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Photo by John Pierce. Twins Henry (top) and Macy Lewis are part of the surge in multiple births at First Baptist Church of Rome, Georgia. [Story on page 4](#)



'Being, knowing, doing'
Congregational ministry focus of Gardner-Webb divinity school faculty

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Ministry multiplying at Northwest Georgia church

Double Up: Several families within the First Baptist Church of Rome, Ga., have had twins in recent years. Ministers and teachers are committed to providing spiritual nurture — and to knowing the children individually. When one family had quadruplets, the church really took notice of the increase.

Two by two — or more

ROME, Ga. — The founding of Ancient Rome is tied to a legend about twin brothers named Romulus and Remus. As a result, twin boys in that culture were seen as a unique blessing. On the other hand, the expectation that a pricy dowry would be paid by fathers of young brides made the arrival of twin girls less desirable.

But a church in the namesake City of Seven Hills in Northwest Georgia is happily welcoming families with multiple births of all varieties. The rise in multiple births was not a strategy for congregational growth. It just happened.

“Our church loves children, so the presence of twins has simply increased the opportunity to love children and support their families,” said Joel Snider, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Rome, Ga., since 1995, who’s getting used to seeing double.

The church’s minister of faith development since 1997, Priscilla “Prissy” Tunnell,

said the “twins thing” is not as new as casual observers might think.

“Ever since I have been on staff, we have had two to three sets as part of the church,” said Tunnell. “Most of those are in high school, college or starting families now, so they are usually not included in the present phenomenon.”

The rise of multiple births gained greater visibility, however, when one church family — with two children already — had quadruplets.

“Talk about an impact on nursery planning!” said Tunnell. “We even had a sign put

up on the road close to the preschool entrance that said, ‘Reserved for families with 8 or more members.’”

The congregation did all it could, she said, to help these parents adjust to the new challenges they were facing.

“The church family as well as community members fed, bathed, rocked those boys — yes, all boys — at their home and at church.”

Tunnell said her ministry to families with multiple births is made easier when the children are easily distinguishable from one another.

“Identical twins give me some anxious moments,” she confessed. “A minister is supposed to be able to call his or her children by name, right?”

Snider said he makes a point during Wednesday church dinners to call the children by name and get to know them as individuals.



“One of the most rewarding things for me is to go from trying to distinguish the identical ones by looks to telling them apart by personality,” said Snider.

But Tunnell reveals some tricks that help get the identification process going. Take Megan and Meredith, for example.

“Meredith has a dot on her cheek,” Tunnell noted. “And since Meredith has a ‘d’ in her name, she is the one with the dot.”

She’s also familiarized herself with the differences in John and Cole’s cowlicks — and how Davis and Wesley’s teeth are coming out at different rates.

“Hopefully by the time they have all of their teeth, I will be able to tell them apart,” said Tunnell.

Other sets of twins she has figured out over time. But there are expected moments of confusion with so many multiple-birth children in the church at this time.

“When someone is in trouble or close to it, I will call out: ‘Wesley-Davis,’ ‘John-Cole,’ ‘Peyton-Evan,’ or ‘Megan-Meredith!’”

Snider said the multi-birth additions have brought both joy and the need for a caring, praying community.



Nicki and Steve Hunt have their hands full with older daughter Campbell and twins Sarah Kate and Callie, whose premature births called the church into action. Above left photo: Twins Cole (left) and John Landrum.

“The Hunt twins, in particular, really gave us a reason to pray and organize for ministry,” said Snider. “Had they been born two days earlier, the hospital wouldn’t have tried to save them — that’s how premature they were. They were the smallest human life I’ve ever seen.”

The church as a whole, and the Builders Sunday school class in particular, walked with

the family through the long and trying experience, he said. “Everyone felt they had a stake in their survival and in supporting Nicki and Steve.”

Watching children develop physically and spiritually is a favorite aspect of being a pastor, said Snider.

“To see them go from infants to toddlers, and from toddlers to small children with church friends is great,” said Snider. “Wednesday nights are one of my favorite times of the week because I get to know them and see how their minds and relationships are growing.”

No one needs to show the Rome congregation the statistical data about the increase in multiple births. They see the results firsthand — every week — and embrace them.

“It has long been thought that if you provide good care, good teaching, a pleasant environment for children, you can grow your church,” said Tunnell. “Well, why not grow it with twins?”

Those working with children, she said, are not blind to the impact these families have made over the last several years.

“One of my nursery workers said one day, ‘Whatever you are thinking, just double the numbers.’ We had a great laugh, then we doubled the count and we were right.” **BT**



Pastor Joel Snider visits with the Summers — (left to right) older brother Brinson and twins Evan and Peyton — during Wednesday dinner at the church.

Quotation

“ remarks ”

“Sometimes I think evangelicals come at people so hard and so fast and don’t take time to listen to where somebody is. We can just try to have a lighter touch sometimes.”

—Former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, in an interview with Christianity Today (RNS)

“...We found the basis for a serious stakeholder discussion of tax policy issues that would affect ministries and churches, such as whether the parsonage tax allowance should be limited for those who have multiple mansions and lake houses, tax-free.”

—Jill Gerber, press secretary for Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, following a three-year review of the practices of several wealthy televangelists (AJC)

“The people who brought America the Moral Majority have been replaced by a younger generation more interested in the environment, social justice and safe drinking water for developing countries.”

—An article in The Economist titled “Evangelical Protestants: Looking for a Leader”

“I’m not exactly for the use of drugs — don’t get me wrong — but I just believe that criminalizing marijuana, criminalizing the possession of a few ounces of pot, ... it’s costing us a fortune and it’s ruining young people. Young people go into prisons, they go in as youths and they come out as hardened criminals. And that’s not a good thing.”

—Religious broadcaster Pat Robertson, Dec. 16, on “The 700 Club” (RNS)

“It is not guilt that motivates the Christian to care for the poor and hungry. It is not even human compassion. The believer preaches good news to the poor, proclaims freedom to the captive and announces healing for the blind and release to the oppressed because he or she has the love of God in his or her heart and those who love God care about the poor.”

—Editor Bob Terry of The Alabama Baptist

“One key reason that poor girls give birth is because too often they see little future for themselves that would be compromised by an early birth. That’s why ... we say ‘hope is the best contraceptive.’”

—Actress Jane Fonda, founder and chair of the Georgia Campaign for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (Atlanta Journal-Constitution)

“This is a very, very sad day for America.”

—Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, on the Dec. 18 Senate vote of 65-31 to overturn the Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell policy prohibiting openly gay and lesbian persons from serving in the military (Baptist Press)

“It is time to close this chapter in our history. It is time to recognize that sacrifice, valor and integrity are no more defined by sexual orientation than they are by race or gender, religion or creed.”

—President Obama in a statement supporting the repeal of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell that he signed into law

“I would study more. I would pray more, travel less, take less speaking engagements ... I’d spend more time in meditation and prayer and just telling the Lord how much I love him...”

—Evangelist Billy Graham, 92, telling Fox News host Greta Van Susteren how he would have lived his life differently (Baptist Press)

“The pope insists on talking about a vague ‘broader context’ he can’t control, while ignoring the clear ‘broader context’ he can influence — the longstanding and unhealthy culture of a rigid, secretive, all-male church hierarchy fixated on self-preservation at all costs.”

—SNAP president Barbara Blaine on Pope Benedict XVI’s assertion that sexual abuse of children by Catholic priests is linked to a broader ideology of social moral relativism (RNS)

“The challenge before we American Christians, as I see it, is to use the freedoms, resources and opportunities at our disposal while making sure not to embrace values and assumptions that contradict what God has said in the Bible.”

—Baptist pastor David Platt of Birmingham, author of Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream (CNN Belief Blog)

“Recent surveys indicate that Americans, perhaps the world’s greatest consumers, are shopping around to find the ‘best and latest’ elements to suit their religious needs. Call it ‘spiritual consumerism.’”

—Rabbi A. James Rudin, inter-religious adviser for the American Jewish Committee (RNS)

editorial

Marketing the church without contradicting the message

By John Pierce

Often we see and hear that consumerism has made its way into the church. That is, persons “shop” for a congregation using the same methods as those employed to make other choices.

The “what-do-you-have-for-me” approach is not unlike buying products and services in other competitive markets. Therefore, churches are paying closer attention to how they market their offerings.

Some congregations embrace the marketing concept fully and use every available resource to make their churches as appealing as possible to those within the well-defined demographics.

Everything from recreational activities to youth and children’s programs to facility designs to worship times, musical style and sermon topics are purposely constructed to attract the largest crowd possible. The church and its many programs are given hot-button names (like Xtreme or Xcite, or the putting together of any two words without a space) to suggest relevancy if not coolness.

Other congregations reject the notion of marketing as something less than spiritual. They react against the over-the-top fanfare of more aggressive churches that seem to have never met a billboard or promotional idea they didn’t like.

As one who pays attention to how congregations clarify and articulate their unique identities and missions — and sometimes assists church leaders in their communication efforts — I reject the notion that marketing principles have no place in the spiritual realm.

Yet clear warnings are needed against a wholesale effort to make the church and its message more palatable than the competition — whether a neighboring congregation with a high-powered marketing scheme or the many other social alternatives to active church membership.

Like many things, marketing as a basic concept is rather value free. It is not a bad word for churches.

However, there are some marketing methodologies that contradict Christian principles and practices, and therefore should be avoided. Try asking this good question: Does this idea communicate our purpose and mission more clearly while not contradicting the values and principles of the very faith we embrace and offer to others?

Sometimes, in our noble desire to attract larger crowds, we can soft sell the Gospel. Madison Avenue marketing gurus would have predicted failure for a new movement launched on the call to “take up a cross.”

Perhaps that is why some so-called ministries reflect Madison Avenue more than they do the teachings of Jesus. It is easy for us to reject the brash proprietors of the “prosperity gospel” (an oxymoron) with their self-serving claims that God dishes out lavish possessions as sure signs of faithfulness.

The challenge, however, comes when our good churches — in an effort to be more attractive — let self-focus and personal appeasement slip in the side door. We have to keep our guards up.

One of the challenges churches face today is the question of how much the congregation’s mission should be determined by what members or prospects “want” — as if Christian discipleship is defined by personal satisfaction. Churches that seek to scratch every new itch may in fact attract those persons who never stop itching.

Tom Long of Emory University’s Candler School of Theology told a Baptist audience a couple of years ago that, indeed, more people are taking a “consumer approach to church” which in turn causes them to expect “customer service” or they



will go elsewhere to get what they want.

Recently a member of a large congregation asked one of my daughters where she attends church. After she told him, he went on to explain in glowing details about the wonderful things his church does for youth. It was like recruiting a star football player with promises of perks not offered by the competition.

In a culture of consumerism, churches must pay close attention to how they communicate their values, purpose and mission.

In the introduction to his book, *Thieves in the Temple: The Christian Church and the Selling of the American Soul* (2010, Basic Books), G. Jeffrey MacDonald raises an important question: “In the new religious marketplace, does the Church offer Americans a way to the highest things or yet another space in which to be self-indulgent?”

The contrasting categories are intriguing: “highest things” or “self-indulgence?”

Church leaders would do well to ruminate on that for a while. What are we really offering? “Higher things” than can be found anywhere else — or just a more spiritualized, attractive version of self-gratification than being sold around the corner?

Again, congregations can be more effective by clarifying and articulating their unique identities. Yet these communication efforts (or marketing practices) should fit the values and purpose of the church’s mission.

Inappropriate methods include deception, equating numerical success with faithfulness to the Gospel, and downplaying the calls to sacrifice and service. Yet, in the best sense, the church does have something of great importance to offer people — something different and ultimately more gratifying than can be found in the larger marketplace.

So, by many means, get the message out. Just let us be sure that it is consistent with the one recorded by the Gospel writers long ago. **BT**

‘Emotional intelligence’

Managing transitions from the inside out

Few people like change. It creates anxiety and discomfort, and it is just plain hard. Yet change is necessary for any faith community seeking to remain healthy and relevant.

Intelligent ministry seeks effective ways to lead a congregation through constructive transition. Emotionally intelligent ministry recognizes and welcomes emotion as an integral part of any change scenario.

After all, the majority of ministry is set within an emotional context. Any change — large or small — within a congregational setting can stir up emotion. Knowing how to perceive and use emotion is a key to effective ministry.

Emotional intelligence has a huge impact on an individual’s ability to form and maintain effective relationships. It also plays a vital role in how we respond to and manage any sort of change or conflict. The good news is that, with proper assessment and coaching, emotional intelligence can be improved.

So just what is emotional intelligence? According to John Mayer and Peter Salovey, who defined it in 1997, emotional intelligence is “the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth.”

This concept was further refined by psychologist David Caruso for use in business management, and it works equally well in a congregational setting.

To put it simply, emotional intelligence is using emotion to help us cope with our environment successfully. The goal is to let emotion motivate and inspire us to constructive action.

The flip side of conventional leadership

In many ways, emotionally intelligent ministry turns upside down conventional

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

wisdom about good leadership.

Conventional wisdom has encouraged leaders to focus on facts and to assume that emotional undercurrents are at best unhelpful and at worst dangerous and to be avoided.

This cold and logical approach seeks to weigh the facts for sober evaluation of possible alternatives and choose the one with the most benefits and least liabilities. This approach, though sensible, often falls short.

Rather than avoiding emotions, the alternative, emotionally intelligent approach takes them seriously and receives them as vital information to be included in the decision-making and transition processes.

This warm approach combines both cold data and emotional realities. Ministry leaders who consider rational and emotional channels of information together are best able to manage successful transitions inside and out.

We have all witnessed failures of congregational leaders’ cold approach to change. One that comes to mind is a church that built a modern sanctuary — a lovely facility that won architectural awards. The old, decaying sanctuary — insufficient and located too close to a major roadway — was expensive to maintain.

Despite leadership efforts, emotional ties prevented the congregation from mustering the votes to tear it down. That church is now saddled with an eyesore and money pit.

Congregations often use a cold approach to the revisioning process. Leaders design a congregational survey, but receive fewer responses than expected. Too late,



they realize that the survey does not provide the information needed, or that it contains mountains of unusable data.

The next step in the cold approach usually involves an ad-hoc visioning team of 12 of the smartest people in the congregation going on a retreat to create a new vision for the church. They come back excited and present the plan to a congregation that responds with a big, collective yawn.

What has happened in each of these change processes? The critical role of emotion was downplayed or ignored. The best transition efforts will fail unless the action plan not only addresses surface needs for change, but also considers how those affected by change will respond emotionally.

Exercising emotionally intelligent ministry

The first step toward exercising emotionally intelligent ministry is developing the emotional self-awareness that allows one to ask questions such as:

1. What is my own emotional response or investment in this decision?
2. What are my natural strengths and tendencies, and are they helpful in this situation?
3. What are my defense mechanisms when there is opposition to my leadership?
4. What are my stress responses? How do I exhibit stress and anxiety?

The other aspect of emotional intelligence is an awareness of the emotional response of others. After ministry leaders identify their own feelings about upcoming changes, they must identify the feelings of the people involved in the transition.

Emotional awareness requires empathy toward others and imagining how they might respond to a proposed change, then trying to recognize those who will become angry, those who will become anxious, and the people who might not be happy but who will take a wait-and-see attitude.

Leaders who take a warm, emotionally intelligent approach to transition consider the various points of view and emotions of

the faith community. Then they work to utilize and manage emotions to support the change process knowing that change will result in some discomfort but, ultimately, in a stronger ministry.

Competence in four areas

Emotionally intelligent ministry involves competence in four areas:

1. *Perceiving emotions.*

Perceiving emotions depends upon our ability to be observant. It begins with asking, "What emotions am I experiencing?" That leads to questions about what others are feeling and tests our ability to read facial expressions, voice tone, pitch and speed, and body language. A word of caution: a primary tool that congregations use to manage transition is the written word. It is important to read emotional communication in writing, but it is difficult. Never assume the emotional content of a written message. Ask.

2. *Using emotions*

If we know how to perceive and then use emotions, we can more effectively accomplish a task. It is worth asking, "Are the emotions present helping or hindering decision-making and thought processes?" Or "What emotional climate do we need to accomplish this work right now?" For example, if you need creativity and spontaneity, a positive, energized climate is best. If you need to spot errors or analyze a plan, a subdued energy level is best.

3. *Understanding emotions*

Understanding emotions enables us to foresee what might happen during a transition. Emotions develop along a predictable progression. It is important to know if a current emotional movement is helpful or detrimental. For example, one that can happen during a period of change is this negative slide: someone starts out skeptical, something happens and he becomes anxious, then distrustful. The situation escalates and he becomes alienated, angry and finally enraged. If we recognize the sequence, we may be able to head things off at the skeptical or anxious stage and avoid the rage. Conversely, there are patterns in positive emotional chains, such as the progression from calm and content to happy and joyful. These are worth knowing and utilizing.

4. *Managing emotions*

Managing emotions does not mean suppressing them. It means recognizing emotional states and deciding how best to utilize or adjust them in order to support the leadership needs of the moment. This involves realizing our own emotional state and deciding whether we need to do some self-coaching to change to a more helpful one. It also involves knowing ways to manage the emotional state of the larger group in order to help in decision making and transition.

Though some people are naturally more

emotionally intelligent than others, it can be improved with self-awareness, practice and coaching. There are a number of good tools to develop self-awareness around emotional intelligence, such as the WorkPlace Big Five Profile, emotional intelligence tests, and 360 feedback assessments. These tools, combined with personal coaching, can help to increase emotionally intelligent ministry. **BT**

—Chris Gambill is senior consultant and manager of congregational health services for the Center for Congregational Health.

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Here in **Camalote**

Belizean church leaders find support, training in Baptist Bible School

CAMALOTE, Belize — It's not exactly Camelot, but the Baptist Bible School of Belize in Camalote provides a peaceful place for pastors and other church leaders to find training that builds ministry skills and improves their knowledge of the Bible and of Baptists.

The school grew out of an effort by concerned members of First Baptist Church of Lexington, N.C. A friendship between pastor Ray Howell III and then-International Mission Board (IMB) missionary Cliff Scarbrough had led church members to a number of Belize-bound mission trips. With financial support from the church and land purchased independently by Scarbrough and others, volunteers built the structures that now make up the Baptist Training Center.

The need for a school in Belize grew as the IMB reduced convenient opportunities for theological education in Central America during the 1990s. The late Dennis Hipp, a member of the Lexington, N.C., church and frequent volunteer, saw a need and led an effort to provide training for pastors.

In cooperation with Baptist leaders in the Baptist Association of Belize (BAB) and Cooperative Baptist Fellowship churches in North Carolina, Hipp spearheaded periodic weekend training seminars from 2003-2005.

Robert Lamb, dean emeritus of the divinity school at Gardner-Webb University, learned about the program and taught at one of the weekend sessions in 2004. Lamb envisioned a more comprehensive program and offered to lead a change of direction that would offer one-week sessions each January, May and August.

Students follow a programmed course of instruction involving both classroom learning during the focus weeks and individual study between sessions. When they arrive for a new session, they take final exams based on earlier



Students and staff gather for a group photo. The front row includes Belize director Antolino Flores, U.S. director Bob Lamb, student services director Graham Hall, BAB president Ruperto Vincente, student Ustaqio Pop, and BAB executive director Henry Baizer.

class work and the self-study textbooks completed between sessions.

Most textbooks are from the Theological Education by Extension curriculum used by the external studies program of Cape Town Baptist Seminary in South Africa. Students who successfully complete the 21 required courses earn a Certificate in Pastoral Ministry from the Cape Town seminary.

Lamb recruits teachers for each session. Instructors volunteer their time and pay their own transportation and lodging costs. Though most teachers have come from North Carolina, eight states will have been represented by the end of the May 2011 session.

The schedule is rather rigorous, beginning with breakfast at 7:00 a.m. and incorporating the exam period and three two-hour class sessions before concluding at 7:30 p.m., with breaks for meals only. Afterward, students typically gather in the worship center, a hexagonal open-air building, where they complete homework assignments and study for their exams the next morning.

The first full-week sessions were held in January 2006. Students, nearly all of whom are bi-vocational, take a week off from work and travel to the training center, some coming

via a bus ride that can take up to eight hours. Some have lost jobs because their employers did not want to give them sufficient time off for studies.

They believe, however, that their sacrifice is well worth it. Seven students graduated after the August session, and seven more began their studies in January. Half of the 16 students who attended in January are women, who are not accepted as pastors among Baptists in Belize, but who receive the same training and serve in all other roles. During school sessions, both men and women regularly lead prayers and devotions.

Cindy Martinez recently finished her "sixth form" (equivalent to two years of junior college) and moved to Belize City, where she quickly became active in a Spanish-speaking church.

"I decided to take Ecclesiastes' advice to 'remember your creator in the days of your youth,'" she said. "While I am young, I want to serve God however he can use me."

Miguel Angel Castillo is pastor of *Iglesia El Buen Pastor* (The Good Shepherd) Baptist Church, a Spanish-speaking congregation in Orange Walk, in the northern part of Belize. He attended his first session as a student in

January, bringing with him church member Lazaro Cabrera, who feels called to teach.

Both men are self-employed auto body repairmen. They dug into the course work with enthusiasm, asking questions and showing openness to new information. Cabrera was uncertain about closing his shop and losing income for a week, but concluded that his experience was worth the price.

Martin Cus, a new student from Silver Creek, studies from a Bible in Kekchi, a Mayan language. Two former graduates also speak Kekchi as their first language; Lamb recently found educational materials written in their first language to assist them in training others. Many Kekchi speakers live in isolated areas and do not speak English well.

All new students were invited to lead in prayers or devotions during the week, receiving warm encouragement from the more experienced students, who also led devotions.

Sharon Austin, one of the veteran students, described while speaking from 1 Corinthians 13 how she had grown up in an abusive home.

“My mother never said ‘I love you’ until I was 19 years old and leaving home,” she said. “I finally gave up on my father ever showing that he loved me, and I asked God to be my ‘daddy.’”

God has been good, she said. Now raising a niece and an adoptive daughter, she wanted to express love to them, but found it hard to say the words.

“I started by writing ‘I love you’ on notes in their lunch box before I could say it,” she said, “but now I say ‘I love you’ many times each day.”

Austin said she had asked God to teach her to love “in an excellent way.”

David Harris, another veteran, is the school’s first “gringo” student. Harris, who lives in southwest Virginia and works as a property assessor, has been coming to Belize for 25 years. He and his wife have adopted five Belizean children, all from the area near Camalote.

In Virginia, David assists with the *Rio de Vida* (River of Life) church, and decided to come to the BBSB for training since he’s so at home in Belize. “I just want to help my church be more effective,” he said.

Primary administration for the school is handled by Lamb, the U.S. director, and Antolino Flores, the Belize director. Flores, pastor of Fabers Road Baptist Church in Belize City and former executive director of

the BAB, sees the school and those who teach there as “investing in the lives of people who will go back into the churches and make a difference in the lives of their country.”

Other leadership tasks are handled by Graham Hall, a retired systems analyst for the air navigation industry and member of First Baptist in Lexington. He handles logistics as student services director, while Susan Pasour, pastor of Mount Adar Baptist Church in Mebane, N.C., assists both Lamb and Hall, and has taught several classes.

Both Lamb and Hall turned 80 years old last year, and are hoping that others will emerge to assume leadership of the school. Of the 15 sessions held so far, each has missed only one.

Financial support for the school comes mainly from individuals and churches who contribute to a designated fund handled by CBFNC, though CBFNC is considering adding some support to its regular budget for the next three years.

That support provides scholarships for the students, who have to pay only travel and lodging costs. The cost for each student is about \$1,200; persons or churches can sponsor individual students and build relationships

with their churches. Lamb can assist with such partnerships (rlamb12@carolina.rr.com).


The Baptist Training Center, which can house up to 100 persons, is used by other denominational groups in Belize, and by U.S. church groups that come to do mission work in Belize, where the national language is English.

More information is available from camp directors Eric and Julie Maas (eric@seeksservesave.org or Julie@seeksservesave.org). Persons seeking ideas for mission trip needs should contact BAB executive director Henry Baizer (drake@BTL.net, 502-632-4211), a graduate and strong supporter of the BBSB.

Bazier and new BAB president Ruperto Vicente hope that the next few years will see the school’s 13 graduates grow many-fold so the association’s churches can have better trained leaders and a more hopeful future. Those who volunteer their time to make the BBSB a reality hope so, too. **BT**

[Editor’s note: More information about life at the camp and opportunities in Belize can be found on Cartledge’s “travelblogs” for Jan. 2-7 at www.baptiststoday.org.]

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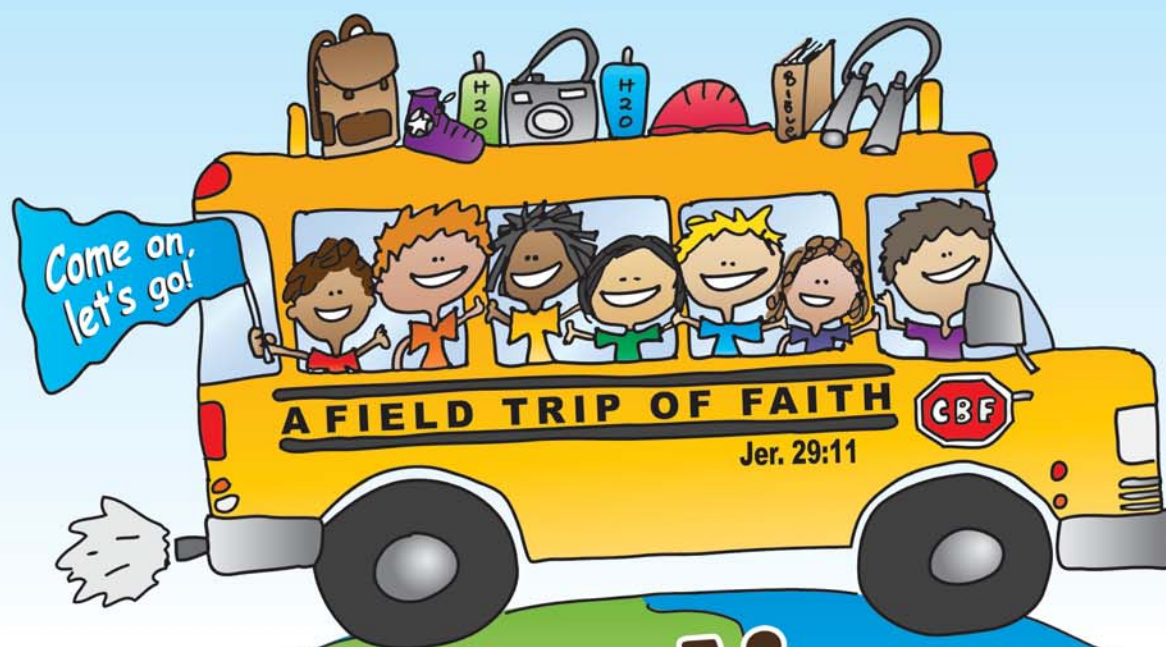
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Available March 1. To view a sample or pre-order online, visit
www.thefellowship.info/vbs or call (888) 801-4223.

Ground Zero center top religion story of 2010

By Daniel Burke
Religion News Service

The protracted and contentious debate over plans to build an Islamic community center near Ground Zero in New York was the top religion story of 2010, according to a survey of religion journalists.

The imam piloting the project, Feisal Abdul Rauf, was voted the Religion Newswriters Association's top newsmaker of 2010, besting Pope Benedict XVI, Sarah Palin, and aid workers in earthquake-ravaged Haiti.

Though the mosque project, known as Park51, is far from completion, the story dominated headlines for weeks, especially as the anniversary of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 approached. President Obama weighed in, saying Muslims have a right to build houses of worship, but other political leaders called the proposal insensitive to Americans still grieving over the loss of friends and family.

The response of faith-based charities to Haiti's devastating earthquake last January — including child-smuggling accusations against Idaho evangelicals — was voted the No. 2 religion story of 2010.

Allegations that Benedict and other Catholic leaders responded inadequately to the sexual abuse of children by Catholic clergy; the rise of the Tea Party; and the various faith groups' responses to Obama's health-care bill rounded out the top five stories of 2010, according to the survey.

The rest of the top 10 are:



Protestors demonstrate against the building of an Islamic community center close to Ground Zero in Manhattan. Photo by David Shankbone.

6. Debates over homosexuality among mainline Protestants, particularly the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the Episcopal Church.
7. The economic recession's effect on churches and ministries, including the bankruptcy of the landmark Crystal Cathedral in southern California.
8. The suicide of several gay teens prompted soul searching among American Christians about whether religion contributes to anti-gay attitudes.
9. A survey by the Pew Forum yielded some

surprising results, including that atheists scored better than many Christians on a test of religious knowledge.

10. The Supreme Court began its session in October without a Protestant justice on the bench for the first time in history. Six Catholics and three Jews sit on the high court. **BT**

Though the mosque project, known as Park51, is far from completion, the story dominated headlines for weeks.

Forty percent of Americans believe in young-earth creationism

By Daniel Burke
Religion News Service

Four in 10 Americans believe that God created humans in something like their present form within the last 10,000 years, according to a Gallup Poll.

While that percentage represents a slight dip from 2008, when 44 percent said they do not believe divinely made

humans evolved over time, it has remained remarkably stable since 1982, the earliest year for which Gallup provided data.

Nearly as many Americans (38 percent in 2010) say they believe humans evolved over time, but that God guided the process. That percentage, too, has remained consistent since 1982.

Meanwhile, the number of Americans who believe humans evolved

apart from any divine intervention crept up from 14 percent in 2008 to 16 percent this year. With few exceptions, that number has risen — albeit slightly — from 1982.

Gallup's 2010 poll was based on telephone interviews of 1,018 adults conducted Dec. 10-12. The margin of error is plus or minus 4 percentage points. **BT**

Who are the Baptists

— in Mexico?

The *Convención Nacional Bautista de México* (National Baptist Convention of Mexico), an active member of the Baptist World Alliance, is the oldest and largest Baptist group in that nation. In 2010, the convention reported 181,000 members in 1,734 churches.

Baptist work in Mexico did not begin until the mid-19th century, in part because of the predominance of Catholicism in the country. James Hickey, an agent who sold tracts and Bibles for the American Bible Society, began traveling through Mexico about 1860. In 1862, he began working in Monterrey, and there in 1864 he established Mexico's first evangelical church.

Hickey followed Baptist principles and the church is widely regarded as Baptist, but perhaps because he worked for a non-denominational agency, it was called "The Christian Church." The church consisted of Hickey, his wife, Thomas Westrup, and two brothers who were baptized: José Maria and Arcadio Uranga.

Westrup, a local man of English descent who had been converted, was named as pastor, and during the next five

years he and the Uranga brothers organized six more churches.

Missionaries from the Southern Baptist Convention and the American Baptist Home Mission Society soon began arriving, and the work grew more quickly.

The Coahuila Baptist Association was organized in Saltillo

in 1884, and the Nuevo León Baptist Association

was organized in Monterrey the following year.

Groundwork for a national convention began in September 1903 with a meeting of 43 messengers at the *Primera Iglesia*

Bautista (First Baptist Church) in Mexico City. They set the framework for a national convention, with Mexican pastors

Editor's note: This is the fifth in a series of articles introducing readers to member groups of the global Baptist family.



moving into more leadership roles, rather than missionaries from the States.

The new convention was involved in the Baptist World Alliance from the beginning, sending Alejandro Treviño as a representative to the initial Baptist World Congress in 1905.

The convention sponsors a variety of works, including missions, publications, and benevolent ministries. Education is supported through three universities and two seminaries: the Mexican Baptist Theological Seminary in Mexico City and the Dr. G.H. Lacy Seminary in Oaxaca.

More information can be obtained at www.cnbm.org.mx/ and through *La Luz Bautista* (*The Baptist Light*) the official periodical of the convention (available online at <http://www.cnbm.org.mx/LuzBautista>). **BT**

[Sources: *Baptists Around the World*, by Albert W. Wardin, Jr. (1995); "History and Development of Baptists in Mexico," by Dinorah B. Méndez (unpublished paper, 2006); Baptist World Alliance 2010 Yearbook]

Religiously, new Congress a lot like America — except with fewer atheists

WASHINGTON (RNS) — An influx of Republicans has colored the House red, but the midterm elections did little to alter the religious composition of Capitol Hill.

Like the U.S. public, Protestants make up more than half (57 percent) of the 112th Congress, and Catholics constitute roughly a quarter (29 percent), according to a study by the nonpartisan Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life.

The number of Protestants in Congress has dropped from 394 in the early 1960s to 304 in 2011, declining by several percentage points each decade. This year's congressional class added 12 Protestants, however.

Nearly seven in 10 Republicans in

Congress is Protestant; and there remain a greater percentage of Methodists (10 percent), Episcopalians/Anglicans (8 percent) and Presbyterians (8 percent) in Congress than in the American public.

Baptists, by contrast, are underrepresented, according to Pew's study: They make up nearly 17 percent of the population, but less than 13 percent of Congress.

No religious group appears to be as underrepresented on Capitol Hill as atheists, however.

About one-sixth of the U.S. population (16 percent) identifies as religiously unaffiliated, according to Pew. While six members of the new Congress don't specify a religious

affiliation, none say they are unaffiliated. Rep. Pete Stark, D-Calif., has said he does not believe in God, but identifies his religion as Unitarian, according to Pew.

As the study notes, there are good reasons for representatives to keep quiet about religious doubts. According to 2010 Pew survey, more than six in 10 Americans say it is important for members of Congress to have strong religious beliefs.

There are 156 Catholics, 39 Jews, 15 Mormons, three Buddhists, two Muslims, and one Quaker in the 112th Congress. There are no self-identified Pentecostals, Hindus, Anabaptists, or Jehovah's Witnesses, according to the study. **BT**

Technology unites missionaries, families

Janine Winkler loves reading books to her 2-year-old grandson Judah, but instead of sitting on her lap at her home in Michigan, he's usually half a world away in Nigeria, where his father works for Wycliffe Bible Translators.

What connects them is Skype, the free online telephone and video service that has made expensive phone calls and lengthy periods of no contact a distant memory for many missionaries abroad and their families back home.

"I've told people that I think God waited to send them until ... the technology got to where it was," said Winkler, who never had a camera on her computer or used Skype before her son left the country. "I couldn't imagine just waiting to get letters from them."

Missionaries say the new technology can bridge the thousands of miles between home and the mission field, often for free and in real time.

In a recent survey of more than 800 of its missionaries, Wycliffe found that about one-third use e-mail daily to communicate with family and friends back home. More than half said the Internet connections have made it possible for them to stay in the field longer.

Wycliffe President and CEO Bob Creson recalls the days when he was a missionary in Cameroon in the 1980s, when a staff of 200 would sign up to use the one landline to call home on weekends. Now texting, Facebook and Twitter are available to his employees.

"The world really has flattened out so that people in these very, very remote areas have contact," he said.

Aid workers and missionaries from other organizations also report improved ability to work abroad and stay in touch with family.

"It certainly does allow there to be instant and constant communication, where before the ability to communicate with family was limited and expensive," said Wendy Norvelle, a spokeswoman for the Southern Baptist Convention's International Mission Board.

Jim, who has served as a Southern Baptist missionary in Asia for 15 years, says technological advances have allowed him and his wife to keep in better touch with their children, who returned to the U.S. as adults.



Missionary Chad Phillips, left, who coordinates missionary kids programs for the Assemblies of God, joins missionary kids on a Skype online video chat. RNS photo courtesy Bianca Flokstra.

When his granddaughter recently started walking, his son in Virginia alerted him that it was time to get on Skype.

"Actually, she walked very poorly because she was distracted by Grandma and Grandpa talking to her," said Jim, who couldn't be identified by last name because he "serves in a place where there are government gatekeepers in religious matters," the missions agency said.

Bwalya Melu served in Zimbabwe as interim national director for the Christian aid organization World Vision for most of 2009. Video communication proved difficult, but he was able to send text messages to his teenage sons after their football games.

"That was important to them," he said. "They wanted me to know ... how the game went, if they lost and how they felt."

Despite technology's benefits, some experts say there's a downside, especially with young missionaries.

"I know of several cases where young missionaries have been asked to spend much less time online, especially in the first year," said Todd Johnson, director of the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

"They're supposed to be doing language learning and being out among the people and they're spending like 50, 60 hours online" a week.

Norvelle said there is "supervision and accountability" for Southern Baptist missionaries, but said there are no specific rules on

the number of hours that can be spent online.

Missionaries find the technology can be available one moment and inaccessible the next.

Chad Phillips, who manages the missionary kids program for the Assemblies of God, said the capability of technology varies greatly, from unlimited reach in Europe to Internet access in some parts of Africa that is "sparse and not user-friendly."

When it is available, he said the technology — including phone services like Vonage — has been particularly helpful when missionary kids leave a foreign country to head to the U.S. for college.

"No longer are Mom and Dad separated as they were 10 years ago, but now the parents can be much more involved while their kids are at college," he said.

Blogs, Facebook and videoconferencing are key for connecting everyone from aging parents back home to growing families overseas, missionaries say.

Chris Winkler alerted his parents back in Michigan that a second grandchild was on the way by having Judah wear a shirt with the words "Big Brother" as they talked on Skype. Other friends found out when he and his wife posted an ultrasound image on their blog.

"It really closes the gap and makes it seem like Nigeria really isn't that far away," said Chris Winkler, whose immediate family has returned stateside until their second child is born.

Winkler's Wycliffe colleague, Heather Pubols, works in Muizenberg, South Africa, and blogs to her family about how she and her husband Jeff spend holidays.

"Having access to video Skype has opened some new opportunities, even as simple as showing friends and family a new haircut," she wrote in an e-mail message responding to questions about her experience.

Both Pubols and Winkler acknowledge that the technology helps, but can't replace the in-person touch of a faraway relative.

"A virtual hug isn't nearly the same as a real hug," Winkler said. "Being able to have Judah sit on his grandparents' lap and listen to the book isn't nearly the same as having them reading the book over Skype." **BT**

commentary

God bless women like Martha Stearns Marshall

By Tony W. Cartledge

There are many reasons why Baptists should honor and employ women who feel called to preach, or at least celebrate the “Martha Stearns Marshall Month of Preaching” by inviting a woman to preach sometime in February.

I have a special reason for celebrating it: Martha Stearns Marshall is the primary reason I am a Baptist today. I can count seven generations of Baptist blood in my family, and all of it started with what seemed to be an unfortunate incident — until you see how it turned out.

The first Cartledges in America (Edmund and Mary) were devout Quakers who came over with William Penn in 1682, helped to establish Philadelphia, and settled in a community named for their English home of Darby. Their two sons (John and Edmund II), however, became Indian traders, lost much of their religion, and were described by one historian as “crude, raffish, violent ... backslidden Quakers.”

When the approach of the colonial wars in the late 1730s ruined the fur trade, a third generation of Cartledges (led by Edmund III) worked their way south and eventually established a large plantation on what came to be known as Cartledge Creek near Rockingham, N.C. Political expediency, job opportunities and intermarriage with an Anglican woman named Elizabeth Keble contributed to the Cartledges’ Carolina conversion to Anglicanism.

Despite their relative prosperity, sometime before 1762 Edmund III gathered his family (including sons James, Samuel, Edmund IV and Joseph) and moved even further south, settling on the Kiokee Creek in what is now Columbia County, Ga., not far from Augusta. Edmund III became a captain in the King’s militia of the royal colony of Georgia, which had adopted a law in 1757 outlawing any worship “not according to the rites and ceremonies of the church of England.”

As the Cartledges were heading southward, so were pioneer Baptist Shubal Stearns, his sister Martha Stearns, and Martha’s hus-

band, Daniel Marshall. As zealous Separate Baptists, they moved from New England to North Carolina, where they established Sandy Creek Baptist Church in 1755, in Randolph County. With Shubal Stearns as pastor and the Marshalls working beside him, the New Light message spread rapidly across the state and many Baptist churches formed.

Daniel Marshall was called to be pastor of Abbotts Creek Baptist Church near High Point, where Martha was remembered for contributing fervent prayers and powerful preaching to the worship services. Martha’s presence in the pulpit led to a delay in Daniel’s ordination because of the difficulty of finding other ministers who did not object to his practice of allowing Martha to speak openly in church, and who would endorse him.



In time, the Marshalls moved their evangelistic enterprise further south, where they preached the gospel and planted several churches in South Carolina before a fateful day in 1770 when they crossed the Savannah River into Georgia. There they held a brush arbor meeting near Kiokee Creek that was apparently well attended.

Historical traditions vary, but at some point during the service, most agree that a “stern constable” arrived and arrested Marshall for preaching a gospel contrary to teachings of the Church of England. That stern constable’s name was Cartledge. He is often identified as Samuel, though some records implicate a different brother. All are agreed, however, that following the announced arrest, Martha Stearns Marshall was quick to defend the gospel her husband had preached.

Samuel Boykin’s version of the story (in *History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia*, 1881), later copied by B.F. Riley (*A History of the Baptists in the Southern*

States East of the Mississippi, 1898), says that Martha Marshall fluently quoted passage after passage of scripture with the result that “the stern constable, Samuel Cartledge, was so impressed by the inspired words to which she gave utterance that he was pricked to the heart, and was ultimately led to Christ” (Riley, p. 31).

An earlier account, by Jesse Campbell (*Georgia Baptists: Historical and Biographical*, 1847), relates that “Mrs. Marshall, who was present, quoted several texts of scripture with so much force as to confound the opposers and convict several persons” (Campbell, pp. 16-17).

That’s some powerfully effective preaching, and it came from Martha Stearns Marshall. Among many others who were “pricked to the heart,” virtually the entire Cartledge clan bought into the Baptist understanding of the gospel. The brothers became founding members, deacons and leaders of Kiokee Baptist Church, the oldest continuing Baptist church in the state. Samuel worked as a “licentiate” under Marshall before becoming a pastor and serving faithfully in Georgia and South Carolina for more than 60 years.

I’m descended from Samuel’s brother James, who saw to it that his children had a good Baptist upbringing, and we are Baptists yet. It’s no wonder that I am thankful for Martha Stearns Marshall.

I am also thankful for Baptist Women in Ministry (www.bwim.info), which sponsors the Martha Stearns Marshall preaching emphasis each February, and for all those valiant women who answer to God, not to men.

If your church hasn’t yet observed the Martha Stearns Marshall emphasis by inviting a woman to preach, it’s about time you do. And the next time you need a pastor, don’t automatically assume that it has to be a man: many women deeply feel called by God to preach and be pastors. Baptist churches have been overlooking some of God’s best gifts for far too long, and the sooner we remedy that, the better. **BT**

guest commentary

The three chapters of CBF

By Rob Fox

This summer in Tampa the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship will light 20 candles, make a wish, and celebrate two decades of mission and ministry. What a birthday celebration it will be!

As we prepare to celebrate, I pause to reflect on three chapters of our Fellowship and offer you my CBF birthday wish list.

CBF 1.0: Refuge

In August 1990, the Fellowship was born after 10 years of public controversy among Baptists. Many needed a new home, and found refuge in CBF.

While courageous Baptists were forming this new Fellowship, I was learning to drive and applying for college. The first time someone mentioned the letters “CBF” was when I entered Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond in 1996.

CBF became real for me through my professor, Dr. Cecil Sherman. He vividly described the purpose and passion of this new Baptist family. Dr. Sherman was our voice.

However, we developed a bad habit of defining CBF by who we fought against, instead of by what we stood for. Twenty years later, we still wrestle with this bad habit.

CBF 2.0: Movement

As we distanced ourselves from the battles, fresh voices emerged within our Fellowship. These voices called for something new and different than another denomination.

A slogan on my 10-year-old CBF ink pen says it best: “A New Way to Be Baptist.”

Dr. Daniel Vestal helped us embrace our new identity as a movement — a Jesus movement. While there was great pressure to become a denomination, Dr. Vestal helped center our mission and ministries on “being the presence of Christ.”

That phrase has allowed us to become a uniquely Christian movement while preserving our historic Baptist identity. Movement energizes most Fellowship Baptists, but like the ancient Israelites on their epic journey,

“The community infrastructure I desire for CBF is light and lean.”

we are beginning to ask two questions:

- 1) Where is the movement going? and
- 2) Is the movement going to end?

CBF 3.0: Community

Which brings us to where we are today. As we look to the next 20 years, consider CBF as community.

“Community” is the word I hear younger Baptists and key leaders use to describe our future, and for some it is the only Baptist community they have ever known.

Now, think about community for a moment. My colleague in Missouri, state coordinator Harold Phillips, says every community has assets, and every community needs infrastructure. Communities need roadways, water pipes, electric grids, telecommunications and other means of infrastructure so that the community can function and grow.

As a Baptist community, our greatest assets are the relationships we have with individuals and churches within the Fellowship. Our infrastructure is relationship-based and is provided via our connections with our field personnel and partnerships with mission and education agencies that provide tangible services to our churches.

The community infrastructure I desire for CBF is light and lean. Our CBF community will work collaboratively with individuals and churches to provide grassroots and global mission and ministry engagement.

Our CBF community will not be based on bricks-and-mortar models of denominational life. Instead, CBF will be known as an

organic, sustainable garden of collaborative relationships and activities that provide fresh expressions of mission engagement in the 21st century.

My CBF Wish List

Now, I realize that kind of community may sound trendy or complex, but it’s actually very simple. When I asked my 9-year-old daughter to define community, she simply said, “Community is where you live, work and play.”

As one who is invested in CBF, I long for a Baptist community where my family and I can live, work and play.

Here are my three CBF wishes:

- I wish for my children to grow up Baptist and learn the stories of “real live missionaries” while also being challenged to consider themselves as missionaries.
- I wish for my children to attend youth camps and hands-on mission gatherings with like-minded Baptists as well as other Christians from various faith traditions who share a passion for God’s mission.
- I wish for my children to have opportunity to attend college (and maybe even seminary) where they can engage Baptist scholars and leadership programs that develop their calling and gifts in congregational mission and ministries.

And when my children are grown, and they walk the aisle to join a new church, I want them to say to their pastor, “Since I was a child, I’ve spent my life serving God on mission. So, today, I want to join this church to serve, not just to be served.”

In short, my wish is that my children, and my children’s children, would grow their Christian faith within a Baptist community with a passion for God’s mission. That’s my wish list. Happy Birthday CBF! What is your wish? **BT**

—Rob Fox is field coordinator for Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Virginia.



readers' responses

Yes, study the issue

EDITOR: Re: the letter to editor titled "Gay, lesbian persons not 'issue' to be studied" (December issue, page 17), this writer is correct that gays and lesbians are not "issues" to be studied, but he is wrong in saying "homosexuality is not an 'issue' to be studied."

It is an issue in many churches and greatly needs to be studied. I made such a study that changed my thinking completely.

Bible historians tell us there was an abundance of same-gender sex by heterosexuals in Bible times. The Bible condemns this heterosexual lust. The homosexual issue needs to be studied by our church leaders.

Bruce Lowe, Dallas, Texas

Advocates Fellowship starting new churches

EDITOR: In the late 1970s as I was a student at Southwestern Seminary, my personal and vocational pilgrimage was moving toward a calling to serve as a pastor of local Baptist churches. During this time the Southern Baptist Convention was gearing up to launch what was known as Bold Mission Thrust to share the gospel of salvation in Christ with every person in the world.

That vision of world missions and evangelism energized this young seminarian. That vision also was energizing an entire denomination to pull together at every level to focus our efforts and resources toward a positive, redemptive work for the Kingdom of God. We know that this vision of Southern Baptists' future was hijacked and the Baptist witness for Christ in the South and elsewhere has been split and diluted beyond repair.

Another timely moment of opportunity presents itself to Cooperative Baptists in the South. What shall be our compelling vision for the immediate and foreseeable future? What vision will be energizing enough to mobilize Cooperative Baptists from the pew to the pulpit, to the schools of theology, to the communities and world where we live?

I am the director of development for the McAfee School of Theology and travel throughout Georgia, Alabama, the Carolinas, Tennessee and Florida. I hear from clergy and

laity alike, young, middle-aged and almost retired, and the unanimous concern, if not plea, is for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship to formulate a thoroughgoing, well-strategized plan to start moderate Baptist churches throughout the South, our base at this time, which will form the basis in middle America for our Fellowship's future.

These churches will form a financial foundation to fund our future, will send the schools of theology students to prepare for ministry, will be places of service for *all* of our graduates, and will institutionalize the values of historic Baptists in distinction from Baptists who no longer hold these fragile freedoms near and dear.

I sincerely hope the process now set into motion and chaired by David Hull will give serious consideration to making CBF's third decade priorities focused on starting churches. Can we energize a people by making this type of missions and evangelism central to our existence again?

Ron Wilson, Atlanta, Ga.

Don't give up on declining churches

EDITOR: I've listened with great interest recently as some of the most respected people in Baptist life have weighed in on the open question of our future. I understand that Baptists of many theological stripes have described "new church starts" as a good path toward a bright future.

While I, too, recognize the value of starting new churches, I contend that we should move part of this conversation — and the subsequent upsurge of energy and funding that I pray will stem from it — from Labor and Delivery to Intensive Care. Baptist denominational resources should more readily and tangibly support declining churches that want to live and will work to thrive.

If there is such a thing as a typical church in need of a re-start, it likely requires more expertise than money. Declining churches may not be especially attractive to ministers who have the training or experience necessary to help change their trajectory.

They are often places ministerial staff move

from rather than to.

Inexperienced ministers who have gratefully received generous financial support from Baptist denominational groups in their theological education may be disheartened to discover they have decidedly less denominational support as they move from the classroom of a divinity school to the sanctuary of a declining church to do the work for which they have been called and educated. Even more critical to the future of Baptists than the successful acquirement of theological education is the successful application of theological education.

When I inquired last year about a denominational program for "dying churches," I found its goal was to provide an expert to help a dying church die with dignity. In exchange, the church would agree to donate its assets to the Baptist organization at the time of its death. While I see the value in helping churches die with dignity, the idea of recommending such a program for my church was laughable.

We want someone who can help us live with dignity. We can't afford your high-priced consultants, and we don't want to sign over the property to you. I shared the "dying church" plan with one of my deacons and told him that I would hope our church would care enough about itself to fire me if I ever signaled my abandonment of hope by bringing such a proposal to them. "I hope we'd fire you, too," he said, smiling. "We need a doctor, not a grave robber."

We should resist and reject the abandonment of hope anywhere we encounter it in Baptist life. My frustration is not that we're pulling the plug on sick churches; it's the negligence of never having given them a plug to begin with. Even with limited financial resources, plans for starting churches and plans for re-starting churches are not mutually exclusive. Any path toward the future of Baptists must include the birth of new churches and the good health of existing ones. If churches are not worth saving, they are also not worth starting.

Josh Hunt, pastor, Ross Grove Baptist Church, Shelby, N.C.

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, or by mail to Editor, *Baptists Today*, P.O. Box 6318, Macon, GA 31208-6318.

2011 Bible Studies

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

Our three passages for the Lenten weeks of March are concerned with status. We care about status. We measure with exquisite precision how we compare with others. We learn at an early age how to value ourselves and others, our stuff and their stuff, our personal development versus theirs, and most offensively, our religious futures as compared with theirs.

This month we will learn how the writer of Matthew portrays the way Jesus responded to his disciples as the question of status was raised on three occasions. Though the names, places, time periods and situations have changed, the message from Jesus remains the same today: How low can you go? Low is high, and humble is great in the Kingdom.

March 13, 2011

Gaining and losing

Matthew 16:21-26

During college a friend cross-stitched as a gift for me a wall hanging that read, "If any man would come after me, let him..." By conveniently leaving out the rest of the verse — the hard part about taking up a cross — she made it into a funny but accurate reflection of our college-girl sentiment. Her verse cropping is an example of why we must study biblical material in context and in large enough pieces so that we can attain full comprehension.

Even as we are doing our Bible study, temptation abounds. We are tempted to gloss over the hard parts and to focus on the parts that apply more directly to other people than to ourselves. We are tempted to hear the affirmation in Jesus' words, but not the admonition. We are tempted to read ourselves into the story as the good guys, but not the problem people.

Temptation is the first lesson today. Peter and the disciples are hearing from Jesus for the first time the harsh reality of the Messiah's

plight. Peter's immediate denial is his way of giving in to the temptation to avoid this reality. But Jesus is tempted as well. Scholars delineate this episode as one of three temptation crises Jesus faced in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew. The first takes place in the wilderness at his ministry's beginning, and the last in the garden at Gethsemane. Surely having his best friend beg him not to speak of suffering and death was a difficult moment for Jesus to endure with perseverance. This was the best friend whom Jesus had just named Rock, and now a moment later he is between Rock and a hard place with hard-headed friends.

Discuss: Think of times/situations when you were sorely tempted but persevered. How did your best friends figure in your situation — as solid rocks or stumbling blocks? What got you through?

The one whom Jesus has just called Rock he now calls Satan. He probably meant to call Peter his adversary or enemy, the generic definition of the word. Jesus must have been frustrated at the irony of Peter's beautiful confession followed immediately by his denial and total lack of comprehension. At this point we readers want to take Peter by the shoulders and shake him.

But we might read his name calling in a different way. Jesus could be referring to Peter as one who wishes to prevent the Messiah's fulfilling his destiny. So when Jesus says, "Get behind me, Satan," he is saying to his friend, "Come on, man, get in line behind me; back me up. Don't stand there as a roadblock to the salvation I intend to bring. Don't let the martyrdom scare you away from the bigger picture of which I am the central part."

We call this big-picture saving task carried out by Jesus the "apocalyptic" task, which means the ushering in of the eschaton, the end of days, the reign of Christ and the kingdom of God. Jesus tells Peter he is being distracted by human concerns such as humiliation,

LESSONS FOR: Sunday, Mar. 13-27, 2011

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



suffering and death. Jesus wants him to see the concerns of God, such as salvation and eternal life. Matthew has written his gospel using apocalyptic language to show his readers that Jesus' passion is the crucial part of the apocalyptic story and anything that works against him can be classified as Satan.

Discuss: Jesus would later tell his disciples that he wanted them to make new disciples, not new believers. What is the difference between a believer and a disciple? Did Peter act as a believer, a disciple or neither — as Satan — in this confrontation with Jesus?

Now, Jesus presents the tallest order any of us will receive: if you want to be my disciple, deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me. Jesus is asking his friends to lower themselves to the level of criminals and outcasts — the ones typically crucified. But he's asking much more than status-lowering. We can name many people throughout Christian history who have taken up a cross. There are others walking among us now whom we would consider cross bearers. We must take care in defining cross bearing.

To Jesus, cross bearing is not something that befalls people. Illness, grief, poverty, oppression, crisis, death and general suffering are all part of being human. Good Christian disciples will meet these situations armed with spiritual power to cope, and some of them will persevere. The category of people who have borne crosses is considerably narrower, however.

Cross bearing is chosen. It is a task taken on apart from the normal course of one's own human suffering. It is the compassionate bearing of a burden not assigned. It is a duty taken on for the sake of others, not self. It is the commitment of one's soul in a self-sacrificing way, for the cause of others through Christ. It is total, not partial. It effects a movement closer to the kingdom of God.

In cross bearing, there is no room for denial of the sort Peter exhibited. Christian disciples bearing crosses cannot afford denial;



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they must be dedicated to reality at all costs. This is what Jesus asks.

Discuss: During the Lenten season as we contemplate crosses, instead of asking, "What can I give up?" ask the question, "What can I take on?" What burden could you choose for the cause of Christ in Lent?

Matthew recounts now the second tall order for readers: Jesus' invitation for us to give up our lives for his sake. The Greek word used here, *psyche*, can mean either life or soul. Scholars favor reading it as life. Jesus is hoping his disciples will choose to see the highest value their lives can have: serving the cause of Christ. A life's value goes beyond earthly existence. Seeing this gives the disciples' lives great worth; failing to see it causes that worth to be lost on them. When we use our lives for Christ's sake, deeply, richly, wholly, then earthly life, though transient, becomes transcendent.

Matthew's Gospel was probably written after the first 12 disciples of Jesus were dead. The final statement Jesus makes here — that some standing there would not die before the Son of Man came into his kingdom — is an odd thing for him to have written knowing it was already not true. Perhaps the writer of Matthew believed the reign of Christ in history had already begun with the resurrection, which almost all were alive to see. It could be that the second coming referred to the transfiguration, which happened in this narrative within days of today's episode. For some scholars, that Jesus makes this statement is a conundrum, because it appears not to have been the case.

Discuss: Could we consider a personal apocalyptic, so that the moment discipleship is born in a person's soul can be a second coming of Christ?

March 20, 2011

The greatest in the Kingdom

Matthew 18:1-7

If there were ever a treatise on the importance of children and the value of Christian ministry to children, this is it — and it comes directly from the lips of Jesus. Children's ministers everywhere should read this passage and sigh to themselves that regardless of their mediocre salaries and disappearing budget-line items,

they are as important as pastors, adult education ministers, music ministers, youth ministers and everyone else in the church staff hierarchy. And their ministry recipients — all children in the church and outside of it — are VIPs in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus says so! We should consider our children's ministry the most important thing the church does for the sake of God's kingdom, and we should back that up in our budgeting, staffing, calendar and space prioritizing, and outreach and charity involvement for children.

In Jesus' day, children were non-persons, owned as property by their parents or caregivers, with no personal power for themselves and no right of will. In the Palestinian caste system of class status, children ranked at the bottom. Like widows, orphans were a drag on the system, mouths to feed with no way of producing anything of value in exchange for their keep.

So when the disciples asked their question of Jesus, "Who is greatest in the Kingdom?" his answer was a shock. "These little kids here, they are the greatest. Be like them if you want to rank in the Kingdom. In fact, you have to be like them even to get in at all. Child-likeness is not just an ideal; it is the minimum standard requirement."

The disciples had been expecting Jesus to name one of them as the greatest. Matthew's writer attempts to soften the reader's perception of the Twelve by having them ask their question differently than in Mark, where they whine and bicker among themselves over who is first in rank. From the answer Jesus gives them, it seems he knows they need a lesson in humility. He answers that the least-valued components of society — children — are number one in his pecking order. His answer teaches his disciples that he expects humility of them as one of the leadership characteristics for the Kingdom, and it shows them he has sorted his priorities differently from the establishment.

Discuss: In our churches, would Jesus recognize the way we order and prioritize the things we value — people, roles, money, property, time, talent, and things held sacred — or do we follow the establishment?

Jesus equates welcoming and receiving a little child with welcoming and receiving him. We recall his saying a similar thing, that even as we do something to the least of our brothers and sisters, we do it to him. In his society, children would not have been received and welcomed as guests. Children were on a par

with the servants and slaves of a household, and they were at the mercy and service of the (usually) male head of the house, for whom warm hospitality was reserved. So Jesus is telling his disciples to turn that upside down, in his name as his representatives, to humble themselves enough to serve even a child, which would have sounded to them like a humiliation. He teaches the Twelve their correct public posture (the servant's humility) and he likens himself to marginalized children, raising their status.

Discuss: In our churches, what do we teach children about their own status? Do we honor them as we honor adults such as the head deacon, the big contributor, the pastor? Do we expect them to serve and be served, to welcome and be welcomed, equally? Do the greeters kneel to their level to speak with them when they walk in as guests? Do we deem teaching children as important as the other jobs in the congregation?

The Greek term for children used here, *paidion*, means little girls and boys, any age from infancy to young adulthood. If Jesus were speaking Aramaic, he would have used the word *talya*, which means child and servant. The translation of this word in both these ways says volumes about the cultural understanding of the place of children. It means Jesus reversed the definition.

These terms may also be taken to mean those who are newly converted disciples, with a simple or childlike understanding of faith. If we want to be great, as the disciples wanted to be, we will adopt an attitude of humble service to children and new believers so that we do not mislead them. We must teach them by example that the last and least are going to be first and greatest. Jesus' image of the woe-begotten one who causes a little one to stumble and is better off on the bottom of the sea with a millstone necklace surely gets his message across. In the Kingdom economy we are dealing with vulnerable souls, which must be treated as treasures as valuable to Jesus as himself.

Discuss: At your church, watch how the children get up from their safe places in the pews and walk bravely in front of God and everyone to the chancel for the children's sermon. They do God the honor of approaching and expecting divine presence. What can you and your church do to welcome and receive these little ones better, so that we all are wearing fewer millstones?



March 27, 2011

The servant of all

Matthew 20:20-28

In today's biblical lesson, one of two possible situations exists. In the first you can just see these two guys, the sons of thunder, attempting to sweep their mother out of Jesus' presence, whispering to her, "No, no, Mom, don't go there; don't ask him that!" as they shoo their mother away red-faced and embarrassed in front of their 10 peers. In the second situation they hang back, hoping their mother will be successful on their behalf if they pretend ignorance, daydreaming of their possible future greatness at the right hand of Jesus, and hoping that the request of a righteous woman will avail much.

Mark's version has the two disciples asking Jesus directly, so Matthew softens the sting of the story by having their mother ask. But it's not much less offensive to readers, and certainly not to the other 10 disciples who are bristling as they overhear. The brothers Zebedee disappoint all of us in and outside of the story by misunderstanding the nature of Jesus' messianic plight and their role as his disciples. So he sets them straight.

"Can you drink my cup?" he asks, knowing they will probably suffer and die from mere association with him, willing participants or not. "Sure we can!" is their thoughtless reply. It is glory they have on their minds, not suffering. The "cup" here is brimming with Old Testament and Passover allusions, the wrath of God poured out over sin. Mom and her boys would never have requested it on purpose had they understood it. We can picture Jesus, see the wheels turning in his mind: "Man, have I got some remedial theological education to do with these guys before they can be the servants they are meant to be. And they are worried about which throne they'll get."

Discuss: We modern disciples generally do not fear suffering persecution for our allegiance to Jesus, but do we expect some glory? What church-type grunt job have you been willing to do because you knew it would add a star or two to your crown? How is this not missional?

Jesus confuses the brothers further when he confesses that the enthroned places to his right and left are not even his seat licenses to give out, much less ticket options to award. The only glory there is comes from God. The remaining 10 disciples are concerned to hear

this as well. They want glory as much as the Zebedees, but the brothers have beaten them to asking dibbs. It seems from Jesus' response that he is not pleased with any of the Twelve or their collective misinterpretation of the type of messiah he is going to be. So he gives them an example.

The secular hierarchies of their day bore a resemblance to some modern ones: those with power tend to favor a regulatory structure that causes them to retain power. Those without power cannot reach the structures in place to change them. A status quo remains unless one with power becomes willing to shift it in a way that lifts the powerless.

If you have ever played The Poverty Game at Wednesday night church supper, you have an idea of how this works. The players who have randomly received the chits of a certain color become the ones who can make a new rule regarding the way chits are valued, and of course they select a rule that favors their own chits. Once this process begins, it becomes more difficult for those with different colored chits to gain any more. The haves keep collecting, and the have-nots keep losing, until most players are left with nothing and are out of the game.

Jesus' instruction to the Twelve is this: Not only do you give away your chits, but you also do not participate in the game because it marginalizes and uses people. You follow a diametrically opposed set of game rules, you serve the people you hope to lead, and if you are willing to drink my cup, you ransom yourself for the sake of the least in our society.

Discuss: Though we are generous with our time and money for the sake of the needy, how do our society's structures work invisibly to keep people in their separated class categories, the haves and have-nots? How do we perhaps unknowingly participate, and how can we follow Jesus' instruction instead?

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LOOKING AHEAD

Baptists Today will feature a SPOTLIGHT section in each monthly issue with targeted, discounted advertising and creative writing opportunities.

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2011 ChurchWorks!

Good ideas for effective ministry

Brought to you
this month
by Bo Prosser



Tune-up for teachers

Teaching is more than telling. Today's learners demand more than just the transfer of information. Perhaps this is a good time to tune up your teaching and begin to make small shifts in the way you teach. Find ways to involve your class participants. Look for a balance between interactive learning, discussion and lecture. Be sure to wrap a relevant story into the teaching event. The following tips will help you "tune up" and engage your class members in ways that lead to spiritual growth and transformation.

First, decide on one main teaching point. Too many teachers complain that they don't have time to cover all the material. Most teachers only have 25-35 minutes of teaching time — hardly enough time to cover a Scripture passage adequately. Focus on a main verse or a key truth. Continue referring to this point throughout the teaching event.

As you introduce the lesson, share the main teaching point and help participants focus on it. Each time you tell a story or share an illustration, refer back to it. Each time you ask a question or entertain discussion, make sure the main teaching point is part of the discussion. As you bring your teaching to a conclusion, emphasize the main teaching point again. Focusing on the main teaching point will keep the class engaged and the discussion on track.

As you begin building your teaching plan, think in three movements or "paragraphs" of thought. The three movements are motivation, examination and application. Budget time appropriately so that each movement is included in each lesson, with the time allotted for depending on your main teaching point and teaching methods.

Use a different teaching method in each movement. Using three to five different teaching methods in each class will keep the participants engaged and prevent too much

lecture. The average adult learner can process lecture for only about eight minutes, so use a different teaching method about every 8-10 minutes.

Motivation is the introductory "paragraph" of the lesson. In the first few minutes of the teaching event, "grab" the collective brain of the learners and draw them into the learning experience. Create interest by asking an introductory question or using music or poetry. State the main focus of the class session and invite participants to learn with you.

Examination is the Bible study portion of the lesson. In this "paragraph," focus on the Bible passage and illuminate places of challenge and devotion. Invite learners to look at the printed Bible material and to hear a portion of the Scripture verses as they are read aloud by either yourself or a reader enlisted before class time.

Application brings the idea of the lesson into daily life. In this "paragraph," biblical truths are translated into "how to live" these in our individual lives. The application experience focuses on the main teaching point and how to bring it to a point of transformation for the learners. This should not be a "mini-sermon" or a "to do" list of rules, but rather a challenge to growing deeper spiritually and more mature faithfully.

Teaching is more than telling. As you incorporate these ideas into your teaching approaches, you are sure to "tune up" your teaching. As you do, you'll feel your own excitement as a teacher growing and you'll feel the engagement of the class growing. And, you'll move from being a vessel of spiritual information to an encourager of spiritual transformation.

(For more ideas, see *Building Blocks of Sunday School Growth* and *Help: I Teach Youth in Sunday School* [Smyth & Helwys Publishing]). **BT**

Sample motivation activities

- Ask questions about childhood experiences that relate to the main teaching point.
- Ask questions about favorite foods, television shows, movies, etc.
- Share poetry, hymn singing, an audio/video clip or creative reading.
- Use art activities.
- Begin with a small group discussion about a current event that relates to the main teaching point.
- Introduce the main teaching point and background for the lesson through a brief lecture.

Sample examination activities

- Present a short lecture (8-10 minutes) on the main teaching point, Bible background information or other insights on the lesson.
- Invite small groups to discuss the main teaching point or some challenging part of the lesson material.
- Use a modified *lectio* group approach of "praying through" the Bible passage, reading aloud the passage prayerfully and discussing insights.
- Share a brief lecture from a video or computer clip.

Sample application activities

- Present a brief lecture (3-5 minutes) that recaps the main teaching point and points of truth that you've covered in the class.
- Ask small groups to share spiritual truths they have gleaned from the class presentation.
- Provide a prayer experience that encourages class participants to pray through the challenges that have surfaced in the class presentation.
- Pose a question such as, "What have you heard that's challenged you this morning?" or "What truth has dawned on you this morning?"

ChurchWorks! 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 Bo Prosser, Coordinator for Congregational Life for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. More ministry resources are available at www.thefellowship.info/News/subscribe and www.thefellowship.info/Resources/Church-Resources/Baptists-Today-resource-page.

'The Calling'

Documentary explores student transitions into ministry

A new four-hour documentary, *The Calling*, follows seven men and women through their transitions from faithful followers to religious leaders in Evangelical Christian, Roman Catholic, Jewish and Muslim faiths. Across 18 months these young Americans attend seminary classes, engage the work of their vocations, travel and study.

They face major challenges in both their religious traditions and their complex personal and family lives.

Fortunately, moderate and progressive Baptists have attended to this transition presented in *The Calling* with greater attention and money in the last decade. Baptists have been among the beneficiaries of the Lilly Endowment's funding of several programs focused on vocation and sustaining ministry.

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and some of its related seminaries and churches have participated in "Sustaining Pastoral Excellence" and "Transition into Ministry" programs. In 2007-2008 the 14 seminaries and theological schools affiliated with the Fellowship enrolled more than 2,150 students (40 percent women / 60 percent men).

Not all of those students will make a transition to ordained ministry. Yet this is a significant number of mostly younger Baptists — along with students at other Baptist-related schools — preparing for religious leadership each year.

The Calling, which premiered in December, is directed and produced by Daniel Alport and a multi-faith film crew. The stories are punctuated by humor, anguish, joy, bewilderment and grief. For example:

While studying to be a pastor at Asuza Pacific University in California, Rob Pene's father, a village chief in American Samoa, dies. Pene is faced with the dilemma of taking on the village leadership mantle or continuing to prepare for ministry.

Tahera Ahmad studies in the Islamic chaplaincy program at Hartford Seminary in Connecticut. She struggles with questions of authority and with expectations of the Islamic community about her role as a single — and later engaged — woman.

In his sixth year at Assumption Seminary in San Antonio, Texas, Steven Gamez is ordained as a deacon and later takes his final priestly vows. His practice of ministry brings him face to face with a host of theological and practical questions from celibacy to the meaning of a child's death.

Shmuly Yanklowitz studies Jewish law five to six hours every morning at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah (YCT) Rabbinical School in New York. He spends the rest of his time advocating for justice, including a campaign to treat immigrant workers fairly at a kosher meat packing plant.



Jeneen Robinson is raising her son alone while taking classes at California's Fuller Theological Seminary and also meeting requirements of the African Methodist Episcopal, Zion Church for ordination. She seeks a pastoral placement while coping with challenging feedback from church elders.

Bilal Ansari works as a Muslim chaplain in a prison and with college students while he studies at Hartford Seminary. His education and ministry are complicated by discrimination in his workplace and a divorce with shared custody of his children.

After graduation from YCT Rabbinical School, Yerachmiel Shapiro and his spouse, expecting their first child, move to an apartment above the "shul" (synagogue) of a small elderly congregation.

The particularity of each story shows — rather than merely telling — the similarities, complexities and hopeful character of these transitions. School is important, but not solely sufficient for gaining the skills and wisdom of ministry.

Learning to care for, speak to or lead a religious congregation demands experience in actual situations of ministry. The interaction of family dynamics, social and religious forma-

tions, and unexpected life events contributes significantly to the way religious vocations unfold. Reflection with peers and mentors is a key element for a successful transition to pastoral leadership.

There is a long-standing tension in Baptist life between clergy and laity. This can result in creative engagement or devolve quickly into polarized hostility. For the sake of greater empathy and partnership, *The Calling* is an excellent conversation starter for churches and ministers.

Questions of purpose and identity, self-care, authority for leadership, and multiple life demands all arise quite naturally in the flow of the documented stories. The film's companion web site, "What's Your Calling?" raises additional questions for conversation.

People from all walks of life respond to questions such as: "How can diversity strengthen service? What challenges do your neighbors face? How have experiences of failure helped to shape your calling?"

Becoming a pastor or other ministerial leader is no easy task. Unfortunately too many local news stories about ministers focus on the failures: arrests, ethical indiscretions and legal battles. However, thousands of men and women work daily to lead congregations, advocate for justice, serve the needy, and negotiate financial, moral and relational crises.

These faithful pastors, priests, rabbis and imams rarely make the headlines. *The Calling* dips into that world and presents a realistic yet hopeful portrait of becoming a religious leader.

—Eileen R. Campbell-Reed is co-director of the *Learning Pastoral Imagination Project* and visiting instructor for *Congregational and Community Care* at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn.

The two-DVD set of the documentary *Independent Lens: The Calling* is available for \$29.99 from PBS at www.shoppbs.org where a video preview is also posted. A companion web site "What's Your Calling?" is online at www.whatsyourcalling.org.

Senior Pastor: West Hills Baptist Church, a Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Church in Knoxville, Tenn., is seeking a senior pastor who reflects the congregation's theology emphasizing grace and forgiveness. The pastor must be spiritually mature and well grounded in faith while leading our congregation to discern God's vision and direction for our church. Our congregation values candidates who put an emphasis on sermon preparation, promoting personal development, visitation and counseling. We believe in a thoughtful and reverent service and are passionate about our traditional music program. A candidate with senior pastor experience and a history of promoting membership growth is preferred. More information about our church can be found at www.westhillsbaptist.org. Please send résumés with references to: Pastoral Search Committee, West Hills Baptist Church, 409 N. Winston Rd., Knoxville, TN 37909 or mhowell@WHBC.us.

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Ball Camp Baptist Church in Knoxville, Tenn., is seeking a **part-time pastor to children and their families**. This person will lead in the planning, promoting and participating in ministry activities for children ages birth-5th grade. Send email cover letter with attached résumé to: jlhalovingood@comcast.net.

in the know

Keeping up with people, places and events

Dixie Ford is minister of youth and children at Crosscreek Baptist Church in Pelham, Ala.

Calvin Parker of Mars Hill, N.C., died Dec. 22. He was a scholar, an author and a missionary to Japan from 1951-1989. He and his wife Harriett were featured on the cover of the November 2010 issue of *Baptists Today*.

Mike Queen will retire on Easter Sunday after 25 years as pastor of the First Baptist Church of Wilmington, N.C. He serves on the Board of Directors of *Baptists Today*.

Paul Sands is pastor of Spring Hill Baptist Church in Mobile, Ala.

Kevin Wilson is associate pastor of youth, children and young families at First Baptist Church of Boone, N.C. He previously served as associate pastor at Flat Rock Baptist Church in Mt. Airy, N.C.



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the lighter side

Breakfast in Peppertown

By Brett Younger

Don't tell my mom. She won't understand. When I was growing up, we did not eat out. I have no childhood memories of restaurants. Diners were as off-limits as pool halls, casinos and Methodist churches. Eating out was morally dubious.

My mother's questions were unanswerable: "Why do you want to waste our money? Is there something wrong with my cooking? Do you think Jesus went out to eat when Mary had supper on the table?"

You might think "We love your cooking, just like Jesus would, and want to show our gratitude by giving you a break" would be a reasonable argument. You would be wrong.

When we went on vacation, mom packed bologna sandwiches, so I got used to driving past Dairy Queens, but there was one eatery that I continued to look at with unrequited longing.

Peppertown Restaurant is at the intersection of County Road 383 and County Road 178, five miles and six Baptist churches from my parents' house. Every time we drove past I imagined the haute cuisine they must be serving. I pictured my favorite foods prepared with astonishing flair. The chef would grace the table with surprisingly inventive bologna sandwiches. I could hear welcoming voices: "Brett, we haven't seen you in here before, but we knew you would make it eventually." Peppertown Restaurant was my vision of the heavenly banquet.

I told my mother we would not be getting to the house until 2:30, so she shouldn't wait on us for lunch — especially since lunch is now at 10:30. At 2:00 when we drove past the PR I surreptitiously decided it would be the last time I passed the extravagant café without having tasted the forbidden fruit. At 2:15, lunch was waiting on my mom's table. She served pot roast, mashed potatoes, green bean casserole, yeast rolls and two kinds of pie — pecan and lemon ice box.

I gained five pounds, but we had a nice visit. I read the *Tupelo Daily Journal* each morning, played touch football and worked on a 1,000-piece puzzle (it was a snow scene

with white clouds, so we felt okay getting only about 400 together). We successfully avoided subjects that have given us trouble in the past — the current president, the last president, public schools, women ministers, gay people, Jonah's completely literal whale, Japanese cars, movies not starring John Wayne, and the Dallas Cowboys.

On the night before we were to leave, I told my mom that we wouldn't be able to stay for breakfast. I chose not to reveal my rebellious plan. The next morning, after almost 50 years of passing by, I stopped.

Ours was the only car that was not a truck. We almost parked in front of a "The Last Car That Parked Here is Still Missing" notice. My heart was pounding as I opened the door. At the counter we briefly considered "Push here for service," but the button is set on a mousetrap. Everyone was friendly, "Just grab a table. There's a nice one in the back next to the heater." It was the friendliness that ushers offer people who clearly have not been to church before.

There is a fine line between antiques and old junk. The Peppertown Restaurant is filled with signs that could go either way: Hostess Creme-filled Twinkies 10¢, Buy Pepsi-Cola

Today 5¢, Hot Dogs 15¢, and "Chewing allowed, Spitting ain't." I so wished the photograph of Elvis, who was born about 10 miles from there, had been taken at the PR, but it wasn't.

We were in one of the few remaining places where Mississippians assume that everyone not from Mississippi has an accent. I was a little thrown by the girl wearing the "I ♥ NY" T-shirt that would have been frowned upon not many years ago. She was trying to explain Facebook to her grandfather. "Preacher man," in an orange cap and camouflage, held court near the front. A couple prayed quietly over their breakfast.

If it had been lunchtime, I would have ordered the sweet tater fries. The butter biscuit sounded good and the chocolate biscuits tempting. I almost ordered the bologna biscuit — which I had long dreamed would be there — but at the last minute I switched to fried eggs and toast. The coffee came in only one flavor, but I had both grape and strawberry jelly. The eggs were just the right level of crispy. Breakfast tasted like the extravagance my upbringing taught me to fear. Maybe it is time I visit a Methodist church. **BT**

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



Photo courtesy of Anna Moderska

Despite abysmal track record, Calif. atheist keeps suing

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — He is the most famous — and the loneliest — atheist in the country.

For 14 years, Michael Newdow, an emergency room doctor and attorney, has challenged what he sees as violations of the First Amendment's protection against established religion. He works alone from his Sacramento home, his only tools a computer, a printer and a razor-sharp sense of injustice.

He has sued to have "In God We Trust" removed from U.S. currency, to prohibit prayer at presidential inaugurations and most famously — or infamously — to strike the phrase "under God" from the Pledge of Allegiance.

To date, he has never won a single case.

Yet Newdow remains undeterred.

Newdow plans to ask the U.S. Supreme Court to hear his "In God We Trust" case, which he lost last March at the California-based 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. After that, he said, he may revive his pledge case, this time on behalf of other families who feel harmed by the pledge's religious

reference.

"I am right, I don't think there is any question that I am right," said Newdow, 57, who was raised in a nominally Jewish home but told the *Brown Alumni Magazine* that he was "born an atheist."

"I am going to keep fighting, hopefully winning, and getting the government to do what it is supposed to do, which is (provide) equal protection for all religious views."

Constitutional scholars and religious liberty activists agree with Newdow that the First Amendment protects against a government establishment of religion. But many disagree with his choice of battles.

"Newdow is a good man with good ideas and too little patience," said

David Silverman, president of American Atheists, whose founder, Madalyn Murray O'Hair, successfully sued to ban teacher-led prayer in public schools in 1963.

"When his suits fail, they can make matters worse by setting a precedent that can be used against us in other lawsuits."

The greatest fear, even among those who share Newdow's views, is that if he were to win, Congress could pass a constitutional amendment that changes the First Amendment's Establishment Clause and possibly erodes the separation of church and state.

"There is a deep concern on the separationist side that some of their major fights could be weakened if they spend their resources and squander public opinion on fights they are not going to win anyway," said Charles Haynes, director of the Religious Freedom Education Project at the Newseum in Washington. "They have to pick their battles and use their resources strategically. I think that is why he is not getting full-throated support."

So Newdow fights his uphill battles alone from his kitchen table, where he does most of his work. He says he has never received financial assistance from so-called separationist groups, and has paid for his filing and printing costs with private donations. He estimates he has logged more than 10,000 unpaid hours on his First Amendment cases.

His church-state fights have recently

morphed into a bid to challenge family statutes he considers unfair. Newdow, the father of a 16-year-old daughter, does not have equal custody with her mother, to whom he was never married.

It was concern for his daughter that first launched Newdow into the national spotlight — and it's the custody arrangement that has limited his success.

Newdow graduated from the University of Michigan's law school in 1988, but returned to his career as an emergency room doctor. In 2002, he sued his daughter's California school district for leading students in the Pledge of Allegiance which, since 1954, has included the phrase "under God."

No one in the legal community gave him much attention — until he won on appeal in the 9th Circuit. A number of organizations filed amicus briefs in support of Newdow's case, including the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Americans United for the Separation of Church and State and American Atheists.

Newdow, who had never argued a case before, represented himself before the U.S. Supreme Court in 2004 and by all accounts held his own. The court rejected his claim, however, after justices decided that as a non-custodial parent, he lacked standing to bring the case on his daughter's behalf.

So far, he has lost all of his cases on either the merits of the case, or because of a lack of legal standing. But the losses may only be a part of Newdow's legacy.

"I think he has put a face on the contemporary reality that many Americans do not have a religious affiliation," Haynes said. "For any cause to advance and for any voice to be heard, someone needs to be the face of that movement and give voice to those concerns. In that sense, Michael Newdow has been very successful."

For his part, Newdow seems unfazed by his legacy, or his popularity. He says he remains focused on his fight, which he says actually has little to do with religion.

"I've said it is not a case of people who believe in God versus people who don't believe in God," he said. "It is about people who believe the government should treat us all equally and those who want their view favored above others. You can't do that. That is what our Constitution says." **BT**



Michael Newdow

Q What should I read between monthly issues of *Baptists Today*?

Daily religious news from around the world, book reviews, editors' blogs and much more can be found at www.baptiststoday.org.

A: *Baptists Today* online of course! Every day.

Don't miss the latest feature, **Weaver's Weekly Wrap-up**, in which popular blogger and Baylor university doctoral student Aaron Weaver analyzes the latest Baptist news.

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Atheists' woes have no black-and-white answers

Alix Jules is an atheist, but for years he felt uncomfortable at gatherings of nonbelievers. The reason: he's black.

"I got really tired of going back and forth to free thought events and being the only black person there," said Jules, 36, who lives in Dallas. "It was not necessarily inviting. I just felt like an outcast ... No one was reaching out to me."

Last year, Jules helped launch a local initiative to address what atheists regard as an international problem for their movement: a lack of racial and gender diversity.

From the smallest local meetings to the largest conferences, the vast majority of speakers and attendees are almost always white men. Leading figures of the atheist movement — Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens and Daniel Dennett — are all white men.

But making atheism more diverse is proving to be no easy task.

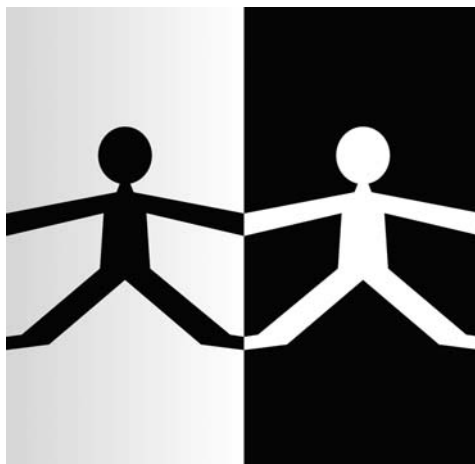
Surveys suggest most atheists are white men. A recent survey of 4,000 members of the Freedom from Religion Foundation found that 95 percent were white, and men comprised a majority.

Among U.S. nonbelievers, 72 percent are white and 60 percent are men, according to the 2008 American Religious Identification Survey; the U.S. Religious Landscape Survey by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life found that Hispanics make up 11 percent, and African-Americans just 8 percent, of "unaffiliated" Americans.

"Anytime you go to an atheist meeting, it tends to be predominantly male and white. We know that," said Blair Scott, national affiliate director for American Atheists, which has 131 affiliate groups. "We go out of our way to encourage participation by females and minorities. The problem is getting those people out (of the closet as atheists) in the first place."

Atheists are working to put a more diverse public face on their movement. A new group, Black Atheists of America, drew about 25 attendees at its first national meeting in October. Also last year, the Institute for Humanist Studies was born in Washington, D.C., with a goal of helping atheism become more diverse.

But diversity remains elusive. As of late December, *American Atheist* magazine hadn't



been able to find enough black atheist writers to fill a special Black History Month edition for February.

In another telling sign, the Council for Secular Humanism tried in vain to present a diverse array of speakers at its four-day October conference in Los Angeles. Most of the 300 attendees were white men, as were 23 of the 26 speakers.

"Considering the changing demographics of our country, we need to consider why our message is not resonating with Latinos, why it's not resonating with people of color, and why it's not resonating with women in the way that it could be," said Debbie Goddard, director of African-Americans for Humanism.

One theory says minorities tend to be more reluctant than whites to "come out of the closet" as non-believers, in part because religion and culture tend to be deeply intertwined in minority communities, according to Anthony Pinn, a black humanist and professor of religious studies at Rice University.

"Within African-American communities, the question concerning black atheists is: have they surrendered their allegiance to the principles and ideas that helped us survive?" said Pinn, who is also research director for the Institute for Humanist Studies.

The concern is that "the African-American atheists have surrendered some of what it means to be black and a survivor in the United States. They've lost touch with their tradition," Pinn said.

Making atheism more diverse is important on various levels, according to atheist organizers. For starters, Scott said gatherings are enriched when atheists have varied backgrounds and experiences to share.

"We need to be more vocal, in the atheist community at large and in our (black) community, to let others feel more comfortable in coming out," said Ayanna Watson, a New York City lawyer and founder of Black Atheists of America.

She and Pinn hope more blacks will feel more comfortable "coming out" as atheists when they learn about black atheism's roots in American history, through such figures as Richard Wright, Langston Hughes, W.E.B. DuBois and Frederick Douglass.

Efforts to cultivate diversity in atheism seem to be gaining some traction among African-Americans, Goddard said, but not as much among Asians or Latinos. "I've seen no real success in outreach, no efforts really being made to the Latino community," Goddard said.

There's also sharp debate inside atheist circles about whether to create separate minority groups. Goddard and others believe such niche groups perform a helpful service by helping minorities embrace their nonbelief, but others say ethnicity-based gatherings betray the movement's commitment to transcending racial and ethnic boundaries.

"Some argue (that) organizing any kind of group for a specific demographic ... is inherently racist, is inherently sexist," Goddard said, "and is not something that our groups should organize or promote."

The white male profile of most atheist gatherings is not likely to change anytime soon, observers concede, especially if atheist minorities find their own community in specially designed separate groups.

Nevertheless, some activists like Jules are holding to a vision of integration. He chairs a newly formed diversity council for the Dallas Coalition for Reason, which includes the area's 15 atheist groups.

Last year, the coalition started targeted outreach campaigns to minority groups, assuring local black gays and lesbians, for example, that atheist groups will accept them non-judgmentally.

Dallas' Fellowship of Free Thought used to be almost exclusively white, Jules said, but now the group counts members with black, Hispanic and Middle Eastern backgrounds, including former Muslims.

"People think (atheism) is reserved for white academia," Jules said, "but it's not." **BT**

guest commentary

'Safe and secure from all alarms'

By Dick Staub

RELIGION NEWS SERVICE

Where to turn for comfort when tormented by your enemies? Islamic militants bombed an Iraqi church last October, killing 60 worshippers. Iraqi Christians cancelled Christmas Eve services after receiving bomb threats. That night, 10 bombs went off in Christian districts, killing two and wounding 21.

On the first day of the New Year, 1,000 Christians gathered for worship in Alexandria, Egypt, when a suicide bomb detonated, killing 21 worshippers.

As I reflected on these tragedies, my thoughts were drawn to an old familiar hymn. The hymn had been on my mind ever since seeing the Coen brothers' new movie, *True Grit*.

The film, based on the 1968 Charles

Portis novel, tells the story of a tough U.S. marshal helping a stubborn young woman track down her father's murderer.

A haunting and beautifully orchestrated melody plays in the background throughout the film, and though I knew the source immediately, it occurred to me that many in the audience might not recognize the old gospel hymn, "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms."

The hymn provides an eerie backdrop for this film about lawlessness and disorder in the Wild West.

"What a fellowship, what a joy divine, leaning on the everlasting arms," it goes. "What a blessedness, what a peace is mine, leaning on the everlasting arms."

The hymn was written by music professor A.J. Showalter in response to troubled times. In 1887, he received two letters on the same day from former students in South Carolina.

The first letter brought the tragic news that one student's wife had suddenly died. Showalter set the letter aside and decided to answer it later. The second letter brought news identical to the first. Both students had been plunged into tragedy through the same circumstances on the same day.

Wanting to console the men, Showalter wrote down a phrase from Deuteronomy, "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." He decided to write a song instead of a letter and started with the chorus.

"Leaning, leaning, safe and secure from all alarms; Leaning, leaning, leaning on the everlasting arms."

He sent the melody and lyrics for the chorus to Elisha Hoffman, who completed the lyrics, writing these verses:

"O how sweet to walk in this pilgrim

way, leaning on the everlasting arms; O how bright the path grows from day to day, leaning on the everlasting arms.

"What have I to dread, what have I to fear, leaning on the everlasting arms; I have blessed peace with my Lord so near; leaning on the everlasting arms."

That old hymn doesn't focus on eliminating or ignoring hardship in our lives but instead emphasizes the comfort of God's presence through them.

Rabbi Harold Kushner, most famous for his book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People?* put it this way: "To philosophers and theologians, God may be the first cause, the unmoved mover. But to people like us, what is most important about God is that he is the presence that makes the world seem less frightening."

The lyrics reveal a Lord who comforts weary humans without reference or regard to our worthiness to receive it, which is why it was such a good match for *True Grit*.

The film's central characters possess their own forms of grittiness, but are also deeply flawed. They are more than ready to give the man who murdered the girl's father what he deserves, but none seems to see their own foibles.

Films by the Coen brothers delight in the universality of human failing, but this film is their best articulation of hopefulness. One line appears in the original 1968 novel, its 1969 film adaptation with John Wayne, and this year's Coen remake, "You must pay for everything in this world one way or another. There is nothing free with the exception of God's grace."

God's grace — and the everlasting arms — bring a subtle and sustained warmth to this gritty film. And it can do the same for each of our gritty lives. **BT**

—Dick Staub is a Religion News Service columnist and the author of *About You: Fully Human and Fully Alive*.



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Makin' bacon

By Tony W. Cartledge

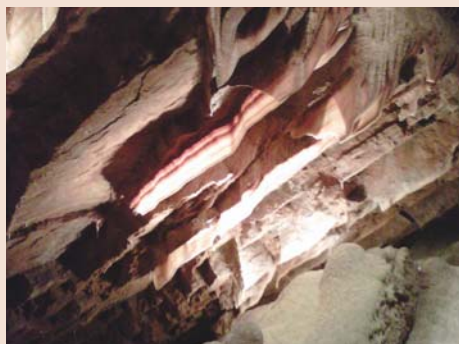
www.baptiststoday.org/cartledge-blog

Posted Dec. 5, 2010

Underground caves and caverns have always fascinated me, and on a getaway in northwestern Virginia, I visited Shenandoah Caverns, where I saw something new. I've visited a number of caverns, and seen my share of stalactites and stalagmites, flowstone and anthodites — but I don't recall having seen bacon.

The Shenandoah Caverns have a number of "breakfast bacon" formations, so real-looking that they were once featured in *National Geographic*, according to the guide. The "bacon" is a type of speleothem generally referred to as a curtain or drapery formation.

It's made of calcite and iron oxide deposited by mineral-laden water dripping over many thousands of years. When the water contains mostly calcite, the bands formed are light in color: when iron



oxide (the same compound as rust) predominates, reddish brown bands are formed.

Looking at beautiful formations hidden beneath the earth, and knowing that they were formed over hundreds of thousands of years, always takes my breath away. Some of God's most beautiful gifts require much patience to create.

I thought of that in comparison to a news note that Answers in Genesis, the fundamentalist young-earth organization that built the mega-million dollar Creation Museum near Cincinnati, is planning a \$24.5 million expansion that will include a full-scale replica of Noah's Ark.

No one knows exactly what Noah's Ark would have looked like, of course. A few specifications are given in Genesis 6:14-16; beyond the basic dimensions it's mostly guesswork.

The developers of the Creation Museum believe in a seven-day creation just over 6,000 years ago, and assume that everything that appears older than that can be explained in some pseudo-scientific fashion, though some posit that God just made things that appear really old in order to throw us off track. The museum features fancy animatronic dinosaurs interacting with humans, for example.

I'd much rather contemplate the columns in Shenandoah's "Cathedral Hall," trying to imagine the thousands upon thousands of years it took to form them. While a literal interpretation of Genesis might float the boat (or Ark) for some folks, I'm content in marveling at the beauty of an earth that can be billions of years old, something that isn't a recent thought, but a wonder that God has loved for a long, long time. **BT**

Denominationalism ain't what it used to be

By John Pierce

Posted Dec. 18, 2010

www.baptiststoday.org/johndpierce-blog

Decline in denominationalism can be overstated or understated. Likewise, it is probably possible to read too much or too little into Randel Everette's departure as executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT) to become pastor of the First Baptist Church of Midland, Texas.

After less than three years at the helm of the largest state Baptist convention, long considered a job with high visibility and great influence in denominational life, he is going back to toting a pastoral load. There are good spiritual answers, I'm sure. But honesty calls for a reality check on the new challenges of denominational leadership.

Mine is not an insider view into Texas Baptist life. But what was once a plum job appears to have become burdensome. Both internal and external

challenges are mounting.

Texas Baptists, like those in Virginia, refused to follow the Southern Baptist Convention's leap over the Fundamentalist ledge in recent decades. However, they have found themselves in a difficult situation.

A rival state convention was formed to siphon off churches and funds — while expressing deep devotion to SBC causes but not duplicating the vast and significant ministries being carried out in the state and beyond. And the BGCT has experienced its own internal problems — including one related to an embarrassing church-start program — that has dampened enthusiasm for some participants.

Texas Baptists partner in missions and ministries with groups like the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Baptist World Alliance — which their detractors use as evidence of unfounded liberalism. In general, the Texas convention seems marked by both theological conservatism and rabid independence, a

mix that makes it an uneasy fit with the highly authoritarian SBC and somewhat cautious with more progressive groups that might engage in issues often deemed liberal.

Add all of that to an ongoing, much-larger trend away from big-bucket denominational mission funding and the BGCT (like most other Baptist bodies) is finding less of the offering plate coming to its Dallas headquarters. (And, yes, a down economy makes an impact as well.)

Surely a new and capable leader will arise and the venerable BGCT will continue to impact the state and beyond with significant ministries. However, the future will be unlike the past. And sitting atop the pile will be less comfortable and more challenging than ever.

God bless the one who does it — and all others trying to steer the ships of conventions, associations and fellowships of churches. The denominational tide has changed. The waters are less friendly and familiar. **BT**

'You are *what you read*'

GREENWOOD, S.C. — Often one friend will ask another, "What are you reading?" But Blake Kendrick, associate pastor for students and spiritual formation at the First Baptist Church of Greenwood, S.C., posed the question to a different audience.

He wondered what kind of reading had influenced the authors whose thought-provoking books have stirred his interest. So he asked them — and they responded.

Nutritionists, Kendrick noted, often say, "You are what you eat." He suggested that many people who are shaped in their thinking by the words and ideas they encounter on printed pages might reach a similar conclusion.

"If the phrase, 'You are what you eat,' is true of our diet," Kendrick wondered, "is the phrase, 'You are what you read,' true of our study?"

Kendrick believes that human imaginations are nourished and sustained through reading — and that the ideas, images, and narratives often shape our beliefs and identities.

"From poetry to prose, from non-fiction to fiction, literature functions to nurture our imaginations and inspire our minds through creative rumination and reflection," said Kendrick.

Such reflections on the influence reading has had on his own life prompted him to ask 25 authors, theologians and other Christian thinkers: "What three literary works, other than the Bible, have had the greatest influence in your life?"

Here are the responses Kendrick received:

Carl E. Braaten, professor emeritus of systematic theology at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago: Martin Luther's *The Bondage of the Will*, Saint Augustine's *The Confessions* and Karl Barth's *The Epistle to the Romans*.

Walter Brueggemann, professor emeritus of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Ga.: John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, Reinhold Niebuhr's *Moral Man and Immoral Society* and Abraham Heschel's *The Prophets*.

Minister asks his favorite writers to tell what books have influenced them

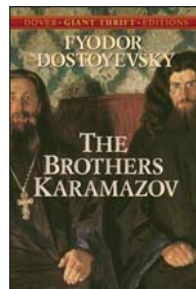
Frederick Buechner, author and theologian: Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory*, Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* and Paul Tillich's *The New Being*.

Tony Campolo, American Baptist minister and professor emeritus of sociology at Eastern University in St. Davids, Penn.: Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, José Miguez Bonino's *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation* and Ernest Becker's *The Denial of Death*.

James H. Cone, the Charles A. Briggs Distinguished Professor of Systematic Theology at Union Theological Seminary in New York City: James Baldwin's *The Fire*



Blake Kendrick



Next Time, Malcolm X and Alex Haley's *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*.

Lawrence S. Cunningham, the John A. O'Brien Professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Ind.: Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy*, Saint Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* and Saint Jerome's *Latin Vulgate*.

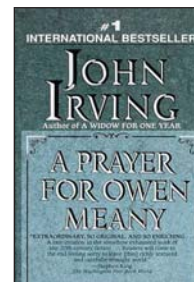
Marva Dawn, teaching fellow at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia: George Herbert's *The Temple: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations*, C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* and Robert Alter's *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary*.

Richard Foster, theologian and founder of Renovaré: Saint Augustine's *The Confessions*, Saint Theresa of Avila's *The Interior Castle* and John Woolman's *The Journal of John Woolman*.

Stanley Hauerwas, the Gilbert T. Rowe Professor of Theological Ethics at Duke Divinity School in Durham, N.C.: Aristotle's *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* and John Howard Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus*.

E. Brooks Holifield, the Charles Howard Chandler Professor of American Church History at Emory University's Candler School of Theology in Atlanta: Iris Murdoch's *The Sovereignty of Good*, H. Richard Niebuhr's *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture* and Perry Miller's *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century*.

James Howell, author and pastor at Myers Park United Methodist Church in Charlotte: John Irving's *A Prayer for Owen Meany*, Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* and Homer's *The Iliad*.

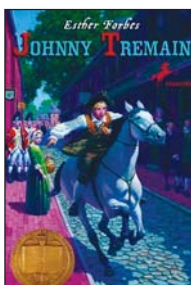


Rienhard Hütter, professor of Christian theology at Duke Divinity School: Saint Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*, John Henry Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* and Pope John Paul II's encyclical letter, "The Splendor of Truth/ *Veritatis Splendor*."

Robert W. Jenson, professor emeritus of religion at Saint Olaf's College in Northfield, Minn.: T.S. Eliot's *Love Song for J. Alfred Prufrock*, Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* and Saint Augustine's *The Confessions*.

Philip D. Kenneson, professor of theology and philosophy at Milligan College in Tennessee: Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, John Howard Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus* and Wallace Stegner's *Crossing into Safety*.

Cleophus J. LaRue, the Francis Landey Patton Professor of Homiletics at Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey: Ester Forbes' *Johnny Tremain*, Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*.



Thomas G. Long, the Bandy Professor of Preaching at Emory's Candler School of Theology: Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory*, Paul Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative* and Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*.

Parker Palmer, founder and senior partner of the Center for Courage and Renewal in Bainbridge Island, Wash.: C. Wright Mills' *The Sociological Imagination*, Thomas Merton's *The Seven Storey Mountain* and Rainer Maria Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*.

Fleming Rutledge, an Episcopal preacher and scholar from Rye Brook, N.Y.: William Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Danté Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

John Shelby Spong, retired Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Newark, N.J.: Paul Tillich's *Systematic Theology*, Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* and David Friedrich Strauss' *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*.

Peter Storey, retired Methodist Bishop of South Africa and professor emeritus at Duke Divinity School: John Wesley Bready's *England: Before and After Wesley*, *Dying We Live: Letters Written by Prisoners in Germany on the Verge of Execution*, edited by Hellmut Gollwitzer, Kathe Kuhn & Reinhold Schneider; and Walter Wink's *Jesus and Non-violence: A Third Way*.

Emilie Townes, the Andrew W. Mellon Professor of African American Religion and Theology at Yale Divinity School in New Haven, Conn.: James Baldwin's *Notes from a Native Son*, Alice Walker's *In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*.

Sam Wells, Dean of Duke Chapel and research professor of Christian ethics at Duke Divinity School: Northrop Frye's *The Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, Keith Johnstone's *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre* and Stanley Hauerwas' *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*.

Woodie W. White, retired Methodist Bishop and current Bishop in Residence at the Candler School of Theology: E. Stanley

Jones' *The Christ of the Mount: A Working Philosophy of Life*, Walter White's *How Far the Promised Land?* and Howard Thurman's *Jesus and the Disinherited*.

William H. Willimon, Bishop of the United Methodist Church for North Alabama: *The Collected Works of Flannery O'Connor*, edited by Sally Fitzgerald; Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*; and W.H. Auden's *Collected Poems*.

Lauren Winner, assistant professor of Christian spirituality at Duke Divinity School: *The Episcopal Book of Common Prayer*, Jan Karon's *At Home in Mitford*, and Gerard Manley Hopkins' *Poems and Prose* (especially the poem "Spring and Fall").

After compiling the reading list, Kendrick said he sees how the literary experiences of these authors have manifested themselves within the vocational, spiritual and intellectual identities of each person.

"As an aside, if I am ever stranded on a deserted island, I could only hope to have access to some or most of these volumes," said Kendrick. **BT**

Take a close look

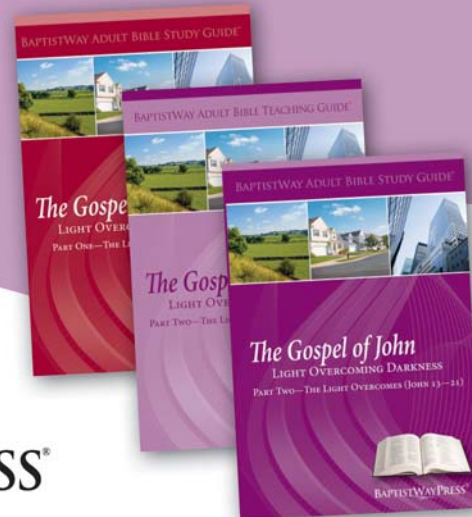
The Gospel of John is many Christians' favorite book of the Bible. *The Gospel of John: Light Overcoming Darkness (Part One: John 1–12)* and *(Part Two: John 13–21)* provide a two-part, in-depth study of this Gospel.

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Today, there is a broader definition of missions and missionaries. Missions now combine evangelism and social action, church planting and Christian education, compassion and justice. And, many Christians are using their skills and resources to be “on mission” — not just long-term career missionaries.

This increased awareness of all Christians being called to serve the physical and spiritual needs of others has opened the door to expanded short-term volunteer mission opportunities both nationally and internationally.

With an emphasis on experiential learning, volunteers are now more effective and welcomed by their career counterparts, whose numbers are rapidly decreasing. Baptist groups such as Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, American Baptist Churches-USA, Baptist Medical & Dental Mission International and Baptist Medical-Dental Fellowship, along with seminaries, divinity schools and colleges are reporting growing numbers of volunteers.

Benefits of short-term mission trips

Short-term mission trips benefit not only the people served, but also the volunteers and their home churches or schools. Initially, they support the overall picture of missions by enhancing the work of long-term missionaries through use of volunteers' unique gifts.

Secondly, short-term mission trips rid volunteers of normal distractions so they can concentrate on the task at hand. Volunteers can exercise their faith and dignify their profession or calling by expanding their world and enlarging their understanding of God and concern for others.



Dr. Carl Goolsby treats one of 200 patients per day at a medical clinic in the Tea Plantations in Kerala, India. A member of the First Baptist Church of Marietta, Ga., Dr. Goolsby and his team worked in partnership with the India Baptist Theological Seminary during a mission trip in February 2010. Photo by Bill Ross.

In addition, the enthusiasm of volunteers affects congregations, energizing them and making them more attractive to new members. Also, if the missions experience is positive, volunteers are more likely to commit to lay leadership.

Finally, most volunteers would agree that mission trips change them as individuals; they feel they receive blessings far beyond any contributions they make.

Preparation, adaptation keys to successful trips

Positive mission experiences cannot happen without significant spiritual, personal and

Short-term mission trips rid volunteers of normal distractions so they can concentrate on the task at hand.

logistical preparation. Persons who require comfort and predictability and seek to be “tourists for Jesus” will need more preparation perhaps.

Experienced mission travelers encourage new ones to read much about the place and people of the prospective mission field; to talk with individuals who have lived there; to learn the basic language and/or colloquialisms; and to obtain details of tasks beforehand, but to be prepared to change plans as needed.

Ideally, preparation begins six to eight months prior to departure, especially for international trips. Volunteers should follow the specific requirements of the host mission/missionary related to work permits, passports, diplomas, licenses, payments and immunizations.

Flexibility is essential. Do not assume anything is “like back home.” People may stare. Personal cleanliness standards, housing accommodations and time schedules will likely be different. Transportation, water and electricity could be in limited supply. Difficulties and unexpected situations are inevitable, so adaptation is paramount.

Culture shock is progressive, especially in a foreign country, so volunteers can expect negative feelings to emerge if the trip lasts more than two weeks.

Staying healthy and safe on the field

Adaptability is especially pronounced in the matters of diet, health and hygiene. Volunteers should take health precautions while seeking not to offend the local residents, especially on overseas fields.

Mission travelers are urged not to overeat and to restrict food choices to those prepared by team members or the mission house staff. Foods should be fully cooked and served hot. Fresh breads and fruits one can peel are also safe choices. Drinks and ice should be made from boiled, bottled or treated water.

In some settings, volunteers must be aware of the potential threat to their physical

and financial safety. While not viewing all unfamiliar people and situations as suspect, volunteers should exercise caution with their cash, credit cards, clothing, manners and political comments.

Building bridges

Short-term missions can build bridges between the mission field and churches. Volunteers are present to empower, not distract from, the long-term local work — and to learn from and support the efforts of the host mission/missionary rather than to offer solutions.

Volunteers should follow the host's requirements for work assignments and personal behavior. Communicating with and being sensitive to the needs of the host, and avoiding any activity he/she or locals may find questionable, will create a positive work atmosphere.

Mission workers can bless the locals/nationals by building relationships with them while respecting their way of doing church and including them in the teaching/learning process.

Volunteers may initiate relationships with those they serve by graciously accepting

their hospitality and gifts and sharing with them pictures of their family, church and community. They should refrain, however, from making promises related to future correspondence, visits, special gifts, etc.

Returning home

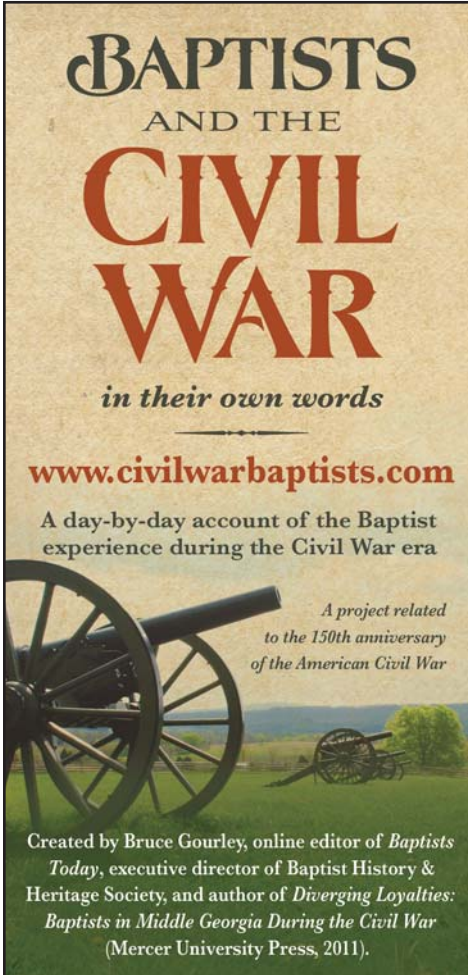
Upon returning home, short-term volunteers may encounter some physical exhaustion, emotional ups-and-downs and “reverse culture shock” — whether the field of service is national or international. Advance planning of travel details and proper rest will make the adjustment easier. Debriefing and follow-up will help separation anxiety and reverse culture shock. Experienced mission volunteers recommend:

- Evaluate your trip in written and oral style.
- Make an interesting presentation to your church (e.g., a missions supper with customs, photos, memorabilia).
- Share your experience with significant individuals.
- Write thank-you notes or send postcards to your support team.
- Begin regular prayer for the people or place you served.

Although immediate results of short-term mission trips may not be evident, the effect of the relationship experience can be long lasting for those serving and those served. David C. Forward, author of *The Essential Guide to the Short Term Mission Trip*, put it this way:

“Forget the statistics ... The solitary young woman you get through to in Albania could go on to be the next Mother Teresa. The young translator who saw the life-saving work your medical team was able to accomplish may have decided to go on to become a doctor herself to help her fellow citizens in the future. That kid you played — and prayed — with in Guatemala could be a future Latino Billy Graham. One life you touch may be as profoundly changed as those of the simple folks our Lord touched, and who went on to be his most precious disciples.”

(For more information on preparation, packing, travel, safety, etc., see *Successful Mission Teams: A Guide for Volunteers* by Martha VanCise, *The Essential Guide to the Short Term Mission Trip* by David Forward and *Short-Term Mission Team* manuals from American Baptist Churches-USA.) **BT**




BAPTISTS
AND THE
CIVIL WAR
in their own words

www.civilwarbaptists.com

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

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

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



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'Being, knowing, doing'

Congregational ministry is focus of Gardner-Webb divinity school

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. — We hear it often: “Young Baptist ministers are uninterested in local church ministry” — period. Well, somebody forgot to share that news with Joshua Hunt, pastor of Ross Grove Baptist Church in Shelby, N.C.

He went to the small, family church as interim pastor in 2003 while a single divinity school student at nearby Gardner-Webb University. The next year he was called as pastor. To the church's surprise, he and his growing family are still there.

“I get energized by the local church,” said 30-year-old Hunt, a native of Norton, Va., and a graduate of Carson-Newman College in East Tennessee. “They are fantastic to me; we just need to grow.”

The congregation has allowed Hunt to grow into the job, he said. And while their hopes are high, their expectations of him are reasonable.

Hunt credits his professors at Gardner-Webb with giving him a positive perspective on congregational ministry.

Pastor Josh Hunt continues to find support from his former professor Sheri Adams, who teaches theology and church history at Gardner-Webb divinity school.



“A lot of academics detest the church and a lot of churches don't trust academics,” he said. However, Hunt considers his divinity school professors to be his “co-ministers.”

Conversations with professors, he said, range from “parsing Greek words to talking about kids making too much noise in the sanctuary.”

That relationship didn't end with graduation, said Hunt. This fall, Sheri Adams, professor of theology and church history, came to Ross Grove to help Josh and his wife, Sacha, with the dedication of their son, Jude.

One of the joys of teaching, said Adams, is building “special relationships” with students. A former colleague once told an incoming class of divinity students at Gardner-Webb: “Unless you have a key to Dr. Adams' house and her ATM card, you are not fully registered.”

“I enjoy that my relationship with students is ongoing,” said Adams. “When I see former students, we fall right back into conversation and sharing as though it had not been three or four years.”

Professors like Adams help Hunt to “flesh out” his theological education in pastoral ministry, he said. Knowing where to find personal and professional support is comforting, he added.

“I enjoy a lot of what I do,” said Hunt, who leads a Sunday night Bible study for his congregation. “But my favorite part of my work is teaching.”

Giving attention to a student's spiritual development and the mentoring ministry relationships are by design said Robert Canoy, dean of the divinity school.

“The buzz here is success in the church attributed to personal spiritual formation,” said Canoy. “Faculty members serve as spiritual mentors for students — each

student has his or her own mentor.”

In developing the program, some divinity school faculty recalled from their own seminary experiences that spiritual formation was often assumed, Canoy said. But evidence of failed ministries sometimes proved otherwise.

“We can't make you be spiritually formed,” said Canoy. But he and the divinity school faculty are providing every opportunity.

“When someone fills out an application (for divinity school), we look for spiritual formation,” said Canoy. “It is the call that is so important to us.”

A three-fold emphasis on “being, knowing and doing” guides the educational approach for the divinity school that offers Masters of Divinity degrees (with several emphases), as well as combination M.Div./MBA and M.Div./English degrees, and a Doctor of Ministry degree.

Pastoral studies is the largest concentration for Masters students, Canoy said.

“Our mission is to prepare people for the church — even those going into academics or other areas.”

The measuring stick of success, said Canoy, is the confidence congregations place in the students who go through a supervised ministry experience in addition to mentoring.

“We don't get complaints...,” said Canoy. “We have more churches interested in positions than we have students to fill them.”

Currently, the divinity school has 197 M.Div. and 24 D.Min. students who are taught by a 10-member full-time faculty and others. Classes are offered on Mondays and Tuesdays to allow those in full-time ministry to complete the M.Div. degree in the standard three-year period by coming to the campus just two days each week. **BT**



Robert Canoy

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is part of an occasional series about Baptist-related educational institutions.

Presidential perspectives

Gardner-Webb's Frank Bonner wants students to gain more than a diploma

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. — Why, during an economic downturn, would Gardner-Webb University launch a \$45 million “Higher Ground” campaign to fund a wide range of projects that will enhance campus life? The oversimplified answer, said university president Frank Bonner, is: “We need all the things included in the campaign.”

The good news is that \$33 million was raised during the silent phase. Physical changes to the campus include a newly completed baseball stadium named for the late professional baseball executive John Henry Moss and an under-construction student center named for benefactors Robert and Carolyn Tucker.

Bonner said the campaign addresses a wide variety of needs — with financial aid and the university’s mission always in mind.

“I’m greatly concerned about the future of higher education and its affordability to students — because the ability of students and their families to pay for higher education is getting more and more strained,” he said.

The campaign also addresses faculty and facility needs as well as programs that will enhance the students’ experiences beyond the classroom.

“In our strategic plan, one of our goals is to have some form of experience abroad as a graduation requirement — preferably an academic experience,” said Bonner. “I have students who come up to me and thank me for this experience — and use terms like life changing... In some cases you’re talking about students who may have barely been outside their county until they came to college. So that’s a tremendous need.”

When asked how he describes Gardner-Webb to those who are unfamiliar with the university with Baptist educational roots going back to 1905, Bonner replied:

“We’re a small-to-medium size university. We’re a private, Christian university. We are voluntarily affiliated with both the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina and national Cooperative Baptist

Fellowship. It’s in our bylaws now — ‘mutually voluntary’ is the language.”

He further described the university as “an essentially liberal arts institution with five professional schools.” And, with a touch of pride, added: “We’re NCAA Division 1 athletics — which surprises a lot of people.”

And the locale? “Boiling Springs ... then you have to tell them where that is — about 50 miles exactly west of Charlotte.”

The quaint college town has seen what began as a boarding high school grow into its current form on 240 pretty acres with a total enrollment topping 4,000.

Bonner spoke of the university’s personality in terms of a distinct yet intangible



quality that is easily felt but difficult to describe.

“I have in the past used the word chemistry,” he said. “It’s in the people. It’s students who will tell me that when they visited the campus they felt welcomed here.”

Prospective faculty, he said, will talk about the sense of community or sense of family on campus. “It’s all about the people who are here, and somehow that mixes together with the sense of purpose.”

That purpose, Bonner noted, is expressed in the daily activities of students, faculty and staff — and in the university’s

motto: “*Pro Deo Et Humanitate* — For God and Humanity.”

“Campus ministry is huge at Gardner-Webb,” said Bonner. Which caused him to rephrase the ancient chicken-or-egg question to university minister Tracy Jessup. “I asked if he thinks Gardner-Webb attracts students with that mind-set (of service) or if they come here and it gets developed.”

Either way, Bonner said campus engagement in community service is staggering — such as an innovative hunger-related effort called the Cleveland County Potato Project. Project leaders Doug Sharp and Bill Cullum often tell Bonner at church: “We could not have done it without Gardner-Webb students.”

Reports from the local United Way’s annual “Day of Caring” revealed that 60 percent of those taking part came from the university. “You hear story after story like this,” Bonner said of the pleasing news.

He also spoke of student Stephanie Gibbs, who was featured in the national publication of Prison Fellowship.

“Stephanie’s father was in jail or prison most of her life; she was raised by her grandmother,” said Bonner. “When she came to Gardner-Webb and saw that one of the campus ministries was related to Prison Fellowship, she was already comfortable going into prisons. So she’s the coordinator now.”

When students leave Gardner-Webb, Bonner hopes they’ll take more than a diploma and professional expertise with them.

“Whatever walk of life they are in, I don’t care if it’s owner of a small business, a lawyer, teacher or a nurse, a pastor or a manager in a company or whatever it is, that they are people of character and integrity — people who have a sense of service in the broadest and best sense of the word,” said Bonner. “People who would say, ‘It’s not all about me — it’s about making other people’s lives better.’”

Then he added: “If you look back on the history of Gardner-Webb..., I think that is what the school has always been about.” **BT**

Baptists AND THE CIVIL WAR

By February, seven southern states have seceded from the United States of America: South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and Texas.

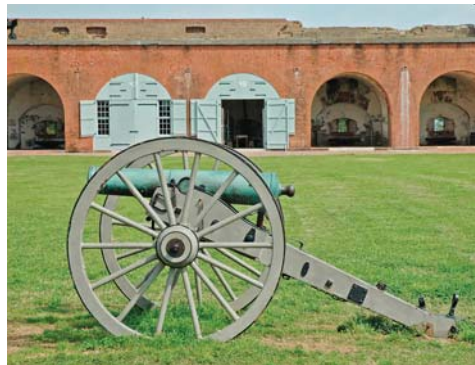
While formal hostilities are yet two months away, Confederate forces are already marshalling and probing Union defenses of southern coastal forts. An early Confederate triumph is the capture of Fort Pulaski (pictured) near Savannah, Ga.

Dozens of Baptists have played significant roles in events thus far. In the South, many Southern and Primitive Baptists served in secession conventions. Northward, rhetoric from abolitionist Baptists is increasing.

In publications and public speeches, southern politicians and preachers proclaim the defense of black slavery as the primary rationale for seceding from the Union. Among white Baptists in the South clamoring for secession and proclaiming God's will for black enslavement is Ebenezer W. Warren, pastor of the First Baptist Church in Macon, Ga., who on Jan. 27 preached — to a full house — a sermon titled “The Scriptural Vindication of Slavery.”

Both the *Macon Telegraph* and *Christian Index* published the sermon, here excerpted:

“Slavery forms a vital element of the Divine Revelation to man. Its institution, regulation, and perpetuity, constitute a part of many of the books of the Bible The public mind needs enlightening from the sacred teachings of inspiration on this subject We of the South have been passive, hoping the storm would subside Our passiveness has been our sin. We have not come to the vindication of God and of truth, as duty demanded it is necessary for ministers of the gospel ... to teach slavery from the pulpit, as it was taught by the holy men of old, who spake as moved by the holy Spirit Both Christianity and Slavery are from heaven; both are



150 YEARS AGO

February 1861

blessings to humanity; both are to be perpetuated to the end of time Because Slavery is right; and because the condition of the slaves affords them all those privileges which would prove substantial blessings to them; and, too, because their Maker has decreed their bondage, and has given them, as a race, capacities and aspirations suited alone to this condition of life”

Among Alabama's state secession delegates is James DeVotie. One of the most respected preachers in the state, DeVotie was pastor (in succession) of Montgomery First Baptist, Tuscaloosa First Baptist, and Siloam Baptist in Marion.

In addition, DeVotie had been a voting delegate at the founding meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in Augusta, Ga., in 1845; helped establish Howard College (now Samford University); and held a variety of elected positions in state and national Southern Baptist life. A lifelong advocate of public education in Alabama, he also served as editor of the *Alabama Baptist*.

DeVotie serves as a chaplain in the Confederate Army, refusing to accept payment for his services, on the principle of separation of church and state.

In Montgomery, Ala., on Feb. 4, representatives from the seven secessionist states join

forces to create the Confederate States of America. In the coming days, Jefferson Davis — Mississippi U.S. Senator and former Secretary of War — is elected as president. A Provisional Constitution is enacted on Feb. 8.

Following the creation of the Confederacy, Samuel Boykin, editor of Georgia's *Christian Index*, in the Feb. 27 edition of the Baptist publication offers a grand and glowing vision of the prospects of the Confederacy and black slavery:

“We will absorb Central America and the contiguous states of Mexico, not by ... bloody ... war ... but by the generous attractions of our superior civilization and purer religion When these golden visions become realities ... then will the proudest nations of the earth come to woo and worship at the shrine of our imperial Confederacy.”

Renowned Georgia Baptist minister Adiel Sherwood offers, in the Feb. 20 edition of the *Christian Index*, his own observation: “... The slaves enjoy soul liberty, a much higher privilege than mere bodily freedom.”

Yet not all white Baptists in the South are celebrating secession and black slavery. Union sentiment is strong in Georgia's northern mountains and in Tennessee at large. Tennessee Governor Isham Harris on Feb. 9 calls for a state vote on whether or not to send delegates to a State Convention that would decide on secession. Itinerant Tennessee Baptist minister Jesse Cox records in his diary: “I walked one mile and voted against the state voting a convention to secede from the Union.” The vote fails, although Tennessee would later become the last state to secede and join the Confederacy on June 8. **BT**

—Bruce T. Gourley is online editor for Baptists Today and executive director of the Baptist History & Heritage Society. His book, *Diverging Loyalties: Baptists in Middle Georgia During the Civil War*, is being published by Mercer University Press.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This new series focuses on the Baptist experience during the American Civil War as it unfolded 150 years ago. For a day-by-day journal along with references to source material, visit www.civilwarbaptists.com.

Recognizing the Judson-Rice Society

Those generous persons who support the ongoing mission of *Baptists Today* with annual gifts of \$1,000 or more comprise the news journal's Judson-Rice Society. Along with the *Baptists Today* Board of Directors, the society — named in honor of pioneer Baptists Ann Hasseltine Judson, Adoniram Judson and Luther Rice — present an annual award for exceptional leadership with integrity.

This year's Judson-Rice Award will be presented to Dr. Randall Lolley during a dinner on Thursday, April 14, in Raleigh, N.C. Deep appreciation is extended to those supporters who, in 2010, gave generously and are included in the Judson-Rice Society.

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Sponsorships (\$500 by individuals or \$1,000 by churches/organizations) in honor of Dr. Lolley may be sent as gifts to *Baptists Today*. Sponsors whose gifts are received by March 18 will be listed in the Judson-Rice Dinner program.

The Judson-Rice Award has been presented annually since 2000 by the Board of Directors of Baptists Today and the news journal's supporters who form the Judson-Rice Society. The award, named for pioneer Baptist leaders Ann Hasseltine and Adoniram Judson, and Luther Rice, recognizes an outstanding Baptist leader who has demonstrated exceptional leadership with integrity.

Religious-freedom trends in decades past and future

WASHINGTON — The challenges surrounding the intersection of church, state and the freedom of conscience, according to experts in the field, were as old as the hills and as new as morning in the last decade. And while the details might differ, they say, the story arc will be similar in the decade that began Jan. 1.

Legal scholars and church-state activists consulted for this story said that there were significant changes — for good and for ill — in regard to both legal and cultural aspects of religious liberty in the United States in the last decade. For the future, they predicted continuing trends in five broad areas: the growth in religious diversity; the rising profile of non-believers; disputes over the role of Islam; emerging conflicts between religious freedom and gay rights; and perils posed by greater government support for religious institutions and fewer government protections for individuals' and organizations' free exercise of religion.

Religious diversity

While America's broad religious diversity has frequently been one of the country's strengths and occasionally a source of conflict, ballooning diversity is presenting new challenges to the centuries-old paradigm created by the First Amendment's religion clauses.

"We are now in a place of just exploding diversity," said Charles Haynes, First Amendment scholar at the Freedom Forum and director of the Newseum's Religious Freedom Education Project. "Hindus have found a voice in this country; they're becoming very active and ... speaking up when they feel they've been left out or marginalized in schools and elsewhere. Sikhs are speaking up. Non-believers, atheist groups are speaking up. So it's a very different place — and ... I think a lot of people who are some of the more angry groups out there, they feel they're losing their country."

Old religious majorities can feel threatened by the rising power of religious

AN ANALYSIS

minorities, who have the same protections under the First Amendment that Christians and Jews do, Haynes and others said. And legal protections are, in the long run, only as strong as the cultural values undergirding them.

"We must not only keep government neutral on matters of religion but also be willing culturally to tolerate our many differences," said Brent Walker, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty. "Our pluralism is a plus; not just something to be tolerated."

Rise of non-believers

One aspect of growing religious diversity is the increasing profile and voice of the irreligious. "I think that non-believers have found their voice in the United States and are increasingly visible — speaking up, filing lawsuits and demanding to be a full part of the discussion about what kind of country we're going to be," Haynes said.

Melissa Rogers, a Baptist who is director of Wake Forest Divinity School's Center for Religion and Public Affairs and a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, said "aggressive campaigns" by high-profile atheists like Christopher Hitchens and Sam Harris were one of the biggest developments of the last decade in religious liberty.

But how the self-described Christian majority reacts is crucial. Some have appealed to their interpretation of American history to fight back against the rise of religious minorities. Haynes said that trend concerns him.

"I think there are now many religious, Christian Americans who actually take it as historical fact that the United States was founded as a Christian nation and is meant to be a nation where Christianity is privileged and the separation of church and state is a myth that is not found in the First Amendment," he said. "I think that these views are now widely held among many Christian groups, and I think in the past decade that's been a very significant, almost kind of stealth, success story for the folks that have been pushing that view of America and American history."



Photo by John Pierce

Battles over Islam

One particular minority group on the rise — American Muslims — has been the subject of intense debate in the past decade. The debate's not likely to end anytime soon.

Haynes said a long-running, below-the-radar trend of simmering Islamophobia boiled over in 2010 — in large part due to the general discontent and political anger raging across the country and the explosion of the so-called "Ground Zero mosque" story into the national news in the late summer.

"One of the things about last year ... that was so misunderstood was that it wasn't just a sudden outburst of fear or anger at Muslims or Islam; it was really the result of a long-term campaign to demonize Islam — a successful campaign," he said.

"Until the Tea Party movement, until the Ground Zero controversy, a lot of the opposition to Muslims and to mosques and things like that were not respectable and were not really visible. But I think ... a lot of the trend in the last couple of years and particularly this past year has been that this has now gone mainstream."

Rep. Peter King (R-N.Y.), the new chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, has announced his intention to hold hearings on the radicalization of mosques in the United States. Muslims and

many religious-freedom groups have criticized the move as simply providing a platform for Islamophobes.

Rogers said King's hearings "will likely reignite a bitter national debate over the place of Islam in America, terrorism and free-exercise rights."

Another growing aspect of the debate over Islam may include attempts to ban the use of Sharia, or Islamic law, like one that Oklahoma voters approved in November. Rogers and Haynes both said that, depending on what political advantage they provide, similar proposals may appear on the ballot in more states in 2012.

"I think politicians in some other states will push measures similar to the Oklahoma one, but I would find it difficult to generalize after that," Rogers said. "I think it'd be necessary to do a state-by-state analysis to guess whether those measures would be adopted and whether, if adopted, they would be likely to have a significant effect on turnout."

However, Haynes noted, national politicians advocating anti-Sharia measures are in peril of overplaying their hand.

"Newt Gingrich has already signaled he is ready to use it. Sarah Palin has already signaled that she is ready to use it as an issue," he said. "But, then again, it's a big risk for people who do it — because it's so transparently nonsense; because one would think the more it gets looked at, the more people will realize there is no threat from Sharia law in the United States."

Religious freedom v. other rights

One area of church-state law that may explode in the next few years is conflicts between expanding civil rights for gays and the freedom of those who have theological beliefs condemning homosexuality.

Polls trending rapidly toward acceptance of gay rights among the broader society will likely mean increased support for legal same-sex marriage as well as non-discrimination laws that provide gays equal protection in employment and housing. But those rights, once protected, may come into conflict with the rights of those — such as landlords or public employees — who feel a compulsion to avoid complicity in something they view as sinful.

Chip Lupu, a First Amendment expert at George Washington University Law

School, said such conflicts were likely because theological opposition to homosexuality "has been increasingly marginalized in the culture, because young people increasingly reject it."

Haynes said the enmity between conservative religious groups and gay-rights activists could spell trouble when the gay groups gain the upper hand.

"I think that history shows that often when an oppressed group becomes supported by the majority ... they don't behave very well towards those they vanquished," he said. "And I think that one of the challenges for the gay-rights movement ... is to take religious freedom very seriously even as they are successful at advancing gay rights."

Haynes pointed to a recent example as a positive way forward: gay-rights activists and Mormon officials working together to pass a Salt Lake City ordinance that protected gays from employment and housing discrimination while carving out exemptions for religious organizations. The effort, he said, "was an example of how there can be ways where both sides can recognize the legitimate claims of both sides."

Legal trends: Establishment and free exercise

Recent decades have seen twin trends in the way courts interpret the religion clauses of the First Amendment. In regard to the Establishment Clause, which prevents government endorsement of religion, the courts have generally — and especially in the last decade — softened the barrier that previously prevented the state from funding religious entities.

Meanwhile, the courts have also backed away from a robust interpretation of the Free Exercise Clause, which protects individuals' and groups religious expression from undue government interference. The results have frustrated religious leaders across the ideological spectrum.

"Unfortunately, the clauses have been watered down to suggest religion needs only to be treated the same as other interests. In fact, often religion should be treated differently — to ensure free exercise by lifting governmentally imposed burdens and prevent establishments by prohibiting government sponsorship of religion," wrote the BJC's Walker, in an end-of-the-decade

analysis. "Religion is special and is treated specially by the First Amendment. We must recognize its uniqueness if religious liberty in this country is to be vital over the next decade."

Haynes said the most dramatic trend over the last decade has been on the funding side — from a near-absolute ban on direct or indirect government funding to deeply religious institutions to interpretations that allow tax dollars to flow to churches.

"I think that now we've crossed into a whole new arena where a good bit of government funding reaches religious groups," he said. "And even though it may be well-motivated and intended to expand help for those in need ... in the long run it undermines religious freedom because it, I think, chips away at the autonomy of religious groups; it makes religious groups more dependent on government money and thus really undermines the commitment to voluntarism and religion."

Meanwhile, a crucial Supreme Court decision in 1990 — *Employment Division v. Smith* — significantly lowered the legal bar that government entities must reach before interfering with free-exercise rights. Attempts to remedy the decision through both legislative and judicial remedies since have met with mixed results.

Haynes lamented that few Americans seem to know or care about the perilous current legal status of their free-exercise rights.

"The American people, I think, are unaware of the erosion of free-exercise protection under the First Amendment and then the efforts to restore it through legislation and litigation," he said. "It does seem arcane. I mean, all this stuff — the compelling-interest test and all — that's lost on most people. Most people, I think, take for granted that they have freedom of religion and are not concerned about government interfering with the practice of faith."

Haynes said people may not wake up until it's too late. "So, my church needs to expand and suddenly the government says it can't because of historical preservation, or there's a law passed saying that nobody can distribute literature in certain areas....," he said, for example. "You know, it just doesn't hit people until it affects some practice that's important to them." **BT**

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