about the possibility of changing their search from *a* pastor to a

pastoral pair. Amy said it was important for them to clarify the specific roles they would fill.

"It was very clear that one of us was not the associate (pastor)," said Amy, who assumed the previous pastor's office to help members grasp the shared role. "I took the lead in the first Communion and did the first baptism."

The church bought into the arrangement with ease, the couple said.

"The (search) committee did a really good job in educating the church (about co-pastors)," Russ said. "They treat us each as the pastor; we've not spent 10 minutes telling them that Amy is the pastor."

Amy said the shared ministry position has been a very fulfilling way to do ministry — one that offsets the isolation often experienced by solo pastors.

"I wouldn't do it by myself; I'd quit a long time ago," she said. "I don't know how anybody pastors a church alone."

The male-female balance strengthens shared pastoral ministry, said Russ. And the model helps break down the structures of

male hierarchy present in many churches: “Just visually, there’s a benefit.”

The Deans believe their personal/professional relationship has become a good model of mutuality, cooperation and partnership — even, or perhaps especially, when they don’t necessarily see eye-to-eye.

“I think it is really interesting for (church members) to see the pastors disagree and have to work it out,” said Amy, noting that any potential stalemates are settled by having specific areas of responsibility to which one is granted final word.

Practically, the arrangement has worked well, the Deans said, in that they can literally be in two places at the same time — such as Amy being with a member at the hospital during a crisis while Russ meets with the deacons at church. “That happens all the time,” she said.

Technically, Russ is a full-time employee and Amy is three-quarters time — though few would know it, they said. The arrangement allows Amy more time with their two sons in the afternoon.

Rather than fill a vacancy for a minister of education, the church incorporated those duties into the dual-pastors function at one point. But it was clear that the shared pastoral roles were still equal.

“It was not two-for-one,” said Russ. “They have to pay both of us.”

The Deans vacation together but take their continuing education time off separately. And they, along with their sons, participated in a sabbatical this summer.

By their choice, Russ preaches about three-fifths of the time but rarely will either pastor preach three Sundays in a row. The congregation has responded well to hearing two distinct voices in the pulpit on a regular basis.

“We have very different preaching styles,” said Amy.

While not for every couple, the Deans hope more will consider this option — as well as more congregations.

“We’re big proponents of the model,” said Russ, who created a network for pastoral couples. “It’s a very fulfilling way to spend a marriage.”

Recently a very prominent church contacted the Deans to see if they would have interest in their pastoral opening. The call suggests that pastoral pairs may have moved a step closer to mainstream.

“I think it is a model that will continue

to become more prevalent,” said Amy.

And why did they not talk with the committee showing interest in them?

“We’re just real happy here,” said Russ. “The chemistry was just right; it’s worked really well.”

A CAMPUS CHURCH

In the mountain home of Western Carolina University, Cullowhee Baptist Church called Jeffrey and Tonya Vickery as pastors seven years ago. They equally divided one position and split the preaching duties evenly.

“There is just that one job description for a pastor,” said Tonya, noting that she and Jeffrey divided up the various tasks aside from preaching.

The Vickerys shared an associate minister’s position at another church before coming to Cullowhee, N.C. The experience gave them a better idea of how to make this arrangement work in a small, campus-church setting with a single pastor.

“Preaching every other week makes sermons richer,” said Jeffrey. “And every other week I get to hear a good sermon too.”

And there is a built-in sounding board, said Tonya.

“I think being a pastor is a hard job, and you’re sharing it with your best friend,” she explained. “That’s not for every couple though.”

Like the Deans, Jeffrey said the church can benefit from seeing its married pastors “having different opinions in a committee meeting and expressing them in healthy ways.”

The Vickerys expressed appreciation for the support they received when some neighboring Southern Baptist churches condemned the Cullowhee church for calling a female pastor. The church, as a result, withdrew from the Tuckaseegee Baptist Association in 2002.

“They came to our defense ... though it was difficult for them,” said Jeffrey of Cullowhee congregation. “They said, ‘We’re Baptists; we’re going to hire who we want to.’”

After a “huge pastoral crisis” in which a pastor needed to be with both a family and the congregation, Tonya said they discovered: “You can be in two places at one time.”

Jeffrey, who also teaches college classes, and Tonya feel they can offer a healthy model for other married couples interested in a shared pastorate. But to do so, they said, requires keeping a proper perspective.

“We still have our individual interests ...,” said Jeffrey. “It’s not that we are one person.” Tonya added that establishing the right boundaries is helpful.

“There is a professional relationship and a personal relationship,” she said. “Jeffrey and I are not going to hold hands in worship, but we will at the movie theater.”

While pastoral pairs are more common in Southeast Asia, the Vickerys said they hope more U.S. congregations will look at this good option.

“We have different models now where it’s working successfully — and we’re getting some longevity,” said Jeffrey. “My hope is that we’ll see more healthy churches calling co-pastors.”

An important part of their success, Tonya attested, comes from the congregation’s affirmation of gender equality and competence: “I didn’t have to earn my right to be pastor at Cullowhee.”

DIVISION OF DUTIES

The search committee of Fernwood Baptist Church in Spartanburg, S.C., was in conversation with prospective pastor Dean Allen when the idea of his wife, Lisa, sharing a portion of the job arose. They were called to serve the congregation earlier this year.

Dean and Lisa split the job 80/20 respectively, allowing Lisa to use her ministry gifts while continuing in another career. Both hold doctorates from Boston University.

“We share worship leadership and preach equally,” said Dean. “In other things, I’m the first point of contact.”

Lisa said her work is mostly tied to worship though both she and Dean are highly relational ministers. The Allens’ shared ministry goes back to college days when they were on a Baptist Student Union summer missions team.

Together they have served the First Baptist Church of Weston, Mass., and at Central Baptist Seminary. At their previous pastorate, the 80/20 split was reversed with Lisa filling the larger time slot.

Early in their time at Fernwood, a health crisis occurred in which Lisa and Dean were able to minister.

“Co-pastoring allows for pastors to respond to a crisis in a different way than a single pastor,” said Lisa. “When there is a call for all hands on deck, there are more hands on deck.”

ONE PASTOR, TWO PASTORS

After nine years as a pastor, Tony Brooks took a different path to pastoral ministry in November 2003. He and his wife, Katrina, were called as co-pastors of North Broad Baptist Church in Rome, Ga.

They shared one job until duties of another ministry position were rolled into the mix. Both have been full-time pastors since the spring of 2004. Pastoral duties are divided between the two, but not cast in concrete.

“We’ve rotated these duties,” said Katrina, noting the importance of keeping the personnel committee “very clear” on who’s doing what. Currently, for example, Katrina leads Wednesday night Bible study for adults while Tony works with youth.

They too have benefited from the groundwork of the Deans and the Vickerys — although each church with a married couple as pastors has taken a different approach.

“The big thing for us is you’ve got to be flexible,” said Tony, who shares the pastor’s office with his wife.

“We felt they needed to see this is the pastors’ office,” he said about the space with two adjoining desks.

Katrina said the model gives the church “a broader gift base to tap into.” And, naturally, some people simply have an affinity for one of the pastors more so than the other.

The couple rotates preaching with the



Tony and Katrina Brooks

other assisting in worship including the children’s sermon. Both provide pastoral care as the members choose.

“For funerals, weddings, baptism, Lord’s Supper — we share,” said Katrina.

Some neighboring pastors reacted with hostility to the calling of a female co-pastor. The local newspaper quoted pastor David Harper of Hollywood Baptist Church saying: “This could lead us down a slippery slope.... We could end up seeing the Nudist Baptist Church or the Homosexual Baptist Church.”

In response, North Broad withdrew from the Floyd County Baptist Association in 2004. Katrina and Tony said their congregation and some other local churches were very affirming of them.

North Broad first contacted Tony as a potential pastor. When he raised the possibility of the co-pastorate, the committee was willing to explore the idea.

It is working very well, said Katrina, whom the children call “Pastor K.” “But the church’s identity must be affirming of women and men as ministers.”

NEW PASTORAL PARADIGM

Clarissa Strickland, networking specialist for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, said she passes along the résumés of married couples interested in a shared pastorate anytime she thinks a church might be open to such an arrangement.

“I always suggest that such couples write a cover letter to send with their résumés,” said Strickland. The letter asks the committee to consider the possibility of co-pastors who bring multiple gifts.

Fernwood Baptist Church was “looking for a pastor with strong people skills and an extroverted personality, and one who brought strong pulpit skills,” said search committee chair Gerald Keown, Old Testament professor at Gardner-Webb University’s divinity school.

“While there was discussion within the committee on how the church would respond to co-pastors, the conviction that they brought the best gifts for our needs outweighed any of those concerns,” said Keown. “It was a pleasant surprise when, at the introduction of Dean and Lisa to the congregation, the congregational response was every bit as positive as that of the committee.”

The First Baptist Church of Norristown, Penn., turned to a married couple to serve as

interim pastors for nearly two years.

“We took turns preaching and often made pastoral visits together,” said American Baptist mission volunteer Carla Romarate-Knipel and David Knipel, who does legal work for American Baptists and other organizations.

This model is not a new idea to every church. Douglas Harris and Carol McVetty, a clergy couple with a commitment to multicultural ministry who now serve a pastorate in Chicago, were co-pastors of the racially diverse First Baptist Church of Detroit for more than 12 years beginning in 1984.

“While there we shared one pastoral position that grew to one and a third position by the time we left in January 1997 to come to North Shore Baptist Church in Chicago,” said Douglas. “In Detroit we shared the preaching by taking turns each week with one the preacher and the other the liturgist and have continued that here as well.”

The shared pastorate was a good way to share more closely in parenting as well, he said.

AT HOME, AT WORK

While married co-pastors may have different divisions of responsibilities, they agree that one of the most important factors is to find the right balance in their professional and personal lives.

“There’s always the challenge of leaving ‘it’ at work,” said Tony Brooks.

His wife and co-pastor Katrina agreed. One will sometimes say to the other: “That’s work related; we’re not going to talk about that now.”

On the other hand, co-pastor couples may spend less time rehashing the day, they said.

When called as co-pastors, Tonya Vickery said she and Jeffrey “promised Cullowhee (Baptist Church) we would never draw them into a marital conflict.”

The upsides outweigh any downsides, these couples agree. In fact, they recommend the idea to other ministry couples and to churches searching for a pastor — or perhaps a pastoral pair.

“I think this model will continue to become more prevalent,” said Amy Jacks Dean, fresh from a sabbatical and eager to continue the shared pastoral ministry of Park Road Baptist Church with her husband and co-pastor Russ. **BT**

Essentially, we divide according to our essentials

By John Pierce

Much of the division within churches and denominations has to do with disagreement over the list of essentials. The essentials of one are not necessarily the essentials of another.

This thought came to mind when reading about an address given by Danny Akin, president of Southeastern Baptist Seminary, during a conference on “Southern Baptists, Evangelicals and the Future of Denominationalism” held in October at Union University in Jackson, Tenn.

According to a Baptist Press report, Akin said Southern Baptists hold a common belief in the triune God, rejection of evolution, the full deity and perfect humanity of Jesus, penal substitutionary atonement, the need for regenerate church membership, salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, the reality of an eternal heaven and an eternal hell, and the sanctity of life from conception to natural death.

He prefaced that list with an affirmation of biblical “inerrancy” and the 2000 version of the *Baptist Faith and Message* doctrinal statement. Then he added that Southern Baptists also agree on the “sanctity of heterosexual marriage, the goodness of sex in marriage and the gift of children, lots of them.”

But, according to Akin, some other much-discussed issues should not be placed on the essential/non-negotiable list. Non-essentials for Akin, according to the article, included: “Calvinism, elders, whether certain spiritual gifts are still active, the time of the

rapture and the nature of the millennium.”

My interest is not in arguing with Akin’s list, but simply to note that division into denominations and within denominations is most often tied to whose list of essentials wins out.

It is curious to note, however, that Akin considers opposition to evolutionary science to be an essential belief while tagging the Calvinist position that Jesus died for a predetermined, limited number of persons rather than the whole world as nonessential. The reasoning for that conclusion, of course, is that Akin opposes evolution and affirms Calvinism.



However, it seems extremely odd that a particular viewpoint on a debated scientific matter would make the essentials list while a doctrinal position on the offer of salvation would not.

Where Southern Baptist leaders draw lines these days matters little to me. I’ve been on the outside of their efforts at exclusion for a long time and prefer life out here. But my interest lies in the ways in which dividing lines are drawn with markers of so-called essential doctrine.

One criticism of the moderate Baptist movement, sometimes from within and often from without, is an uneasiness with spelling out a list of essentials that participants are asked to affirm. Charges are made that

moderates are wishy-washy on doctrinal and moral issues or too willing to accommodate any and all beliefs.

However, it is the heavy-handed use of an ever-changing list of “essentials” by some Baptists that makes other Baptists shy away from even the appearance of imposing their beliefs on another. And much of it has to do with a historic Baptist understanding that no one Baptist’s interpretation of scripture should be forced upon another.

Yet even some moderate Baptists, displeased with or dismissed by the narrow doctrinal exclusion of Southern Baptists, feel the need for some clear, even if very limited, parameters. Others feel such fence-building should be left to local congregations — out of respect for church autonomy — while denominational groups simply coordinate the mission and ministry opportunities of these diverse congregations.

From a practical standpoint, it is hard to rally around the “essentials” when essentially everyone has a different set. Yet it is possible to rally around shared commitments — to missions, disaster relief, religious liberty, etc. — despite holding different lists of beliefs.

Someone asked about my own list of essentials. My surprise was how little desire could be mustered for producing one. It has nothing to do with my lack of belief in Christian doctrine, but my keen awareness that my list carries little weight with others.

It is one thing to sit down with a group of fellow believers and discover what we hold in common. It is another for a select few to create a list of beliefs deemed essential — and start excluding everyone who can’t sign on the dotted line.

Of course, it’s even more challenging when those calling for allegiance to their “essentials” keep changing the list.

My resistance to producing or affirming a list of essential beliefs is not because doctrine is considered unimportant — but because such efforts in my recent memory have been used more as wedges than unifiers. And, for me, the essentials seem to get fewer and firmer as I get older. **BT**

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'STREET QUESTIONS ABOUT BAPTISTS'

Editor's note: This is the 12th and final article in a series titled "Street Questions about Baptists," in celebration of 400 years of the Baptist movement.

'Where did Baptists get their name?'

Recently I asked a group of college students if baptism was important. One of them replied, "No, it is a meaningless ritual and we should do away with it."

Of course, I know his words were meant to shock. He was looking for a reaction from his professor.

Still, his response was startling and raised a host of disturbing questions. For one, if the younger generation views baptism as trivial, then we who identify ourselves as the "Baptists" are in trouble. Furthermore, his question pressed me to study Baptist identity in a new light.

How did we come to value baptism so much that it became our name?

A century before our Baptist story began, a group of young men in Switzerland risked their lives to gather a New Testament church marked by adult believer's baptism. In January 1527 a large crowd followed a condemned man named Felix Manz through the streets of Zurich to the edge of the River Limmat.

In an act of poetic justice, the town council had sentenced Manz to be drowned because he refused to stop baptizing those who confessed Christ. As Manz marched to his execution, he proclaimed to all within hearing that believer's baptism was the true Christian baptism.

His executioners placed him in a boat, took him to a fisherman's hut in the middle of the river, and bound him hand and foot. There they dropped Felix Manz into the cold dark waters of the river.

Anyone who dared embrace Manz's "Anabaptist" beliefs (as they came to be called) met a similar fate. Both Catholics and Protestants hounded Anabaptists across the European continent with an unrestrained viciousness. Anabaptists suffered and died because they insisted that a church founded on the New Testament pattern required believer's baptism.

In the next century, another group of Christians — called the Baptists — would

arrive at a similar conclusion.

In 1608 a small group of Puritan separatists — weary of persecution and harassment by the Church of England — fled to Holland seeking religious freedom. A Cambridge-educated minister named John Smyth and a prominent layman named Thomas Helwys led the small band to Amsterdam.

Smyth zealously defended his decision to "separate" from the Church of England and wrote passionate appeals urging his friends at home to be faithful to the teachings of the New Testament. Smyth was obsessed with ridding the church of corruption and longed for a pure fellowship of believers.

He came to the conclusion that the Church of England was not a "true" church because it followed practices not supported by scripture. In order for the church to be pure, argued Smyth, it had to conform to the New Testament pattern in every way.

For example, he and other reformers believed that church members should choose their own leadership and style of worship. The Church of England insisted that all churches in the realm should submit to the authority of the Archbishop of Canterbury and conduct services according to the patterns outlined in *The Book of Common Prayer*.



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Smyth believed this hindered the work of the Holy Spirit. Churches must follow scripture to the letter and sift out all the human inventions that perverted the gospel of Christ.

Church membership also troubled Smyth. The church could not be pure, in his thinking, unless all of its members had confessed Christ as Lord. In the Anglican pattern, ministers of the Church of England baptized the children born in each parish.

Hence, all citizens were Christians. All participated in communion and confession, and any could seek a position of church leadership.

The Puritans felt that church membership should be extended only to those who could offer a testimony of conversion. How could the church function as the body of Christ if one could not claim to be "in Christ"?

After studying the scriptures, Smyth became convinced that baptism should be administered after a confession of faith. In 1609 Smyth baptized himself, Helwys and about 40 other members of their congregation. Smyth asserted that the church must be "rightly constituted" with the proper form of baptism in order to guarantee its purity.

Ever the zealous seeker, Smyth immediately began to wrestle with questions of authority and became insecure about his "self-baptism." As a result, Smyth and Helwys parted company.

Smyth applied to the Dutch Anabaptists for membership, and Helwys took a small group of followers back to England. There, they established the first Baptist church on English soil in a village near London.

Thomas Helwys' congregation, like

other early Baptist churches, did not immediately adopt the Baptist label. Instead, they preferred being called “the Brethren,” “the Brethren of the Baptized Way,” “Churches of Christ,” or the “Baptized Churches.”

The name “Baptist” originated as a nickname to ridicule Baptist beliefs. One prominent opponent named Daniel Featley mocked the practice of immersion in printed tracts and scoffed at those believers who had been “plung’d head over ears.”

Because the name “Baptist” emerged in a spirit of contempt, these churches were reluctant to accept it. Other enemies described Baptists as Anabaptists, a name Baptist leaders vehemently rejected.

An unfortunate incident in the city of Münster in 1534-35 had so tarnished the name “Anabaptist” that it had become a synonym for anarchists. Frequently Baptist pamphlets and confessions protested that they were “falsely called Anabaptists.”

For example, the *First London Confession* of 1644 claimed it was “a confession of faith of seven congregations or churches of Christ in London, which are commonly, but unjustly called Anabaptists.” Over time the baptized churches embraced the name Baptist, although they continued to protest the Anabaptist label well into the 18th century.

The 17th century Baptists’ obsession with baptism cannot be understood apart from the quest to establish a church rooted in scripture. My friend Doug Weaver rightly describes the Baptist pilgrimage as the search for a New Testament church.

The fact that Smyth and Helwys were Christians before they submitted to baptism as adults indicates their concern for ecclesiology. Both had received baptism as infants along with the majority of their fellow church members. Even though they clearly affirmed the necessity of individual, personal conversion, they understood confession as the beginning of the journey toward baptism and church membership.

Smyth described the church as “a company of the faithful; baptized after confession of sin and of faith, endowed with the power of Christ.” Interestingly, in *The Confession of 1660*, the lengthiest discussion of baptism can be found in the article on the church.

There it states *that the right and only way, of gathering Churches, (according to Christ’s appointment, Mat. 28. 19, 20.) is first to teach, or preach the Gospel, Mark 16. 16. to the Sons and Daughters of men; and then to Baptize (that is in English to Dip) in the name of the Father, Son, and holy Spirit, or in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ; such only of them, as profess repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, Acts. 2. 38. Acts 8. 12. Acts 18. 8*

A profession of faith led to baptism. Baptism produced a pure church.

Contemporary rhetoric about baptism often obscures or ignores the relationship between baptism and the church.

Many ministers encourage new believers to be baptized as a public confession of their faith and perhaps exaggerate the act as a “personal” ritual. However, we need to help congregations understand that baptism serves as the foundation of a believer’s church.

In her study of Baptist baptismal theology, Sheila Klopfer concluded that “Baptism was not a monologue; it was a dialogue between Jesus Christ and the willing disciple ... [Baptism] belonged to Jesus and was not the believer’s own act in isolation, which reflected the importance of baptism as a relational act.”

By grace through faith, baptism binds us to Christ and knits us to one another as the church. Perhaps we should return once more to the riverbanks and stand as witnesses together. Maybe we should receive new believers into the warmth of our arms as they come out of the water as a tangible reminder that “by one spirit we were all baptized into one body.” **BT**

“Both Catholics and Protestants hounded Anabaptists across the European continent with an unrestrained viciousness. Anabaptists suffered and died because they insisted that a church founded on the New Testament pattern required believer’s baptism.”

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Quotation

“ remarks ”

“...We gather in the hope that one day such a service will not even be newsworthy because we have overcome issues of racism, sexism, classism and all other -isms that separate us from one another and God.”

—Pastor Mark Kelly Tyler of Mother Bethel AME Church in Philadelphia on the first joint worship service with predominately white St. George’s United Methodist Church in more than 200 years when his African-American congregation was formed due to racial tension (RNS)

“[S]ome claim that the best way to protect the freedom of religion is to implement so-called anti-defamation policies that would restrict freedom of expression and the freedom of religion. I strongly disagree ... The protection of speech about religion is particularly important since persons of different faiths will inevitably hold divergent views on religious questions. These differences should be met with tolerance, not with the suppression of discourse.”

—Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on international efforts to adopt policies outlawing the defamation of religions (BP)

“I would like it understood that this committee’s recommendation will allow nobody to take this resolution and say this convention has in any way approved the consumption of alcoholic beverages.”

—Judge Paul Pressler of Houston on a Southern Baptists of Texas Convention resolution on the sufficiency of Scripture that affirms “nothing as sin unless it is forbidden explicitly or implicitly” in the Bible, which he amended to state that “the consumption of alcoholic beverages is intrinsically wrong” (BP)

“The work that we need to do, we atheists, humanists and non-believers, is to build a better world and not try to tear down those with whom we disagree. When our goal is erasing religion, rather than embracing human beings, we all lose.”

—Greg M. Epstein, the Humanist chaplain at Harvard University (RNS)

“The movement, like the original Baptist movement, is a marginalized, prophetic attempt to form communities true to the New Testament in an era of radical change.”

—William Loyd Allen, professor of church history and spiritual formation at Mercer University’s McAfee School of Theology, on the Emerging Church (ABP)

“They’ve just proven that Jefferson and Madison got it right. It’s a reminder of the difference between religion that’s state-sponsored and religion that is vital, voluntary and robust.”

—Charles Haynes of the First Amendment Center on fans in Ft. Oglethorpe, Ga., who responded to a ban on cheerleaders holding overtly Christian banners on the field during football games by wearing faith-affirming T-shirts and holding signs in the stands (New York Times)

“I benefited from loving, godly people who loved my family unconditionally and reflected what Scripture taught about living out one’s faith. But I also watched my father navigate the church’s

shark-infested waters, which were occasionally filled with a spiritually high-minded deacon or another sanctified busybody who was always ready to extract pounds of flesh from the preacher.

—David Sanders, a Little Rock columnist and educational television producer/host, in a commentary on race and the church (ABP)

“There’s a generation coming behind me in their 20s and 30s that are saying, ‘We need to forfeit the American dream for the nations.’ That is challenging me to the core. I think when a generation is coming along saying, ‘We’re willing to forgo nicer cars, we’re willing to live in lesser neighborhoods,’ I’ve never been challenged that way in my life.”

—Southern Baptist Convention president Johnny Hunt, pastor of First Baptist Church of Woodstock, Ga. (BP)

In the news, 25 years ago . . .

Responding to a *Texas Monthly* article tying him and others leading the Southern Baptist Convention takeover to the actions of late fundamentalist pastor Frank Norris, Dallas First Baptist pastor W.A. Criswell responded: “There is nothing in any of this that I see as Norrisism. Nothing, absolutely nothing. What these men are doing is trying to keep our denomination conservative, that’s all... A ‘conservative’ is a Bible-believing man like me.”

—SBC Today December 1984

Historic church makes history again

Five questions for Jeffrey Haggray

By John Pierce

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Pastor Jeffrey Haggray took to the historic pulpit of the First Baptist Church in the City of Washington on Nov. 15 as the first African-American to guide the church established more than two centuries ago.

Haggray, 46, has served as executive director/minister of the District of Columbia



Jeffrey Haggray

Baptist Convention since 2001. A native of Savannah, Ga., he is a graduate of the University of Virginia, Yale University Divinity School and Wesley Theological Seminary.

His wife, Shelby, is also a minister who serves as associate dean for community life at Wesley Seminary. They have three children.

Haggray took time from his busy transition to answer these five questions from *Baptists Today* editor John Pierce.

BT: In just a couple of sentences, please describe the congregation as you see it.

JH: First Baptist is a warm and sincere congregation that is both profoundly aware and proud of its rich Baptist legacy, and eager to embrace the emerging diversity and complexity that are to be found in contemporary Washington. First Baptist is a youthful-looking, 207-year-old congregation that intends to keep current as a community that is forward looking while remaining faithful to its Christian heritage.

BT: What from your eight years as executive director/minister at D.C. Baptist Convention will be of benefit to you in this pastorate?

JH: Apart from being the first church of the D.C. Baptist Convention, First Baptist is in many respects a microcosm of the denominational, ideological and demographic diversity within DCBC.



More than two centuries since its founding, the First Baptist Church of Washington, D.C., has called Jeffrey Haggray as pastor. He is the first African-American pastor to lead the historic congregation, reaching a diverse population in the nation's capital.

First Baptist members represent all regions of North America, and many internationals are part of the congregation. Members also represent diverse viewpoints as Baptists who profess faith in Jesus Christ and who cherish soul liberty.

First Baptists are a missional people who see the Metropolitan Washington Region as their mission field, and who passionately want to work with diverse individuals, congregations, Baptist bodies and other communions to fulfill the Great Commission. Every lesson I have learned from my time with DCBC will serve me well at First Baptist.

BT: What ministries in or through the church excite you most?

JH: First Baptist has a consistent track record of reaching out to the young adults who live in the community surrounding the church. Through a combination of small groups, study, recreation and mission endeavors, First Baptist consciously seeks to provide a community of faith that is home away from home for these young adults. I am excited about becoming a part of that outreach.

Also, First Baptist is passionate about ministry to small children. What a concept!

The church has a child development

center, and a weekly program on Sundays that seeks to disciple children. As parents of three children, Shelby and I are excited to become part of a church that is committed to families with small children.

BT: What ministry challenges/opportunities come from being in the nation's capital?

JH: In the nation's capital, the challenges are usually synonymous with the opportunities. Millions of people pass through Washington, D.C., on a weekly basis, some for a day or a few days, some for a few months, and others to settle permanently.

The church's mission is to provide a caring and enduring faith community for those who come to stay, and to be a witnessing and worshipping community for those who are passing through.

Also, the District of Columbia is both a local community and the Federal City. It would be a mistake to be so fixated on Capitol Hill, the White House and the Judiciary that one overlooks the spiritual and moral needs of local residents who do not always place national politics at the top of their agenda.

Conversely, it would be shortsighted to neglect to proclaim Good News and the year of the Lord to the powers that be while also modeling a heart of love and welcome.

Folks inside Washington are more in touch with their spiritual and moral needs, and their vulnerabilities, than the "inside the beltway" accusations give them credit for. A church — that fulfills the Great Commission and the Great Commandment, and that extends the invitation to discipleship, and welcomes all who respond — will succeed in this city.

BT: What hopes do you have for this congregation?

JH: My hope is that First Baptist will continue to resemble God's beloved community more and more, wherein the Good News is boldly preached, where worship is offered in a spirit of excellence and enthusiasm is typical, where welcome and hospitality to all people is practiced, and where it perceives its mission to be both local and global seven days a week. **BT**

Former SBC leader says NAMB is obsolete

By Bob Allen
Associated Baptist Press

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. — An elder statesman who led three Southern Baptist Convention entities for a total of 40 years says the denomination's North American Mission Board is an obsolete bureaucracy that will likely have a diminished role or disappear altogether in the 21st century.

Duke McCall, 95, says in a recently published essay that leadership missteps before 2006 add to NAMB's vulnerability as a new generation of SBC leaders emerges in the first quarter of the 21st century. On the other hand, McCall says, NAMB's successes have helped boost the growth of Baptist state conventions across the nation.

"These state conventions are a better alternative for domestic missions than a central organization," McCall writes. "This has been obvious for at least 50 years in that most of the Cooperative Program funds sent to Atlanta for the North American Mission Board have actually been spent by the state conventions through various kinds of 'partnership' programs."

McCall, in a postscript chapter in

Against the Wind: The Moderate Voice in Baptist Life by Carl Kell, called the North American Mission Board, established in 1997 in a merger of three SBC agencies, a "wasteful funding mechanism" that "has served as a pressure device to keep state conventions in line with Southern Baptist Convention programs." "Thus the North American Mission Board continues to appeal to SBC leaders despite its clear obsolescence," McCall says.



Duke McCall

Kell said McCall originally submitted the essay before discussions that led to appointment in June of an 18-member task force to study how Southern Baptists can work "more faithfully and effectively together in serving Christ through the Great Commission." Meetings of the task force, appointed by SBC president Johnny Hunt, are not open to the press, but comments by individual members suggest looking at the role of NAMB is part of their thinking.

According to the *Biblical Recorder*,

Danny Akin, a task force member and president of Southeastern Seminary, has said that NAMB "is broke, and has been broke for a long time." Pastors quoted in a task force listening session in North Carolina described Southern Baptists' church-planting method as "stupid" and said it involved "massive replication."

McCall says a few changes in the Cooperative Program — the SBC's unified giving mechanism — would improve efficiency and greatly strengthen the Baptist state conventions. "Like the nation's budget, it has been the victim of political changes until it reflects political power more than fiscal rationality or denominational strategy," he says.

McCall says it may be about 2015 before a revision of SBC strategy can take place — after at least three "new breed" SBC presidents have served their terms and made appointments to the convention's committee on boards. Any effort before that, he says, would "result in little change, because the mindset at the end of the last century will still be in office." He suggests a target date for "a renewal of the Cooperative Program" for its centennial in 2025. **BT**

Mission board 'essential', Baptist state execs say

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — Alabama Baptists want to reach North America and the world for Christ, said Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM). And through the Acts 1:8 strategy adopted by both the International Mission Board (IMB) and the North American Mission Board (NAMB) about eight years ago, "we are doing that."

But the ability to continue strong evangelism efforts in all levels of this strategy — Jerusalem (local area), Judea (state), Samaria (North America) and "the ends of the earth" (international) — depends on the existence of NAMB, he said.

Recent talks among Southern Baptists have led to discussions and informal proposals of dissolving the two mission boards and combining all missions efforts into one global

mission board. But Lance and others like Georgia Baptist Convention (GBC) Executive Director Bob White, believe NAMB is "absolutely essential" to Southern Baptists and reaching North America for Christ.

Lance said that NAMB is involved in numerous ministries including church planting, evangelism strategies, disaster relief and missions education.

"It's a total missional effort," he said. "And those ministries only touch the surface of what really the North American Mission Board seeks to do, much of which is under the radar."

White told the GBC executive committee in September: "There is no agency in the SBC (Southern Baptist Convention) that

works like NAMB. In cooperative agreements with 42 state Baptist conventions, NAMB works to support the effort of missionaries in language missions, resort missions and various other ministries that reach our nation for Jesus Christ. Those joint efforts are unique to NAMB."

Lance said if NAMB no longer existed, something like it would have to be reinvented. "You'd have to start all over. The states would have to do it rather than there being a national strategy." Both Lance and White noted affirmation from executive directors from smaller and newer state conventions for what larger ones like Alabama and Georgia are doing through their support of the Cooperative Program and in partnership with NAMB. **BT**



Rick Lance

— Joe Westbury of the Georgia Baptist Christian Index contributed to this story through Baptist Press.

O'Hair: the atheist who just won't die

By Robert Marus and Ken Camp
Associated Baptist Press

WASHINGTON — Thanks to the Internet, some gullible American Christians can engage in one of their favorite hobbies — digging up the metaphorical corpse of Madalyn Murray O'Hair and rhetorically flogging it — more easily than ever before.

Even though the famous atheist's body was discovered in 1998 and positively identified in Texas — and even though she apparently has been dead since she disappeared in 1995 — patently false rumors about her alleged anti-Christian campaigns continue to spread. Credulous Christians who once forwarded these kinds of rumors in mimeographed chain letters or spread them on talk radio now can broadcast them around the world with the mere click of a mouse.

And, of course, O'Hair is not alone in the annals of perceived enemies of Christ about whom some Christians will spread the most ridiculous stories, not bothering to do the merest hint of fact-checking on them. From the old Procter & Gamble Satanism libel to tales about President Obama's faith and citizenship, Internet-fueled rumors seem to run rampant.

But why would Christians who should hold the highest standards of truth-telling be so eager to spread such rumors and even downright libels?

"Their gullibility seems to follow the culture's levels and channels of gullibility," said Bill Tillman, Christian-ethics professor at Hardin-Simmons University's Logsdon Seminary. "That similarity should give Christians pause to think: If I am no different than the surrounding culture on the treatment of e-mails and communication they carry, with what else am I no different?"

Historically, O'Hair is the hands-down favorite target of the Christian rumor mill. Some tales tied to her name have been in circulation for more than a quarter century. The most pervasive and indestructible O'Hair rumor credits her for a campaign to ban religious broadcasting.

It links her to a petition to the Federal Communications Commission — a peti-

tion, the e-mails claim, that if approved would remove all Sunday worship services from radio and television. O'Hair typically is identified in the e-mail as the atheist "whose effort successfully eliminated the use of the Bible reading and prayer from public schools 15 years ago." Some versions of the e-mail link the petition to an effort to remove religiously themed television shows, specifically mentioning *Touched by an Angel*.

There indeed once was a petition about religious broadcasting filed with the FCC, but that's the extent of the truth in this rumor.

The petition, called RM 2493, was filed nearly 35 years ago — but not by O'Hair, and not to eliminate religious broadcasting.

According to Snopes.com, a website that debunks urban legends, e-mail rumors and other myths, Jeremy Lansman and Lorenzo Milam asked the FCC to prevent religious organizations from obtaining licenses to operate radio and TV channels reserved for education.

The petition was not intended to ban all religious broadcasting, but rather to prevent religious organizations that operate universities and schools from receiving FCC licenses for broadcast frequencies reserved for educational use. The FCC turned down the petition in August 1975. And O'Hair never had anything to do with such a petition.

There are other problems with the latest rumor. O'Hair's famous court case — in 1964, not 15 years ago — didn't eliminate Bible reading and prayer from public schools, but rather led to the Supreme Court decision that said government-sanctioned school prayer and school-led, devotional Bible study are unconstitutional.

Moreover, the FCC would not have the authority to ban religious broadcasting, since such a rule would blatantly violate the First Amendment's religion clauses and would be overturned by the Supreme Court. But the rumor just won't die.

According to Snopes, the FCC has

received at least 30 million letters, faxes or e-mails expressing opposition to this petition since 1974. The only new element in this later incarnation is the mention of *Touched by an Angel* — a show that's been off the air for six years.

But O'Hair's posthumous powers should not be a surprise. Labeled by *Life* magazine in 1964 as "the most hated woman in America," O'Hair is considered enough of an enemy by many Christians that they are willing to believe just about anything about her. The advent of the Internet only made the rumors easier to spread and harder to correct.

And rumors become more powerful when they tap into the hostility and distrust toward government that is widespread among conservative Christians. It's easier to believe a rumor that fits one's larger political paradigm.

Ethicist Tillman said that gullibility may grow out of fear and anxiety — that directly relates to what people believe.

"I suggest to my students, 'Tell me something about your fears, and I will tell you something of your theology,'" Tillman said. "Dealing with our fears — an action usually dismissed or ignored — may be one of the keys to understanding just which e-mails we forward and those we don't." **BT**

—Robert Marus is Washington bureau chief for *Associated Baptist Press*, and Ken Camp is managing editor of the *Texas Baptist Standard*.



Madalyn Murray O'Hair

Read about it in
Baptists Today

then
discuss
it at



BaptistLife.com

Open letter, open response to questions about being Baptist

EDITOR'S NOTE: The name of the person who submitted this open letter is being withheld to avoid identification of the church. While no one Baptist speaks for another — much less for a Baptist organization or movement — Bill Hardee, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Griffin, Ga., was asked to give his perspective on the issues raised in this open letter. Also, the commentary on Baptists and baptism by Curtis Freedom (on page 17) speaks to a specific point in question.

An open letter

Dear editor:

I use this open forum as I know a number of other Baptists who feel as I do. We earnestly desire to know where some of you are trying to take our Baptist church.

Are we to still be Baptist, or are we to become only a church taking advantage of the Baptist name but with none of the historical Baptist distinctives that made us so different? Why? Have the Baptists been wrong for 400 years now?

How did you discover our mistakes? Can we be Baptist without baptism? Do we not deserve some explanation?

Here are only a few of my reasons for asking these questions: My church, a Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) church never very concerned about the Baptist distinctives such as immersion baptism of believers only, now is accepting as members some never baptized at all and anyone only baptized as an infant.

Is getting names on the church rolls the true motive? Are numbers that important? Baptist without baptism?

In my church there is no recognition that believer's baptism by immersion is a basic and important aspect of demonstrating one's obedience to and acceptance of Christ and his commands. The pastor says he will baptize by immersion those making professions of faith, but will accept anyone saying they are already members of other churches regardless of baptism or mode of baptism.

He does say that he feels those

being baptized as infants should have been "confirmed." How can one be Baptist without baptism?

Further, my church is now trying to observe Advent and Lent, and lights candles to signify the presence of the Holy Spirit. The program for the 2009 CBF General Assembly included a workshop on Lent; thus I assume it must be CBF recommended.

I am not a total stranger to Baptist history and have never discovered a record or seen any evidence that in the previous 400 years of our history that Advent, Lent nor lighting candles to signify the presence of the Holy Spirit was a part of Baptist worship. Am I wrong? If so, where is there such a record?

Is there a biblical reference? If not, what is the basis for the practice? Did I miss a meeting or fail to read my mail or Baptist papers when these items were presented? Do I even have a choice, or must I just "do them"?

I realize full well that as a pre-baby-boomer, I am an old Baptist still on the Baptist pew and rolls but not of much long-term value. With deep regret and almost unbelief I have been told that believer's baptism by immersion is not taught as a Baptist distinctive in at least one Baptist school of theology; that baptism is not really an important part of a Baptist church, and certainly not the mode of baptism, and this in a church with Baptist in its name.

Can this be the future of this old denomination that I have held so closely for so long, or is there no future? Did those Baptist martyrs die for this? Was it for no good reason that those 50-odd

Baptists were jailed, beaten and abused in Virginia because they stood for the ideas and beliefs of a true Baptist?

Was Obadiah Holmes' beating useless? Were Adoniram and Ann Judson baptized to become Baptist in vain?

My heart is heavy. My denomination, in which I was baptized by immersion in July 1941, now seems to be telling me: "It was not so," you really don't have to "believe and be baptized," a church is not really made up of baptized believers as I thought it was. I failed since I did not celebrate Advent, Lent or light candles to remind me that I was in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

I am greatly concerned that the Baptist name seems to stand for very little now, only a way to attract a few but is really meaningless. I agonize more though over the fact that those in the church, in the future, will not have what I have had; pride in our distinctive history and glory in the examples of the achievements of those like Helwys, Ketch, Williams, Backus, Stearns, Marshall (both Daniel and Martha), Leland, Truett, Hobbs and many more.

I know where I stand and face my future with confidence, but I mourn for those following who apparently will not have the experiences that I have had and may not know the joy of that old-time religion. What is a Baptist without baptism? Will someone please tell me?

These are my "Ninety-five Theses." I nail them on my church door, pleading for your response. I, too, can do no other.

(Name withheld by editor at request of writer)

An open response

By William L. Hardee

Dear Concerned Baptist:

I empathize with your anguish over changing times and the adoption of new practices among Baptists. As a pastor in my mid-50s who has lived through revolutionary changes in church, let me offer to you the answers I have found in my own journey of faith, particularly since those answers coincide with the practices of your own church.

First, let us acknowledge the important differences between Baptist *principles* and Baptist *practices*. Principles are enduring because they are based upon our theology of God and man. Practices may change and do change as needs arise.

It is appealing to imagine that all Baptist practices arise from the Bible. However, most of our practices arise from more practical considerations. For example, Sunday school is not found in the Bible nor are indoor pools for baptism.

In my own studies of Baptist history I discovered a Baptist association that withdrew fellowship from a church for installing an indoor baptistery. Now the practice is pervasive. Also, while the Bible may tell us of qualifications for deacons, nowhere does it tell us what they do. Each church determines what it means to be a deacon in its context.

Second, let us also acknowledge that baptism is not a Baptist-only tradition. Mainline Christianity in its denominational varieties has always affirmed baptism as a clear command of Christ. What is distinctive and one of our Baptist principles is *believer's baptism*. John Smyth and Thomas Helwys reacted against the traditions that baptized infants, reasoning that baptism was an outward sign of a commitment to Christ.

In very important ways it signifies the beginning of a Christian journey toward maturity. It is a public confession of a commitment to Christ. Yet it is surprising to most Baptists to discover that the first Baptists were not immersed, but rather were baptized by having water poured over their heads. John Smyth actually baptized himself in that manner. Immersion, however, did become the common *practice* after only a few decades.

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) churches I am aware of practice believer's baptism by immersion. Only in unusual circumstances — such as a frail

resident in a nursing home — might a minister consider any other mode.

As I reflected on your letter, the real concern seems to be accepting believers from other denominations who have not been baptized by immersion as believers.

So what has changed in the intervening years? In your generation, people rarely changed denominations; to do so was almost an act of treason in some settings. Today, it is not unusual for 50 percent of new members in a traditional Baptist church to come from other denominations. We live in a post-denominational age; that is, people join a church based upon how good a fit the church is in terms of nurturing their faith and providing meaningful friendships — not because of its denominational affiliation.

This has led many ministers to raise important questions regarding the basis of a requirement of re-baptism (by immersion). The most troubling question to me is: If baptism is biblically related to one's initial faith commitment, what value is there in requiring re-baptism years later — especially when Christian maturity is greatly evidenced?

Other questions are also perplexing. If the form of baptism (immersion) is so important, why isn't the form of the Lord's Supper (using real wine and unleavened bread) important? If a believer coming from another faith tradition is satisfied with his or her baptism, isn't there some arrogance in us making re-baptism by immersion a requirement simply for membership in a Baptist church? After all, baptism does not save us; it is a symbol of spiritual rebirth.

Certainly, prospective members whose baptism came after making a commitment to Christ (even if not by immersion) is more palatable to our sensibilities. However, there is always a possible moment of growth when we listen to those who come from other traditions. One member, who came from a Presbyterian church more than 40 years ago and was re-baptized, is our church's most ardent proponent of Baptist heritage. Yet to this day she sees her re-baptism as adding nothing to her faith and as a blatant act of disrespect to her former tradition.

Another member was baptized as a baby and confirmed in the Catholic Church. When

he was taking a class leading up to church membership, he expressed gratitude that he was not required to be re-baptized. His comment was that God had used his parent's faith and the confirmation process to draw him to Christ. In his words, re-baptism would feel like denying the rich spiritual experiences that enabled him to be the person of faith he has become.

My task as a minister is to facilitate people's spiritual journey, not to ask them to negate the path God has used to bring them to faith. As Baptists, it seems fair to ask people to yield to our requirements if they are to be one of us. But as Christians, we may judge our requirements to be stumbling blocks.

Sometimes you have to choose whether you will be Baptist in practice or Christian in principle. We can't always be Baptist and Christian; sometimes we must choose. Baptist principles don't change; Baptist practices may.

Even when we accept a believer from another denomination, we do not change our own tradition of baptizing by immersion those who come to faith in our congregation. To become Baptist means that new members respect the Baptist principle that baptism is for believers. Regardless of their own faith tradition that has nurtured them, they have now made a decision to live within the Baptist vision.

It is interesting to note that this practice of accepting believers without requiring re-baptism has numerous precedents in Baptist history. G. Todd Wilson has written an excellent essay in *Baptism and the Lord's Supper*, edited by Walter B. Shurden. He writes that "*open church membership* has existed from our earliest beginnings."

The most prominent early advocate was John Bunyan who in 1673 warned of the peril of making an idol of God's ordinance of water baptism. In the 18th century, Robert Robinson of Cambridge vigorously argued that an error in the mode of baptism should not prevent membership or communion in the Baptist church.

Wilson concludes his paragraph by noting that accepting believers without re-baptism is in fact "the accepted practice of many British churches where our denomination originated."

The church was at its best in Acts 15. Recorded there is the remarkable story of church leaders changing their practices to reach people. Church leaders met in Jerusalem to assess Peter's encounter with Cornelius and



Bill Hardee

Paul's preaching to the Gentiles.

The traditionalists mounted their best case that Gentiles had to conform to the Word of God (the Torah) with all its prescriptions, laws and even the initiatory rite of circumcision to be Christians. In what is arguably the most radical text in the entire Bible, James and the leaders of the council in Jerusalem set the gospel free. They erased the binding authority of the Torah (Genesis through Deuteronomy). They said that God had done such a radical, new thing in Jesus that *it seems good to us and to the Holy Spirit* not to lay the burden of the Law on Gentiles.

The New Testament church could be self-critical about its own *practices* and enlarge its own *principles* to cover new situations. New Testament Christians believed that being followers of Christ compelled them to be open to new ways of looking at things if it was true to the spirit of the gospel, as well as the larger reality that God's Spirit was leading them.

The simple answer to celebrating Lent, Advent and other sacred moments in the church year is that they are meaningful. Historically, Baptists have tended to react against more fixed forms of worship found in the Episcopal, Presbyterian, Methodist and Catholic traditions. Sometimes, our resistance to respecting other traditions and listening to their testimony has resulted in us being

impoverished. This is certainly true with our tendency to ignore or diminish the liturgical calendar.

The word liturgical simply means worship. The calendar is an overview of significant moments in the life of the early church — moments that we are invited to relive and draw inspiration from as we remember those pivotal moments that continue to enrich our lives.

Advent reminds us that we spend much of our lives in waiting. And the experience of Christmas is much deeper when we rehearse the story of the prophets, Zachariah, Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds and draw their longings and aspirations into our own lives.

Likewise, why would we want to dismiss Lent when its goal is to teach us how powerful the flesh is; to remind us that even the best of Jesus' followers failed him; and, to prepare our hearts to rejoice that the power of death has been broken by Christ's resurrection?

And surely we must not forget Pentecost — the birthday of the church. It is a time when we are reminded that we are successful only when we are enlivened by the Holy Spirit. The church calendar collects our common spiritual ancestry and helps us to flow from one season of faith to another rather than to live randomly, disjointed with no larger purpose than what is happening at any moment in our lives.

What could be more biblical than taking the rich story of the gospel and reliving it every calendar year under the rich themes of joy, repentance, empowerment and growth?

Protestant principles remind us that the church is always in need of reform. Baptist principles are best understood as ways of setting people free: a free conscience to choose God; a free church to decide its own path; a free state unencumbered by religious wrangling; a free body of believers who can each hear God and testify to his words; and, a free act of commitment (baptism) whereby one says *yes* to God in his/her unique journey with Christ.

Part of what these principles hold to be dear is that each believer is free to respond to God as God meets him/her and guides him/her. The authenticity of one's baptism is an issue between a believer and God. I do not feel the need to judge someone else's experience. I am much more interested in the fruit a life produces.

Judging from the parable of the sheep and goats, God seems to be pretty interested in that too. We celebrate Baptist *principles*; we evaluate Baptist *practices* as to their value to God and his children.

—William L. (Bill) Hardee is pastor of the First Baptist Church of Griffin, Ga., and a former college professor.

Physicians give chaplains a clean bill of health

By Omar Sacirbey
Religion News Service

Science and faith may often clash, but a new survey suggests that most American doctors believe religion and spirituality can help patients.

Published Oct. 26 in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*, the survey found that 90 percent of physicians are satisfied with spiritual services provided by hospital chaplains to their patients.

While most doctors in the survey acknowledged that religion and spirituality help patients cope with illness, the study found that at least one-third of U.S. hospitals do not have chaplains, and many of those that do have chaplains don't have enough to address all patient needs.

Consequently, doctors play a crucial

role in ensuring that patients have access to chaplains, the study said. But most doctors have little training in connecting chaplains to patients, and instead rely on their own spiritual values and experiences.

About 5 percent of referrals connecting patients with chaplains come from physicians, while the rest come from nurses or patient family members, said George Fitchett, a chaplain at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago, and the study's lead author.

"Things are changing a little," said Fitchett. "There's a lot of education to help physicians become better at making referrals, but it's still not systematized."

Fitchett said an ideal ratio of chaplains to patients is hard to pinpoint, and depends on what type of patients a hospital treats. For example, hospitals specializing in cancer

patients or with emergency rooms have a greater need for chaplains than hospitals specializing in joint replacements or cosmetic surgery.

The survey also found that physicians in the Northeast and those with negative views of religion's effects on patients were less likely to be satisfied with chaplain services.

Those who were satisfied tended to be physicians who worked in teaching hospitals, practiced medical subspecialties, such as cardiology, oncology, or emergency medicine. Half of the physicians surveyed said it was appropriate for them to pray with patients if circumstances warranted.

Of the 1,102 physicians surveyed, 59 percent identified themselves as Christian, 16 percent Jewish, 14 percent other affiliations, and 10 percent reported having no religious affiliation. **BT**

guest commentary

Baptists and baptism at year 400

By Curtis W. Freeman

The Baptist movement began 400 years ago with the self-baptism of John Smyth, but the roots of immersion lie beyond that first gathered community whose mode was affusion (the pouring of water on one's head).

Edward Barber was probably the first to embrace believer baptism by immersion sometime in 1640. In his tract *A Small Treatise of Baptisme or Dipping*, written in 1641, Barber argued: "They only are to be dipped that are made disciples by teaching. Infants cannot be made disciples by teaching, therefore infants are not to be dipped."

Barber's *Treatise* was followed by at least 34 baptismal tracts between 1640 and 1645 that stirred the transatlantic controversy in Old and New England. The most famous was a 51-page booklet published in 1643, titled *A Confutation of Infants Baptisme*, by Thomas Lambe, a popular London Baptist pastor and soap-boiler.

Lambe declaimed that no one was a true member of "the visible Church according to the Gospel, unless they did manifest faith, and be in covenant with Abraham according to the Spirit and baptised into the same faith."

When Baptists began arguing for believer baptism by immersion, they were alone. But the 21st century ecclesial landscape looks quite different.

Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, the most widely-distributed and studied ecumenical document, states: "While the possibility that infant baptism was also practised in the apostolic age cannot be excluded, baptism upon personal profession of faith is the most clearly attested pattern in the New Testament documents."

Non-Baptist churches commonly practice believer baptism by immersion. Even the Catholic Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults recognizes adult believer baptism as the normal way for unbaptized persons to become Catholic Christians, and as the norm adult conversion baptism makes the exception of

infant baptism make sense.

Yet the persuasiveness of this witness is too seldom acknowledged. In many Baptist congregations, those who have been baptized as believers by immersion but not in a Baptist church are refused membership until they have been "properly" dunked in Baptist water.

Baptism as practiced by many Baptists has consequently ceased to be a biblical mandate and a sign of union with Jesus Christ and his universal body. Instead it has devolved into a denuded ritual of club membership.

Only lingering Landmarkism, which still clings to the empty assertion that the Baptists and only the Baptists are the true Church, can justify the refusal to admit into membership those who have been baptized by immersion upon their profession of faith in Jesus Christ but whose baptism happens to have been administered by a non-Baptist church.

Baptists today must look for marks of true Christian baptism that may not always be indicated by a sign out front with the word "Baptist" on it. We do well to attend to our original conviction — not that everyone must be immersed and become a Baptist, but that believer baptism is the most clearly warranted pattern of Christian initiation in the New Testament and that it is a disciple-making practice waiting to be embraced by the whole church.

Believer baptism deserves, and indeed demands, to be practiced by Baptists. This is a gift to the Church catholic. Yet faithfulness to the Baptist heritage also means that whenever Christian baptism is practiced according to the apostolic pattern, it must be recognized and received.

But there is one more lesson: Though all early Baptists argued for and practiced only believer baptism, some of them went further

by not excluding from their church fellowship those who had received infant baptism but had never submitted to re-baptism.

Among the so-called "open membership" Baptists were John Bunyan, John Thombes and Henry Jessey. Advocates of open membership were admittedly a distinct minority, but their voices were influential and their dissent was respected.

Daniel Turner, an 18th-century English Baptist minister, argued that by excluding any of God's children from the means of grace "we are guilty of invading the prerogative of Christ." Not surprisingly, he was the guiding influence behind the covenant for a gathered church in Oxford, which admitted into membership both Presbyterians and Baptists.

After noting the difference of sentiment on the baptismal views of the two groups, the church covenant pledged "to receive one another into the same affection and love" offering among its reasons "because the Lord Jesus receiving and owning them on both sides of the question, we think we ought to do so too."

Perhaps the time has come for Baptists today to ask in the same spirit whether or not Methodists, Catholics, Presbyterians and others who are genuinely committed disciples of Jesus Christ are true Christians and have been accepted by the grace of the Triune God into the one universal Church.

Can the infant baptism of such persons be recognized as a true baptism that has been joined with personal faith? And if the answer is "Yes!" then the question must be asked why a church that is limited to those who have been baptized as believers only by immersion only should remain smaller than that one true universal Church. If the Lord Jesus receives and owns them, can't the Baptists find a way to do the same? **BT**

—Curtis W. Freeman is research professor of theology and Baptist studies and director of the Baptist House of Studies at Duke University Divinity School.



Willow Meadows Baptist Church, Houston, Texas, seeks a **senior pastor**. Please send résumés to: rtsimmons@aol.com.

Living Faith Baptist Fellowship, a partner congregation of the Kentucky Baptist Fellowship and Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, is accepting résumés for **senior pastor**. Interested persons should send their résumés to: Barry Birdwhistell, 2825 Ring Rd., Elizabethtown, KY 42701. For more information, visit www.livingfaithbaptistfellowship.org or email livingfaithinfo@gmail.com.

First Baptist Church of Rockingham, N.C., a mid-sized moderate church aligned with the CBF and SBC, is prayerfully seeking an **associate pastor of children and youth**. We would prefer the candidate to have a master's degree from an accredited seminary or divinity school and at least 2 years of experience working with children and youth. Guided and supported by the children's council and youth council, this person would be responsible for the development and implementation of programs for children and youth, and would also provide pastoral care to children, youth and their families. The candidate should be energetic and enthusiastic with good communication skills. Salary would be based on experience and education. Submit résumé to: Harry Coble, Chairperson, Children and Youth Minister Search Committee, First Baptist Church, 201 N. Randolph St., Rockingham, NC 28379.

Immanuel Baptist Church has an immediate opening for an energetic **part-time youth minister**. The minister to youth, with the cooperation of church leaders, is responsible for giving creative and effective leadership in conducting a comprehensive program of activities and ministries for our 7th-12th grade youth. Please submit a cover letter and résumé to: Personnel Committee, Immanuel Baptist Church, 222 Belle Meade Blvd., Nashville, TN 37221, or Ckennycooper@juno.com, or (615) 297-2247 (fax).

First Baptist Church of Marietta, Ga. is seeking a **student minister** to work with youth grade 6 through college. Applicants should have experience growing a Christ-centered youth program, as well as coordinating events and programs with adult volunteers and other ministerial staff, in addition to effectively managing a departmental budget. We are looking for a person with a strong sense of mission to help our youth and young adults become active and caring persons in partnership with our community. Submit résumé to: studentminsearch@mariettafbc.org. For more information, view employment opportunities at www.mariettafbc.org.

First Baptist Church of Marietta, Ga., is seeking a **children's minister** to work with children pre-K through 5th grade. Applicants should have experience growing a Christ-centered children's program, as well as coordinating programs and events with adult volunteers and other ministerial staff, in addition to effectively managing a departmental budget. We are looking for a person with a strong sense of mission to help our children become active and caring persons in partnership with our community. Submit résumé to: childminsearch@mariettafbc.org. For more information, view employment opportunities at www.mariettafbc.org.

Morningside Baptist Church, Spartanburg, S.C., is seeking an **associate pastor to children**. Morningside is a congregation of 1,550+ members and has a ministerial team of six other ministers, and affirms women in ministry and worships in a traditional form. Appropriate college and seminary degrees are required. Candidates must have the ability to coordinate a comprehensive children's program. Send résumés to: Mike Hensley, Associate Pastor to Children Search Committee, Morningside Baptist Church, 897 S. Pine St., Spartanburg, S.C. 29302, or mikehensley@bellsouth.net.

The Tennessee CBF Coordinating Council is announcing a call for applications for the new position of **CBF field coordinator in Tennessee**. The woman or man who is selected for this exciting position would work jointly with TCBF and national CBF to coordinate all Cooperative Baptist Fellowship ministries for Tennessee. Information regarding the qualifications of the ideal candidate can be found at www.tncbf.org. Please submit your curriculum vitae or résumé to: Judy Fryer, P.O. Box 399, Murfreesboro, TN 37133-0399, and include a brief statement that outlines your personal history of support and involvement in the CBF movement.

The McAfee School of Theology at Mercer University invites applications and nominations for a tenure-track **faculty position in pastoral care and counseling**. The appointee will teach two or three courses each semester and one course in a January or summer term. Rank and salary will be based on experience and qualifications; competitive benefits package provided. Preference will be given to scholars who have demonstrated ability in teaching, publication, hold the M.Div. and the Ph.D. or equivalent from an accredited university/college, and are committed to preparing men and women for vocations in ministry. Experience in counseling, CPE supervision or congregational pastoral care experience will be an asset. The appointee must be willing to work in a collegial context and engage in interdisciplinary conversations, which assumes interaction with students outside of the classroom. Applications should include a letter of application, complete vitae and list of references attached to the brief online application found online at www.mercerjobs.com. The committee will consider all applications submitted by the deadline, but reserves the right to fill the position at any time or extend the search deadline if needed. The review process will begin Dec. 1, 2009. Applicants will be notified when the position is filled. AA/EOE/ADA

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2010 Formations Commentary

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LESSONS FOR: Sunday, Jan. 3-17, 2010

Written by Mark Nickens,
assistant professor of
church history at Carolina
Evangelical Divinity School in
Greensboro, N.C.



Jan. 3, 2010

Jesus revealed to the wise men

Matthew 2:1-12

The story of the wise men is familiar to many both through the Bible story and in the nativity scenes that appear in front of churches and in homes throughout December. Most know that the wise men came in search of the baby Jesus, eventually found him and gave him three gifts.

Giving the three gifts has given rise to the belief that there were three wise men. We do not know how many there were. Matthew only mentions the title “magi,” which has been translated to mean wise men or kings.

Before getting to the mission of the wise men, consider this: Why did they come at all? What interest would they have had?

Again, we don’t know, but perhaps there is a clue in the Old Testament. Genesis 25:1-6 describes the family Abraham had with another wife and some concubines after Sarah died. According to verse 5, “Abraham left everything he owned to Isaac.” And the other sons (half-brothers of Isaac)? Verse 6 states: “But while he was still living, he gave gifts to the sons of his concubines and sent them away from his son Isaac to the land of the east.” So, descendants of Abraham were living in the east. Perhaps these descendants kept alive the memory of Abraham, and, many years later, were the ones God spoke to about the

newborn king.

As the wise men approached, they first went to Jerusalem. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, so why did they go to Jerusalem? Because it was the capital city of the Jews, and they were looking for the newborn king.

Once they arrived, they naturally began asking for the location of the new king, which greatly interested the current king, Herod. This brings up another question, though: Why did Herod care that some strangers were in the city asking for the newborn king? After all, Herod knew he did not have a new son, plus he assumed that his son would become king after he died. So why did Herod care? Herod’s identity as an ethnic Idumean and his lack of a royal pedigree could have contributed to his well-known sense of paranoia, even though the Romans had installed him as king of the Jews.

So, when the wise men showed up asking for a new king, Herod grew concerned that the Jews might have hidden a Jewish royal family, and now there was a new son. Finding out from the wise men when they first saw the star, he decided to kill all baby boys two years of age and under. In this way Herod thought to ensure that his bloodline would continue to rule in Israel (which is what happened).

After the wise men left Herod, they continued to follow the star. Eventually it stopped over the site where Jesus was born. Upon seeing Jesus, “they bowed down and worshiped him” (Matt. 2:11). How did they worship him?

This brings up an interesting point about the idea of “worship.” If you ask many Christians today what worship is, you will find a range of answers. But most likely a common thread running through their answers will reflect the time spent in church on Sunday morning when they are gathered with other Christians for “worship.” This will include songs, Bible readings and a sermon.

But this was not the type of worship in

which the wise men engaged. Now, to be fair, we really do not know what they were thinking as they worshipped. But we do know that when Jesus was revealed to them, all they could do was bow down and worship.

When you think about it, isn’t this really the response we all should have when Jesus is revealed to us? Whether in the “church hour” or in our cars or in prayer or among other people, when Jesus is revealed to us, what other response could we have? Certainly, we cannot “bow down and worship” in most situations, be we can and should respond as Thomas did after Jesus appeared to him and told him to place his hand in the holes in Jesus’ hands and side: “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:27-28).

In whatever way Jesus reveals himself to us, therefore, our response should be the same as that of the wise men or Thomas or any number of people who saw Jesus. In our spirits we bow down and acknowledge him as the king of all kings.

Discuss: The Wise Men and the shepherds were some of the first worshippers of Jesus. In what way did the Magi honor Jesus? What would their prayers have sounded like? What do you think the wise men told their family and friends when they returned home? How were the lives of the wise men changed?

Jan. 10, 2010

Jesus revealed at his baptism

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

As Baptists, we are all familiar with baptism. It takes place in a variety of locations — the baptistery, lakes, the ocean, swimming pools — but the meaning is the same: This person acknowledges his or her past sinful life and decision to follow Jesus by undergoing baptism in this place and time and in front of these people as witnesses. In doing this we follow the example of Jesus.

Before moving on, let us look at John’s



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baptism. Luke 3:3 tells us about John, “preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” And John speaks later of “a voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him’” (v. 4). So John recognized that he was not the Chosen One, but one who would prepare the way.

Yet some people still wondered. Although John had stated otherwise (“one who would prepare the way”), still some people thought he might be The Way. Perhaps these people believed this was the manner in which the Christ would be revealed to them (3:15, “all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ”). Yet John knew the truth. He even more directly prepared the people in addition to quoting from Isaiah 40:3 (see Luke 3:4). He told the crowd that the one to come would be so far above John that John would not be worthy to untie his sandals (Luke 3:16).

It would not be by baptizing with water that the Christ would be revealed, but by baptizing “with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” Yet that is not what took place at this time. Here, Jesus came to John and desired to be baptized. From Luke 3:21 it sounds like a regular day for John. Luke 3:7-14 tells us that crowds came, which included tax collectors and soldiers. So John baptized many, as he probably did so often, and then Jesus approached.

The Scripture does not tell us if Jesus was the first or the last to be baptized that day, only that he was baptized while others were being baptized. I like to think that Jesus was in the middle of the pack, because this reflects the nature of his desire to come to us: to show his love for us by living among us.

Yet his baptism had a different immediate result than the person in front of him. After being baptized, Jesus prayed and the heavens opened up “and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased’” (3:21-22). In this manner, therefore, was Jesus revealed.

Remember that one of the reasons for John’s baptism was for repentance of sins. Yet Jesus had no sins from which to repent. For average persons, baptism meant they revealed themselves to others as someone who has changed. But Jesus did not change; he did not need to undergo a change. So

what was revealed about Jesus as a result of his baptism? His nature.

The person who was baptized in front of Jesus revealed his repentance; Jesus revealed his deity within the Trinity. As he was baptized, the Father spoke and the Holy Spirit descended. Thus the Trinity of God was revealed in this act. The Father is the part who is to be obeyed, the Son is the part who is to be praised, and the Holy Spirit is the part of the Godhead who comes to the earth after Jesus is revealed in order to live within Christians.

This was above the comprehension of the persons on the bank of the Jordan. But what they did understand was that the baptism of Jesus was different. They did not understand how different because God had not acted in this way throughout human history. But this revelation of the fullness of God would be recorded and understood after Jesus ascended to heaven and the Holy Spirit came to indwell all believers.

Following his baptism, Jesus was ready to begin his ministry. It is this event to which John was looking forward when he spoke of Jesus having a different baptism.

Discuss: What do you think John thought the next day about what he had experienced with Jesus? What would a Roman soldier (see Luke 3:14) have thought about his experience of watching Jesus be baptized? If Jesus had told one of his friends that he was going to be baptized by John the Baptist, and the friend had asked him why, what do you think Jesus would have said?

Jan. 17, 2010

Jesus revealed at a wedding

John 2:1-11

When I was preparing to get married, an older man told me to leave the planning to my fiancée. After all, most women have been dreaming of their wedding day for years, if not decades, whereas I had been planning it for a couple of weeks; if nothing else, she just had more practice! So women, it seems, have a way around weddings.

Now, Jesus had a mother, and Jesus was at a wedding, and a problem came up. Having gone through wedding planning (and a wedding, although probably small) before, Mary decided to come to the aid of

the bride. She came to Jesus and told him the wine was depleted. We do not know why Jesus was there; he may have been invited as a friend or as a friend of a friend or a friend of the family. But it does not appear that Jesus was in charge of any aspect of the wedding. Since the wine ran out, it was the responsibility of someone else to have replenished it. Jesus was just a bystander.

Nevertheless, Mary became involved. Again, we don’t know if she was just concerned for the embarrassment of the wedding party, or if she was related and felt a duty. But assist she did. Approaching Jesus, she informed him of the predicament.

Remember that this has taken place after Jesus has been revealed as a king to the magi at his birth and as God at his baptism. Also, at this point Jesus had begun gathering what would be his apostles. The previous verses in John reveal that at this point Jesus had chosen Andrew, Peter, Philip and Nathaniel. Out of all these, Andrew had also been John the Baptist’s disciple (John 1:35-40), which meant he likely had witnessed Jesus’ baptism. And he likely told Peter (his brother), Philip and Nathaniel. And perhaps Mary had told them of the incident with the magi. So they knew that Jesus was special, but not the extent of his “specialness.”

Now they are all at the wedding (John 2:2). Jesus’ mother informs him of the problem. But instead of performing the miracle himself, as he did on so many other occasions, Jesus works his miracle through others. He tells the servants to fill six jars with water, and then to take some of the water to the master of the banquet. Upon tasting it, the master declares it first-rate and even praises the wine to the bridegroom (John 2:10).

Next John tells us this was the first of Jesus’ miracles and that “he thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.” But what was his glory? We know from the previous revelations that Jesus was King and God. What does this add to this title? Nothing. But his glory was revealed in that he showed his divinity by doing only what God could do — a miracle.

But note this was not just any miracle. To further explain, the four Gospels tell of a

See COMMENTARY page 21

in the know

Keeping up with people, places, and events

PEOPLE

Kal Busman is pastor of King's Cross Church in Tullahoma, Tenn. He came from the staff of Central Baptist Church in Fountain City, Tenn.

Terri Byrd is associate coordinator for congregational life and missions for Alabama Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Wilma B. Cospser died Oct. 12 at age 85. She was professor emeritus and former department chair of Western Carolina University's department of human environmental sciences. An active member of Cullowhee (N.C.) Baptist Church, she also served as a trustee at Mercer University and a director for *Baptists Today*.

Larry Fields will retire yearend from Central Baptist Church of Bearden in Knoxville, Tenn., where he has served since 1986.

Herbert C. Gabhart, 95, president of Belmont University from 1959-1982, and chancellor for the past 26 years, died Sept. 10.

LeAnn Gunter Johns is pastor at New Community of Faith in San Jose, Calif., an ABCUSA and UCC-affiliated congregation, after serving as CPE resident at Veteran Affairs Hospital in Palo Alto. She previously served as associate pastor of Peachtree Baptist Church in Atlanta.

Paul Meyer died Oct. 25 in Waco, Texas, at age 81. An entrepreneur and philanthropist, Meyer was a major supporter of Baylor University as well as other charitable causes.

Greg Warner received Associated Baptist Press' inaugural lifetime achievement award in religious journalism Oct. 23 that will bear his name. The independent news service, which Warner led from 1990-2008, was formed in response to the firing of two top editors of the Southern Baptist Convention's news service, Baptist Press. The Warner Award will honor journalists whose work has contributed to the understanding of religion in America, according to ABP.

Jeff Zurheide died Oct. 28 at age 54. Diagnosed with cancer six years ago, he preached his final sermon at First Baptist Church of New London, N.H., on Aug. 30. He came to that pastorate in 2004 from the First Baptist Church of Oklahoma City.

EVENTS

The Religious Liberty Council of the Baptist Joint Committee announces the fifth annual **Religious Liberty Essay Scholarship Contest**, which is open to all high school students in the graduating classes of 2010 and 2011. This year's contest will commemorate the 50th anniversary of John F. Kennedy's landmark speech about the relationship between his religion and his politics and the separation of church and state. The scholarship contest offers a grand prize of \$1,000 and a trip for two to Washington, D.C. Second prize is \$500, and third prize is \$100. To read this year's topic and to download entry forms, visit www.BJConline.org/contest. Entries are due March 1, 2010.

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COMMENTARY from page 20

number of miracles Jesus did. He healed lepers and a blind man, cast out demons, and raised people from the dead. He also performed what are known as "nature miracles," those that do not involve a healing but instead involve changing nature in some way. The Gospels describe seven of these: turning the water into wine, walking on

water, calming the storm, feeding the multitude with bread and fish, the miraculous catch of fish by the apostles, Peter catching a fish with a coin that covered the tax he and Jesus owed, and killing the fig tree that bore no fruit.

So this first miracle was not a healing miracle but a nature miracle. Why so? We actually see the answer to this in a healing miracle Jesus did. In Matthew 12:22-24, Jesus healed a "demon-possessed man who

was blind and mute." Immediately the Pharisees stated, "It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons." So Jesus' enemies could discount a healing miracle by making up a reason, no matter how far-fetched. But there was no way they could defeat a nature miracle (nor his disciples, who had only been following him a very short time). Thus his divinity was revealed, "and his disciples put their faith in him" (2:11). **BT**

2009

Brought to you this month
by Jackie Riley



The Resource Page

... creative and practical ideas

Greening your faith community and worship space

According to the Sierra Club, “67 percent of Americans say they care about the environment because it is ‘God’s creation’ ... Most of the world’s major religions have long-standing traditions and teachings that inform how humans should interact with the natural world.... ‘Creation care’ is a growing movement.... People from all walks of life are coming together to make a difference.”

Your church can make a difference by taking these first steps:

- Ministers can preach a “creation care” sermon series, using Scriptures such as Genesis 1-11, Micah 6:8, and the parables of the talents and the prodigal son.
- Use worship opportunities such as the reading of Psalm 104 on creation, the call to worship, liturgies, prayers of confession and carefully chosen music.
- Teach that the most basic call to stewardship in the Bible concerns care of the earth.
- Enlist support through informal dialogue and discussion in class or other settings, engaging people at their area of interest (ex: economics, the future of their children and grandchildren, effects on the church by changes in the environment).
- Create a creation care group to study environmental stewardship and provide leadership.
- Involve young people in creating awareness and challenging conversations.
- Share examples of what churches in similar situations are doing.
- Set up a notice board for green information and announcements.
- Educate worshippers on how to incorporate “green” practices into their daily lives (ex: invest savings in ethical and earth-friendly companies and funds; use alternate transportation such as carpooling, walking, bicycling and public transportation).

Suggested resources:

Gushee, David. “Christian Environmental Ethics: Bringing Creation Care Down to Earth.” *Keeping God’s Earth*. InterVarsity Press, 2009.

Merritt, Jonathan. *Green Like God: Unlocking the Divine Plan for Our Planet*. Hachette Book Group, 2010.

www.buildingchurchleaders.com

www.careofcreation.net

www.creationcare.org

www.creationcareforpastors.com

www.earthministry.org

www.faith-commongood.net

www.shopipl.org

(your state’s name) Interfaith Power and Light

- Start a recycling program, placing the campaign logo on every receptacle. If the church doesn’t have recycling pickup, members can take the items home.
- Use Fair Trade coffee and tea and also locally-produced and organic foods, and reduce the consumption of meat.
- Replace Styrofoam cups and plates with ceramic, glass or metal ones.
- Establish a comprehensive composting system.
- Recycle ink and toner cartridges.
- Properly dispose of electronics.
- Reduce paper and printing in the church office and by volunteers, using email and phone whenever possible; provide an option for electronic bulletins/newsletters.
- Use recycled paper products.
- Avoid using pesticides and gas-powered equipment in yard maintenance.
- Use eco-friendly and people-friendly cleaning products.
- Implement an energy audit.
- Monitor electricity and gas use.
- Run only full dishwasher loads.
- Avoid heating or cooling the sanctuary or

other large spaces when a smaller space could be used.

- Clean HVAC ducts.
- Install a vapor barrier in the basement and crawl areas.
- Reduce water heater temperature to 120 degrees.
- Seal doors, windows, ductwork, etc.
- Clean debris and vegetation away from outdoor HVAC units.
- Change air filters every 1-3 months.
- Schedule meetings and other building uses on specific days/nights and in concentrated areas of the buildings to reduce the activation of an entire heating/cooling system.
- Heat or cool the sanctuary according to guidelines for pipe organ maintenance (www.gipl.org/organs.html).
- Post signs reminding people to turn off lights upon exiting a room.
- Use natural daytime lighting when possible.
- Use all refrigerators and keep them full.
- Turn off office equipment during long lunch hours and overnight; for shorter periods, use the sleep mode.
- Place water coolers and drink machines on timers.
- Unplug equipment when not in use.
- Use insulated curtains and reflective blinds.
- Reduce the amount of water used in toilets.
- Clean gutters and cut back or remove surrounding vegetation.
- Replace T-12 tubular fluorescent lights used more than 40-50 hours per week with T-8 bulbs.
- Replace frequently used incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescents.
- Install bulbs in all light receptacles.
- Retrofit or replace incandescent exit signs with LED signs.
- Use sensor-controlled or timed or battery-powered lights wherever feasible. **BT**

THE RESOURCE PAGE is provided by the Congregational Life office of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in partnership with *Baptists Today* and for those dedicated lay leaders working in the educational ministries of local churches. This month’s page was written by Jackie Riley, managing editor of *Baptists Today*. Resource Page Archives are available at <http://www.thefellowship.info/Resources/Church-Resources/Baptists-Today-resource-page>.

Evangelicals rethinking creation care

By Mark Vanderhoek
Mercer University

MACON, Ga. (ABP) — American Christians must move beyond a theology of “me” to a theology of “we” in order to play a meaningful role in creation care, according to speakers at a conference held Oct. 29-31 on the campus of Mercer University in Macon, Ga.

Dubbed “Caring for Creation: A Scientific and Theological Response,” the gathering included sessions where speakers focused their messages on inspiring those of faith to engage with science, and scientists to engage with the faithful, on caring for the Earth.

At the opening session David Gushee, a Mercer Christian ethics professor, and Jonathan Merritt, author of the forthcoming book *Green*



David Gushee

Like God and son of a former Southern Baptist Convention president, addressed the gathered.

Adding creation care to the agenda for Christians will take new theology and a new outlook on caring for God’s creation, Gushee noted.

The theological narratives of current American evangelicals are almost entirely personal — “God and I,” he noted.

Using the analogy of a fictional “Billy Christian” — a typical white evangelical Christian — Gushee highlighted the obstacles in moving Billy from his individualistic faith in Christ to a more cosmic and holistic view of faith. “God’s redemptive purposes go beyond human beings. They extend to the whole created order,” Gushee said, and Billy must be swayed by the realization that “the God who made the whole world has intentions for the whole world.”

Billy must also be persuaded to read about God’s call to care for creation while he is on Earth, Gushee said. By focusing his faith on his own time and place rather than heaven, Billy will be inspired to a more global vision.

“We must help Billy transition to a social and global moral vision, not just a personal or interpersonal one,” Gushee said. “Maybe when the other theological work is done, Billy will come to see that what God is looking for in followers of Christ is a global Kingdom-of-God vision, a vision of comprehensive love of

neighbors and of self, a vision of doing unto others as we would have ourselves done by. And if you think about the world as it is, this is about more than being a nice person and being honest at work. It’s about caring that others can’t breathe clean air, can’t drink clean water, can’t eat safe food, and can’t feed their



Jonathan Merritt

babies safe breast milk because we have been bad stewards of God’s creation.”

Merritt began his quest to do just that while still in seminary, inspired by the realization that God’s creation is part of what theologians call “general revelation,” and the idea that the destruction of creation was akin to tearing pages from God’s specific revelation, the Bible.

He worked with others to draft the “Southern Baptist Declaration on the Environment and Climate Change” that called on Southern Baptists to refocus themselves on urgent environmental problems as a natural outgrowth of their doctrinal stances. The document received strong denunciations from some prominent Southern Baptists, as well as personal attacks, Merritt said. The criticism was stunning, he said — but it also confirmed that he was doing the work he was supposed to do.

Merritt set out to examine the obstacles to creating a more creation-focused evangelical message. Among the three most prominent barriers, he said, are misguided theology, a misinformed constituency and misplaced hope.

“Churches that claim to teach the whole Bible sheepishly avoid or brush over the many passages that ... reveal God’s intentions for this Earth,” Merritt said.

On the misinformation side, he said the explosion of communications technology can elevate “experts” in every field who are far from expert. He urged Christian leaders and scientists to maintain “occupational integrity” and to beware of those who would spread misinformation about things like climate change.

“Neither viewership of Fox News nor ownership of a copy of *An Inconvenient Truth* makes you an expert,” Merritt said. . . . Christian communities should be places of honesty and integrity. Christian people should

be the last people to accept contrarian information without doing the hard work of researching the validity of the claims being made.”

The final obstacle is misplaced hope in a political form of religion. The morphing of Christian faith into a political movement in the late 20th century has had ramifications for the climate-change debate, he said.

“Americans began to choose sides. So the Right stole God and the Left stole green,” Merritt said. “And you almost never, until recently, saw those two words in the same sentence. One side did a lot of talking about green and the other side did a lot of talking about God, but you had to wonder sometimes, does God have anything to say about green? They were totally separated, entrapped.”

“The way Christians started to talk about God began to change. Instead of God being a loving being who wrapped himself in flesh in order to bring peace to the entire cosmos ... many spoke of God as an American patriot who has a disproportionate stake in our federal government’s success. This God was not building a global kingdom on Earth, or an other-worldly kingdom beyond Earth. This God was building and blessing an American kingdom.”

A new generation of young evangelicals is realizing the paradoxes of the past, Merritt said, and is taking these challenges head on. He encouraged the audience of more than 800 to take this challenge on as well.

“At the intersection of faith and facts we sit at the feet of a green God who has placed the burden of action squarely on our shoulders,” Merritt said. “So don’t give in to the temptation to get angry or haughty. Stay humble. Constantly confess the intellectual and theological arrogance in your heart. Open up your mind to these conversations. Rest assured that inside each of us, beginning with me, there is a bulbous cyst of egotism yet to be brought under the lance of God’s grace. Don’t become callous or bitter because of those who disagree with you. Don’t be discouraged. I can tell you — because I’ve traveled around the country and talked to people about it — God is on the move, God’s people are on the move, transition is occurring, people are waking up to these issues, we are engaging them, and in some cases now leading these conversations.” BT

readers' responses

Women owed an apology

EDITOR: As a proud, female, Baptist Sunday school teacher (at Providence Baptist Church in Charlotte), I take great offense at the publication of the commentary for the Nov. 1 lesson (Formations Commentary, October 2009, page 19) on Bathsheba.

The third paragraph from the end ["She should have known the king's routine and that he or anyone else could see her from the palace. Did she draw David's attention and therefore use her beauty to lure David...? Probably so."] continues to support the notion that when a man in power (political, economic, physical, emotional) takes advantage of a woman, it is probably *her* fault.

If King David had gone to war, *as was his duty*, he would not have been on his roof. To suggest that a woman should know his routine is a far stretch of any biblical truth.

When I read this paragraph to the 43 adults in my class, they were as surprised as I that you would continue to perpetuate the notion that women "get" what they deserve. You usually do better than this. However, you owe all women an apology for this affront.

—Anita Pangle, Charlotte, N.C.

(Editor's note: Anita, your point is well taken and the apology you requested is sincerely offered. The writer of the commentary, Terry Eddinger, said in response to your critique that while he is not the only person who thinks Bathsheba is not free from some blame, he does not subscribe to the notion that "women get what they deserve.")

What Middle Eastern narrative do Americans hear?

EDITOR: Tony Cartledge's commentary, "Considering the Palestinian 'Problem'" (October 2009, p. 26), invites the question: What really *is* the Middle Eastern narrative that Americans hear? Tony suggested that for many it is: "Israelis good; Palestinians bad. End of story."

"Americans tend to see only the angry rock-throwers that Israel's communications ministry wants us to see," he added. Meanwhile we "comfort ourselves with Bible stories about God giving the land to Abraham, assuming that everyone else is an automatic interloper."

In reality, Americans and American Christians have ample opportunity to hear both sides of what Tony correctly calls "the thorniest political issue of our time." What we hear depends upon what news sources we follow and what websites we consult. It also depends upon which side of the American religious, cultural and ideological divide we sit.

Do we consider "the Palestinian problem?" Or do we think more in terms of "Israeli aggression"? *The New York Times* and the BBC will guide us in one direction. Fox News and *World* magazine will point us in another.

If we are liberal Protestants, we likely will take umbrage at the "security barrier" that Tony said Palestinians are "kept behind." We may also oppose Israel's policy of "collective punishment" of the families of suicide bombers, while we deliberate measures such as divestment in American corporations that do business with Israel.

If, on the other hand, we are conservative evangelicals, we may be more offended that four out of 10 of the total number of Jews in the world may never get a good night's sleep. And that because they live in a part of the Middle East where their Arab neighbors have for 60 years vowed their destruction.

Education also makes a difference. A graduate of The University of Chicago Divinity School may find it impossible to fathom why the Israelis need to live in a corner of the world where few want them, much less why the United States government would swear by their strategic importance or invest so heavily in their defense. If, by contrast, one graduated from Dallas Theological Seminary — also a serious institution — all of that might make perfect political and biblical sense.

When in the summer and autumn of 2007 Israel responded to the kidnapping of two of its soldiers by bombing Hezbollah positions in Lebanon, what bothered us? Was it stories of Katyusha rockets landing indiscriminately and terrorizing the residents of Haifa, Nazareth and Tiberias? Or was it the "collateral" destruction of property and innocent lives in Beirut?

When last December Israel wearied of hundreds of Kassam rockets fired over several years toward its southern city of Sderot, and responded with a heavy hand, what bothered us then? Did we decry what Hamas termed a "Gaza massacre"? Or did we sympathize with Israel's determination to stop the attacks, regardless? Obviously, it all depends.

Which suggests that our attitudes toward Israel and its neighbors, the Palestinians included, are shaped largely by our crowd — the people we run with and the influences we honor. They determine the Middle Eastern narrative that we hear.

Tony correctly called Palestinian suffering "wrong in the sight of God and humanity." I wonder, however, if there can be any indisputably correct or Christian or biblical position on the Palestinians vis-à-vis Israel. Not, I suspect, if we are content to hear one side only and then forge our attitudes accordingly.

A few years back I spent a sabbatical in Jerusalem with a mostly Catholic group. Tantur Ecumenical Center is located on the dividing line between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, in clear view of "the wall" that now separates Israel from the West Bank.

Tantur's rector, Fr. Michael McGarry, noted that many of the Americans who came his way arrived with a pro-Israel point-of-view. Most, however, departed three months later feeling deeply for the Palestinians. And that because the receptionists, the housekeepers, the cooks, the librarians and the gardeners were Palestinian. It was their narrative that students heard daily.

As I dined in the refectory or enjoyed coffee in "The Bethlehem Room," I listened

This forum gives readers a chance to participate in respectful, though often passionate, dialogue on important issues. Your opinion is welcomed. Please include your name, address and phone number, and limit your letters to 200 words. Send by e-mail to editor@baptiststoday.org, by fax to (478) 301-5021, or by mail to Editor, *Baptists Today*, P.O. Box 6318, Macon, GA 31208-6318.

as my fellow sabbaticants bemoaned “the wall.” Stories were told of soldiers and their harsh dealings with Palestinians. Israeli “harassment” was a common theme.

One evening I visited the checkpoint nearby and observed two soldiers — teenaged girls, both of them — processing Palestinian families through “the wall.” Such encounters have tested tempers on both sides, but I witnessed no mistreatment that evening.

Then I thought of another “wall” that stood nearby — a concrete barrier that Israel erected along the southern slope of the suburb of Gilo, to prevent bullets fired from Bethlehem from entering the windows of the many tall apartment buildings that make up the community.

The question whether Israel has dealt justly with the Palestinians is indeed “thorny,” as thorny as the question whether the Palestinians and other Arabs intend ever to live peacefully alongside their Jewish neighbor. What is beyond argument is that Israel is there in the land of its fathers, vibrant and strong, and apparently not planning to vacate the premises.

Americans and American Christians should take advantage of our unparalleled opportunity to hear all sides. Still, for Christians, even the appearance of *taking* sides is distinctly unhelpful. We can and should sympathize with everyone, even as we hold everyone — ourselves included — accountable before God.

—Steve Pressley, Greensboro, N.C.
(Pressley is associate pastor of First Baptist Church of Greensboro, N.C.)

Realities about health care missed

EDITOR: Although the article by Bert Montgomery (October 2009, page 24) about an increased role in the health care reform by faith-based hospitals was well meaning, it ignores several realities. As one who has served on the board of a Baptist hospital system, I feel that I have some insights that give other perspectives.

First, these hospitals are already rendering large amounts of money in charity care. When I was a board member, we received extensive reports about this at every meeting related to finances.

We were constantly reminding ourselves that the doors were open because of the love of God for all people and because of the sacredness of human life. To imply otherwise is to misunderstand the motivation of many who already feel that they are ministering by providing quality care for the sick.

Second, the implication that many are turned away should not be exaggerated. Hospitals are under legal obligation to treat people, but this does not mean that they satisfy every patient with the level of care that patient wants at the moment he or she appears (especially in the ER), nor that reasonable means to determine a person’s ability or willingness to pay for care should not be sought.

Yes, faith-based hospitals do compete for dollars from the insurance companies, because that is one significant way in our society that payment can be found.

Third, every faith-based hospital (like any public institution) has to operate in a business-like way, even though it is understood that the mission of the hospital is not to make profits.

To put it simply: someone has to build the buildings, compensate the employees and pay the bills.

If this is not done, the hospital closes. Reasonable financial reserves must be maintained; in fact, this is mandated by law. If that were not enough, common sense would tell us to do it.

Furthermore, to personalize the situation a bit, if the doctors, nurses, custodial employees and clerical help are not paid, they cannot donate their time for free.

Fourth, the analogy to medical missions trips overseas also breaks down at this point. Almost all the people who make these trips have had to take vacation time from paying jobs to go. Somebody had to pay them.

Medical missionaries are paid by their respective mission boards. They cannot minister overseas full time for free. The offerings of churches ultimately built the hospitals and clinics in which they and their U.S. visitors serve. If fact, unless Brother Montgomery is independently wealthy, I assume that his church pays his salary and benefits, too.

Fifth, faith-based hospitals are certainly seeking more dollars for charity care, but none is as successful as St. Jude in Memphis. They are able to conduct massive nationwide fundraising campaigns in order to treat everyone.

The part I agree with in this article is that faith-based hospitals and churches can do more. But to assume that they are the simple solution to a most complex problem is naïve. It is the responsibility of all citizens in America to find ways to repair a good but flawed system so that everyone can receive needed care.

—Charles Parker, Antioch, Tenn.



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BAPTISTS
Today

guest commentary

The consequences of resurgent Baptist Calvinism

By Fisher Humphreys

This year marks the 500th anniversary of the birth of the man who gave us Calvinism. The word refers to the vision of the Christian faith of John Calvin, a 16th-century Protestant reformer.

He thought that, before creating the universe, God decreed that human beings would fall into sin; God then chose which ones God would save (“the elect”) and which ones would remain lost (“the reprobate”). God decided the destinies of the elect and the reprobate sovereignly, without reference to God’s knowledge of how they would respond to the gospel.

Some Christians think that Calvinism is a matter of degree, but in fact you either are a Calvinist or you aren’t. If you think that in eternity God sovereignly predestined some people for salvation and not others, then you are a Calvinist; if you do not think this, you are not a Calvinist.

Some people assume that the difference between Calvinists and other Christians is that Calvinists emphasize God’s sovereignty while non-Calvinists emphasize human freedom. This is inaccurate. Non-Calvinists emphasize both divine sovereignty and human freedom; they just do not believe that God decided to save some while passing over others.

The first Baptists opposed Calvinism, but soon Calvinism entered Baptist life and flourished. For more than two centuries, most of the best-known Baptist leaders were Calvinists. Eventually, however, Calvinism began to fade from Baptist life, and for more than a century now most Baptists have not been Calvinists.

Today, however, Calvinism is experiencing a resurgence among Baptists in the South and elsewhere. An organization of Southern Baptist Calvinists called Founders Ministries is dedicated to this endeavor, and some — but not all — of the six Southern Baptist Convention-supported seminaries actively

promote Calvinism.

No one knows exactly how many Baptists are Calvinists. A recent survey found that 10 percent of pastors in the SBC are Calvinists, but that figure may be high. In my home state more than 3,100 churches are affiliated with the Alabama Baptist State Convention, but fewer than 1 percent of them (29 churches) are listed as “Founders-Friendly Churches” on the group’s website.

Still, Calvinism is making a comeback. What are the implications of that? There is good news and bad news.

Calvinism has made massive contributions to Christian theology. Resurgent Calvinism may help restore a sense of the value of theology to sectors of Baptist life where that sense is weak.

One of the great temptations we all face is narcissism. Calvinism is effective at helping people turn their attention away from themselves and toward God.

And Calvinists have a long record of taking worship seriously. This could prove helpful to Baptist churches, many of which have become so focused on helping people that they need to place more emphasis on worshipping God.

On the bad-news side of the equation, though, most significant conflicts dividing Alabama Baptist churches today involve disputes over Calvinism; presumably this is true in other states as well.

Usually, but not always, this takes the form of a congregation becoming distressed when it discovers that its pastor is a Calvinist. Some congregations have dismissed their Calvinistic pastors; in other congregations numerous members have left upon discover-



ing their pastor’s Calvinism.

Many Baptists worry that resurgent Calvinism will undercut our commitment to evangelism and missions. They reason that if God has predestined who will and won’t be saved, our efforts to evangelize do not really matter; the elect will be saved whether or not we evangelize. This means that many Baptists are being motivated to engage in missions and evangelism by the idea that their efforts can make a difference in who is saved.

Obviously, Calvinists don’t believe that such human effort can make a difference in whom God chooses to save. However, they have other motives for doing evangelism. They evangelize because Christ commanded it, because it brings glory to God, and because they enjoy doing it.

The Calvinistic Baptists I know are committed to evangelism and missions. Still, unless they are able to replace the motive they take away (“we can make a difference!”) with other motives, resurgent Calvinists could undermine Baptists’ evangelism and missions.

We Baptists — Calvinists and non-Calvinists alike — are brothers and sisters in Christ. We likely will continue to disagree about whether God predestined some for salvation and passed over others, so we need to treat each other with what the New Testament calls “forbearance.”

We who are not Calvinists have a special responsibility to emphasize God’s love for the entire world; then we can follow that up with our conviction that since God loves everyone, God would not have predestined some to be lost. **BT**

—Fisher Humphreys is a retired theology professor living in Birmingham, Ala. This column from Associated Baptist Press originated as an essay for the Baptist History and Heritage Society.

the media shelf

Reviews by Jackie Riley

The Unfinished Gift

A Novel

Dan Walsh

It's Christmastime in 1943, and 7-year-old Patrick Collins is grieving the death of his mother, waiting for his father to return from the war and rescue him from his grumpy old widowed grandfather whom he has never known — the only relative the kind social services lady could locate.

While Patrick waits he discovers the only Christmas present he wants other than his father's return — an "unfinished gift" long hidden away in the deep recesses of his grandfather's attic. Its discovery also unveils deeply-bedded bitterness and family issues that need resolution. Yet he also experiences the warmth of community from a boisterous Italian woman and an impoverished African-American family.

Dan Walsh presents in his first novel a masterpiece full of authentic characters and captivating details. Well written and appealing to adults and youth alike, readers will find it hard to put the book down — being kept in suspense with its twists and turns and then a surprise ending.



\$14.99 / hb / 250 pp / Revell Books / ISBN 978-0-8007-1924-1 / www.revellbooks.com

Christmas Without Kyoko

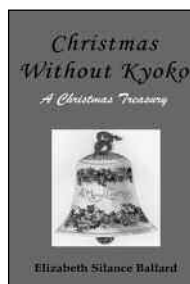
A Christmas Treasury

Elizabeth Silance Ballard

With story titles such as "The Christmas Shoes," "A Broken Truck for Christmas," "The Barber of Babylon," "The Red Lunch Box," "Saving Baby Jesus" and "The Christmas Nandina," Ballard proves herself an able storyteller. She has a keen sense for delving into the thoughts of her characters and for heightening interest through details and conversation.

A collection of 10 Christmas stories primarily fictional, but based on real events, this *Christmas Treasury* will both entertain and

inspire as the author seeks "to show human nature at its best and that there is more to people than what we often see." It will touch the heart and encourage readers old and young to be better people.



\$15.00 / pb / 176 pp / Righter Books / ISBN 978-0-9706023-4-5 / www.righterbooks.com

Christmas Promises

Heavenly Gifts for the Holiday Season

LeAnn Weis

In this delightfully designed and easy-to-read volume of 22 stories, readers will find inspiration in the quotes and messages, true stories about God fulfilling promises, thought-provoking life reflections, and prayers.

Weis, a bestselling author known for her popular "Hugs" series, seeks to help us personalize God's promises through offerings such as "Christmas Eve Intruders" and "The Charlie Brown Tree of Hope."



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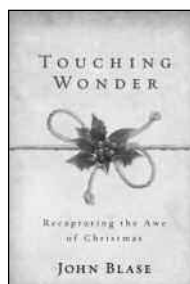
Touching Wonder

Recapturing the Awe of Christmas

John Blasé

In an imaginative retelling of the miracle of Christmas, the author of *The Message Children's Bible* explains the Christmas story from the viewpoints of characters such as Zachariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph and the shepherds.

While not pretending to provide answers or to know the thoughts of these folks, Blasé offers



incredible insights through his descriptions of them. He offers this challenge to readers: "These wonder-filled characters played their parts well. I pray you won't diminish the part you've been given. Remember, the Mighty One's favor comes in unexpected ways."

This gift book of 12 short devotional readings and a prelude and an interlude is easy to read and attractively designed with its delicate pencil drawings. Along with each reading the author offers reflections that emphasize the concept of pondering and recapturing the awe of the story. Each reflection is then followed by a handwritten prayer.

\$12.99 / hb / 128 pp / David C. Cook / ISBN 978-1-4347-6465-2 / www.davidccook.com

The Christmas Dog

Melody Carlson

Betty Kowalski is finding it hard to take seriously her minister's December sermon on loving her neighbors. Folks all around her are sporting fancy clothes and cars and trips while she lives on a meager widow's income and in a place far away from her children but close to strangers.

The week of Christmas then becomes anything but mundane. From a mysterious and obnoxious neighbor to a wayward granddaughter to a daughter-in-law with a hidden agenda to affluent friends celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary to a stray dog ... What can Betty learn about the real meaning of Christmas?

Melody Carlson has a gift for writing wholesome, easy-to-read books in which she ably interweaves various characters and plots. *The Christmas Dog* will warm the hearts of both young and old, especially dog lovers. It's perfect for fireside reading on a winter afternoon or night, complete with a hot beverage in hand.

\$14.99 / hb / 176 pp / Revell Books / ISBN 978-0-8007-1881-8 / www.revellbooks.com



the lighter side

Christmas quiz

By Brett Younger

Most readers of *Baptists Today* have an extensive, inconclusive and superfluous knowledge of the Christmas stories in the Gospels. Scholars argue that we should not try to reconcile the stories in Matthew and Luke, but scholars are not always the most fun at the Christmas party. While no prizes will be awarded — only in part because the answers are provided — this could start you on your way to yuletide joy.

_____ 1) The Roman emperor at the birth of Christ was: a. Quirinius. b. Julius Caesar. c. Julius Caesar's nephew. d. deceased by the time Jesus was born.

_____ 2) There was snow that first Christmas: a. all over Israel. b. somewhere in Israel. c. nowhere in Israel. d. for the very first time in history.

_____ 3) According to Luke, who did Mary first visit with the news of Jesus? a. Anna. b. Joseph. c. Elizabeth. d. Dr. Luke.

_____ 4) Also according to Luke, how did Mary and Joseph make the trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem? a. on camel. b. Joseph walked; Mary rode the donkey. c. Mary walked; Joseph rode the donkey. d. Luke doesn't say. e. in silence; Mary wasn't real thrilled with the timing of the trip.

_____ 5) Which are the innkeeper's recorded words? a. "There's no room." b. "I have a stable." c. "Come back after the Christmas rush." d. none of the above.

_____ 6) When Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph were: a. dating. b. betrothed. c. married. d. not speaking.

_____ 7) The baby Jesus cried: a. like other babies. b. at the little drummer boy's song. c. he never cried, but he would not be thrilled with this quiz.

_____ 8) A manger is: a. a cradle. b. a trough. c. a stable. d. any vehicle in which you get "away."

_____ 9) Which animals does the Bible mention as being present at Jesus' birth? a. cows, sheep, goats. b. only sheep. c. lions and tigers and bears. d. none.

_____ 10) What "sign" did the angels tell the shepherds to look for? a. "This way to baby Jesus." b. a star. c. a baby in a manger. d. a baby that doesn't cry.

_____ 11) What did the angels sing? a. "Joy to the World" b. "Glory to God in the Highest" c. "Unto Us a Child Is Born" d. the song about chestnuts.

(Isn't this great? Do you think you've missed any yet? You've looked at the answers, haven't you? You don't have the Christmas spirit at all, do you?)

_____ 12) What does Magi mean? a. wise ones. b. kings. c. any person in the Christmas play wearing a bathrobe.

_____ 13) What is myrrh? a. an easily shaped metal. b. a spice used for burying people. c. a drink. d. According to recent New Testament scholarship, myrrh and frankincense are the same thing.

_____ 14) As long as Christmas has been celebrated, it has been on December 25th. (true or false)

_____ 15) This quiz was: a. a time of thoughtful biblical inquiry that helped prepare me for this Christmas season in a new and fascinating way. b. well worth the time. c. about 15 questions too long.

(You're not supposed to look at these until you finish.)

- 1) c. Luke 2:1
- 2) b. Mount Hermon in Israel is always snow covered.
- 3) c. Luke 1:39
- 4) d. Some have argued that a carpenter wouldn't own a donkey.
- 5) d. The innkeeper isn't mentioned.
- 6) b. Luke 2:5. This doesn't get mentioned much in some churches.
- 7) a. The line "little Lord Jesus no crying he makes" is, surprisingly, not found in scripture.
- 8) b. "Manger" is from the French word for eating.
- 9) d. The Hallmark Cards people don't let it bother them.
- 10) c. Luke 2:12
- 11) b. Luke 2:14
- 12) a. They were trained in astrology and dream interpretation.
- 13) b. The spice serves an aromatic purpose.
- 14) False. It wasn't until the fourth century that December 25th was celebrated.
- 15) Don't be a grinch. **BT**

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



Illustration by Scott Brooks

Singing in church . . . for better or worse

By John Pierce

Posted Oct. 24, 2009

www.bteditor.blogspot.com

Although my own musical gifts are very limited, my discernment about musical choices has grown over the years. Perhaps it is the result of some bad musical decisions in my past.

Once, as a campus minister, I allowed a transfer student to play his guitar and sing at one of our weekly meetings without asking what song he would perform. Even today my former students and I are trying to find the spiritual significance in Jim Stafford's "Wildwood Weed."

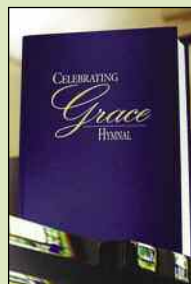
As teens, my friends and I often belted out the worst song ever sung in church, "I Wish We'd All Been Ready." It had

delightful lyrics like: "Children died, the day grew cold, a piece of bread could buy a bag of gold ..."

Sadly, those words are still etched in my mind from an early '70s obsession with Hal Lindsey's wacky and profitable predictions of the world coming to an end while we were wearing our bell-bottom pants.

But for those who value the important and inspiring role of music in worship there is some exciting news. A new hymnal, *Celebrating Grace*, is headed for pew racks in the spring.

The hymnal's premiere — with concerts,



congregational singing and workshops — is set for March 7-9, 2010, at Atlanta's Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church.

"We believe a hymnal should be a comprehensive, practical worship resource for churches and congregations," reported the team responsible for this new resource. "The editors set high standards for the music, the texts, the support materials, the organization and the production."

The hymnal has many supplemental resources to enhance its use. Some very gifted church musicians, theologians and lay leaders have put enormous effort into bringing together this superb volume.

Most happily, I checked the index and neither "Wildwood Weed" nor "I Wish We'd All Been Ready" made the cut. Praise God from whom all blessings flow. **BT**

Life's reward

By Tony W. Cartledge

Posted Oct. 15, 2009

www.tonycartledge.com

While on a writing retreat, I took a walk around the Northwest Creek Marina near New Bern, N.C. I don't know a sloop from a ketch, but I enjoy taking note of the various names boat owners give to their yachts.

I saw one named "Stressless," which I thought was interesting, given that two years of owning a little runabout had brought me far more stress than relaxation. I can't imagine the trouble that a yacht would bring, unless you were rich enough to pay someone else to keep it up for you, and I can't imagine that, either.

One boat had a statue of Buddha on the back, perhaps an aid to peaceful meditation

when the boat breaks down three miles offshore.

Other craft had playful names like "Skinny Dippin'" and "Killin' Time," drinking names like "Absolut," fanciful names like "Starship" and "Kizmet."

I saw a sailboat named "Hananiah," a Hebrew name that means something like "Yahweh is gracious to me." Whether it's a family name or reflects a belief that someone got the boat by the grace of God, I don't know.

Speaking of which, I couldn't help being taken aback by a floating oxymoron. On the back of a big cabin cruiser was the name "Life's Reward." Attached to the back window was a sign: "For Sale by Owner."

I paused. Can life's reward be bought and sold?

I couldn't help but recall the words of someone I admire greatly: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth ..." **BT**



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A conversation with Bill Underwood

MACON, Ga. — William D. (Bill) Underwood is an attorney and educator with a distinguished career at Baylor University where he also served as interim president. Since July 1, 2006, he has served as the 18th president of Mercer University.

Along with another active Baptist layman, President Jimmy Carter, he envisioned and led in the development of the Celebration of a New Baptist Covenant that was launched with a historic gathering of diverse Baptists in Atlanta in the winter of 2008.

Executive editor John Pierce conducted this interview in September when the news journal's Board of Directors met in Macon, Ga., where both Mercer University and *Baptists Today* are headquartered. The conversation has been edited for space and clarity.

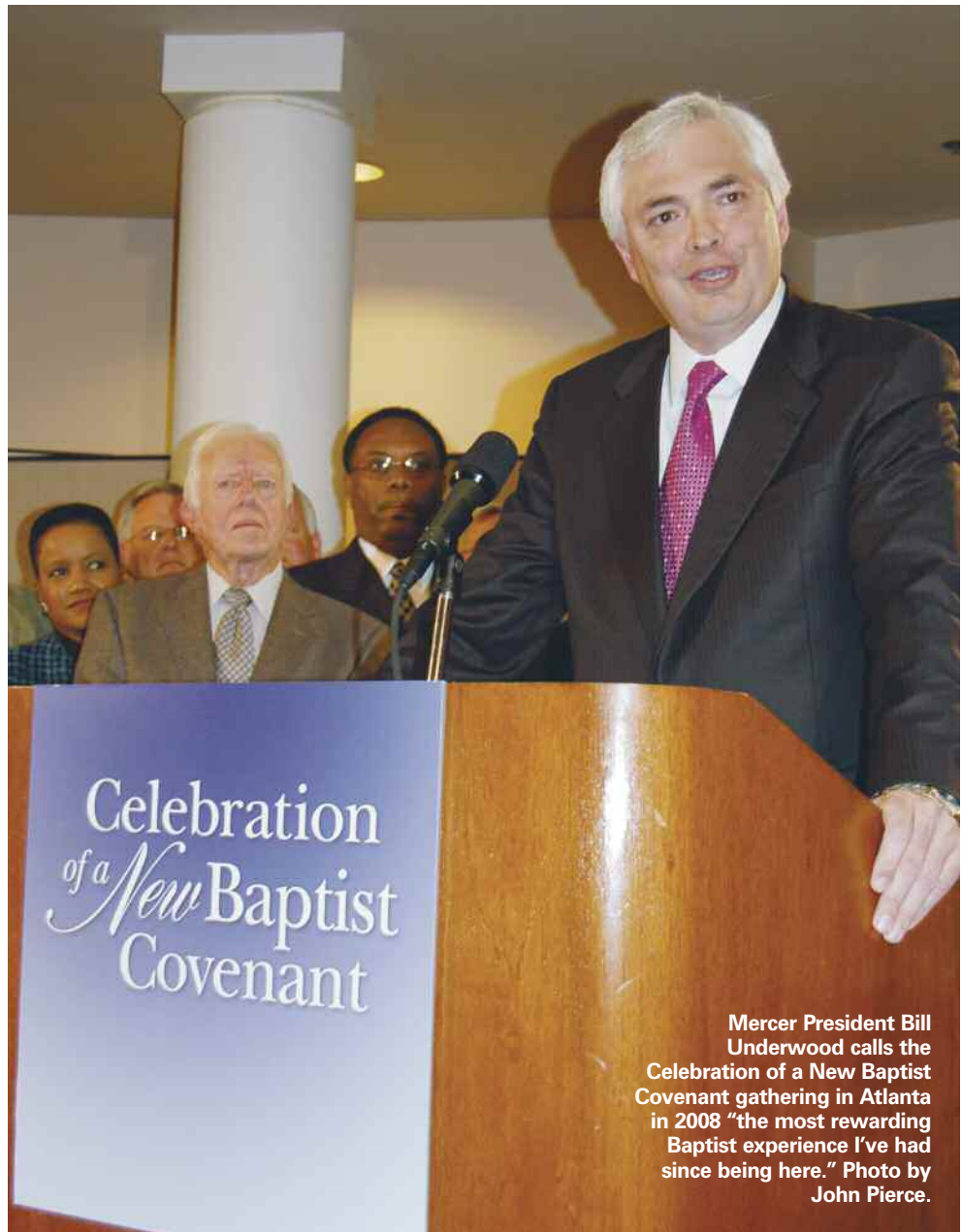
BT: You came to the presidency of Mercer from Baylor. How have you found Baptist life to be different here — and elsewhere — outside of Texas?

BU: The first difference I noticed was when I interviewed. Over dinner they offered me a drink. At Baylor, we had to do that in secret.

BT: I'll give you another shot at that question.

BU: Actually I do see some things that are different. I think in some respects the moderate, progressive Baptist element is stronger in this part of the world than it is in Texas. And that's a little bit counter-intuitive because we know the Baptist General Convention of Texas resisted a fundamentalist takeover.

But I think to some degree the consequences of that, organizations such as the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship seem to be more present, more active in this part of the world than I sensed in Texas. Because



Mercer President Bill Underwood calls the Celebration of a New Baptist Covenant gathering in Atlanta in 2008 "the most rewarding Baptist experience I've had since being here." Photo by John Pierce.

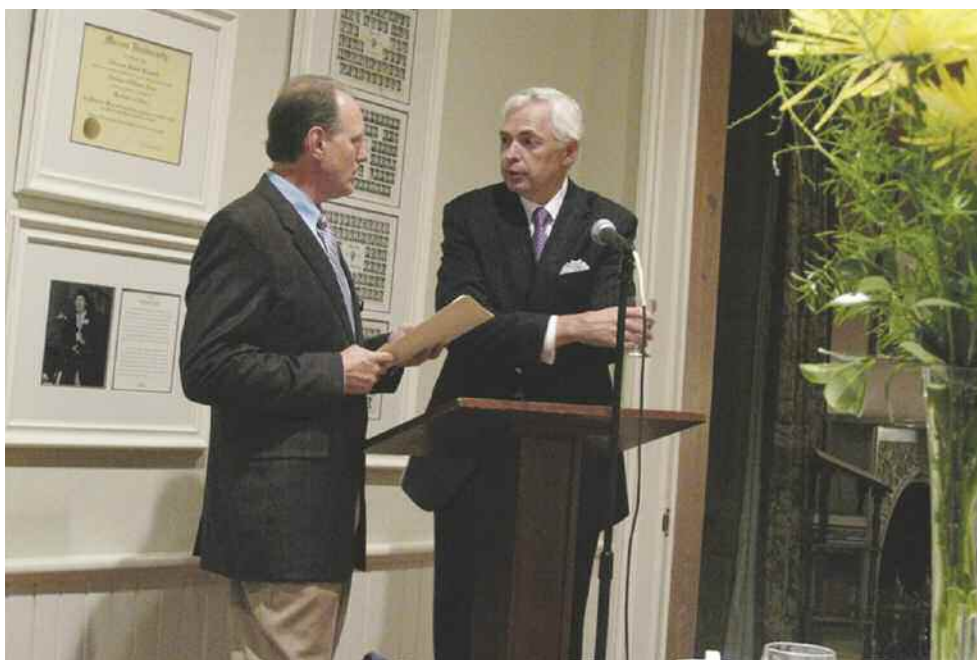
here they are filling a void that didn't really exist in Texas.

I think you all (*Baptists Today*) are probably a stronger presence here (in the East) than in Texas. So that's one difference I've noticed.

BT: You took the position early — along with trustees — that Mercer would be an

"intentionally Baptist university." Why and how? And do you still feel the same way about Mercer's heritage and mission as you did when you arrived here?

BU: I think the Baptist principles that animated the founding of the university have always been very important to our institution. Regardless of who the president has



Mercer University President Bill Underwood (right) responds to questions from *Baptists Today* editor John Pierce during a dinner at the Woodruff House on the university's law campus in Macon, Ga. The event was part of the news journal's Board of Directors meeting in September. Photo by Clem White.

been or who the trustees have been, it's an institution that for 176 years has been guided by some very important Baptist principles.

The historic Baptist commitment to intellectual freedom and religious freedom has certainly been felt stronger at Mercer than I think at any of the other Baptist universities in the country — something that remains very, very important to us.

The historic Baptist commitment to encouraging young people to use their gifts and talents in service to others has always been something very important at Mercer University. You look at the university today and see programs like Mercer on Missions that are designed to promote spiritual growth through encouraging young people to use their gifts and talents in ministering to others through healing and education and other types of service designed to improve the human condition.

Those things have always been very important at Mercer and they have defined the institution. And those are principles this institution will continue to embrace whether we are affiliated with a particular Baptist convention or not.

BT: Speaking of that, the Georgia Baptist Convention broke ties with Mercer just before you came. Yet you started developing wider connections between the university and various Baptist entities.

Has that gone as you had hoped? Do you still see value in doing that?

BU: Yes. I think we have maybe stronger relationships with individual Baptist congregations than we've ever had. I spend 15 to 20 Sundays a year speaking in Baptist churches.

I think for the university to relate to individual Baptist congregations is a very appropriate and Baptist thing to do. I think we've established an even-stronger relationship with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship than we had before.

Because, to some degree, our relationship with the Georgia Baptist Convention placed some limits on the full development of relationships with some organizations like the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. My sense is that we are freer to fully develop that relationship than we may have been historically.

And I think the participation of the university in things like the New Baptist Covenant has been a really rewarding thing for us and has enabled us to relate to groups of Baptists that we haven't had strong relationships with before — like the American Baptist Churches USA. We now have relationships with Baptists in the North that we didn't have historically.

Relationships with some of the African-American Baptist conventions like the National Baptist Convention and the

Progressive National Baptist Convention have been fostered through our participation in the New Baptist Covenant. Those are new and exciting relationships for us.

BT: Building Baptist bridges across cultural and convention lines can be challenging. Have you found some challenges in trying to initiate partnerships among diverse Baptists without appearing to take the dominant leadership role in each of those efforts?

BU: Yes. (long pause)

BT: Would you dare articulate some of those challenges?

BU: One of the things I learned through the New Baptist Covenant process was how culturally diverse these various Baptist organizations are — and how sometimes we don't speak the same language and sometimes when I think we are communicating we're not, because of cultural differences that exist between the organizations.

At least at some point in the New Baptist Covenant movement I was persuaded that the movement was likely to do better if Mercer did not play as strong a role as it had initially. By Mercer perhaps stepping back a step or two it would create room for more participation by others. We've done that, and I think by gauging from the success of the regional gatherings of the New Baptist Covenant, there's been a lot of merit to that.

BT: What has been the most frustrating or disappointing experience — from a Baptist perspective — you've encountered since assuming the presidency of Mercer?

BU: I haven't had any frustrating experiences; everything's been happy.

BT: Then what has been the *second* most frustrating or disappointing experience?

BU: I think the most frustrating experience was probably the meeting we had at the Carter Center right after our New Baptist Covenant gathering in Atlanta. I thought we had an opportunity to build even greater momentum coming out of that event than we probably had.

I think the regional meetings have been great successes and I sense there is something happening in Baptist life surrounding that movement. But I thought our initial meeting after the gathering in Atlanta tended to reflect typical Baptist infighting more than the spirit of cooperation.

BT: What — from a Baptist perspective — has been your most gratifying experience?

BU: The fact that 18,000 people from different geographical areas and different theological backgrounds and different ideological perspectives and different races and different Baptist organizations came together for three days to worship together and study together and celebrate all the wonderful things we have in common in Atlanta in January 2008. That's the most rewarding Baptist experience I've had since being here.

BT: How much more or less "Baptist" can we expect Mercer to be in the near future?

BU: I think you can expect us to be more Baptist. How much more is hard to quantify. But I think we will certainly be Baptist in some different ways.

Things have changed over the last 20 years, 50 years, 100 years. One change is we're no longer affiliated with the Georgia Baptist Convention; we no longer have a state convention supporting our work at the university.

That requires rethinking how we do some of the things we do. Like at most Baptist universities, the Baptist presence on our governing board, on our faculty and in our student body is declining. I think that's a reflection of the demographics of our society.

There was a time (1970) when one in every five Georgians was a Baptist. Now it's one in every ten. If that demographic trend continues, then that percentage will continue to decline — and that's the demographic we draw students from principally. So you'd expect to see the percentage of Baptists among our student body continue to decline.

The question is how to be a Baptist university in that kind of environment — when we're no longer connected to the

state convention and where the percentage of Baptists on our campus is less than it once was and probably will continue to decline.

The answer is that we embrace those Baptist principles that have always animated the university and we remain a place that is committed to the historic Baptist commitment to religious and intellectual Baptist freedom. We continue to be a place that puts people first and where people genuinely love one another and where our students are embraced by faculty.

We continue to be a place that is willing to grapple with the great moral and ethical issues of our age — and willing to consider those issues from different faith perspectives. We continue to be a place where students are encouraged to ask the great questions that once were at the core of university curriculum but are now seldom asked at our universities: Why am I here? What should I do with my life?

We continue to be a place where students are encouraged to ask the really tough questions like where was God at Auschwitz? Or how can a God of love and grace allow hundreds of millions of people to be born into almost unimaginable poverty in places like Zimbabwe? You know, the really tough questions.

We must continue to be a place that recognizes that, as important as these intellectual questions are, our faith is not primarily a private, intellectual matter. How we conduct our lives matters. . . .

That we be a place that encourages our students to follow the Great Commandment, that we love God by loving our neighbor, and a place that actively encourages spiritual growth in our students by encouraging them to use their gifts and talents to improve the lives of other people.

By being that kind of place, we will be a great Baptist university regardless of how many Baptists are on campus.

BT: What perspective do you bring to your work from being a preacher's kid?

BU: Certainly my understanding of what it means to be a Baptist grows out of the education I received at home from my parents. And my commitment to Baptist principles reflects the lessons taught to me by my father who was a Baptist preacher.

I don't have any theological training at

all. When I was interviewed by Mercer's search committee, one of the pastors on the committee pulled me aside and asked: "Bill, you're not a theologian are you?"

I said, "No, I'm not." He said, "Thank God."

BT: Do you see the partnership between Mercer and *Baptists Today* — as well as among other Baptist groups or causes — as being mutually beneficial and helpful to the larger movement?

BU: Well I think these relationships are beneficial to *Baptists Today* and to Mercer — and are natural relationships to have. *Baptist Today*, to me, is in the education business and so are we.

To the extent that we can support your work in educating the Baptists around the country, that is consistent with our mission and supportive of our mission. The same is true with a number of other Baptists we have embraced and support.

The American Baptist Historical Society, which is based on our campus in Atlanta, (and) brought its wonderful, historical archives to Mercer, is another Baptist organization committed to education. I see their mission and our mission as being mutually supportive.

The Baptist History and Heritage Society, which is now located on our campus in Atlanta, is the same thing — mutually supportive missions focused on education. And, of course, we're very proud of the fact that the national office of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship continues to be on our campus in Atlanta.

BT: Finally, can you share one big dream that you can't seem to get off your mind?

BU: Yes, my dream of Mercer playing football one day.

BT: Is that moving toward reality?

BU: Yes.

BT: At what speed — like a wide receiver or a lineman?

BU: A more serious answer to your question is that I'd eventually like for every Mercer student to participate in Mercer on Missions. **BT**

Connecting research, classroom learning, service

Academia is often criticized for its ivory tower. What does all of this education have to do with daily living?

Thirty Vietnamese — walking for the first time in years — could testify to the success of an intentional effort at Mercer University to bring research, classroom learning and service together and to the streets. Each received a low-cost leg prosthetic designed, manufactured and fitted by faculty and students as part of the “Mercer on Mission” program.

The Vietnam effort — part classroom study and part on-site participation — was one of eight “Mercer on Mission” projects this past summer. The growing program, directed by University Minister Craig McMahan, seeks to involve 100 students at nine sites in 2010 with hopes of reaching 250 per year soon.

President Bill Underwood has a goal of every Mercer University student having this experience that he has called life changing for several students involved in the initial projects.

Dr. Ha Van Vo of Mercer, an associate research professor in the medical school and an assistant professor of biomedical engineering, set the stage for the project in his homeland when seeking to address the need for artificial legs in Vietnam where, according to reports, approximately 2,000 people are injured each year by land mines and unexploded bombs. It is estimated that 100,000 amputees are living in Vietnam today with millions of others worldwide.

Typically, a leg prosthesis costs between \$5,000 and \$50,000, said President Underwood, noting that customized fitting is the primary expense. So Dr. Vo turned his research eyes and hands toward developing a universal socket that could be adjusted to fit any



Photo courtesy of Mercer University

amputee's stump.

Then engineering students got involved in the development of a leg mechanism that could be adjusted on site to suit the length and gate of the recipient. The fully-functioning leg costs \$170 to produce, said Underwood.

In a video of the project, one student told of a man receiving his leg and trying to walk away before the adjustments were complete because it had been decades since he could do so.

Students will manufacture 100 more prosthetics for next summer. Underwood said the business school is being asked

to come up with a business plan so that the low-cost prosthetics can be mass produced in poorer nations to provide economic as well as health benefits.

“There are 30 people in Vietnam walking today who were dragging themselves through the street,” said Underwood, who described the program as “a transformative learning experience” for the students involved.

It is a way of “loving God with our minds,” said Underwood of the university’s focus on “a marriage between research activities and mission outreach service.” **BT**

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The *pavilion* people

Church has carved out niche in construction missions

JASPER, Ga. — David Stuart, a longtime minister at the First Baptist Church of Jasper, Ga., received a phone call last July from Dianne Fuller with Morningstar Children and Family Services asking if a mission team might build a 16x16 pavilion at their facility in Macon, Ga.

“I said that’s no problem as long as its 14x22,” Stuart recalled with a laugh.

The reason: volunteers from the congregation in the North Georgia mountains have built 17 shelters of that same size over several years.

This unique, specialized mission effort grew out of the church’s longtime involvement in resort missions — especially in partnership with resort missionaries Bill and Cindy Black of Gatlinburg, Tenn., who have long led Smoky Mountain Resort Ministries.

Youth teams from the Jasper church would lead ministry programs in campgrounds. They discovered a need for better facilities to hold day camps and evening programs.

The resort ministry leaders suggested that building pavilions would “create goodwill” with campground owners who open their facilities to outreach efforts and serve as helpful ministry tools for ongoing projects.

“We were looking for ways to use adults in mission projects,” said Stuart who came to the church in 1974 as minister of music and youth. His earliest resort mission efforts were specifically for teens.

Church member Anthony Whitworth had the plans for a 14x22 pavilion and has laid out every one of the 17 built by the Jasper congregation thus far — with the first one going up at a campground in Pigeon Forge, Tenn., in 1993. A total of six have been built in the Smoky Mountain region.

Two each have been erected in resort settings in Panama City, Fla., and Branson, Mo., said Stuart. Overall, ten of the 17 have been connected to resort ministries.

In fact, the Jasper congregation was once recognized by the Southern Baptist North American Mission Board as the resort



David Stuart, minister of music at First Baptist Church of Jasper, Ga., and his daughter, Hannah (left), a social work major at the University of Georgia, joined crew chief Anthony Whitworth, Dennis Woodard and Jeff Hyatt to construct a shelter for Morningstar Children and Family Services (shown above). The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Georgia also contributed to creating a new picnic/play area for families. Photos by Dianne Fuller and John Pierce.

ministry church of the year — a unique honor for a church not in a resort setting.

In recent years, mission volunteers from Jasper have made four summer trips to the main Morningstar campus in Brunswick, Ga., that serves mentally retarded and severely emotionally disturbed children. Five pavilions — each measuring a familiar 14x22 — have been built there by the Jasper teams to provide outdoor gathering spaces with protection

from the hot sun and coastal showers.

Also, an experienced team of five men from Jasper built a shelter (in just nine hours over two days) in 2004 as part of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Georgia’s “Touching Taliaferro with Love” rural poverty initiative. Jimmy Lewis, pastor of First Baptist Church of Jasper, is a former missions coordinator for CBF of Georgia.

While the Jasper congregation does a wide variety of mission activities in their local community and beyond, they have discovered the benefits of providing this unique ministry in repeated settings. One wonders if they could build a 14x 22 shelter in their sleep.

“One of the satisfactions is the knowledge that these things will be used for various ministries for who knows how long,” Stuart concluded. **BT**

outdoor outreach

Community garden grows out of church ministry exploration

GAINESVILLE, Fla. — How does a Sunday school growth seminar grow into a garden? Leaders of Parkview Baptist Church in Gainesville, Fla., have the answer.

Parkview, according to pastor Greg Magruder, was one of four churches participating in the seminar conducted by the Santa Fe River Baptist Association in 2006-2007 that called for finding ways congregations could focus on particular groups within their community. Sunday school director Jean Paul Calixte ran with the idea.

“Jean Paul began to implement the process in our Sunday school,” said Magruder. “He rallied the Sunday school classes to meet for a strategy session on how to best reach the community for Christ.”

After studying demographics and gaining insight into the various groups within their community, the adult classes met together in November 2007 to discuss ways to reach out more effectively.

“We had learned in previous sessions that the church neighborhood has a majority of singles and young adults,” said Magruder. “Five discussion groups were organized and participants presented ideas that would help us reach these groups.”

Over the next year a task force explored and evaluated the many good options before making a report to the congregation the end of last year. The top three projects identified were a singles Bible study, a ministry to unwed mothers and a community garden.

One group of church members made connections with the Stephen Foster Neighborhood Association to develop a common community garden. A University of Florida graduate student interviewed the pastor about Christian views of environmental issues. Visibility of the church’s ministries was raised in the community.

After signing an agreement with the neighborhood association, the congregation



One Florida congregation has found that a community garden makes for good food and important neighborhood connections. Photo contributed by Parkview Baptist Church.

sectioned off a portion of a church-owned park for the garden. Wendy Wilbur of the University of Florida and the Alachua County Extension Office provided expertise in garden development.

Calixte, who works for the Natural Resources Conservation Service, coordinated the garden working within the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s People’s Gardens initiatives. The Florida Organic Growers and their Gainesville “Initiative for Tasty Gardens” program provided a grant for the 10 raised garden beds and compost. United Way volunteers assisted church members in building the garden.

Tomatoes, various greens, onions, carrots, beets and herbs began making their appearances earlier this year and continued in

a mild climate that makes for a long growing season. But church leaders say more has grown out of this project than produce.

“New friendships and relationships have developed in the neighborhood,” said Magruder. “The church is now seen as a positive influence in the community.”

Other doors of ministry have opened — such as the pastor being asked to mediate community conflicts and to counsel residents — as a result of this project. And new families have become involved in the church.

“The gardens have built bridges to the community and given a new vision of outreach to the church,” said Magruder, remembering that it all started with Sunday school leaders looking for ways to reach out beyond the classroom. **BT**

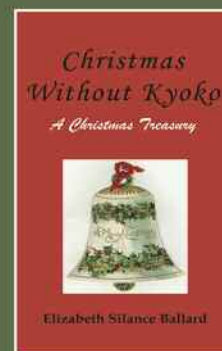


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New series to address clergy, congregational health

Insightful articles on “Healthy ministers for healthy churches” will appear in each issue of *Baptists Today* during 2010 through a partnership between the news journal and the Center for Congregational Health. This special series is supported by a generous gift from Henry V. Langford of Richmond, Va.

Bill Wilson, president of the Center for Congregational Health, based in Winston-Salem, N.C., in an introductory article explains the need for both clergy and laity to pay close attention to good practices of healthy ministers and churches.

Gifted writers from a wide variety of backgrounds and disciplines have been enlisted to provide practical and proven information that can help ministers and congregations to nurture trusting relationships and caring communities.

Facing the challenges head-on

By William G. Wilson,

It is hard to imagine a more timely topic than “healthy ministers for healthy churches.” Too many of us have seen the image of the local church go from a pillar of strength in the community to an institution associated with conflict, weakness, division and confusion.

An infusion of health is desperately needed. It is fitting to clarify what a healthy congregation — minister and ministry — looks like, and how to move toward health.

Honesty is the best place to start. Churches are full of people so there is potential for grace, harmony and healing as well as for bitterness, conflict and pain.

Some of us are in denial about how unhealthy the outside world believes our churches to be. David Kinnaman, in his book *Unchristian*, clearly reveals the perception that churches and Christians are hypocritical, insensitive and judgmental.

This perspective is not limited to those



Topics to be addressed

- “Marks of a healthy faith community”
- “Why every minister needs a coach”
- “Ministers need Sabbath too”
- “Getting off the road to burnout”
- “Finding realistic expectations in ministry covenants”
- “The pastor as prophet and chaplain”
- “Managing time and setting boundaries while remaining accessible”
- “Finding healing from sick religion”
- “Linking emotional health and spiritual maturity”
- “Numbers don’t lie: The truth about clergy health”
- “One pastor’s story of truth and grace”
- “Living in a glass house without cracking”

who view us from the outside. As a pastor, I constantly encountered people who had been deeply wounded by a church or a minister and no longer chose to be part of an organization they deemed unhealthy.

Our organization’s web site is healthy-church.org. One person, upon hearing that, declared such a name to be an oxymoron. She laughed bitterly at the idea, and then told me her painful story of conflict and disillusionment that resulted from a dysfunctional church and its unhealthy practices.

As with our physical bodies, the Body of Christ begins the journey toward health when we decide to make that a priority. We can wait until crisis occurs or be proactive before illness takes root. Either way, our decisions — or lack thereof — have consequences.

When we are at our best, the church provides meaning, healing, purpose and hope found nowhere else. But we must give deliberate attention to engendering such health and to nurturing the kind of fellowship that brings life to all who are part of a church.

Also, individual ministers must recognize that their own wellness is at the heart of helping create a healthy culture among our churches. This subject addresses a multitude of concerns including physical,

spiritual and emotional health.

Higher than average rates of obesity, heart disease, diabetes, back pain and a host of other ailments make ministers one of the higher risk groups to insure. The ability to blend the demands of ministry and the practices of eating, exercising and other types of self-care are beyond many of us. It is difficult to set boundaries in a boundary-less profession.

Also important, clergy desperately need tools for engaging in a positive and proactive approach to relationships and group process. Maturity, wisdom and discernment are spiritual gifts that can be enhanced by healthy practices and habits.

Many clergy neglect their own spiritual formation in the rush to care for others. Like a travel agent who never travels, we describe spiritual destinations never visited. To lead a church toward health, a minister must move spiritual health practices to a high priority for all concerned.

The stakes are high. Far too many clergy find ministry to be discouraging and leave for other vocations. Ministry opportunities are missed. Potential witness is lost. The Kingdom suffers. It’s time to get healthy.

This *Healthy Ministers for Healthy Churches* series might help you if ...

- You’ve been in a church business meeting where people argued for 45 minutes about whether the parking lot stripes should be perpendicular or diagonal.
- You are a pastor who usually works on your day off.
- You are a pastor who secretly takes days off when you are supposed to be working.
- You can’t remember the last time you laughed at church.
- The angriest you can ever remember being was on church property.
- You are a pastor who thought “24/7” meant the members approved of you playing the lottery.
- Your image of a coach is someone who gets doused with Gatorade when things go well.
- Your congregation’s vision for future ministry is to do the same things you’re doing now, only with a few more people — just like the ones attending now except younger with children. **BT**

digital fasting

Seeking a disciplined response to 'online overload'

In the world of faith-based social networking, evangelical Christian leader Mark Oestreicher commanded a huge chunk of cyberspace.

Known as “Marko,” the technological hipster amassed 4,000 Facebook friends, 1,500 Twitter followers and 2,000 daily readers of his blog. But then he decided he’d had enough — and unplugged from his online circle of friends.

“It’s not that I don’t think online connections are real. It’s just that they are perpetually superficial,” said Oestreicher, former longtime president of Youth Specialties, a company based in El Cajon, Calif., that specializes in youth pastor training materials and seminars.

In an age when many religious leaders embrace the latest technology and even “tweet” from the pulpit, some — like Oestreicher — are reassessing the potential negative impact of online overload.

“Unplugging has become essential to my spiritual journey and truly hearing God,” said Anne Jackson, an author, speaker, and volunteer pastor at Cross Point Church in Nashville, Tenn. “For me, all the noise can drown that out if I’m not careful.”

Jackson, author of the book *Mad Church Disease: Overcoming the Burnout Epidemic*, maintains a church leadership blog at Flowerdust.net that draws 150,000 page views a month, by her estimate. She has 6,700 Twitter followers.

But earlier this year, she closed her Facebook account — saying goodbye to 2,500 friends — and committed to spend less time on Twitter and her blog.

She finally acknowledged what her husband had hinted for a while: She had become a little obsessed with her online persona.

“For me, Facebook was a problem,” Jackson wrote in an essay titled “Why I Kissed Facebook Goodbye.”

“I don’t believe everyone should quit using Facebook, or be afraid of it if one hasn’t started,” she added. “We just need to be aware of the ways any form of media can interrupt our time with God or those closest to us.”

Balance is the key, said Peggy Kendall, an associate professor of communication studies at Bethel University in St. Paul, Minn., who has researched the impact of technology on society. She bristles at the notion that online connections are “perpetually superficial.”

“While there are certainly limitations to online communication, there are also significant benefits to communicating online that one can only rarely experience face to face,” said Kendall, author of the forthcoming book *Reboot: Refreshing Your Faith in a High-Tech World*.



In the old days of youth ministry, a pastor might endure years of junior high gym nights and overnight retreats before a student would feel comfortable enough to share deep hurts and uncertainties and ask authentic questions, she said.

But in an age of texting and instant messaging, a student might divulge “intensely personal things” within days of getting to know the youth pastor, Kendall said.

Students “have found that the hyper-personal nature of online communication provides them a safe place to be real and communicate freely,” she said.

Rather than unplug entirely, Kendall advocates that people of faith periodically “fast” from technology — to assess what’s helpful about their online activities and what’s simply distracting.

This concept has become a “huge conversation” in the classes that theology professor Dillon Burroughs teaches at Tennessee Temple University in Chattanooga, Tenn.

“I call it ‘digital fasting,’ although I recommend short breaks since it is like asking someone my parents’ age to stop using a phone or reading a newspaper,” said

Burroughs, a former pastor who networks extensively with ministry leaders and has more than 38,000 Twitter followers.

During the week, Margot Starbuck, a mother of three who works as a writer and speaker, said she writes, blogs and typically replies to e-mails within minutes of receiving them.

“If I’m not at my computer, I’m wondering what I’m missing,” said Starbuck, an ordained Presbyterian pastor who lives in Durham, N.C. “I check e-mail first thing in the morning and often as the last thing I do before bedtime. I am not proud of that.”

Even on Sundays, when she wasn’t technically working, she found herself staying busy with e-mail and computer games. So, she implemented what she calls “Unplugged Sabbath” — no computer all day long.

“When I wake up in the morning, when I’d typically start mentally tuning in to work on the computer, I find I have nothing better to do than crawl in bed with my daughter,” Starbuck said.

“After worship, when I don’t have to be about my own business, I’m freed up to take a hike with my family and be entirely present to them,” she added. “By the time evening rolls around, I don’t even want to check the e-mail that’s backed up all day.”

In Oestreicher’s case, he said he’s not suggesting that everyone delete online profiles and stop using the Internet.

Rather, he said he made a personal decision to choose “best over good” and stop constantly checking his BlackBerry for updates.

Trying to maintain hundreds — and even thousands — of online connections distracted from his real-life relationships with his family and colleagues, he said. Months after unplugging, he voiced surprise at how little withdrawal pains he experienced.

“I think that was primarily because I so immediately saw a return of four things I was hoping for: time, presence, focus and creativity,” he said. “My family could tell the difference, and my co-workers also. It was rather astounding, actually.” **BT**

Evangelicals look to nonpolitical future

SOUTH HAMILTON, Mass. — Repentant for having spent a generation bowing at the altars of church growth and political power, concerned evangelicals gathered in mid-October to search the soul of their movement and find a new way forward.

That evangelicals, who compose a quarter of the American population, must refocus on shaping authentic disciples of Jesus Christ has always garnered wide support. But how to do that in a consumerist society with little appetite for self-denial is fueling internal debate.

The state of evangelicalism drew the scrutiny of intellectuals as 500 people attended a conference at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary on “renewing the evangelical mission.” Leading thinkers called fellow believers to repent for a host of sins, from reducing the Gospel to a right-wing political agenda to rendering God as a lenient father who merely wants “cuddle time with his kids.”

“We are seeing the very serious weakening of American faith, even among people who profess to be believers,” said Os Guinness, senior fellow of the EastWest Institute in New York and author of *The Case for Civility*. “Yet an awful lot of people haven’t really faced up to the true challenge and still think they can turn it around with things like political action.”

Speakers earned applause for highlighting where evangelicalism, which began as a Protestant renewal movement, has ironically come to need its own renewing. At one point, participants sang a new hymn that’s setting the tone for a new era: “We spurned God’s way and sought our own,” they sang, “and so have become worthless.”

“The church in a sense has lost its mission to go out and love the people,” said Steven Mayo, pastor of Elm Street Congregational Church in Fitchburg, Mass. “We’ve become useless in a society that desperately needs us.”

How to become useful again, however, is a matter without consensus. Calvin Theological Seminary President Cornelius Plantinga urged pastors to talk less about fulfilling personal potential and offer more from the likes of Old Testament prophet Joel, who warns God’s people to wail and repent before the Lord scorches the earth.

“For pastors, it’s very easy to lose [a] job by taking your advice,” said Rachel Stahle of First Presbyterian Church in Carteret, N.J., after Plantinga’s lecture. “...So what wisdom



John Jefferson Davis, a theologian at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, was one of several intellectuals who discussed the future of evangelicalism at the Massachusetts New Service photo courtesy of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

do you share with us to take what you’ve said back to the churches?”

Some evangelicals are taking little comfort these days in successes of the past two decades, which included hundreds of mushrooming megachurches and the advancement of a socially conservative agenda. Too often, they say, Christians came to display un-Christian behavior in the public square and did their disciple-making cause a disservice.

“Beware the escalation of extremism,” Guinness said. “Christian sayings such as, ‘love your enemies’ — they’re forgotten. People are attacking their enemies, [but] they’re certainly not on the side of Jesus in this.”

For some, the solution lies in re-emphasizing Reformation doctrines. This approach resonates with the growing ranks of “New Calvinists,” who profess such teachings as man’s total depravity, God’s complete sovereignty and predestination of souls to heaven and hell. Some church leaders feel the drift away from traditional teachings has led evangelicals to neglect such biblical mandates as ecumenism and organize around lesser principles, such as political preferences.

“We [evangelicals] have moved from a church grounded in solid theology to a church grounded in personal relationships,” said Neil Gastonguay, pastor of Bath United Methodist Church in Bath, Maine. “We don’t have a message anymore.”

But others say evangelicals have worried too much about doctrinal differences when they’ve needed to be joining forces on larger

issues. Richard Alberta, senior pastor of Cornerstone Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Brighton, Mich., said preoccupations with doctrinal purity help explain why he struggles to round up fellow evangelicals to join him at anti-abortion events.

“When you get evangelicals among themselves, instead of addressing the social and moral issues, they get backwatered into some debate about dispensationalism or Calvin or Charismatic Renewal,” Alberta said. “There’s lots of suspicion, and those [worries] seem to act as filters that keep evangelicals from getting together.”

Similar frustrations beleaguer Travis Hutchinson, pastor of Highlands Presbyterian Church in Lafayette, Ga. He routinely gets a cool response from fellow evangelicals, he said, when he asks them to show courage and join his efforts to minister among undocumented immigrants. The problem, as he sees it, is that the doctrine-obsessed have lost touch with the heart of Jesus Christ.

“The missing ingredient is not the primacy of the mind and doctrine,” Hutchinson said. “It’s the willingness to suffer.”

Though renewal strategies may vary in the years ahead, evangelicals agree their calling is to be found in their bedrock source: Scripture. Theologian John Jefferson Davis of Gordon-Conwell, for instance, said today’s Christians “need a high-intensity experience of God” and should seek it through meditative readings of Scripture.

Still, he conceded, even Bible-based worship will need to be “more attractive and more enjoyable than a trip to the shopping mall.” “Unless we can experience God [in a way] that is as real and as appealing as what we see on a 60-inch, high-definition plasma home theater screen,” Davis said, “we are in trouble.” **BT**



Os Guinness

When pastors' silent suffering turns tragic

HICKORY, N.C. — What kind of personal pain would cause a 42-year-old pastor to abandon his family, his calling and even life itself? Members of a Baptist church here are asking that question after their pastor committed suicide in his parked car in September.

Those who counsel pastors say Christian culture, especially Southern evangelicalism, creates the perfect environment for depression. Pastors suffer in silence, unwilling or unable to seek help or even talk about it. Sometimes they leave the ministry. Occasionally the result is the unthinkable.

Experts say clergy suicide is a rare outcome to a common problem. But Baptists in the Carolinas are soul searching after a spate of suicides and suicide attempts by pastors. In addition to the September suicide of David Treadway, two others in North Carolina attempted suicide, and three in South Carolina succeeded, all in the last four years.

Being a pastor — a high-profile, high-stress job with nearly impossible expectations for success — can send one down the road to depression, according to pastoral counselors.

“We set the bar so high that most pastors can't achieve that,” said H.B. London, vice president for pastoral ministries at Focus on the Family, based in Colorado Springs, Colo. “And because most pastors are people-pleasers, they get frustrated and feel they can't live up to that.”

When pastors fail to live up to demands imposed by themselves or others they often “turn their frustration back on themselves,” leading to self-doubt and to feelings of failure and hopelessness, said Fred Smoot, executive director of Emory Clergy Care in Duluth, Ga., which provides pastoral care to 1,200 United Methodist ministers in Georgia.

A pastor is like “a 24-hour ER” who is supposed to be available to any congregant at any time, said Steve Scoggin, president of CareNet, a network of 21 pastoral counseling centers in North Carolina. “We create an environment that makes it hard to admit our humanity.”

It's a job that breeds isolation and lone-

liness — the pastorate's “greatest occupational hazards,” said Scoggin, who counsels many Baptist and other ministers. “These suicides are born out of a lack of those social supports that can intervene in times of personal crisis.”

No one knows for sure how many ministers suffer depression or attempt suicide, said London. But he estimated 18 percent to 25 percent of all ministers are depressed at any one time.

Most counselors and psychologists interviewed for this article agreed depression among clergy is at least as prevalent as in the general population. As many as 12 percent of men and 26 percent of women will experience major depression during their lifetime, according to the American Medical Association.

“The likelihood is that one out of every four pastors is depressed,” said Matthew Stanford, a professor of psychology and neuroscience at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

But anxiety and depression in the pulpit are “markedly higher” in the last five years, said Smoot. “The current economic crisis has caused many of our pastors to go into depression.”

Besides the recession's strain on church budgets, depressed pastors increasingly report frustration over their congregations' resistance to cultural change. Most depression does not lead to suicide, but almost all suicides begin with depression.

Nearly two out of three depressed people don't seek treatment, according to studies by the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance.

Counselors say even fewer depressed ministers get treated because of career fears, social stigma and spiritual taboo.

“Clergy do not talk about it because it violates their understanding of their faith,” said Scoggin. “They believe they are not supposed to have those kinds of thoughts.”

Treadway, pastor of Sandy Ridge Baptist Church in Hickory, was the exception. He told his congregation he was in treatment several months before his suicide. Still the shock was hard to absorb, co-workers said.

Rodney Powe, worship pastor at the church, said he only now understands depression is a mental illness. Christians who don't experience depression trivialize it, he said. “We just say, ‘Come on, get over it. We have the hope of Christ and the Holy Spirit.’”

Studies purporting to measure the suicide risk of various occupations have produced wildly different results. But Stanford said depression in Christian culture carries “a double stigmatization.” Society still places a stigma on mental illness, but Christians make it worse, he said, by “over-spiritualizing” depression and other disorders — dismissing them as a lack of faith or a sign of weakness.

Polite Southern culture adds its own taboo against “talking about something as personal as your mental health,” noted Scoggin.

The result is a culture of avoidance. “You can't talk about it before it happens and you can't talk about it after it happens,” said Monty Hale, director of pastoral ministries for the South Carolina Baptist Convention.

For pastors, treatment can come at a high price. “You are committing career suicide if you have to seek treatment,” said Stanford, “particularly if you have to take time off.”

In some settings, however, it is becoming a little more acceptable for clergy to get treatment, he said.

The good news, said Smoot, is “most pastors don't stay depressed. They find a way out of that frustration.”

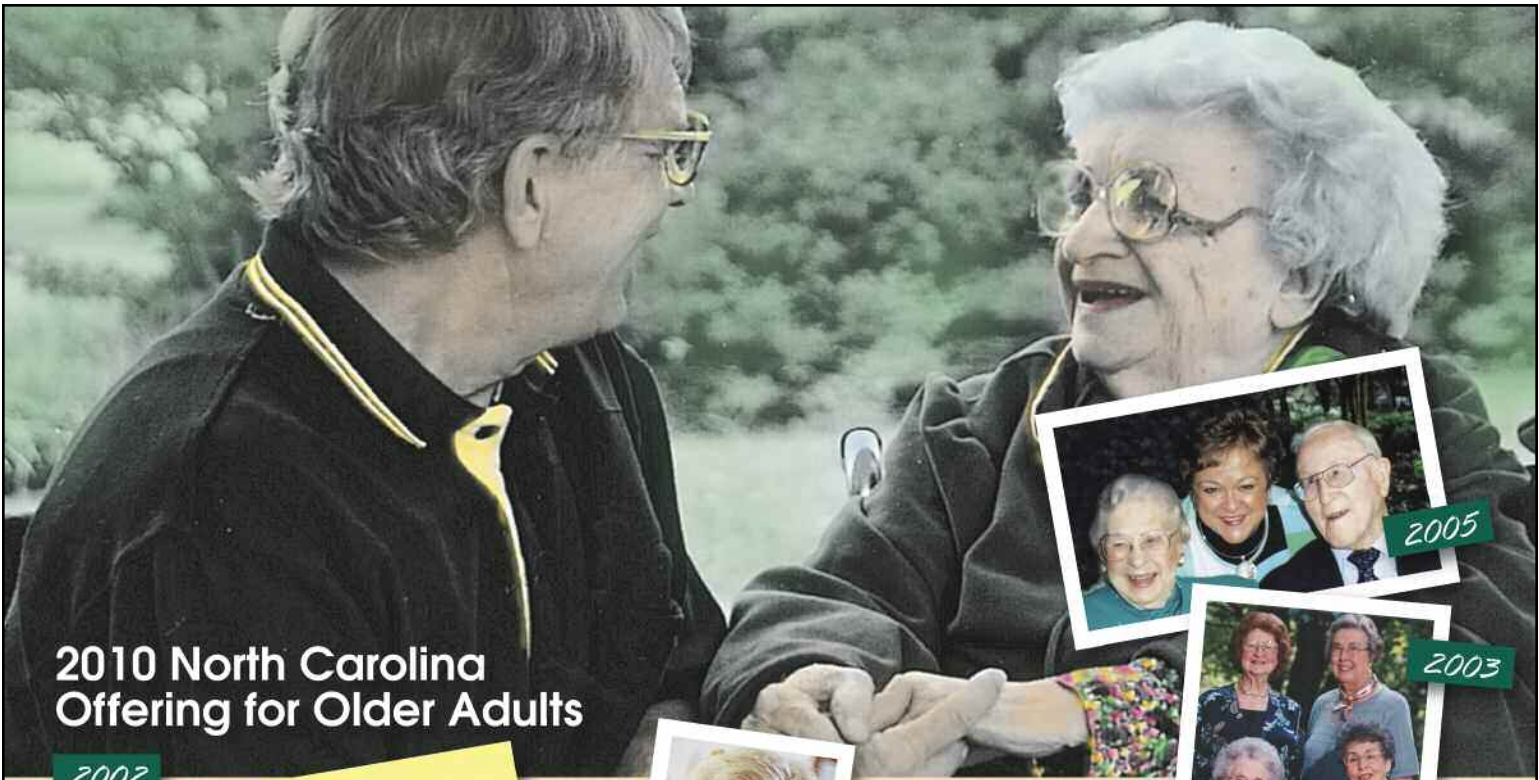
“Depression is part of the human condition,” added Scoggin. “Some people simply find ways to gracefully live with it. Like other chronic illnesses, you may not get over it.” **BT**



“Besides the recession's strain on church budgets, depressed pastors increasingly report frustration over their congregations' resistance to cultural change. Most depression does not lead to suicide, but almost all suicides begin with depression.”

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