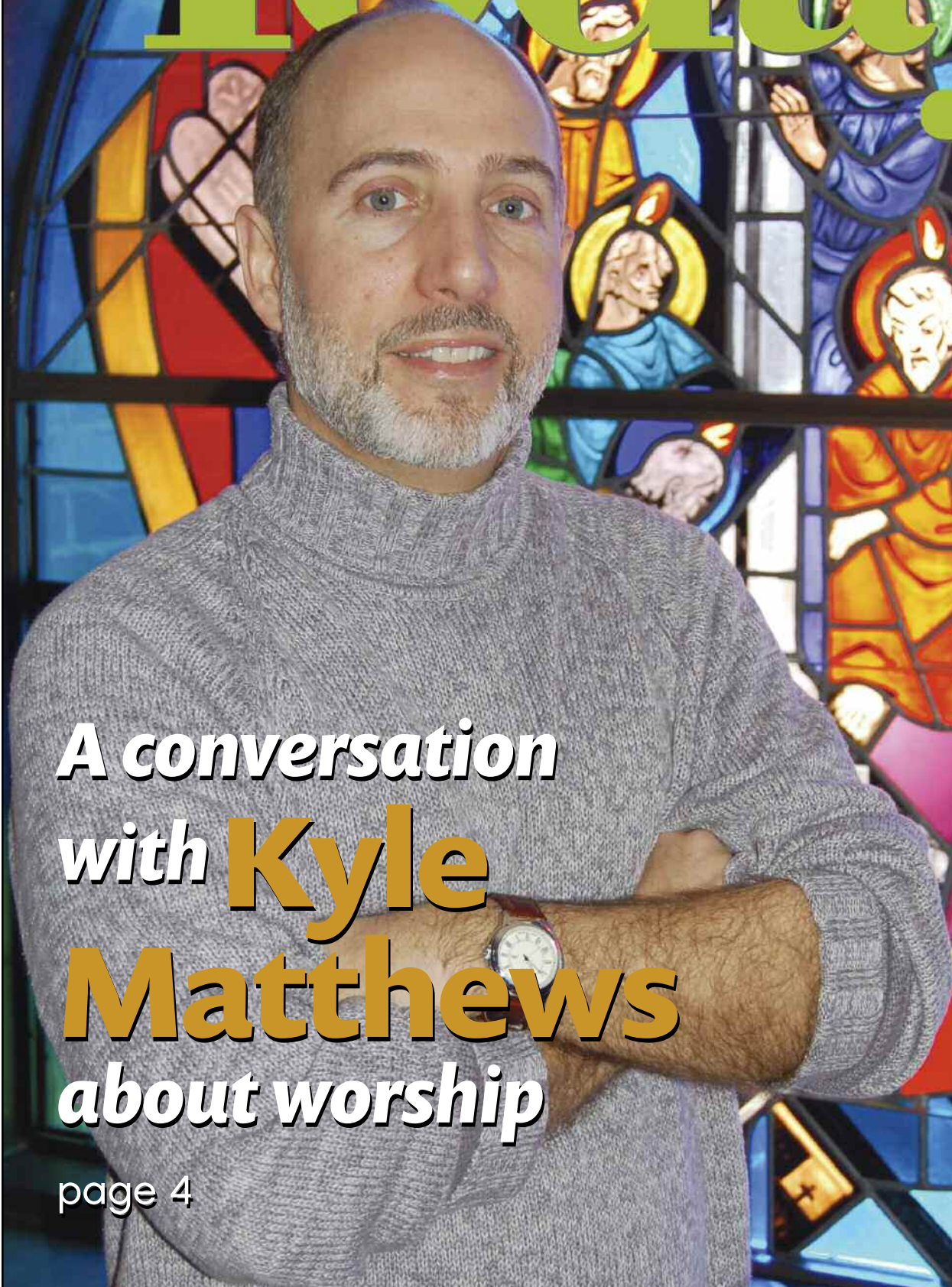


BAPTISTS Today



A conversation
with **Kyle**
Matthews
about worship

page 4

CELEBRATING GRACE

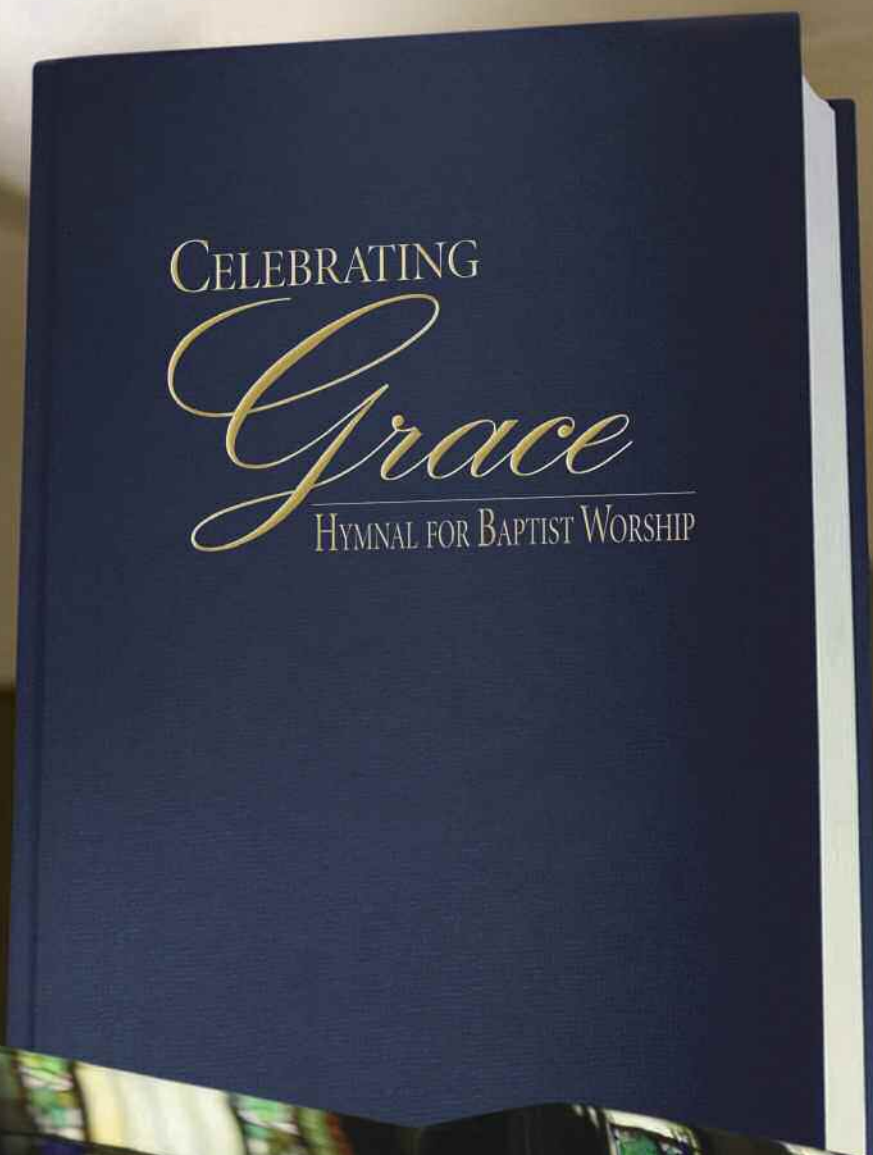
Enriching worship through the power of hymnody

Pre-release orders are being accepted for *Celebrating Grace Hymnal*, a beautifully bound collection of timeless hymns and new expressions of Christian faith. This treasury of more than 700 hymns and readings represents the spirit, wisdom, and creativity of musicians, theologians, ministers and laypersons from across North America.

Celebrating Grace also offers companion worship resources online, including supplemental music materials and the Worship Matrix™, an extensive worship planning tool.

Celebrating Grace Hymnal will be in churches Easter 2010.

For complete details, including the list of song titles, please visit our website at www.celebrating-grace.com/bt



Join Us for the Celebrating Grace Hymnal Premiere

March 7 – 9, 2010 ■ Atlanta, Georgia

Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church

Register online at www.celebrating-grace.com/bt

An autonomous national Baptist news journal

John D. Pierce
Executive Editor
editor@baptiststoday.org

Jackie B. Riley
Managing Editor
jackie@baptiststoday.org

Keithen M. Tucker
Development and Marketing Director
ktucker@baptiststoday.org

Tony W. Cartledge
Contributing Editor
cartledge@baptiststoday.org

Bruce T. Gourley
Online Editor
gourley@baptiststoday.org

Vickie Frayne
Art Director

Jannie T. Lister **Connie Pursiful**
Office Assistant Circulation Assistant

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

Board of Directors

- Gary F. Eubanks, Marietta, Ga. (chairman)
- Kelly L. Belcher, Spartanburg, S.C. (vice chair)
- Z. Allen Abbott, Peachtree City, Ga.
- Jimmy R. Allen, Big Canoe, Ga.
- Nannette Avery, Signal Mountain, Tenn.
- Ann T. Beane, Richmond, Va.
- Thomas E. Boland, Alpharetta, Ga.
- Huey Bridgman, Columbus, Ga.
- Mary Jane Cardwell, Waycross, Ga.
- Robert Cates, Rome, Ga.
- Kenny Crump, Ruston, La.
- David Currie, San Angelo, Texas
- James M. Dunn, Winston-Salem, N.C.
- R. Kirby Godsey, Macon, Ga.
- William B. Greenhaw, Macon, Ga.
- Leslie D. Hill, Lexington, Ky.
- Michael M. Massar, Tyler, Texas
- J. Thomas McAfee, Macon, Ga.
- William T. Neal, Stone Mountain, Ga.
- Ella Wall Prichard, Corpus Christi, Texas
- Michael G. Queen, Wilmington, N.C.
- Mary Etta Sanders, Dalton, Ga.
- Charles Schaible, Macon, Ga.
- Macon Sheppard, Folly Beach, S.C.
- Walter B. Shurden, Macon, Ga.
- Charlotte Cook Smith, Raleigh, N.C.
- David M. Smith, Houston, Texas
- Leo Thorne, Valley Forge, Pa.
- Sarah Timmerman, Cairo, Ga.
- Clement H. White, St. Petersburg, Fla.
- Winnie V. Williams, Seneca, S.C.

Advocates

- Mary Jayne Allen, Chattanooga, Tenn.
- Randy L. Hyde, Little Rock, Ark.
- Sherry McGlaughlin, Liberty, Mo.
- David Woody, Daniel Island, S.C.

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

To subscribe or place an advertisement, call 478-301-5655 or toll-free 1-877-752-5658.

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

Periodical postage paid at Macon, Ga. 31208

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

© 2010 *Baptists Today*. All rights reserved.

Baptists Today serves churches by providing a reliable source of unrestricted news coverage, thoughtful analysis and inspiring features focusing on issues of importance to Baptist Christians.

PERSPECTIVES

- > The First Baptist Church of Consumerism9
By John Pierce
- > Southwestern's acquisition of Lottie Moon items14
reflects dual motives
By Tony W. Cartledge
- > Will 'goodwill ambassadors' bring good will?25
By Tony W. Cartledge

IN THE NEWS

- > Obama's Muslim outreach top story of 200912
- > Messianic Jews wary of stepped-up persecution15
- > Where religious persecution is real, it's intense.....16
- > Young minister counts news journal as valued resource36

Churches, other Baptist groups support the work of *Baptists Today* Page 18

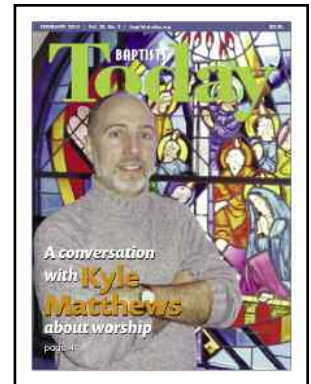
FEATURES

- > Balancing Act: Bivocational ministry presents26
unique challenges, opportunities
By John Pierce
- > Keeping up the church house: Facilities analysis30
can prioritize church maintenance needs
By John Pierce
- > Test of faith: Historic church thriving in revived38
D.C. neighborhood
By Edie Gross

IN EVERY ISSUE

Editorial	9	Classifieds	24
Quotation Remarks	13	Lighter Side	28
Readers' Responses	17	Reblog	29
Formations Commentary	19	Media Shelf	32
Resource Page	23		

10 Why every minister needs a coach
By Melissa Clodfelter



Cover photo by John Pierce. Kyle Matthews talks about how worship should be transforming rather than a source of division over personal preferences.

Page 4

Musicians sing praises of new hymnal

CELEBRATING *Grace* HYMNAL
WORSHIP & CHURCH MUSIC RESOURCES

34

A conversation with kyle matthews

ABOUT WORSHIP

GREENVILLE, S.C. — Kyle Matthews has seen Christian worship from a variety of perspectives — as a Baptist preacher’s kid, an award-winning songwriter, a popular concert artist and now as a church staff minister.

In addition to several original recordings, Kyle’s music has been recorded by well-known artists such as Vince Gill, CeCe Winans and Point of Grace. His song “We Fall Down,” recorded by gospel singer Donnie McClurkin, won the Dove Award for Traditional Gospel Song of the Year, the Stellar Award for Song of the Year, and ASCAP’s 2002 Christian Song of the Year.

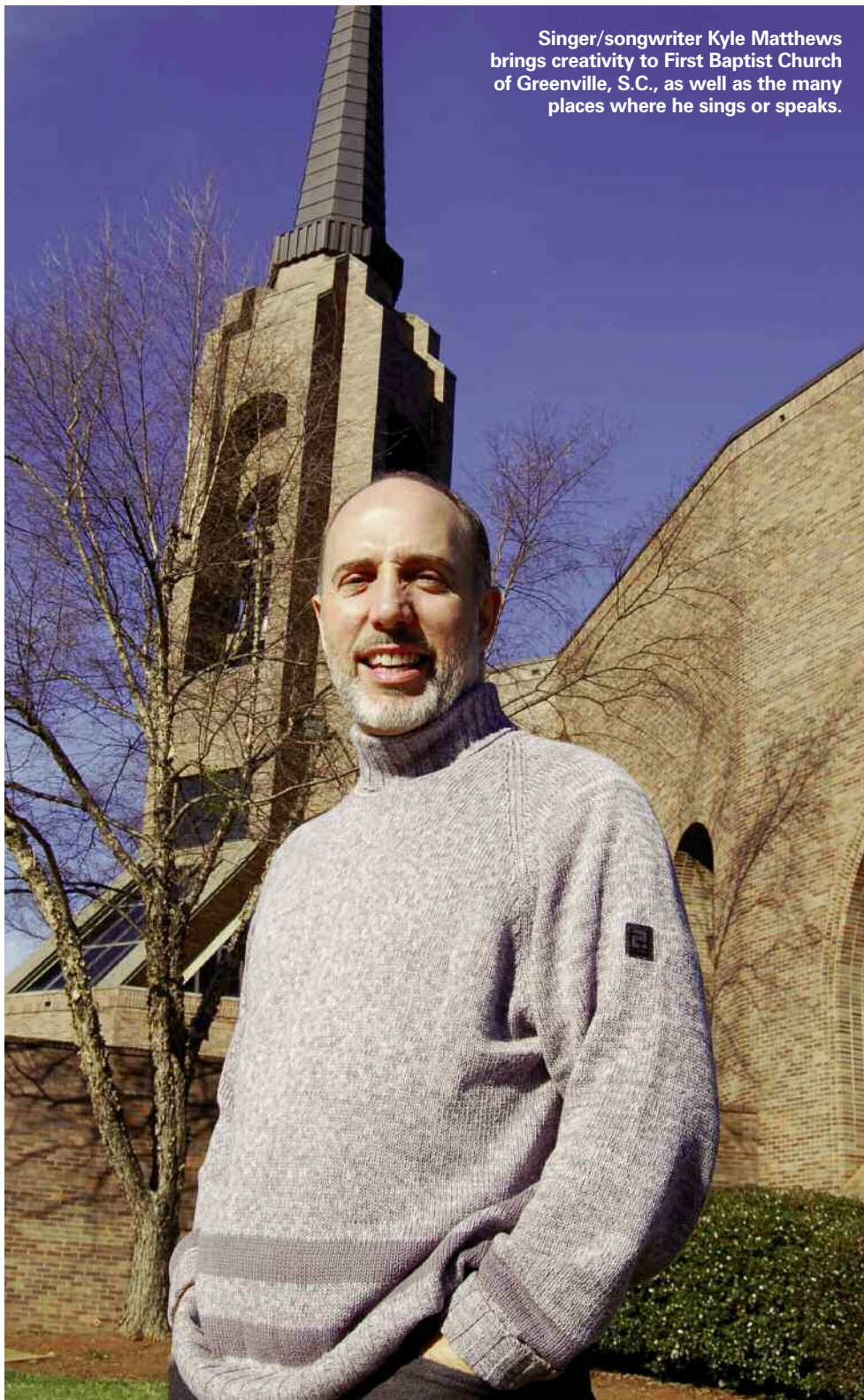
However, a little more than a year ago, Kyle and his family moved from Nashville to Greenville, S.C., where he joined the staff of his “home church” — First Baptist — in a part-time ministry position to bring new creativity to a wide range of congregational endeavors.

Yet Kyle continues to travel extensively to do concerts and to speak on faith, worship and ministry. He has also been diligent to connect those who appreciate his music with opportunities for hands-on missions.

In 2006, his alma mater, Furman University, awarded him the Richard Furman Baptist Heritage Award that recognizes “a graduate who reflects Baptist ideals by thinking critically, living compassionately and making life-changing commitments.”

Kyle’s music and information on booking him for an event are available at www.kylematthews.com.

Baptists Today editor John Pierce visited Kyle in Greenville recently to pose some questions about worship.



Singer/songwriter Kyle Matthews brings creativity to First Baptist Church of Greenville, S.C., as well as the many places where he sings or speaks.

BT: Why is worship of such great interest to you?

KM: I had so many formative experiences in worship services that I know it has a critical role in transforming character, opening minds, changing hearts and cultivating community. I want that for my own children.

Second, my itinerant career showed me that most churches are in crisis over worship trends, and that a lot is at stake. I don't believe that the "solutions" most churches are choosing have much of a future, and I want to be part of creating a different model.

Third, after working in the contemporary Christian music (CCM) industry for 18 years and seeing how the "sausage" of Christian media is actually made, I realized the extent to which we cannot trust that industry to speak to and for all Christians. There needs to be an alternative perspective of a local worshipping community that is not trying to sell something.

BT: Many worship leaders are under pressure from members who insist on having their personal preferences (style, time, etc.) met on Sundays. Has the approach to worship in many churches shifted from what God desires to what we like?

KM: When the "praise and worship" movement began, people often quoted the verse "God inhabits the praises of his people," insinuating that worship should be more authentic and emotive and personal than it had been. I think that impulse was valid.

But when we tried to turn those qualities into products for the marketplace, we did it by asking the same question secular entertainment asks: "What do people like?" And we created something entirely consumer-driven and virtually devoid of content.

It turns out that it's very easy to please a crowd, but there are other Bible verses to consider too, like the one about bringing our first fruits — the best we have — to worship. Popularity is no substitute for excellence, and it's not the best criterion for determining what music we use in worship.

Eugene Peterson says the larger the crowd, the less truth is conveyed.

The scheduling you're talking about is interesting. The 11 o'clock hour came into being in agrarian societies where farmers had daily chores to do in the hours after dawn. There's nothing sacrosanct about it.

But where there's a "customer is always right" mentality, people can be more demanding about the hour they prefer than they are about the content of the service. Each church has to decide for itself how many services it is willing to provide to accommodate those demands.

In the CCM industry, the conversation was almost exclusively about giving masses of people what they like. Generally speaking, they like either sexy secular culture wrapped in a Christian package, or they like sentimental traditionalism, or they like their fears and prejudices validated.

While I don't know how to quantify what God likes, I'm pretty sure it has to do with transforming people to want different things. So I began to see less and less value in trying to create fans for artists. I want to know: What changes minds? What makes us more compassionate and devoted to kingdom living?

BT: Sometimes worship leaders are forced to please one group while offending another — or try to strike a compromise that sometimes displeases both. Is it possible to create meaningful worship when strong and conflicting opinions exist within the congregation about how worship should be done?

KM: I believe it is possible, but not through the strategies that are popular today. They are all based upon consumerism and marketing, which works best when you concentrate your efforts on one demographic, which is the opposite of what most churches are called to do.

But my idealism comes from two places. First it comes from a belief that the content

of the gospel does not reside exclusively in either traditional or contemporary packages, but in the larger life of the church.

That means we can use any style to get a message across without having to ask the congregation to subsist on a diet of it. Style, which divides us, must be subordinate to message. Message and common purpose unite us.

Second, it comes from my belief that people would want more if only they were exposed to it, and that if we'll respect their intelligence and challenge them, if we'll provide the intergenerational experiences they can't find anywhere else, and if we provide excellent music, art and substantive teaching, it will raise their expectations to where they can't be satisfied any longer by cheap attempts to appeal to their demographic. The worship leader's task is to create experiences that transcend style.

BT: The so-called "generational divide" is often mentioned as a reason for offering different styles of worship. Yet mixed signals get sent.

For example, early services are typically favored by middle-aged or older members, who like to get up early and eat lunch early, even when designed by style to appeal to younger persons. Are some of our assumptions wrong about which demographic wants what?

KM: It stopped being about the "generation gap" over a decade ago. Now, it's all about personal preference.

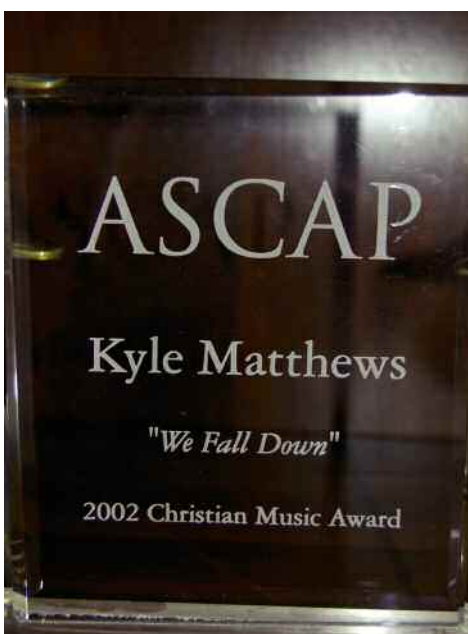
I met a college student recently and asked him what he was listening to and he got this faraway look in his eyes and said, "Frank Sinatra."

Youth culture has always had its own music. Teens are usually turned off by the music of their parents' generation, whatever it is.

But that never created a schism in adult worship culture until the boomers came along. They are the generation responsible for replacing hymns with youth camp choruses, making "praise and worship" a brick-and-mortar business, and creating the demographically targeted services you're talking about.

But people are finally starting to see that these musical styles are much more than styles; they are theological cultures that do not always agree.

When the folks in those separate services



finally sit down for a church conference, they often realize they don't know each other, they don't believe the same things, they don't like each other, and yet they have to share a budget, a staff and a building. Then, they often split.

The churches that are successfully offering multiple services have to work overtime to provide a counterweight of small groups and fellowship opportunities that help members identify themselves as belonging to the same church, and it's a lot of work. But it's very naïve to think that musical style is the only thing separating those groups; it's more than that.

BT: How did we get to this point?

KM: Well, history helps here. Most of us grew up in a world in which community was created by denominations that determined largely what we would sing and how we would design worship services.

Then, the marketplace took over, and boomer Christians proved to be one of the most predictable demographics ever.

Corporations realized there was money to be made, and a huge industry grew up in a very short period of time. Mainliners who eschewed the marketplace found themselves quickly abandoned by the publishing industry, and that's where a cultural split emerged between those who were Christian radio/pop culture consumers and those who were not.

Now the marketplace of groupthink is being replaced by something no one really understands yet, but it has to do with the way the Internet accommodates personal taste.

Denominations and corporations are struggling with how to market content in that environment and still make money, while the church, exploited and abandoned, is having to figure out how to cultivate community all over again. Separate services won't do it.

BT: Picking up on what you said earlier, how did one style of music get labeled as "praise and worship" to the exclusion of others? Isn't that the purpose of all church music?

KM: That happened because publishers were looking for a catch phrase to market a very specific type of song and message, with no idea what impact it would have. It was a poor choice of words.

Notice how "worship" is listed second after "praise," rather than praise being listed as one of six or seven elements under



Kyle likes to include choirs in concerts he gives in various churches.

"worship." That's an accurate description of what a diet of that music does to a church's theology; it reduces all worship to praise.

What many church folks don't know is what happened next. When the MP3 technology began to hit the profits hard (just imagine the impact of replacing an \$18 CD with a \$.99 download and giving half of that to iTunes), and the recession came on, the industry responded by circling the wagons and dispensing with stylistic and theological diversity and experimentation, doing away with any music, artists, labels or radio formats that were not "praise and worship."

It was a strategic move motivated by self-preservation, but it left us with "praise and worship" or nothing. We have to look outside the normal channels for musical expressions of confession, narrative, music that educates about biblical texts, wisdom literature, petition, lamentation, church music history, or music for children and senior adults.

BT: What are you witnessing about worship today that may be different from what we think is happening — particularly related to the so-called "worship wars"?

KM: On the positive side, the "me-generation" boomers — and I'm one of them — are having less influence, and young people are searching for more challenging content.

They are not so gaga over production or as easily impressed by technology. They know that those are not substitutes for social and spiritual experiences.

They don't believe you can fulfill the

demands of the gospel by building buildings. They are natural-born social networkers, like Jesus. They are more interested in a variety of the arts and in experimental forms of communication. If we'll include them, they can bring substantive change.

On the negative side, the worship outlook is perilous because churches have lost the musical canons that once helped unite us, and have not replaced them with anything.

While some people are saying "good riddance," I think there's cause for concern when you can travel from church to church and never hear two congregations sing the same song. There are a growing number of churches — large ones — that only sing songs they themselves have written. Even as a writer of original songs, it's hard for me to articulate all the things I think are wrong with that.

BT: If a church is suffering the wounds of such battles, what steps toward healing do you suggest?

KM: I'd first suggest that they call the style demon by name. I don't see any value in tip-toeing around that.

We have to respect people's opinions about the songs and authors and artists that have meant something to their faith development, of course. But when you ask a congregation whether they really want to be known as people of a particular style or people of the transforming gospel of Jesus, I've found they all pretty much agree about that.

We just have to point out that people have 1,000 songs on their iPods, 500 channels on their TV, and the world-wide web

available 24/7, but that worship is one hour in which we set aside personal preference to celebrate God as an intergenerational community. I think we can trust people to “get” that.

Second, we need forums for talking about this openly. Staff ministers need to explain our choices, and to task our membership with explaining to the church why a certain song or style is so important to them. That forces us to hear one another’s perspectives and usually prompts some self-examination.

Third, I’ve found that when a song is contextualized in a personal story or related to the message, churches can tolerate styles of all kinds. In worship design, context is a critical concern. Whether to use a certain song is not the issue so much as when to use it and how to use it.

We should ask the congregation as a whole to accept responsibility for sublimating personal preferences to the service of the message.

Then, we have to start taking seriously what we preach about spiritual gifts. We have to replace the culture of solo performance with one of congregational engagement and involvement, because healing will only happen when our members feel valued and their gifts needed.

When people contact me about a booking, we immediately start the dialogue about what choirs, ensembles or instrumentalists might want to be involved, as a way of working to replace the solo performance culture with communal experiences.

BT: Since so much emphasis has been placed on style in recent years, we may need a reminder of the reason for worship. If so, how would you describe the purpose of our worship?

KM: There are many wonderful working definitions of worship, and I wouldn’t take anything away from them. But one element I rarely hear mentioned these days — and one that I think would reframe the debate about worship — is transformation.

The emphasis has been to say “it’s all about God, let’s just praise God.” But Jesus said it was not we that were made to serve the Sabbath but the Sabbath that was created to meet the needs we have.

What is it about our practice of worship that changes us, educates us, forces us to rethink our views, opens our hearts to the poor and to the enemy, calls us to confession and repentance?

Marketing people would say, “But those things make people uncomfortable!” But any teacher, doctor, therapist or coach will say, “Do you want to get better or not?”

We have work to do. I think the marketplace has taken us over to the point that most people don’t realize there are other ways to think of themselves besides “customer.”

People of all ages tend to talk about worship in terms of likes and dislikes. I rarely hear people talk about what worship is about or how exactly it accomplishes anything internally in a person.

To get at that, you have to go to a different vocabulary altogether. Rather than style, I think you have to talk about theme, message and narrative.

Rather than popularity, I think you have to talk about engagement. Rather than entertainment, you have to talk about personal transformation.

BT: Can you say something, honestly, that might make those who have been wounded by the “worship wars” feel better about the future?

KM: Some of this painful reshuffling is not a bad thing because it has caused churches of all stripes to reconsider their purpose and mission. And while I’d want to discourage perpetual church shopping, I think some members may need to move on to other churches if staying where they are causes them to be negative and subversive. Some change is good.

I would also say that vacuous, self-indulgent worship that produces no fruit and doesn’t do anybody any good will one day pass away. So, there’s hope in that.

In the short run, we will lose some opportunities with some discerning people we need to be reaching. But it won’t last forever.

Substantive ministry always produces fruit, which always touches lives. Churches that change lives, improve their communities and love their neighbors will last, and they will never have to advertise their address.

Also, some of the new career paradigms for ministry are much healthier than the old ones. I’m meeting “ministers of fine arts,” “ministers of worship,” “ministers of discipleship,” “ministers of assimilation,” and “teaching pastors” that are not the senior pastor, which is itself an indication that we’re thinking more carefully about gifts than traditional career slots.

If that kind of gifts-valuing culture finds its way to the congregation, we’ll see greater lay participation and more creative worship services.

Finally, the simple, core elements of worship will always have the power of the Holy Spirit in them. That’s something that cannot be artificially manufactured or destroyed by trends.

The sacraments, simple songs, faith stories, biblical teaching and preaching, intergenerational community and unifying community ministries will always have a future and will always have power whether the rear-projection screen is working or not. We have to trust that it’s human interaction with the Spirit that matters, not production.

BT: What should worship planners have as their focus when they start looking toward the Sunday or Sundays ahead?

KM: I’m not qualified to be prescriptive in that way. If there are churches where it’s sufficient to sing through some old familiar hymns or the latest radio hits, hear a sermon and go home, that’s fine. I just know that I don’t worship that way and I wouldn’t last very long in a job where that kind of service was my responsibility.

What inspires me in worship planning is the challenge of bringing people within range of a transforming message. I can’t usher in the Holy Spirit, but I can try to create a process that opens us up to the Spirit, a process that moves us from an awareness of God’s presence, to praise, to confession, to pardon, to biblical teaching, to an invitation, to a sacramental and communal response, and a missional sending forth.

So, the question I’m asking is: What’s the transforming word? The theme? The message? Why does it matter and what difference does it make?

Then I try to figure out how best to bring people into an encounter with that, regardless of what musical styles we use.

At our place, Sunday services are driven by the lectionary passages. Midweek services are usually topical series. But we strive to ensure that they are always message-driven and that the form flows out of the lesson or theme.

The inspiring thing about this approach is that we never exhaust the creative power of biblical lessons. If we ever find ourselves stumped for ideas, it’s invariably because we’ve stopped really listening to the passage and letting it have its way with us. **BT**



| M | M | B | B |

Tailor-made for pastors who parent.

The *Benefits for Life* program offered by the Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board offers security for your family today—and into the future. *Benefits for Life* provides life and disability protection while you lead the church, then lifetime income in retirement. For more information or to enroll, call 800.986.6222 ext. 126 or send an email to service@mmbb.org.

MMBB—Retirement Benefits for Church Workers Since 1911

THE MINISTERS AND MISSIONARIES BENEFIT BOARD

www.mmbb.org

editorial

The First Baptist Church of Consumerism

By John Pierce

Dr. Tom Long, professor of preaching at Emory University's Candler School of Theology, has noted that a consumer mentality has invaded the church that causes many members to expect a type of "customer service" in which their own personal preferences are met at every point of church programming.

Those are not his exact words, but the essence of his response to one pastor's question at a Baptist gathering in Georgia last fall about what to do when someone repeatedly threatens to go to another church unless the pastor leads the congregation to do so-and-so according to his/her desires.

The emphasis, as Dr. Long noted, has shifted from the church being a place where one can use his or her gifts in service and find meaningful relationships to a place where someone should "get" what he or she wants from the church.

Singer/songwriter/minister Kyle Matthews addresses this subject as well in the interview on page 4. In response to my questioning about this concern, he said: "Where there's a 'customer is always right' mentality, people can be more demanding about the hour they prefer than they are about the content of the service. Each church has to decide for itself how many services it is willing to provide to accommodate those demands."

Many members expect — and sometimes demand — a certain worship style and time to their liking as well as other church-sponsored programs they deem superior to the personal preferences of other members.

"Me, me, me, me, me ..." keeps coming forth from the same persons who will buy an

expensive ticket for an out-of-town, outdoors sporting event with a starting time not yet set by the controlling hand of television.

Of course, the problem is that enabling church leaders have sought to accommodate these multiple, self-focused requests. So we have all kinds of worship services at various times and have created programs *de jour* to pacify those who demand them.

Then we wonder aloud why we have a fractured assortment of members rather than a close, connected fellowship.

Some church members hold congregational leaders hostage with their "my way is better" demands accompanied by threats to leave. The pressure on ministers to grow a congregation against all kinds of odds is often unreasonable and unproductive.

Church leaders (and lay leaders can do this more effectively than paid staff) need to come to grips with the reality that their congregation is not well suited for everyone. Some people are simply better off in a church that more clearly reflects their ideas of faith and practice.

Give a fundamentalist pastor 50 percent plus one vote and he (and I mean *he*) will have no problem tossing the losers to the sidewalk. But more moderate churches will allow a discontented minority — as few as one — to keep the congregation in turmoil.

Most amazing is how more-conservative church members will remain a thorn-in-the-

flesh (a holier term than the one that comes to mind first) in a moderate congregation despite the presence of numerous churches all around that are more suited to their desires.

During one of my interim pastorates, a young man visited the church for a second consecutive Sunday. After the benediction a lay leader gave him a warm welcome — but the young man responded with his stated disbelief that a woman deacon had given the morning prayer.

The wise and compassionate layman explained briefly that the church had done a careful study a few years ago and concluded that women should serve as deacons. But the young man started flipping frantically through his Bible and citing verses to prove the congregation wrong.

"We have already done that," the church leader said kindly but firmly. "And we have reached our conclusion."

The reality is that this young man would have no trouble finding dozens of Baptist churches within a stone's throw that share his perspective on gender roles. And another important reality is that this layman did both the visitor and the congregation a favor with his response.

Congregations that try to be all things to all persons or seek to appease a few strong personalities often send out conflicting signals about the church's identity that inhibits drawing those who share their values and mission.

Self-identity is not an elimination process but a way of clarifying the most important, commonly held attributes and values of a congregation. Then, even a clearly self-identified congregation can be respectful and inclusive of those with different perspectives on the church's mission — as long as those persons do not constantly seek to impose their ideas as being spiritually superior.

Self-identity is important for a congregation because it is based on shared values — not to be confused with narrow doctrinal constraints. And, therefore, the church's mission is based on those shared values — rather than trying to scratch every individual itch. **BT**



Baptist News, Baptist Views
online

www.baptiststoday.org



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

Why every minister needs a coach

By Melissa Clodfelter with client comments reported by Molly Lineberger

I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now..." (Numbers 11:14-15).

Does that sound healthy? Even Moses, arguably the greatest leader of all time, had limits. He needed help to bear the heavy burden of leading God's people.

So do clergy today. I am an executive coach and my specialty is working with ministers. I can say, without a doubt, that every minister needs a coach.

In our down economy, ministers are being asked to do more with less. Surrounded by suffering, they often want to cry out for justice for themselves. Ministers face the tension of balancing self-care with care for others and often neglect their own emotional, physical and spiritual health.

At other times, a pastor needs help to find the balance between "the way we've always done it" and her or his idea of a better way.

"How long do I listen," my clients often ask, "before I can start making changes?" Transitions are challenging.

More and more clergy are discovering that coaching can dramatically increase the health and effectiveness of their ministry. Ministers thrive in their work when they are connected to their passion and empowered to see their goals.

My own passion is helping ministry leaders name their dreams and move toward them with confidence. As a coach, I am trained to ask questions and to listen.

How many leaders, especially those in ministry, have someone to listen objectively?

Coaching takes place on two levels. First,

there are the tangible things to be done, and then there are the deeper issues that make the tangible things difficult.

Often, a pastor has the answer to a problem but needs me to help break open the "a-ha" moment that leads to a healthier place. Most of my clients are quick to offer forgiveness to their congregations, but strive for perfection themselves, often denying their own guilt and shame.

I ask pointed questions, like, "Are you willing to accept the same grace you give to other people?" Other times I ask whether, after a conflict, they are prepared for someone to be unhappy with the outcome.

One of my clients, David, is pastor of a Baptist church in Richmond, Va., that averages 300 in worship. His staff includes three other ministers. We have worked together for four years.

I have coached him and each of the other ministers individually and as a team. There were many staff issues when our relationship began. There was also a need for restoration within the congregation.

What David says

We first used Melissa for a staff retreat. I was somewhat new to the church and understood the real need for team building. She asked the questions that helped us create a cohesiveness and shared vision.

She guided discussion of congregational issues to help the staff deal with those issues constructively. Our church feels like a new place today; there is a new spirit within our congregation.

I have found coaching to be an invaluable



tool. Processing decisions with a coach is more helpful than with a fellow minister or spouse because the coach is objective, is for you, and can give you opportunities to see your mistakes through honest reflection. I recommend coaching for anyone and require that my staff be in a coaching relationship with Melissa.

Some important components of a coaching relationship are:

- Acknowledging that the client has the power within himself or herself to see possibilities and move toward them
- Asking hard questions
- Unearthing possibilities for reaching goals
- Holding the client accountable for plans and actions to move toward established goals
- Support in developing a focus for the client and for their congregation

With coaching, ministers can rediscover their passion. I ask them to consider what was important to them when they were first getting started in ministry and whether they want to reconnect with that.

I want my client to set the goals of our coaching relationship. My goal as a coach is to provide enough support, encouragement, depth and accountability to help them get where they want to be.

I ask clients to dream bigger and to live better; to see clearly where they have been, where they are going and how they are going to get there.

"Whose life are you living?" I might ask. "Whose expectations are you trying to meet?"

Another client, Mandy, is a part-time associate pastor at a Baptist church in Charlotte, N.C., with 150 members and three ministers on staff. Mandy and I have been in a coaching relationship for three years.

What Mandy says

Working with a coach is the smartest decision I could have made going into ministry. Melissa and I started working together during my discernment process.

She asked me to consider the strengths I would bring to a ministry staff and what strengths I would seek in other staff members. We discussed practical issues like maternity leave as well as areas of visioning and dreaming. As a result, my current job is a very good fit.

She has helped me to work with intentionality and authenticity. Because of this coaching relationship, I can tell a positive difference in myself, my soul and my ability to minister to others.

Coaching is beneficial to a congregation in a number of ways. It helps ministers become strategically focused — more effective at establishing goals and working for results.

Happier, healthier ministers have more energy for the congregation. Those who are aware of their strengths and weaknesses are more effective, and life-long learners are creative and innovative.

A third client, Lucas, five years out of seminary, is a youth pastor at a Baptist church in Orlando, Fla., with more than 500 in worship. We have worked together for two years.

What Lucas says

Melissa's coaching provides wise counsel in moments of crisis as well as ways to think strategically in my day-to-day ministry. With her guidance, I am better able to navigate the often-uncertain waters of church life.

The hardest part of my coaching relationship has been when Melissa has suggested that I find the patience to suspend the decision-making timeline. While this process may be painful, it does open up time and space for the best possible result.


Ministry is complicated and at times lonely, and I cannot imagine doing church work without a coach.

Sometimes ministers ask for coaching expenses to be covered as part of their compensation package. In David's case, coaching

for him and his staff is covered by a grant. I advise ministers to ask up front about funding when they are considering a new position.

I usually meet with clients by phone once per month, but we talk more often during a time of transition or crisis. The conversation is tailored to the client's needs. **BT**

—Melissa Clodfelter is director of vocational formation and the Pathways Program at Wake Forest University School of Divinity and coordinator of coaching for the Center for Congregational Health (healthychurch.org) in Winston-Salem, N.C.



Asking how
you can better serve
your church?

focus ON MINISTRY essentials

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly
June 23-26 | Charlotte, N.C.


The Fellowship's General Assembly isn't just an event; it's a resource to help your church fulfill its God-given mission. New this year is the *Essentials Conference* for church leadership, including deacons, teachers, committee members, staff and other leaders. Held during the Assembly on Friday and Saturday, the event features four 75-minute learning sessions on topics including:

- Essential Pastoral Care Skills for Deacons/Lay Ministers
- Essentials for Sunday School and Small Group Growth
- Growing Generosity Now: Essentials for Stewardship
- Essentials for Discerning Your Congregation's Future


And many more! Space is limited for this special Assembly event. Register at the Assembly Web site before March 1 at an early discount of only \$20 per person.

The 20th annual Assembly is June 23-26 in Charlotte, N.C. Come for worship, workshops, fellowship and much more. Registration for General Assembly is free and can be done online at www.thefellowship.info/assembly


2010 Assembly theme:
"And so we are ..." (1 John 3:1)



Bill Leonard, Thursday evening worship speaker



Lauren Winner, Friday evening worship speaker

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship 

Obama's Muslim outreach top story of '09

By Adelle M. Banks
Religion News Service

President Obama's speech to the Muslim world was ranked by the nation's religion journalists as the top religion story of 2009.

The June speech in Cairo, in which the president quoted from the Quran and said America will "never" be at war with Islam, was ranked as the No. 1 religion story by members of the Religion Newswriters Association.



Evangelical leader Rick Warren, whose invocation at Obama's inauguration was greeted by protests from gay-rights groups, was named the 2009 Religion Newsmaker of the Year.

The entire top 10 list of news stories is as follows:

1. President Obama promises a new start of Muslim-U.S. relations in a speech at

Cairo University.

2. Health care reform, the key topic in Congress for much of the year, includes religious groups urging assistance for "the least of these" and groups like the Roman Catholic bishops seeking restrictions on abortion funding.

3. Considered a devout Muslim, Maj. Nidal Hasan, the accused gunman in the Fort Hood massacre, prompts a review of the role of Islam in terrorism, with some fearing a backlash.

4. Dr. Carl Tiller, considered the nation's leading abortion doctor, is shot to death while ushering at his Wichita, Kansas, church.

5. Mormons in California come under attack from some gay rights supporters because of their November 2008 lobbying efforts on Proposition 8, which outlawed gay marriage. Iowa, Vermont and New Hampshire approved gay marriage later in the year but it is overturned by Maine voters.

6. President Obama gives the commence-

ment speech and receives an honorary degree at the University of Notre Dame after the Roman Catholic university becomes embroiled in debates over his abortion views.

7. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America votes to ordain gay and lesbian clergy who are in a monogamous committed relationship, prompting some conservative churches to make steps toward forming a new denomination.

8. The recession forces cutbacks at a range of faith-related organizations — houses of worship, colleges and seminaries, relief agencies and publishing houses.

9. The Episcopal Church's General Convention votes to end a moratorium on installing gay bishops, disregarding a request from the archbishop of Canterbury.

10. President Obama's inauguration features controversial prayers by evangelical megachurch pastor Rick Warren and civil rights veteran Joseph Lowery, as well as a pre-ceremony prayer by gay Episcopal Bishop V. Gene Robinson. **BT**



Langford honored for courage, contributions

Henry V. Langford (center) is presented with a resolution from *Baptists Today* at a fall luncheon in Richmond, Va. Representing the news journal are Ann Beane (left), a member of the Board of Directors from Richmond who sponsored the luncheon, and executive editor John Pierce (right).

The resolution commended Langford for his courageous stand for racial equality that cost him his pastoral position during the civil rights struggle and for his continuous engagement in Baptist life. Langford, who fulfilled his calling in various roles, also became a successful conservationist.

A series on "healthy ministers for healthy churches" appearing in *Baptists Today* throughout 2010 is supported by a gift from Langford in an effort to help congregations become more caring and effective faith communities. Photo by Keithen Tucker.

Coming this spring!

A Capsule History of Baptists

By Bruce T. Gourley

Published by the Baptist History and Heritage Society
(www.baptisthistory.org)

"A riveting account ..."

—NEVILLE CALLAM
General Secretary,
Baptist World Alliance

Due to a scheduling conflict, Marian Wright Edelman is unavailable to receive the 2010 Judson-Rice Award. Further information on the April 22 luncheon at Calvary Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., will be forthcoming.

Quotation

“ remarks ”

“God used murderers to write a good portion of the Bible. Now, how big are your sins? And can God use you?”

—Andrew Farley, author of *The Naked Gospel: The Truth You May Never Hear in Church*, referring to Moses, David and Paul in an interview with the *Austin American-Statesman*

“This is pretty amazing. I don’t think any church has gotten a cash offering like that off a letter.”

—Saddleback Church pastor Rick Warren announcing Jan. 2 that his letter to members concerning a \$900,000 budget deficit had brought in \$2.4 million to date (*Washington Post*)

“With a church of our size, I guess you always run those risks. It’s not like we’re screening people at the door.”

—Aaron Miller, student pastor at Colonial Baptist Church in Cary, N.C., on someone stealing a flat-screen television during a well-attended Christmas program (*The Cary News*)

“That this cowardly event took place in [President] Carter’s hometown is evidence that racism in America, and politics, is far from over.”

—Baptists Today online editor Bruce Gourley, in a Jan. 4 blog about an effigy of President Obama found hanging from a sign in Plains, Ga. (baptistperspective.brucegourley.com)

“Interfaith dialogue is not capitulation of our Christian or Baptist principles to another ideology or religion, any more than talking with someone who cheers for the Cowboys means I forfeit my devotion to the Redskins.”

—Michael Clingenpeel, pastor of River Road Church, Baptist in Richmond, Va. (*ABP*)

“Our generation is more focused on happiness and prosperity, going to college, getting jobs. It’s important to be part of the culture. If you’re above the culture, you can’t change the world.”

—University of Maryland junior David Moffitt, whose parents were part of a mass wedding performed by Unification Church founder Sun Myung Moon 27 years ago in New York (*Washington Post*)

“I love her more now even than when I asked her to marry me and she turned me down.”

—President Jimmy Carter speaking of Rosalynn Smith Carter, his wife of 63 years (*AP*)

“The Church may be eternal, but not the churches.”

—Béatrice de Andia, founder and president of the *Religious Heritage Observatory* in Paris, on the lack of preservation of historic churches in France (*New York Times*)

“The fight for religious liberty is an effort to prevent the government from doing what even God will not do: coerce faith.”

—K. Hollyn Hollman, general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty (Report from the Capital)

“I would love to say the Lord told me it’s gong to be peace and prosperity and it’s wonderful and that God’s going to bless America... I can’t say that.”

—Pat Robertson, 79, making his 2010 predictions Jan. 4 following an annual prayer retreat (*ABP*)

“We cannot simply imitate either the high liturgism of the Catholics and Anglicans or the emotional passion of the charismatics. We don’t do either of these very well, and our efforts often feel awkward and forced.”

—Mercer University ethics professor David Gushee calling Baptists down a third path toward a more vibrant future (*ABP*)

“Election, by whatever definition, represents the most heinous injustice one could impute to God. It makes a mockery of moral law, defies any reasonable understanding of human freedom and begs the obvious question: ‘Why try?’”

—Gilbert H. Vieira of Cofax, Calif., in a letter to *Christian Century* regarding the comeback of Calvinism

“The highest overall levels of restrictions are found in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Iran, where both the government and society at large impose numerous limits on religious beliefs and practices.”

—From a Pew Forum study that showed almost 70 percent of the world population faces limitations on their faith (*RNS*)

“The phrases that kill relationships and stifle creativity are ‘I told you so,’ ‘You should have listened to me,’ anything beginning with ‘You never’ or ‘You always,’ and any response that says, ‘I’m glad you finally figured out what I have known all along ...’”

—Episcopal priest and Religion News Service columnist Tom Ehrlich

AN ANALYSIS BY TONY W. CARTLEDGE

Southwestern Seminary's acquisition of Lottie Moon items reflects dual motives

FORT WORTH — According to a story from Baptist Press, the promotional arm of the Southern Baptist Convention, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary unveiled several shipping crates in December that are purported to contain remnants of Lottie Moon's rented house from P'ingtu City, China, along with personal possessions and other 19th century antiques from the area.

Seminary president Paige Patterson displayed open crates containing "some of Moon's furniture, such as chairs and a stove, as well as shingles, bricks and other remains from her house in P'ingtu, China," according to the article, which provided no information about how the items were authenticated.

Since Moon is known to have lived exceedingly frugally in a tiny dirt-floored house, the 35,000 pounds of materials reportedly contained in the shipment must have included several tons of bricks and clay shingles, along with many things that never belonged to Moon.

As expected, Patterson used the occasion to praise Moon as a champion of "biblical inerrancy," something he's done since the old "School of the Prophets" days at Criswell Bible College back in the 1970s.

According to the article, Patterson prefaced his dedicatory prayer over the artifacts with a talk that "explained why Lottie Moon is so significant to Southwestern Seminary and the Southern Baptist Convention 'in the aftermath of the conser-

vative renaissance of the convention.'"

Patterson repeated a time-worn story of how Moon was once engaged to Southern Seminary Professor Crawford H. Toy but broke off the engagement because Toy had "imbibed historical-critical thinking" and developed a skeptical attitude toward biblical inerrancy. While there is evidence for a broken engagement, I've seen nothing to substantiate the motives Patterson attributes to Moon.

The article led me to imbibe in two tracks of thinking. The first was to note that the acquisition of Lottie Moon's effects from China, presuming they are authentic, appears to have completely bypassed Woman's Missionary Union, whose history is closely intertwined with Lottie Moon, and which has raised untold millions of dollars for international missions through its trademarked "Lottie Moon Christmas Offering."

Southern Baptist leaders have sought during the past decade to gain ownership of the Lottie Moon trademark as well as to control WMU by making it an agency of the SBC, but both efforts have been, thus far, unsuccessful.



Paige Patterson



Lottie Moon

The plan to build a public shrine to Lottie Moon at SWBTS may be well intentioned, but it could also be used to magnify the mission pioneer's role as a very conservative Southern Baptist while diminishing her historic connection with WMU, which is not mentioned in the article.

One could hope that WMU will be invited to partner with SWBTS in developing the display, but given that the ultra-conservative Southern Baptist Convention of Texas is raising funds for the project, exclusion is a more likely scenario.

The article also inspired me to reflect on the life of Moon's spurned suitor. Crawford H. Toy was a brilliant scholar and a man of great piety who was loved by colleagues and students, but who felt forced to resign his post at Southern Seminary rather than surrender his integrity. He later had an illustrious career at Harvard, and was lost to Baptists.

I have admired Lottie Moon from childhood, when devoted WMU ladies taught me about her willingness to suffer deprivation because of her devotion to Christ and to missions. Increasingly, I have also come to admire Crawford Toy, who was no less devoted to Christ, and who was willing to suffer rejection by Southern Baptists rather than surrender to the narrow-minded demand that he forgo scholarship and limit his teaching to popularly accepted notions.

There's more than one way to be a hero. **BT**



Baptist News, Baptist Views

BAPTISTS TODAY

An autonomous national Baptist news journal

Call today 1-877-752-5658



Messianic Jews wary of stepped-up persecution

By Michele Chabin
Religion News Service

ARIEL, West Bank — After their teenage son was nearly killed in 2008 by a bomb disguised as a holiday gift basket, few people were as eager for Ya'acov Teitel to see justice as Leah and David Ortiz.

Teitel, an Orthodox Jewish loner who confessed to placing the package in the family's stairwell, said he targeted the Ortiz family because they are Messianic Jews — Jews who believe in Jesus as the Messiah.

"We want justice, not revenge," said Leah Ortiz, who has lived in this religiously mixed city of 30,000 since the late 1980s. "This happened because Teitel had hate in his heart. He needs to be in prison."

The attack, which left 15-year-old Ami with shrapnel wounds and burns over much of his body, has highlighted the vulnerability facing Israel's small and increasingly beleaguered Messianic Jewish community.

Community members say the decades-old harassment has intensified in recent years, as ultra-Orthodox Jewish groups dedicated to stopping missionary activity have grown stronger and more confident.

Anti-missionary activists hold protests outside Messianic places of worship and post photos and the addresses of believers on lampposts. They tell the Ministry of the Interior that Messianic Jews are converts to Christianity, something that would make them ineligible to immigrate to Israel.

Although Israeli law permits missionary activity — provided the evangelizer does not offer any material incentive to a potential convert — the persecution and forced conversion of countless Jews for generations has made Jews extremely wary of proselytizing.

Messianic Jews, who publish and distribute the New Testament in Hebrew, say they are eager to share the "good news" with anyone willing to listen, but insist that they do so within the parameters of the law.

Aaron Rubin, who heads the anti-missionary department at Yad L'Achim, Israel's leading anti-Messianic organization, insists that Messianic Jews lure unsuspecting Jews by speaking Hebrew and quoting Jewish texts.

"They lie. They try to convert people



Leah and David Ortiz are Messianic Jews in Ariel, West Bank. Their teenage son was badly wounded when an ultra-Orthodox loner left a bomb disguised as a gift basket in the family's home. Religion News Service photo by Michele Chabin.

but say they're not Christians. They're fundamentalist Christians who call themselves Jews," Rubin asserts.

Several of Israel's estimated 100 Messianic Jewish congregations are reporting an unprecedented level of harassment:

- In the southern cities of Beersheva and Arad, fervently Orthodox Jews regularly protest outside Messianic Jewish congregations and the homes of worshippers. A chess club run by one of the congregations was burned to the ground.
- When ultra-Orthodox Jews in central Ashdod learned that Israel and Pnina Comforti are Messianic believers, they convinced local rabbinical authorities to revoke the all-important kosher certification for the couple's bakery. Despite an order from Israel's Supreme Court last June, the rabbis continue to refuse to recognize the bakery as kosher.
- In early December, two ultra-Orthodox men were arrested for torching the car of the Levine family, Messianic Jews who live in the northern town of Beit Shean. Activists armed with a megaphone go around town, telling residents the Levines are Christian missionaries who bribe children to convert to Christianity.
- Barry Segal, a Messianic leader who co-founded the Joseph's Storehouse Humanitarian Aid Center with his wife

outside Jerusalem, attributes the recent rash of high-profile incidents to his movement's growing popularity.

"The number of believers in Israel was roughly 300 in 1981, and today it's over 12,000," he said. "I'm talking about those of us who are Jewish born, who were married in Jewish weddings."

Thousands more Israelis, primarily Russian and Ethiopian immigrants whose Jewish status is questionable, combine Jewish and Christian ritual in their daily lives.

"In times past, the harassment mostly consisted of mail tampering and phone calls with vicious intent," Segal said. But in recent years, "there has been a rising tide from harassment into violent acts."

Segal is quick to point out that Sudanese and Pakistani Christians face more deadly threats than Messianic believers in Israel. Still, "any violence, actual or threatened, is unacceptable."

Pnina Comforti, the bakery owner, said business has been down 50 percent since her bakery's kosher certification was torn off the wall. "People come and say, 'We heard you do something to the cakes'" that renders them unkosher. "What the rabbis say, people do."

Still, she is undaunted. "What those who threaten us don't understand is that they strengthen our determination and our faith." **BT**

Where religious persecution is real, it's intense

By Robert Marus
Associated Baptist Press

WASHINGTON — Some Christians in the United States are quick to cry “persecution” if courts, schools or businesses fail to favor their religion above others. But in places around the world where Christians face beatings, economic reprisal, imprisonment or even death because of their faith, Americans’ claims of religious persecution in the United States ring hollow.

“Many Christians are not even doing what is expected, which is to pray and to speak for those who have no voice,” said Chris Van Gorder, a Baylor University religion professor and expert in global persecution of Christians, who ticked off a number of places where severe violations of religious freedom were taking place.

Consider Afghanistan. “During Taliban rule, persecution of Christians was government policy and this is no longer the case even though the few Christians that remain in the country continue to face very dangerous pressures,” Van Gorder said, noting the 2006 apostasy trial and conviction of an Afghan man who converted from Islam to Christianity — and faced the death penalty for doing so. He was freed only after an international outcry against the sentence.

Another is Iraq. “Iraq was once a haven for Christians under the more secular Ba’athist regime of Saddam Hussein, who once praised Christians as the ‘little flowers of Iraq’ and who gave a number of Christians high-ranking positions in his government,” Van Gorder said. “Since 2003, the situation for Christians has deteriorated rapidly. Muslim terrorist groups [have] targeted Christian churches and bombed Christian-owned business, which had all been protected under Saddam Hussein. Many Iraqi Christians were the target of kidnapping and these problems have encouraged over a million Christians to flee the country, many going first to Syria. On July 13, 2009, seven churches were bombed, four people were killed and 30 Christians were wounded in these attacks.”

Saudi Arabia is an ally of the United States, but religious freedom there is

regarded as essentially non-existent by the U.S. State Department as well as independent and international human-rights groups.

“Any individual who publicly criticizes official statements about Islam faces the risk of harassment and detention,” said Van Gorder. “... It is illegal for a Muslim to convert to Christianity, and those who do face the death penalty.”

“No religious freedom exists in Saudi Arabia,” agreed Knox Thames, a Baptist who is acting executive director of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

Rob Nash, global missions coordinator for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, said many of the most egregious religious and governmental restrictions on religious freedom are taking place in the former Soviet republics of Central Asia such as Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

“This seems to be the place of most intense persecution by government in a direct way today,” said Nash. “Christians and others, including Muslims, in many of these nations are suffering the worst sorts of persecution. Church meetings are raided, and Christian leaders are often arrested and/or fined.”

But Nash said religious persecution often can be tied to communal or ethnic conflicts that have little or nothing to do with national or regional governments. But the persecution that arises may be tolerated or even instigated by local political and religious leaders.

“The most intense religious persecution today is not governmental persecution, but rather persecution brought on by religious zealots of other religions or faiths,” he noted. “Orissa in India is one such place where some significant persecution of Christians and Muslims is occurring by extremists in the region. The same has been true fairly recently in East Timor.”

In Eastern Europe, Russia and former Soviet republics, local Orthodox Christian officials have, in recent years, incited mobs against local Protestant or Catholic groups.

While China often is portrayed as one of the world’s worst violators of religious freedom — and the State Department

views it that way — Nash said the situation there is complex.

“Many Americans assume that there is extreme religious persecution in China. In point of fact, China is growing increasingly more open when it comes to religious freedom,” he said. “China recognizes five official religions, including Protestantism, Catholicism, Islam, Buddhism and Taoism. Registered Christians and churches have full religious freedom as long as they are supportive of the nation and work toward building a harmonious society. Bibles are published in China and widely available to the public. Chinese Christian bookstores sell Christian books openly. In many places, Christian meeting places are recognized as churches as soon as they have a building and a trained pastor. Seminaries exist very openly and are working hard to train clergy.”

But religious groups by which government leaders feel threatened in China have had a more difficult time. Uighur Muslims in interior parts of China, Christians in unregistered Protestant house churches, practitioners of the Falun Gong religion and Tibetan Buddhists all have suffered severely at the hands of the Chinese regime.

Those interviewed agreed that proper responses to global persecution are as complex and varied as the situations in which incidents arise. But Americans and other Westerners have an outsized opportunity — and responsibility — to act.

“Write members of Congress and urge them to press the State Department to make religious freedom promotion a foreign policy priority,” said Thames. “Senators and congressmen also have the ability to talk directly with heads of state, so constituents can urge their members to raise specific situations of concern.”

“Sometimes advocacy is best accomplished through huge media pressure to effect change,” said Nash. “At other times, it is best to wait quietly for local Christians to work it out.”

He recommended the Baptist World Alliance and Forum 18, a Norway-based Christian news service that tracks global persecution, as good ways of staying informed and gauging a proper response. **BT**

readers' responses

Reaction to commentary

EDITOR: Thank you for publishing Anita Pangle's letter (December 2009, page 24) concerning Terry Eddinger's 'take' on Bathsheba's responsibility for her fate. I had exactly the same reaction when I read the commentary.

I don't know the basis for "she should have known the king's routine..." The king's routine during a time of war would normally have been to be at the head of his army!

Her husband and the rest of the men were there. If anything, she might have thought with all the men at war, she was safe to shed her burka for a little while.

As to luring the king, men of power have always felt entitled to whatever women they choose, regardless of marital status — current political and sports figures included.

Women of that day were treated more like property than consenting adults of equal weight in decision-making — especially where sex was concerned. If the king summoned someone for his pleasure, it is highly unlikely she'd be able to change his mind by giving him a morality lecture. It is far more likely she'd lose her head.

I appreciate Ms. Pangle's letter of rebuttal. Far too often we women have not spoken out against such *status quo* opinions. We have played our "good little girls smile and keep quiet" roles, rolled our eyes, bit our tongues and moved on.

That is also how moderate thinkers found ourselves shut out of the Southern Baptist Convention and state conventions. Tolerance for diverse opinions only worked in one direction.

Obviously there is still room in the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and in *Baptists Today* for conservative viewpoints, but we need to feel free to question and call to account those opinions expressed as facts. God expects all of us to use the brains he gave us.

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.

I am grateful to belong to a church where women are respected as deacons and leaders, not just relegated to raising money and keeping the casseroles coming. Perpetuating the "Bathsheba got what she had coming" mentality is not just demeaning; it is very, very sad.

Joyce Fulcher, Madison, Ga.
(Fulcher is a member of Madison Baptist Church.)

Opening a can of worms

EDITOR: The December 2009 issue of *Baptists Today* really opened a serious can of worms. It calls for a response.

It is quite ironic that on the 400th anniversary of Baptists, one of their major publications should give space to attacks on believer's baptism. With the December issue, the traditional definition of a Baptist church, "a body of baptized believers," goes out the window.

Now, the essential doctrine for which our forebears hazarded their lives and fortunes is suddenly of little significance. I am no "Landmarker," but it is not some kind of bigotry to insist that the sacramental (saving) baptism of most churches is not valid.

Also the original Baptist belief that infant baptism is a senseless ceremony, which puts at jeopardy the soul that relies upon its efficacy toward an eternal right-standing with God, cannot have suddenly ceased being true. There is no doubt that there are Christians in other denominations, but this would be despite the erroneous teachings that these groups preach and proclaim.

Also, not content to wreak so much havoc in one area, this same issue of *Baptists Today* tries to justify the liturgical ceremonialism and the papist trappings that our predecessors in the faith rejected

and condemned.

It seems that some Baptists no longer identify Lent as the useless self-mortification and works religion (autosoterism) that it is. Most Baptists have stood for "faith alone" and rejected such ascetic practices as fasting, meatless Fridays, cutting tonsures in the hair, clerical garb, flagellations, and acts of penance as being the outward show of Pharisees.

I am Baptist. If I needed ritualism or if I thought God enjoyed seeing people lighting candles (magical vehicles for sending up prayers through sacrificial flames), I would join some faith tradition that features such religious frippery.

Richard L. Atkins, Winter Park, Fla.

Where have they gone?

EDITOR: Where have the Baptists gone? Those who do not cut mission giving when crunch comes. Those who united around missions, not theology. Those who are not mad about something.

Those who want to relate to all Baptists because of our common heritage. Those who believe God's redemptive plan is complete in the Bible without agreeing on a view of inspiration. Those who want to relate to 230 other Baptist groups around the world to offer our united support for freedom.

Those who believe there are other Christian groups than Baptists. Those who don't label all who do not agree with them. Those that "love mercy, do justice and walk humbly with God."

Charles R. Barnes, Annapolis, Md.
(Barnes is executive director emeritus of the Baptist Convention of Maryland-Delaware.)

Read about it in
Baptists Today
DISCUSS IT AT

www.BaptistLife.com



Churches, other Baptist groups support news journal

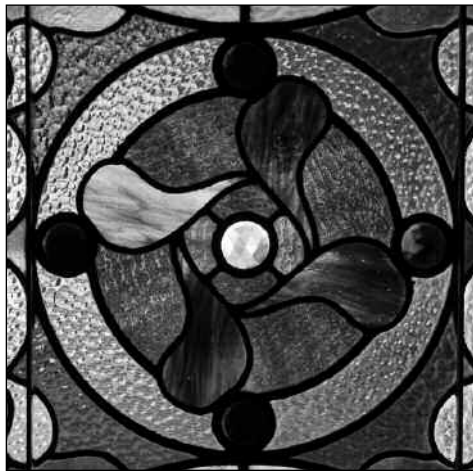
Baptists Today expresses deep appreciation to the churches and organizations that made gifts to this communication ministry in 2009 through direct or designated gifts, as First Freedom Project partners or through the Missions Resource Plan of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina.

Organizations and Agencies

American Baptist Churches USA
Campbell University, Buies Creek, N.C.
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Georgia
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Oklahoma
Mercer University, Macon, Ga.
Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board
Oconee Institute, Macon, Ga.
Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, N.C.

Churches

Antioch Baptist Church, Enfield, N.C.
Antioch Baptist Church, Mamers, N.C.
Ardmore Baptist Church, Winston-Salem, N.C.
Baptist Tabernacle Church, Wendell, N.C.
Boonville Baptist Church, Boonville, N.C.
Brandt Oaks Baptist Church, Greensboro, N.C.
Brunswick Islands Baptist Church, Supply, N.C.
Burningtown Baptist Church, Franklin, N.C.
Calvary Baptist Church, West Asheville, N.C.
Cashie Baptist Church, Windsor, N.C.
Churchland Baptist Church, Lexington, N.C.
Covenant Baptist Church, Winston-Salem, N.C.
Dortches Baptist Church, Rocky Mount, N.C.
Early's Baptist Church, Ahoskie, N.C.
Edenton Baptist Church, Edenton, N.C.
Faith Baptist Church, Georgetown, Ky.
First Baptist Church, Ahoskie, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Arden, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Asheville, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Belhaven, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Buies Creek, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Burlington, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Burnsville, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Canton, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Carolina Beach, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Clemson, S.C.
First Baptist Church, Clinton, N.C.



First Baptist Church, Commerce, Ga.
First Baptist Church, Dalton, Ga.
First Baptist Church, Dunn, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Elkin, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Elon, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Fairmont, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Farmville, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Fayetteville, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Ft. Oglethorpe, Ga.
First Baptist Church, Four Oaks, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Frederick, Md.
First Baptist Church, Gainesville, Ga.
First Baptist Church, Gastonia, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Goldsboro, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Graham, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Greensboro, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Greenwood, S.C.
First Baptist Church, Kannapolis, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Lenoir, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Lexington, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Lumberton, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Madison, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Marion, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Mt Airy, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Mt. Olive, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Muleshoe, Texas
First Baptist Church, New Bern, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Raleigh, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Savannah, Ga.
First Baptist Church, Smithton, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Stoneville, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Sylva, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Tarboro, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Wilmington, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Winston-Salem, N.C.
Flat Springs Baptist Church, Sanford, N.C.
Forest Hills Baptist Church, Raleigh, N.C.
Glenn School Road Baptist Church, Durham, N.C.
Goshen Baptist Church, Leland, N.C.
Grace Crossing, Charlotte, N.C.

Greenwood Forest Baptist Church, Cary, N.C.
Greystone Baptist Church, Raleigh, N.C.
Grove Park Baptist Church, Clinton, N.C.
Hayes Barton Baptist Church, Raleigh, N.C.
Heritage Baptist Church, Wake Forest, N.C.
HomeStar Fellowship, Apex, N.C.
Jersey Baptist Church, Linwood, N.C.
Kirkwood Baptist Church, St. Louis, Mo.
Knightdale Baptist Church, Knightdale, N.C.
Lakeside Baptist Church, Rocky Mount, N.C.
Littleton Baptist Church, Littleton, N.C.
Louisburg Baptist Church, Louisburg, N.C.
Magnolia Road Baptist Church, Jonesboro, Ark.
Main Street Baptist Church, Kernersville, N.C.
Mars Hill Baptist Church, Mars Hill, N.C.
Masonboro Baptist Church, Wilmington, N.C.
Memorial Baptist Church, Buies Creek, N.C.
Morningside Baptist Church, Asheville, N.C.
Mt. Carmel Baptist Church, Chapel Hill, N.C.
Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church, Fayetteville, N.C.
Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church, Liberty, N.C.
Murfreesboro Baptist Church, Murfreesboro, N.C.
New Life Christian Ministries, Marietta, Ga.
Northminster Baptist Church, Jackson, Miss.
Oakmont Baptist Church, Greenville, N.C.
Pauline Baptist Church, Four Oaks, N.C.
Peace Covenant Fellowship, Charlotte, N.C.
Providence Baptist Church, Charlotte, N.C.
Reynoldson Baptist Church, Gates, N.C.
Roberts Chapel Baptist Church, Pendleton, N.C.
Robertsville Baptist Church, Oak Ridge, Tenn.
Second Baptist Church, Liberty, Mo.
Sharon Baptist Church, Smithfield, N.C.
Shiloh Baptist Church, Baton Rouge, La.
Smoke Rise Baptist Church, Stone Mountain, Ga.
Snyder Memorial Baptist Church, Fayetteville, N.C.
Southeast Baptist Church, Greensboro, N.C.
St. Johns Baptist Church, Raleigh, N.C.
Swift Creek Baptist Church, Raleigh, N.C.
Tabernacle Baptist Church, Raleigh, N.C.
The Memorial Baptist Church, Greenville, N.C.
Union Grove Baptist Church, Oak Ridge, N.C.
United Baptist Church, Winston-Salem, N.C.
Viewmont Baptist Church, Hickory, N.C.
Watts Street Baptist Church, Durham, N.C.
Westwood Baptist Church, Cary, N.C.
Wilshire Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas
Wingate Baptist Church, Wingate, N.C.
Winter Park Baptist Church, Wilmington, N.C.
Wise Baptist Church, Wise, N.C.
Woodland Baptist Church, Wake Forest, N.C.
Woodland Baptist Church, San Antonio, Texas
Yates Baptist Church, Durham, N.C.
Zebulon Baptist Church, Zebulon, N.C.

2010 Formations Commentary

Bible Study resources for the adult Formations lessons available from Smyth & Helwys Publishing (www.helwys.com)

**LESSONS FOR:
Sunday, Feb. 21-
Mar. 21, 2010**

Written by Keith Vaughn, long-time business manager for a corporation in Milledgeville, Ga., and a recent graduate of McAfee School of Theology.



Feb. 21, 2010

A question of fellowship

Matthew 9:9-13

Critics come in many flavors. At the table of fellowship, the sweetness of Jesus' acceptance of others so unlike him mixes with the tartness of those religious professionals who repel all but their own people. The Pharisees were soured by both cultural and religious mores. The flavor that critical group brought to the table failed to satisfy the palate of these hungry sinners.

The guest list of those at Matthew's banquet included the good, the bad and the ugly. From the perspective of the good Pharisee, there were many sitting around the table with whom good folks just did not associate. My guess is that Mathew's guest list included the social elite of Capernaum — politicians, merchants and a few scoundrels mixed in. Matthew's friends were not religious professionals. It is doubtful that they were even religious. As we glance around the table, we see those labeled as traitors — Herod's cronies, in cahoots with Rome, picking the pockets of the good citizens of Galilee by collecting taxes. There are others, society's less desirable elements — not saints, but sinners. It is this table where Jesus and his disciples are invited to sit.

Years of dealing with Pharisees had likely left a rancid aftertaste in the mouths of many of the tax collectors and others in the room that night. Imagine never being quite good enough to live up to the other's principles. The Pharisees set high religious and moral

standards in an attempt to maintain the purity of their religion. But a more self-serving motive for the Pharisees might have been to portray themselves as God's righteous standard. Part of this standard included guarding against mixing with those who either supported the enemy — the Roman government — or those who failed at some point on the stringent religious requirements of their community. Many held the Pharisees in high regard. However, this group of sinners sitting at the table, this class of people who never hoped to attain a higher religious orthodoxy, knew they were unable to meet the social and religious standards.

There was a particular sweetness in Jesus' attitude toward these sinners that was in stark contrast to the mood set by the Pharisees. First and foremost on the menu was the fact that Jesus accepted sinners. There was no scriptural obligation requiring that the rabbi must share time with sinners, yet he generously did so. This rabbi broke with current Jewish social conventions, but the Pharisees did not share his position.

When questioned about his actions and called to face his critics, Jesus assumed a role beyond the rabbi, the teacher of disciples — he became a healer. Physicians are allowed access to places most people cannot or will not go. As a result, Jesus was invited into the presence of the sick and spiritually malnourished. This religiously anemic group sitting around the table needed a physician to prescribe the proper spiritual sustenance they had failed to find from the Pharisees. The religious establishment just could not break old dietary habits regarding eating and drinking with sinners, and failed to understand others who did. Jesus' simple act of sharing a meal was therapeutic and healing to people who had never experienced love, fellowship and acceptance from the religious community.

What did all this commotion mean to the disciples? This whole scene causes one to wonder if they were accustomed to social settings such as this. They were sandwiched between Jesus and the Pharisees. On the one side they

found the inclusive mercy of God's kingdom, and on the other they felt the tug of an excluding and hierarchical structure. In the eyes of these pharisaical judges, this smorgasbord of fishermen, zealots, tax collectors and others — those we call disciples — came closer to the side of the sinners rather than the religious right. Having prescribed meal therapy for the sinners, Jesus now turned to the Pharisees and prescribed a good dose of scripture. His injection of Hosea 6:6 targeted the root of the problem: judgmental attitudes. That day the disciples were able to witness a simple act of fellowship and its healing effect on sinners gathered around a table.

Jesus' simple action of sharing a meal is a reminder that simple actions are sometimes all God requires from us. Simple actions remind us of Mother Teresa feeding a malnourished Calcutta man, Rosa Parks sitting in the front of the bus, or even Clarence Jordan eating with people of color — all at times when most folks avoided mixing those flavors at the dinner table. Jesus' simple action challenged society's concept of fellowship.

There was little likelihood that any of the "sinners" would hear about God from the crowd of religious folks looming over them, much less hear of his great love. Is it any wonder, then, that they gathered around Jesus as flies around a picnic table? There was something good at that table with them, and they wanted a taste. Where else would they find health, wholeness and healing?

Feb. 28, 2010

A question of authority

Mark 3:19b-30

Everyone surrounding Jesus had questions. It is not uncommon for people to question authority, particularly religious authority, in order to raise doubt about a particular person or subject. In Mark's text, we find Jesus' opponents, and even Jesus' own family, drawing us toward doubting Jesus. Characters surrounding Jesus believe he has no authority over self,



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



family, religion or Satan — but Jesus demonstrates he is in full control and has complete authority over all things.

Jesus' renown extended far beyond Capernaum and the borders of Galilee. He was immensely popular, and he drew huge crowds. So many people showed up at the house that Jesus and his companions were unable to carry out even simple routines such as sharing a meal.

Scribes came down from Jerusalem. From Mark's writing, we cannot say with certainty that they were sent as official emissaries, but these learned men represented the religious authority in the eyes of the people. Throughout Mark there is tension between this group and Jesus' disciples. On this day the scribes were not there to honor Jesus, but to question his authority and damage his reputation.

Many of the people present at the house were talking about the recent happenings and all they had seen and heard. People were saying, "He has gone out of his mind." Alan Culpepper tells us this passage may be literally translated as: he is "standing outside himself," "beside himself" or "out of his mind" (*Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary: Mark*).

Perhaps the question of Jesus' sanity was foremost in the minds of his immediate family members. Demon possession was linked to madness, and what family wanted their son characterized in this way? To allay the suspicion of insanity, his family decided to take action. The Greek verb used here is translated as "arrest" in two other places in Mark. Here the New Revised Standard Version chooses a less forceful translation by saying, "They went out to restrain him," and the New American Standard, "They went out to take custody of him." Mark does not fear telling his story in a way that reveals the first family's failure to embrace Jesus' immense popularity.

It had been noted that even the demons submitted to Jesus' authority. Because of the prevailing belief system, scribes from Jerusalem began to speculate that this could only happen if Jesus himself were possessed (3:30). The accusation was plain: "He has *Beelzebul*, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons" (3:22).

Ben Witherington III (*The Gospel of Mark: A Social-Rhetorical Commentary*) explains the meaning behind the reference to Satan. Here, *Beelzebul* is not to be confused with *Beelzebub*. The former is a combination of *Baal*, translated as "Lord," and *zeboul*, an

ancient word that means "house." *Beelzebub* was used as a mockery for the Canaanite storm god and is translated as "Lord of the Flies." Jesus was accused falsely: "By the lord of the house he casts out demons" calls to question the validity of his authority and at the same time attempts to discredit him before the crowd of people who have swarmed the house. It is a serious accusation to which Jesus responds.

Jesus frames his defense in the form of a parable. His words catch everyone by surprise. We read of conflict, a divided kingdom and a separated house that gives the appearance of divided demonic forces, but Satan is not at war against himself. That family structure will not last. Satan is the owner of the house; however, it is Jesus who has broken into Satan's house and plundered his possessions. He did this earlier (1:39), and he even passed that same authority to his closest followers (3:15). Satan's end has come (3:26), not because his kingdom has risen up against itself, but because another kingdom — the kingdom of God in the form of Jesus — has come to war against Satan. In true parabolic form the answer is not printed directly onto the page but must be intuited from the story.

The final form of authority Jesus displays is the authority to forgive. Mark has already presented us with a powerful story of forgiveness of sin (2:10-11) where Jesus forgave the paralytic and cured him of his ailment. Mark now introduces us to the concept of a sin for which there is no forgiveness. Jesus authoritatively states that people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter, with one exception: there will be no forgiveness for blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. This guilt is eternal.

Jesus stands against Satan and on the side of God. Those who fight against what Jesus does fight against God, and by implication, fight against the Holy Spirit, which empowers and directs God's agents in the world — including Jesus. Any who claimed Jesus had an unclean spirit failed to recognize the true source of his power. In rejecting Jesus, they rejected the only one able to forgive them of their sin.

Mark's text shows us that Jesus' authority was called into question. In typical fashion, Mark does not mince words as he gets to the point. There is no question: Jesus has all authority over earthly and heavenly things. His authority is final and extends into eternity.

March 7, 2010

A question of piety

Luke 13:10-17

There are many opposing forces at work within the account of this bent-over woman. Luke presents us with the polar forces of shame and honor, bondage and liberation, and finally the sacred and the profane — strong cultural systems that continue to pull at our imagination and keep this woman's story alive.

Shame and honor were intense social forces in first-century Palestine. Shame isolated people, and in some cases, kept them from full engagement in the religious community. Its form may not only be found in infirmity, as is the case with the older woman on center stage, but it may also come through verbal dishonor as in the episode with Jesus and this synagogue ruler. The shame weighing heavily upon the bent back of this woman was transferred to the synagogue ruler when her healing touched a nerve and caused him to criticize its timing. Pulling his logic from the same Old Testament book used by the synagogue ruler, Jesus shamed him by offering an alternate interpretation that proved apropos. At the same time, we find that the woman's shame in being excluded from full membership in the community has been replaced with honor and inclusiveness now brought on by her new label as a daughter of Abraham.

Bondage and liberation are additional forces at work here in Luke's account of this healing. The specific forces at work binding this woman's life and spirit were legion. Her bondage can be understood as both spiritual and physical. Jesus called her physical binding a spirit of weakness — a demonic condition described as bondage to Satan (13:16) All the other players in this drama are bound to a wrong interpretation of the law, which has occurred over years — even generations — as each person is intertwined in cords of tradition and understanding.

Alternately, the process of liberation can occur in other ways. Liberation may occur through an appropriate touch, a word aptly spoken, or even through an insight that was previously hidden. All of these occur within Luke's story. Liberation occurs with Jesus' declaration of freedom and his healing touch that loosed the demonic bonds and allowed her freedom of movement. Her freedom then transformed her into a person who stood



straight and openly praised God. The prophetic words of Isaiah, spoken by Jesus in Luke 4, are fully realized in this woman: “He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives ... to let the oppressed go free ...”

Religion carries the potential for both sacred and profane acts: two other influences in this narrative. The particular response of an individual to his or her religion is influenced by both the culmination of generations of teaching and by social forces that influence his or her action. It is a rare individual who goes against either. Most people simply follow their ancestors’ ways or the strong tidal forces of society. The results are seen here in Luke’s story as all these participants in his drama respond according to the forces at work in their lives. Some profane and others embrace the sacredness of the moment.

The Sabbath day was determined as sacred and was part of the framework for God’s chosen people. Sabbath became the trademark of Jewish identity following the Babylonian exile. The ruler, the people, this woman and Jesus — all who were in the synagogue — were born into this pattern of thought and action. Maintaining the sacredness of Sabbath through particular actions helped them maintain their identity.

Work and rest held particularly acute positions for interpreting the commandment of keeping Sabbath. Rabbis and others through the centuries discussed and dissected the meaning of work and its relationship to Sabbath rest. The lines were drawn between chronic and critical situations in a way that presented chronic conditions as something to be endured on this sacred day. This view labeled her medical treatment as a profane act. Conversely, an animal’s critical need for water required attention that was exempt from the ordinary classification of work. The synagogue ruler, not Jesus, was the one uniquely positioned within the social structure to determine an appropriate response to this woman’s condition. He failed at that task. Jesus used the same Old Testament text (Deut. 5:13-15) to transform the crowd’s understanding of work and of the sacredness of the day.

Examining the forces at work within this drama helps us understand the setting and life of this crippled woman. Her desire for healing and full acceptance requires the opposing forces Luke chooses to tell his story. These forces reveal a misplaced piety on the part of her synagogue ruler and her peers. Their deeds and particular form of piety proved flawed. Jesus shows us that doing good deeds and speaking

words of blessing are sacred acts that bring life, healing and wholeness to all God’s people. This is a drama with a happy ending.

March 14, 2010

A question of outrageous claims

John 6:41-59

We must admit that Jesus does share some radical ideas here. His listeners in the Capernaum synagogue deemed these ideas outrageous and failed to grasp the eternal significance of his words, which offended them. Below are five of Jesus’ most outrageous claims.

1. “I have come down from heaven” (v. 42). From the several verses that precede this one, it is interesting that the people heard and focused on this one point instead of focusing on Jesus’ claim to give life. Apparently these people know Joseph and Mary. This human factor drops an anchor in their thinking process so that they dispute Jesus’ claim of heavenly origin. “We know,” emphasizes their concrete mindset. Personal knowledge distorts their ability to perceive an alternate reality. In the end, their reasoning limits their ability to clearly hear all Jesus is saying.

2. “Whoever believes has eternal life” (v. 47). John links a person’s belief with eternal life. With these words he returns to one of his major themes — yoking these words together for the fifth of six times (cf. Jn. 3:16, 18, 36; 5:24; 11:26). Repetition breeds emphasis. John’s retelling emphasizes that this connection is life giving. The statement is a simple one that opens the possibility of eternal life to all of humanity. Exclusion in this verse is understood, yet not directly stated. Elsewhere the converse is plainly given. “Those who do not believe are condemned already” (3:18). Even in John’s simplistic language the message escapes those gathered in the synagogue.

3. “I am the bread of life” (v. 48). In this statement Jesus reaches back to an earlier event when 5,000 people were fed from a little boy’s lunch pail. We remember John’s account of the day following this episode when people swarmed after Jesus — they were chasing after the source of earthly food. The huge banquet on the grassy hillside satisfied the hungry people only temporarily; they wanted a repeat performance of that temporarily satisfying event. Jesus now reminds them that earthly food is not permanent. Manna has limitations.

Its life-giving properties extend no further than supporting the body. The bread Jesus speaks of is from a heavenly source. When anyone takes this bread — once — they will not die. The Greek verb form of the word “eat” indicates a one-time action. The word “die” refers to spiritual death (6:50). As great as the manna was for survival, it was void of eternal life-giving qualities. Jesus’ life-giving attributes stretch into eternity.

4. “I am the living bread ... the bread that I give for the life of the world is my flesh” (v. 51). A dramatic change occurs at this point when the bread of life, the living bread, is now referred to as flesh. What began with “and the Word became flesh and lived among us” (1:14), became the gift of God (3:16), “came down from heaven” (6:51), and finally now in this larger passage of verses 41-58 has become a gift from heaven that Christ gives to the world. God’s love incarnate becomes a holy gift. Here the complete quality of humanity is present in flesh — Christ incarnate. A reference to the death of Christ is easily understood as we look back into the pages of Christian history. The world is held in a life-and-death struggle, and the currency the kidnapper requires is the death of Christ. This mention of flesh took those sitting around by surprise. For us, it is easy to understand how this verse is an expression of the love of God in Christ that makes Jesus’ death a ransom paid for the sins of the world. Another perspective in John is this: Jesus’ death is a gift given freely to the world (cf. 10:17-19). In both passages, 6:52 and 10:19, the Jews present are divided because of his words. His sacrificial death is still controversial.

5. “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them” (v. 56). One of the early charges leveled against Christians was cannibalism. Those living during Roman times heard bits and pieces about this new Jewish sect — those called Christian. Jesus’ words give rise to a misunderstanding of a shared communion meal. Many still understand Holy Communion as the real body and blood of Christ. Their understanding is that the bread and wine are somehow miraculously transformed as the believer partakes. Others disagree, holding that no one is going to argue seriously that the one thing necessary for eternal life is to receive Holy Communion. Leon Morris (*The Gospel According to John*) asks, “Is it not necessary to believe if we are to have life?” Maybe there is another view on which we can all agree. Another way of looking at this passage is through the use of the word abide.



In some translations we find “remain” used instead. The word used here is presented in a verb tense that is continuous. Perhaps an ongoing relationship is implied. As disciples, we must take Christ into our innermost being, and allow his presence to nourish us. We enter into a special intimate relationship once. Our relationship with Jesus continues eternally through the abiding presence that sustains and nourishes us.

The Jews in Capernaum’s synagogue totally misunderstood the idea about what constituted true bread. Their focus, like that of the multitude, was on temporary sustenance while Jesus offered outrageous claims of eternal life-giving qualities, which are found nowhere else. Our deepest needs are met in him — now and forever. How radical is that?

March 21, 2010

A question of destiny

Matthew 23:29-39

As a young boy growing up in the 60s, I whiled away many Saturday afternoons watching episodes of Georgia Championship Wrestling. Those times were filled with thrills as “good guys” and “bad guys” attempted to pin one another to the mat for the count of three. Between the matches, one side or the other would stare into the camera and lambast his opponent.

One particular tag-team called “The Assassins” hid behind masks as they fought their opponents. Years later, I learned the true identity of Assassin Number One before he left wrestling in 1968 to follow a different career path.

There were Pharisees who lived behind their own self-righteous masks. Probably not all, but at least some within this group played their religious game well. They tithed, prayed and even kept flowers on the graves of the righteous prophets; however, their actions were

a mask that hid the true nature. During that time the Pharisees were the top religious team. It all looked real, but Jesus removed their masks and exposed their true nature.

Beginning in verse 29, Jesus brings his opponents to the mat for the seventh time. This “woe” Jesus pronounces on the Pharisees indicates their final destiny to be one from which there is no escape. His three-count indictment announces judgment on their generation. In count number one, Jesus announces that they are descendents of those who murdered the prophets. At count number two, Jesus announces that God had sent countless prophets, sages and scribes who were mistreated or killed. Then Jesus gives the final count. In the end, these bad boys have even rejected the Son of God.

The Pharisees found some benefit from being closely aligned with their nation’s prophetic heroes. This was a solid position to be in. People saw their care for the graves and shrines of the righteous dead and believed that truly pious persons do such good deeds. With their good works the Pharisees fooled themselves — and others — into thinking that they couldn’t possibly be like their ancestors who rejected and killed the righteous messengers of God.

At this point we must remember the parable of the wicked tenants from Matthew 21. The Pharisees are viewed in the role of the ones who killed the landlord’s slaves and ultimately rejected the landlord’s son. This team shows us that the apple truly does not fall far from the tree. They have inherited the tendency to rebel against God and in this way are very much like their ancestors who murdered the prophets. Now with Jesus’ words “Fill up, then, the measure of your ancestors,” he invites them to fulfill the prophetic words of this parable of the wicked tenants.

History’s murderers will not escape justice. The label of snakes and vipers (23:33) echoes

words used previously by John the Baptist (3:7) and Jesus (12:34). Abel is used to illustrate the first murder of an innocent person in scripture. Abel is paired with Zechariah, son of the priest Jehoiada, whose death is the last of a righteous person recorded in Hebrew scripture. The words of Zechariah in 2 Chronicles 24:22, “May the LORD see and avenge!” come to fruition with the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

In the final section (23:37-39), Jesus laments over Jerusalem with a dramatic feminine image of a mother hen who longs to protect those under her wings. Jesus’ true love and care for all God’s people, the good and the bad, are evident in this verse. Doubtless the Pharisees are included in this powerful mental picture painted by a lyric text that is filled with deep emotion; however, with their rejection of God’s love in the person of Jesus they are eliminated from divine protection.

Their rejection of Jesus — despite many opportunities to embrace what God was doing through his son — puts his opponents down for the count. Without God’s presence in the person of Jesus, the city of Jerusalem — even all of Israel — becomes a desolate house. This city and people’s ultimate destiny is outlined as the story moves into chapter 24. Their end surely has come.

The tables are turned. Throughout history there have been those who worked hard against God’s will for humanity. Countless people have rejected and killed God’s righteous messengers. For many years, it seemed the ultimate destiny of the “good guys” was doom; however, this story illustrates that the final destiny of the “bad guys” is destruction. Their real persona — one of hypocrisy and deceit — is uncovered. This team of Pharisees is unmasked. Jesus is the clear victor in this final match. In the words of Bill Lee, pastor of Friendship Baptist Church in Eastman, Ga., and former Assassin Number One, “You can’t stay in that atmosphere and be in God’s will.” **BT**

EXPERIENCE makes the DIFFERENCE

Publications, Business Stationery, Website Development, Banners & Posters, Corporate Identity Packages, Annual Reports, Pocket Folders, Postcards, Variable Data Mailing and More... all under one roof.

DESIGN PRINTING MAILING & FULFILLMENT

Competitive Pricing Award Winning Results

WaltonMedia
create • print • distribute

1360 US Hwy 78 East • P.O. Box 1047 • Monroe, GA 30655
770.267.0022 • 800.241.7879 • www.waltonmedia.net

2010

The Resource Page

... creative and practical ideas

Brought to you this month
by C. Franklin Granger

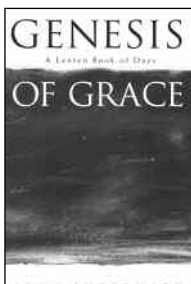


Lenten studies on grace, biblical spirituality and prayer

Following are summaries of three study pieces appropriate for use during the season of Lent (or other times in the Christian year) and in various settings.

The following two books by John Indermark are collections of daily readings (2-3 pages long) that incorporate scriptural passages accompanied by comment and reflection. They may be used by individuals or by small study groups in Sunday school or elsewhere. The studies fit into a 6-7 week period with a study/leader's guide available for purchase.

Genesis of Grace: A Lenten Book of Days (Upper Room Books, 1997) offers readers the opportunity to experience Genesis as a narrative of real persons trusting God, failing God and being redeemed by God's grace with the invitation to discover God's grace within their own lives.

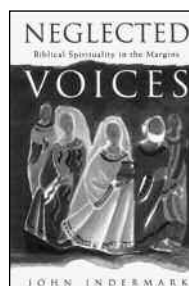


In the first reading, Indermark questions the connection of the goodness in Genesis 1 and the tradition of the fingerprint of ashes on foreheads at Ash Wednesday. He points out that these fingerprints on the characters in the Genesis text challenge the misconception that Old Testament is law and New Testament is grace.

The stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the Flood, Abraham and Sarah and the patriarchs, and the Joseph narrative are all included. In Indermark's explanation of the renaming of Abram to Abraham and Sarai to Sarah, he notes that "their lives still cradle new promise" and that it is grace that enables these two to become someone new. Then he asks, "Who will grace enable you to become?"

Neglected Voices: Biblical Spirituality in the Margins (Upper Room Books, 1999) takes

readers on a scriptural journey with lesser-known biblical characters in the "margins." Indermark suggests that while these may be considered minor figures in scripture, their stories are not minor in meaning or significance. He reveals how these biblical commoners affirm "the existence of vital spirituality in persons far removed from the limelight."



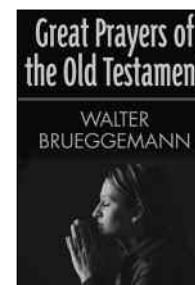
Three biblical characters are introduced and discussed in each week's focus theme. The daily reading includes the corresponding scripture passage for the character, a brief exploration with insight and meaning, and a brief sentence prayer/meditation. The final reading is a reflection on the theme for the week, incorporating the three characters reviewed.

The six themes are: beginnings, renunciation, trust, courage, servanthood and promises. Characters are taken from both testaments and include men and women such as Rahab, Barnabas, Dinah, a daughter of Jacob, Haman, Nathan and Phoebe. Indermark invites participants to explore biblical spirituality through these and other individuals, learning of the "possibility of fresh beginnings," "the discipline of renouncing old ways" and trusting God "with gracious abandon."

Great Prayers of the Old Testament (Westminster John Knox Press, 2008) by Walter Brueggemann could be used as a resource for preaching a series on prayer in the Old Testament, for a study in a Sunday school class or a weekday or evening group Bible study, or as personal reading to enrich one's approach and perspective on prayer.

In it, Brueggemann describes prayer as the "human reach toward Holy Mystery and Holy Ultimacy." He reminds us of our familiarity of the Psalms as a great source of the full range of types and emotions in prayer. However, in this exploration of prayers he points out that the prayers of the people of Israel also occur in the narrative.

Brueggemann calls the prayer of Israel "dialogical" reflecting a genuine transaction between two parties — a "real exchange between engaged agents." Prayer is a daring act, he says, intended to connect the present urgent situation and context with the authority and compassion and holiness of God. He does not imply that prayer is easy; prayer requires "great faith and courage." In fact, he says, "It would be safer (better?) not to pray."



Brueggemann claims the prayers voiced by Israel are applicable, even necessary, for 21st century living. They counter the idolatry around us and the sense of self-sufficiency fostered in our world and also reflect a commitment to be in active dialogue with God.

Great Prayers of the Old Testament is organized into 12 chapters, with each chapter focusing on a different character and prayer. Prayers of Moses, Hannah, David, Hezekiah, Daniel and Job are included, among others. Brueggemann includes commentary on the context and background of these prayers as well as a deep investigation of the prayer dialogue between the individual and God. Each chapter concludes with questions for reflection and discussion. **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 C. Franklin Granger, minister of education at First Baptist Church of Athens, Ga. Resource Page Archives are available at <http://www.thefellowship.info/Resources/Church-Resources/Baptists-Today-resource-page>.

Central Baptist Church, Bearden, a large suburban Knoxville, Tenn., church with ties to both the SBC and the CBF, is seeking a **senior pastor**. Selection will be led by the Holy Spirit; however, professional degrees, maturity and experience in related positions will be expected of any candidate. For more information about this position, to apply, or to recommend a candidate, please see the church website at www.cbcbearden.org/pastorsearch.shtml.

First Baptist Church of Chattanooga, Tenn. (www.fbcchattanooga.org), is seeking a **senior pastor**. Our church is located in a prominent site in downtown Chattanooga, and is made up of members from in and around the city. Our total membership is approximately 1,000. We are a moderate church with ordained women on our ministerial staff, and we ordain both males and females to serve as deacons. Our church was organized in 1838, so we have a long history and a long tradition of ministry in the downtown. We have always maintained active participation in regional, state, national and international missions together with our heavy involvement in various downtown ministries. We seek a pastor who is committed to Baptist principles, and has excellent preaching skills, genuine pastoral attributes and strong leadership abilities. Direct all inquiries and résumés to: Pastor Search Committee, First Baptist Church, 401 Gateway Ave., Chattanooga, TN, 37402, or judy@1stbaptistcha.org.

Woodmont Baptist Church, a Christ-centered church, located in Nashville, Tenn., is looking for a dynamic **minister to students**, primarily for grades 6-12. The ideal candidate is creative and upbeat in demeanor and personality, seminary trained, and a self-starter. The candidate should also be focused on educating, guiding and mentoring the students in their walk with the Lord, be willing to assist in leading Sunday morning worship services, and be a valuable member of the church's ministerial staff as they continue to lead the church into the 21st century. All interested individuals should contact Lil Cook at (615) 297-5303 for more information, or send their résumé to: Woodmont Baptist Church, 2100 Woodmont Blvd., Nashville, TN 37215, for prayerful consideration.

First Baptist Church, Gainesville, Ga., is seeking an **associate pastor for children's ministries**. We are a congregation one hour north of Atlanta in an area of high growth. We prefer an individual with some experience in children's ministry but will be open to any gifted person with a passion for leading children and their families. If you qualify and are looking for an exciting challenge and want to be part of a loving congregation with a strong future, contact the pastor's assistant at kristiwright@mindspring.com, or mail résumés to: Pastor, First Baptist Church, 751 Green St., Gainesville, GA 30501.

ADVERTISE WITH BAPTISTS TODAY

Ad Size/Inches	Horiz.	Vert.	Price (bw/clr)
Full Page	7.75	10.75	\$1400/\$1800
Back Cover	8.0	8.0	\$2200 (clr only)
2/3 Page V	5.12	10.5	\$1000/\$1325
1/2 Page H	7.75	5.12	\$775/\$1000
1/2 Page V	5.12	7.75	\$775/\$1000
1/3 Page V	2.45	10.5	\$500/\$650
1/3 Page Sq	5.12	5.12	\$500/\$650
1/4 Page H	7.75	2.45	\$375/\$500
1/6 Page H	5.12	2.45	\$250/\$325
1/6 Page V	2.45	5.12	\$250/\$325

Print Classified Ads

- line: \$1.50 per word
- 1/3 page: \$450
- 1/6 page: \$225

Web Display Ads

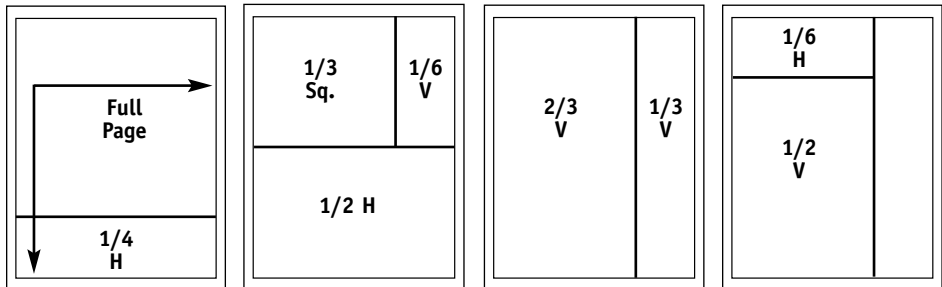
- Banner: \$150 / week
- Side box: \$75 / week

Web Classified Ads

- line: 75¢ per word
- 1/3 page: \$225
- 1/6 page: \$112.50

Details, ad reservations: jackie@baptiststoday.org

1-877-752-5658



- Making a gift of \$_____ (enclosed).
- Making a pledge of \$_____ to the Keystone Fund to be given over three years. (Initial gift enclosed)
- Making a gift of \$_____ in memory or honor (circle one) of _____.
- Providing a church group subscription (25 copies) through a gift of \$450.
- Sending individual gift subscriptions to _____ friends at \$20 each for one year or \$35 for two years. (Enclose names and addresses of recipients.)
- Exploring ways to support *Baptists Today* through estate planning. (Contact Keithen Tucker at 478-330-6223 or 478-361-5363 or ktucker@baptiststoday.org.)

YES! I/We want to support BAPTISTS TODAY by...

NAME _____

PHONE _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____

ZIP _____

•••

MAIL completed form with check to: *Baptists Today*, P.O. Box 6318, Macon, GA 31208-6318 — or, to use a CREDIT CARD, call 1-877-752-5658 or 478-301-5655.

BAPTISTS TODAY IS A 501(c)(3) CHARITABLE ORGANIZATION.

commentary

Will 'goodwill ambassador' bring good will?

By Tony Cartledge

The *Christian Index*, official news journal of the Georgia Baptist Convention, featured a recent article praising former Southern Baptist Convention president Bobby Welch, now employed by the SBC as "Strategist for Global Evangelical Relations."

Index editor Gerald Harris touted Welch as the SBC's "ambassador of goodwill to Baptist and evangelical bodies around the world."

That is quite a task, considering that the SBC alienated itself from most of the world's Baptist bodies in 2004 by withdrawing from the Baptist World Alliance in a very public snit.

When it became evident that the BWA's 200-plus member bodies would not knuckle under to the SBC's demand that the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship be refused membership in the global organization, the BWA's biggest donor and a founding member decided to take its cash and go home.

Not willing to participate when they could not dominate, SBC leaders persuaded convention messengers to approve a recommendation to withdraw from the global body, justifying their actions by charging the BWA with a "leftward drift," tolerance of homosexuality, and

I know Baptists from many countries on several continents, and few of them feel kindly toward the SBC, whose top-down missions strategy is often at odds with the goals of local Baptists.

pronouncements of "anti-American" sentiment.

The charges were bogus then, and they are bogus now.

Many BWA member bodies are very conservative — some more fundamentalist than the SBC itself. Some have more moderate tendencies, and a very few border on liberal. BWA members recognize, however, that unity does not require uniformity.

Attend one meeting of the BWA General Council and you'll hear lively debate, different opinions, and both yeas and nays when votes are taken.

Attend a worship service, and you'll observe a great harmony of spirit, a commitment to a common Lord and a common mission.

Yet, Harris continues to beat the dead

horse of deceit: four of the first five paragraphs repeat the SBC's misbegotten justification of its decision to go it alone. In the process, Harris boldly misrepresents the *Washington Post* by repeating its description of SBC complaints as if they reflected the paper's own judgment.

In his dodgy efforts to keep alive the tired aspersions, however, Harris illustrates how badly the SBC needs an ambassador of goodwill.

I know Baptists from many countries on several continents, and few of them feel kindly toward the SBC, whose top-down missions strategy is often at odds with the goals of local Baptists.

Bobby Welch is an extrovert's extrovert who, I believe, really wants to do good things. It's hard not to like him.

What I fear, however, is that his goodwill efforts in promoting the SBC will be directed primarily toward those bodies or local leaders who are most in tune with the SBC's brand of theology, and that the end result will be to take the SBC's intra-family power struggle global.

We live in a world that needs all the good will it can get. And all of us would do well to be "goodwill ambassadors" to all we meet: a worthy goal for this year and every year. **BT**



Yes! I want to subscribe today

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

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

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Church _____

print subscription

1 year \$20

2 years \$35

online subscription

1 year \$15

2 years \$25

BAPTISTS
Today

balancing act

Bivocational ministry presents unique challenges, opportunities

MADISON, Ind. — Dennis Bickers is Southeast Area Resource Minister for the American Baptist Churches of Indiana and Kentucky and an experienced bivocational minister and author who blogs at <http://bivocationalministry.blogspot.com>. In this interview with *Baptists Today* editor John Pierce, he addresses some issues related to the one-person, two-jobs approach to ministry.

BT: How prevalent is bivocational ministry?

DB: Bivocational ministry is much more widespread today than many people realize. In a 1999 Baptist Press article, writer Linda Lawson predicted that bivocational ministers would outnumber the fully-funded pastors in the Southern Baptist Convention within 10 years.

Some Baptist state conventions report this has happened in their conventions, and it will be interesting to see the 2009 report

Editor's note: This is the first in a two-part series on bivocational ministry. for the denomination to find out if this prediction came true. John Caldwell wrote an article in *The Bivocational Beacon*

in 1996 in which he reported that over 73 percent of all Baptist churches in the U.S. were led by bivocational ministers.

Bivocational ministry is not just found in Baptist churches. In one study of the Church of the Nazarene, approximately 30 percent of the pastors identified themselves as bivocational. During a 2008 sabbatical I spoke with national representatives of the United Methodist Church, the Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church USA, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the Mennonite Church USA. Each reported that the numbers of bivocational ministers are growing in their denominations, and that they expect those numbers to continue to increase.

However, due to various reporting issues, none of these denominations has accurate numbers. My own denomination, the ABC/USA, has the same problem.

Nationally, our database shows 180 persons serving in bivocational ministry roles.

However, in 2003 I requested the names and contact information from our regions of the bivocational ministers serving in their regions. Only 19 regions responded, but I received contact information for 612 bivocational ministers. Many of our smaller churches do not submit annual reports and others fail to identify their pastors as bivocational, which makes it very difficult to get accurate numbers.



Dennis Bickers

BT: Is bivocational ministry present primarily in rural settings?

DB: One can find bivocational ministry primarily in both rural and urban settings, but there are also bivocational ministers serving in suburban churches. It is important to remember that not all bivocational ministers serve in small churches.

Before serving as a national missionary for bivocational ministers in the SBC, Leon Wilson was the bivocational pastor of a 600-member church in Oklahoma City. This church had six staff ministers, all of whom were bivocational by choice.

BT: What are some of the unique challenges and opportunities of bivocational ministry?

DB: The number-one challenge for bivocational ministers is time management.

Bivocational ministers must balance five areas of life: their relationship with God, their relationship with family, their church work, their second job and their own self-care. Bivocational ministers must be very intentional to keep these areas in balance.

A second challenge for many is poor salaries and few benefits. I know a bivocational minister whose church check pays for health insurance for the family. If for some reason they would lose that income, they would not be able to afford insurance. Most bivocational churches provide few benefits such as insurance or retirement to their pastors.

A third challenge is the cultural perception that they are second-class ministers. This perception is sometimes still held by their fully-funded peers and denominational leaders. This view by outsiders can impact their own perspective and lead to serious self-esteem issues unless they maintain their sense of call by God to the work they are doing.

Bivocational ministry can also provide some unique challenges to the churches. Many smaller churches suffer from self-esteem issues especially if they were once much larger churches, and this can become worse if the church finds it must move from having fully-funded leadership to bivocational leadership.

Some in the community may question the value of a church that apparently cannot afford a fully-funded pastor and may avoid involvement with this church because of the traditional expectations it has of a church. Churches with bivocational ministers will soon learn that their pastor cannot be available 24/7, which can become a problem for churches that have traditionally expected

their pastor to be available to the membership whenever needed.

Fortunately, there are a number of benefits to bivocational ministry for both the minister and the church. Many bivocational ministers enjoy the greater flexibility that this ministry can provide. Although time is always a problem, bivocational ministry is often less structured.

Bivocational ministry provides expanded ministry opportunities as the minister will spend a certain number of hours each week in some form of secular employment. This places the minister in the center of a mission field every day, which can result in ministry opportunities.

Bivocational ministers often serve in communities where they have lived for some time. So they enjoy the advantage of having deep roots in those communities. This often allows the minister to remain at a church for a longer period of time because there is less incentive to move.

Although most bivocational ministers do not receive large salaries, the salaries they do receive are added to their income from their other employment resulting in a higher overall income level. Bivocational ministers are also less threatened by being removed from their ministries because even if that did happen they would still have income to support their families from their other job.

Churches served by bivocational ministers also experience several benefits. Bivocational ministers often remain at their churches for longer periods of time, and this can lead to a stronger church with a more effective outreach to its community.

These churches will often have more lay involvement because people understand that the minister is not always available to them. Lay leaders must step up and fill the gap when the pastor is at his or her other job. In a smaller church over half of the church's income can go for the salary and benefits of a fully-funded pastor, but having a bivocational pastor often means that more money is available for ministry.

Many denominations are involved in planting new churches. Using bivocational ministers can save these denominations significant money that can be used to plant even more new churches. Using local bivocational ministers can help the pastor have instant credibility with the people the church is attempting to reach since he or she is not seen as an outsider.

BT: How did you get involved in bivocational ministry yourself?

DB: In 1981 I felt led by God into pastoral ministry. I learned that a small church in our county was seeking a pastor and sent them my résumé. Despite my lack of experience and formal education, they called me as bivocational pastor.

At the time I was working full time in a factory. I served that church as a bivocational pastor for 20 years before being called as an area resource minister with the American Baptist Churches of Indiana and Kentucky.

BT: What led you to become a provider of resources to bivocational ministers?

DB: One of the frustrations I had as a bivocational pastor was a lack of resources designed to assist us and the churches we were serving. At the time there were very few books written for smaller churches and even fewer for bivocational ministers.

When I took early retirement from the factory job, I decided to write a book on bivocational ministry. That book was released in 2000. In the spring of 2010 my sixth book will be released.

All but this last one specifically addresses bivocational ministry and issues in smaller churches. As a result of these books, I have had the opportunity to lead a number of workshops in various denominations for bivocational ministers and small church leaders.

BT: Many Baptists have spent their lives in congregations with multiple ministers whose only vocation is in the church. What would be interesting for them to know about bivocational ministry?

DB: The call to bivocational ministry is not a lesser call than to fully-funded ministry, nor is it a higher call. It is simply a valid call of God on a person's life to serve a particular church.

Bivocational ministers come from many different backgrounds with a wide range of education and experience. When I began my pastoral ministry I had no education beyond high school, but I have known bivocational ministers who had Ph.D.s from some of the most prestigious seminaries in the country. (I am now finishing my D.Min.)

Some have served as fully-funded ministers in the past and made the choice to move to a bivocational role. Bivocational ministers serve in blue-collar jobs and in highly paid professional occupations.

They often struggle to maintain a healthy balance in their lives having to juggle so many different demands. I have served as a coach to a number of bivocational ministers, and nearly every one of them struggled to spend sufficient time with their families and with self-care.

Many people have asked why someone would want to serve as a bivocational minister. The only answer is that we believe God has called us to this role.

Most of us love the churches we serve, and we believe we are making a difference in the lives of our members. We have chosen to be obedient to the call God has placed on our lives. Although it is often challenging, we have found it to be a very rewarding ministry. **BT**

Gifts to
Baptists Today
have been received
in honor of . . .

The Baptists Today staff from:
Shirley and Bill Day

The Posey and Jean Belcher Family
from:
Kelly and Philip Belcher

Tony and Jan Cartledge from:
Elizabeth W. Austell

Laura and Charlie Cooper from:
Dr. and Mrs. Wallace C. McGill

Jack U. Harwell from:
Carol and Thomas Hawkins

William E. Hull from:
Mr. and Mrs. Arlis C. Hinson Jr.

The 100th birthday of
Bessie Skinner from:
Kelly and Philip Belcher

the lighter side

Why I am a patient driving instructor

By Brett Younger

My son Caleb will be getting his driver's license in a couple of months. I have been an unexpectedly gracious coach: "That was only the curb, nothing to worry about." "I've always thought this garage was narrow." "For future reference, the brake is on the left."

There is a reason I am so patient. When I was 15 years old my father was the pastor of First Baptist Church, Saltillo, Miss. — the strictest church in the world. He preached loudly. Think John the Baptist with a better haircut. My father is a kind and caring man, but when I was growing up he frightened me.

At that time you could get a driver's license at 15. (That now seems about 10 years too soon.) My father insisted I drive the right way — hands at 10 and 2 o'clock, 5 miles below the speed limit, acting with utmost patience — "Don't ever drive in a hurry." As part of my teenage rebellion, when my dad wasn't in the car, I put my hands at 9 and 3 o'clock and went 5 miles above the speed limit.

One evening I got into a hurry driving home. I was the fourth car following a tractor down a two-lane road when I inexplicably decided to pass them all. I ended up rolling my father's car one and a half times and landing upside down in a ditch. As I began rolling I thought, "I am dead."

When the car stopped, I thought of my father. Once again, "I am dead."

I totaled my father's car. When the police officer asked who to call to come get me, I said,

"Let me think about that." My mother wasn't home. My father was at the church, but I decided not to bother him right then. I would have the car towed to the garage. I could ride in the tow truck and then get a ride home. That would give me time to figure out how to tell him.

How could I have been so stupid? The inevitable grounding, the taking of the keys, and whatever corporal punishment he would come up with were all less terrifying than the fury he would undoubtedly unleash.

I was thinking about the judgment to come when I saw my father walking

toward me. A helpful church member had seen me standing in the ditch by my father's overturned car and had called him. I decided to walk right up and tell him the whole truth so that he could immediately bundle me off to hell. I would use the prodigal son's speech: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."

I started the speech, but I didn't get far. I was completely unprepared for what happened next. My father did the most painful, wondrous thing he could have done. I wouldn't have cried if he had done anything I had expected, but he took me in his arms and hugged me. All he said was, "I'm so glad you're okay."

On the ride home, the next day, and the next week I waited for him to get around to punishing me. I have been waiting for more than 30 years, but my dad has never reprimanded me for wrecking his car. Maybe he thought that forgiveness would be the best way to keep my hands at 10 and 2 o'clock and the accelerator at 5 miles below the speed limit. Maybe he didn't think about it at all. Maybe he was just glad I was okay.

The older I get the more I think God's mercy works that way. God loves us, not out of strategic considerations, not because it will make us more of who we should be, though it may, but because that is who God is. God is always coming to embrace us, God's children. **BT**

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

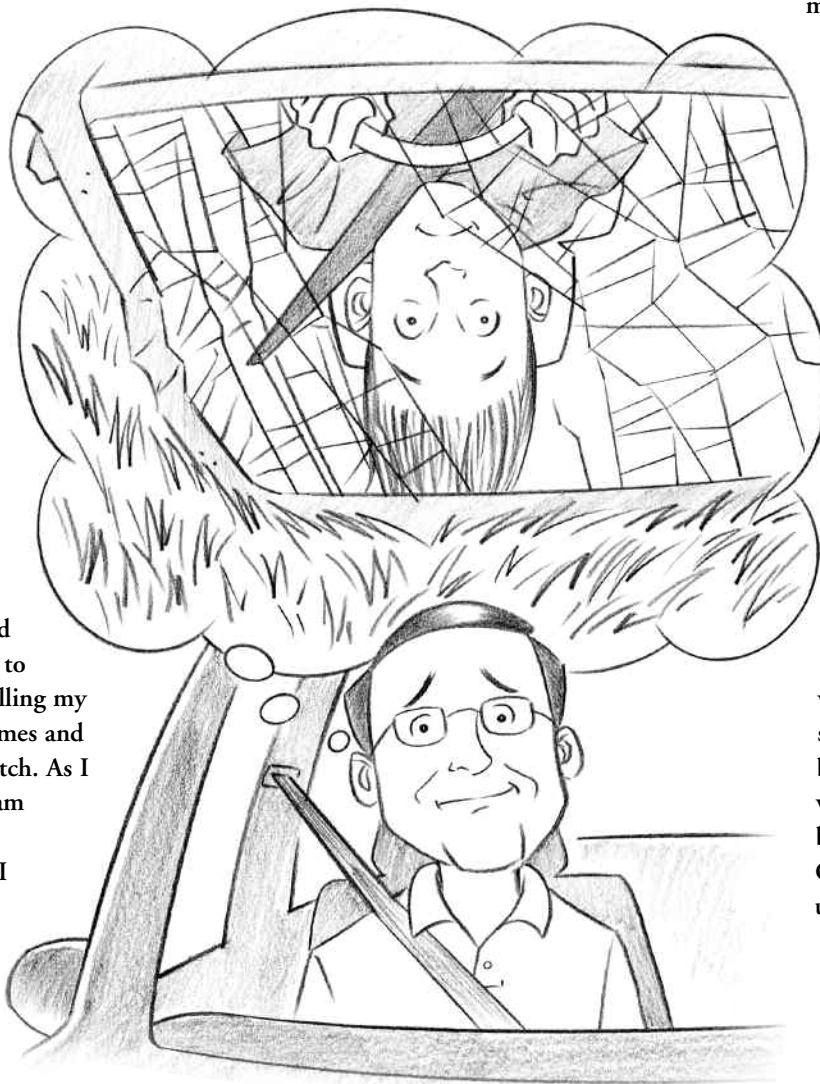


Illustration by Scott Brooks

Do you love your stuff?

By Tony W. Cartledge
Posted Dec. 30, 2009
www.tonycartledge.com

If the cold weather has you spending more time in front of the TV than usual, perhaps you've noticed a distinct right-brain trend in advertising — marketers are more interested in creating a subjective aura around their product than in providing useful information about it.

The theme of "love" is especially popular, as noted by Andrew Adam Newman in *The New York Times*. Viewers of many ads may not know any more about a product at the end of an ad, but they're intended, at least, to have a warm and fuzzy feeling about it.

Here's a quiz — I'll cite the tag lines

from several current commercials, while you see how many of them you can identify:

- "I'm lovin' it."
- "Love what you do."
- "Love the skin you're in."
- "See what you love. Love what you see."
- "I [heart] shoes."
- "Quality you can love."
- "You can hate the morning less, and love running more."

Do you love your stuff? I like the way my BlackBerry helps me stay in touch, and I enjoy my iPod. I have positive feelings about my Prius (especially the gas mileage), and I'm much happier with my aging MacBook than with any Windows laptop I've owned.

I can find pleasure and utility in possessions (to the extent that we can really possess anything), but I've always sought to avoid mixing the word "love" with any material thing.

Jesus' teaching made it very clear that his followers should put a priority on people over things. Things can be very useful, but they're to be used — not loved. People, in contrast, are to be loved — not used.

It is all too easy to get those priorities backward. Perhaps the departure of the "aughts" and the coming of a new year might inspire us to keep them straight: we use things; we love people. **BT**

[Curious about the quiz? The advertisers are: McDonald's, BlackBerry, Oil of Olay, LensCrafters, Payless, Nissan, New Balance.]

Fundamentalist fence building a never-ending task

By John Pierce
Posted Dec. 19, 2009
www.bteditor.blogspot.com

Parents whose sons and daughters go to Truett-McConnell College in Cleveland, Ga., can rest assured that soon every faculty member will have expressed allegiance to the narrow doctrinal confines of the 2000 *Baptist Faith and Message* statement.

According to an article in the Georgia Baptist Convention-controlled newspaper, *The Christian Index*, the trustees and president at the Georgia Baptist Convention-controlled small college in the North Georgia mountains are eager for their campus to "be the first Southern Baptist college to require a signature to affirm the *Baptist Faith and Message* in a public forum."

Wow! How comforting to know that even the person teaching mathematics or the chemistry professor handling those explosive components will adhere to fundamentalist teachings such as women being excluded from certain church leadership positions and the need for a wife to "submit herself graciously" to her husband's authority.

Imagine a gifted and experienced foreign language professor moving into the North Georgia mountains due to a spouse's job transfer but not being offered a teach-



ing position at Truett-McConnell because of this policy that the majority of Christians and a whole bunch of Baptists would find objectionable.

Revised in 2000, the confession (first adopted in 1925) went from being an umbrella of widely held beliefs to being a theological sledgehammer used to enforce uniform fundamentalist thought.

Proponents swore that the new statement would not be used as a creed, yet its required affirmation soon resulted in about 60 loyal Southern Baptist missionaries being forced off the field.

The fact that this ever-narrowing stranglehold of Southern Baptist fundamentalism is playing out at Truett-McConnell is no surprise. Just look at the cast of players.

Evangelist and former SBC president Bailey Smith — famous for convincing church members to be rebaptized and for his assertion that God doesn't hear the prayers of Jews — is the trustee who made the motion. And TMC's new president, Emir Craner, a former Muslim turned Baptist fundamentalist, is the protégé of SBC powerbroker Paige Patterson.

Fundamentalist fence builders never stop digging holes, setting posts and nailing up barriers. Creating a smaller pasture open to only those who think just like them is always the goal.

For some parents, this will be exactly the kind of place where they will want their kids to go to school — safely away from any thought that might challenge them. It is their choice.

Southern Baptist education (at all six SBC seminaries and a growing number of state convention colleges) has greatly changed over the past couple of decades. Today they resemble an independent fundamentalist approach to isolation and indoctrination.

Churches that continue to send so-called "mission money" (out of habit or ignorance) to the Southern Baptist and Georgia Baptist conventions should be aware that this is the kind of fundamentalism they are helping to advance. Churches have choices too. **BT**

Keeping up the church house

Professional analysis can prioritize maintenance needs, project costs

MACON, Ga. — We've heard it a thousand times: the church is the people, not the building.

However, most congregations gather in physical structures that range from small and simple to massive and simply spectacular. And good stewardship of church buildings and the finances required to maintain them calls for a good plan, said Rusty Poss of The Provident Group.

"In most cases, churches have very little knowledge of the condition of their facility," said Poss, whose company in central Georgia provides "facility condition assessments" for churches, schools and others with buildings to maintain.

"The only way to properly manage your facilities assets in a proactive — as opposed to reactive — manner is to have a solid knowledge of the condition and to know the deficiencies that must be corrected," said Poss, who has an extensive background in project management, cost estimating and building code inspections.

He also chairs the property committee at Vineville Baptist Church in Macon, Ga., where he and his family are active members. He recently completed an assessment of Vineville's 1924 sanctuary building with 27,000 square feet of space including classrooms.

To some, bringing up building maintenance at a time when many church budgets are tight may not seem like a good idea. But Poss said an awareness of a facility's condition is even more important when funds have to be allocated carefully.

"It's a challenging time, but also a time to spend your money wisely," said Poss. "That's where prioritizing comes in."

Facility assessments are beneficial in several ways, said Poss, whose company does not provide design or construction services and therefore can offer "a totally objective" perspective on a facility's condition.

First, churches encounter fewer maintenance-related surprises when a thorough analysis of the building has been completed. While emergencies occur on occasion, churches with an assessment can better prepare for most expenses such as replacing an aging



Rusty Poss points to work being done on the historic sanctuary of Vineville Baptist Church in Macon, Ga. Next page: Costs for replacing aging heating and cooling systems (top photo), along with roofs and other needs, are projected in a facilities assessment. New cypress sills, fresh paint and leading protect the beautiful stained-glass windows (below photo).

roof or heating and cooling system.

And, in many cases, churches can avoid more costly expenditures by addressing maintenance issues before they become severe.

"The two big expenses for most churches are roofs and HVAC," said Poss, noting that such projects with life cycles of 15-20 years can sneak up on a congregation without proper planning.

Second, the written assessment of a building's condition is spelled out in a series of priorities with estimated costs. Therefore, finance committees can budget funds more accurately.

"If the church has a good idea when capital projects are needed and an accurate cost estimate to complete the projects, they can plan for them years in advance," said Poss.

Other deferred maintenance that often slips up on church leaders relates to wiring, plumbing, plaster and flooring, said Poss. But, with an assessment, "you have a document" to follow.

Third, having an unbiased, professional assessment can help church leaders put the needs ahead of wants — such as an outspoken

church member advocating for renovation of the bride's room when limited funds are needed to replace weak plumbing that could result in a costly disaster.

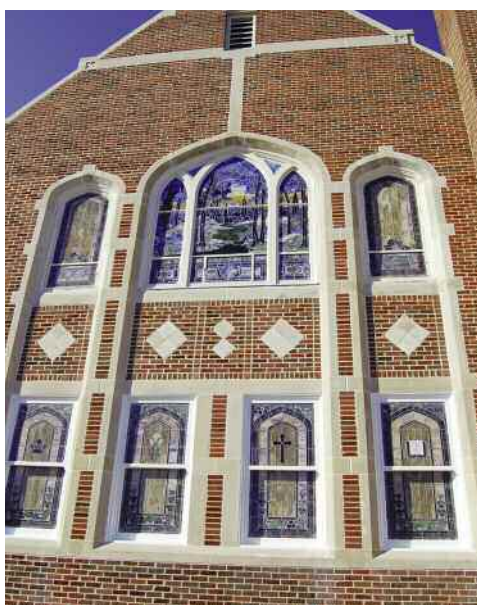
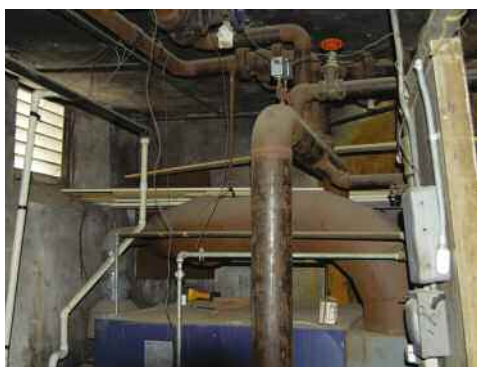
"Our third-party nature provides information that comes from an external source," said Poss. "Therefore, opinions and preferences of committee members or church leaders do not influence the outcome of the report."

Maintenance priorities and the associated costs are clearly spelled out in the assessment report. The course of action is presented in a clear, predictable way.

Four, seeing the big picture of building needs can allow for significant cost savings by grouping several repairs into one larger project rather than tackling smaller ones here and there.

"Consolidation of the known deficiencies into one larger renovation effort will not only provide you with significant economies of scale but will prevent having to come back to the same building time and again," said Poss.

On a scale of 1-to-30 (with the higher number indicating poorer condition), Poss gave the historic Vineville building — named



for longtime music minister Loyd Landrum — a score of 17. That fits in the middle of the designation called “major renovations required.”

Then the written assessment outlines the building’s needs in terms of four stages of priority to be addressed over the next five years. The detailed, bound document — with recommended budgets for the five-year period, descriptions of the deficiencies found, definitions of terms, detailed project summaries, along with drawings and photographs — provides a prioritized plan to follow and gives the finance committee and congregation a realistic picture of budget needs before embarking on any new construction or renovations.

“Even if you can’t make the repairs now, you need a plan,” said Poss.

For those looking toward new construction or major renovations, Poss said the cost estimates that his company provides can put such projects into a congregation’s long-range planning with a clearer idea of needed funds. And Dr. Patrick Madison, an experienced environmental consultant with The Provident Group, can bring his perspective to the site.

Through an environment assessment, a congregation can be advised on the best places to focus “green” dollars to address such issues

as energy efficiency and water conservation.

An additional benefit of having a facility condition assessment, said Poss, is that the document remains even when church leadership doesn’t.

When a church staff member leaves or committee chairs change position, the assessment becomes even more valuable to give continuity to the ongoing process of building maintenance, said Poss. It enhances the church’s commitment to financial stewardship.

Older buildings like the Vineville sanctuary are not the only ones served well by an assessment said Poss. The excitement over a new building, addition or renovation should be followed by a plan for maintaining that facility.

“Now is the time to set up a plan and to stay ahead of the (maintenance) curve,” he advised.

Bottom line: if you’ve got a building, you need a plan.

“Without a solid, defensible base of information, the typical tendency in facilities management is to ‘apply grease to the squeaky wheel,’” said Poss. “But if you know the overall condition of each facility, and have good descriptions of the deficiencies along with accurate cost estimates, you can spend precious resources in a more efficient manner.” **BT**

2 great gatherings. 2 stunning settings. 1 life-changing summer.



JULY 12 - 17, 2010
Keuka College | Keuka Park, New York USA

BPFNA Summer Conference 2010
LIGHT TO LIVE IN:
The Biblical Call to Peace Rooted in Justice

This life-sustaining week for all ages will include worship, workshops, story-telling, music, study and more led by: Tony Campolo, Peggy Campolo, Pat Dutcher-Walls, Maung Maung Yin, Rachel McGuire, and Kim & Reggie Harris



JULY 29 – AUGUST 1, 2010
Asilomar Conference Grounds | Pacific Grove, California

24th Annual Alliance of Baptists Gathering
Born of Wind & Water
Moving with the Spirit

A retreat for children, youth, and adults that will gather progressive Christians to explore spirituality, spiritual practices, and faith formation for individuals and congregations, led by singer-songwriter Carrie Newcomer as well as worship and workshop leaders Mark Yaconelli, Cynthia Winton-Henry, and James Chuck.



Change your life this summer.

Visit bpfna.org/peacecamp & allianceofbaptists.org/convocation

SeniorFest

at Campbell University
Butler Chapel

Fun Fellowship Learning



Featuring David Crabtree,
News Anchor, WRAL-TV
Raleigh, NC

Sponsored by North Carolina
Baptist Foundation and
Campbell University

Hosted by Campbell University's
Board of Ministers

Breakout Sessions on Topics of
Vital Interest to Senior Adults

March 9, 2010

Cost: \$10 for lunch

(800) 760-9827, ext. 1830

the media shelf

Reviews by Jackie Riley

The Focused Life

The Beatitudes for Everyday Living

Richard S. Hipps

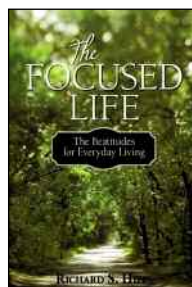
With chapter titles such as “Meek is not weak” and “Happy are the harassed,” Hipps presents fresh interpretations of the eight Beatitudes to help Christians find a “profound sense of well-being” — his idea of “blessed” or “happy.”

This long-time Baptist minister with pastoral, teaching and missionary experience writes in a very approachable style, heightening interest through many anecdotes and quotations.

Perhaps the most commendable parts of the book are the introduction and the epilogue.

In the introduction, Hipps proposes three preconditions to studying the Beatitudes: see deeply, approach the scriptures with a beginner’s mind and awaken from our sleep.

The epilogue, “Looking in the rearview mirror,” offers an inspiring challenge for the new year and for moving through Lent and looking toward Easter.



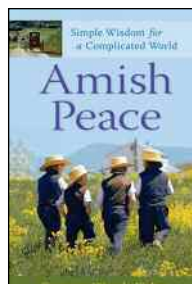
\$22.95 / hb / 108 pp / iUniverse /
ISBN 978-1-4401-8090-3 / www.iuniverse.com

Amish Peace

Simple Wisdom for a Complicated World

Suzanne Woods Fisher

The Amish lifestyle is one we admire from afar, sometimes wishing we could adopt the simple ways that seem to bring such peace to this close-knit community of believers. Suzanne Fisher has long been interested in the Anabaptist culture, and in this volume offers the perfect guide to simplifying our lives and making personal peace in a complicated world.



Organized around five central themes

in Amish life — simplicity, time, community, forgiveness and the sovereignty of God — the true stories of 2-3 pages each are based on interviews with Amish people. Each entry begins with an Amish proverb and ends with questions for reflection and action and a “plain living” vignette on Amish culture or practice.

Fisher’s guide seems easy enough to follow, but no doubt could challenge the most dedicated among us. Applying the principles of one reading each week or working through one theme each week during Lent could change our lives and the lives of those around us.

\$12.99 / pb / 224 pp / Revell /
ISBN 978-0-8007-3338-4 / www.revellbooks.com

The Good News According to Jesus

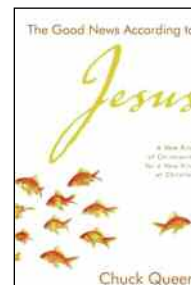
A New Kind of Christianity for a New Kind of Christian

Chuck Queen


How should disciples of Jesus Christ relate to people of other religious “faiths”? What are the dynamics of an authentic faith? Must Jesus literally return to this earth?

Baptist pastor Chuck Queen poses these and other poignant questions in a volume intended, as he says, for common Christians and religious seekers — not the scholarly community or evangelical leaders “who are content with the way things are.”

Relying extensively on Scripture and the wisdom of well-known writers and ministers and also pop culture, he emphasizes the necessity of focusing on the Synoptic Gospels rather than just the theology of John’s Gospel and Paul’s writings in order to portray a more holistic gospel aimed at transformational Christianity.



\$18.00 / pb / 216 pp / Smyth & Helwys /
ISBN 978-1-57312-528-4 / www.helwys.com



I chose BTSR

... with its historic roots, stable biblical foundation, and strong partnership ideals, BTSR stood out as a model moderate Baptist school in my eyes. I also wanted a close-knit community that was not necessarily tied to any undergraduate or graduate institution. I found all of those things at BTSR. I believe BTSR gave me a firm foundation of theological education with which to engage the world in wholesome and holistic ways. Thank you BTSR for ministering to me so that I can minister to the world!

Lindsay, Class of 2007, Field Personnel, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Southeast Asia

888.345.BTSR WWW.BTSR.EDU

Are you equipped for the ministry that God is calling you to? Choose BTSR for your theological education and training.

Master of Divinity
Doctor of Ministry
Continuing Education

BTSR
BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY AT RICHMOND

Walker's latest book engaging, compelling

A review by D. Leslie Hill

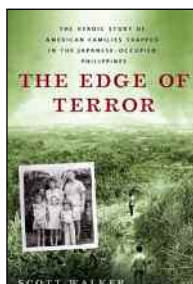
The Edge of Terror

The Heroic Story of American Families Trapped in the Japanese-occupied Philippines

Scott Walker

Japan's rapid early success in World War II caught most people by surprise. Northern Baptist missionaries and American miners in the Philippines proved no exception. Walker's book notes that military commanders and individuals often made hurried decisions based on too little understanding. The results produced a mix of good and tragedy.

Walker's account follows a small group of American missionaries (the "Hopevale Martyrs") and miners. Their decisions to



avoid capture by the Japanese and location on the central Philippine island Panay brought them together. Under stress, at times they made different decisions but gained an unexpected appreciation for each other.

Walker keeps the reader aware of the wider events of the war while following the lives of the small group living, as one noted, "on the edge of terror." He gives in-depth personalities to many of the individuals based on extensive research. Also, he describes in detail the severe circumstances under which they lived month after month, presenting their persistence to follow their faith and serve their calling and country. The account includes the outstanding courageous support they found among the Filipinos. Both the tragedy of discovery by the Japanese and the triumph of escape claim the reader's attention.

In his closing, "Author's Note," Walker draws conclusions regarding faith, hope, love and war. These conclusions follow the pattern of his other writings, for example, *Glimpses of God*.

Over the years, Scott Walker's books have often been in the top 10 Christian book lists. Having grown up in the Philippines as a child of missionaries, he reveals a feeling for and understanding of the Filipinos. Both his research and writing skills have produced a compelling book. **BT**

\$26.99 / hb / 336 pp / Thomas Dunne Books / ISBN 978-0-312-33834-3, ISBN10: 0-312-33834-1 / us.macmillan.com

—Les Hill of Lexington, Ky., is a retired missionary, having served 38 years in Southeast Asia. He currently serves on the Board of Directors of Baptists Today.



A SEMINARY EXPERIENCE YOU CAN AFFORD, FIT IN, AND ACCOMPLISH.

- Offering the Master of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry degrees
- 90% of students receive financial assistance
- Classes in "Block Schedule" offered on Mon., Tues., and Thurs.
- Study Travel - Holy Land, Peru, Civil Rights Sites, and more

gardner-webb.edu/divinity ♦ Boiling Springs, NC ♦ 877.498.4723

Faith ♦ Service ♦ Leadership

Gardner Webb University
School of Divinity

Musicians sing praises of new hymnal

By John Pierce

ATLANTA — The long-awaited hymnal, *Celebrating Grace*, will premiere at a three-day event next month at Atlanta's Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church and start appearing in church pew racks across the nation this spring.

Milburn Price, who trained a generation of music ministers at the former School of Church Music at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, served on the hymnal's editorial board. He said the new hymnal is distinctive for Baptists in four areas: its organization, its presentation of supplementary readings, its attention to the Christian year and its contents.

"The hymnal contents are organized into two major divisions," said Price, who was dean of the School of Performing Arts at Samford University before retirement.

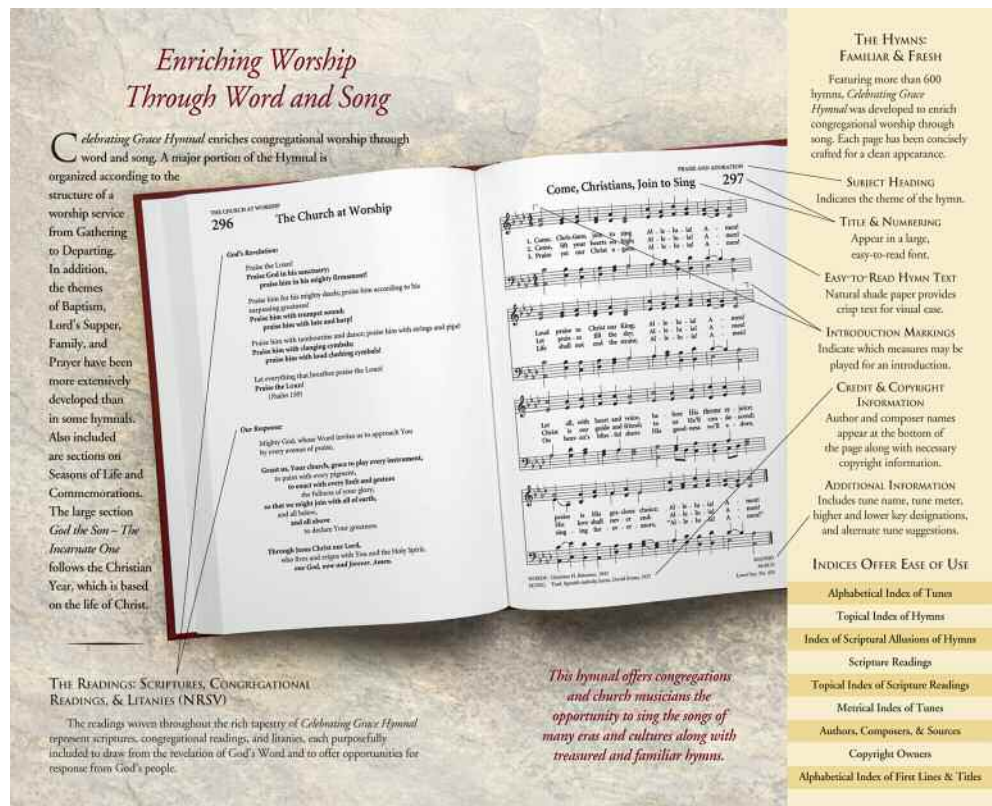
One division is focused on the theme "I Will Be Your God" and includes hymns on the Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, he explained. The second division is titled "You Will Be My People," which contains hymns about the people of God as a community of faith that worships and ministers together.

Readings are placed strategically throughout the hymnal, said Price.

"Instead of being gathered at the back of the book and using only scripture, the readings are interspersed throughout the hymnal according to theme or topic," he said.

For a growing number of Baptists and other congregations that plan worship around the Christian calendar or church year — a cycle that follows the life of Christ — the new hymnal is an easier-to-use resource.

"The section of hymns related to Jesus Christ is organized according to the life of Christ expressed in the Christian year — Advent, Christmastide, Epiphany, Lent and Eastertide," said Price. "For the Pentecost season, the number of hymns on the Holy Spirit is increased, and there are several



hymns specifically for Pentecost Sunday."

Price added that a brief essay at the back of the hymnal explains the spiritual meaning of the seasons of the Christian year.

The primary question for most worshipers and worship leaders when a new hymnal comes on the scene is: Which hymns are included? Price is eager to respond.

"*Celebrating Grace: Hymnal for Baptist Worship* maintains the tradition of the 1956, 1975 and 1991 Baptist Hymnals in including a substantial representation of historic hymns of the church as well as favorite gospel songs," he noted. "However, to these hymns it adds a significant number of hymns and tunes by late 20th and early 21st century writers — including several Baptists — and a representative selection of contemporary songs as well as global songs written by Christians in other cultures."



Milburn Price



Mark Edwards

The idea for the new hymnal grew out of a conversation between then-president (and now chancellor) of Mercer University, Kirby Godsey, and Baptist layman Tom McAfee whose family has been a strong supporter of the university and proponents of church music. The discussion centered on prominent Baptist leader and university founder Jesse Mercer (1769-1841), who published the popular *Cluster of Spiritual Songs*.

McAfee wondered aloud if it was time for another hymnal to be produced that would keep many of the beloved hymns while expanding the collection to include fresh expressions of faith.

"Our desire was to build a hymnal that would meet the needs of Baptists and be broad enough in scope to assist other denominations with creating meaningful worship services," said McAfee, who has led the effort through every phase.

Church musicians explain that a hymn is distinguished from a song in that it takes the singer and listener on a spiritual journey — as does a sermon. Therefore,



Tom McAfee

compiling a new hymnal is a creative, intentional and careful endeavor.

Mark Edwards, minister of music at the First Baptist Church of Nashville, Tenn., left his church position in 2007 to serve as vice president and worship resource manager. He has overseen the music side of the hymnal project.

He and McAfee, who handles the business side of the hymnal's publishing and distribution, enlisted a cadre of experienced church musicians, worship leaders and theologians to guide the hymnal from concept to reality.

"We knew we wanted to build our team with the best musicians, theologians and historians," said McAfee.

As the hymnal project grew, a new non-profit organization — separate from Mercer — was formed in the name of Celebrating Grace, Inc. to carry out the production, promotion and sales of the hymnal, which contains a comprehensive collection of more than 600 hymns and worship songs and other resources.

McAfee said the team has "been intentionally inclusive" by engaging Baptists from various groups — including Fellowship Baptists, Southern Baptists, American Baptists, National Baptists and Canadian Baptists — as well as worship leaders from other denominations.

"There has never been a hymnal that has incorporated this wide variety of heritages," he said. "The result is a hymnal that is comprehensive in musical style and that is contemplative in its content."

Carol Giesbrecht, director of music at Highland Baptist Church in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, and a member of the texts and tunes committee, has been involved with other hymnal projects. Yet she is impressed by the careful attention

given to the theology of hymns included in *Celebrating Grace*.

"I can say that on no other project has the theological content of submissions been as thoughtfully considered," said Giesbrecht, noting that she "found the entire experience to be stimulating to my own spiritual growth."

As a companion to the hymnal, an online resource called "Worship Matrix" assists worship planners by connecting scripture, hymns, readings, quotations, choral music and the Christian year.

The March premiere of the hymnal

will be a culmination of dreams, careful planning and much labor. Attendees will have the chance to listen to and participate in a wide range of congregational singing, said McAfee, and to attend workshops for pastors, church musicians and laypersons.

"The congregational concerts will feature fresh and familiar hymns from *Celebrating Grace Hymnal*," he said. "We will have two evenings of exceptional worship led by a mass choir made up of children, teenagers and adults. Handbells, brass, piano and organ will assist in leading the service." **BT**

CHURCH WORKS!

CONFERENCE

Make plans to attend this conference for Christian educators and young leaders. Whether you serve in a traditional church setting or create aspects of church in non-traditional settings, come for a time of fellowship, renewal, networking and learning.

This event is sponsored by Current, CBF's network for young leaders, and the CBF Congregational Formation initiative. The annual True Survivor conference and Current retreat have combined for this exciting new event.



Featured speakers

Diana Butler Bass
Scholar, speaker and author of seven books, including her newest book *A People's History of Christianity*



Dave Odom
Executive vice president of Leadership Education at Duke Divinity and founder of the Center for Congregational Health

\$425 All-inclusive registration includes lodging for three nights at the Scarritt Bennett Center, lunches and dinners and the program fee.

\$125 Registration includes some meals and the program fee. Students enrolled at a CBF partner schools are eligible to receive a \$75 discount on registration. Additional lodging is available at nearby hotels. Go online to learn about group rates.

To register, go online to www.thefellowship.info/churchworks.

February 22-25, 2010, in Nashville, Tenn.
The conference will be held at the Scarritt Bennett Center.



Following up on a series of regional pre-release events, a major premiere of the new hymnal is set for March 7-9 at Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church beginning with a Sunday evening congregational concert. Workshops and other events related to church music will follow. Details on the premiere and the hymnal can be found at www.celebrating-grace.com.

Called to serve the church

DANVILLE, Va. — Stephen Cook is only 33 years old, but he discerned his call to ministry when in the seventh grade.

“By the time I was 13, it had become clear to me the purpose for which God had put me on this earth,” said Cook, who grew up in Charlotte, N.C., and now serves as pastor of First Baptist Church of Danville, Va.

He credits Charlotte’s Providence Baptist Church with helping him recognize and develop his ministry gifts. On his 14th birthday, he obtained a youth work permit and became a custodian at his church.

“Taking that job was out of my love for the church and my way to serve the church and the people I loved,” explained Cook, who continued the job through high school.

Church leaders recognized his strong commitment and encouraged him with opportunities. “I was the only custodian who also made hospital visits with the ministerial staff,” he chuckled, adding that the visits helped give shape to the calling he felt.

Another experience that shaped his ministerial identity was five years of riding with the Charlotte Fire Department through a student internship program. His participation grew out of the death of a youth who was hit by a car in front of the church in 1989.

“I saw the way the firefighters took care of that family,” he said. “And when they took their place among the mourners at the funeral service for our friend, well that was a powerful witness to the kind of presence and care they bring to people’s lives.”

Cook feels his early experiences provided a foundation on which to build his ministry.

“I learned how to stay calm in a crisis, to provide a presence of care, concern and comfort, and to be invested in and involved in an institution and in the lives of the people who make up that institution,” he said. “Those are all vital elements of ministry.”

While at Wake Forest University, Cook served in youth ministry at Winston-Salem’s Ardmore Baptist Church. An internship evolved into a full-time position.

Afterward he attended Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond where he met his wife-to-be Amy. After the young couple graduated, they married and moved to Morrow, Ga., where he became pastor of First Baptist Church and Amy was a hospice chaplain.

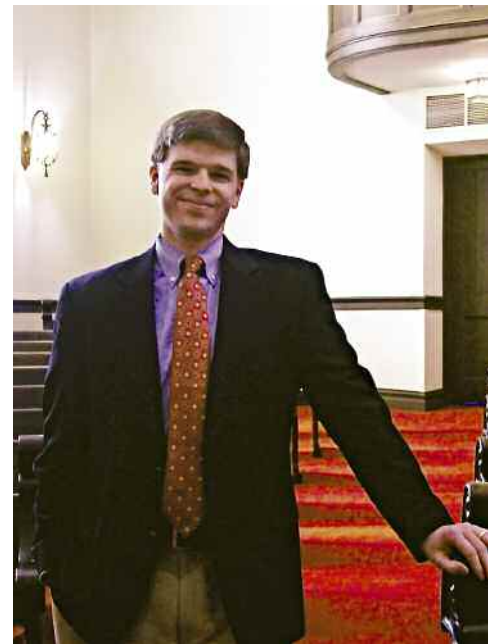
After additional graduate work at Brite Divinity School at Texas Christian University, Stephen was called to Danville. The young pastor, husband and father is also enrolled in a doctoral program at Columbia Theological Seminary.

One important tool in his personal ministry resource kit is *Baptists Today*, a news journal he was introduced to at Ardmore. A self-described news hound, Cook values being aware of what is happening in Baptist life and in the broader religious landscape.

“Whenever we have the opportunity to broaden our awareness and understanding of how different people are living out the Gospel commission to be the presence of Christ in the world, then I think we are doing ourselves a favor to become aware of it,” he said.

He saw the difference that *Baptists Today* made within the Morrow congregation “when members ... invested in not only Baptist life, but also the Christian life beyond their own congregation.”

In Danville, Stephen urges members to



read the news journal as well.

“Having an unbiased voice out there is vital,” he said. “*Baptists Today* is a voice that we need.” **BT**

For information on making a gift to *Baptists Today*, contact Keithen M. Tucker at ktucker@baptiststoday.org or (478) 330-5613.

Opening New Worlds 2010

Church, Teacher & Parent Disabilities Ministries Conference

March 19 & 20

First Baptist Church Griffin, GA

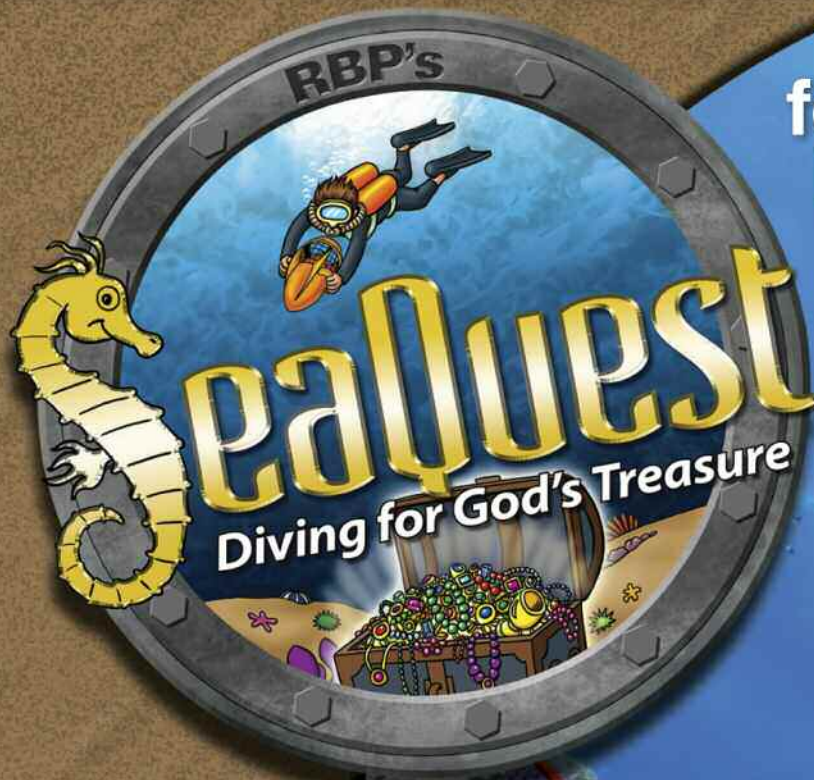
An enlightening conference custom-made for churches, teachers and parents ... includes sessions on starting special needs ministry, decision-making for people with special needs, innovative training, ministering to children with autism, navigating Georgia’s “special needs” system, parent support groups and much more!

Visit www.DDMGA.org for information on registration, church rates, sponsorships ... OR email/phone DDM ...

EMAIL: OpeningNewWorlds@DDMGA.org
PHONE: 1-888-340-5820

Hosted by Developmental
Disabilities
Ministries

DIVE RIGHT IN



for an exciting,
life-changing
adventure!

VBS 2010

- Easy-to-Use
- Evangelistic
- Fun & Creative
- Bible-Centered

www.rbpVBS.org



test of faith

Historic church thriving in revived D.C. neighborhood

WASHINGTON (ABP) — Moments before Sunday worship begins, Pastor Amy Butler and members of the Calvary Baptist Church choir gather in a small annex next to the sanctuary. Butler leads the group in a short prayer, then issues a warning.

“I’m really reaching this morning, preaching that Jezebel is wise,” she says with a grin. “So keep your facial expressions under control.”

Everyone laughs. In truth, it takes more than that to upset the congregation of Calvary Baptist, in the heart of the nation’s capital city.

Once, a man strolled into the Sunday morning service in superhero regalia, complete with cape and tights. Another time, a woman poked people with her umbrella during communion. And during the invocation prayer one Sunday morning, the police marched in and arrested a man in the front row.

There was a time when those incidents would have been shocking to the members of the stately red-brick church at 8th and “H” Streets NW in Washington’s Chinatown neighborhood. In its heyday, thousands packed Calvary’s pews and luminaries worshiped there, including congressmen, ambassadors and even President Warren Harding.

But if the historic, staid edifice has remained the same, the congregation has not. Today, it’s an urban church working hard to serve and to engage the neighborhood around it.

The congregation’s willingness to embrace the unexpected goes a long way toward explaining how a church once on the brink is now a thriving community asset.

“If you want to be a Christian, you better get ready for life to be hard. This is not ‘Put on your pretty hat and go to church.’ Jesus Christ did some really hard things...” Butler said of her congregation. “What would

Jesus expect us to do when feeling threatened or uncomfortable? Love God; love your neighbor. That’s what we’re doing here. That’s the essence of the gospel.”

Calvary Baptist members are proud of their church’s long history and its tradition of commitment to social change. Founded by abolitionists during the Civil War, the church often was on the forefront of social movements.

The Northern Baptist Convention

(forerunner of today’s American Baptist Churches USA), was organized at the church in 1907. When women flooded into the workplace during World War II, Calvary was among the first organizations to offer daycare. It provided



Amy Butler

a canteen for military personnel — and assistance for conscientious objectors. In 1955, it became the first white church in Washington to admit a black member.

But by the early ’90s, Calvary Baptist’s golden era was well behind it. The local families who’d once crowded its sanctuary had

long since moved to the suburbs. As neighborhood crime rose, Sunday attendance dropped. Those who stayed in the church had their hands full.

“They had ushers, they had greeters and they had people assigned to pick up the condoms and Scotch bottles off the front steps in the morning,” Butler said.

But the congregation, now affiliated with the Alliance of Baptists, the American Baptist Churches and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, never really considered leaving the District of Columbia.

“They felt, ‘We are called by God to be in this place, and we have to figure out a way to do it,’” Butler said.

In 2003, Calvary was a dwindling, aging congregation smack in the middle of a multi-ethnic neighborhood scarred by urban blight — and in need of a new pastor. Butler, then a 32-year-old mother of three and an associate pastor at St. Charles Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans, was bold enough to accept the challenge of leading a diverse, urban faith community.

In her first months, she’d get a crash course in managing a multi-million-dollar



Photographs by Mike Morones



renovation project, defusing staff conflicts and trying to revive a church with an 800-seat sanctuary, but an average Sunday attendance of no more than 50.

“The only way I can describe those first two years at Calvary is to tell you I was doing triage the whole time,” Butler said.

It’s a hard scene to imagine, sitting in Butler’s cozy office six years later. With its soft lights, framed photographs and cushy couches, the space radiates warmth and peace. So does Butler. But those first few years were chaotic.

Calvary capitalized on rising property values in the area and raised \$11 million for a renovation project by selling some land for an office building. But the church’s ability to manage a real-estate deal of that magnitude was tested regularly. Developers occasionally tried to take advantage of the church, said Butler, who quickly learned the art of confrontation.

“Pastors are pleasers. It’s in our DNA. We like people to like us,” she said. “That can get in our way.”

But soon Butler realized that the church’s assets — in the form of real estate — also could play a role in reshaping and promoting the church’s mission and reaching out to the neighborhood. Calvary’s office, worship, classroom and recreational space covered 50,000 square feet, much of which was leased out to non-profits. Some paid rent. Others didn’t.

When those groups had to vacate the church during the renovation project, Butler seized the opportunity to start fresh. She started hunting for agencies that comple-

mented Calvary’s mission — groups that pledged to invest in the emotional, spiritual and financial health of the community.

“I really wanted to not perpetuate the model of the church being a landlord. I worked to emphasize the word ‘partner,’” said Butler, who hand-selected a small cadre of such groups that moved into the church when renovations wrapped up in 2005. “You have to have a clear mission. Otherwise, you’re just filling slots.”

She sought out well-run non-profits that were financially stable and clear about their missions. It was not a quick process, and she said “no” more often than “yes.”

Partners primarily serve children. Kid Power Inc. is a youth organization that explores the city’s history, and a non-profit after-school cooking program called Brainfood uses Calvary’s enormous commercial kitchen. The teens make food for various occasions, including meals for the residents of a local psychiatric hospital who gather at Calvary for lunch each Thursday.

Theatre Lab, which works with up-and-coming actors, at-risk teens, seniors, youthful offenders, homeless-shelter residents and people living with HIV, uses the church’s Sunday school classrooms for children’s acting camps and hosts evening courses for adults on subjects such as movie-making, comedy boot camp and playwriting. Children in Calvary’s Vacation Bible School participate in acting workshops, and Theatre Lab is helping the church produce a one-act play based on the Gospel of Mark.

Calvary’s previously tiny choir got a serious boost three years ago after Butler

recruited the Washington Youth Choir, which needed a new facility.

“It’s a whole big world out there. Churches that stay insulated are not going to be successful in their attempt to interest the community,” Butler said. “But we can’t do everything, so what can we do? We can find others who can be partners.”

The church’s renewed vitality is gratifying to longtime members like Victor Tupitza, 82, who has attended Calvary with his wife for 30 years.

“We are a very healthy congregation now. I think that’s impacting the whole spirit of the church,” said Tupitza, who noted that an influx of younger members has assured the church’s future. “It’s one thing to have faith the church is going to survive in the community. It’s another thing to believe the church is going to thrive in the community.”

More than 100 people are in the sanctuary on the Sunday Butler takes up the cause of Jezebel. When she encourages the crowd to pass the peace, they not only shake hands with their neighbors but roam the sanctuary, hugging and catching up.

It’s a diverse crowd: black, white, Asian, Latino, young professionals and older retirees, singles and families, suits and ties, jeans and T-shirts.

In her sermon, Butler doesn’t exonerate Jezebel. Instead, Butler tells the congregation, perhaps Jezebel’s story teaches us most how not to live. Jezebel was resourceful, goal-oriented and confident, but without God in her heart, those attributes amounted to nothing.

“In the end, she placed all her confidence and trust in her own abilities, a dangerous place for any of us trying to navigate the scary, difficult, pain-filled task of human living,” Butler said. “Learn from her devastating mistakes. Place your confidence where it belongs: in the hands of God.”

That sort of faith is far from easy, she said later. It requires a willingness to try something you might never have tried before, a willingness to step outside your comfort zone, a willingness to be more than you thought you could. And her congregation is willing. **BT**

—*Eddie Gross is a reporter for the Free Lance-Star in Fredericksburg, Va. This article originally appeared in the online journal Faith & Leadership, produced by Duke Divinity School.*

What do these churches have in common?

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

Ardmore Baptist Church, Winston-Salem, N.C.

Boulevard Baptist Church, Anderson, S.C.

Broadmoor Baptist Church, Baton Rouge, La.

Brunswick Islands Baptist Church, Supply, N.C.

Chadborn Baptist Church, Chadborn, N.C.

Church in the Meadows, Lakeland, Fla.

College Avenue Baptist Church, Lenoir, N.C.

College Park Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla.

Covenant Baptist Church, Gastonia, N.C.

Cullowhee Baptist Church, Cullowhee, N.C.

Druid Hills Baptist Church, Atlanta, Ga.

Edenton Baptist Church, Edenton, N.C.

Emerywood Baptist Church, High Point, N.C.

Faith Baptist Church, Georgetown, Ky.

Fellowship Baptist Church, Fitzgerald, Ga.

Fernwood Baptist Church, Spartanburg, S.C.

First Baptist Church, Ahoskie, N.C.

First Baptist Church, Aiken, S.C.

First Baptist Church, Anderson, S.C.

First Baptist Church, Asheville, N.C.

First Baptist Church, Cape Girardeau, Mo.

First Baptist Church, Carolina Beach, N.C.

First Baptist Church, Carrollton, Ga.

First Baptist Church, Chattanooga, Tenn.

First Baptist Church, Clemson, S.C.

First Baptist Church, Columbus, Ga.

First Baptist Church, Commerce, Ga.

First Baptist Church, Conway, S.C.

First Baptist Church, Dalton, Ga.

First Baptist Church, Forest City, N.C.

First Baptist Church, Fort Myers, Fla.

First Baptist Church, Frankfort, Ky.

First Baptist Church, Gainesville, Fla.

First Baptist Church, Gainesville, Ga.

First Baptist Church, Gastonia, N.C.

First Baptist Church, Greenville, S.C.

First Baptist Church, Greenwood, S.C.

First Baptist Church, Griffin, Ga.

First Baptist Church, Hawkinsville, Ga.

First Baptist Church, Huntsville, Ala.

First Baptist Church, Jasper, Ga.

First Baptist Church, Lexington, N.C.

First Baptist Church, London, Ky.

First Baptist Church, Lumberton, N.C.

First Baptist Church, Macon, Ga.

First Baptist Church, Madison, Ga.

First Baptist Church, Madison, N.C.

First Baptist Church, Marion, N.C.

First Baptist Church, Mocksville, N.C.

First Baptist Church, Morganton, N.C.

First Baptist Church, Morrow, Ga.

First Baptist Church, Mount Olive, N.C.

First Baptist Church, Murfreesboro, Tenn.

First Baptist Church, New Bern, N.C.

First Baptist Church, Orangeburg, S.C.

First Baptist Church, Pensacola, Fla.

First Baptist Church, Rome, Ga.

First Baptist Church, Rutherfordton, N.C.

First Baptist Church, Sanford, N.C.

First Baptist Church, Savannah, Ga.

First Baptist Church, Spruce Pine, N.C.

First Baptist Church, Tifton, Ga.

First Baptist Church, Wilmington, N.C.

First Baptist Church, Wilson, N.C.

First Baptist Church, Winston-Salem, N.C.

Forest Hills Baptist Church, Raleigh, N.C.

Franklin Baptist Church, Franklin, Va.

Grace Fellowship Baptist Church, Meridian, Miss.

Greystone Baptist Church, Raleigh, N.C.

Haddock Baptist Church, Haddock, Ga.

Hendricks Avenue Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Fla.

Highland Hills Baptist Church, Macon, Ga.

Highland Park Baptist Church, Austin, Texas

Holmeswood Baptist Church, Kansas City, Mo.

HomeStar Fellowship, Raleigh, N.C.

Johns Creek Baptist Church, Alpharetta, Ga.

Kathwood Baptist Church, Columbia, S.C.

Knollwood Baptist Church, Winston-Salem, N.C.

Lakeside Baptist Church, Rocky Mount, N.C.

Lakeview Baptist Church, Camden, S.C.

Lexington Avenue Baptist Church, Danville, Ky.

Lystra Baptist Church, Chapel Hill, N.C.

Millbrook Baptist Church, Raleigh, N.C.

Mount Zion Baptist Church, Macon, Ga.

National Heights Baptist Church, Fayetteville, Ga.

New Heights Baptist Church, Macon, Ga.

Northminster Baptist Church, Jackson, Miss.

North Stuart Baptist Church, Stuart, Fla.

Oakmont Baptist Church, Greenville, N.C.

Peachtree Baptist Church, Atlanta, Ga.

Providence Baptist Church, Charlotte, N.C.

Providence Baptist Church, Cookeville, Tenn.

Providence Baptist Church, Hendersonville, N.C.

Pullen Memorial Baptist Church, Raleigh, N.C.

Reynoldson Baptist Church, Gates, N.C.

Rock Falls Baptist Church, Orrick, Mo.

Rolling Hills Baptist Church, Fayetteville, Ark.

Rolesville Baptist Church, Rolesville, N.C.

Second Baptist Church, Liberty, Mo.

Second Baptist Church, Memphis, Tenn.

Second Baptist Church, Richmond, Va.

Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church, Atlanta, Ga.

Shades Crest Baptist Church, Birmingham, Ala.

Smoke Rise Baptist Church, Stone Mountain, Ga.

South Main Baptist Church, Houston, Texas

St. Andrews Baptist Church, Columbia, S.C.

St. Matthews Baptist Church, Louisville, Ky.

Tabernacle Baptist Church, Carrollton, Ga.

Tabernacle Baptist Church, Raleigh, N.C.

The Lakeland Fellowship, Lakeland, Fla.

The Memorial Baptist Church, Greenville, N.C.

Trinity Baptist Church, Cordova, Tenn.

Trinity Baptist Church, Moultrie, Ga.

University Baptist Church, Baton Rouge, La.

Vineville Baptist Church, Macon, Ga.

Watts Street Baptist Church, Durham, N.C.

Wieuca Road Baptist Church, Atlanta, Ga.

Wingate Baptist Church, Wingate, N.C.

Winter Park Baptist Church, Wilmington, N.C.

Woodmont Baptist Church, Nashville, Tenn.

Yates Baptist Church, Durham, N.C.

Youngsville Baptist Church, Youngsville, N.C.

Zebulon Baptist Church, Zebulon, N.C.

Your church can be better informed, too

FOR AS LITTLE AS \$450 A YEAR

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