

BAPTISTS Today



Welcome to Dexter Avenue

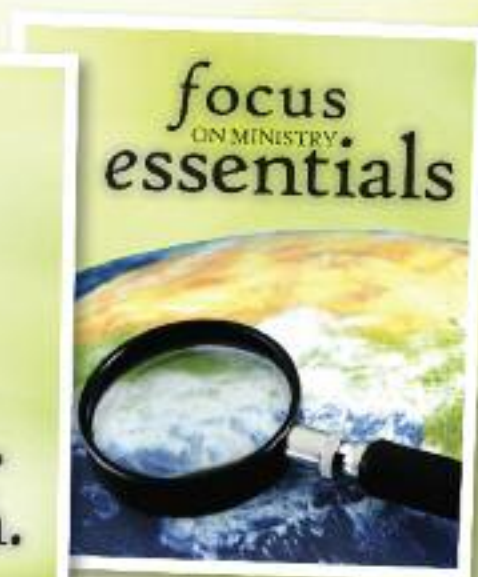
page 4

Register
online
today!

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship 

20th annual General Assembly

June 23-26 | Charlotte, N.C.



This year's Assembly is 20 years in the making; and you'll want to be part of this historic event. Build your own Assembly by finding events that interest you. This year's highlights include:

Monday, June 21

- **Charlotte Sessions**, an event for college students begins.

Wednesday, June 23

- **Loving Your Muslim Neighbor**, learn how to minister among Muslims.
- **Leadership Institute** with speaker **Alan Roxburgh**
- **Global Missions Commissioning Service** of new CBF field personnel



Roxburgh

Thursday, June 24

- **Discover your Passion**, a special missions emphasis.
- Baptist historian **Bill Leonard** preaching in evening worship.



Leonard

Friday, June 25

- **The Essentials Conference**, a new Assembly event for church leadership. With 14 topics led by experienced practitioners, this is an event that your deacons, teachers and young leaders can't afford to miss!
- Noted author **Lauren Winner** preaching in evening worship.



Winner

Saturday, June 26

- **The Essentials Conference** continues
- **Breakfast and prayer retreat** with Lauren Winner
- **Explore Charlotte** is an opportunity to visit Charlotte-area attractions with other Fellowship Baptists.

Sunday, June 27

- **CBF Community in Worship** is an opportunity to join local CBF partner churches in worship on Sunday.

Assembly pre-registration is free and can be completed at www.thefellowship.info/assembly

An autonomous national Baptist news journal

John D. Pierce
Executive Editor
editor@baptiststoday.org

Jackie B. Riley
Managing Editor
jackie@baptiststoday.org

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

Tony W. Cartledge
Contributing Editor
cartledge@baptiststoday.org

Bruce T. Gourley
Online Editor
gourley@baptiststoday.org

Vickie Frayne
Art Director

Jannie T. Lister Office Assistant
Connie Pursiful Circulation Assistant

Walker Knight Publisher Emeritus
Jack U. Harwell Editor Emeritus

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

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

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

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

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

Periodical postage paid
at Macon, Ga. 31208

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

© 2010 *Baptists Today*.
All rights reserved.

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

PERSPECTIVES

- > Effective communication depends on awareness7
of audience
John Pierce
- > Great commission sermonizing may be hard sell16
Tony W. Cartledge
- > Three reasons to abolish the death penalty17
Fisher Humphreys
- > What is the argument?18
David L. Odom
- > Can we do it again?27
Tom Ehrich

IN THE NEWS

- > For churches, how much risk is too much?13
- > Chaplains keep wary eye on 'Don't Ask/Don't Tell'14
policy repeal
- > Eco-friendly burials gaining popularity15
- > Germany's Passion Play is back and still30
stirring controversy
- > Cruise companies navigate choppy religious waters.....38
- > *Baptists Today* to honor veteran journalist39

FEATURES

- > 'Miss Jan' controls the crowds at Plains, Ga., church10
By Kay Campbell
- > Three books to share26
By Chuck Queen
- > BaptistLife forums still going strong after 10 years36
By John Pierce
- > Pastor finds screenwriting lessons can37
enhance sermons
By Judy Lunsford

IN EVERY ISSUE

Editorial	7	In the Know	24
Quotation Remarks	12	Readers' Responses	25
Bible Studies	19	Lighter Side	28
Resource Page	23	Reblog	29
Classifieds	24	Media Shelf	34

8 Avoiding
pastoral burnout
By Joel Snider



Photo by John Pierce. Tour manager Miriam Norris leads visitors through historic Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Ala., where Martin Luther King Jr. served as a young and influential pastor.

Page 4

32
Oakhurst Recovery
Program rooted
in compassion



Historic Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church in Montgomery was the first and only full-time pastorate of Martin Luther King Jr. Current pastor Michael Thurman is giving up the church study and desk used by his famous predecessor so that visitors can have access.

“I’m not a historic preservationist. ... I went to school to learn to be a good preacher.”



Dual challenge

Dexter congregation balances rich history, ongoing ministry

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — Assuming the pulpit of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in his hometown of Montgomery, Ala., in December 1996, Michael Thurman knew he would be balancing the realities of historical significance with the daily demands of ministry.

Imposing government buildings, including the Alabama State Capitol, surround the simple brick sanctuary that was completed in 1885. But the historical significance of Dexter Avenue cannot be diminished.

Martin Luther King Jr., a young and influential pastor, served the congregation from 1954 to 1960. Wrapping up his doctoral work

at Boston University, King came to Dexter to serve his only full-time, senior pastorate.

Historians consider the Dexter pastorate to be the “growing ground” for King’s non-violence and passive resistance that catapulted him into a national civil rights leadership role. Dexter members responded to his call for challenging the discrimination present in America, especially in the Deep South, in that era.

The church basement was a gathering place for organizing a boycott of city buses — which featured seamstress Rosa Park’s protest and led to a major anti-discrimination movement.

King, the first president of the Montgomery Improvement Association, urged his congregation to practice their Christian

faith that affirmed the value and equality of every person.

“This is where a lot of the planning meetings were held,” said 48-year-old Thurman, the church’s 27th pastor, pointing to the basement that he hopes will be restored to its 1960 appearance.

Thurman said the “dual challenge” of preserving this important history while carrying out the ministries of a vibrant congregation led to the formation of the Dexter Avenue King Memorial Foundation as a separate entity from the church with the shared name.

Continued on page 6 >

'Where the Kings lived, loved...'

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — Shirley Cherry, a retired teacher and volunteer tour guide, shows visitors through the restored parsonage on South Jackson Street in Montgomery that was bombed on Jan. 30, 1956.

Martin Luther King Jr., the young pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, lived in the house from 1954 to 1960. His wife, Coretta, and baby daughter, Yolanda, were home at the time of the bombing.

"Welcome to where the Kings lived, loved and sacrificed to make the world a better place," said Ms. Cherry with a contagious smile and deep passion.

With each step through the 98-year-old house she offers a story — from the bedroom where little Yolanda was sleeping on the night of the dreadful violence, to the dining room where the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) was formed, to the pastor's study where numerous planning meetings were held during the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

"I'm a direct beneficiary of what was done here," said Ms. Cherry, who returned to her native Alabama after retirement as a teacher and librarian in a Rhode Island school system where she was the only minority. Though tempted to continue living on the peaceful New England coast, she was drawn to Montgomery by a desire to help tell this important episode in the struggle for human rights.

And she tells the story well. The phone in the hallway, she explained, is where a young pastor's wife and mother received 30-40 calls a day threatening the lives of her family.

She noted how Dr. King's concern for the poor was not rooted in his own daily experiences with public transportation.

"He didn't even ride the buses," she explained, "but he cared about the people who did."

The home study was added in 1956 so that King could spend more time near his family, said Ms. Cherry, who is collecting books with publishing dates before 1960 to refill the shelves.

By design, the kitchen is the last stop on the tour of the Parsonage Museum. For effect, Ms. Cherry does not turn on the lights.

With great passion she tells of the night that Dr. King, just 27 years old, was so

gripped by fear that he couldn't sleep.

Sitting at the kitchen table with a cup of coffee, he wrestled with God into the night. Many consider it to be the major turning point in the civil rights movement, she said.

Dr. King confessed to God that he was losing his courage, she continued. Earlier he had shared with his pastor friend Ralph David Abernathy that "fears are creeping upon my soul."

Yet at a late hour and while alone in that kitchen, God removed the fears in what Ms. Cherry called "a defining moment." It was an epiphany that enabled this young pastor to become the drum major for peace and justice, and to lead a movement that would change a nation and yet cost him his life.

"All of the fears left him," said Ms. Cherry of that prayerful night. "He just wanted to be obedient to God's commands."

Not only does Shirley Cherry tell the story well, but she also lives with gratitude for how the faithfulness of one can make life better for others today.

"It's all about living the legacy," said the retired educator who keeps on teaching. **BT**



'Living the legacy'
Retired educator Shirley Cherry gives informative and inspiring tours of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church parsonage where young pastor Martin Luther King Jr. found the courage to lead the civil rights movement despite constant threats and a bombing of his home.



VISITING DEXTER AVENUE

Information on group tours of the historic Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church and the Parsonage Museum is available at www.dexterkingmemorial.org or by calling (334) 263-3970.

"We like to begin the tours every hour on the hour," said tour manager Miriam Norris at the church, noting that tours are not conducted on Sundays and Mondays.

Weekday tours begin at the top of the hour — except for noon — from 10 a.m. until 3 p.m. The last Saturday tour starts at 1 p.m.

Admission to either the church tour, which lasts approximately 45 minutes, or the Parsonage Museum at 309 South Jackson Street is \$5. A combination ticket is \$7.

Parsonage Museum hours are 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. Tuesday through Friday and 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. on Saturday. The adjacent Interpretive Center features a gift shop and orientation room for viewing videos and holding discussions on the King family as well as church and community life.

Unpublished photographs of the Kings, Dexter members, civic/business leaders and Montgomery ministers active in the bus boycott are on display along with accounts of the bombing of the parsonage and other significant events.

Visitors can also take advantage of the King-Johns Garden for Reflection, located behind the Dexter Parsonage Museum.

Designed with a circular walkway to symbolize unity, the quiet space allows for reflection upon the themes of equality, forgiveness, hope, peace, understanding and unity.

Those themes were taught to the Dexter church family and larger community by pastors Vernon Johns (1947-1952) and Martin Luther King Jr. (1954-1960) for whom the garden is named.



The Dexter Avenue King Memorial Legacy Center, which opened in December 2008, provides office, educational and fellowship space for the congregation that still worships in the adjacent historic sanctuary.

➤ Continued from page 4

The foundation was set up to focus on preservation — including conducting tours of the historic church and parsonage bombed in 1956 — while the congregation concentrates its full attention on worship, education and other spiritual matters.

Thurman, a graduate of Morehouse College and New Orleans Baptist Seminary, said both are important endeavors that deserve significant, yet separate attention:

"How do you preserve and protect these buildings so others will be empowered by their stories? And how do we keep the church focused on what it needs to be doing?"

The opening of the adjacent Dexter Avenue King Memorial Legacy Center in December 2008 was a major step in that direction. The modern facility provides office, education and fellowship space for the congregation — with only Sunday worship occurring in the historic sanctuary building.

Thurman, who is still moving some books and other belongings from the old building to the new, is pleased with the arrangement after many years of sitting behind the desk that his famous predecessor once used. No longer will tourists open his office door for a peek. The Dexter pastor's study used by King — and, until recently, by Thurman — is now part of the church tour.

The historic Dexter Avenue church and restored parsonage have National Historic Landmark designations. The foundation board hopes to raise approximately \$1 million to restore the lower level of the church basement that includes the pastor's study and

the fellowship area where the Montgomery Bus Boycott was planned.

"We're on the cusp of being a World Heritage Site," said Thurman of Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church along with two Birmingham churches with significant ties to the civil rights struggle: Sixteenth Street Baptist Church where a racially-motivated bombing killed four young girls and Bethel Baptist Church where pastor Fred Shuttlesworth, a strong civil rights activist, served.

Both the Dexter sanctuary building and the parsonage, still owned by the church, were leased to the foundation.

"We restored the parsonage to look like it did during Dr. King's tenure," said Thurman of the home on South Jackson Street in Montgomery, about seven blocks from the church.

Miriam Norris, who grew up in and was baptized at Dexter Avenue, manages tours of the historic church building.

"Mostly I find people have a good sense of what happened here," said Norris of the visitors coming to tour the church. "I think people want to have me fill in the gaps in the story. I pass along what I've learned."

The church's past and present still intersect, said Thurman, when visitors "can come any Sunday from all over the world." But then, that is a ministry opportunity as well.

Thurman said the historical significance is a blessing to the congregation as long as it helps rather than hinders the most important task: "trying to reach a new generation of congregants. That's the challenge." **BT**

editorial

Effective communication depends on awareness of audience

By John Pierce

In one of my favorite seminary classes, titled “Cross-cultural communication of the Gospel,” Professor George W. Braswell Jr. taught us the importance of knowing the audiences to which we speak. It is a lesson that has paid dividends for me in all kinds of settings for more than three decades.

In fact, I often encourage aspiring writers to focus on connecting with readers rather than trying to appear brilliant. It is possible to write intelligently yet in a conversational way that is understood by a wider range of readers.

This same principle and practice applies to preachers and Bible study teachers. And how a congregation communicates its identity and mission outwardly is of vital importance.

Sociologists, Dr. Braswell explained, refer to “speech communities” as those cultural subgroups that share a common language and understanding. The application, however, is broader than crossing borders where native tongues and daily practices differ from our own.

There are countless “speech communities” within and without the church. We Baptists speak a language of our own. Yet we have multiple speech communities within a larger speech community that knows words and concepts such as baptism by immersion, the Lord’s Supper and dinner on the grounds.

Within some Baptist circles we can even use initials like SBC, CBF, ABC and BWA without any failure to communicate. Try that outside of the subgroup and look for glazed-over eyes from a lack of comprehension.

The language we employ must be determined by a keen awareness of the group being addressed. In other words, we should constantly be asking ourselves: Who is my audience? How am I being understood?

Churches must be careful to know and to address audiences in ways that are effective. Our language must be understood if the compelling message of the Gospel is to be embraced.

While a guest in my colleague Tony Cartledge’s writing class at Campbell University Divinity School a couple of years ago this subject arose. One student noted that persons writing medical reports in the area were being instructed to write at a sixth-grade level because — as he said — “that’s where the people of Eastern North Carolina are right now.”

In quick response, a wisecracking classmate exclaimed: “We ain’t neither.”



The point is that whether writing or speaking, effective communication largely depends on addressing the audience in ways that result in understanding. Also we must know that the interests of one subgroup should not be assumed for another.

Marketers understand this very well. They target their messages to subgroups that will be most receptive.

That’s why Toyota, Ford and GMC all advertised their pickup trucks within a brief span during the Georgia Bulldogs vs. Tennessee Volunteers football game telecast last fall.

Churches must be careful to know and to address audiences in ways that are effective. Our language must be understood if the compelling message of the Gospel is to

be embraced.

We cannot assume that our listeners hear us clearly — or that the message they receive is the one we intend.

Admittedly, the audiences to which churches speak today are harder to define, given the decline in denominational loyalty and demographic changes in communities that are no longer homogenized. Therefore, how we frame the Gospel message — not in terms of content but expression — is vitally important to getting a fair hearing.

Once while consulting with a vibrant, growing church about the messages it was sending out intentionally and unintentionally, I discovered several places where the communication misfired. Some had to do with inconsistencies and the use of language that could be easily misunderstood — if understood at all — outside the church subgroup.

For example, in working through the church’s printed materials, I noticed that visitors were being asked to mark their marital status as married, single or divorced. In my questioning of such an early invasion of privacy, church leaders spoke of the superb divorce recovery program the congregation offers.

They were so optimistic about the program that the thought of asking a first-time visitor to confess to a failed relationship had not dawned on them. In response, we removed the “divorce” check box and added an announcement of the divorce-recovery program to the list of services provided by the congregation.

So whether choosing to promote a particular program of the church, putting identifying terms into the public area, or explaining the life-changing message of God’s love and forgiveness, there is value in asking how we are likely to be understood. **BT**

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

Avoiding the trap of pastoral burnout

By Joel Snider

When you accepted God's call to ministry, how did you visualize the life you would lead? Did you foresee two hours each day in Bible study and prayer, with the remainder of the day dedicated to visiting individuals who need spiritual advice?

Perhaps your vision of ministry was not that naïve, but you likely envisioned a less complicated day than the one you had yesterday — or the one you are having today. Some ministers are isolated from church members who need to discuss the color of replacement carpet in the sanctuary, but many spend more time than they wish with tasks that have little to do with the gospel.

The ministry is rewarding, but it often contains days filled with tasks unrelated to the life we imagined when we accepted the call.

And then there is the schedule. Frequently, our time is not our own. Deaths and other crises never consult a calendar. Insert a funeral or two into an already crowded agenda and our souls, bodies and minds feel depleted.

Few ministers want to admit it to parishioners, peers or to themselves, but burnout is a genuine possibility in our profession.

What God said to Cain about sin seems true to us about burnout: "Beware, it crouches by the door waiting" (Gen. 4:7). Unless we take precautions, tasks that drain our spiritual energy, along with an impossible schedule, can create a fatigue that will not be solved by a day off or a week's vacation.

How do we recognize burnout? Symptoms include a decreased ability to

focus, emotional disengagement from important relationships and an overall inability to make ourselves do anything. These symptoms affect all areas of our lives, causing us to disengage from even the activities we love and the individuals we care about most.

A friend described it as "not just tired, but sick and tired." If we find ourselves feeling this way, what steps can we take to avoid the trap of burnout and restore the goodness of God's high calling?

We can start by addressing two primary issues. The first is a lack of balance. Too much work — or grinding away at tasks that seem to get us nowhere — decreases our desire to do the work that fulfills our calling.



The second issue is the feeling that we seldom accomplish tasks that move us forward in life or ministry. When we see no progress, it is easy to grow weary of trying.

So let's consider three things we can do to correct these issues.

First, in an effort to correct the imbalance between work and rest, establish a weekly Sabbath. Doing God's work on Sunday is not a Sabbath, so plan a time each week when you will rest.

I used to think that any time away from work was Sabbath, but as I get older, I find myself growing more restrictive in my understanding. Biblically, the chief characteristics of Sabbath are "refrain" and "refresh."

Refrain from work; refrain from tiring activity. Refresh your body and soul. For a weekly Sabbath to be genuinely helpful, it cannot be a time to run errands left over from last week, nor is it a time for a golf game or a tennis match.

Make your Sabbath a time where you

give yourself permission to rest and do nothing. After all, God rested on the seventh day of creation. Do we really think we can get by with less?

Turn off your iPhone and ignore your email. Don't let reading escalate into studying or walking into aerobic exercise. The idea is to rest in order to refresh our spirits.

Outside pressures will surely impinge on your Sabbath time. Get ahead of some of the challenges to your Sabbath by clearly framing your rest time. Instead of calling it your "day off," label it specifically as "Sabbath." Support staff and congregants will have greater respect for the time if you define it in the spiritual terms it deserves.

We cannot control when funerals are scheduled or tragedies take place. Thus, when the inevitable conflicts occur and you cannot take a full day, set aside a few hours for genuine rest.

Try to find at least three to four hours on one day during the week. An intentional three-hour lunch is more rest than no time at all. Reserving even a small amount of time to refrain from work and refresh your soul will feel like victory to a weary spirit.

Second, to address the feeling that you aren't accomplishing much, consider a personal achievement that you long for.

For instance, many ministers want to write, but never do. If not now, when? Start small; decide on an article to write or a sermon to edit.

Maybe it is a physical accomplishment such as running a half marathon or hiking portions of the Appalachian Trail. What about learning another language or reading a major work such as Sandburg's *Lincoln*? Decide on an accomplishment that, when finished, will give you a sense of personal growth.

Finally, determine an objective related to your ministry that you want to accom-

plish. Why not start now to launch a soup kitchen or drama ministry?

What is it that you believe God wants you to lead the church to do, but you never have the time to start? What is it your church needs you to establish if it is going to move forward in its God-given mission?

Perhaps during your Sabbath time, the Spirit will have a chance to direct your thinking toward the larger, needed projects that would move your ministry to a higher plane.

Essentially, I am asking you to set three goals in your effort to avoid burnout. The goals represent balance among rest, personal achievement and professional accomplishment.

A wise man once told me a goal is not a goal until it is written down. We tell church members this is the reason we ask them to fill out a pledge card for the annual stewardship campaign or the capital drive. It is easy to forget a mental goal — or to keep modifying it until it is meaningless.

A written goal becomes a concrete intention. So, write down your goals for a regular Sabbath, a personal achievement and a ministry project you feel compelled to undertake.

Once the goals have been written down, put them on your calendar each week with the conviction that they are among the most important items on your schedule.

My suggestion is to schedule times for these goals early in the week, so that when the unavoidable conflict arises, you have the opportunity to reschedule before the week is over. Establishing specific times for these three goals — and sticking to them — is critical for the balance between the long-term desires of our lives and the demands

placed on us over which we have no control.

As ministers, we can — and must — avoid burnout and restore the goodness of God's high calling. Certainly, a balanced life that progresses toward goals that matter to us is important enough to try these steps.

Start small, but start. If not all three goals at once, try one, and celebrate success. If not today, when? **BT**

—Joel Snider has served as pastor of First Baptist Church of Rome, Ga., for 15 years.

A CAPSULE HISTORY OF BAPTISTS

BRUCE T. GOURLEY

Published by the Baptist History and Heritage Society

\$15.00

Orders:

www.baptisthistory.org

THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF BAPTISTS TODAY

invites you to a celebration of a free press and the presentation of the annual Judson-Rice Award to

MR. CHARLES L. OVERBY

during a noon luncheon on Thursday, April 22, 2010, at Calvary Baptist Church 755 8th Street NW, Washington, D.C.



Mr. Overby, a Baptist layman, is President and CEO of the Freedom Forum and the Diversity Institute, as well as CEO of the interactive Newseum on the Washington Mall.

For luncheon reservations, sponsorships or other information, visit www.baptiststoday.org or call 1-877-752-5658.

Tickets: \$35

Sundays in Plains

'Miss Jan' controls the crowds at Maranatha Baptist Church

PLAINS, Ga. — With its aging storefronts and small train depot, its graceful pecan trees and clipped fields of peanuts, cotton and hay, peace still seems possible in this tiny town.

And nowhere is that peace protected more fiercely than at Maranatha Baptist Church, where former President Jimmy Carter teaches adult Sunday school class two or three Sundays of every month.

Jan Williams, who taught Amy Carter when she was in fourth grade, is the head peacekeeper at the simple country church set in a grove of pecan trees. At 8 a.m. on a Sunday morning, Williams — known universally as “Miss Jan” — steps out the church’s front doors and encounters a line of visitors already forming.

“Are you a member of the Secret Service?” a woman in the line asked, noting the men wearing earpieces who stepped out behind her.

“No, I’m Jan Williams. I’m in charge,” Williams said. “They say I’m too dangerous to carry a loaded gun.”

Even though Carter left office 30 years ago, security remains tight at the church, which is open to anyone who wants to come to Sunday school. But first they have to get past Miss Jan and the Secret Service.

A civilian Marine and a bomb-sniffing dog check each vehicle. Secret Service agents comb the church, sometimes checking each hymnal in the pews. Everyone who comes in, including regular members and Williams herself, is stopped as their pockets and purses are checked with a metal-detecting wand.

Williams was one of the Maranatha members to realize early on that if they were going to continue to enjoy Carter’s Bible-based teaching, and also keep their church open to visitors, there would have to be some rules.

“It was a circus,” Williams said. “People



Jan Williams, who's known as “Miss Jan,” takes a new group of visitors through the protocol of attending former President Jimmy Carter’s Sunday school class at Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, Ga. Photo by Kay Campbell/*The Huntsville Times*.

were standing up to take pictures. They were talking. It was not worship; it was entertainment. We had members going home because there was not room to sit.”

That’s when Williams took charge.

“My church maybe will have the one-time witness to someone who has never had the opportunity to hear the gospel,” Williams said. “For many, it is the first time they have ever been to church or to a Christian service.”

The line moves inside, guided by other members, including Williams’ husband, George, who hands out bulletins. Six visitors are seated on each row in the center section of

pews; portions of the side pews are reserved for members.

Williams walks the conglomeration of visitors from around the world through the steps. She practices how Carter would ask where they were from and orchestrates as each section is called out: China, Korea, Denmark, Brazil, and every state, it seemed, from Alabama to Wyoming.

Williams shows off the mahogany offering plates and the new wooden cross hanging behind the choir loft, both of which Carter turned in his own shop. She walks through the process of staying after church if you want a

picture with the Carters.

“Whatever you do, do not attempt to shake his hand unless he extends his first,” Williams said. “People, he’s 85 years old. How do you think germs are passed?”

Williams pauses in her list, lowering her gaze.

“Do not think that you can leave this church after Sunday school, go on down to Mom’s Kitchen to eat and then attempt to jump back into my picture line after church.”

Also on Miss Jan’s list of rules: “Whatever you do, do not applaud when he walks in or after the lesson,” Williams says. “He hates that. The kind of applause President Carter wants from you is that when you leave here, you will go out and live the Christian life.”

And that, in many ways, is what animates this small rural church. Founded in the 1970s with 29 members who split from Plains Baptist Church, Maranatha never expected to be huge; membership is now at about 130, with about 40 members coming each week.

But as long as Carter’s here — and hopefully, they say, even after that — the church’s outreach will arrive, quite literally, at Maranatha’s front door.

“This is one church that does missions without having to go anywhere,” says pastor Jeffery Summers, 36, who’s led the congregations for five years.

Williams closes her briefing with prayer for the guests and those in the military, and thanks God “for the man who comes to give a lesson to us today.”

Carter, who entered quietly during her prayer, is suddenly standing by the podium at one side, checking his microphone. On cue, he asks, already knowing the answer, “Do we have any visitors?”

Carter braces as cameras are raised in what Miss Jan had said would be the only photo opportunity in the church. Violators would have their cameras confiscated and turned over to the Secret Service.

As the cameras are put away and the Sunday school quarterlies opened, Carter becomes much more comfortable. And he should be: he’s been teaching regularly since he was 18. The text is from the Gospel of Matthew, when Jesus calls Matthew, a despised publican, as his disciple.

“Jesus taught that what is most important is the love — of whom? Of people who are not lovely. Of people who didn’t love him back, necessarily,” Carter says.

“Jesus picked out the scum of the earth as

an example of a person who had the proper relationship with God. He came to show that all people are equal in the eyes of God.”

Carter pauses and looks at the crowd.

“I think that’s a very disturbing lesson. If you’re a Republican, it’s hard to believe that a Democrat is equal,” he says in the only political references he made. “And I know from experience that if you’re a Democrat....”

The chuckles from the congregation complete his sentence.

Carter teaches for about 50 minutes before the organist begins a prelude of lively hymns. “You will sit down and be quiet,” Miss Jan warns, and then moves to the piano for the opening hymns. Carter takes a seat in a side pew with Rosalynn, who is on the list to provide flowers for the sanctuary May 30. A Secret Service agent stands quietly at the end of their pew.

Miss Jan and other members know their church functions as merely a tourist attraction for some guests, but also as a pilgrimage site of sorts for others. Why people come isn’t their problem, she said. Their mission is to do what they can to serve them once the Secret Service lets them in the door.

“People sometimes come looking for one



thing — to see a former president and first lady in person — but when they leave, they leave with so much more,” Williams said after the service. “It is just such a blessing to provide this service to people.” **BT**

—Kay Campbell writes for *The Huntsville Times* in Huntsville, Ala.

People Relating to God

Log on to www.baptistwaypress.org

This 8-lesson study of the Book of Genesis combines two significant and attractive ways of studying Scripture—studying a book of the Bible and studying the people in the book of the Bible.

Estudios disponibles en inglés y español

Call 1.866.249.1799 to order or for a FREE sample today!



BAPTISTWAYPRESS[®]

Baptist General Conference of the U.S.A.

Quotation

“ remarks ”

“I don’t see how I could be president without prayer.”

—Former President George W. Bush, speaking to a Fort Worth Christian School event (AP)

“The greater cause is to stop the unbelievable demands for doctrinal conformity that is causing our Southern Baptist Convention to out Mormon the Mormons and out Jehovah Witness the Jehovah Witnesses.”

—Wade Burleson on why he made public another Southern Baptist pastor’s email to seminary administrators questioning the employment of professors who don’t affirm “storehouse tithing” (BaptistLife.com)

“To decline to grapple head-on with the role of religion in a liberal-arts education, even as debates over faith and reason rage on blogs, and as publishers churn out books defending and attacking religious belief, is at best timid and at worst self-defeating.”

—Writer Lisa Miller on the near absence of religious studies in Harvard University’s undergraduate program (Newsweek)

“To make that argument work, you would have to argue that the phrase is not an accurate summation of the First Amendment. And Thomas Jefferson, who penned it, thought it was.”

—Randall Balmer of Barnard College, on political activist David Barton using the fact that the phrase ‘separation of church and state’ is not in the Constitution to support his case that founders intended for America to be a Christian nation (New York Times)

“A lot of people think seminary is a big Sunday school class, but this is a master’s graduate program and we expect our students to explore a spectrum of ideas and topics.”

—Professor Maisha Handy of the International Theological Center in an Atlanta Journal-Constitution article on theological education in the metro area

“We may disagree about gay marriage, but surely we can agree that it is unconscionable to target gays and lesbians for who they are — whether it’s here in the United States or ... more extremely in odious laws that are being proposed most recently in Uganda.”

—President Obama to the National Prayer Breakfast in February (Reuters)

“You will be greeted by ushers in green jackets — no coincidence there. Worship is funky and fun, and the attire is very casual.”

—Angel Cleary, reporting on a visit to The Masters Worship Center, across the street from the famed Augusta National Golf Club (Metro Spirit)

“We are confident that given the opportunity and given the avenue to move resources, our people will respond.”

—David Emmanuel Goatley, executive secretary-treasurer of the Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Convention, on a \$50 million pledge from historic African-American Baptist Mission groups to rebuild Haiti after the January earthquake (Chicago Tribune)

“Jesus didn’t go up the ladder of success. He went down... Real life is in that descending.”

—92-year-old Gordon Crosby, retired pastor of Church of the Savior in Washington, D.C. (Christian Century)

“The challenge before us is to marginalize religious extremists, not religion.”

—The conclusion of a two-year study on engaging religious communities abroad by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs (CNN)

“Government understanding religion is good. Government attempting to use religion is problematic beyond measure.”

—Baptist minister C. Welton Gaddy of the Interfaith Alliance, urging “special care” when U.S. foreign policy involves religious concerns (ABP)

“Ken Starr is a human being and therefore more complex than his advocates’ and detractors’ litanies. So, he most likely will be neither the super-hero for which his fans long, nor the evil villain his foes fear.”

—Baptist Standard editor Marv Knox on the former special prosecutor’s election as Baylor University president effective June 1

“Our younger people are more influenced by the Christianity they encounter in Christian bookstores and by generic Protestant pop culture than they are by their denominational identity.”

—Presbyterian pastor Adam J. Copeland, writing in Christian Century

For churches, how much risk is too much?

By G. Jeffrey MacDonald
Religion News Service

For Travis Hutchinson, the life of a pastor in a small-town Georgia church is about preaching the gospel, ministering to the needy and, increasingly, figuring out how to handle an ever-growing list of risks.

Some new risks are real and demand vigilance, says Hutchinson, pastor of Highlands Presbyterian Church in LaFayette, Ga. For example, conducting a criminal background check on everyone who works with children has become a necessity.

Other risks are more remote, he says. Still, vendors stoke anxiety about everything from shooting sprees to federal audits.

"I get lots and lots of stuff that just seems like fear mongering, and apparently that's taken hold in some places," says Hutchinson. "One of the things we have to do as a congregation is ask ourselves: How much of our time is (risk management) eating up? And how much time are we spending doing what God wants us to do?"

In the wake of the Catholic Church's clergy sexual abuse crises and several church shooting incidents in recent years, risk has become a hot topic for churches. The National Association of Church Business Administration last year convened 30 first-time regional workshops to raise risk awareness among the 85 percent of churches it says are vulnerable because they don't have a professional administrator.

"Risk management is a huge issue in the church right now," says NACBA Deputy Chief Executive Officer Phillip Martin. "It carries everything from child protection issues ... to the issue of security as it relates to guns, protection of pastors, staff and congregants."

This year, GuideOne Insurance is responding to rising demand from churches by rolling out new types of coverage, such as insurance against income loss caused by a church intruder. In March, church leaders descended on Richardson, Texas, and Grove City, Ohio, for conferences on church security.

For some church leaders, raising risk awareness and taking steps to prevent disasters is a matter of faithfulness. Tom Danklefsen, executive pastor of Grove City

"The question being lost in today's risk management is: what are we willing to lose for the sake of the gospel?"

United Methodist Church in Grove City, Ohio, coaches pastors of small and mid-sized churches on a range of risk issues, from protecting a church's tax-exempt status to thwarting the efforts of pickpockets during worship services.

"We're managing God's resources, and we want to do that well," Danklefsen says. "We have to do due diligence. (Using safeguards) frees us to do better ministry. We don't have to worry, 'Well, gosh, is this guy a criminal?' We know the background" because the church does background checks on employees and volunteers who work with children or the elderly.

But some say churches can become so concerned with minimizing risk they forget how to take risks appropriate to Christian discipleship. Theologian Scott Bader-Saye worries, for instance, that churches preoccupied with institutional safety may become unwelcoming toward poor people because embracing them could pose hazards to their bottom lines. Another concern: churches anxious to protect endowment assets may not notice when opportunities for generosity come along.

"We're seeing faithfulness being reduced to good business management," says Bader-Saye, a professor of moral theology at Seminary of the Southwest in Austin, Texas. "There are things more important than being safe. Those things involve loving God, loving neighbor, pursuing the good ... If we teach our children that our fundamental objective is safety and security, then we don't prepare them to take the kind of risks they need to take to be disciples and to have joyful and fulfilling lives."

In the ministry trenches, pastors are sometimes working out principles to help them distinguish between risks to mitigate and risks worth taking. Hutchinson asks: Does taking a particular risk help the church

advance the gospel or not?

Foregoing background checks on long-time Sunday school teachers wouldn't serve a lofty purpose and might in fact lead to shameful tragedies, Hutchinson says. Hence Highlands Presbyterian opts not to take that risk. But the congregation does offer worship space and humanitarian aid to immigrants, whether they're legal citizens or not.

Highland elders have taken heat for such displays of hospitality; one elder had a brick thrown through a window at his home. But they keep taking such risks, Hutchinson says, because they believe sometimes people must suffer for their gospel witness.

"The question being lost in today's risk management is: what are we willing to lose for the sake of the gospel?" Hutchinson said.

In Las Vegas, a nondenominational church known as The Village makes a point of taking risks to show God's love for people in need. For example, rampant drug-related violence in Tijuana, Mexico, didn't deter 25 church members from traveling there in November for a weekend effort to renovate an orphanage.

"The basic model (of church in America) has been: we've got this safe place for you ... we'll look after your teenagers, we'll provide all these programs, (and) you can be kind of insulated from the world around you," says The Village Pastor Barry Diamond. "I think that's the very opposite of what Jesus wants."

Still, risk-taking among Villagers isn't foolhardy, Diamond says, because the church manages its risks to ensure institutional longevity. It has an insurance policy, which Diamond calls a "necessary evil," to cover the organization in the event that someone gets hurt on a Village mission trip, which has happened.

Looking forward, Bader-Saye hopes churches will invest as much effort in discerning which risks are worth taking as they now put into being safe. At present, he observes, that isn't happening often enough.

"Churches haven't asked the more basic question about what kind of risks should we be taking, and what kind of risks should we be resisting?" Bader-Saye says. "It's not in the end a question of taking risks or not taking risks, but recognizing that there are proper risks to take." **BT**

Chaplains keep wary eye on possible repeal of ‘Don’t Ask/Don’t Tell’ policy

By Adelle M. Banks
Religion News Service

WASHINGTON — As Congress and the Pentagon grapple with a proposal to allow gays to serve openly in the military, some chaplains — especially evangelicals — worry the change will infringe on their religious beliefs.

“It’s morally wrong,” said Billy Baugham, executive director of the International Conference of Evangelical Chaplain Endorsers, saying his group believes the Bible condemns homosexuality.

“The implication of that is that the military is going to force military personnel — both Christians and non-Christians — to accept that value.”

Defense Secretary Robert Gates, with the backing of the White House and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the Pentagon will spend a year studying the ramifications of repealing the “Don’t Ask/Don’t Tell” policy, which has been in place since 1993.

In January, even before the change was announced, Baugham’s group huddled with military and legal experts to plan their opposition. The group said the current policy should remain intact so chaplains can “faithfully proclaim the truth presented in God’s Word” and safeguard members of the armed forces from “the unimaginable environment that open homosexual conduct would inflict upon that very close society.”

Paul Vicalvi, a retired Army chaplain who directs the Chaplains Commission for the National Association of Evangelicals, has written to the chief chaplains in the Army, Navy and Air Force, saying the military was “created to serve for the good of our nation and not to be a social experiment or testing ground for society at large.”

Vicalvi said the proposed change is prompting a range of questions, from whether heterosexual chaplains will be mandated to serve in the same pulpit as gay ministers to whether chaplains would be required to permit a gay couple to attend a marriage retreat.

“That will really shut them down,” he said of the retreats. “And we will lose a great gift that the chaplains give to the military in



“Army” by Stacy Braswell

keeping marriages together if this happens.”

Concerned chaplains have already contacted him, he said, looking for guidance.

“A number of them are calling me already and saying, ‘What do we do? Do we resign? Do we have to marry a gay couple?’” he said. “They want direction from us.”

George Miller, chairman of the board of the Evangelical Church Alliance, also wrote to Gates arguing that reversing current policy “will create a constitutional challenge with the free exercise of religion.”

Miller, who also directs his denomination’s Military Chaplain Commission, said chaplains who’ve contacted him say they are “a little bit nervous” and are concerned their ability to preach freely will be restricted.

In a Feb. 17 letter to President Obama and Gates, the conservative Christian law firm Alliance Defense Fund added to the questions: Could chaplains preach against homosexuality, and how would they be required to counsel military members on the subject?

“... (I) f the government chooses to repeal current law and normalize homosexual behavior in the military, chaplains with contrary religious beliefs will be forced to choose ‘to obey God or men,’” the ADF said.

Those concerns, however, are not universally shared.

John Gundlach, who oversees government chaplaincies for the United Church of Christ,

joined two other retired military chaplains in a letter to Obama and Gates to rebut the swirl of “false conflicts and innuendos.”

The three men also wrote an eight-page document called “What the Military Would Look Like Without ‘Don’t Ask/Don’t Tell.’” It says chaplains can’t perform duties that violate the teachings of their faith but are “duty bound” to assist military members with referrals for requested services.

“I think there’s been a lot of jousting at straw men,” Gundlach said. “I think there’s still going to be plenty of room to provide ministries according to our own faith groups. So far, (gay) marriage is not legitimate because of public laws in most places.”

But Gundlach, who comes from one of the country’s most gay-friendly denominations, said even UCC chaplains are divided over whether the law should be rescinded.

“I know that our chaplains run the spectrum on this, too,” said Gundlach, a retired Navy chaplain. “We are an open and affirming denomination but, within that, we can’t speak with one voice for everybody.”

Vicalvi, of the NAE’s Chaplains Commission, said evangelicals’ opposition to the change is not a reflection of homophobia but rather their belief that “homosexuality is a sin just like every other sin.”

“We are not against homosexual people.” **BT**

Green to the end

Eco-friendly burials gaining popularity

MAHWAH, N.J. — In a world that is increasingly renewable, recyclable and energy-efficient, many Americans already spend much of their lives in an eco-friendly environment.

Now they can go into eternity in that way, too.

When Paul Magalhaes Sr. was considering burial plans last October, he settled on a new “eco option” at Maryrest Cemetery in Mahwah, N.J.

After his death on Jan. 7 at age 78, Magalhaes was interred in Maryrest — the first person to be “ecologically buried” in one of the country’s first Catholic cemeteries with an environmentally sensitive section.

“My father always loved nature,” said his son, Paul Magalhaes Jr. “He was the kind of guy, if there was an ant crawling, he’d say, ‘Don’t step on it; it has a purpose.’”

People in the funeral industry say more Christians are embracing the idea of burial in cemeteries striving to contain their own carbon footprint.

This new movement has parallels to traditional Jewish and Muslim burial customs and is broadly in keeping with Catholic teachings — as well as recent papal pronouncements — on the importance of environmental protection.

At Maryrest, which is run by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Newark, only certain types of caskets, embalming and grave markers are permitted in the new eco-section, the goal being to limit environmental damage.

Nationwide, dozens of cemeteries advertise green practices as a way of countering modern burial practices that many now see as ecologically unsustainable. Church officials say they expect baby boomers to increasingly opt for it.

“The church is trying to be green,” said Andrew Schafer, executive director of Catholic cemeteries for the Newark Archdiocese.

“Being a boomer myself,” he added, “we grew up going to recycling centers on weekends, we learned in grammar school

This new movement has parallels to traditional Jewish and Muslim burial customs and is broadly in keeping with Catholic teachings.

about protecting the environment, and Earth Day came about as we were kids. We are a generation of people who have been constantly exposed to protecting the world and the environment. ... As this group ages, I think they will seriously consider this.”

Typical practices in sections of these cemeteries include:

- Bans on chemical embalming, to leave the body in a natural state, and out of concern that chemicals contaminate groundwater.
- Prohibiting coffins of metal or rare woods in favor of coffins constructed using more easily reproducible woods or wicker that decompose relatively quickly; or burying bodies in just a shroud.
- Forbidding tall, cut headstones, which require costly fueled transport, in favor of smaller markers.
- Banning herbicides and pesticides for lawn care; and banning gas-powered mowers, to save fuel.
- Banning the concrete vaults used to hold coffins at most American cemeteries.

“This is the way it was 100 years ago,” said Robert Prout, a funeral director in Verona, N.J., who promotes green burial techniques at funeral directors’ conferences around the country. “This is the way it was for thousands of years. Wrapping a body in a shroud without a casket is still done in many parts of the world.”

There are probably a few dozen cemeteries in the United States that allow only green burials, and dozens more have specified green sections like the one at Maryrest, according to industry observers.

The term “green burial” is hard to define and has been criticized as overly vague. A national Green Burial Council, established in 2005, certifies just 20 U.S. cemeteries as meeting its green standards.

Other cemeteries advertising natural burials have not sought certification.

The term can include cremations, when ashes are poured into a hole in the ground or buried in a biodegradable urn. About 30 percent of Americans are cremated, a figure that has risen in recent decades.

Concerns over the release of carbon dioxide and mercury into the air have somewhat damaged the green image that cremation held among many environmentalists, but high-tech air-filtration systems for crematories are expected to become more common.

The section at Maryrest will have several “shades” of green, Schafer said. The darkest shade, for the real purists, will allow neither caskets nor embalming — not even embalming with natural products. People will be buried in shrouds. The middle shade will allow the wood or wicker caskets but no embalming. The lightest shade, expected to be the most populated, will allow wood or wicker caskets and embalming with natural products.

The green section, consisting of two acres of sloping grassland, is a small part of the 70-acre cemetery, which has 27,000 other bodies buried under manicured lawns. The green section, when completed later this year, will have a more natural look, with plantings, shrubs and wildflowers meant to attract birds and butterflies.

Magalhaes Sr. was buried Jan. 11 in a wicker casket after being embalmed in natural products.

“Our thought was a regular cemetery is kind of sad,” his son said. “You go there and they’re all the same. You have tombstones lined up next to each other like soldiers. You go in and people are grieving.

“... We thought this was a much more happier setting. Instead of going there and grieving, we thought we’d go there and think of the better times.” **BT**

—Jeff Diamant writes for
The Star-Ledger in Newark, N.J.

commentary

Great Commission sermonizing may be hard sell

By Tony W. Cartledge

A “Great Commission Resurgence” task force appointed to recommend ways to revitalize the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) made a progress report to the SBC’s executive committee in February.

The 22-page report, presented primarily by task force chair Ronnie Floyd of Springdale, Ark., began with almost three pages of pleasantries, followed by a nine-page sermon based on Joel 2:12-17, a memorable call for abject repentance, which Floyd used as a challenge for all-out evangelism. Floyd outlined six recommendations from the task force, which he called “components of this vision we are asking Southern Baptists to champion for the future.”

The first recommendation calls Southern Baptists to “rally towards a clear and compelling missional vision and begin to conduct ourselves with core values that will create a new and healthy culture within the Southern Baptist Convention.” The missional vision churches should adopt, Floyd said, should be “As a convention of churches, our missional vision is to present the Gospel of Jesus Christ to every person in the world and to make disciples of all the nations.”

It is interesting that some SBC leaders have now embraced the term “missional,” which the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) has been using for years. While CBF and other self-designated “missional” Christians define the term as a holistic call for churches to live and minister to all as Jesus did, the GCR task force defines it in terms of evangelism alone. Yet, whether “missional” is defined as holistic ministry or propositional evangelism, it is easier said than done, and certainly can’t be implemented by decree.

The second recommendation calls for the North American Mission Board, which has been plagued by scandal and in disarray for more than a decade, to be “reinvented and released” to focus on planting churches and evangelizing North America. Such efforts would require a wholesale reorganiza-

tion of NAMB, along with a major disentangling of NAMB and the state Baptist conventions.

Floyd noted that two-thirds of the Cooperative Program funds received by NAMB are spent in the Bible belt, much of it in kickbacks to the state conventions, where many staff members are dually employed by NAMB and the state convention. The recommendation is that NAMB be released from those financial obligations so that it can redirect most of its funding to “the lost and dark areas of America.”

Look for considerable push-back as state Baptist conventions in the South — many already cash-strapped while being leaned on to send ever more money to the SBC — would see fewer of their Cooperative Program dollars coming back to their state. They would be faced with assuming full funding of staff or with eliminating positions.

Look for resistance from NAMB, as well. The recommendation calls for the organization to become decentralized from its large office complex north of Atlanta, and to set up seven regional offices with smaller staffs whose primary focus would be to “serve and mobilize churches to plant churches.”

The third recommendation could lead to friction as it calls for the International Mission Board (IMB) to cross over into NAMB territory by appointing missionaries to people groups who originated overseas but now have a substantial presence, through immigration, in North America. (In a related move, the sixth recommendation calls for IMB funding to go from 50 to 51 percent of the Cooperative Program pie, a symbolic indication that reaching the world should be the SBC’s first priority.)

Recommendation four frees up money for the IMB increase by reassigning the tasks

of Cooperative Program promotion and stewardship education from the SBC’s executive committee to the state conventions. Note, however, that the state conventions are being asked to be the prime promoters of an SBC budget that will be flipping fewer dollars back to the states, so the move could easily backfire.

The fifth recommendation promotes a historic change in describing the traditional Cooperative Program as “our central means of supporting Great Commission ministries,” yet urging Southern Baptists to “celebrate” designated contributions to convention agencies, state conventions and associations as “Great Commission Giving.” This move would minimize criticism of influential SBC leaders whose churches give a paltry percentage through the Cooperative Program while making larger designated gifts to specific projects through the IMB or other agencies.

Shifting bragging rights from “Cooperative Program Giving” to “Great Commission Giving” could allow for some new leaders to emerge, but also lead to a serious decline in traditional Cooperative Program giving — which has been the gold standard of SBC faithfulness.

The bottom line? The rationale behind the recommended changes is understandable, but the reality of implementation could prove daunting. Describing the current culture of the SBC as being more like 1 Corinthians 3 (which was directed to immature, quarreling Christians) than 1 Corinthians 13 (a paean to unselfish love), Floyd said: “Envy, strife, and division needs to become unacceptable.”

Given the major structural shifts, blurring boundaries and financial redirection called for in the task force’s preachy-toned report, the outcome is likely to be more strife and division in the SBC, not less. When the response to their report proves to be underwhelming, perhaps the task force can take comfort in remembering that Joel didn’t get much of a hearing either. **BT**



guest commentary

Three reasons to abolish the death penalty

By Fisher Humphreys

On the death penalty, as on so many issues, Will D. Campbell has been out in front of many of us. Perhaps you have heard the story about a debate he had on this subject.

His opponent made a case for capital punishment that was reasoned, balanced and thorough. The moderator of the debate then turned to Campbell and said, "Mr. Campbell, why are you opposed to the death penalty?" He replied, "It's tacky."

You can never top Campbell, but my answer to the moderator's question would be almost as brief as his. I would say, "I oppose the death penalty because Jesus said, 'Blessed are the merciful.'"

I believe Jesus meant what he said, and I want my nation and my state to be blessed. Refusing to execute people who deserve to die is an act of mercy and so is blessed.

For me, Jesus' teaching is a sufficient reason to support the abolition of the death penalty, but I realize this isn't a sufficient reason for everyone, so I'll mention two others.

One is that apparently it is impossible to administer capital punishment in a way that is just. For example, since 1973, 139 people have been released from death row after having provided evidence of their innocence. It is unjust to imprison someone who is innocent but at least, when that is done, it is possible to offer the person an apology and some compensation, which obviously isn't the case with those whom we execute.

Another example of injustice concerns economics and race. People who are poor or non-white are more likely to be sentenced to death than people with financial resources or who are white. People who are poor cannot afford the most effective attorneys, and people who are non-white are at a disadvantage both in the selection of juries and at sentencing.

I am not alone in thinking it is impossible to execute justly. The American Law Institute (ALI) comprises more than 4,000 law professors, judges and lawyers.

In 1962, the ALI created a "model statute" to help states achieve some

consistency in their death penalty laws, and in 1976 the Supreme Court largely adopted the ALI's framework when it re-instituted capital punishment after a decade without executions. But last year the ALI pronounced its own project a failure and abandoned it.

Recently, Michael Traynor, president emeritus of ALI, wrote in the *Los Angeles Times*: "It is impossible to administer the death penalty consistently and fairly, and it therefore should not remain a punishment option in this country. The institute could no longer play a role in legitimizing a failed system. How much longer can any of us?"



How long, indeed?

Another reason I'm against the death penalty is that it's expensive. Many people assume that it's cheaper to execute criminals than it is to keep them in prison, but that's wildly inaccurate.

For a variety of reasons, keeping people on death row is much more expensive than keeping them in the general prison population. Death row inmates must be kept in special cells and guarded by special guards, and they must be provided special arrangements for dining, exercising, showering and medical care.

The greatest costs are legal. Death row inmates must be provided special legal counsel because some appeals for death-row inmates are automatic. Usually death-row inmates are effectively given a second trial (in which they are no longer presumed to be innocent), and of course the government must pay its own attorneys to prosecute these appeals cases.

According to the Death Penalty Information Center, California spends in excess of \$100 million a year more to keep people on death row than it would have to spend to keep the same prisoners in the general prison population. Florida spends \$51 million a year more to keep people on death

row than it would spend to imprison its death-row inmates for life.

The federal government and the 35 states that still have capital punishment could save themselves a lot of real taxpayer money just by commuting all death penalty sentences to life sentences.

In summary, I am against the death penalty because it is unjust and a waste of taxpayer money, but mostly because Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful." **BT**

—Fisher Humphreys is a retired professor of divinity at Samford University's Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Ala. This column is used by permission from ethicsdaily.com where it first appeared.

I want to subscribe today

Please fill out this form and return it to *Baptists Today*, P.O. Box 6318, Macon, GA 31208-6318, or call 1-877-752-5658.

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

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

Zip _____

Phone (_____) _____

Email _____

Church _____

print subscription

1 year \$20; 2 years \$35

online subscription

1 year \$15; 2 years \$25

BAPTISTS
Today



What is the argument?

Reframing the question can help congregations define identity

By David L. Odom

What do people care deeply about? What is the argument where you live? I am particularly interested in the arguments that extend over a long period of time.

For the 15 years that I lived in Lexington, N.C., when folks surprised us at dinner time we would run over to Kerley's and get a couple of pounds of chopped barbecue, slaw and rolls. Barbecue is pork, slow cooked over a wood fire and served with a vinegar dipping sauce.

All the restaurants in Lexington are part of a bloodline of cooks. You might find ribs or a hamburger on the menu, but a plate or a tray is barbecue. The rest of the menu is for the outsiders. If we want to start a donnybrook, just call barbecue a method of cooking on a grill and see what happens.

Today, I live in Durham, N.C. The argument here is between shades of blue. When designing a logo, I learned to listen to the expert communicators who said, "That shade of blue is too light."

Duke University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill are eight miles apart. The parties in this argument live among each other.

Congregations have their version of arguments that form identity, provoke reaction and create loyalty. The subject can be style of worship or music, a particular mission experience, or including/excluding certain people.

Identifying the argument is tricky. Sometimes a heated discussion disguises a deeper and more important argument. Sometimes an argument is silly. The discernment comes in figuring out what is at stake in an argument and for whom.

Some discussions go to the heart of the gospel and are not matters of personal opinion, but rather expose the purpose of our life together. Other arguments involve positions that are hardened by self-interest.

We can become so combative about the particulars of an argument that we lose sight of what is at stake.

In the later chapters of Acts, Paul comes back to Jerusalem and under the instruction of James he begins a purification rite in order to prove to the Jews that he is faithful to God's law. Before the ritual is complete, a group of Jews recognize Paul and try to kill him. When the Romans charge in to break up the fight, Paul is arrested.

Before he leaves, Paul addresses the crowd and shares his testimony of conversion and his calling to serve Gentiles. His comments enrage the crowd. They believe Paul is dishonoring the faith by bringing Gentiles to the Jewish God directly and ignoring the law.

When brought by the Romans before the council of Jewish leaders, Paul shifts the emphasis to an old argument about "resurrection." Pharisees believe in it; Sadducees do not.

Paul sees representatives of each side before him — and shifts the focus from himself to the group. However, he also shifts the discussion away from Gentiles, who are not represented on the Council. Having an argument over people and perspectives that are not in the room is not productive.

The shift also focuses on a core element of Jesus' story: death, burial and resurrection. Everyone in the discussion has a stake in the discussion.

What would it look like in your congregation to make a shift like Paul made? What tension or argument is happening in your church? Who has something at stake in the discussion? What is at stake? What scripture story or theological conviction is at the heart of the argument?



Underneath important arguments is often a question. For Paul the question might have been, "What is life with God?"

Arguments that extend over time point to the traditions that animate the life of a congregation. These traditions provide life for ministry and are a source of inspiration in meeting new challenges that communities face. When leaders are able to describe the argument, they can reframe the conversation in a way that helps the community talk to each other in new ways.

When such a reframing occurs, the community is able to make progress on the issues. They are able to minister in new ways that both honor the tradition and reflect the changing landscape.

When Rowan Williams was selected Archbishop of Canterbury, the Church of England had been planting new churches for about 20 years and the energy was waning. There was an old argument about whether to focus on planting new churches or to revitalize an established one.

Williams said the real issue had to do with fresh expressions of the church. The new ministries needed to reach and involve people in God's work were both expressions of traditional and new churches.

The work required a "mixed economy." Williams reframed the argument and empowered the Fresh Expressions movement in a way that caught the imagination of other denominations, who now work together on this vision of the Church.

May our arguments become the fuel for clearer visions of God's reign. **BT**

(Editor's note: David Odom is executive director of Leadership Education at Duke Divinity School in Durham, N.C. This column is based on a presentation at the Church Works conference in Nashville, sponsored by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, in February.)

2010 Bible Studies

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

May 2, 2010

Praise God for salvation

1 Peter 1:1-12

It's tough enough following Jesus in summertime, when the fish are jumpin' and the cotton is high. Doing it under pressure, especially the high-tension intimidation of official persecution, calls forth all the grace and strength Christians can muster. Our lessons this month from 1 Peter offer a glimpse into the big fisherman's psyche and soul as he counsels the churches under his charge during what surely must have seemed like the last days.

If we accept the traditional view that 1 Peter was actually written from Rome by Simon Peter prior to his death in A.D. 64, it makes sense to conclude from the letter itself that Peter's purpose was to instruct and encourage Christians in Asia Minor as they faced religious persecution by the Roman emperor cult. He sums up his intention at the end of the epistle: "I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!" (5:12). His exhortation to courage should not be lost on us in this era of capitulative Christianity.

Today's entire passage is a paean to God's free gift of salvation in Christ, marked by the great apostolic doxology: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!" (1:3). But oh, the competing interpretations and dueling passions ignited by Peter's designation of his audience as those "chosen according to the foreknowledge of God" (1:1b-2). Bible teachers must tread carefully here, avoiding what Wayne Jackson calls "the confusing fog of sectarian dogma" ("1 Peter 1:2 – Foreknowledge," ChristianCourier.com).

Some believers, heirs to the Reformed tradition known as Calvinism, lean toward translative interpretations that render the Greek word *prognosin* ("foreknowledge") in verse 2 as "destined" or "predestined." They cite this introductory passage as evidence that the

sovereign God, before the creation of the world, selected some to be saved and some to be damned, regardless of their response to the gospel.

These advocates of the "doctrines of grace" have a lot to teach us about the value of an emphasis on God's sovereignty in offering salvation as a free gift of grace, not of works. Yet I find the identification of foreknowledge with a rigid divine predetermination difficult to square with the constant apostolic call to believe, confess, and obey and the clear gospel mandate to win the lost. Paul helps us get the sequence right in his letter to the Ephesians: "In him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation — having also believed, you were sealed in him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:13-14).

Here's what I think Peter means. Since God knew all along that God's children would sin and fall short of God's glory, God provided a way back for fallen creatures. God came to us in Christ, offering a new birth to a living hope by Christ's resurrection from the dead (1:3). The "way back" is the way of Jesus Christ. We who are "in Christ" are saved "by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with his blood" (1:2b). And our salvation is secure! We have "an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for us, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1:4-5).

I like Wayne Jackson's summation: "Election is the way we affirm our belief in God's redemptive plan, Christ's sacrificial death, the Holy Spirit's revelation of the truth, and our obedience to the same." Election, in other words, is a way to understand God's extension, in Jesus Christ, of the possibility of salvation to everyone. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever

LESSONS FOR:
Sunday, May 2-30,
2010



Written by John H. Hewett, president/CEO of Hewett Consulting in Charlotte, N.C., and senior minister of First Baptist Church in Monroe, N.C.

believes in him will not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Salvation, for Peter, is not a transaction in which we are passively uninvolved; no, we "obtain [it] as the outcome of our faith" (1:9).

First Peter is clearly a letter written to believers under stress. Four times in this brief epistle Peter mentions current or impending persecution (1:6-7; 3:16-17; 4:12-19; 5:9). He exhorts believers to rejoice in spite of being "distressed by various trials" and "tested by fire" (1:6-7). Their hope is in Christ, who is coming again to vindicate their faith and reward their courage for standing firm.

Be careful with the last three verses of today's passage. It is true that the early Christians saw in Jesus Christ the fulfillment of all the hopes of the prophetic movement, and probably inevitable that their leaders would read back into the Hebrew Scriptures multiple predictions of the life and ministry of Jesus. But we do violence to the Hebrew texts when we ignore their own context, yank them hundreds of years into the future and read them as exclusive witnesses to Christ. Not every reference to wood prefigures the Cross; not every mention of blood is about Christ's blood. When Peter writes, "they were not serving themselves, but you," he's reminding us of the prophets' own longing for messianic fulfillment that, he affirms, found its perfect completion in the person and work of Jesus. To which we can all add a hearty "Amen."

May 9, 2010

Live like a believer

1 Peter 1:21-2:10

I love this epistle for the way it has enriched the language of the worshipping church. So many times I've stood before people of faith and reminded them (and myself): "Once you were no people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have" (2:10) or called them to the memory of that



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



day God reached into our darkness and brought us dripping, squinting and trembling into God's marvelous light (2:9). For the richness and beauty of this language we have Silvanus (Silas), Peter's *amanuensis* (scribe), to thank (5:12); he set Peter's rough-hewn Galilean Aramaic into glorious, polished Greek. The language of 1 Peter soars. It sings — a testimony to the value of a good editor.

In this holy season of Eastertide we do well to notice how much of Peter's instruction is rooted in Easter faith, echoing Paul's own affirmation that Jesus was "designated son of God with power *by his resurrection from the dead*" (Rom. 1:4). Twice in the opening chapter Peter cites the resurrection as the foundation of Christ's saving work:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope *through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*" (1:3).

"For he ... has appeared in these last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who *raised him from the dead and gave him glory*, so that your faith and hope are in God" (1:20-21).

Without the resurrection, Peter is convinced, he'd have nothing to preach. Remember his sermon that morning at Pentecost?

"Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through him in your midst, just as you yourselves know — this man ... you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put him to death. *But God raised him up again*, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for him to be held in its power (Acts 2:22-24). It was a theme to which Peter would return again and again:

"The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life, the one *whom God raised from the dead*, a fact to which we are witnesses" (Acts 3:13-15).

"Let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, *whom God raised from the dead* — by this name this man stands here before you in good health" (Acts 4:10).

"*The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging him on a cross*" (Acts 5:30).

They also put him to death by hanging him on a cross. God raised him up on the third day and granted that he become visible, not to all the people, but ... to us who ate and drank with him after *he arose from the dead*" (10:39-41).

Today's lesson illustrates the strong ethical dimension of Peter's preaching. Some believe this passage actually introduces a "training manual" for new Christians. Peter calls believers to life in a beloved community characterized by obedience and love, empowered by Easter faith and guided by the living Word of God.

Peter employs two vibrant metaphors to describe this beloved community. First, and with no hint of condescension, he compares believers to newborn infants, pure and undefiled, longing for "the pure milk of the word" (2:2). Whereas Paul refers to baby Christians in less-than-flattering terms (1 Cor. 3:1-2), Peter uses the image positively, affirming the way little ones are eager to be fed, and repeatedly. Just as babies grow strong by feeding on the right food, Christians are to "grow in respect to salvation" (2:2).

Second, the believers are to be a house constructed of "living stones," building blocks of a spiritual temple, fulfilling the prophetic longing of Isaiah that God would lay in Zion a cornerstone for the foundation of Israel's faith (Isa. 28:16). They are not merely individual believers; God is forming them into a community of faith, a house of prayer.

Peter concludes with a rhapsody of praise for what this community is becoming, quoting freely from the Hebrew Scriptures. "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession" (2:9). No word here of a "personal" Savior, as though Jesus had been apportioned to each one individually ... They weren't singing "O That Will Be Glory for Me," but "When We All Get to Heaven."

That's the message. The operative pronoun for Christians is always "we."

May 16, 2010

Share your faith

1 Peter 3:13-4:6

This fascinating passage is packed with theological symbolism. From these verses Christians have traditionally found strong support for the practice of Christian apologetics.

Apologetics, from the Greek word *apologia* in verse 15, is the field of Christian theology that aims to set forth a coherent, credible case for Christian beliefs and defend the faith against objections. Peter is writing to Christians under persecution, so the language of defense is completely understandable here. Apologetics is not argumentation *per se*; it is witness under fire, with the hope that the credible gospel might convert unbelievers and transform enemies into friends.

So, when you suffer, suffer like Christians, Peter counsels. Persecution for righteousness' sake is no disgrace; indeed, it is a blessing, an opportunity to imitate the Suffering Servant, Jesus. Christians are to use persecution as an opportunity for preaching the gospel, on the notion that persecutors represent as captive an audience as the one being persecuted.

"But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame" (3:15-16).

Be careful, though. Peter is not talking about people being mean to us at work or fellow Christians treating us shabbily at church. The context here is religious persecution, which not many of us have known. When other people or organizations or institutions come against us because we follow the Lord, this is how we are to behave.

We are to suffer after the example of Jesus, Peter writes, whose death was manifestly unfair and would have been eternally permanent had God not raised him from the dead. God vindicated Jesus, and God will vindicate us when we follow him. This means we do not retaliate when provoked; we do not return evil for evil, but good.

Verse 18 is one of the great statements about the atonement in the New Testament, much beloved by liturgists and hymn writers everywhere. I still remember thumbing through old hymnals as a child, sitting on the piano bench before my feet could reach the pedals and playing P.P. Bliss's beloved gospel song, "Free From the Law, O Happy Condition." The memorable chorus goes like this:

*Once for all, O sinner, receive it
Once for all, O brother, believe it
Cling to the cross, the burden will fall
Christ hath redeemed us once for all.*



Of all the apostles, surely none had a deeper appreciation for what it meant to carry a burden of guilt for sin than Simon Peter. Let's add to the list of memorized scriptures such as John 3:16 and Romans 8:28 this great Christological hymn from 1 Peter 3:18: "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that he might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit." That is enough gospel to save anyone, even a man who had denied the Lord after being given the keys to the kingdom.

Now comes in verse 19 this tantalizingly brief mention of what one of my teachers used to call the Lord's "three-day revival meeting in Hades." Many Christians confess the Apostles Creed each Lord's Day, saying, "He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell." That confession is based on this single verse from 1 Peter. Roman Catholics call the place Jesus visited *limbus partum*, or limbo of the fathers — the place where the souls of the just who died before Christ were detained, and were waiting for the time of their redemption.

What are we to make of this verse? Theories abound. Here are three that Christians have found most compelling.

Before he lived on earth, Jesus preached to the disobedient people of Noah's time, perhaps through Noah himself.

Between his death and resurrection, Jesus descended to the place of the dead and preached to the spirits of the evil people of Noah's time.

Between his death and resurrection, Jesus ascended to the realm of the wicked angels (sons of God) who are mentioned in Genesis 6:2,4 as forerunners of Noah and the wickedness of Noah's time. There Jesus proclaimed God's victory over all principalities and powers.

Wise scholars will avoid building an entire theological system on one or two obscure verses such as this one. I believe Peter is reassuring fellow believers under duress that nothing can separate them from the love of Christ, not even death. The authority of Christ is eternal, extending from before the foundation of the world all the way to the end of the age. If the Son of God found room within God's mercy to offer eternal life to those who had never had an opportunity to hear, how much more will his mercy extend to those who had heard and were found faithful in much? And if God could bring Noah and his family through the waters to dry land and a hopeful future, how much more will God bring God's children through the waters of baptism, made possible by the resurrection of

Jesus Christ?

The last verses in 4:1-6 offer another exhortation to people under pressure to live like Christians and arm themselves with the power of God. Don't miss Peter's almost casual reference to the evangelistic power of a transformed life in 4:3-4. I like Eugene Peterson's rendering of this passage in his lively translation, *The Message*: "You've already put in your time in that God-ignorant way of life, partying night after night, a drunken and profligate life. Now it's time to be done with it for good. Of course, your old friends don't understand why you don't join in with the old gang anymore."

We would do well to pay attention to this sequence of events in our own evangelism. The transformed life comes first. Only then do we offer our verbal witness of what Christ has done in our hearts. As Peter made clear, if we arm ourselves with the same purpose as Christ, who faced suffering and death and conquered them both, then our changed behavior will become a permanent introduction to a gospel witness. When our behavior changes, we no longer need to memorize catchy evangelistic slogans or employ poorly written tracts or use manipulative techniques of persuasion. People will notice. Most will ask. That question, "What happened to you?" is the open door through which the Spirit waits to walk.

May 23, 2010

Use your gifts

1 Peter 4:7-5:5

Peter is convinced he and his followers are now living in the "last days," with the final end of history about to be ushered in by the longed-for return of Christ to the earth. So he counsels his flock on how to behave during this brief interim before the Lord wraps up what was begun at Creation.

They are to live like conspicuous Christians, staying sane and sober, praying constantly, cheerfully welcoming everyone to their homes, and, more than anything else, excelling in love for one another as fellow members of the body of Christ. The image here is of athletes competing, stretching every muscle and sinew in a sustained effort. Such active, muscular love hides a "plethora" (*plethos*) of sins (cf. Prov. 10:12b), which is another way of saying that living lives of *agape* puts all our sins and failures into God's gracious perspective.

And they are, as believers, to employ their *charismata*, or spiritual gifts, in service to one

another as good "economists" (stewards) of God's grace. Peter identifies teaching and serving as the two primary spiritual gifts God has given the church through them. Those who teach are to speak with gravity and authority, giving not their own opinions but the words of God. Given the shortness of time, the church can ill afford idle speculation. The people need divine truth.

Those who serve (Peter uses the word *diakonei*) are to do their ministry in humble dependence upon God, who supplies all the strength, tact and humility required to do their work in Jesus' name. (For reasons difficult to understand, the word *diakonos* was never translated from Greek into English, but simply transliterated to form a new English word, "deacon." The transliteration gives us nothing of the flavor of this remarkable term.

Diakonos is actually two words: *dia*, across or through, and *konos*, dust. "Deacons" were domestic servants who did their work running back and forth through central household courtyards, literally, "through the dust." Had we actually translated *diakonos* rather than transliterated it, Baptist churches across America today would be served by men and women aptly called the Dusty-Footed Ones. I have to say, I like that image better than that of the corporate board of directors still found so widely among our number.)

Peter concludes the first part of this passage with a doxology worthy of modern memorization: "so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen." Reading this majestic text makes me long for a revival of biblical prayer language in our churches, as opposed to the impoverished prose plaguing our worship. Why would we employ the lowest common denominators of our culture in public prayer when we can exalt God with words like these?

Verse 12 brings us back to suffering and persecution, a recurrent theme in this epistle. Here Peter offers a profound theological appraisal of the "fiery trials" being visited upon Christians by the Roman emperor cult. Believers are not to be surprised by persecution, as though it were something unexpected; rather, they are to rejoice and give praise to God that their witness has been found worthy, that they have been incorporated into the very sufferings of Christ, and that they will be rewarded for their endurance when Christ returns.

Peter goes even farther. Whenever you are cursed for the sake of Christ, at that moment



you are being drenched by a waterfall of God's abundant blessing. In other words, though you may feel abandoned and alone, God is right there with you, singing over you, showering you with grace and love.

But you have to be suffering for Christ. You can't claim God's vindication for everyday, garden-variety punishment for evil deeds such as murder, robbery, wickedness or disturbing the peace. Not all of life's difficulty rises to the level of a "fiery trial." Only when we suffer as Christians does God's glory fall upon us.

But be of good cheer, and thank God you're part of God's family. For if judgment is this painful for the family of faith, how much more intense will it be for those who reject God? Verse 19 is a wonderful comfort for all who have had the slings and arrows of ungodly forces unleashed against them for doing what is right: literally, those who suffer because God wills it commit their souls to God's eternal care and keeping, trusting that God knows what God's doing. This verse echoes Paul's instruction to young Timothy: "For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day" (2 Tim. 1:12).

The concluding verses of this week's lesson represent an aside to congregational leaders and followers, who now have the daunting task of walking together through overwhelming persecution. (Note: Bible scholars had no qualms about translating *presbuteros* as "elders," rather than retaining the transliterated title, *presbyters*.) Peter draws upon his own experience as an eyewitness to the crucifixion of Jesus. Here are his instructions to the elders:

- Tend to the people of God.
- Lead them with joy and freedom.
- Don't let your service make you greedy.
- Don't let your authority go to your head.
- Set an example for those you have been called to lead.

And to the rest, especially the younger folk: Pay attention to those who have been here before.

And to everyone, old and young alike: Dress yourselves everyday in garments of utter humility, for God can't do so much with the perennially proud, but God can change the world with those who remember who they are.

Perhaps all these instructions could be woven into the liturgy for every future service of commissioning or ordination, wherein we set apart for service those in whom we discern the spiritual gifts of teaching, service, exhortation and leadership. And we could let these words

serve as a fitting benediction: "And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."

They all believed Christ was coming soon. The promise of his glory was quite enough to see them through. May it ever be so.

May 30, 2010

Resist temptation

1 Peter 5:6-14

Peter's parting words ... that's how we read these final verses. He loves this church, and does what parents do when their kids are heading out on a long journey. He stands at the car door and gives final advice.

Humble yourselves so that you can be exalted at the proper time. Sound familiar? It should, since Peter was there when Jesus told this parable to the guests of the Pharisees:

"When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this man,' and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place. But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:8-11).

Don't forget; humility is one of the antidotes for persecution. Even Nero couldn't crush their spirits when they had already humbled themselves under the mighty hand of God.

Cast all your anxiety on God because God cares for you. This is not a bromide. Many of these believers would be thrown to the lions for the emperor's sport. Torture and death were real possibilities, and in the near future. So this is not about anxiety the way we moderns define it, a low-grade worry treatable with medication. This is crippling worry over real possibilities. Peter's counsel: Give it to God. God knows what's about to happen, and, should the worst take place, God will be there to greet you on the other side.

Don't be naïve about the Evil One. The Accuser is real and on the prowl, as real as Nero's lions, looking for souls to slaughter. But your faith makes you strong enough to withstand radical evil. Indeed, your brothers and sisters in Christ are doing it all over Asia Minor. Can't you just hear Paul trying to elbow

into this conversation? ...

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm" (Eph. 6:10-13).

This suffering won't last forever. When it ends, God will be on the other side, waiting to make you whole. God isn't surprised by any of this. God retains the original image of your creation, and will restore you, heal the broken place, and get you ready for eternity.

Peter closes the letter with a series of postscripts, each one worth a few moments' attention. First, he thanks his *amanuensis*, Silvanus (Silas), most likely dictating the letter in his rural Aramaic so that Silvanus could translate it into a Greek serviceable for its more sophisticated recipients. This was a common practice in the first century. You'll remember that Paul used several. At the very end of his Epistle to the Romans, as Paul is sending personal greetings and local news to the Roman Christians, we suddenly read these words:

"And I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord" (Rom. 16:22).

So we should be as grateful to Silvanus (Silas) as Peter apparently was, his faithful brother. (The names Silvanus and Silas are used interchangeably in the New Testament. Most scholars concur that this Silvanus is the same as the Silas who was Paul's travel companion.)

Then there is the tantalizing mention in verse 13 of "Babylon," the symbolic name for Rome. Peter reminds his charges in Asia Minor that the church in Rome is alive and well, facing similar persecutions, and worthy of their prayers and support. It's an early exemplar of a true ecumenism. We are all of us bound up together with Christ as one body, regardless of our present locations.

Finally, the admonition to let every greeting be a salutation of great intimacy, the kiss of Christ's love, and Peter's parting benediction, the call for the *shalom* of God's reign for all who are in Christ. It's not high-church Catholicism or liturgical formalism that lead modern Baptists to say these holy words in worship each week: "The peace of the Lord be with you."

No, we get it from Scripture. It's right here, in the Word. **BT**

2010

The Resource Page

... creative and practical ideas

Brought to you this month
by Brian Foreman



Looking outside the church for community resources

In the summer of 2008, I resigned from a position as youth minister at a church in Charlotte, N.C., in order to concentrate on further education. To pay the bills, I began work as a consultant with an organization that focuses on community engagement around issues of social trust. Since then, I have experienced excitement about resources, partnerships and ideas, while also experiencing sadness over lost opportunities.

Consider this exchange with the leader of a local student drama troupe. He had been working with this group to create original pieces around social issues such as racism, dating violence and gang activity. The group included students from several demographics across ethnic and socio-economic status. I asked why he chose to take on this project. His response was: "Students are not just the future, but the now. They have the power to change the course of history."

The group of students performed their pieces five times in the community, at local theaters and colleges, but never once in a church. These pieces speak directly to the issues students face, but the church had no opportunity to frame a conversation around them with the words of Christ. When I asked other youth ministers around town, they loved the idea but had no notion this type project was taking place.

Why did I spend nearly two decades in student ministry? I believe in the power of students to change the world as God directs and uses them. I heard a similar refrain echoed from several people who work with students at schools, arts agencies, nonprofits and corporate mentor programs. There are countless people who work with youth in a variety of sectors that I had never considered as resources and partners. I suspect I am not alone in this regard. Ministers and educators are so busy with their work that networking is not always a

Resources

Block. *Community: The Structure of Belonging.*

Cohen and Prusak. *In Good Company: How Social Capital Makes Organizations Work.*

Hurley and Brown, "Conversational Leadership: Thinking Together for a Change."

Wenger. *Cultivating Communities of Practice.*

Vogt. "The Art of Powerful Questions: Catalyzing Insight, Innovation and Action."

www.flamecentre.com

www.thegatesnotes.com

www.theworldcafe.com

valued use of time. When we do network it is with people like us at other churches, where we mine for ideas and best practices, oblivious to what exists beyond our boundaries.

Lay leaders have an advantage in this area in that they interact outside the church in various circles. The challenge is being attentive to those potential relationships that can enhance ministry, programming and service opportunities.

In any event, there are opportunities to grow your resource list through human capital rather than just ideas captured from the Internet or the latest book. While these are valuable resources, the ideas of people in your community may prove priceless. Here are a few recommendations for building those relationships.

- Volunteer in projects that do not involve the church. A secondary benefit here is the renewal you may find through connecting with others.
- Every couple of months, invite individuals in your area of interest to discuss together what they are working on, finding energy in, and are generally excited about.
- Ask friends who they think you should get to

know who has a passion similar to you. Call them and schedule lunch.

Creating change and partnership ideas begin with conversations. Networking to build human resources in the community is essentially that. Nurturing your passions outside of ministry is also vital.

Consider some of the following ideas for collaboration that enhance what you are doing in ministry.

- Ask a local drama group for volunteers who can provide dramatic scripture readings.
- Engage local slam poets to listen to a conversation your group is having and respond to it with an impromptu poem.
- Invite people working on the front lines of social causes to speak to your group and then volunteer with that person's organization.
- Find ethnic restaurants to host your group and have a conversation about coming to a new community, cultural diversity and hospitality.

These are simple ideas, but the real magic occurs when you have built trust with those outside the church who help make these events better because they share a mutual regard and passion for the work you are doing. This requires the work of building relationships through conversations that matter. You may be surprised to find that others want to have substantive conversations with people, even those with whom they may not find agreement.

As you engage with and meet people in your community who share similar passions to yourself, try building authentic conversations where you share your dreams and fears about what is happening in your area of interest. In the midst of those conversations you will discover pockets of energy in one another, ideas about other people you could connect one another with, and ideas for making your projects better. **BT**

THE RESOURCE PAGE is provided by the Congregational Life office of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in partnership with *Baptists Today* and for those dedicated lay leaders working in the educational ministries of local churches. This month's page was written by Brian Foreman, a doctoral candidate in educational leadership and a consultant for community engagement issues in Charlotte, N.C. Resource Page Archives are available at <http://www.thefellowship.info/Resources/Church-Resources/Baptists-Today-resource-page>.

in the know

Keeping up with people, places and events

Fletcher Allen died Feb. 27 in Franklin, Tenn., at age 78. He served as editor of *The Baptist & Reflector*, news journal of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, from 1987 until his retirement in 1998. Earlier he was associate editor of the *Baptist Courier* in South Carolina and editor of the Maryland/Delaware publication now known as *Baptist Life*.

Daniel G. Bagby will retire as professor of pastoral care at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond on May 31. He will continue to teach several courses each year at BTSR.

Rodney V. Byard of Wake Forest, N.C., died Feb. 4 at age 81. A former minister of education, he also served in public relations at Southeastern Seminary.

Paul T. Losh died Feb. 27 in Worcester, Penn., at age 88. He was a former president of Central Baptist Seminary and an executive minister of the Vermont Baptist State Convention.

Gary Nelson, general secretary of Canadian Baptist Ministries and a vice president of the Baptist World Alliance, will become president of Tyndale University College and Seminary in Toronto July 1.

Carrie Veal is associate pastor of children's ministries at Morningside Baptist Church in Spartanburg, S.C., coming from a similar position at First Baptist Church in Gainesville, Ga.

Neill's Creek Baptist Church is seeking a full-time **senior pastor** with a minimum of 5 years pastoral experience and the M.Div. degree. Neill's Creek is a Southern Baptist church primarily aligned with CBF, and has an average worship attendance of 100-135. Send résumés to: Pastor Search Committee, 4200 Neill's Creek Rd., Angier, NC 27501 or ncbc@embarqmail.com.

University Baptist Church of Chapel Hill, N.C., is seeking a full-time **minister of music**. A full job description is available at www.ubc-ch.org/position.pdf.

Emerywood Baptist Church, High Point, N.C., seeks a **minister of music/worship and fine arts** to lead the music ministry and build an innovative fine arts ministry. The candidate must be energetic, have a music degree, and be able to work with both traditional/classical and blended/casual worship settings. Salary is commensurate with education and experience. For more information, contact: ljwbishop@northstate.net.

Associate Pastor for Children, Youth and Families: First Baptist Church of Boone, N.C. (www.boonefirstbaptist.org), located in downtown Boone and adjacent to Appalachian State University, is seeking a full-time associate pastor to develop relationships and implement programs to attract and grow ministries to children, youth and families. First Baptist, established in 1871, is a moderate Baptist church of 325 resident members who support CBF, the BSCNC and the SBC. We support missions both near and far, and are very involved in disaster relief. We affirm women in ministry and the diaconate. We offer both contemporary and traditional services. A seminary degree or the equivalent is preferred. A full job description is available upon request to office@boonefirstbaptist.org. Submit résumés to: Search Committee, c/o Ted Hagaman, 876 Parkcrest Dr., Boone, NC 28607 or ted.hagaman@wilkescc.edu.

Fellowship Baptist Church, a CBF church in Fitzgerald, Ga., is seeking a **part-time** (up to 20 hrs. weekly) **children/youth coordinator**. Responsibilities include planning and leading Wednesday night and Sunday morning activities. This would be an ideal position for a seminary student. For more information, contact Miriam Reeves at (229) 423-9423 or emreeves@windstream.net.

Richmond Baptist Association is seeking résumés or recommendations for a full-time **director of missions**. Send résumé postmarked by April 15 to: DOM Search Committee, Chairperson Rev. Mike Robinson, 7250 Patterson Ave., Richmond, VA 23229 or newcovenabc@aol.com (subject: DOM COMMITTEE).

BEULAH LAND TOURS

Custom-tailored Excursion to the Holy Land

Jordan-Petra-Jerash-Mount Nebo

May 17-27, 2010

\$2,995 (double occupancy)

Information/reservations:

bpcall@bellsouth.net

P.O. Box 7774

Marietta, GA 30065-7774

(404) 444-4906



Barbara P. Callahan

Licensed tour director
35th trip to Bible lands

Advertise today
1-877-752-5658

EXPERIENCE makes the DIFFERENCE

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

DESIGN PRINTING MAILING & FULFILLMENT

Competitive Pricing Award Winning Results

WaltonMedia
create • print • distribute

1360 US Hwy 78 East • P.O. Box 1047 • Monroe, GA 30665
770.267.0022 • 800.241.7579 • www.waltonmedia.net

readers' responses

Appreciates Lottie Moon article

EDITOR: Thank you for the wonderful article, "Lottie Moon legacy not captured in Texas" by Catherine B. Allen (March issue, p. 32).

Many Baptists capitalize on the Lottie Moon name without knowing much about the real Lottie Moon. Her name is used to promote the largest missionary offering gathered by one group.

The diminutive missionary to China from 1873 to 1912 was a pioneer far ahead of her time. She mastered the language, adhered to the culture and adapted to the ways of the people she served.

Lottie Moon struggled constantly for equality for women in doing mission work. Forbidden by her mission board to teach men, plant churches or evangelize, she did all of those things anyway. She wrote to the board: "Simple justice demands that women should have equal rights with men in mission meetings and in the conduct of their work."

The [International Mission] Board that uses Lottie Moon's name to promote its offerings has not learned much from her struggles. Southern Baptists have made their position clear. Women cannot be pastors or deacons, cannot teach men, must obey their husbands, and must do as men demand.

A 2000 article in the *Mainstream Messenger* asked the question, "Would Lottie Moon be appointed today?" It concluded that as a Southern Baptist missionary she would not fit in.

The name of Lottie Moon is almost magic in enticing Baptists to give to missions. Many churches that have ceased supporting Southern Baptist missions have trust funds designated to the Lottie Moon Offering forever. Many of the long-deceased donors would change their wills if alive today.

I am convinced that if Lottie Moon were living today she would not support the offering that bears her name. She would make her donations, instead, to the Global Mission Offering of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

*Jack V. Colwell, Macon, Ga.
(Jack Colwell is a retired pastor living in Macon, Ga.)*

An open letter to Cooperative Baptist Fellowship churches

EDITOR: Nearly 20 years ago, Baptists came together to birth a movement called the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. And though no one knew what it would become, we celebrated its possibilities.

Two decades later we stand for freedom, serve the least of these, speak against global injustice, and practice our conviction that God calls all people. But lately the financial gifts that nurtured CBF's early development are down; and the Fellowship I hope my children will want to be part of is having to limit ministry possibilities.

We are all cutting budgets: every church, every nonprofit. In my second year serving as chair of CBF's Finance Committee I have watched CBF staff carefully reduce spending by 20 percent, wisely delaying resources that we — the individuals and churches they serve — are asking them for.

Everyone needs to pay the bills, including CBF. With no pledge system or capital campaign, CBF can only project a future budget based on the history of gifts received from partner churches and individuals. If a church that has given \$10,000 annually over the last five years suddenly stops giving, it is a felt impact. If multiple churches simultaneously do this, it renders pointless even the most careful budget.

It might seem easier to trim the church budget by cutting more unnoticed line

items. After all, the Banjara people in India will never know which church didn't send in cooperating gifts this year, and someone else will hopefully pay CBF missions field personnel.

Delaying gifts to CBF may seem the only option, but paying the local bills by borrowing from cooperative efforts is shortsighted and dangerous. It borrows from the future of Fellowship Baptists, potentially pausing global ministry and turning down the volume on larger conversations about freedom, ethics and faith.

That's why church members must pay close attention to their congregation's spending priorities and speak up for the bigger picture of God's work in the world. Challenge your congregation to live sacrificially and, if budget reductions are necessary, create an even distribution of cuts along the way.

The economy will turn around; tithing and budgets will rebound. And when that happens, I pray that congregations that may be laying low right now will rise, recognizing that the larger Fellowship family is still standing, still speaking up for justice and mercy, still serving among the least of these, and still singing hymns freely and faithfully.

*Colleen Burroughs, Birmingham, Ala.
(Colleen Burroughs is vice president of Passport, Inc.)*

Balanced view welcomed

EDITOR: I just recently read Tony Cartledge's commentary from Oct. 2009 "Considering the Palestinian 'Problem'" and wanted to extend a warm thank you to him for having the courage to write about a sensitive and widely misunderstood situation. It's so important that we Americans have a balanced view in order to be effective in reaching peace in that region.

Kathy Posey, Falls Church, Va.

Baptist News, Baptist Views

BAPTISTS TODAY *online*

www.baptiststoday.org



Have you **read...**?

Three books to share with others



Chuck Queen is pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church in Frankfort, Ky.

Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination
By Walter Wink (Augsburg Press, 1992)

This was the third book in Wink's "Powers" Trilogy and the winner of several prestigious religious book awards. He poignantly describes the "Domination System" that Jesus' reign confronts and challenges.



His exposition of Matthew 5:38-42 was groundbreaking; Jesus was teaching his followers a strategy for engaging violence in a nonviolent, direct way. Wink presents the most persuasive biblical, theological, social and practical argument for nonviolent engagement in print.

Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer
By Richard Rohr
(The Crossroad Publishing, revised and updated 2003)

Rohr is a Franciscan priest, author of many books on spirituality, and the founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, N.M.



Although a small book, every page is packed with deep spiritual insights.

According to Rohr, much depends on how we see; Rohr contends that we tend to see not as things really are, but as we are. This is a book to be read over and over. (Don't be fooled by the title; this is not just about prayer, but about healthy, transformative spirituality.)

The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God
By Dallas Willard
(Harper Collins, 1998)

Willard is a philosopher and evangelical theologian who teaches philosophy at the University of Southern California. He offers an excellent critique of "sin management" systems, expounds the meaning of the Sermon on the Mount, and argues, quite brilliantly at times, that discipleship to Jesus is the key to personal transformation.



Willard introduced me to the vital importance of the central message and theme of Jesus' life and ministry: the kingdom of God.

Editor's note: This recommendation of books comes in response to my article "Three books to share with others" in the March issue, page 37. Following the same format, readers may send their own suggestions to editor@baptiststoday.org.

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

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

NAME _____

PHONE _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____

ZIP _____

•••

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

BAPTISTS TODAY IS A 501(c)(3) CHARITABLE ORGANIZATION. GIFTS OF SUPPORT ARE GREATLY APPRECIATED.

guest commentary

Can we do it again?

By Tom Ehrich, RELIGION NEWS SERVICE

My grandfather — Class of “Naughty-five” at Purdue University — was a civil engineer, builder and inventor imbued with an American “can-do” spirit.

He worked on a great dam project in the Northwest, when a new nation tamed rivers, spanned canyons and enabled populations to expand.

He served in the cavalry during World War I, returned to Indiana, invented a machine for canning tomatoes, and started a company. He lived simply, educated his daughters, and was a loyal Mason, church-goer and citizen.

I contrast him with today’s bright stars, who amass fortunes by managing wealth that someone else created and prey on the unwary. They invent games and entertainment devices, but rig systems like health care and education to their benefit. Too often, they profit from others’ travails.

They live extraordinarily large and leave military duty and community service to others. They evade whatever taxes they can, and see education as credentialing for accumulating wealth, not for building useful infrastructure, products and services.

No wonder America’s bridges are crumbling. No wonder China is leaping ahead of us in technology, transportation and efficient power, while we lack the political will to fix broken systems, much less invest in new ones.

No wonder automakers keep cycling back to the easy days. No wonder we are buried in debt from spending money we didn’t have, and are vulnerable to the medieval feuds of religious extremists sitting atop oil we can’t imagine living without.

No wonder newspaper headlines tell one corruption story after another. When “get mine” replaces “can do,” all restraints vanish. Civic virtue is for suckers, and dirty-hands work is for losers. Self-sacrifice and personal ethics give way to the smug pieties of religious ideology.

No wonder the self-described “greatest nation” and its audacious “experiment in democracy” are floundering in the hands of obstructionists whose only goal is to gain power and its financial benefits, as ideologues harvest anger and anxiety in seeking to turn citizens against each other.

The blindness of self-serving is rampant. In a Sunday school class discussing their congregation’s dwindling fortunes — empty pews, lifeless services, minimal ministry — most were eager for change and growth, but a noisy few carried the day: “I grew up here, I like the church, it does not need to change,” said one.



“We’ve heard these arguments before, leave it the way it is,” said another. “If you don’t like our church,” one suggested, “why don’t you go to another?” And then this: “We don’t need those people who leave.”

Such sentiments violate the gospel and guarantee the death of an institution. Yet they prevail because few have the courage to resist nihilism. Conflict-avoidance seems safer than the risks, tussling and hard work that are required to build something.

How bad is it? These feel like the latter days of the Roman Empire, when an effete and corrupt ruling class lived large at others’ expense. Or the early days of repression, when demagogues promise easy answers, scapegoat the vulnerable, and flatter people while seizing power from them. Religion, meanwhile, goes silent in order to protect its franchise.

I look for spine, like my grandfather had. Not the bullying of demagogues, nor the phony certainties of fundamentalism. Not smug entitlement, but spine, a can-do spirit, a belief in hard work and risk-taking, a joining of hands in great endeavors, living simply, and serving others.

We lived that way once; I’m increasingly skeptical we could ever do it again. **BT**

—Tom Ehrich is a writer, church consultant and Episcopal priest based in New York City.

YOU'RE NOT JUST ANOTHER ACCOUNT NUMBER. AND WE'RE NOT JUST ANOTHER INVESTMENT FIRM.



We've always believed our personalized approach made sense for our clients. And they agreed. Edward Jones ranked "Highest in Investor Satisfaction with Full Service Brokerage Firms," according to the J.D. Powers and Associates 2009 U.S. Full Service Investor Satisfaction Survey™. But investing is about more than numbers and rankings — it's about you.

Edward Jones received the highest numerical score among full-service brokerage firms in the proprietary J.D. Powers and Associates 2009 Full Service Investor Satisfaction Study™. Study based on responses from 4,438 investors measuring 21 investment firms and measuring opinions of investors who used full-service investment institutions. Popularity study results are based on telephone and perceptual data of consumers surveyed in March/April 2009. For more information, visit jdsurvey.com.



Jack C. Bishop Jr.
Financial Advisor

15 Woodland Drive
Waynesville, NC 28786
828-452-4048

www.edwardjones.com Member SIPC

Edward Jones
MAKING SENSE OF INVESTING

To learn how we can help make sense of investing for you, contact one of our financial advisors today.

the lighter side

What kind of fiend?

By Brett Younger

When Carol was six months pregnant with our first child, she was scheduled to take a trip to Alabama for a writer's conference.

We asked our doctor repeatedly, "Is it OK for her to take this trip?"

He kept reassuring us, "Yes, this is fine. There's no reason for Carol not to go."

The WMU sent tickets for a 9 a.m. flight out of Louisville, Ky., about an hour from our home in Indiana. We left in plenty of time, but about two miles down the road our little red Subaru died. We coasted into a gas station. I tried to get the car started, but it wasn't going to start. After a while even if it did start, we had spent so much time trying to get it started that it was doubtful we could make the plane.

The cashier at the gas station, who was a member of our church, loaned us her car. We drove as quickly as we could, all the time realizing that we weren't going to make the departure and we didn't. It had started to rain, so traffic was moving slowly. We got to the airport 20 minutes after the plane was to leave. We went to the counter to see what arrangements could be made and were told that the plane had not yet left, "If you run, you might make it."

We moved as fast as an expectant father will let a six-months expectant mother move. It was a harrowing, comical experience.

"Carol, don't run."

"We have to. Catch up now."

At the gate we were told the plane would not be leaving for 30 minutes. There was a big storm in Alabama that they were hoping would clear. We sat down to catch our breath. The plane was not the big jet we were expecting, but a twin-engine prop plane — a small one. The light rain was heavy when the passengers finally started to board.

Carol turned to me and said, "If you don't want me to go, then I don't have to."

Looking at the plane and the rain, I came close, but then, just like Bogie, I said, "If you don't go, you'll regret it. Maybe not today or tomorrow, but someday, and for the rest of your life."

They had trouble getting the plane started. As it finally taxied off, I thought I spotted a funnel cloud. The drizzle was a downpour, and our umbrella was in our car at the gas station. In my hurry, I had failed to note carefully what kind of car I had borrowed. I thought it might be blue. The keys said "Ford," and I felt reasonably sure that it would have Indiana license plates. I ran through the rain in a remarkably large airport parking lot, looking for a Ford from Indiana that might be blue that my key would open.

After trying to open enough doors to look like a really poor car thief and after a period of time that seemed infinitely longer than it actually was, I stumbled on to the right car. I drove home in a thunderstorm and passed the time worrying about Carol. I finally got home and waited for her to call. I knew when she was originally supposed to get there. That time passed. I knew when the delay should have put her there. That time

passed. I decided on a reasonable time at which to start seriously worrying. That time passed. I couldn't get the picture out of my mind of her offering not to go. Now I could see that she was practically begging not to go.

What kind of fiend forces a pregnant woman on to a crop duster in a tornado? The phone rang. My heart raced. I was rude to someone who wasn't Carol. Then it rang again, and this time I heard her voice calling my name, telling me that everything was OK.

I think about that day every Easter when I read the resurrection story in John. Jesus turns to Mary and calls her name. In that one word, in the calling of her name, joy overwhelms despair.

Mary was convinced of the resurrection not when she saw the empty tomb or even Jesus himself, but when she heard Christ say her name. Easter is the opportunity to hear God calling our names, letting us know that, in spite of our fears, everything is going to be OK. **BT**

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



Illustration by Scott Brooks

Guns and religion: a scary mix

By Tony W. Cartledge
Posted Feb. 26, 2010
www.tonycartledge.com

A Baptist pastor/evangelist recently opened a gun store in Smithfield, N.C., along with lots of help from his wife and his son, who manages the store.

They were stuck on a name for the store, which features handguns along with a full line of rifles and shotguns, until his wife dreamed that God told her to name it after the Second Amendment, which speaks of a constitutional right for citizens to bear arms — and that they should call it the “2nd Amen-ment Gun Shop.”

When I read the article in the *Raleigh News and Observer*, I wanted to throw up. Seriously.

The same day, I heard a radio clip of



presidential wanna-be Sarah Palin stumping for Texas governor Rick Parry, a Republican who’s running for re-election. To raucous cheers, Palin said “A lot of us in our states proudly cling to our guns and religion.”

I almost had to pull over.

What is wrong with our country — what is wrong with the American brand of

Christianity — that leaves it open to such perversion? What are we thinking?

The twisted notion of combining guns and religion in any way — much less citing them as top core values — calls for the most vehement objection, and yet huge masses of people cheer! Jesus must stand on his head at the thought of his teaching — which calls for humility and self-sacrifice — being morphed into a gospel of macho bang-o cowboy conservatism — yet millions of Americans have been led to believe that gun-slinging and Bible-toting are somehow akin.

That picture is so wrong that you could throw it in the dump and the garbage would throw it back.

It’s not Denmark that has the problem. Something is rotten in the state of Texas, and Alaska, and North Carolina and ... **BT**

‘Where there is hatred . . .’

By John Pierce
Posted Feb. 27, 2010
www.johndpierce.com

For some odd reason, openly expressing hatred toward groups seems more socially acceptable than toward individuals. While the targets of hostility change over the years, the sad practice continues.

Early in my life, the targets of blame and condemnation within my earshot were often Yankees (not the baseball team, but all persons above the sacred Mason-Dixon line), African Americans (called by a variety of horrible names),

any religious group other than our own (particularly Catholics and Jews), and “foreigners” in general because little distinction was made among such groups.

Having perceived enemies somehow seems necessary for many persons to direct their fears and blame. So we often overhear the venom spewed toward well-labeled groups as if all individuals within such groups walk in lockstep and are of shared minds.

Group hatred allows us to act as if all blame can be directed toward those other than our righteous selves. Our problems would be erased by simply eliminating “them” — Democrats, Conservatives,

Muslims, politicians, gays/lesbians, immigrants, Arabs, Jews, Baptists, etc.

The essence of talk radio is to bring group targets into sharper focus. Seeing persons as groups rather than individuals uniquely created in the image of God allows for our broad generalizations and justified hatred.

During an interview with World Series MVP pitcher Orel Hershiser several years ago, I joked that as a longtime Braves fan I liked the Dodgers as individuals — just not as a group. But often that distinction is not made humorously.

The bottom line is that lumping people together makes us less loving. **BT**

YOUR CHURCH'S SOLUTION FOR FACILITIES CAPITAL PLANNING & MANAGEMENT

TPG
The Provident Group
Facility Condition and Capital Planning Solutions

P.O. Box 4972
Macon, GA 31208
fax 478.741.2142
478.746.7060

www.theprovidentgrouppllc.com

The best way to manage your facility's assets is to be pro-active rather than being forced into reactive maintenance.

The Provident Group provides:

- A detailed, unbiased overall assessment of the church's facilities
- Accurate & detailed cost estimates for repairs and capital improvements
- A solid plan, prioritized by importance for making needed capital improvement
- A properties budget for five - seven years
- Code compliance assurance



Once-a-decade play is the lifeblood of Bavarian village

OBERAMMERGAU, Germany — Taking just a quick look at this picturesque Bavarian town, it would be easy to lump it in with a whole host of other nearby villages.

Skiing? Check. Local sought-after souvenirs? Check (in this case, wood carving). Quaint inns with generous helpings of beer, schnitzel and sausage? Check, check and check.

But looking closer, one notices a fair number of men with Woodstock-style hippy beards. Children skip sports for choir or music practice. And in almost every home and restaurant, rows of pictures depict generation after generation of actors dressed up like they're going to a costume party hosted by a Roman emperor.

Welcome to Oberammergau as it prepares for its once-a-decade dramatic retelling of the death of Jesus.

The show is, in many ways, the lifeblood of the town. The five-times-a-week performances bring in millions of euros from the hundreds of thousands of guests that will come here from May to October. Nearly half of the town's 5,200 residents are involved in one way or another.

"It's not like you fear the role, but you have a great respect for it," says Frederik Mayet, one of the two men who will play Jesus in this year's performance.

Mayet, who played the apostle John in the 2000 production, knows audiences and critics will have their own expectations of how Jesus should be. And not all of them will be happy with his performance.

"When I found out I got the role, I was extremely happy. It was total euphoria," says Mayet, who is press spokesman to the show's director in his day job. "A few days later, I began to think, uh-oh, this is a pretty big role."

Continued on next page >

Still stirring controversy

Germany's historic Passion Play returns in May

OBERAMMERGAU, Germany — With its focus on the last days of Jesus' life, a Passion play should, by its nature, arouse passions. But here, the world's most famous Passion play keeps stirring the wrong kind.

As it has almost every 10 years since 1634, this Bavarian town is putting the final touches on the Oberammergau Passion Play, keeping up its end of a divine compact after residents survived the bubonic plague amidst the Thirty Years War.

And, as has become almost routine in recent decades, plans for the play — particularly the choice of words in the script — are causing heartburn among some of the world's Jewish leaders.

"Passion plays, by their very nature, present serious problems," says Rabbi James Rudin, the American Jewish Committee's senior interreligious adviser. "It is possible to have a Passion play without the Jews as villains, but I have never seen one."

The disagreement resurfaced in February when the play's creative team officially presented the script to the archbishop of Munich. They noted to the media that the script had been reviewed by two Jewish organizations.

That much is true — some German Jewish groups have praised organizers for their attempts to strip some of the more blatant anti-Jewish lines from the script. But U.S. Jewish groups complain they've only been able to look at the script, not suggest changes.

The AJC and the Anti-Defamation League, in a joint statement, said they've spearheaded the "decades-long process of removing anti-Jewish elements" from the Oberammergau production for one main reason: "Passion plays have perpetuated anti-Jewish sentiment through caricatures

and stereotypes of Jews and selective texts."

But there's another reason: Oberammergau is one of the few remaining Passion plays and, by far, one of the largest. The play, which clocks in at well over four hours, will be staged five times a week, from May through October, in a theater that holds 4,700.

The spectacle attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors to the picturesque village during its five-month run every 10 years; nearly half of the town's 5,200 residents participate in one way or another. The show is the town's bread and butter, plumping city coffers with enough funds to build a municipal swimming pool and a ski lift — amenities other towns can only dream of.

The production transforms the tiny village into a major tourist destination. Only locals may act in the show, and many male actors shun razors for a year or more to lend their beards a more authentic look. With the enthusiasm, the history and the numbers, Oberammergau is no ordinary Passion play, Rudin said.

"You come pre-prepared (knowing) that this is something significant. Therefore what you see on the stage is significant," said Rudin, who's also a columnist for Religion News Service. "It has a great potential to transmit toxic images."

Director Christian Stueckl and dramatist Otto Huber have made changes since they took over the production in the 1980s, making sure, for example, that Jesus is referred to as a rabbi, and removing some anti-Jewish references from the Gospel of Matthew about a blood curse against the Jews.

Some, including Rudin, think there's room for still more changes, but others aren't so sure.

James Shapiro, an English professor at Columbia University who has written about Oberammergau, says the directors



The Oberammergau Passion Play in southern Germany, seen here in its last production in 2000, attracts hundreds of thousands of pilgrims during its five-month summer run. Photo courtesy Passion Play Oberammergau 2010.

and actors can't make too many more changes without straying too far from the original material. The blood curse — "His blood be on us and our children" — comes straight from the Gospel of Matthew.

"It's not a flattering portrayal of the role of the Jews in the death of Jesus," he said. "It's impossible to imagine anything that would be a flattering portrayal given the Gospel narratives."

In essence, "we're dealing with the way that two different religious groups read this material," he added. "I think we're getting pretty close to a bedrock level of difference."

Stueckl, the director, argues that there are major changes in his productions compared to earlier versions.

"It is actually an inter-Jewish story," he said, taking a break from rehearsals.

"(Jesus' actions against the Jewish authorities) is like a young Catholic opposing the pope."

With that in mind, he said his first production focused on portraying Jesus as more of a revolutionary. Subsequent productions have aimed for a more nuanced Jesus, and Stueckl said he added more scenes this year because "I wanted to write more about Jesus."

For their part, locals say the massive undertaking is their attempt at presenting faith as they understand it. For many of the amateur actors, the experience is equal parts religious and dramatic.

"I believe in God," says 21-year-old Maximilian Stoeger, one of the two men playing the apostle Peter. It's not the only reason he signed up, he said, but "it helps me to understand my role, even if it's not

> From previous page

Twenty major roles are cast each year, with two people assigned to each part so actors can balance the show with their regular lives. Thousands of extras are cast as background players, many of them tasked with shouting and reacting to the events on stage. Still others sing in the chorus or play in the orchestra.

To be considered for a part, one must be a native of the town or have lived there for at least 20 years. Mayor Arno Nunn says anyone who wants to participate can.

Jonas Konsek, one of the men playing Peter, says he has to balance the demands of the play with his studies in Munich — an hour away — while making it clear to the people at his internship that there is a good reason for his wild hair and beard.

Otto Huber, the show's dramatist and cast as a narrator for the third consecutive time, says the show binds together the people of Oberammergau.

"We are not telling this story as the most faithful people of Europe," he says. "Instead, maybe by acting it out, we will understand what is essential ... that our reality is more than a Mercedes car ... that there could be something behind it." **BT**

my motivation."

Frederik Mayet, one of the two men playing Jesus, said his motivation was partly based on tradition, but also because of the religious questions it forces him to confront.

"Interacting with Jesus, the character, you learn whole new factors. You have the opportunity, if you haven't studied theory, to really interact with Jesus."

Huber, the dramatist, agreed, noting that crews obsess over details in a bid to accurately present Jewish life, but also to create a meaningful spiritual experience for the audience — many of whom will not understand the German-language dialogue.

"You will be touched somehow," he said. "In Oberammergau, there is a very clever combination between, on one hand meditation, and drama." **BT**

True to the *call*

Oakhurst Recovery Program rooted in compassion

DECATUR, Ga. — Carol Burgess remembers the Sunday in 1981 when A.B. Short, an ordained minister and member of Oakhurst Baptist Church in Decatur, Ga., “sounded a call” for a compassionate response to Atlanta’s homeless. She volunteered.

“I thought it sounded too much like work at first,” she confessed.

At the time, Carol worked in adult protective services at the Fulton County Department of Family and Children Services in the downtown area where many homeless men gathered. She thought, “I could be a liaison.”

However, her involvement in the ministry to homeless men has grown along with the program. She remains an active volunteer and a member of the Oakhurst Recovery Program’s board of directors.

“I went to the first meeting and ended up being a cook,” she recalled.

The earliest days had little strategy. Just take a church van downtown and pick up homeless men looking for a place to eat and sleep.

“We turned the Sunday school rooms on the third floor (of the church’s education building) into individual rooms,” she recalled.

The more Oakhurst members interacted with these men, the better they understood the causes of homelessness.



AFFECTING CHANGE

Volunteer Carol Burgess (left) of Oakhurst Baptist Church has served as cook, spirituality group leader and board member of the recovery program now directed by David Reeves (right), an experienced leader in chemical dependency recovery.

For information on the Oakhurst Recovery Program or to discover ways to support this effort, call (404) 371-0590.

“Addiction is a big reason for homelessness,” said Carol, noting that mental illness is another.

Over the years the Oakhurst program evolved from a night shelter — going through various partnerships with other organizations — into a residential recovery program for men.

“It was first called Hospitality House,” said pastor Lanny Peters who has been at

Oakhurst since 1989 and was heavily involved in the program’s transition to its current form. He admits many challenges have been met — including changes in leadership and limited financial resources — over the years.

“Each time the church has said, ‘This is an important ministry and we are not going to let it die,’” said Lanny. “It’s a vital part of our identity.”

Oakhurst is widely known for its compassion, inclusiveness and a willingness to adjust its ministry attention to a changing community. As many as 70 volunteers have been engaged at any one time in this service to homeless men.



Residents of the Oakhurst Recovery Program have individual bedrooms in this house adjacent to the church. Ten men at a time participate in the program with many successful graduates.

Today the program is directed by David Reeves, an experienced and certified specialist, who came to Decatur from working in recovery programs in New York City.

His motivation comes from “knowing I may have helped affect change in one person.”

The church purchased a home next door to better serve as a residence for the men. Church facilities are still used for group meetings, meals and other activities.

David said the Oakhurst program is unique in that each man has his own bedroom — something he saves as a pleasant surprise when a guy arrives expecting to live in a dorm. Also, David encourages those entering the program to give full attention to the needed personal changes in their lives — for about six months — before seeking employment.

Referrals often come from detoxification centers — and represent a diverse population in terms of race, education, age and experience. Former Georgia Tech and Green Bay Packers running back Eddie Lee Ivery credits Oakhurst with his successful recovery after a failed attempt through an NFL-sponsored program, said Lanny.

Having worked in chemical dependency for 18 years, David said the Oakhurst program — while not fail-proof — provides men with the “time to focus on 12-step work.” The “re-entry phase” — job training and search, family reconnection — comes after



the hard work of dealing with addiction.

“Graduates come back as volunteers,” he said. “We try to keep guys linked in that way to a program that was good to them.”

There is special motivation, he said, when someone who has successfully completed the program looks another man in the eyes and says, “You can too.”

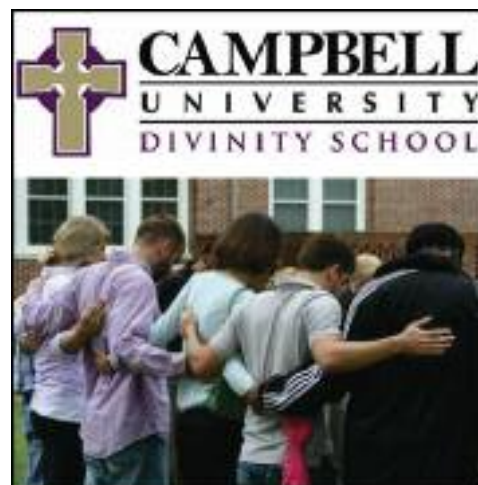
Carol is among the volunteers who lead spirituality groups for the men. She has been doing so since 2001.

“They are all phony when they come in, though they don’t mean to be,” she said. “You get to see them grow spiritually and to see them get to know themselves and have a spiritual life with daily practices.”

Some men choose to worship with the Oakhurst congregation, but attendance is always a choice.

While funding is a constant challenge and the process of recovery is never fully predictable, David said he and others carry out their daily work with the reminder: “We’re dealing with human beings.”

In one way or another, and having touched many lives, the Oakhurst congregation has stayed true to the call that was sounded nearly three decades ago. **BT**



Degree Programs:

Master of Divinity

Master of Divinity/Master of Arts in Community Counseling

Master of Divinity/Master of Business Administration

Master of Arts in Christian Education

Doctor of Ministry

Certificate Programs:

Preschool and Children’s Ministry

Christian Women in Leadership

Hispanic Theological Education



Campbell Divinity School

Buies Creek, NC

<http://divinity.campbell.edu>

800-760-9827, ext. 1865

the media shelf

From inside a trailer, a shot at the prosperity gospel

By Roy Hoffman, RELIGION NEWS SERVICE

Forty years ago, in the bedroom of a single-wide trailer in Columbus, Ga., 13-year old Karen Spears — now Karen Spears Zacharias — knelt in despair and beseeched God to come into her life.

Young Karen had suffered a terrible tragedy: Her soldier father, David Spears, had been killed in Vietnam when she was 9 and the loss had taken a heavy toll on the family.

“My mother shut down emotionally with the Lord,” recalls Zacharias, a journalist and author, looking back on her childhood. “She felt betrayed by God.”

But Zacharias, inspired by a youth pastor, prayed to God at the time: “I ask you to come into my heart, cleanse my sins, be my Lord.”

“I was crying,” she remembers.

Storyteller, editorial writer and author of a provocative new book on God and money, *Will Jesus Buy Me a Double-Wide?*,

Zacharias’ faith has only deepened from that transforming moment in a Georgia trailer park.

Zacharias’ first book, a memoir in 2005, was *After the Flag Has Been Folded: A Daughter Remembers the Father She Lost to War — and the Mother Who Held Her Family Together*.

Her second, in 2008, plunged into the post-9/11 psyche of America: *Where’s Your Jesus Now? Examining How Fear Erodes Our Faith*.

Zacharias’ new book is both a foray into her personal feelings about prayer and money — having had little of the latter when young — and into stories of people who offer “parables,” she says, that illustrate her theme.

She sees her work as a “corrective” to what’s known as the “prosperity gospel,” or as she writes: “We treat God like a slot machine, yanking on the prayer cable, hoping that the

triple 7s will appear.”

William Paul Young, author of mega-selling *The Shack*, gives this dustjacket endorsement: “If the prosperity gospel had a heart, Karen has stomped that sucker flat.”

There is no endorsement from the hugely popular televangelist Joel Osteen. Indeed, Osteen is one of the purveyors, Zacharias says, of the notion that prayer can



Karen Zacharias is author of *Will Jesus Buy Me a Double-Wide?* RNS photo by Kate Mercer/Mobile Press-Register.

bring down riches on one’s head.

“Joel Osteen is a good man,” she says, “but wrong about the message he’s giving.”

“The folksy Osteen,” she writes in her book, “comes across as harmless but the gospel he’s selling isn’t. The wounded in this world are dying and despairing by the thousands while prosperity preachers are offering up home-brewed remedies of Entitlement theology. These charlatans are selling salve to the sick when salvation is what people really need to fix what’s ailing them.”

She also takes issue with interpretations of Bruce Wilkinson’s monumental bestseller, *The Prayer of Jabez*, that asks, in part: “Oh, that you would bless me, indeed, and enlarge my territory.”

The “increase in territory,” Zacharias says, is about the spiritual presence in one’s heart, not financial domain.

In person, Zacharias is easy-going, amiable, both a widely-traveled writer and a country gal who claims to “speak two languages — English and hillbilly.”

A resident of Oregon, where she and husband Tim raised their four children, she has spent considerable time back in the Deep South.

In study questions Zacharias has added to the back of her new book, she suggests a study topic for the jubilee chapter: “Consider Leviticus 25:8-17. Contrast the biblical definition of Jubilee to that of the current teachings in the church regarding Jubilee. How do they differ?”

For study questions tied to the chapter, “The Redhead,” about the struggle of a close friend with cancer, she suggests: “Have you ever struggled with the death of a loved one? What good is the God of prosperity in such moments?”

Zacharias emphasizes that she is not romanticizing what it means to be poor. “I’m not in favor of poverty, having lived it!”

But “the obligation” for bringing in income, she says, “is on us, not on God.

She says she offers the same prayer for every book she publishes. “I’m not asking God to make this a bestseller,” but to “make the book everything you intend for it to be. Nothing more. Nothing less.”

In addition to faith, and love of family, and writing, what else keeps her going?

Her eyes fill with tears as she becomes that 9-year old girl again, hearing news of her father’s death in battle.

“I try to live my life so my father would be as proud of me” — she pauses, wiping at her eyes as the tears quicken — “as I am of him.” **BT**

—Roy Hoffman writes for The Mobile Press-Register in Mobile, Ala.



| M | M | B | B |

Tailor-made for pastors who parent.

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

MMBB: Sharing your values. Securing your future.

THE MINISTERS AND MISSIONARIES BENEFIT BOARD

www.mmbb.org

Baptist Life

Online forums still going strong after 10 years

The topics range from theological minutia to breaking Baptist news to barbecue. With little warning, the discussions can go from light bantering to near boiling temperature.

Yet for a decade now, a loyal and diverse group of Baptists — with many others coming and leaving along the way — has kept the conversations going at BaptistLife (www.baptistlife.com). And self-policing makes it a popular place for throwing out an issue and watching the crowd respond.

“I have enjoyed participating in BaptistLife.com since its beginning and don’t know of a better arena where I can have regular — and mostly civil — exchanges with theological liberals, moderates and conservatives,” said William Thornton, a Southern Baptist pastor in Northeast Georgia and a loyal critic, who now moderates the site’s “SBC News and Trends” forum. “The daily discussions of current issues, expressions of opinion, even the rants and tirades have made life much more interesting.”

BaptistLife.com was birthed in 2000 by Bruce Gourley of Montana, who serves as online editor for *Baptists Today* and was recently named executive director of the Baptist History and Heritage Society.

“I know of no other public place today where Baptists of all kinds can freely discuss theological, ecclesial, political and other matters,” said Gourley. “For the past decade, many breaking news stories, inside scoops, and emerging themes and trends in Baptist life were first introduced to the Baptist public on BaptistLife.com.”

Gourley said the forum predated blogging as a popular concept, and in turn has become, among other things, “an online waterhole for many Baptist bloggers when they’re not blogging.”

Timothy Bonney, an American Baptist pastor in Iowa, has engaged in these online discussions for several years and now serves as a moderator of the popular “Baptist Faith and Practice Forum,” helping to keep



discussions on track.

“I have found BaptistLife to be a place for honest and frank discussion on topics covering every subject imaginable,” said Bonney. “[It] is also a unique caring community of Christian friends that I have greatly enjoyed getting to know over the years.”

Bonney credits Gourley, the site owner, with making BaptistLife.com an open place to express one’s view regardless of their theological orientation within denominational life.

“I believe BaptistLife.com has made an important contribution to Baptist faith and practice,” said Bonney.

At age 83, retired pastor, chaplain and teacher Hal Eaton of Virginia thinks the sharp exchanges help keep his mind sharper.

“I gain in every way from the give-and-take of a daily dunk into the morass of Baptist life, opinion and comment,” he said.

Lamar Wadsworth, a former pastor living in Northwest Georgia, considers

BaptistLife.com to be a better cyberspace version of what many Baptists have been doing for a long time.

“Back in the pre-Internet days, when I was a Southern Baptist, I looked forward to the monthly *Baptist Program* magazine,” said Wadsworth. “The first thing I read was ‘The Open Meeting’ — where a variety of viewpoints would be published on the topic of the month.”

BaptistLife.com delivers those kinds of exchanges on a much wider variety of subjects every day, he said.

“Diverse viewpoints are still welcome at BaptistLife.com, just like they used to be in the SBC,” said Wadsworth.

Neil Heath, a retired campus minister in Georgia, said the forums allow for relationship building despite great physical distances.

“Beyond our sometimes-heated debates, we also share the messiness of our lives and receive encouragement, support and celebration from people we’ve never met face-to-face,” said Heath. “We share, we argue, we tease, we laugh, we scold, we support, we complain, we stay together. That’s family ... I hope it’s here for a long time to come.”

That suits Gourley just fine — who keeps the site up and upgraded.

“Ten years, several software incarnations, thousands of participants and lurkers, and hundreds of thousands of posts later,” said Gourley, “the BaptistLife.com discussion forums have become an online home for widely diverse Baptists in an era of denominational schisms and theological battles.”

Beyond expected disagreements, however, Gourley has enjoyed watching positive results emerge.

“Lasting friendships have been formed and a greater understanding among diverse Baptists achieved through BaptistLife.com,” he said. “The story of BaptistLife.com is the story of what Baptist laity and clergy talked about during the first decade of the 21st century. The site is a narrative of modern Baptist history in the making.” **BT**



Bruce Gourley

The art of preaching

Pastor finds screenwriting lessons can enhance sermons

What can pastors learn from sitcom writers when preparing sermons? Plenty, according to Executive Pastor Mike Massar of Williams Trace Baptist Church in Sugar Land, Texas.

“In today’s world, preachers need to learn how to think in terms of pictures when they are preaching because that’s how this generation has been trained,” said Massar. “Your introduction in a sermon better be really good because you only have 8-12 minutes before the first break in a sitcom occurs. That’s when we’re all conditioned to get up to get a Coke, or whatever.”

In 2006, Massar received a sabbatical grant from the Lilly Foundation to do a comparison of writing screenplays and writing sermons. His grant took him to the University of Southern California film school, where he conducted research and wrote a paper titled “Homiletics as a Dramatic Art Form.”

“When you’re preaching, you can tell when you’re not there in a sermon because you will see [church members] get up, go somewhere else, in their mind. Learning this has been a great discipline for me.”

The experience awakened in Massar a desire to pursue other writing ideas, and he

For information on how you can support the ongoing mission of *Baptists Today* news journal, contact Keithen Tucker at ktucker@baptiststoday.org or (478) 330-5613.

began to think about ways to do it. He made some changes. After serving 12 years as senior pastor of First Baptist Church of Tyler, Texas, he accepted a new role in 2009 as executive pastor at Williams Trace.

“In this new role, I get to preach and teach, but I also have time to do some writing,” he said. “It also allows me to do more pastoral care with church staff.”

While Massar embraces a new approach to writing sermons to reach today’s congregations, he feels not all changes in churches have been good ones. He has great concern for churches where “people go, are entertained, and then leave.”

He continued, “Thank goodness, there are churches that have a real potentiality to them — where you’re not going to be comfortable just coming and sitting on Sunday morning for an hour — churches that almost demand that you find your place of calling.”

According to Massar, it is a church’s calling to help members find their calling.

“If you’re not doing what God is calling you to do, then we’re not being all that we can be as a church,” he explained. “We want to give you an opportunity to serve. It’s OK for you say ‘no,’ but you need to be engaged some place. Local churches that are doing a good job are saying, ‘You can’t just talk about your faith; you have to be engaged in it.’”

Massar sees *Baptists Today* as a way to help church members understand the importance of being engaged in their faith.

“I have always encouraged folks to read

it so that they can find out how much wider the Baptist stream really is and to be exposed to different things,” said Massar, who serves on the *Baptists Today* Board of Directors. “That’s one thing, especially in Texas, that is very important.”

Massar encourages involvement with Baptists beyond Texas through groups like the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. The easiest way to make church members aware of such broader connections, he said, is “to put *Baptists Today* in somebody’s hand and say ‘just read it for awhile.’”

“That’s a non-confrontational way to let people start talking about things and asking questions that you get to follow up on,” he added.

Massar says part of the genius of *Baptists Today* is that it not only inspires spiritual growth and provides insight into Baptist life, but it also calls individuals and churches to understand the bigger issues of what it means to be an authentic Christian at this time — and the importance of holding to Baptist principles.

“*Baptists Today* is able to communicate with young people,” said Massar. “They are hungry for authenticity and for people who have passion about what they believe.”

He is encouraged by the younger generation’s commitment to protect Baptist principles such as the priesthood of the believer and the autonomy of the local church — and he wants older Baptists to know that the movement is not going to die.

“One of the things I love about *Baptists Today* board meetings is the opportunity to watch some of the gentle, sweet souls when they start talking about [earlier times in Baptist life],” said Massar. “Their eyes have a passion to them.”

Massar says *Baptists Today* gives readers a place where honest questions are asked.

“*Baptists Today* doesn’t expect you to agree with them on everything they write,” he added. “They are kind of like the gadfly that starts making you think about things. And I think that’s really good.” **BT**



Mike Massar

Baptist News
Baptist Views
BAPTISTS
TODAY

1-877-752-5658

Faith at sea

Cruise companies navigate choppy religious waters

Before stepping aboard her first cruise back in December 2008, Pam Biedenbender and her husband attended Mass at a Catholic church in Miami; later, onboard the *Carnival Valor*, she learned she'd have to miss Christmas Mass because the ship had no priest.

"When I booked the cruise, I specifically asked, and they said there is usually a priest on board at Christmas and Easter," said Biedenbender, who regularly seeks dispensation from her priest when she's going to miss Mass.

She inquired about attending Mass in port at Belize on Christmas Day, but the ship's crew discouraged her, citing safety reasons. Biedenbender said she enjoyed the cruise, but missing Mass on Christmas made her feel like she missed out on Christmas itself.

Like many industries and institutions, cruise lines navigate turbulent waters as they try to determine how much — if any — accommodation to provide to their religious customers.

With specialized cruises targeting different religious groups — from kosher cruises with Jewish entertainers, to wholesome Christian itineraries, to ships with Scientology seminars — travelers who want to sail the seas while practicing their faith face an array of choices.

Some travelers want to worship at sea; others say their vacation away includes a vacation from church.

Earlier this year, Celebrity Cruises, citing passenger feedback, ended its policy of providing an on-board Catholic priest for every cruise.

"(Guests) wanted to see more balance across different faiths," said Tavia Robb, Celebrity's public relations manager.

Under the change that took effect Jan. 1, Celebrity will provide religious services only on major religious holidays. Catholic and Protestant clergy will conduct services daily during Lent and on Palm Sunday, Easter and Christmas. A rabbi or cantor will conduct



Passengers party during a gospel concert by former *American Idol* contestant Mandisa during a Premier Christian Cruise on board Royal Caribbean's *Monarch of the Seas*. RNS photo courtesy Premier Christian Cruises.

services during Passover, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Hanukkah.

The decision sparked a spirited discussion on *USA Today's* travel blog. "Maybe Druids can demand trees and a shaman on their next ... cruise," wrote one commenter under the name "Arubaman."

The New York-based Catholic League, however, wasn't amused. The group suggested that Catholic travelers who are "serious about their faith" examine their options before booking with Celebrity. Catholics are unique, the group noted, because the faith requires members to observe weekly liturgy, which can only be led by a priest.

"Why punish the Catholic priests and cruise-goers?" wondered Susan Fani, spokeswoman for the Catholic League. Instead of adding religious leaders from other faiths, she said, Celebrity was reacting to "anti-Catholic" complaints.

Some cruise lines, including Royal Caribbean, already had a policy similar to Celebrity's, placing clergy on board for major holidays. During the rest of the year, Royal Caribbean offers weekly interdenominational worship, either a pre-recorded service or one led by a staff member.

Others, like Holland America, place Catholic priests on all cruises and Protestant ministers and rabbis on important holidays. The priests celebrate Mass daily and on Sundays; weekly interdenominational services and Sabbath services are typically led by passengers or crew.

"We have on-board surveys that (ask),

"What do you use? What are you interested in? Is this a value to you?" said Erik Elvejord, director of public relations of Holland America. "They're attended enough that we're not going to get rid of them."

Bob Thompson, a professor of popular culture at Syracuse University, said the minor uproar over Celebrity's decision appears to be a combination of market forces and culture wars.

"If the problem is one faith is privileged over another, one can either cut them all, or cut the one that's being privileged, or add the ones that are not," Thompson said.

It comes down to basic customer satisfaction, he said, comparing the controversy to the outcry when airlines discontinue a perk they once provided. When something is taken away, "people who liked those services or wanted those services and used to have them are going to feel strongly about it."

One Catholic priest who has served on a dozen cruises all over the world said the working trips are his primary means of taking a vacation; priests are not paid for their services but cruise for free.

David Farnum, a New York-based Paulist priest, said he celebrates Mass daily when he serves on a cruise. Once a week, he also leads an ecumenical prayer service and a Mass for the ship's crew; he has also helped couples renew wedding vows and supported grieving families when tragedy has struck on board.

"I may not share their specific denominational identity or tradition but I'd like to think that I am trained well enough to be a pastoral presence no matter who I talk to," he said. **BT**

Baptists Today to honor veteran journalist

By John Pierce

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The Board of Directors of the autonomous, national news journal *Baptists Today* will host an April 22 luncheon at Calvary Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., to present the annual Judson-Rice Award to layman Charles L. Overby.

Overby is chairman and chief executive officer of the Freedom Forum, an independent, nonpartisan foundation dedicated to First Amendment freedoms and media issues.

He also heads two Freedom Forum initiatives: the Diversity Institute — which recruits and trains a diverse workforce for newsrooms — and the interactive Newseum, a popular visitor's destination on the Washington Mall.

At the noon luncheon Overby will address the importance of a free press and dialogue with those in attendance. For reservations or sponsorship information, call 1-877-752-5658 or visit www.baptists-today.org.

Overby has promoted the values of a free press in his travels to six continents. While editor of *The Clarion-Ledger* in his hometown of Jackson, Miss., the newspaper won the 1983 Pulitzer Prize Public Service Award for news and editorials on education reform in Mississippi.

A seasoned reporter, Overby covered the White House, presidential campaigns, Congress and the U.S. Supreme Court during his tenure with the Gannett Co., the nation's largest newspaper company.

Later he was named vice president for news and communications by Gannett and served on the management committees of Gannett and *USA TODAY*.

In 1989 Overby was named president and chief executive officer of the Gannett Foundation, which was renamed the Freedom Forum in 1991. He became chairman and CEO in 1997.



Charles L. Overby

Overby served two stints in government, first as press assistant to Sen. John Stennis, D-Miss., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and then as special assistant for administration to Gov. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn.

He serves on the board of the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans and on the foundation board of the University of Mississippi, his alma mater. Previously, he was a member of the Board of Regents at Baylor University and the Board of Directors of *Baptists Today*.

Charles and his wife, Andrea, are active members of the First Baptist Church of Nashville, Tenn., where he teaches Sunday school.

The *Baptists Today* Board created the Judson-Rice award in 2001 to commemorate the great contributions of early Baptist leaders Adoniram Judson, Ann Hasseltine Judson and Luther Rice, and to recognize a current Baptist leader who has demonstrated significant leadership skills while maintaining the highest integrity. **BT**

FIVE GOOD WAYS to support *Baptists Today*

1

Subscribe for a friend or two, and we'll get the subscriptions going right away.

2

Make a three-year financial pledge to support the ongoing ministry of *Baptists Today*, through "The voice to sustain Baptists tomorrow" campaign.

3

Make a gift of \$450 or more to create a group subscription for your church or another congregation.

4

Encourage your church to include the First Freedoms Project that equally supports three First Amendment-focused national ministries — Associated Baptist Press, the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty and *Baptists Today* news journal — in the annual budget.

5

Consider making *Baptists Today* a part of your estate planning to ensure an autonomous and unrestricted news voice continues into the future.

FOR INFORMATION on doing any or all of the above, contact Keithen Tucker at 478-330-5613 or ktucker@baptiststoday.org.

What do these churches have in common?

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

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

Boulevard Baptist Church, Anderson, S.C.

Broadmoor Baptist Church, Baton Rouge, La.

Brunswick Islands Baptist Church, Supply, N.C.

Chadborn Baptist Church, Chadborn, N.C.

Church in the Meadows, Lakeland, Fla.

College Avenue Baptist Church, Lenoir, N.C.

College Park Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla.

Covenant Baptist Church, Gastonia, N.C.

Cullowhee Baptist Church, Cullowhee, N.C.

Druid Hills Baptist Church, Atlanta, Ga.

Edenton Baptist Church, Edenton, N.C.

Emerywood Baptist Church, High Point, N.C.

Faith Baptist Church, Georgetown, Ky.

Fellowship Baptist Church, Fitzgerald, Ga.

Fernwood Baptist Church, Spartanburg, S.C.

First Baptist Church, Ahoskie, N.C.

First Baptist Church, Anderson, S.C.

First Baptist Church, Asheville, N.C.

First Baptist Church, Cape Girardeau, Mo.

First Baptist Church, Carolina Beach, N.C.

First Baptist Church, Carrollton, Ga.

First Baptist Church, Chattanooga, Tenn.

First Baptist Church, Clemson, S.C.

First Baptist Church, Columbus, Ga.

First Baptist Church, Commerce, Ga.

First Baptist Church, Conway, S.C.

First Baptist Church, Dalton, Ga.

First Baptist Church, Forest City, N.C.

First Baptist Church, Fort Myers, Fla.

First Baptist Church, Frankfort, Ky.

First Baptist Church, Gainesville, Fla.

First Baptist Church, Gainesville, Ga.

First Baptist Church, Gastonia, N.C.

First Baptist Church, Greenville, S.C.

First Baptist Church, Greenwood, S.C.

First Baptist Church, Griffin, Ga.

First Baptist Church, Hawkinsville, Ga.

First Baptist Church, Huntsville, Ala.

First Baptist Church, Jasper, Ga.

First Baptist Church, Lexington, N.C.

First Baptist Church, London, Ky.

First Baptist Church, Lumberton, N.C.

First Baptist Church, Macon, Ga.

First Baptist Church, Madison, N.C.

First Baptist Church, Marion, N.C.

First Baptist Church, Mocksville, N.C.

First Baptist Church, Morganton, N.C.

First Baptist Church, Morrow, Ga.

First Baptist Church, Mount Olive, N.C.

First Baptist Church, Murfreesboro, Tenn.

First Baptist Church, New Bern, N.C.

First Baptist Church, Orangeburg, S.C.

First Baptist Church, Pensacola, Fla.

First Baptist Church, Rome, Ga.

First Baptist Church, Rutherfordton, N.C.

First Baptist Church, Sanford, N.C.

First Baptist Church, Savannah, Ga.

First Baptist Church, Spruce Pine, N.C.

First Baptist Church, Tifton, Ga.

First Baptist Church, Wilmington, N.C.

First Baptist Church, Wilson, N.C.

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

Forest Hills Baptist Church, Raleigh, N.C.

Franklin Baptist Church, Franklin, Va.

Grace Fellowship Baptist Church, Meridian, Miss.

Greystone Baptist Church, Raleigh, N.C.

Haddock Baptist Church, Haddock, Ga.

Hendricks Avenue Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Fla.

Highland Hills Baptist Church, Macon, Ga.

Highland Park Baptist Church, Austin, Texas

Holmeswood Baptist Church, Kansas City, Mo.

HomeStar Fellowship, Raleigh, N.C.

Johns Creek Baptist Church, Alpharetta, Ga.

Kathwood Baptist Church, Columbia, S.C.

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

Lakeside Baptist Church, Rocky Mount, N.C.

Lakeview Baptist Church, Camden, S.C.

Lexington Avenue Baptist Church, Danville, Ky.

Lystra Baptist Church, Chapel Hill, N.C.

Millbrook Baptist Church, Raleigh, N.C.

Mount Zion Baptist Church, Macon, Ga.

National Heights Baptist Church, Fayetteville, Ga.

New Heights Baptist Church, Macon, Ga.

Northminster Baptist Church, Jackson, Miss.

North Stuart Baptist Church, Stuart, Fla.

Oakmont Baptist Church, Greenville, N.C.

Peachtree Baptist Church, Atlanta, Ga.

Providence Baptist Church, Charlotte, N.C.

Providence Baptist Church, Cookeville, Tenn.

Providence Baptist Church, Hendersonville, N.C.

Pullen Memorial Baptist Church, Raleigh, N.C.

Reynoldson Baptist Church, Gates, N.C.

Rock Falls Baptist Church, Orrick, Mo.

Rolling Hills Baptist Church, Fayetteville, Ark.

Rolesville Baptist Church, Rolesville, N.C.

Second Baptist Church, Liberty, Mo.

Second Baptist Church, Memphis, Tenn.

Second Baptist Church, Richmond, Va.

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

Shades Crest Baptist Church, Birmingham, Ala.

Smoke Rise Baptist Church, Stone Mountain, Ga.

South Main Baptist Church, Houston, Texas

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

St. Matthews Baptist Church, Louisville, Ky.

Tabernacle Baptist Church, Carrollton, Ga.

Tabernacle Baptist Church, Raleigh, N.C.

The Memorial Baptist Church, Greenville, N.C.

Trinity Baptist Church, Moultrie, Ga.

University Baptist Church, Baton Rouge, La.

Vineville Baptist Church, Macon, Ga.

Watts Street Baptist Church, Durham, N.C.

Wieuca Road Baptist Church, Atlanta, Ga.

Wingate Baptist Church, Wingate, N.C.

Winter Park Baptist Church, Wilmington, N.C.

Woodmont Baptist Church, Nashville, Tenn.

Yates Baptist Church, Durham, N.C.

Youngsville Baptist Church, Youngsville, N.C.

Zebulon Baptist Church, Zebulon, N.C.

Your church can be better informed, too

FOR AS LITTLE AS \$450 A YEAR

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