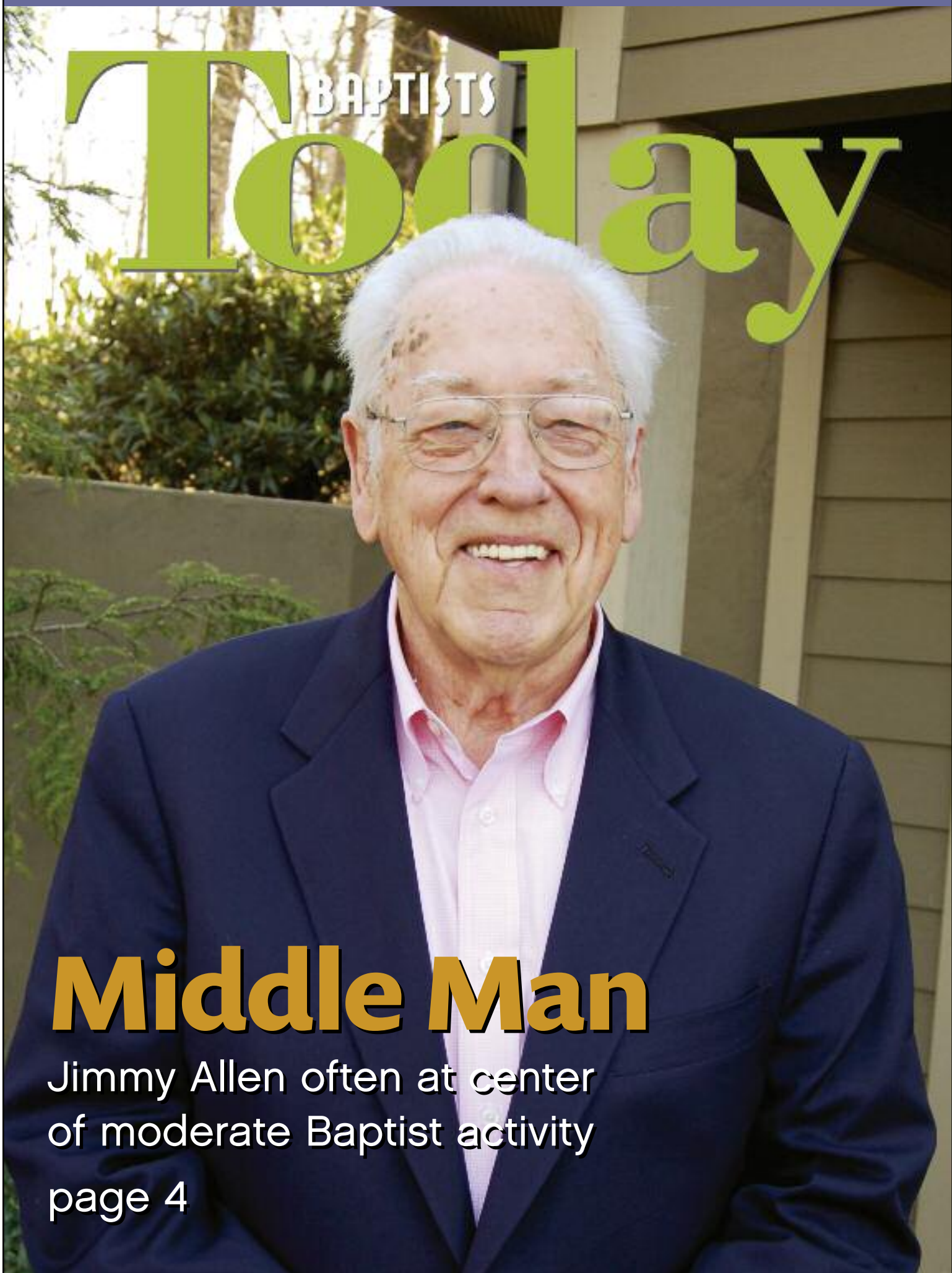


BAPTISTS Today



Middle Man

Jimmy Allen often at center
of moderate Baptist activity

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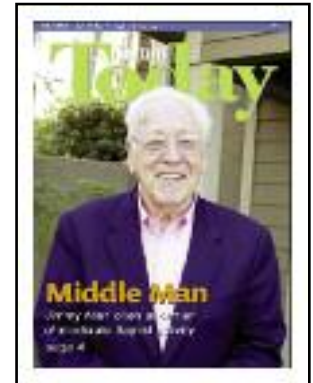
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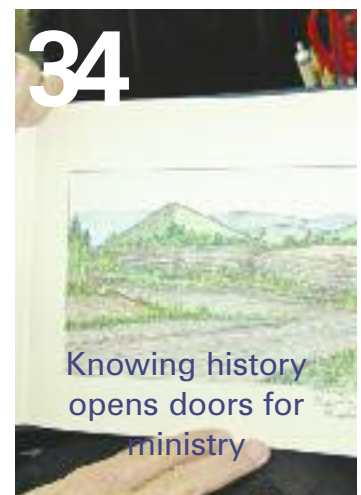
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Managing time and setting boundaries while remaining accessible

By David W. Hull



Cover photo by John Pierce. Jimmy Allen, the last moderate SBC president, helped organize the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Celebration of a New Baptist Covenant. **Page 4**



Middle Man

Jimmy Allen often at center of moderate Baptist activity

BIG CANOE, Ga. — He was the last moderate to serve as president of the Southern Baptist Convention before the fundamentalist takeover began in 1979. Then in 2008, he used his wide-reaching relationships with various Baptist leaders to coordinate the high-profile Celebration of a New Baptist Covenant.

When Baptists have struggled with emerging social issues such as racial reconciliation and dealing with HIV/AIDS, he has been there in word and deed.

Over the past half-century and still today, Jimmy Allen is often found at the center of moderate Baptist life.

Raised a preacher's kid in Dallas, he took to the pulpit himself — most notably as pastor of the First Baptist Church of San Antonio. He rose to top elected leadership positions with Texas and Southern Baptists.

A respected communicator, he pushed Southern Baptists to use every available technology. An Emmy — from his television work in China — sits on a shelf in his home study in the Georgia mountains north of Atlanta.

An ethicist of T.B. Maston's influence, he is known for balancing pragmatism with prophetic calls, and for deep compassion such as that expressed in his book, *Burden of a Secret*, when HIV/AIDS made an early,



(ABOVE) BRINGING BAPTISTS TOGETHER
Joined by President Jimmy Carter and a cadre of Baptist leaders at a 2007 press conference, Jimmy Allen announces plans for the Celebration of a New Baptist Covenant held the following winter.



(AT LEFT) FRIENDS THROUGH THE YEARS
A longtime friendship between National Baptist Convention, USA leader William J. Shaw and former Southern Baptist president Jimmy Allen helped bring about a 2008 gathering of Baptists that crossed racial and convention lines.

deadly impact on his family.

His friendships with President Jimmy Carter and with leaders of historic African-American Baptist groups have led to opportunities to fulfill a commitment to peacemaking and reconciliation within and beyond the Baptist family.

Early influences, he said in a recent interview at his home, set the course for his remarkable life.

"My preacher-father and my mother are at the top of the list," he said. "They were the most powerful influences in my life."

An only child, Jimmy received "a sense of nurturing and responsibility" from his mother and his father who was called into ministry later in life.

He grew up in Dallas during an era that emphasized preaching from the likes of George W. Truett. Illness kept the golden-voiced pulpiteer from preaching Jimmy's ordination service. Wallace Bassett was a capable replacement.

"They were people of strength in the Baptist movement who trafficked into my life and helped me a great deal," said Allen.

“The racial issue was so basic and so critical as it came to the consciences of the churches across the country that to be silent at that moment was just an unthinkable betrayal of the gospel.”

RETHINKING RACE

Allen’s provincial thinking got challenged when “I ran into Clarence Jordan who helped me with my old racial attitudes.”

He credits his late friend and colleague Foy Valentine with helping him engage in this important social issue as well. Like on other students of that era, a seminary ethics professor in Texas made an indelible mark.

“T.B. Maston is the pioneer of racial attitude change that profoundly affected me as a student,” said Allen.

After receiving his first degree from Southwestern Baptist Seminary in Ft. Worth with an emphasis in theology and entering the pastorate, Jimmy was drawn back by a desire for further study.

“I found as a pastor that what I needed was how to help people get through the week and how to behave,” he said. “So I went to Dr. Maston and asked if I could change my major after I already had my undergraduate degree.”

The seminary required Jimmy to audit every ethics course taught by Maston before pursuing graduate studies toward a doctorate.

“So I did that because this man had challenged me on the racial issue so profoundly,” said Allen, whose parents had studied with Maston as students in the seminary’s non-degree program.

However, he discovered that being a young voice for changing racial attitudes was different from guiding a conservative denomination toward change. In 1960, Allen was asked to lead the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission — which Maston had helped launch a decade earlier. At Maston’s urging, he took the position with a willingness to tackle the controversial issue of racial justice.

“With the coming of the Martin Luther King movement in the ’60s, we were more confronted with it,” said Allen. “The real strength of the civil rights movement, with its civil disobedience, was to confront the conscience of the people who were believers...”

Advocating for social change, as a Baptist minister in Texas, was not easy, he confessed.

“I found myself very much involved —

while in the uncomfortable place of being in the most segregated congregations of the country at a time when if I’d moved into the streets as a protester I would have moved out of the pulpits where I was trying to persuade people,” said Allen. “So I had to deal with standing for racial justice and helping make things happen without going into the streets myself.”

He compared his position to “wearing a gray coat and blue trousers during the Civil War. One shot at your chest and the other at your legs.”

But Allen continued to call Baptists of Texas and beyond to repent of racism and to build healthy interracial relationships.

“The racial issue was so basic and so critical as it came to the consciences of the churches across the country that to be silent at that moment was just an unthinkable betrayal of the gospel,” he said. “But there were a lot of people who betrayed the gospel because of that (issue), and there were people who paid the price for not betraying the gospel during that time.”

Allen said relationships cemented with African-American Baptist leaders in that era made the New Baptist Covenant effort possible several decades later.

“The opportunity for us to see each other as brothers became our task,” he said of working closely with National Baptist leader William Shaw and others in the 1960s. “It was at one time unthinkable, then it became possible — and then it becomes unthinkable that you don’t do that.”

CONVENTION CHANGE

Bold Mission Thrust, an ambitious Southern Baptist Convention effort to take the gospel to the entire world by 2000, was in its early stage when Allen was elected president in 1978.

“I came into the presidency with a sense of mission that we were standing at the verge of discovering how important lay involvement in missions had become,” he said. “I thought it was the moment for Baptists to seize.”

Although he considered the SBC to be

“a major cohesive movement for missions, evangelism and social impact,” Allen said something else was drawing the attention and energies of some Southern Baptists.

“At the same time this insidious, fundamentalist attitude was struggling to take over the convention,” he said. “I recognized it because I had grown up in the shadow of J. Frank Norris. So I knew that and tried to help people around me know about it.”

Allen said mission zeal faded into an all-out political struggle for control of the convention, which fundamentalist leaders sealed after a string of annual presidential elections.

“I thought we missed our moment,” said Allen. “When you miss your moment, God refuses to bless and a deterioration takes place. I thought the Southern Baptist Convention would be damaged beyond measure and it has been. ... The deterioration has been heartbreaking.”

When every effort to stop the takeover or to find compromise failed, Allen said he turned his attention to finding new ways to carry out his understanding of Baptist life.

“I went to every healing meeting we had, but you don’t heal with people who are ready to take over and manipulate you if they have 51 percent of the power,” he said. “Though I supported every effort to find some common ground, I knew there was no common ground.”

NEW WAYS

Allen gave leadership to a gathering in Atlanta in 1990 that is now marked as the beginning of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. He said the gathering was fueled by shock at losing a denominational home and by a more positive belief “that we have business that is big and we need to be doing it, so let’s go after it.”

Not all who were disenchanted with the refashioned SBC were ready to leave for new territory, he said.

“I think the dawning of it coming in waves was true,” he said. “The dominoes

were falling and some people didn't know they were falling."

Shifting loyalties, even in the face of obvious change, is difficult for many people, he said.

"The ingraining of the Cooperative Program as the way to be Baptist was so profound," said Allen. "So we were trapped in inertia ..."

The "elasticity" provided by Baptist beliefs in individual and congregational freedom enabled the CBF to emerge, he said. The simple agenda for that initial Atlanta gathering was to meet and discuss, "What now shall we do?"

"It was obvious that we had to reach out in some way and do the mission that God had for Baptists," he recalled.

As the one presiding over the meeting, Allen made sure each person who wished had an opportunity to speak his or her mind. Participants also met according to states to discuss regional concerns.

"Out of that discussion there came the realization that if you are going to have anything you've got to organize it," he said. "Baptists are good at organizing, so the organization [of CBF] began to evolve.

Allen said discussions swirled around a variety of concerns from naming the organization to which issues to give priority.

"There was a creative atmosphere of discussion going in the halls and in the general meeting," he said. "We didn't gather to organize something, but everyone knew something would have to come out of it that would continue — and that means organizing something."

20 YEARS LATER

CBF started with many odds stacked against it, said Allen.

"I think we had the problem of timid pastors and old loyalties and some confusion about how we manage what we used to do in what we are trying to put together," he said. "It was not only 'wake up, wake up, wake up,' but confusion within the structures of churches that didn't want to turn their backs on their mother-child relationships."

Some SBC agency and institution leaders, he said, struggled to decide where to stake their claims in Baptist life.

"Some of them, sadly to say, bent with whatever wind was there and didn't make up

their minds to do the courageous thing at that time," said Allen. "All of that caused spurts of energy and then the dispensation of that."

But it was enthusiasm for missions that gave CBF an early boost, he said.

"At that time, the European Baptist Seminary was being cut off from Southern Baptists," he said. "It became a cause that rallied a lot of people who were interested in missions and education."

More moderate Southern Baptists began to realize that missionaries they had long supported were being "eased out or pushed out," he said. CBF came to their rescue.

Allen admits that CBF has not grown to rival the SBC in size nor developed in all the ways he first imagined. But he said the Fellowship came on the scene in the face of many challenges.

"Yes, I think the very democracy we pride ourselves in is slow to catch on in the grassroots," said Allen. "Therefore the movement survived because God had his hand on it, but it didn't thrive in the same dimension of size that some of us thought it would in the first place."

BEYOND BAPTISTS

Aside from his leadership among Baptists, Jimmy has become a voice for compassionate responses to those impacted by HIV/AIDS. The issue chose him — entering his family in devastating fashion.

"I think we've come a long way in our understanding of HIV/AIDS," he said. "It became one of many places where the conscience of the Christian has been touched."

Over time, he said, the church and society at large have gained understanding of the disease and the antiretroviral medications that allow people to live with it. "It is no longer an unthinkable thing for people with AIDS to be a part of our fellowship."

While HIV/AIDS is not exclusively tied to homosexuality, the two issues are often addressed together in church circles.

"The homosexual issue, the gay life issue, is a pressing one, and has been a pressing one in my personal life," said Allen, who has an openly gay son. "I've discovered you can love beyond your theology."

Allen said he holds to the position "that God's intention for us is in the direction of commitments in our relationships between

husbands and wives within marriage."

However, he avoids condemnation of those with a different perspective.

"Missing the mark in that direction is not what I allow to damage my relationship with my family and other people who are gay or lesbian. We are still brothers and sisters, and we still have the same spiritual needs. My love goes beyond that."

He considers this to be "the most difficult issue we face right now within church life in America" — and calls for caution.

"I hope that it will be faced with an acceptance that people have different interpretations that we respect — rather than with the kind of divisiveness or hard-heartedness we have been seeing demonstrated," he said.

Science still has a word for us, he added. "I keep waiting for the laboratory genetics to prove that this is indeed a condition that cannot be disciplined and channeled."

Attitudinal barriers need to come down, he said, in order to deal constructively with the presence of gay and lesbian persons in congregational life.

"I've seen covenants between people who are gay that are as strong, as loving and as faithful as between heterosexual people — and, many times, stronger."

Allen said he takes an attitude of acceptance, both of homosexuals and "of the fact that God is at work and will do with his people what he plans to do." Unless the church deals with this issue more constructively, he said, the damage could be great.

"I think we will lose a generation if we don't get busy finding how to love," he said. "The younger generation coming along will not tolerate intolerance."

A BAPTIST FRIEND

Jimmy Allen met Jimmy Carter when the Baptist layman from Georgia was running for president in 1976.

"He was on the Brotherhood Commission of Southern Baptists when he was governor of Georgia," said Allen. "I knew that, but I didn't know him."

Carter came to San Antonio, Texas, when Allen was pastor of the First Baptist Church, during the primary campaign. News swirled around Carter's self-description of a "born-again" Christian.

"When I read that, I thought they were attacking this man on the basis of what was

my understanding of life,” said Allen, who decided to offer pastoral encouragement.

While riding together to the airport after the campaign stop, the two Jimmys discussed topics like church-state separation.

“It didn’t take long because we saw alike,” said Allen.

Carter, along with Mississippi layman Owen Cooper, hosted a meeting in the White House to encourage lay participation in Bold Mission Thrust. But Allen, who had been elected as SBC president in 1978, didn’t go out of fear that the purpose of the meeting would be misunderstood.

“So we didn’t start out with a long relationship,” said Allen. “But over the period of time he was in the White House, I went to see him.”

Their relationship deepened over the years. After Allen moved to Georgia to serve the interdenominational chapel at Big Canoe in 1992, he and Rosalynn Carter served together on the board of Friendship Force International. And, Allen preached a revival at Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, Ga., where the Carters are active members.

So it was not surprising that President Carter asked his well-connected, pastoral friend to help plan the New Baptist Covenant gathering.

“We’ve had a lot of opportunities to work together,” said Allen. “Our relationship is close because our objectives are close. We understand the gospel in the same sort of way.”

Reports that President Carter asked Allen to go to Iran to see the Ayatollah during the hostage crisis that began in 1979 are incorrect. Allen said that fact-finding mission was planned by others. After agreeing to go, however, Allen said he informed Carter of his plans.

“I called the White House and told one of his assistants that I’d like to tell the President that I’m going to Iran to see about what’s happening there and that I haven’t gone crazy,” he recalled. “I went over there and did find some things I was able to share with him personally.”

Allen said he and Carter have worked to fulfill the mandate of Luke 4:18 — to preach good news to the poor, proclaim freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, and to release the oppressed — long before it became the focus of the New Baptist

Covenant gathering in 2008.

“We share a relationship as brothers in Christ.”

BIG GATHERING

The Celebration of a New Baptist Covenant in 2008 brought together a wide assortment of Baptists that crossed racial, geographical and theological lines. Allen gave primary attention to its planning.

A big question raised along the way was: Is this a meeting (or moment) or a movement? Allen says that with more than two years of hindsight and some regional meetings that have followed, the question remains unanswered.

“It think it is not yet proven,” he said. “It is open to possibilities.”

Several positive results can be identified, he said. Yet the full potential is still untapped or unknown.

“I think it is a movement in the sense that it gave acceleration to a lot of things ... that needed to be done across these racial lines,” said Allen. “It’s often being done in what the common language calls silos — over here and over here.”

Cooperative efforts through these new Baptist relationships will need to be carried out through existing denominational structures, he said. “And there are lots of agendas in those structures that make it difficult.”

And not all resulting actions are carried out under the banner of this meeting, he said. But they are out there and, because of the New Baptist Covenant, they are working or working better.

“I don’t know yet whether it is a meeting or a movement,” he confessed. “I know that it is a meeting that has great motion out of it.”

A future meeting will give better evidence, he said, of the stage at which this larger Baptist family in North America finds itself. And that meeting, Allen said, will be carried out by a different generation of Baptist leaders.

“Leadership of the various groups is changing and we don’t know where all of this will end up,” he said. “But I think we are going to have a lot more Baptists who care about other Baptists than we’ve ever had.”

A steering committee to plan that gathering will be assembled soon, he said.

LOOKING AHEAD

Allen said he hopes emerging leaders will embrace the historic and guiding Baptist principles of biblical authority, the priesthood of the believer, congregational autonomy and religious liberty. He is less concerned about denominational structures now.

“I’m not particularly concerned about having a super-denomination anymore,” said the former president of two Baptist conventions and the SBC Radio and Television Commission. “I think the day of super-denominations is past.”

His focus is now on the local church.

“We are now into congregationalism as Baptists started out. It has been a long time getting the circle around, but that is where it is. I’d like to see a lot more interaction between congregations in activities and in mutual involvement. I’d like for us to be sensitive to where God is at work and to be useful. We’ve not always done that.”

However, he does see great value in how congregations choose to work together.

“We’ve often centered ourselves on what we need rather than on what the need is,” he said. “I hope local churches can manage to stay sensitive and connected well enough to work together without having to be driven there by false loyalties.”

And he hopes Baptists will give needed attention to the ever-changing world of communication technology.

“I think Baptist communicators have a wonderful opportunity,” he said. “They are often inched away from the trough of the finances that will make that opportunity come to pass — and that has to be changed.”

However, not all changes brought about by new technologies are good, he said. On a personal level, Allen said technology is creating isolation that the church needs to address “because we exchange information rather than relationships.”

Yet discovering the most constructive uses of communication technology is vital to the mission of the church, he expressed.

“I’m finding both in personal experience and in observation that the person thinking he knows where communication is going has not been communicated with,” he said. “It is exploding all over the map. The gospel needs to be on the front end of every technological advance, because it is the truth.” **BT**

Allen biography reveals courage, consistency, says author

Editor's note: Larry L. McSwain, associate dean for doctor of ministry studies and professor of leadership at Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology, is the author of Loving beyond Your Theology: The Life and Ministry of Jimmy Raymond Allen. He responded to questions from Baptists Today editor John Pierce about this forthcoming biography from Mercer University Press.

BT: Why the title of this book?

LM: The title comes from a line in his book about his family's struggle with HIV/AIDS and mental illness, *Burden of a Secret*. He seeks to make sense of suffering for the believer in God and concludes God enters our pain with us, which is a part of the mystery of grace.

He sees the church at its best when it is ministering to hurting people regardless of their behavior, and concludes his theology with a question: "Can we Christians overcome our prejudices and love past our theology to help meet the needs of dying people? I pray so."

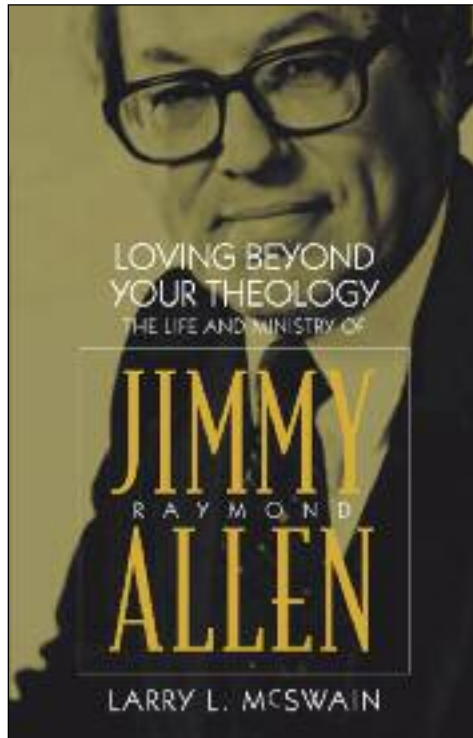
BT: What is most important about Jimmy Allen's story from the standpoint of Christian ethics?

LM: Consistency and courage. The issue addressed throughout his ministry was racial injustice. He had to be converted from segregation in the 1950s. He has been an advocate for a kingdom view of racial reconciliation and oneness through five decades.

He sought in every leadership role he had as pastor or denominational leader to bring people together in spite of racial differences. He included African Americans on the platforms when president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas and the Southern Baptist Convention; he incorporated interracial gatherings into three major mass meetings including the New Baptist Covenant.

Along with that, religious liberty and separation of church and state are two other issues on which he has been prophetic.

He exhibited unusual courage on multiple occasions from ignoring KKK murder threats to addressing national hate in the days following the assassination of President Kennedy to preaching during the riots in



Watts to walking the streets of Belfast during the conflicts there to meeting with the Ayatollah Khomeini during the Iranian hostage crisis to speaking to lesbians and gays of the Metropolitan Community Church about HIV/AIDS.

If he thinks God is in it, he is going to go anywhere and do anything he can to be a part of the solution.

BT: What are your hopes for the book?

LM: My primary hope is people will read it. I hope people who know him can read it and feel affirmation for their story. His story is the narrative of a multitude of people who have transitioned from a Baptist past captive to a provincial culture and an ironclad theology.

That transition is leading to an awakening of a global mission perspective that calls for innovation, flexibility and affirmation of a kingdom theology of inclusion around the table of Jesus. A similar book could be written about a host of persons of his generation.

I hope young people will read it and feel one man's optimism and hope in the power of congregations, denominations and institutions to make a difference in the world.

Jimmy was never anti-institutional. He worked constantly to make them better and

when he could not he worked to create new ones, like the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. There is a lesson in that for post-modern young people.

BT: How does Jimmy's life and ministry fit within the larger story of Baptists over the past half-century or so?

LM: I try to present his saga and the cultural changes of the past half-century as parallel. Baptists, especially of the South, have grown from a highly provincial, relatively ignorant, good-hearted and regionally bound people to an increasingly diverse, affluent, globally aware constituency.

That same change happened to Jimmy. Now, within that change are subgroups of the fearful and resisters to the dramatic change that has and is occurring. But the election of Jimmy Carter as President changed the South in much the same way the election of John F. Kennedy changed the role of Catholicism in the U. S.

Jimmy Allen is both a product of and contributor to that change.

He became a spokesperson for a denomination in the White House, the Knesset of Israel, in the diplomatic offices of Tehran, and imagined a television delivery system that would telecast Southern Baptists singing Christian hymns in the People's Hall of Beijing in the 1980s.

That is an amazing transition and, for all of their fits and starts, Baptists are making that same transition today.

BT: What surprised you the most in doing this project?

LM: Two things were a surprise. First was the transparency of Jimmy Allen. He hides nothing that affects himself. I do not think many people, even religious leaders, are that honestly transparent.

The second was the goodwill people have toward him. Some of the book is based on interviews with his contemporaries conducted by long-time Baptist journalist Jim Newton and myself.

While we did not go searching for critics, every person interviewed by us was positive, even effusive, about him as a person, a man of integrity and an exceptional leader. **BT**

editorial

Are we making the church too comfortable to be comforting?

By John Pierce

Many congregational leaders are struggling for answers to the question of how to be and do church at a time when so many odds seems stacked against them.

The low-hanging fruit of yesteryear is no longer there for the picking. That is, an abundance of prospects who share the faith tradition, ethnicity and cultural orientation of the congregation.

It is easy for outside experts — and editors, to be confessional — to talk about the need for the church to be relevant, sensitive, hospitable, theologically reflective and so on. But that doesn't erase the challenges faced by those seeking to create the kind of church that attracts worshipers without capitulating to sheer gimmickry.

One of the methods often employed is an effort to make the church more comfortable. Therefore, we look for the most convenient times — in hope that our services will not conflict with the many other Sunday interests that abound.

We go to great lengths to ensure that boredom rarely, if ever, creeps into our worship services or other programs. Convenient parking, easy access and other creature comforts demand attention in order to draw and keep a crowd.

Church leaders are skilled at never admitting that a certain activity is being purposefully executed to counter the plans of a neighboring and, yes, competing congregation.

In a recent Religion News Service column, Rabbi James Rudin, the senior inter-religious adviser for the American Jewish Committee, wrote about how marketing firms might advise various religious groups concerning their "market share."

Of mainline Protestants (which seem to fit many Baptist congregations more closely than Evangelicals in style and demographics), he said: "Many Americans, facing a

myriad of religious alternatives, want comforting churches with a progressive theology.

He went on say: "However, our research shows you often come across as cold, self-righteous and a little too zealous in the quest to be 'prophetic' and 'cutting edge.'"

That latter wrist slapping is deserved, probably, and could be explored for a good while. But his earlier observation should not pass us by.

Many Americans, this Jewish observer suggested, want "comforting churches" with progressive theology. What is a comforting church?

Perhaps we are putting so much energy into trying to create "comfortable" churches that we have failed to recognize the importance of being "comforting"?

One does not need to go to church on Sunday morning to be comfortable. A blanket at the lake, the soft music at the coffee shop and the cozy sofa at home can provide that pleasure.

Finding comfort from the storms of life, however, is a more difficult pursuit.

So how do we shape our congregations to give more attention to being comforting than comfortable?

One, a person who is hurting must feel that the church really cares. Compassion and sensitivity are not programmed — they are formed through spiritual discipline.

Two, fear of condemnation is a roadblock to community. One will only risk his or her pain, struggles and other evidence of human frailty in an environment of understanding, acceptance and grace.

Three, the church must be a place when the transcendent presence of God can be experienced more so than anywhere else.



Worship — regardless of style — must allow for those who bring burdens, fears, hopes, uncertainty, joy and confusion into the full presence of the Divine.

Surely there are more, but these three basic ideas might need to move up the list as we give attention to congregational purpose and priorities.

Perhaps we need an intentional shift from asking how to make the church more comfortable to asking how we can become a congregation whose worship and fellowship are comforting to those traveling along the bumps, curves and straight-aways on the highway of life. **BT**

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Editor's note: This is the seventh 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.

Managing time and setting boundaries while remaining accessible

By David W. Hull

I love the soothing song by Kyle Matthews called "A Rhythm to Live By" from the CD, *The Main Event*. Phrases from the song keep running through my mind:

*I need a rhythm to live by
Time for work and worship, rest and play*

*I need a rhythm to live by
So my feet can keep the beat of my heart*

*Help me find the balance I was made for,
from the start*

One of the toughest challenges in ministry is time management. There is never enough time to do all we think we need to do.

How can we find this "rhythm to live by" that is vital to healthy ministry? The Bible is a good place to start.

Ephesians 5:15-17 (NRSV) says, "Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."

The word that is translated "making the most of" has as its root the Greek *agora*. The Agora was the marketplace of the Greek world.

This idea of "making the most of the time" could also be translated as "spending." Just as you might go to the marketplace and exchange money for an item you want, so with our lives it is wise to think of spending or investing our time that produces something valuable in return.

Using this biblical instruction as our frame of reference, good time management is spending our time wisely.

We need to ask the right questions. What is our purpose in life and ministry? Do we understand what "the will of the Lord is" for the work God has called us to do? If so, what items in the marketplace of life will we say "No" to so that we will be able to say "Yes" to what matters the most?

Boundaries help us to say "No." Accessibility keeps us in tune to say "Yes."

The "rhythm of life" is the right balance between these two ways to spend our time.



BOUNDARIES

I do not know who coined the following expression, but it has helped me to set boundaries in my ministry: "To be healthy, we should divert daily, withdraw weekly and abandon annually."

Think about these three ideas as a way of setting boundaries.

Divert daily. Determine the most important tasks in your ministry. These may be priorities that are critical to your mission.

They may also be tasks that only you can do — no one else has this assignment on a regular basis. Then, invest time each day in this task.

In fact, you may need to divert from other opportunities so that you can focus on the thing that matters most.

As a pastor, I am the primary preacher in our church. No other person stands up four

times a week and preaches/teaches to the congregation. That means I must divert from doing other things so that I can invest some of my best time and energy into the task that only I can do.

I choose to have my study in my home, separate from my office in the church. This forms a boundary.

It allows quiet time for study and prayer away from the noise and congestion of the church office. I study at home in the morning — diverted away from many good things I could be doing at the church building in order that I can invest my best efforts to a task that only I can do.

What is most important in your ministry? How are you diverting from some of the other attractions in the marketplace of life to ensure that your very best resources are invested in what only you can do?

Withdraw weekly. God commanded that we observe a weekly boundary in our lives. It is called the Sabbath.

For those of us who minister in congregational settings, our Sabbath will never be on Sunday. It is clearly a day of work for us.

However, that does not excuse us from keeping the commandment. After a week of work we need to withdraw and find time for "worship, rest and play."

My Sabbath is on Friday. When is yours?

Abandon annually. I have heard a self-righteous pride among ministers who brag about never taking a vacation.

"After all, the devil never takes a vacation," they say.

The response to that should always be, "And look at the shape he is in!"

A much better way to find rhythm in

our lives is to get away for a period of time each year. I learned long ago that one week of vacation was not enough time for my soul to rest so that “my feet can keep the beat of my heart.”

For years, our family has taken two weeks of vacation together at the beach. It is a ritual now — sacred time that is far away from home and church.

What will you be doing to “abandon” this year? Amazingly, the church will get along fine until you return!

ACCESSIBILITY

“Help me find the balance I was made for from the start.” Balance is crucial for a healthy ministry.

Something that is out of balance will fall. Too many wonderful ministries have fallen for lack of balance.

While boundaries are important so that we can invest time into what matters most in our ministry, there is another side to this coin. Ministry is about people.

We must be accessible to the needs of people. If we are perceived as always “diverted, withdrawn and abandoned,” we will not have a healthy ministry. We need to develop practices that work for us in finding this rhythm between boundaries and accessibility.

Here are some of my practices. See if they would be helpful for you:

Walk slowly among your people. Take time when the church gathers on Sundays and Wednesdays to move among the people of the congregation to listen and speak into their lives.

You will always be busy; never be in a hurry. This will create an open door for accessibility and communication.

Be reachable even when you are inaccessible. When I study at home, I do not answer the home phone.

I am alone and quiet in my study. A boundary has been set.

However, my cell phone is right beside me and I can be reached in a moment’s notice from the church office if I am needed for an emergency.

Be a master, not a slave, to new technology for communication. Use new technology such as a smart phone to be very accessible. Master this new technology by keeping some boundaries in place.

For example, I never answer the cell phone or text messages during a meeting. I want to be very accessible and present to the ones I am with at the moment. Then, right after the meeting or appointment, I check messages and get back in touch with the one who is trying to reach me.

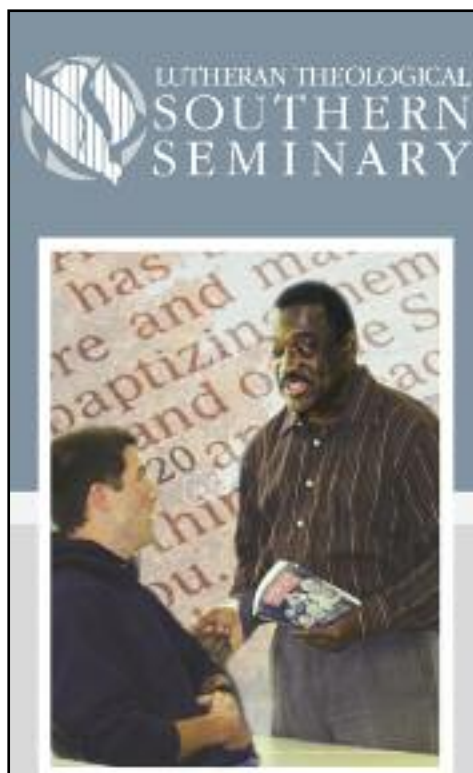
Mobile communication is a wonderful tool for ministry. Use it — but do not let it use you.

Schedule times to be available to colleagues. If you supervise staff or work closely with volunteers, set regular times to meet with them individually.

While your boundaries may mean that you are not always available, these regular meetings will be times when important conversations can happen about the work you do together.

These things have helped me to find a “rhythm to live by.” What will you do to “make the most of the time” God has given to you? **BT**

—David Hull is pastor of First Baptist Church of Huntsville, Ala.



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Quotation

“ remarks ”

“Jesus was fearless, ... a man’s man. He was a carpenter who worked with his hands. He wasn’t a metrosexual who did his nails.”

—*Ultimate Fighting Championship middleweight Rich Franklin who praises God after pummeling his opponents (CNN)*

“There are many similarities between the athletic and the evangelical take on life. Both are competitive, capitalistic. It’s good guys versus bad guys. You have winners — people who are saved — and losers — people who are going to hell.”

—*William J. Baker, author of Playing with God (CNN)*

“The truth of the matter is that every advance in medicine in the last 50 years was made by someone who studied biology from a perspective that was not hostile to Darwinian influence. We live longer, fuller lives, because of their efforts and dedication.”

—*Ed Sunday-Winters, pastor of Ball Camp Baptist Church in Knoxville, Tenn., in a blog following his prostate cancer surgery (ABP)*

“I think we have grown up. And I think we now realize that first, we are a very diverse country and, secondly, that there are core principles that we need to look to when selecting a justice and religious affiliation has really little relevance.”

—*First Amendment Center scholar Charles Haynes on the nomination of Elena Kagan whose confirmation would create the first U.S. Supreme Court without a Protestant justice (RNS)*

“I do want to be relevant so folks can connect and so that real needs and real people are brought to a real God ... There just comes a time when we cross a line that makes us look very fake and quite silly.”

—*Derik Hamby, pastor of Randolph Memorial Baptist Church in Madison Heights, Va., on the rise of church gimmickery (ABP)*

“Saying this year’s increase in baptisms is good news is like bragging your state moved from the 47th to 46th state in educational achievement. It’s better, but it’s not time for a parade.”

—*Southern Baptist researcher Ed Stetzer, writing on the blog “Between the Times” about the latest statistics that show a slight increase in the convention baptism rates after four years of decline (RNS)*

“On a continent-wide basis, sub-Saharan Africa comes out as the most religious place on Earth.”

—*Luis Lugo, director of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, on survey results showing strong Islam and Christianity commitments where traditional indigenous religions were once dominant (Christianity Today)*

“The greatest thing taken here was not money, but trust. Barbara was so loved here that if we knew she had a need we would have done everything we could to help her.”

—*Pastor Dean Haun of First Baptist Church in Morristown, Tenn., to the Knoxville News Sentinel, after longtime financial secretary Barbara Whitt was charged with allegedly embezzling about \$1.5 million (RNS)*

“Authentic Christian living tends to be a more powerful and persuasive influence to pre-Christians than sermons, songs or religious programs. Pre-believers are more interested in the genuineness of your personal faith than they are your doctrinal purity or your denominational loyalty.”

—*Barry Howard, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Pensacola, Fla.*

“Forcing people to talk about death is almost never helpful. Rather, the conversations should provide a flexible, safe space for people to share their needs, fears and hopes.”

—*Daniel Johnson, a palliative-care physician and director of Life Quality Institute in Denver, on end-of-life conversations (Christian Century)*

“Twenty-first century Baptists have much to learn from the rich historical heritage of Baptist baptismal theology. For these early colonial Baptists in America, baptism was neither a sacrament nor a mere symbol. It was a relational act and an authentic symbol.”

—*Shelia D. Klopfer, assistant professor of religion at Georgetown College in Georgetown, Ky. (Baptist History and Heritage)*

“Of all the potential ironies of a short-term mission trip, objectifying people is perhaps the most spiritually damaging. When we fail to become acquainted with our hosts and their communities, we ... inadvertently commodify the very people we intend to help.”

—*Mark Wm. Radecke, chaplain and associate professor of religion at Susquehanna University in Pennsylvania (Christian Century)*

Evangelicals find new unity on immigration

By Adelle M. Banks
Religion News Service

WASHINGTON — In the shadow of Arizona's strict immigration law, a broad range of evangelical leaders are speaking in support of comprehensive immigration reform, with more specifics than some were able to embrace before.

At the same time, the No. 3 Democrat in the Senate, New York's Charles Schumer, is hoping evangelicals will nudge their allies in the GOP to push an on-again, off-again immigration bill through Congress.

The renewed push came in the form of a full-page ad in the Capitol Hill newspaper *Roll Call*, paid for by the National Association of Evangelicals, and a three-page policy proposal from Liberty Counsel, a conservative Christian legal firm.

The NAE statement calls for keeping families intact, securing national borders, and establishing a path to legal citizenship for qualified people who want to become permanent residents.

"Initiatives to remedy this crisis have led to polarization and name calling in which opponents have misrepresented each others' positions as open borders and amnesty versus deportations of millions," the ad reads. "This false choice has led to an unacceptable political stalemate."

The Liberty Counsel blueprint was even more specific, calling for a "just assimilation" of those seeking legal citizenship that includes lessons in English and U.S. history. It says temporary worker visas recognize the

need for "field workers to engineers" in U.S. companies.

"America deserves a just immigration policy," the statement said, "one that begins with securing, not closing, our borders, one that provides a temporary guest-worker program, and one that offers a pathway for earned legal citizenship or temporary residency."

Mathew Staver, founder of Liberty Counsel and a signatory on both the ad and the statement, said there has long been consensus on the need to secure the nation's southern border, but evangelicals are now focusing on the future of the nation's estimated 12 million undocumented immigrants.

"I think that's where the consensus is building," he said.

Southern Baptist ethicist Richard Land said the Arizona law — which gives local authorities new powers to round up suspected illegal immigrants — has prompted evangelicals to feel more strongly about the need for federal reform and to speak up for their Hispanic "brethren."

"I think evangelicals have said 'Enough is enough is enough,'" he said in a May teleconference call hosted by the group Conservatives for Comprehensive Immigration Reform.

Land included his name on both the ad and the policy proposal, as did Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National

Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference. Others signing the ad include NAE President Leith Anderson; megachurch pastors Bill Hybels and Joel Hunter; and civil rights veteran John Perkins. Bishop George McKinney, a leader in the predominantly black Church of God in Christ, also signed the proposal.

Christian ethicist David Gushee said the new energy surrounding immigration reform by non-Hispanic conservatives reflects a reaction to the Arizona law and long-term friendships that some have cultivated with Hispanic Christian leaders.

"Relationships are maturing and so that provides a context for engagement together," said Gushee, who teaches at Mercer University in Georgia and is a leader of the New Evangelical Partnership for the Common Good, which supports comprehensive immigration reform.

"When you've got a friend who's screaming out in pain, who's saying this is really dangerous, you pay attention to that."

Gushee said a broad range of evangelical support — including the most conservative evangelicals — could be a "major force" in passage of immigration reform.

"There are certain issues that have the opportunity to break through our entrenched polarizations," he said, "and I think immigration is one of them." **BT**



David Gushee



Richard Land

Majority of Americans say moral values in decline

By Fernando Alfonso III
Religion News Service

Three-quarters of Americans say the country's moral values are worsening, blaming a decline in ethical standards, poor parenting, and dishonesty by government and business leaders, Gallup reports.

The number of Americans who say the nation's moral values are in decline grew by 5 percent since last year. Other reasons Americans mentioned were a rise in crime,

a breakdown of the two-parent family and a moving away from religion or God.

Only 14 percent of respondents believe that the country's moral values are getting better. An increase in diversity and Americans pulling together in tough times are two of the reasons these respondents gave.

Pollsters also found 45 percent of Americans believe that current moral values are in a poor state. This number is equal to last year's, which was the highest since

2002. Only 15 percent of Americans believe the country's morality is in an excellent or good state.

A majority of Republican respondents — 52 percent — said the country was in a poor moral state, followed by 48 percent of independents and 35 percent of Democrats.

The U.S. adult findings are based on May 3-6 telephone interviews with 1,029 adults, with a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percentage points. **BT**

Southern Baptist baptisms up, membership down

By Adelle M. Banks
Religion News Service

NASHVILLE — The Southern Baptist Convention reported a slight increase in baptisms in 2009, after four consecutive years of decline, but leaders say the denomination still needs to regain its focus on evangelism.

Baptisms in the nation's largest Protestant denomination totaled 349,737 last year, a 2 percent increase from 2008, according to LifeWay Christian Resources, a division of the Southern Baptist Convention. The 2008 baptism total was the lowest since 1987.

"The fact that more people were



baptized this year than last year gives us a reason to hope we're on the right path," said Thom Rainer, president and CEO of LifeWay, in a May 14 announcement of the latest statistics. "At the same time, we as

Southern Baptists continue to show signs of drifting from our historic commitment to evangelism, as reflected in the fact that it still takes 46 Southern Baptists to lead one person to faith in Christ."

Total membership for 2009 dipped slightly — by .42 percent — to 16.1 million.

Ed Stetzer, president of LifeWay Research, said the denomination's membership may have peaked.

"We are a denomination in decline," he wrote on the "Between the Times" blog sponsored by Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. "Some don't like to admit it. But, the decline of SBC membership is not a matter of debate. It is a matter of math." **BT**

Photo courtesy of Mee Lin Woon

Majority now find homosexuality 'morally acceptable'

By Fernando Alfonso III
Religion News Service

WASHINGTON — A slight majority of Americans view gay or lesbian relations as morally acceptable, a first since Gallup pollsters started asking about the issue in 2001.

In a recent survey of 16 different behaviors or social practices, pollsters found that 52 percent of Americans accept gay or lesbian

relations, a steady increase since a form of the question was introduced nine years ago. The percentage of Americans who find it "morally wrong" dipped to its lowest point: 43 percent.

Sixty percent of Democrats and independents are accepting of gay or lesbian relations, compared to 35 percent of Republicans.

Americans were tied, at 46 percent, regarding the morality of doctor-assisted suicide — a stark contrast to the 77 percent

of Americans who believe suicide is morally wrong.

Americans are overwhelmingly agreed on admonishing cheating spouses, with only 6 percent of respondents saying marital infidelity is morally acceptable.

The findings are based on telephone interviews with 1,029 U.S. adults, with a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percentage points. **BT**

Evangelicals call on president for prison-rape reforms

By Ankita Rao
Religion News Service

Evangelicals are calling on the Obama administration to enact long-promised prison reforms, saying the incarcerated deserve protection from violence and rape.

In 2003, former president George W. Bush signed the Prison Rape Elimination Act, which aimed to lower the estimated 13 percent of inmates sexually assaulted each year. The bill called for the Department of Justice to research prison rape and requires prisons to establish prevention programs.

Now, the National Association of Evangelicals is urging the National Prison

Rape Elimination Commission to follow up on the standards proposed.

NAE President Leith Anderson and Director of Government Affairs Galen Carey wrote on May 10 to Attorney General Eric Holder that "those behind bars deserve the same protections against violence as those on the outside."

The NAE pushed for the rape commission to adopt the standards from the 2003 act regardless of the government's tight budget, suggesting that the reforms will reduce recidivism and lead to cost savings.

In 2003, the bill drew support from varied religious and advocacy groups including the Southern Baptist Convention, the

Christian Coalition of America, the NAACP and Human Rights Watch.

Like the NAE, the Human Rights Watch's Jamie Fellner reaffirmed the organization's stance in a Jan. 5 letter to Attorney General Holder — saying that "tens of thousands of adults and juveniles are still sexually abused each year because officials have not instituted basic measures to protect them."

According to the Department of Justice Web site, Holder appointed members to the review panel on Jan. 1 in order to assist the Bureau of Justice Statistics in identifying common characteristics of prison systems and prisoners involved in prison rape. **BT**

CBF, Haitian Baptists agree on earthquake recovery

By Carla Wynn Davis
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

ATLANTA — As part of its ongoing earthquake response efforts in Haiti, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship has signed a memorandum of understanding — representing an official partnership — with the Convention Baptiste d’Haiti.

CBF Executive Coordinator Daniel Vestal signed the agreement with leadership from the Haitian convention in Atlanta in May. The organizations agreed to a three-year development strategy, including partnerships in medical ministry, restoration and development and micro-enterprise.

“I’m grateful for all that God is doing to meet the needs of our Haitian brothers and sisters as CBF works in concert with our partners at the Haiti Baptist Convention,” said CBF Global Missions Coordinator Rob Nash. “We’re committed to ministry in Haiti over at

least a three-year period of time, understanding that real healing can only occur as we move beyond a band-aid approach to work that truly transforms the lives of the Haitian people.”

A base camp for Fellowship relief efforts has been established in the community of Grand Goave, southwest of the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince and among the worst hit by the devastating Jan. 12 quake.

Tim Brendle, a retired Virginia pastor and former missionary to Haiti, has been coordinating CBF’s relief efforts in Grand Goave and has been joined by Tori Wentz, one of the group’s medical field personnel. In the northern areas of the country, CBF field personnel Nancy and Steve James, who are co-appointed with American Baptist Churches USA, are continuing their medical ministry.

Since the quake, more than \$1.18 million has been given to the Fellowship’s Haiti earthquake response, which includes new initiatives

such as counseling earthquake survivors.

Recently Reid Doster, a pastoral counselor and coordinator of CBF of Louisiana, and David Lane, counseling program coordinator and professor of counseling at Mercer University, traveled to Haiti to lay groundwork for a new program to train Haitians to provide post-traumatic-stress counseling to earthquake victims. Ultimately, Lane hopes to develop a training model that can be easily taught by Haitians to Haitians.

“Essentially, we would train trainers, who can teach fellow Haitians lay counseling,” Lane said. “We see this as something that can be very meaningful for a group of hurting people.”

Mercer’s Ha Van Vo, assistant professor of biomedical engineering, is also working with the Fellowship in Haiti, designing and fitting low-cost prosthetics for earthquake victims. More than 20 people have been measured for prosthetics and have begun the fitting process. **BT**

Christians discuss ‘good’ and ‘bad’ evangelism

By Peter Kenny

EDINBURGH, Scotland (RNS/ENInews) — “Good evangelism” and “bad evangelism” came under discussion when a diverse group of Christians met to mark the 100th anniversary of the historic 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conference.

Antonios Kireopoulos, the associate general secretary for interfaith relations for the New York-based National Council of

Churches, on June 4 used his keynote address to draw a line between “good” evangelism and bad “proselytism.”

Evangelism is most harmful, he said, when it “strives to make Christians from among people that are already Christians,” and suffering under political difficulties.

The Edinburgh meeting is commemorating the centenary of the 1910 World Missionary Conference, which marked the beginning of the modern ecumenical move-

ment for church unity.

The organizers of the 2010 meeting include representatives of evangelical, Orthodox, Pentecostal, Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions, as well as of the World Council of Churches.

In Iraq, where Christian communities had borne much of the suffering since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, there had been a “particularly egregious missionary effort,” Kireopoulos said. **BT**

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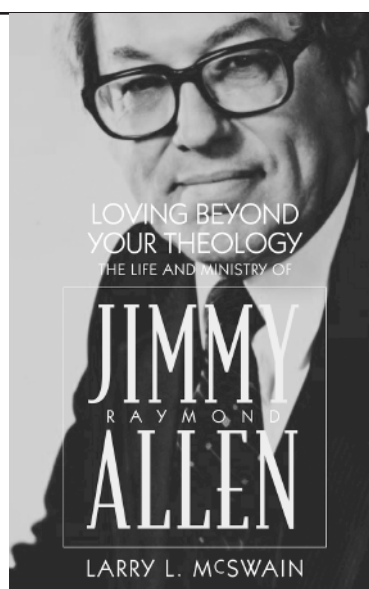
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Assessing two decades of a Baptist renewal movement

By Bruce Gourley

Twenty years ago, two groups of Southern Baptists, following years of intense political conflict veneered with theological jargon, began parting ways. The separation, to be certain, was messy.

Both sides looked over their respective shoulders as their trajectories slowly diverged, and both competed for the loyalty of the majority of Southern Baptists who remained in the middle, many who were unaware that a denominational civil war had been raging for the past decade.

The fundamentalist-moderate struggle that preceded formal division in 1990 is now a matter of history, albeit too fresh in memory to yet be dispassionately analyzed.

However, in hindsight at least one central truth is now evident: when confronted with a fork in the road, most Southern Baptists chose the path most visible — many without realizing there was an alternative option.

Indeed, after seizing control of the Southern Baptist Convention, fundamentalists initially did an admirable job of maintaining institutional life. By retaining the trappings of the old SBC structures, fundamentalists retained a generation or two of Southern Baptists whose identities were welded to the institution.

Even as the new denominational leadership increasingly reshaped all facets of institutional life into an ever-narrowing, theologically and politically correct mold, many traditional Baptists were simply too vested to walk away. Gritting their teeth and choosing to ignore the new realities, they refused to forsake Southern Baptist life.

For other Southern Baptists, 1990 presented a reluctant opportunity. In religious history, renewal movements are times in which people of faith, when confronted with a collective challenge, pause to assess current troubles and look to the past to find strength and guidance to begin moving forward again.

For traditional Southern Baptists who recognized the changing landscape, the institutional movement forward ended in June 1990, when fundamentalist victory at the annual

SBC meeting formally aligned the convention structure with the ideologies of Jerry Falwell and the right wing of the Republican Party.

Two months afterward, however, something new began as 3,000 disenfranchised Southern Baptists showed up at an informal meeting in Atlanta to discuss the question of what to do next. It was the beginning of a modern renewal movement, an effort to reassess and reconnect with the Baptist ethos in order to grow an authentic Baptist voice for the future.

A definition of renewal is, “the conversion of wasteland into land suitable for use of habitation or cultivation.”

In 1990, moderate Baptists gazed upon a wasteland: centuries-old central Baptist tenets such as freedom of conscience, priesthood of all believers, religious liberty for all, separation of church and state, and biblical authority had been uprooted, burned and forsaken by fundamentalists in a crusade for political and theological correctness.

Twenty years later, what does the Baptist landscape look like? Perhaps appropriately, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship — the central national organization that took root in the devastated wasteland — is now headquartered in the same city in which those initial 3,000 Baptists gathered.

Thus, one might reasonably ask, is CBF today that which was envisioned by Baptists who in 1990 chose the path less visible? Or, is someplace or something other than a formal institution now at the center of the renewal movement’s two decades’ journey?

Initially envisioned as a refuge for many, reality gradually set in for CBF: denominational loyalty remained entrenched among the older generations, while denominations held little sway upon younger generations. In the jaws of a generational vise, the organization transformed mission methodologies, invested

in new educational opportunities, and embraced partnership with, rather than ownership of, institutions (including independent state and regional CBF groups).

While designed as a framework for organizational growth, the net result of CBF efforts finds current expression in hundreds of mission personnel and approximately 1,500 churches affiliated with the national organization (and perhaps a few hundred additional churches that participate only in state or regional CBF life).

Compared to the wider contemporary Christian trajectory in America, CBF has thus far existed in the shadows. Popular marks of Christian success in the late 20th and early 21st century revolve around big numbers.

Conservative mega-churches with cavernous buildings, sprawling campuses, large staffs and private jets stand as gilded kingdoms within America’s metro areas. Large, top-heavy denominational organizations trumpet hundreds of thousands of baptisms annually and boast of global influence. And politically-focused para-church organizations recruit millions of foot soldiers and raise hundreds of millions of dollars to “win” the world for Christ, promote civil religion and force God into government.

Against the backdrop of widely accepted norms of success, how should the advance of moderate Baptists these past 20 years be interpreted?

Firstly, we must recognize that renewal movements are fueled more by perseverance than numbers. Our early Baptist forebears, miniscule in numbers compared to other religious groups, persevered for nearly 200 years before their movement reached maturity and realized the objective of religious liberty for all and separation of church and state.

While one might be tempted to argue that the rapid pace of change that characterizes the 21st century demands quick results, the element of perseverance nonetheless remains more critical than that of popularity.

Often, quick growth and large numbers are signs of temporality. In the online world,



many once-very-popular websites and businesses wither in a matter of just a few years. During the recent economic recession, many large corporations went bankrupt.

The success of local church kingdoms often rises or falls with the (almost always) man behind the pulpit. Denominations, now shriveling in size, spend much of their energy trying to recapture glories long past. And para-church groups often ebb and flow with the political winds blowing from Washington, D.C.

Renewal is a journey of commitment and perseverance, not a quick-growth scheme or a race to erect buildings or a central focus on the creation of institutions.

In this regard, commitment and perseverance among moderate Baptists is visible in efforts to further freedom of conscience, religious liberty for all, and separation of church and state across our nation and our planet; share the Good News of Christ apart from the chains of cultural conditioning, nationalism, imperialism, racism, sexism, and political and theological correctness; continually retell the Baptist story with both its central themes and important nuances; advance the role of women in ministry; champion the importance of education and critical thinking for a life of faith and living; and emphasize the biblical context and historical, present, and future importance of pluralism, human rights, and ministry to the poor and needy in our communities and around the world.

None of these critical tasks can be accomplished in a season, nor is there a finish line in sight for any one of them.

Secondly, on a personal level, renewal is about genuine transformation of individuals and communities, not rote followship of a charismatic leader or intellectual assent to the doctrinal flavor of the day.

In Baptist history, freedom of conscience, missions involvement, and social consciousness all sprouted from and were initially fueled by

transformed individuals and communities of faith. Only when the ideas survived the harsh winds and scorching wrath of critics did Baptist institutions eventually come alongside these renewal movements and provide nourishment necessary for maturity.

Today, moderate Baptist seminaries are nurturing the lives of thousands of young people of a generation that is suspicious of institutions, seeks honesty and relevancy in the living of faith and life, and sees Christ in places far from church pews.

These young people in turn are unfurling their branches within the larger moderate Baptist community and looking for a place to call home. Unfortunately, the limited number of moderate churches and lack of new church starts constrains the transformational potential of this generational influx. The field must be expanded for multi-generational renewal to mature.

Transformation is also taking place in genderless pulpits, human freedom, social concerns, creation consciousness, holistic scripture and theological honesty. Such values and attitudes, while not equating with popular definitions of success within American Christendom, are contemporary, outward manifestations of redemptive currents long embedded within Baptist roots.

Finally, renewal, if it is to be lasting, must reproduce. Personal witness is the historical means whereby Baptists have expanded their presence and increased in numbers.

Methodology varied. Formulaic evangelism became characteristic of the early and mid-20th century, only to decline in effectiveness and appropriateness by the end of the century. Yet in its wake, moderate Baptists have yet to find a viable 21st century strategy for organic growth.

While missionary commitment and partnerships provide moderate Baptists an expanding presence and a degree of lateral

growth, reproduction is yet a necessity. Ultimately, perseverance and transformation will stall and retreat without effective personal witness.

Patient cultivation of the wasteland is necessary for renewal to take place. Today, green shoots and stalks are visible for all to see. Of different shapes and sizes, hues and complexities, old growth and new growth together bask in the spring sunshine, nourished by four centuries of Baptist roots.

The institutional orderliness that characterized the 20th century Baptist landscape is absent. More descriptive of the contemporary moderate world is the counter-cultural experience of 17th and 18th century Baptists.

Struggle accompanies transformation. Personal witness can be awkward. Life is lived in the shadows of popular religion, if not detached altogether.

The ever-present threat of persecution both marginalized and motivated the early Baptist witness. Today, comfort rather than persecution describes the daily lifestyles and general landscape of Baptists and Christians at large in America, moderate or otherwise.

Moderate Baptists are far enough removed from the wasteland of 20 years ago that a younger generation has no memory of, and little interest in, Baptist battles of a few decades ago. Yet the tilled and fertile land that has arisen from a scorched earth is far from yielding lasting sustenance.

For renewal to be lasting, moderate Baptists increasingly depend upon a new generation who are willing to work the land with hands, voices, hearts and financial resources. Therein lies the key to renewal truly realized. **BT**

—Bruce Gourley of Manhattan, Mont., is online editor for *Baptists Today* and executive director of the *Baptist History and Heritage Society*.

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A framework for the standards-based classroom

You may be aware of the discussion surrounding the standards-based classroom, which is creating so much buzz in educational circles. Thinking about this made me consider what our own church's Christian education might look like if we operated within the framework of this environment. Charlotte Danielson suggests a framework of four domains in her book, *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching*. Consider for a moment how this may be helpful in your own classroom.

(1) **Planning and preparation** describe how the teacher orchestrates what students need to know and do. The teacher must capture the students' attention and engage them in learning, which requires proper preparation.

Preparation is accomplished through study, setting instructional outcomes and planning what resources to use. Resources may include items to enhance the teacher's knowledge (e.g., commentaries) or student learning (e.g., activities). Curriculum such as *Intersection* by Smyth & Helwys offers multiple options for planning a strong lesson, and the teaching guide includes suggestions for resources.

Danielson states: "A teacher's role is not so much to teach as it is to arrange for learning." This is our basic responsibility as teachers. Knowing our students well will help us select approaches that best suit their learning styles and/or abilities, enabling them to learn important content.

(2) **The classroom environment** is concerned with creating a setting for learning to occur. More than anything else, the classroom must be a safe place. A quick review will ensure that aisles are open, craft supplies are appropriate for the age group, and furniture is strong. The physical environment is only one-half of this domain's concern, however. We

must also consider respect — between teacher and student and also among students.

Students are free to learn when they are allowed to be spontaneous or to give wrong answers occasionally without suffering verbal abuse. Learning is heightened when the culture is one where students are actively participating and understand that we have high expectations for them. Feedback must be positive. We want our children to be comfortable, relaxed and open to participation. A class that has the feel of an institution or incorporates negative reinforcement does not achieve this.

(3) **Instruction** is at the core of the teaching event. We should not think of instruction as simply reading the lesson or lecturing; there are many effective and beneficial methods we may employ. Consider using varied discussion techniques. The quantity of questions asked is less important than their quality.

Think about the physical materials we use to enhance learning because these engage the students in a way that invites them to become involved in the learning process. We need to choose materials that engage not only the physical aspect of learning, but also the mental aspect. Perhaps we may choose to use a technological approach through multimedia or computer games. At other times a writing activity may be more appropriate.

To enhance instruction, we may group students. The teacher may allow students to work in units of two, three or more. Grouping is based on what the teacher is trying to accomplish. Some tasks or projects may be suited to homogenous groups where students work at the same pace. At other times a heterogeneous group may have higher achievers who help slower learners. Grouping is especially well done when the students take pride

in their work and then help and support struggling learners.

(4) **Professional responsibilities** are not for seminary graduates alone; we can all perform the work in ways similar to professional teachers.

First, we learn that personal reflection on our teaching will help us evaluate the event in order to learn from it and make it better the next time. This follow-up thinking should include questions such as: Were the class goals met? Were the students engaged? How might a concept be made clear?

Second, communication with families is important. Parents know we take a keen interest in their children when we communicate with them concerning the progress of their little ones.

Third, we teachers need to understand that we are not ready-made for teaching. When we seize opportunities for our own personal growth, we become better teachers.

Finally, we are part of a larger community. When we work with pastors, staff or other teachers to elicit feedback, we can use that knowledge to enhance our own performance.

Conclusion: The core structure of the frameworks approach — strong planning, the environment, effectual instruction and a professional approach to teaching — produces wonderful benefits. As you think back to your childhood, what classroom experiences were the most memorable? Ask yourself how you can create healthy and memorable learning events for the children you teach. No one will judge your performance based on an annual achievement test. Your performance as a teacher will be lived out during the upcoming decades as your students grow into adulthood and mature as Christians. It is then that they will have the opportunity to put into practice what they learned in your classroom. **BT**

ChurchWorks is provided by the Congregational Life office of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in partnership with *Baptists Today* and for those dedicated lay leaders working in the educational ministries of local churches. This month's page was written by Keith Vaughn, a graduate of McAfee School of Theology and a freelance writer, who lives in Milledgeville, Ga. More ministry resources are available at www.thefellowship.info/News/ subscribe and www.thefellowship.info/Resources/Church-Resources/Baptists-Today-resource-page.

2010 Bible Studies

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Aug. 1, 2010

Parental favoritism

Genesis 25:21-34

I am the father of twins. My twin daughters were born 22 months after my first daughter was born. For all practical purposes, I am the father of triplets! Their close proximity in age ensured that they moved through most of life's joys and challenges simultaneously. All three were in diapers at the same time. They learned to ride bikes on the same weekend. All three entered baptismal waters on the same night. I was burdened (Did I say burdened? I meant blessed) with concurrent car payments, prom dress purchases and college tuitions. They shared many of life's joys and challenges.

At the same time, my three daughters could not be more different from one another. Their lives have been generally bent in three different directions — academics, art and athletics. Of course their uniqueness cannot simply be confined to these labels. They were and are individuals. They face life, live life and respond to life differently. As parents, we tried to be sensitive to their individuality, while at the same time fostering a sense of fairness toward them. It was not always easy to do.

I was recently eavesdropping — with permission — on a conversation between two sets of parents. One set was at least 20 years my senior and the other a decade behind me in the parenting process. The younger asked the elder which of their children they had loved most. I expected the elder parents to say, "We loved them all the same." But they didn't. Rather, they very quickly and wisely responded, "Whichever one needed it most at the time."

Verse 28 of this week's text is very clear. There is little wiggle room for those uncomfortable with even a fragment of parental

favoritism. Isaac favored Esau and Rebekah favored Jacob. Isaac's favoritism is linked to a common taste for wild game. The source of Rebekah's favoritism is not specified, but has been oft assumed to be Jacob's propensity toward loving the indoors rather than the outdoors; he wasn't interested in hunting game, but certainly knew how to kabob and cook the kill.

Parental favoritism may have as much to do with the needs of the parent as the bend of the child. With my own delightfully different offspring, I often gravitated toward the one who was engaging life on my terms — the one who could meet my needs in the moment. If one was reading a book I liked, she had my attention. If one was participating in a competition I found exciting, she garnered my time. If one was exhibiting a particular skill that could be useful in my life or work, she commanded my immediate consideration.

Often, my needs and my perception of the needs of the community dictated to which child my time and attention were steered. There was nothing inherently and consistently more desirable about that particular child. She simply provided what was needed in the moment — for my life and/or the life of the community. This may have been the case in Isaac and Rebekah's family. Parental needs or the needs of the family may have dictated the proximity of one parent to a particular child.

Of course, if favoritism within a family makes one feel uncomfortable, then that person will surely be unnerved by God's practice of favoritism. I've recently seen a cute quip appearing on bumper stickers and t-shirts — "God loves everyone, but I'm his favorite." The idea is funny until it's confirmed.

Rebekah's favoring of Jacob and Jacob's eventual rise to prominence is couched in a succession of both maternal and heavenly

LESSONS FOR:
Sunday, August
1-29, 2010

Written by Jim Dant, pastor
of Highland Hills Baptist
Church in Macon, Ga.



biases. Abel, the younger brother, presents a sacrifice favored by God. Isaac, the younger son, is favored by God and Isaac's mother Sara over Ishmael. Joseph, the younger of several brothers, will be a parentally favored and heavenly favored child. The older brothers of David will be overlooked, and he will be anointed the second king of Israel. And in Israel's national history, there are already Canaanites and Egyptians dwelling in God's young world when Abraham and his offspring are designated "chosen people."

Rather than raising our ire, however, this may say more about God's need within the movement of history and biblical text than it does about God's inappropriate bias. In each case, the ones selected were not perfect. They did, however, possess a quality that served God's purposes at the time. Backing away from the immediate context, one can observe the pairing of gifts with God's intended direction for his people — Jacob's cunning as family and wealth are accumulated, Joseph's willingness to assimilate into foreign culture in order that multiple nations might be fed, and David's leadership abilities as the Israelite kingdom is firmly established. Parental favoritism — at least from God's perspective — has very little to do with a random focus of affection.

Discuss/Reflect: How have you experienced favoritism positively and/or negatively? How have you practiced favoritism and why? How might God's choices of particular persons in the biblical story be justified? How do you feel about God's practice of favoritism?

Aug. 8, 2010

The family blessing

Genesis 27:18-41

I have three small scraps of paper in the center drawer of my office desk. They were ripped from a pocket-sized memo pad, and



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each contains just a few pen-scribbled words. The letters are a bit misshapen, but easily recognizable. The sentences are not properly structured, yet they make sense. At first glance, one might think a child wrote them. The content, however, quickly proves otherwise. The short messages were penned by my father just days before his death. In his final days — after esophageal cancer had taken his voice but before it took his life — he conversed with me through these short notes. Morphine kept his penmanship and grammatical skills at bay, but his heart refused to be silenced. Scribbled along one line of the now-faded sheet are the words, “Im prod you.”

I was almost 40 years old when my father penned those words. It was the first time I had seen him in almost two decades. Early neglect on his part and a rambling lifestyle on my part had kept us miles apart. I had no doubt, however, that his words of blessing were true. I had known it for years. It was, however, nice to see it on paper.

Everyone needs to be blessed. I’ve never met a man or woman who, at the depth of their soul, was void of the desire to be blessed by their parents. In fact, some of the most difficult counseling situations I’ve engaged are often rooted in a lack of such. The blessing of a parent can provide a firm foundation for life. The absence of blessing can be devastating.

Several years ago I attended the Bat Mitzvah of one of my daughter’s friends. During the course of the service, the young girl’s father rose and walked to the bema where he stood beside her. Pushing back tears he said, “No matter what you do or fail to do, no matter where you go, and no matter whom you become; I will always love you. You will always be my daughter. I will always be your father.” Tears filled my eyes. I had not received a note from my father yet. I’ve never met a man or woman who, at the depth of their soul, was void of the desire to be blessed by their parents. Not even me.

The blessings we experience are typically affirmations. Blessings within the Genesis story carry that much weight and more. Within the early Israelite tradition, blessings were prayers that were expected to be translated into reality. There was a near magic quality to the words when spoken. In verses 28-29 of our text, Isaac speaks a word of blessing to Jacob, and it prayerfully

ensures that the wealth and the authoritative role of the family will rest in his care. Traditionally, this blessing is reserved for the eldest son. Today’s blessing was acquired by deception ... of one form or another.

At first glance it seems obvious that Rebekah has deceived Isaac into blessing Jacob. The elaborate plan of porridge and skins and clothing leaves Isaac looking foolish and is complex enough to make great narrative. It may, however, be too complex. Maybe Isaac is wiser than we presume. Maybe the trick is really on the rest of the family.

In the first verse of this chapter, Isaac is described as being blind. The deception connived by Rebekah will seemingly take advantage of Isaac’s blindness by appealing to his other senses: the sound of Jacob’s voice, the feel of his arms, the taste of prepared game and the smell of his clothing. The loss of one sense, however, tends to heighten the receptivity of other senses. A person who experiences blindness typically develops a keener sense of hearing or smell or touch. It would stand to reason that Jacob’s best attempts at fooling his father would fall short. Animal skins do not feel like human skin. Jacob’s voice could not sound like Esau’s voice. A goat will not taste like wild game. The wondering of Isaac in verse 22, “The voice is the voice of Jacob ...” may have been the exact opportunity he was seeking.

Isaac is old and blind, but not befuddled. His blessings are well spoken and thorough. Isaac is probably well aware that the impulsive Esau cannot be trusted to carry the weight of the family inheritance. The younger, more complex child must be chosen — but how? It may be that the one being tricked is actually the greatest trickster of all. In verse 36, we also get the sense that Esau knew this was coming. The reference to Jacob’s name origin — the one who supplants — indicates that the notion had been floating in Esau’s mind as well. There are many things within a family that are just known. They may not always be spoken. But they are known.

Esau is not left without a blessing, because blessings are important. It is filled with prosperity and pain and hope. Most blessings are.

Discuss/Reflect: How have you been blessed or missed blessing in your life? In what way might you be able to give blessing to others?

Aug. 15, 2010

Conflict and boundaries

Genesis 31:1-9; 17-21; 25-26

Some things never change. Jacob will always be Jacob. Humans will always be human. God will always be God.

In earlier chapters, we watch the acquisitive nature of Jacob. He acquires the affection of his mother, the birthright of his brother and the filial blessing of his father. Chapter after chapter and verse after verse, Jacob casually moves through the family like a magnet of blessings. This particular form of magnetism does not bode well with his elder brother. In fact, Esau wants to kill him. As a result, Jacob flees to the house of Laban, his future father-in-law.

In Laban’s home the acquisition continues. Through hard work Jacob acquires the daughters of Laban as his wives — Leah and Rachel. According to verse 17, he also acquires children, camels, livestock and an immense amount of wealth. Some things never change. The stuff of life just keeps gravitating toward Jacob.

Howard seemed to be blessed in the same way. He was a faithful member of a congregation I served years ago. He was not an aggressive person nor did he present as a particularly savvy businessman. And yet, everything he touched seemed to turn to gold. Items purchased at one price could always be sold for more. Pieces of property and other investments seemed to soar while in his hand. He was always quick to give God credit. He was always quick to share the wealth with God’s church. His quick answer to our ponderings with regard to his success was, “I have never been able to out-give God.”

Jacob’s acquisitive nature remained the same. Jacob’s propensity — or at least reputation for deceptiveness — didn’t change either. In verse 1, Laban’s sons accuse Jacob of taking all their father’s possessions — an accusation made earlier by Esau. And while Jacob gives God complete credit for the fine-tuned genetic engineering of Laban’s sheep, in previous chapters, it’s obvious that Jacob is manipulating the mating process! And now that it’s finally time to leave, Jacob is stealthily leaving town. One of his wives is stealing the family idols. It has been said, “we take ourselves wherever we go.” Acquisitiveness



and deception follow Jacob throughout the story. Jacob will always be Jacob.

And humans will always be human. There will always be persons who complain as Laban's sons do in verse 1. We know very little about their efforts in animal husbandry, but they are obviously jealous of Jacob's success. We might question the purity of Jacob's actions with regard to Laban's sheep, but we cannot question his ability to act. He's laboring, not lamenting.

There will also always be those who take advantage of others. Laban — while tricked by Jacob — probably got what was coming to him. One must remember that Laban tricked Jacob into marrying the older daughter, Leah, after working seven years to marry Rachel. Laban then demanded another seven years of labor for Jacob to wed Rachel. Apparently, Laban continues to exploit Jacob's affection for his daughters by shifting and cheating him with regard to wages. Add to all this, Rachel's theft of her family's idols ... and we've got a story full of humans being human. Yes, Jacob is consistently Jacob. But Jacob is not the only human exhibiting a less-than-perfect nature in the story.

In contrast to all the humanity that pervades this story, we are also reminded that God will always be God. God speaks to Jacob in verse 3. In verse 5, Jacob reflectively states that he has sensed God's presence in his life. And in verse 9, Jacob notes God's presence in the seeming happenstance of life. As God always seems to do, God is guiding, guarding, providing, sharing and withholding throughout the story. Add to that, it is vivid that God has chosen less-than-perfect people to move the redemptive story along. It shouldn't surprise us ... God will always be God.

There will always be conflict between people. There will also be conflict between humanity and God. My ways are not always my neighbor's way. And my way is certainly not God's way. Hopefully, we can find ways to co-exist — accepting, adjusting and maybe sometimes even separating for the kingdom's sake.

Discuss/Reflect: What characteristics of "self" do you "take with you" wherever you go? How has God been able to use these characteristics for good? How might those characteristics be "adjusted" to display a greater sense of holiness?

Aug. 22, 2010

Reconciliation

Genesis 32:3-32

The Genesis account has not always been kind to Esau, the twin brother of Jacob. In Genesis 25, the boys are birthed and immediately Esau is given a prophetically subservient role to Jacob. Later, in the same chapter, Esau's impulsiveness is highlighted as he foolishly sells his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew. The text says that Esau intended to "gulp down" the stew — he's obviously being depicted as an uncouth individual. Two chapters later in the narrative, Esau is the dull target of Jacob's treachery and loses the family blessing in addition to his loss of the birthright. Esau's resultant anger at Jacob explodes into murderous threat. Continuing to follow Esau's story throughout Genesis, the origin of the Edomites — Israel's enemies — is traced to Esau.

The Genesis account, on the whole, is not kind to Esau. But every once in a while, even the worst of folk can muster a little holiness.

During my childhood I feared our next-door neighbor, Mr. Bowen. He spent hours in his yard ... keeping me, my siblings and all the other neighborhood children out of his yard! He apparently was growing award-winning grass in his yard because he never wanted us to step on it. He also guarded the boxwoods that separated our home from his. He did not appreciate this carefully pruned row of shrubbery being used as a football goal. (They were the perfect height over which to kick extra points and field goals.) When we scored a point on his side of the property, his screaming always ensued — and I'm not talking about cheering. Screaming is the only sound I ever heard come from Mr. Bowen's mouth — except once. It was the week before Christmas, 1971.

School had been dismissed for the winter holidays. Teams had been chosen in the backyard; our version of the Super Bowl was about to begin. As we were tossing the coin, Mr. Bowen stepped across the edges. We were silent. He stepped to the middle of our motley pack, pulled a handful of candy canes from his pocket, handed one to each of us and almost politely said, "Here. Merry Christmas. Don't throw the paper in my yard." And then he walked away. Every once

in a while, even the worst of folk can muster a little holiness.

Of course, before we present Esau with accolades, let's check in on Jacob. Jacob is still being Jacob. Having lost favor with Laban, it is time for the fugitive son/brother to make his way back home. When he left decades ago, his brother Esau was spewing murderous threats. There was no reason to believe that time had calmed the savage beast. So, Jacob does what Jacob does best ... he connives.

First, Jacob sends messengers ahead to scout the situation. The scouts are to inform Esau that gifts will soon follow — lots of gifts: cattle, asses, sheep and slaves. When the messengers return, however, they bring news of Esau's movement toward Jacob; Jacob becomes frightened. And so, he connives some more. Jacob prays to God, reminding God of promises God has made. He sends three waves of gifts to Esau — hundreds of animals — hoping they might garner Esau's kindness. Jacob wrestles with God (or an angel ... or his own conscience) through the night and attempts to benefit from one more blessing. Jacob is externally and internally active, "doing" all he can do to control the circumstances of his life. Jacob is still Jacob.

For once, Esau appears to be the better man. It is time for reconciliation. It is time to face the past and deal with it. It is time to accept life on life's terms. It is time to put matters to rest. And Esau's methodology is much simpler than Jacob's. In verse 7, Jacob's messengers return from Esau's camp and report, "... Esau himself is coming to meet you ..." There are not manipulative gifts, scouting messengers or strategic movements. Esau is intentionally moving toward a face-to-face conversation with Jacob. It is the purist and most proper first step toward reconciliation.

I heard it more than once in my younger years, "Why didn't you come talk to me?" When I felt unfairly graded on an English composition, I sulked for days. Finally, the professor got word of my disappointment. He confronted me after class and asked the question, "Why didn't you come talk to me?" When a deacon shared an offensive comment in a meeting, I held the hurt for weeks. Later, at a dinner, I told him how his words had made me feel. His first reaction was the question, "Why didn't you come talk to me?"

Much of the hurt we carry could be assuaged with honest, civil, open conversation. Our hearts and minds could truly rest from worrying and strategizing if we simply and humbly faced our family and friends ... and maybe even our enemies. Esau got it right. He shows us that every once in a while, even the worst of us can muster a little holiness.

Discuss/Reflect: What offenses or resentments are you carrying today? What strategies have you contemplated or employed for reconciliation or retaliation? How might a healthy conversation begin the process of reconciliation?

Aug. 29, 2010

Closure

Genesis 33:1-17, 35:27-29

True closure occurs when change occurs. After a crisis, people often speak of needing closure. The process of finding closure typically involves some level of change in circumstance or change within the person. An individual who has lost a relative to violent crime will inevitably seek closure through change. The status of the perpetrator must change: from unnamed to identified, or charged to guilty, or guilty to sentenced. The external change of circumstance might precipitate closure. The change, however, might be an internal change. Victims and the family members of victims may find the inner strength to accept — maybe even forgive — and a sense of closure is achieved.

Change is at the heart of closure in the saga of Jacob and Esau. As in most moments of reconciliation, the change occurs on both sides. One person can't mend a relationship. One person can't carry all the credit or blame. Both sides must experience a degree of change for true reconciliation and closure to occur.

In Genesis 33, there is an obvious shift in the persona of Esau. Our last encounter with Esau was frightening. Having lost his birthright in a foolish trade and then losing the family blessing through his brother's deceit, Esau was violent. He was in a murderous rage. As he approaches Jacob, in verse 1, with 400 armed men, we can't help but think the violence is about to resume and be completed. It is shocking to see Esau break ranks with his cohort, run to his brother, greet him, embrace him, kiss him and weep with him. Esau has changed.

The change in Esau cannot be attributed to any of Jacob's strategies. The waves of gifts meant nothing to Esau. He was already a wealthy man. Jacob's prayer had not been heard by Esau. Jacob's family was not yet visible to Esau. Esau was not privy to the midnight wrestling of Jacob. None of Jacob's movements had been the impetus for Esau's movement. Rather, the change in Esau seems to be the result of his perceived change in Jacob.

As Jacob approaches Esau, he bows to him seven times. This is apparently Esau's first visual of Jacob, and it is a powerful one. Bowing seven times was the traditional display of homage to one's master. Jacob is not only bowing, but he is also limping.

The night before (the end of chapter 32), Jacob's hip socket had been wrenched. Jacob no longer physically exhibited the arrogant air of a sly deceiver, but rather exuded a repentant humility. Such is the case when one wrestles with God.

Even after Esau's embrace, Jacob's words further attest to his changed nature. In verse 11, Jacob adjures Esau to "... accept my present ..." While at first glance this seems to refer to the multitude of gifts Jacob had sent in advance of their meeting, it may actually refer to much more. The phrase can just as credibly be translated, "... take my blessing ..." This translation would further denote Jacob's repentant heart. True closure occurs when change occurs.

True reconciliation and closure change the way we see each other. There are few verses in all of scripture more beautiful than Genesis 33:10. Having broken his tearful embrace with Esau, Jacob begs him to receive the gifts that have been offered. And then he adds, "... for to see your face is like seeing the face of God ..." We know that reconciliation, closure and true transformation has occurred when we see the face of God in others. This is the sign that enemies have become brothers, foreigners have become kin, and the strange and estranged have become familiar and close. The darkness of separation, violence and hatred ends when the face of God is seen in the other.

Sister Helen Prejean is the Roman Catholic sister who wrote the non-fiction work, *Dead Man Walking* that was eventually adapted to the cinema. Her writing was a report of relationships established between herself and two death-row inmates. Sister Helen served as a spiritual advisor to both men during the final months of their lives. While she never condones the acts for which they were accused, she did allow herself to get close enough to the perpetrators to see them as human ... maybe even to see a sliver of the image and face of God in them.

No one can condone the arrogant, deceitful methods of Jacob. And no one can truly condone the violent threats of Esau. We can, however, affirm and praise their willingness to change. And we know, true closure occurs when change occurs.

Discuss/Reflect: What character traits in your life have made it difficult to get along with people? Have you ever assumed that changes in character are impossible? How might you address those character defects and experience some degree of change? BT

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Heritage Baptist Church, located in Cartersville, Ga., is seeking a visionary leader to serve as **lead pastor** of our diverse congregation. Heritage is a covenant congregation that seeks to honor and praise God through its missions, ministries and programs that are structured around fulfilling the covenant commitments we have made with one another and God. Heritage is looking for a lead pastor whose life is characterized by a spirit of service, humility and prayer. At Heritage the lead pastor serves as the spiritual leader for the church family and leads the congregation in worship through preaching from God's word. The lead pastor is also charged to work with and provide guidance and supervision to the church staff as, together, they provide spiritual instruction, pastoral care, and leadership to the congregation. This is a full-time position with a competitive salary. For more information about the position and Heritage Baptist Church, visit

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Baptist Temple, a historic church located near downtown Houston, Texas, with ties to CBF, SBC and BGCT, is seeking an **associate pastor** to join our ministry team. We seek a person with energy, creativity and strong faith who feels called to an urban church setting. The ideal candidate would have a willingness and ability to contribute to many areas of our church's overall ministry and mission. A seminary degree and ministry experience are preferred. Submit résumés to: personnel@baptisttemple.org.

Wake Forest Baptist Church, a dynamic CBF-affiliated church of more than 900 members in Wake Forest, N.C., is actively seeking a **minister of youth and missions** as part of a multi-staff team. This position will primarily oversee a vital, growing youth ministry averaging 50-60 weekly. This position also is responsible for overseeing the church's mission efforts. The candidate must have a seminary divinity degree, with two years experience preferred. Submit résumés to: Youth and Missions Minister Search Committee, Wake Forest Baptist Church, 118 E. South Ave., Wake Forest, NC 27587.

Fellowship Baptist Church, a CBF church in Fitzgerald, Ga., is seeking a **part-time** (up to 20 hrs weekly) **children/youth coordinator**. Responsibili-

ties 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.

Homecoming

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in the know

Keeping up with people, places, and events

PEOPLE

Colleen Burroughs is moderator-elect for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. She is the vice president of Passport, Inc., a Birmingham-based non-profit she began with her husband David while they were in seminary. Passport is now an international student ministry that has hosted more than 75,000 campers over the past 18 years.

Sam Carothers is retiring after 27 years as chaplain of Meredith College in Raleigh, N.C.

David Keith will become director of the Townsend-McAfee Institute for Graduate Studies in Church Music at Mercer University Aug. 1. Keith will also serve as graduate studies director for the School of Music and as an associate professor, teaching in the field of church and choral music. For 27 years, he served as professor of conducting and church music at Southwestern Baptist

Theological Seminary's School of Church Music before assuming his current post as director of music and worship at Brentwood United Methodist Church in Nashville, Tenn.

Matt Marston is pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Moultrie, Ga., coming from a two-year pastoral residency at Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas.

Ann White Morton was named Distinguished Church Woman of 2010 by Baptist Women in Ministry of Georgia. She has served as a church minister and as founding theology librarian for Mercer University in Atlanta, and also taught at the McAfee School of Theology.

These four long-time representatives of the Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board, with a combined 54 years of service, are retiring this summer: **Richard D. Reese, Hazel A. Roper, Kenneth E. Stout and Betty Wright-Riggins.**

AB Women surpass goal

Since launching "Break the Chains: Slavery in the 21st Century" in July 2007, American Baptist women have raised more than \$470,000, far exceeding the initial fundraising goal of \$250,000. Through workshops, preaching, community events, a "virtual mission encounter," online discussions, and a variety of other methods, AB Women's Ministries has inspired women across the U.S. and Puerto Rico to support ministries with trafficking victims, survivors, and at-risk women and children. The national mission project "Break the Chains" was originally scheduled to end in July 2009, but women were so passionate about the project that it continues through 2010 with new awareness-raising activities, events, and fundraising projects planned throughout the remainder of the year. **BT**

commentary

Don't twist, do tell ... the truth

By Tony W. Cartledge

As a congressional vote to repeal the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy drew near in late May, the Southern Baptist Convention's Baptist Press stepped up efforts to oppose the repeal of the policy, which requires gays and lesbians to stay in the closet if they want to stay in the military.

In a May 27 article by Tom Strode, the story's headline declared "Military Chiefs Oppose Repeal as 'Don't Ask' Vote Nears." The headline (all that many viewers will read) clearly implies that the heads of the four military branches uniformly oppose the measure's repeal.

The article, however, is based on letters from the military chiefs in response to a request from Senator John McCain, asking their views. In their responses, the chiefs did not express an opinion on repealing the policy itself: what they opposed was Congress taking a vote to repeal it before a Pentagon review is completed in December.

The headline is thus misleading.

Of greater concern is an article the previous day titled "Analysis: Sexual Assault More Likely Among Gays in Military." In the article, writer Michael Faust cites twisted statistics and dubious reasoning based on data compiled by Peter Spriggs, of the conservative Family Research Council.

Spriggs said he examined publicly available records of military assaults for fiscal year 2009 and discovered that 8.2 percent of sexual assaults reported involved males acting against males. He then declared that unnamed "homosexual activists have admitted that less than three percent of Americans" are gay or bi-sexual, citing 2.8 percent of males as the actual number.

By dividing 2.8 into 8.2, presumably, he concluded that homosexual servicemen are about three times more likely to commit sexual assault than straight ones.

There are several problems with Spriggs' reasoning, beginning with the assumption that the percentage of homosexual males in America is 2.8 (Faust says 2.7) percent. That number cannot be taken at face value, for several reasons.

Even in today's increasingly open culture, gay people may not feel free to respond honestly about their sexual orientation on surveys, for one thing. For another, counting homosexuals inevitably runs aground on the shoals of definition.

Does every person who has had a homosexual feeling or experience count, or only those who practice an exclusively gay lifestyle? A full spectrum of human sexual preference and behavior is possible, and it's incorrect to assume that everyone is at one extreme or the other.

In any case, a number of studies have suggested that the percentage of people with homosexual inclinations could be considerably higher than the numbers adopted by Spriggs. Studies generally conclude that the percentage is somewhere between four and 10 percent. Surprisingly, a 2002 Gallup poll showed public opinion of how many people are gay was even higher.

The bottom line is, nobody really knows how many Americans are predominantly gay, lesbian or bisexual. Even if we could come up with precise statistics for the larger population, there's no guarantee that the same numbers would be reflected in the military. And, we certainly can't get an accurate survey of sexual preference among military personnel, because the current law specifically prohibits asking and discourages telling.

Numbers aren't the only problematic issue here, however. A homosexual assault does not necessarily indicate a homosexual

orientation, especially among males. It's a dictum of psychology that sexual assault, in general, is more about power and aggression than about sex.

Homosexual rape, in particular, has been employed throughout history as a means of expressing power and shaming other persons. Even the Bible contains examples.

Genesis 19 describes how the men ("young and old") of Sodom sought to gang rape two visitors to Lot's home, and Judges 19 portrays a similar incident involving the men of Gibeah and a Levite who was passing through. Were all the men of Sodom or all the men of Gibeah homosexuals? Of course not — but they employed same-sex aggression as a means of expressing their power and shaming visitors.

When men are pressed into close quarters and highly stressful situations with little or no access to women — as in prison confines or some military settings — they may act out their frustration and aggression through same-sex assault even if they would not, in other settings, feel attracted to persons of their own gender.

It's simply incorrect to assume that all male-on-male sexual assaults, particularly in the military, are perpetrated by homosexuals.

In short, the practice of applying inaccurate numbers from the general population to the specific setting of military life and then extrapolating that gay soldiers are three times more likely to commit sexual assault demonstrates a misuse of math, a misunderstanding of human sexual behavior, and a lack of respect for the truth.

One could argue that publishing such specious reasoning amounts to verbal assault on a sexual minority as part of a larger effort to deny gay people the right to serve their country while remaining true to themselves. It's a lame attempt at shaming, and it's shameful. **BT**



Is there a 'just' way to end a war?

By G. Jeffrey MacDonald
Religion News Service

For centuries, Christianity's theory of "just war" has helped religious and political leaders determine when, if ever, war is justified and how to conduct a moral military campaign.

Now, as the U.S. prepares to reduce troop levels in Iraq this summer and Afghanistan next year, the 1,500-year-old theory is being deployed on a less familiar mission: ending the wars ethically.

Ethicists and theologians believe just war theory has much to offer in guiding U.S. strategy, but hewing to its insights could add numerous challenges, particularly to the withdrawal from Iraq.

In April, leading just war theorists gathered at Georgetown University to consider thorny post-war issues, including refugees and lingering political and religious unrest.

Eric Patterson, assistant director of Georgetown's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs, said the challenge facing ethicists and policy makers is, "Why we have a peace deal, (yet) we can't seem to root an enduring peace."

One reason: the secular authorities and institutions responsible for leaving a war zone "haven't thought deeply enough about some of the moral and ethical issues. ... That leads right back to just war," he said.

Policy makers are now finding that the same theory that some of them used to justify the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq now holds them to uncomfortably high standards upon exit.

Since just war includes a duty to reconcile and rebuild, the U.S. has incurred a lengthy list of unfulfilled obligations in Iraq, said Tobias Winright, associate professor of moral theology at Saint Louis University.

Responsibilities include cleaning up munitions sites and submitting to the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court, which could lead to Americans being on trial for war crimes, he said.

Applying just war concepts to an Iraq exit plan means that Americans are going to be held accountable for things that they are morally responsible for, said Winright, co-author of a forthcoming book on post-war justice, what theorists call "jus post bellum."

In an effort to envision jus post bellum,



scholars are identifying the relevant principles in a tradition that stretches back to the ancient worlds of St. Ambrose and St. Augustine. At the same time, they face the challenge of prioritizing competing principles.

For example, Michael Walzer of the Princeton, N.J.-based Institute for Advanced Study, invokes the protection of innocents as a central tenet of just war. When extended to a post-conflict environment, he said, coalition forces must leave Iraq in relatively stable condition. It also compels the U.S. to provide sanctuary for Iraqis who cooperated with the U.S. and its allies.

"One of the crucial principles of 'in bello' (during war) justice is to minimize the risks you impose on the civilian population," said Walzer, author of the 2004 book *Arguing About War* and 1977's *Just and Unjust Wars*. "And you have to do that when you're getting out also."

Others say leaving a stable Iraq is important, but note that justice involves a delicate balancing act among competing goods. For David DeCosse, editor of a 1992 reflection on the morality of the Persian Gulf War, the just war principle of "rights vindication" means Iraqis are entitled to inherit an environment that lets them determine their own destiny.

Yet at some point, others note, autonomy for Iraqis may require foreign powers to pass down a less-than-stable situation.

"The Iraqis have made it clear that a major U.S. military presence should end," said James T. Johnson, a just war expert at Rutgers University. "And we have to accept that, even if the society is not yet in as good a shape as

would be desired."

In Winright's view, secular doctrines based on international law have lost sight of a crucial principle for all stages of war: "right intent." That principle obligates war-making regimes to conduct, and conclude, war for one specific purpose, namely to "restore a just and lasting peace."

When that sense of purpose is lost, he notes, wars are waged for lesser causes, or can simmer in perpetuity. In leaving Iraq, he argues, America must embrace and interpret the idea of "right intent" anew — or risk being haunted for decades by an unjust end to a controversial war.

"If we are going to embark on just wars," Winright said, "then hopefully this (jus post bellum) category will really give nations pause to think about ... not just, 'How do we go into a war?' or 'How do we conduct a war?' but also, 'How are we going to end it in a way that's just?'"

Not all just war thinkers are trying to raise the bar beyond what American forces have acknowledged as their responsibilities. Jean Bethke Elshtain, an ethicist and just war scholar at the University of Chicago, has emphasized continuing responsibility for Iraq's political stability, infrastructure, and security, until the Iraqis can handle those tasks for themselves.

"The worst possible outcome would be to leave the Iraqis in worse shape than before the war," Elshtain said. "And, given that the Republic of Fear of Saddam was so hideous, you would have to go some length to achieve that." **BT**

guest commentary

My calling and the mischief in God's sense of humor

By Martha Dixon Kears

People make jokes about preachers' kids — with some justification, certainly. But, in reality, it's a great life.

You get the run of the church, along with the knowledge of where to find a vanilla wafer when you need one. You get pampered by the older people, raised by the village, and just enough limelight to give you a healthy self-esteem.

What you also get is a look behind the wizard's curtain, so to speak. Everyone else may be impressed by the Great and Powerful Oz when he stands behind his pulpit every Sunday, but you — you have seen the guy rushing from the bathroom in nothing but a towel. You have seen him lose his cool when he mistook his thumb for a nail, and take care of the ghosts clamoring to get out of your closet at night.

And he is the guy who made you spend your entire Saturday raking the leaves in the back yard — when you know, theologically speaking, that God would not have made leaves fall if God did not intend for them to stay there.

If the ministers in your home are doing their job right (which mine did), the face of God looks like cookies and homework and being grounded and having a brand new bike all at once — which is exactly why it is difficult to face becoming a minister if you have grown up the child of one.

When I left college, I got a job in Charlotte, N.C., teaching high school. I moved there with all the optimism and hope of a young person beginning a new profession — thinking the students would love me, knowing I would be a cool teacher, believing I would change their lives and hoping I would become for my students what my teachers had been for me.

The realities of teaching are harsh, but I managed to hold onto my optimism for many years until the needs of my children

Knowing what I knew about the ministry and churches, knowing how many calls, how many conversations, how many meetings were in store for me, I stepped across the threshold of the church as one of its ministers.

superseded my need to teach.

I had no such optimism about becoming a minister. None. First, I had absolutely no intention of ever becoming a minister or taking a paycheck of any kind from a church. I ended up doing some summer work for churches, but my experiences there simply reinforced my determination to never hitch my star to the church wagon.

I know the life of a minister — I know what 24/7/365 looks like. One summer I did serve as a summer minister, and I had to sit on a Sunday morning and hear a sermon about the importance of maleness to the role of ministry. I did not remain a member of that church.

At another church my duties continued well past the summer (at the end of which, coincidentally, the church stopped paying me for my time), and that role became a burden on top of my duties as a teacher.

So when people began to say to me, "You should be our children's minister," I laughed. Derisively. Repeatedly. Wholeheartedly. And then a few more started saying it. "You're so good with the children — why don't you become our children's minister?" Ha ha ha! No.

But I found myself spending my time thinking of how to tell Bible stories to chil-

dren. I found myself keeping a sermon-idea notebook. I found myself taking on tasks that involved ministering to children.

Finally, in what I call "The Miracle of the Monty," the camel's back snapped in two. My husband, Monty, is not the kind to make hurried decisions. Just purchasing a new battery for a car is the kind of act that requires weeks of thinking, researching and pondering.

So one day I asked him, prepared for weeks of questions and negotiations, "What would you think if I applied for the job of children's minister at the church?" I braced myself.

He said, "If you think that's what God wants you to do, then you should do it."

And that was it. No questions, no worries, no, "What will we do with the children?" or, "How many meetings is this going to entail?" Just do what God wants.

That small miracle put me over the edge. Knowing what I knew about the ministry and churches, knowing how many calls, how many conversations, how many meetings were in store for me (and for my family), I stepped across the threshold of the church as one of its ministers.

I found myself relaxing into a role I knew to its very core — and the further I have allowed myself to go into this life, the more I have felt at home.

It has occurred to me in these last eight-and-a-half years during which I have assumed the role of minister that God's sense of humor is a lot like my brother's, a lot like my father's — there is a twinkle of mischief in the workings of the Lord. **BT**

—Martha Dixon Kears is minister to children and families at St. John's Baptist Church in Charlotte, N.C. This commentary is adapted from a Baptist Women in Ministry blog post and distributed by Associated Baptist Press.



Zookeepers try to repopulate Israel with animals known in biblical times

By Sarah Grooters
Religion News Service

JERUSALEM — Like a scene out of a Hollywood action thriller, Shmulile Yedveb jumped out of the truck, package in hand, and ran into the building, the dirty door slamming shut behind him.

In loud, rapid-fire Hebrew, he shouted directions to two uniformed workers who were tight on his heels. Once inside, Yedveb turned on the lights, carefully opened the box and peered inside.

The life-giving cargo? A handful of white vulture eggs.

Yedveb works at the Jerusalem Biblical Zoo, about 20 minutes from its historic Old City, and the delivery of the eggs must be near perfect. The large white orbs could one day rescue their species from the brink of extinction.

The birds were first mentioned as “detestable” and “an abomination” in Leviticus 11:13, but today they’re the centerpiece of Yedveb’s efforts to repopulate the Promised Land with biblical animals that haven’t been seen since Noah loaded them up, two by two, onto his ark.

There are nearly 100 different types of animals mentioned in the Bible, many of them key players in well-known stories: the lions in Daniel’s den; the dove that scouted for dry land from Noah’s ark; the ram that was sacrificed by Abraham to save the life of his son, Isaac.

Today, many of them are gone, hunted to the point of extinction or driven away by ongoing conflict. Of the 10 animals that are listed as acceptable dinner fare in Deuteronomy 14 — ox, sheep, goat, deer, gazelle, roe deer, wild goat, ibex, antelope and mountain sheep — only two (the gazelle and the ibex) could still be found in the historical boundaries of Israel in 1960.

“If you read the book of Job, God is describing to Job why he should believe. If you count the number of phrases, one-third of them at least — even more — are about nature,” said Yehoshua Shkedy, a chief scientist for the Israel Nature and Parks Authority.



“There are nearly 100 different types of animals mentioned in the Bible, many of them key players in well-known stories.”

“... I want to keep the vultures because they were mentioned in the Bible that it was a common animal and that’s good enough for me.”

Shkedy has spent the past 15 years trying to repopulate Israel with biblical animals. He works with zookeepers like Yedveb across the country, closely monitoring and coordinating their efforts to return animals like the Griffon vulture to the wild.

Shkedy’s team uses the Bible as a starting point to see what animals were once in Israel, reading the Scriptures with a conservationist’s point of view. They then use the Bible as a marketing tool to raise support, as well as funds, for the cause.

While Shkedy would love to bring back lions and hippopotamuses, he focuses on the animals that realistically stand a chance to thrive again, like Persian fallow deer and vultures.

“Israel is now too dense to reintroduce predators, large predators,” said Shkedy. “We lost the bear for example, but who would be brave enough to bring back a bear?”

In the Bible, vultures are only mentioned by name in a few places; some

conservationists believe translators confused them with more frequently mentioned eagles. More recently, vultures have been victims of poisoning.

“Farmers want to kill wolves and jackals that hunt their chickens and cattle, so they put out bait to poison them, and because vultures eat dead animals, they get poisoned too. Then they die,” explained Michal Erez, a bird keeper at the Jerusalem zoo.

“At last count, there are about 240 vultures in all Israel and it’s a very sharp decline. Less than 10 years ago, there were about 400.”

The illegal poisoning and low birth rates have placed the vultures in a critical situation, said Erez, who incubates the vulture eggs for about two months and then places the baby birds with foster parents. Ideally, within three months, the birds are then reintroduced to the wild.

But because foster parents are hard to come by, Erez rears many babies by hand. She never lets them see her, in hopes they will develop a healthy fear for humans.

The eggs come in from across Israel. Park rangers check vulture nests for eggs in the wild; eggs are brought to the Jerusalem zoo, where they stand a greater chance of survival.

“I believe that if my organization doesn’t do its job properly, in a few years my kids won’t have something to see — no animals or nature,” said Roei Arad, a park ranger who hunts for eggs in northern Israel.

For Shkedy, the fight to save Israel’s natural wonders is personal. When his parents emigrated from Europe in 1947, they wanted to fulfill the Zionist dreams of their ancestors by working the land with their own hands. The dream has shifted in subsequent generations, he said.

“My generation, and my kids’ generation, have to change this aspiration, this vision. We have to conserve and protect rather than develop and invest,” Shkedy said.

“We should keep in mind that we didn’t come to this country just because we wanted to see a sea of houses. We came to this country ... because of biblical things.” **BT**

the lighter side

Your fourth favorite Gospel

By Brett Younger

When our friends at Smyth & Helwys asked us to write a book for their annual Bible study, Carol and I were delighted to say yes. When they said this was a year to study a Gospel, we were even more pleased. When they said it was Mark, we thought, “At least it is not Leviticus.” As Gospels go, Mark is not many people’s first choice.

Matthew has the visit of the Magi, the Lord’s Prayer and the Sermon on the Mount. Luke has the shepherds, the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son.

John has the wedding at Cana, the woman at the well and the washing of the disciples’ feet. We will not be writing about these stories, because Mark does not mention any of them. If Mark went to a writer’s conference, the other writers would want to know what Mark’s editor was thinking. Mark is not going to be the first Gospel featured on Oprah’s Book Club.

What Mark does have is lots of verses that will never be cross-stitched.

“As you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them” (6:11).

“Some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them” (7:2).

“He had put saliva on his eyes” (8:22).

“How much longer must I put up with you?” (9:19).

“In the resurrection whose wife will she be? For the seven had married her” (12:23).

“He left the linen cloth and ran off naked” (14:52).

The next time you are visiting a Christian book store, ask the clerk if the store has any of these verses from Mark on a T-shirt.

We have been thinking about a title. My first suggestion was *Mark: Your Fourth Favorite Gospel* — which is true for many, but Carol feels like that is not a name that jumps off the shelf. My second idea was *Mark: Shorter Than the Others*, which is also true and would appeal to those with short attention spans, but not the most positive spin either.

If we focused on the lack of a nativity scene, we could call the book *Mark: Skipping Christmas*.

Another option was to concentrate on the story of Jesus sending swine off a cliff.

We could call it *The Gospel of Mark: When Pigs Fly*.

Carol quickly rejected all of these as well as one centering on the cursing of the fig tree, *When Jesus Doesn’t Give a Fig*.

Bach wrote, “The Passion according to St. Matthew” and “The Passion according to St. John,” but never got around to “The Passion of St. Mark.” In the new *Celebrating Grace* hymnal’s “Index of Scriptural Bases of Hymns,” Matthew has 42 listings, Luke has 41 and Mark has 16.

Mark does not lend itself to music. This is not the Gospel for people who stop to sing, but for people in a hurry to get where they need to go. Mark uses the word “immediately” 27 times.

Jesus covers a lot of ground. He does not do much teaching — only four parables. Things are frightening, and Jesus, like

Mark, is in a hurry to do what

has to be done. Jesus keeps moving, scattering miracles. The second Gospel includes lots of miracles, especially healing ones.

Mark is not about explaining details. His purpose is to make it clear who Jesus is. Mark says it right in the first sentence. Jesus is the Son of God, come to change all of creation, come to change us. Mark — which is moving up on our list of favorite Gospels — wants us to be in a hurry, too, to follow

Christ and share the good news. **BT**

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

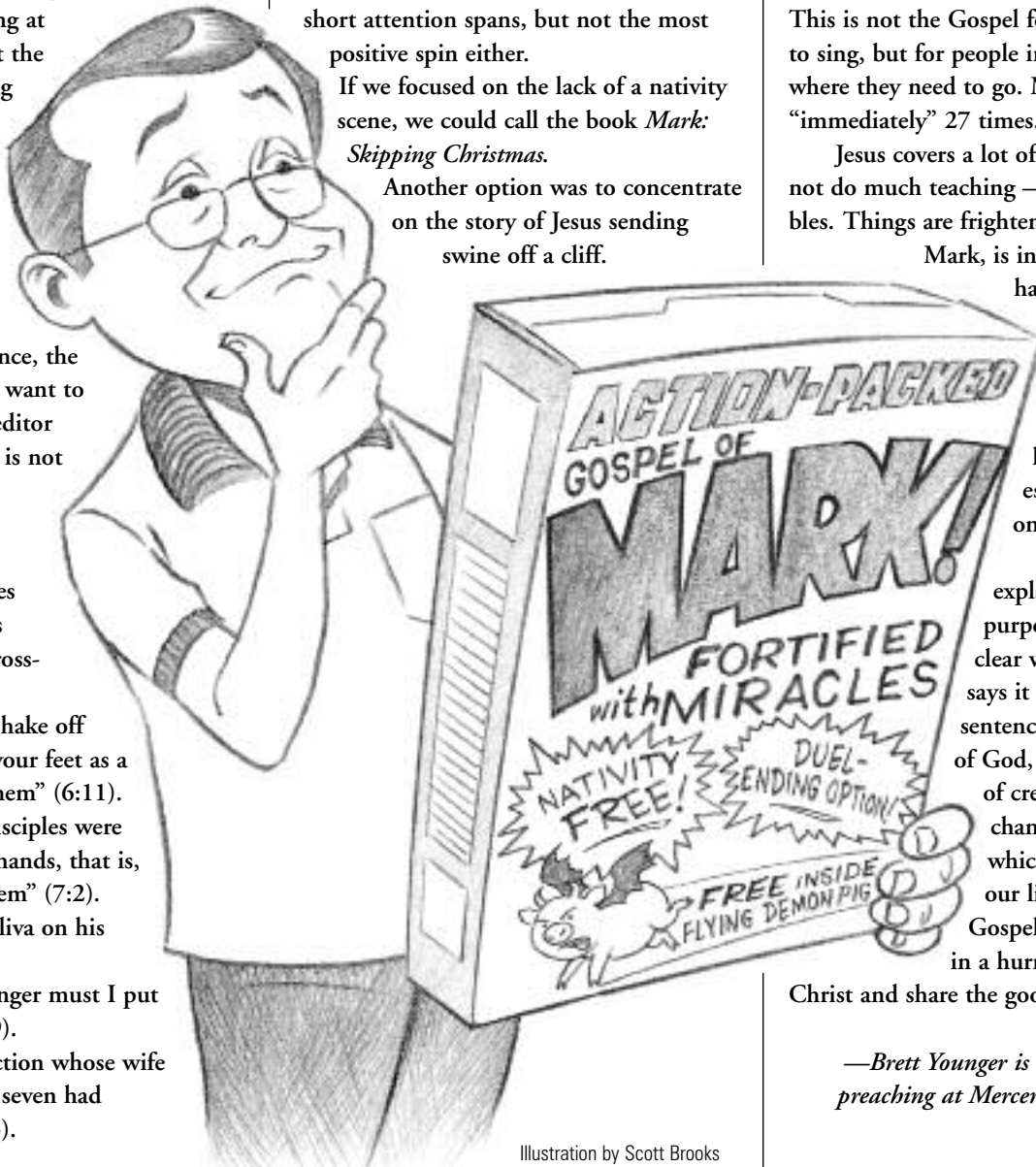


Illustration by Scott Brooks

'Put aside your nets ...'

By Tony W. Cartledge
Posted May 19, 2010
www.tonycartledge.com

Simon Peter would be hopping mad. James and John, the thunderous sons of Zebedee, would be breathing fire. Andrew, perhaps, might be trying in vain to calm their troubled waters: fishing has been banned in the Sea of Galilee.

Catch a boatload of fish there now and it will be more than a miracle — it'll be a crime.

Israeli officials cited diminishing populations of fish as they banned fishing in Lake Kinneret, as it's called in Israel, for two years. Stocks of tilapia, sold to tourists as "St. Peter's fish," have declined sharply in recent years. As a result, fisher-

men have resorted to more intensive (and illegal) methods such as poisoning the water, fishing in spawning areas, and using nets with an increasingly finer weave, said the agriculture ministry.

Following the ban, the fishermen who run the 70 registered fishing boats on the lake will have to find other work, convert their fishing vessels into tour boats, or rely on government assistance. They, as I imagine Peter and his buddies would have been, are not happy.

Declining fish stocks are not the only problem with Israel's water systems. Intensive irrigation by Israel, Syria, and Jordan now robs the Sea of Galilee of much of the water that once flowed into it.

More water is pumped from the lake,

and still more from the Jordan River below it. The trickle that's left of the Jordan is so polluted that baptisms, like fishing, are banned except for a small section near Yardenit, before the river reaches a major influx of raw sewage.

The poisoning of the waters in "the Holy land" is a sad reminder of how poisoned the atmosphere remains. Continued tension between Israelis and the Palestinians makes life very difficult, and resident Christians — once common among the Palestinian Arabs — are now more rare than fish in the Sea of Galilee.

If only it were as easy to put a ban on hatred and persecution as it is to prohibit fishing! Some things, like the biblical notion of the dangerous Leviathan, are better left in the deep. **BT**



By John Pierce
Posted May 11, 2010
www.johndpierce.com

Sorting mail has created a new pile at our house: college stuff. Our 16-year-old daughter, wrapping up her junior year in high school, receives a steady stream of materials from colleges and universities, large and small, near and far.

As one who couldn't see beyond my own locality at that age, I confess to living vicariously through her search and look forward to upcoming campus visits. I'm also seeking the advice of those who have gone through this experience before me.

One friend said the only parameter set for his daughter was that the school must

Avoiding deception

be within the same time zone. Guess he wisely envisioned late-night phone calls.

Others get my attention anytime the advice relates to scholarships, grants or other financial aid that won't result in deep debt.

My goal is to be a helpful resource to my daughter without attempting to write her script. Therefore, I win some and lose some in my advice giving. She considers my alma mater too small but looks favorably at the university campus on which I worked when she was born.

And I'm not above putting some mailings on the top of the stack while making others less noticeable. But she has me figured out.

The New York University material stayed around long enough to scare me. She finally said: "I'm not sure an 18-year-old female in Greenwich Village is such a great idea." (Good point; wish I'd thought of that.)

The marketing strategies of these colleges and universities interest me as well. Some admission offices send postcards, letters or small brochures. Others send impressive printed pieces — even posters. Duke, Wake Forest and Vanderbilt, for example, must keep local printing companies very happy.

Recently a large white envelope,

addressed to our daughter, arrived from the "Scholarship Information Center" in Forest, Va. Emblazoned across the lower front was: "Your scholarship information is enclosed."

While tossing the envelope into the proper pile, a small gold imprint on the back caught my eye: "National Guard."

The letter did not make it into the college pile. While military service is commendable, a deceptive letter (with no mention of the deployment of National Guardsmen to Iraq and Afghanistan over the last several years, just lots of talk about scholarships and training near home) to a 16-year-old — bypassing her parents — didn't set well with me.

This letter was a reminder to me that one of the most important aspects of education is to teach young people to avoid deception.

From infomercials to TV preachers to telemarketers to cleverly-crafted recruitment letters to young teens, deceptive practices abound. Their continued existence suggests that the quote often attributed to P.T. Barnum, that "there's a sucker born every minute," is correct. I just don't want to help create any more in the world.

The Bible offers a lot of counsel about avoiding deception. It seems to a part of what Jesus meant by being "wise as serpents but gentle as doves." **BT**

Baptist theologian draws on U2's music

Harmon book calls for Christian fellowship

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — A new book written by a Baptist professor applies theological themes found in the music of the Irish rock band U2 to the quest for Christian unity.

In *Ecumenism Means You Too* — pun intended — Steven Harmon, associate professor of divinity at Samford University's Beeson Divinity School, describes a conversation a few years ago with a colleague at Campbell University Divinity School, where Harmon taught at the time. They were discussing a summer course on ecumenism — the organized attempt to foster cooperation and unity among Christian denominations.

The colleague commended the idea with the observation, "After all, as U2 said, 'We're one, but we're not the same.'" The line is from the band's song "One" from the 1991 album *Achtung Baby*.

That sparked an idea Harmon fleshed out in a 2008 lecture titled "U2 and the Eschatology of Ecumenism," workshops, and then, ultimately, the book.

Subtitled *Ordinary Christians and the Quest for Christian Unity*, Harmon's book is not about theological themes in the music of U2 — a topic that has been explored by scholars and pastors throughout the band's three-decade career. Instead he invokes ideas drawn from U2 lyrics to help build a case that seeking unity in the body of Christ is "an inescapable obligation of Christian discipleship."

Even though the Gospel of John reports that on the eve of his crucifixion the main thing Jesus prayed for his disciples was "that they may be one," Harmon says much of the story of the next two millennia was about how the church lost its unity.

Various attempts to bridge those differences, including the modern ecumenical movement in the 20th century, have been stymied by various factors. One barrier for many evangelicals, Harmon says, is

suspicion that ecumenism means a "lowest-common-denominator approach that compromises core convictions in the interest of securing a superficial unity."

For Harmon, however, the quest for Christian unity is a matter of "eschatology," a technical term for theology that deals with "last things." Typically concerned with end-time events, Harmon borrows from Baptist theologian James McClendon to give the term a broader meaning of referring to "what lasts" — God's ultimate goals for creation and the role of God's people in bringing them to pass.

For mainstream Christians, Harmon writes, the eschatology of the Bible reflects a tension between the "already" and "not yet." He says it's an outlook shared in music like U2's "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For," a hit song from the band's 1987 album *The Joshua Tree*.

"The 'already' dimension of Christian faith is stated in no uncertain terms: 'You broke the bonds and you loosed the chains/carried the cross and all my shame,'" he observes. "But even that has not yet completely transformed all that is wrong with the world (or the singer): 'But I still haven't found what I'm looking for.'"

Harmon describes the overarching sound of a U2 song as "yearning." The band's most successful single, 1987's "With or Without You," voiced the pain of fallen relationships. Harmon says Bono didn't have the quest for Christian unity in mind when he wrote the song, but all U2 songs have "multiple layers of meaning" that he applies to the church.

"We often find it impossible to live with the other, and yet the truth is that we

can't live without the other, because the other belongs to our very identity as persons-in-relationship," Harmon writes. "That's true of human relationships in general, and it's true of relationships within the body of Christ in particular. Because we're one body, because we're members of one another, we can't live without another member of the body of Christ."

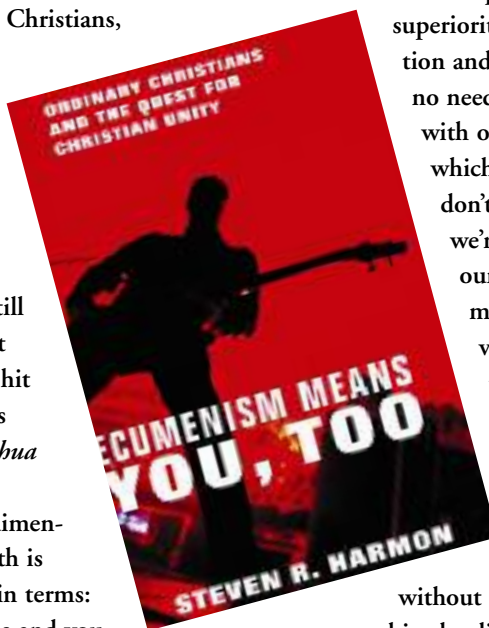
In the midst of current divisions in the church, Harmon says, "We find it all too easy to decide that we can't live with certain other Christians — that it would be easier simply to live without them."

"We tend to explain denominational identity in terms of how our denomination isn't like other denominations," he continues. "We pride ourselves in the superiority of our own denomination and contend that we have no need to seek full visible unity with other churches from which we're separated, for we don't think we need them — we're doing quite well on our own, thank you very much, and at any rate visible unity with other traditions would compromise our distinctiveness."

"So we're tempted to think," he writes. "But we can't live

without those from whom we are separated in the divided body of Christ. The body of Christ is wounded, and some of those wounds were inflicted by other churches on our own communion long, long ago, while other wounds have been inflicted more recently by fellow members of our own denominations in the intra-denominational strife that has torn apart most Christian communions today."

Harmon says it would be easy for Christians to go their separate ways, but in light of Jesus' prayer for the visible unity of his followers, "We can't live without them." The appropriate response of Christians wounded by fellow Christians, Harmon says, is Jesus' response to those who wounded him: "And you give yourself away." **BT**



Simple success

Amish offer business tips for CEOs

Some of the most successful entrepreneurs in America have never been to high school, don't use electricity, and would sooner love their competitors than sue them.

For generations, the Amish have tended farms tucked away in rural communities like Lancaster, Pa., motivated by a faith that urged them to be in the world, but not of it. But as housing subdivisions and strip malls suck up farmland, many Amish have traded their plows for profits — with remarkable success.

There are nearly 9,000 Amish-run small businesses in North America, according to Donald Kraybill, a professor at Elizabethtown College in Lancaster and a noted expert on the Amish and other Anabaptists. And whereas 50 percent of small businesses fail within the first five years, only 10 percent of Amish-run enterprises have gone belly up.

Despite church strictures against electricity, the Internet, motor vehicles and many forms of advertising, Amish businesses have landed contracts with companies like Kmart and Ralph Lauren, developed nationwide networks of retailers, and crafted kitchens for customers from coast to coast.

"The phrase 'Amish millionaire' is no longer an oxymoron," Kraybill says.

Amish expert Erik Wesner explores this surprising success story and offers tips on what other entrepreneurs can learn from the "plain people" in his new book, *Success Made Simple: An Inside Look at Why Amish Businesses Thrive*.

Wesner first encountered the Amish as a traveling book salesman in the Midwest.

"The business owners were the busiest of anyone," Wesner recalls. "They only had 10 minutes to talk to me. But when I did talk to them, they bought books."

At a time of short-sighted speculators, when Wall Street brokers brag of luring widows into bad investments and executives admit to ambitions that outpaced their ability to produce safe cars, the Amish have a unique and compelling ethos, according to Wesner.

"The meaning of success in an Amish context tends not to be wealth," he said. "Generally, financial success is a means to an end."

Those ends include preserving their family-centered lifestyle, working hard at an honest trade, and passing a meaningful vocation on to their children. As a result, Amish businesses tend to stay small, keep a low overhead, treat employees and customers with kindness, and practice frugality, Wesner said.

In short, many Amish would rather be righteous than rich — a lesson that can apply to everyone from Microsoft to mom-and-pop stores.

"It's not a very sexy message," Wesner said, "but I think we've lost touch with that quality."

Whereas mainstream entrepreneurs may shutter shops and liquidate assets if they don't make a pile of money right away, the Amish are willing to put up with slim profits, as long as they stay in the black.

"There's more to it than making a bundle of money," said Benue Riehl, an Amish man from Lancaster who recently opened a food stand with his wife and six sons in a market in Shrewsbury, Pa. "This has really given me an opportunity to work with my family, to know my wife in a whole new way,

and to build new relationships with my sons."

There are limitations on Amish entrepreneurs: the entertainment, alcohol, and computer industries are verboten, traveling by airplanes is forbidden, and bishops will break up businesses that grow too large.

"You don't see 500-employee Amish companies with Amish CEOs kicking their feet up on a mahogany desk," Wesner said.

What you do see, however, is thousands of small, thriving shops making furniture, leather goods, and gazebos, not to mention countless stands selling food, clothes and crafts. Surrounding those shops is a strong social network that provides reliable labor, business acumen, and loans, if needs be.

While Wesner takes a sunny view of the Amish move from farm to factory, the long-term consequences of this mini-Industrial Revolution remain to be seen, said Kraybill.

Will gender roles change? Will the use of the unique German dialect dissipate? Will religious teachings adjust to an increasingly pluralistic society?

"It's the biggest and most consequential change in Amish life since they came to North America," Kraybill said. "It will have dramatic repercussions in the next several generations." **BT**



Amish businesses tend to stay small, keep a low overhead, treat employees and customers with kindness, and practice frugality.

Muslim Miss USA: Progress or immodesty?

By Omar Sacirbey
Religion News Service

Europe's burqa debate and a steady stream of media images showing veiled women have led to a widespread impression that all Muslims are obsessed with covering the female body.

It might be a surprise, then, that many Muslim Americans are toasting Rima Fakhri, who made history on May 16 by becoming the first Muslim crowned Miss USA.

Fakhri, who donned a gold bikini and a strapless white dress for the pageant, will return to Las Vegas in August when she represents America in the Miss Universe contest.

"There's recognition among Muslims that this is not a traditionally Islamic way for a woman to dress," said Shahed Amanullah, editor at AltMuslim.com, a news and commentary website. "But in its own weird way, it's progress."

Many Muslims are critical of beauty pageants as lewd and degrading to women. At the same time, Fakhri, 24, is being hailed as a symbol of Muslim-American integration who shatters the stereotype of the cloaked and dour Muslim woman.

Fakhri's family, which she said celebrates Muslim and Christian holidays, is from Lebanon. After living in Queens, N.Y., where Fakhri attended a Catholic high school, the family settled in Dearborn, Mich., home to one of the largest Arab-American communities in America.

Now, Fakhri is developing a fan base that includes not only Muslims who are less strict about religious dress-codes, but also those who don headscarves and watch what they wear.

"The crowning of Rima Fakhri as Miss USA demonstrates the diversity of Muslims, not just in terms of ethnic diversity, but diversity of opinion and religiosity," said Tayyibah Taylor, editor and chief of *Aziza*, a magazine that caters to Muslim women, and always features cover models in headscarves.

"So often, people see Muslims as a monolithic group, and this shows that we're not all in one camp."

Laila Al-Marayati, of the Los Angeles-based Muslim Women's League, also said Fakhri reflects the diversity in the Muslim- and Arab-American communities. "It's true that many of us would not dress in a similar



Rima Fakhri, 24, of Dearborn, Mich., reacts after being crowned Miss USA 2010 in Las Vegas, Nevada, in May. Religion News Service photo courtesy of Darren Decker/Miss Universe Organization.

manner but, at least here in the U.S., it is a personal choice."

Other Muslims saw additional benefits to Fakhri's coronation.

"People are so happy that the headlines about an Arab-American have nothing to do with terrorism," said Ginan Rauf, a progressive Muslim activist from New Jersey. "As a community, we're often targets of ridicule and hostility, so it's nice to see an Arab-American be the object of adoration."

However, Fakhri's victory wasn't welcomed by all Muslims.

Kiran Ansari, communications director of the Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago, said beauty pageants degrade women, are un-Islamic and that Fakhri does not represent Muslims well.

"The route she took to get this fame is not in line with Islam. A Muslim woman can be beautiful, but walking around in front of millions of viewers in a swimsuit, is not in sync with Islamic values," said Ansari.

The Quran speaks of beauty and demureness, saying that Muslim women should "lower their gaze and guard their modesty," and should not "display their beauty and ornaments." It also cautions

women to "draw their veils over their bosoms."

Still, other Muslim women have participated in beauty pageants, even though Islamic authorities in Malaysia, Egypt, and elsewhere have issued fatwas prohibiting Muslim participation in beauty pageants.

In 2002, Nigerian Muslims objecting to the Miss World contest being held in their country rioted, leaving more than 200 people dead.

Nonetheless, there seems to be a growing number of Muslims who are participating in — and winning — beauty pageants.

Hammasa Kohistani, the daughter of Afghan refugees, became the first Muslim to win Miss England in 2005, beating out another Muslim contestant, Sarah Mendley, who competed as Miss Nottingham.

Representing Turkey, Azra Akin, the Dutch-born daughter of Turkish immigrants, won Miss World in 2002 after that contest was moved to London. Other Muslims have gone into modeling, including Yasmeen Ghauri, who has worked for Victoria's Secret and Versace, among others.

Given the growing number of Muslim women entering the beauty industry, Fakhri's victory isn't that shocking to many Muslims. More interesting, they say, is how anti-Islamic commentators have reacted.

Daniel Pipes, who runs the conservative Middle East Forum, suggested on his blog that Muslims winning beauty contests was an "odd form of affirmative action."

"Don't let her lack of a headscarf and her donning a bikini in public fool you. Miss Michigan USA, Rima Fakhri is a Muslim activist and propagandist extraordinaire," fumed Debbie Schlüssel, a conservative talk-show host, on her blog on May 13.

She also accused Fakhri of having relatives that were in Hezbollah, the Lebanese militant group. "Hezbollah Muslims believe that Fakhri is a tremendous propaganda tool for them," Schlüssel wrote.

To many Muslim observers, the comments veer between sad and absurd.

"That is the most disturbing aspect of this story, since it reveals the abject racism some Americans express towards Muslims and Arabs," said Al-Marayati. "They refuse to accept that we are part of the fabric of America." **BT**

Prothero:

Differences between religions do matter

Religion scholar Stephen Prothero has traced the path of Jesus from Son of God to American icon, chastised the religiously illiterate, and tweeted the essence of the world's great faiths in 140 characters or less.

Now, the Boston University professor has a new book *God Is Not One*, and a new task: outlining the differences between religions, and why they matter.

Prothero spoke recently about American ignorance, Oprah's Kool-Aid, and why the Dalai Lama is a dangerous man. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Q: Aren't the differences between religions apparent to almost everyone, painfully so sometimes?

A: If they were, I wouldn't have written the book. Inside academia, more and more scholars are understanding and emphasizing the differences. But there is a widespread view elsewhere that all the religions are basically the same, just different paths up the same mountain.

Q: Where are people getting that idea?

A: That's the message from books like *Eat, Pray, Love*, from Oprah, from Huston Smith's *The World's Religions* — the best-selling book in the history of religious studies.

Q: Polls show that nearly 70 percent of Americans believe that more than one religion can lead to eternal life. Are they drinking Oprah's Kool-Aid, or what?

A: I think we want all the religions to be basically the same because we don't want religious violence. We have this naïve hope — I call it "pretend pluralism" — that is rooted in some very positive ideals and aspirations: that we won't kill each other for religious reasons, that religion unites us rather than divides us.

Some of the other people behind this idea, for example, are Gandhi and the Dalai Lama. But the only way we can have lasting



religious cooperation is to see religions how they are, rather than how we hope them to be. For me that means seeing the good, and the evil, they do.

Q: But isn't it better to have a bunch of Dalai Lamas who seek religious similarities, rather than Osama bin Ladens, who see only differences, and want to kill people over them?

A: I'll take the Dalai Lama over Osama Bin Laden any day. But there are instances, for example, the U.S. going into Iraq, that were driven by false views of religions.

We didn't understand the differences between Sunnis and Shias because we didn't have a high-school level education about Islam. People are dying in Iraq today because of a false idea about religion.

Q: But isn't our government's ignorance a secondary problem? The primary problem is Sunnis and Shias killing each other over religious

differences. Wouldn't everyone be better off if we emphasized similarities instead?

A: That's a totally unrealistic hope. Convincing Sunnis and Shias that they don't have any differences is like saying we'll elect my 12-year-old daughter as president. It's not going to happen. The alternative is for us to understand religious differences and then come to respect and tolerate one another on the basis of those differences.

Q: But can't religious attitudes change? For example, 50 years ago, would most Americans have said there is more than one path to eternal life?

A: Let's take the idea of race, and of a colorblind society. We correctly learned (a generation ago) that that's a dead end.

Saying "I'm black," is not the same as killing other people over it. Why is it so bad to say that "I'm proud of being black, or being a Lutheran?"

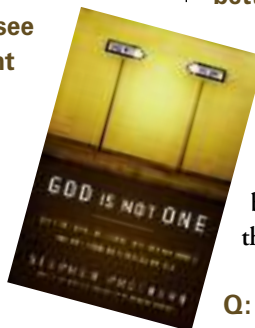
Q: Doesn't pride often bleed into violence, though, because it fosters the idea that your differences make you better than others?

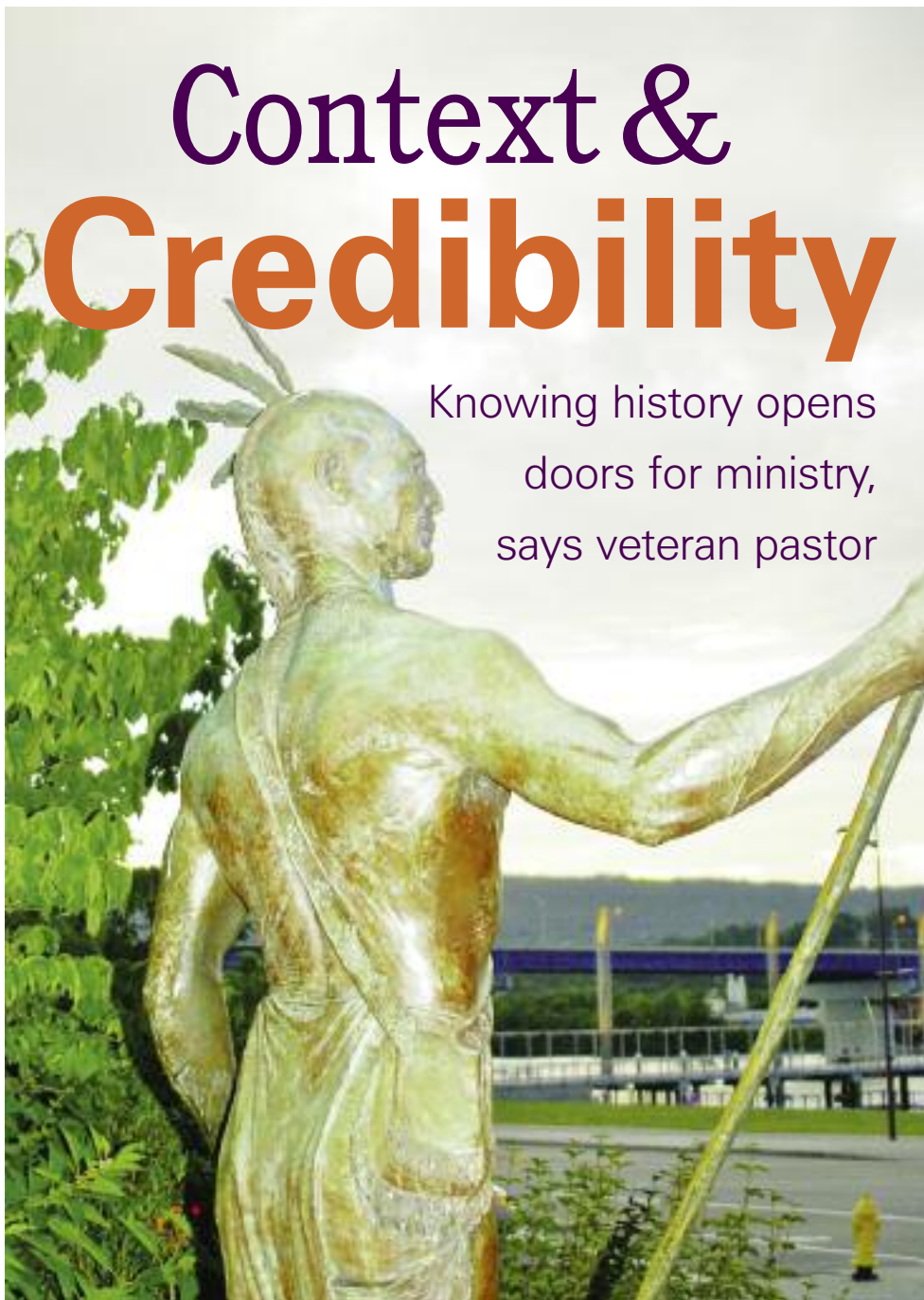
A: You are jumping from the articulation of difference to intention to commit violence. I think you can say "I'm black and proud," without there being anything wrong with that. I don't think we need to pretend we're all the same.

Q: Okay, let's jump tracks. Brit Hume: religious genius, or dunce?

A: I criticized Hume (when he said Tiger Woods should convert from Buddhism to Christianity in January), because he was illiterate about Buddhism. Buddhism is not about salvation or forgiveness.

I thought it was great when Tiger spoke back and said, "The problem is not that I'm not a Christian. The problem is, I was a bad Buddhist." **BT**





Context & Credibility

Knowing history opens doors for ministry, says veteran pastor

JASPER, Ga. — When retired pastor Charles O. Walker was honored in March for his many years in ministry, the tributes flowed from within and well beyond his Baptist church family. A representative of the Cherokee Nation traveled from Oklahoma to the north Georgia town of Jasper, where Walker served as pastor of the First Baptist Church from 1960 until his retirement in 1997.

Jack Baker, national president of the Oklahoma-based Cherokee Indian Nation, called Walker “a special friend to me and to American Indians everywhere.”

Joined by Indian leaders from North Carolina and Tennessee, Baker presented

Walker with a large flag of the Cherokee Indian Nation for his significant research, writing and publishing about the Cherokee people.

In a recent interview at his home, Walker said of his writings: “I knew they were correct when Cherokees in Oklahoma and North Carolina wanted to buy my books. That meant they were authentic.”

The Atlanta native’s interest in the Cherokee people was stirred as a young man who worked briefly for an insurance company and taught missions to boys at Jefferson Avenue Baptist Church in East Point, Ga. A visit to Cherokee, N.C., in 1948 fueled his desire to uncover more of the history of these



Retired pastor Charles O. Walker was presented with a flag of the Cherokee Nation for his research and accurate writings about the history of Native Americans. Photos by John Pierce.

people and to tell their story accurately.

Walker has written 12 books related to Baptists, Native Americans or the relationships between the two groups. Three of those books deal with the history of Cherokee Indians in North Georgia before their forced removal to reservations in Oklahoma in 1838 — known as the “Trail of Tears.”

Walker’s honesty in writing about the mistreatment of the Cherokees and other Native Americans by white settlers is often commended.

“I just told things like they were,” said Walker of his research and writing style.

He has assigned the copyright to his books, *Cherokee Footprints: Vols. 1-3* and *Cherokee Images*, to the Georgia Chapter of the Trail of Tears Association, based nationally in Little Rock, Ark.

Candidly, Walker acknowledges the failure of Baptists and other Christians to speak out against such human rights violations during this tragic chapter in U.S. history.

“Baptists didn’t take any stance [on Indian removal],” he confessed. “Of course, Baptists haven’t taken too many stances on anything except whisky.”

Walker said wealthy landowners in the Carolinas and Virginia were taking over the land there and that South Georgia was already home to many plantations, making the property occupied by the Cherokees in North Georgia very desirable to those with fewer resources.

“Whites were moving into houses while the Cherokees were still trying to get their stuff out of their houses,” said Walker.

Human rights issues did not concern local church leaders in that time and place, said Walker.

“Slave owners don’t worry about people,” he said. “A lot of the Baptist leaders were slave owners, so (the Cherokees) were just another lower class of people.”

The desire for land was stronger than any other concern, said Walker, of those who carried out the Indian removal: “Land has always been a controlling factor.”

“I’m a historian who believes in true history,” said Walker. “It all had to do with the land — who was going to control the land.”

The rich fields along the creeks and riverbeds and the prospect of gold in the mountains had great appeal to poor white settlers, said Walker.

Yet some Cherokees remained in the area and intermarried, he added.

“If you swore allegiance to the state of Georgia, you could stay,” he said. Most Cherokees and other Native Americans, however, headed west to make the most out of the situation forced upon them.

Of his longtime relationships with the Cherokees, he said: “There is a lot of difference when you actually meet people of Native American background — and they get where they trust you.”

A talented artist, Walker’s sketches of historic churches and other sites of the old Cherokee Nation can be found in multiple books and pamphlets, as well as on display in various places. Ten of his drawings adorn signs at the New Echota Historic Site near Calhoun, Ga., where the Cherokee national legislature established a capital in 1825 and produced the first Indian language newspaper.

He described the Cherokees as smart and adaptive people — who used those attributes to survive many challenges.

Walker has drawn more than 200 maps for researchers and tourists. Based on information found in Walker’s writings, the Going Snake Historical Society of Westville, Okla., sponsors tours of historic Indian sites in Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee and North Carolina. Their favorite tour guide has always been Pastor Walker.

While few ministers can expect to publish multiple works of history or display such artistic talent, Walker thinks it is a mistake to move into a community and not learn what has

shaped the people there.

“It helps to know the history of the area where you serve,” said Walker, now 82.

Ministers who learn the local history upon relocating to a new area of service, he explained, will discover new insights into ministry, expand their contacts to the broader community and gain credibility as more than just another outsider.

Walker has practiced what he preaches, said Mimi Jo Butler, who chairs the local Pickens County Historical Society.

“Through his historical research, and his compassionate writing about our ancestors — Indians and otherwise — Pastor Walker has shown a lot of people that it’s alright to have a bad apple or two on your family tree,” said Butler. “And that’s a pretty important thing for some of us to understand and accept.”

The March celebration marked 50 years since Walker assumed the pastorate in Jasper after serving in the U.S. Army and then as pastor of the First Baptist Church of Abbeville in South-Central Georgia — where he learned about the Creek Tribe. He studied at Georgia State University and Southern Baptist Seminary.

Walker was a charter member of the Georgia Baptist Historical Society and the Whitsitt Heritage Society, and served two terms on the former Southern Baptist Historical Commission. He served on the first coordinating council when the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship was formed in 1992, and made the motion that led to the formation of the state CBF organization in Georgia.

Georgia CBF coordinator Frank Broome presented Walker a framed copy of a note he penned calling on moderate Baptists to “quit talking about it and go ahead and start” the organization. Representatives of many other organizations paid tribute as well.

Local leaders praised Walker and his late wife, Betty Anne, for helping launch the local Head Start program and for assisting in many other community services such as disaster relief.

Current Jasper pastor Jimmy Lewis said in tribute: “Charles Walker cut a wide swath across North Georgia, far beyond the ministries of this local congregation. He left some mighty big shoes to fill. His legacy will live in Baptist history and in the mountains of North Georgia for decades to come.” **BT**

—Jack Harwell is editor emeritus and John Pierce is executive editor of Baptists Today.



ART AND HISTORY

Charles Walker’s sketches of Cherokee life prior to Indian removal are found in his books and other places such as on signs at the New Echota Historic Site in North Georgia.

The copyrights to his self-published *Cherokee Footprints: Vol. 1-3* and *Cherokee Images* (above) were assigned to the Georgia Chapter of the Trail of Tears Association.

‘Unglamorous reality’

Students discover credit, conviction in ministry exercise

Many homeless people eke out their meager existence on islands of despair, but “instead of building relationship bridges, the church tends to just throw them life rafts.” For Brock Tharpe, a student at Campbell University Divinity School (CUDS), that was the main takeaway from a poverty simulation weekend sponsored jointly by the school and Woman’s Missionary Union of North Carolina in mid-March.

More than 25 students, spouses and leaders participated in the overnight experience, which required them to surrender most of their possessions, wear second-hand clothes, and watch a randomly chosen person eat steak while the rest dined on far poorer fare.

For most students, however, the most memorable aspect of the exercise was the time they spent interacting with some of the men, women and children who live on the streets of Raleigh, N.C.

Students distributed new socks, warm gloves, sausage biscuits, and hot coffee to cold and hungry persons, but it wasn’t the aroma of the coffee that made the strongest impression on Catherine Campbell, a student who also coordinates volunteer ministries at Angier Baptist Fellowship. “The rich fragrance of being in conversation with someone fed my soul unlike anything else done that weekend.”

The students’ desire for direct communication with homeless individuals was sparked by guest speaker Hugh Hollowell, who impressed on them the importance of relationships. Hollowell, a former financial planner, left a successful career to live at the poverty level while working full-time with homeless people.

He contends that the root cause of homelessness is not a lack of adequate housing or funds alone, but a lack of relationships. Often, people become homeless



SORTING
Elaine Marshall, Paul Burgess, Adam Cox and Nathan Blake sort donated clothes at First Baptist Church of Raleigh, from which they chose their own outfits to wear during a poverty simulation exercise.

because they run out of friends or family members who will either take them in or assist them in getting access to social services.

Consequently, the people of the streets need more than handouts of food and clothing: they need someone to listen.

Paul Burgess, a student who works with youth at Smithfield Baptist Church in Smithfield, N.C., reflected afterward that “It takes no emotional investment, no vulnerability to put money in a plate or a used coat in a truck bound for Goodwill. To sit down with homeless persons and hear their story, though, requires our time. It requires that we give our attention to the unglamorous reality that is their life.”

Students learned quickly that taking time to talk was often recognized as a gift. Tyler Ward noted that he spent some time talking with a man and a woman who shared with him a common hair color — red. As the conversation ended and he turned to walk away, the man called out to him to say, simply, “Thanks.”

Ward said he learned that homeless people long for more than material sustenance. “They yearn for human interaction that views them as people, not as statistics and mouths to feed. When they looked me in the eye and flashed a smile, I didn’t see the poor, but I saw people who are lovely in the eyes of God, and for that reason, I love them, too.”

Learning to relate to the homeless in a non-judgmental way was key for David Anderson. Noting that people often judge others on the basis of their appearance or their words, he said, “When I’m sharing conversations with the homeless, the only judging in our midst comes from the passersby who hope we won’t notice them pretending not to notice us.”

The impact of the 25-hour exercise caught some students by surprise. Nell Wagner, a student who is also the youth minister at Raleigh’s Millbrook Baptist Church, said the experience was “a jolt to my entire being.”

Now Wagner wants to help others see what she has seen: “My eyes have been opened, and my heart is heavy. My hope is to educate our youth and church family about the impoverished here in our city and across the world.”

Sharlene Provilus, a New York native who grew up in a poor section of Brooklyn and knows something about surviving in poverty, didn’t expect the experience would have much to teach her.

“But by the end of it, I realized that it was never about how to survive: this was a lesson on how to live” she said.

The exercise was not just a “cockamamie simulation” designed to evoke an emotional response, she said, but an invitation to spiritual transformation. Provilus said she got more from the class than an hour of academic credit.

“I signed up for this class and got a good dose of conviction.” **BT**

“Students learned quickly that taking time to talk was often recognized as a gift.”

Lila Stevens' life enriched by traveling unexpected paths



Adventurous faith

Lt. Col. Lila Stevens often sends photos — such as this one of the ship *Presque Isle* entering Agate Bay near her home in Two Harbors, Minn. — to the *Baptists Today* staff along with her monthly contributions to support the news journal's mission.

TWO HARBORS, Minn. — Lila Stevens appreciates the unexpected paths her life has taken over the past 69 years.

“Being a Christian is not all about your own wants and desires,” she said. “It is about being open to what God has to say to us and the path he has for us if we choose to follow.”

The military was a path Stevens didn't expect while studying nursing at the University of Maine in 1962.

“I was having trouble paying for my senior year of college and the Army would pay for one to two years of school in return for two to three years of service,” explained Stevens, a retired lieutenant colonel. “I joined thinking I would serve on active duty for two years and then go back to Maine. Obviously, that didn't happen. I found that I liked it... So, 20 years later, I retired.”

After Stevens received her degree in nursing, her military career kept her on the move. In addition to her numerous stateside assignments, she served tours at the 121st Evacuation Hospital, near Seoul, South Korea, and the 67th Evacuation Hospital, a combat support unit, at Qui Nhon, Vietnam.

The Army quickly recognized her gift for leadership. She often served as the nurse-training officer.

After the Army sent her to the University of Pennsylvania to earn a master's degree in nursing, Stevens was assigned in 1970 to teach at the prestigious Walter Reed Army Institute of Nursing (WRAIN), a joint program between the Army and the University of Maryland's School of Nursing. WRAIN students completed their clinical studies at Walter Reed Hospital

that, because of Vietnam, had more than a 1,000 patients in residence.

“I always have considered nursing a ministry,” said Stevens who credits her patients for much of her growth professionally and personally.

“You remember them for their heart and their courage,” she said, her voice softening. “I think about some of my patients and how they faced their illnesses and, sometimes, imminent deaths, and you learn from them. I learned far more from them than they ever learned from me.”



Lila Stevens

While at WRAIN, a student invited her to a Southern Baptist church. Although her father was Baptist, she had been raised in the Catholic faith of her mother.

“I had been drifting away from Catholicism for a long time,” she admitted. “When I attended the Baptist church in Silver Springs, it felt like home to me — the place I belonged.”

She fully embraced her Baptist faith. When the Army sent her to Fort Wainwright, Alaska, she became a member of Friendship Baptist Mission, a small congregation of diverse nationalities and cultures. The pastor and his wife, two home missionaries, and Valeria Sherard, a pioneer Alaskan missionary to the Eskimos, became friends.

“I really had a good time working with those three people,” Stevens said. “They even roped me into teaching a Sunday school class of

sixth grade boys.”

From Alaska, she went to Fort Gordon in Georgia and then to Fort Campbell in Kentucky, where she retired in 1982. She decided to return to Georgia and began her civilian nursing career. But the turmoil that was occurring within the Southern Baptist Convention was present in her own congregation.

“They want to tell me I can't teach a Sunday school class that has men in it because I am a woman,” she said, incredulously. “No, no, no. I loved being a Southern Baptist, but when things got crazy, it was not where I belonged. I am still a Baptist, but I'm not Southern Baptist.”

Stevens regularly supports Baptist organizations that share her values, including the news journal *Baptists Today*.

“Part of the reason I support *Baptists Today* is my belief in the importance of an independent publication,” she said. “Newspapers do not always get the financial support they need. The other part is that I grew up with newspapers and I like newspapers. I want to see this one continue. I want other people to have the opportunity to read what these writers have to share whether it's a serious subject or a humorous story.”

In 1988, she moved to Two Harbors, Minn., where she concluded her nursing career at a community hospital. She said *Baptists Today* keeps her connected to her Baptist family.

“I have been very blessed,” said Stevens. “This is where I have been led, and this is where I belong.” **BT**

FIVE

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FOR INFORMATION on doing any or all of the above, contact Keithen Tucker at [478-361-5363](tel:478-361-5363) (ktucker@baptiststoday.org) or Julie Steele at [478-301-5655](tel:478-301-5655) (jsteele@baptiststoday.org).

Baptist nurse answers call to aid Haitians

GRAND GOAVE, Haiti (ABP) — The children swarm Tori Wentz as she walks down the street. Some run up for a fist bump. A few chant, “Blan! Blan! Blan!”

Wentz waves back, smiles and shrugs at the Creole term for “white.”

“I’m used to that,” she says. In Ethiopia, Kenya and Burma, the children would also follow and chant the local slang for “foreigner.”

Wentz, 46, a member of Fredericksburg Baptist Church and hospice nurse in Spotsylvania County, Va., frequently goes on long-term mission trips, traveling the globe to bring medical care to the needy.

Since March 6, Wentz has been in Haiti, staffing a medical clinic for the residents of Grand Goave, a town about two hours from Port-au-Prince.

Wentz, a medical missionary with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, planned to serve in Haiti, as soon as she learned Creole. But the Jan. 12 earthquake sped up that trip by more than a year.

Wentz walked through the village of Grand Goave to visit patients. First, she stopped at a large canvas tent nearby where Carmel Foblasse and her daughter, Love



Wentz checks on Carmel Foblasse, who lives in a tent with her daughter, Love Fortuna. Foblasse suffered a stroke a year ago and has lost use of her legs. Photos courtesy of Associated Baptist Press.

Fortuna, are living.

Foblasse has been unable to walk since a stroke last year. Her 29-year-old daughter takes care of her and can’t work. For nearly a year, the mother and daughter begged relatives and neighbors for money to see doctors. Wentz monitors both women, at no charge.

“She helps me a lot,” Fortuna said of Wentz. “She helps me buy medicine. She helps me carry my mom. She goes to the hospital with me.”

Wentz checks Foblasse’s vital signs. Her blood pressure, which had been high, is coming down.

“This medicine is working better for you,” Wentz tells Foblasse through a Haitian translator.

Within moments of entering the tent, Wentz is covered in sweat. The air outside is like a sauna; inside the tent, it’s more like an oven.

Fortuna wanders across the street to sit in the shade of a mango tree. She says she wants to move back into their house, a small concrete building down the street from the tent. The house survived the earthquake but still looks unsteady.

Wentz finishes with Foblasse and walks onto the road. Immediately, a toddler runs over and demands to be held.

Wentz picks him up and the boy’s mom shows the nurse a lump the size of a

grape under the baby’s arm. At the same time, a man approaches with a prescription. She talks to the mom, then heads back to the damaged clinic building to fill the prescription.

In the clinic yard, a cluster of tents serves as home for Wentz and the builders. The night before, a thief climbed over the crumbling clinic wall and helped himself to some of the medical supplies. But Wentz didn’t notice too much missing.

She gives the man the medicine and heads back out to look for amputees as she awaits a medical mission team coming with prosthetics. She travels rough paths littered with split mangoes, tin cans, plastic bottles, empty bags of Chiritos (fat cheese curls) and excrement.

Wentz stops to play soccer with a couple of young boys. Another child walks by



Haitian schoolgirls gather at a well for a drink of water in the town of Grand Goave during a break.

with a kite made of cellophane and sticks. Nearby, a young girl bathes a baby in a large metal bowl.

Gene Genbry, a Spokane, Wash., pastor helping to build a school, watches Wentz walk away.

“She’s really amazing,” he says. “And the people here just love her. It’s something, to see all the kids surround her. They all just love her.” **BT**

—Amy Flowers Uumble writes for the *Free Lance-Star* in Fredericksburg, Va. This story appeared originally in the newspaper and is reprinted here with permission.



King George resident Tori Wentz gives a Haitian child a fist bump while walking through a field in the coastal town of Grand Goave, Haiti. Wentz, a hospice nurse, often goes on long-term mission trips throughout the world.

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