

ABN Digest

Stories of interest
to Arkansas Baptists

Lawsuit says fire chief fired for Christian faith

ATLANTA – The city of Atlanta fired its fire chief solely because of his religious beliefs about same-sex marriage and homosexual conduct, according to a lawsuit filed Feb. 18 in federal court, Fox News reported. The lawsuit was filed by Alliance Defending Freedom attorneys on behalf of former fire Chief Kelvin Cochran, one of the nation's most decorated firefighters and a devout Christian. Cochran was suspended for 30 days and later fired over a men's devotional book he authored that included a section on biblical sexual morality.

Graham: 'Islamic storm' coming against West

BOONE, N.C. – A storm of Islamic persecution is coming against Christians in the West, Franklin Graham, founder of Samaritan's Purse, wrote on Facebook after Islamic State (ISIS) terrorists beheaded 21 Christian Egyptian men in Libya. Graham asks why there hasn't been global condemnation from Muslim leaders, CBN.com reported. "Can you imagine the outcry if 21 Muslims had been beheaded by Christians?" he wrote. The Islamic terrorists released a video of their atrocity against the Christians, with a headline that read: "A Message Signed with Blood to the Nation of the Cross." "We'd better take this warning seriously as these acts of terror will only spread throughout Europe and the United States," Graham wrote. "The storm is coming."



Graham

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www.arkansasbaptist.org/abn-digest

Bryant HS student leads teammates in Bible study

Jessica Vanderpool
Arkansas Baptist News

BRYANT – When we see football players gathered together, we expect them to be running drills and training – not studying the Bible. But Caleb McElyea, football player and senior at Bryant High School, thinks outside the box.

He started a Bible study for his high school's offensive line. But what began with six offensive linemen soon grew to incorporate 30-plus players from the rest of the team.

"The football locker room really isn't the place where God is glorified all that much, and so I just felt a call at one of last year's (church) youth retreats to just do it," said McElyea, a member of Geyer

Springs First Baptist Church, Little Rock.

He said when leading the Bible study, he used a Fellowship of Christian Athletes Bible, which contains a list of topics related to football and teenagers.

He led the study for about 14 weeks during the 2014 season and offseason.

"Caleb is the type of person who is going to spread the gospel in whatever setting he is in," said James Paul, a teacher at Bryant High School, "whether that is through the football team or later through dentistry, the career he wants to pursue."

McElyea said while no one accepted Christ through the Bible study, it did raise questions among team members.

"Some of the best things

you can do is cause people to think about eternity and where they're going to be after they die," said McElyea. "We had a lot of questions like, 'What does it really mean to be saved?' and stuff like that. So it was really good. I still have conversations with all those guys about it."

Chad Hampton, lead student pastor at Geyer Springs First Baptist Church, said the Geyer Springs student ministry "exists to 'live for God, love people and reach the nations.'"

"We challenge our students weekly to make disciples that make disciples by investing where they are," Hampton said. "The Bible study that Caleb started is an example of what we are praying becomes the norm for our students."

Grant Ferguson, a sophomore at Bryant High School and fellow Geyer Springs member with McElyea, was one of the offensive linemen who took part in the Bible study. He said one of the things that stood out to him was the "active participation" and the fact that the players were interested in learning about God.

Though he was already a Christian and church member before the study began, Ferguson said the experience encouraged him to minister and make a difference in his sphere of influence.

He said he is praying about the possibility of taking over the Bible study next year when McElyea goes to college at Arkansas State University.

Contact Jessica Vanderpool at jessica@arkansasbaptist.org.



McElyea



Ferguson

DONATION

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"The (Cross Church) Board of Directors, Pastor Ronnie Floyd and leadership team were unanimous in this decision. Cross Church is thrilled to anticipate the lives that will be changed by the gospel of Christ and the love of Christians through this ministry."

Sarver sent the email to David Perry, executive director of ABCHomes, and J.D. "Sonny" Tucker, ABSC executive director, shortly before the announcement was made on all Cross Church campuses.

"Gentlemen, what a joy to share this with you today. We are blessed and appreciate all the ABSC does in all of its ministries," Sarver wrote.

Floyd, who is currently serving as president of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), said of the decision, "Cross Church is absolutely thrilled to make this gift of land to the Arkansas Baptist Children's Home. We believe in families and want to do all we can to help these single moms and their children. Partnering for gospel causes with the children's home, the Arkansas Baptist State Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention is a joy."

Perry expressed gratitude to Cross Church for the donation.

"Arkansas Baptist Chil-



Cross Church in northwest Arkansas has donated a 1-acre parcel of land in Springdale to the Arkansas Baptist Children's Homes for the establishment of a home for single mothers.

dren's Homes is extremely grateful for this generous gift of property from Cross Church to serve single mothers and their children in northwest Arkansas. We expect to soon have construction funding and will then focus on raising long-term operational support," he said. "ABCHomes is looking forward to partnering with many churches and individuals in northwest Arkansas in the creation and operation of this ministry for years to come."

Perry emphasized that construction on the new facility would not start until "significant operational funding has been raised so as to have minimal impact on our current

ministry budgets."

Sarver said the 1-acre parcel of property donated has an approximate value of \$200,000.

The property is located on the east side of the Cross Church, Springdale, campus property, explained Sarver, who added that it faces east in "a beautiful shaded area."

The home will face Cambridge Avenue. It is located only one block from Tyson Elementary School, "so parents can walk their children to school," Sarver said.

"Walmart is located only a quarter-mile walk, so this will allow families to shop conveniently. While on the church property, it is close enough to walk to church, yet secluded

enough to feel private for families."

Sarver added, "Since the announcement was made publicly we have had many already come forward to volunteer in this incredible ministry to families. I can't wait to see what God does in this partnership with ABCHomes and the ABSC. We also must remember that this will be an association and statewide effort of SBC churches to support, supply volunteers and pray for the new ministry."

Central Baptist Church in Jonesboro made a similar gift to ABCHomes, which resulted in the construction of a Family Care Home that opened in June 2014.

Ouachita alum Jason Tolbert named university's CFO

ARKADELPHIA – Jason Tolbert, controller for the Arkansas Baptist Foundation since 2004, has been named chief financial officer for Ouachita Baptist University effective March 30. He succeeds Brett Powell, who recently was named director of the Arkansas Department of Higher Education.

Other roles held by Powell as vice president for administrative services have been reassigned to current university administrators, including Keldon Henley, vice president for institutional advancement, also supervising student financial services, and Bill Phelps, director of information technology (IT) services, being named assistant to the president for IT services

and facilities management.

Tolbert, a 1998 Ouachita graduate, holds a Master of Business Administration degree in accounting from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. He also holds an Arkansas license as a certified public accountant.

Serving as the controller for the Arkansas Baptist Foundation for the past 11 years, Tolbert has handled charitable trusts and investments for Arkansas Baptist churches and institutions, including some endowment funds for Ouachita. During his tenure at the Foundation, total assets under management grew from \$128 million to

more than \$230 million.

"I am pleased to have Jason Tolbert come serve with us at Ouachita," said President Rex Horne. "His devotion is clear. His ability is proven. Jason is a difference-maker and will be a great asset to our university and to all of us."

"I am so thankful for the opportunity to officially rejoin the Ouachita family, although like most alumni, I feel like I never left," Tolbert said. "I am delighted to share in the vision Dr. Horne has for the university. We have exciting days ahead of us, and I am privileged that God is allowing me to be a part of it."



Tolbert

SHEEPDOG

continued from page one

deaths in the last three years and addressed the issue of the escalation of sex crimes on church properties, noting that on faith-based properties, the number of sex crimes far outweighs the number of shootings.

Conference attendee Tommy Ishmael recounted on stage his experience as part of his church's security team in Illinois when a man shot and killed his pastor.

The evening prior to the conference, the film "Faith Under Fire" was shown at Crossgate.

"We can't deny the fact that we live in a world full of evil and there are people who want to do harm to innocent people, but also there is a lot of animosity, hostility, toward Christianity and even the things of God," said Shawn Barnard, lead pastor of Crossgate Church.

He said that while their "ultimate goal" is to proclaim Christ, His name and His Word, they want people to feel safe as they do so.

"We realize that we're doing a good thing for the cause of Christ, and we don't want anything to come in that would keep us from doing what we need to do," he said. "And ultimately, we want to show the love of Christ and the hope of the gospel, but we also realize there's evil in the world and we want to do everything we can to be prepared. That's the

biggest thing is we don't want to be reactive; we want to be proactive."

In interviews with the *Arkansas Baptist News*, Meeks noted that not all "violent deaths" involve guns. A woman and her children were killed by an out-of-control car that veered off the road as they were selling fruit at a church.

Meeks stressed that church staffs need to be prepared to protect their church members – and the first step toward doing this is to recognize the danger.

"It never does any good to discuss what needs to be done until you're convinced, 'We've got to do something.' ... Everything you do every day, you do after you wake up," he said.

The next step is to develop a plan and get trained, he said.

He said in the Sheepdog seminar they "try to get people to see ... that you're not going to know what to do in dealing with violence in a house of worship – or in your life – unless you've been trained."

"And you need to have a group of men and women who have a plan," he added.

Meeks noted that "you don't rise to the occasion; you sink to the level of your training."

Protection doesn't have to involve guns. Meeks noted the importance of fasting.

"We want people to be good with whatever weapons they're using – whether it's fasting or a firearm or the words of your mouth," Meeks said. "The vast majority of disturbances in church do not call for the



A VISION FOR DISASTER RELIEF – Randy Garrett, Arkansas Baptist State Convention (ABSC) disaster relief director, shares his vision for the disaster relief ministry at the ABSC Unit Leader Training Feb. 6 at the Cold Springs Retreat Center near Conway. More than 100 disaster relief "blue cap" unit leaders attended the two-day event, which continued through Feb. 7.

use of deadly force. You've got to calm people down."

He noted the prevalence of funeral shoot-outs and the number of drug dealers who meet on church parking lots.

In addition, Meeks said he has confirmed that terrorist groups are monitoring American church websites, specifically mission trip information including departure and arrival dates in foreign countries.

"We don't live in a different day; we just live in a day where there's more people. People are not more evil than they've ever been; there's just more evil people," Meeks

Tolbert previously served in assurance services for PricewaterhouseCoopers in Little Rock, in international accounting for Alltel Information Services and as an office manager for the Arkansas Faith and Ethics Council. He also is chairman of the legislative committee for the Arkansas Society of Certified Public Accountants.

Tolbert and his wife, Kathy, are members of First Baptist Church of Benton where he serves on the budget and finance committee. Kathy Tolbert, also a 1998 Ouachita graduate, teaches second grade at Howard Perrin Elementary School in Benton. They have two sons, Luke, 10, and John, 5.

ABN Digest

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Church attendance high in Ark., low in Vermont

PRINCETON, N.J. – Slightly more than half of Utah residents say they attend religious services every week, more than any other state in the union, according to a Gallup survey. Residents in the four Southern states of Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana and Arkansas are the next most likely to be frequent church attendees, with 45 percent to 47 percent reporting weekly attendance. At the other end of the spectrum is Vermont, where 17 percent of residents say they attend religious services every week.

More Alabama counties OK same-sex marriage

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (BP) – Following a week of tumult in Alabama concerning gay marriage, most of the state's counties are now issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples. But the chief justice of Alabama's Supreme Court continues to argue that state judges who issue marriage licenses are not bound by the federal court ruling that declared Alabama's same-sex marriage ban unconstitutional. Meanwhile, two leaders of the Alabama Baptist State Convention have issued a statement affirming the biblical definition of marriage and noting that churches whose staff officiate same-sex weddings are not in "friendly cooperation" with the state convention. Fifty of Alabama's 67 counties had decided to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples as of Feb. 13, the *New York Times* reported. That marked a significant increase from Feb. 9, when as many as 44 counties said they would not issue licenses to same-sex couples despite the federal court ruling.

Contact Jessica Vanderpool at jessica@arkansasbaptist.org.

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Editorial & Opinion

"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have..."

1 Peter 3:15 (NIV)

The danger of radical Islam

The United States has been here before.

Our country's isolationism as a world war raged in Europe could have resulted in us all speaking German one day had not Japan attacked and drawn us into World War II.

While the threat was real then, the threat of radical Islam is just as great because of two things: (1) The general apathy and disconnect of the American people regarding world affairs and (2) the fact that radical Islam can raise its ugly head in practically any U.S. town or city through



PRESSING ON

Tim Yarbrough
Phil. 3:14

"homegrown" followers and sympathizers.

The explosive growth of radical Islam across the world should have us all worried, especially when they are beginning to murder not only their own, but also "followers of the cross."

False religious are rampant throughout the world, but few are so determined to force their beliefs on the "infidels" than radical Islam.

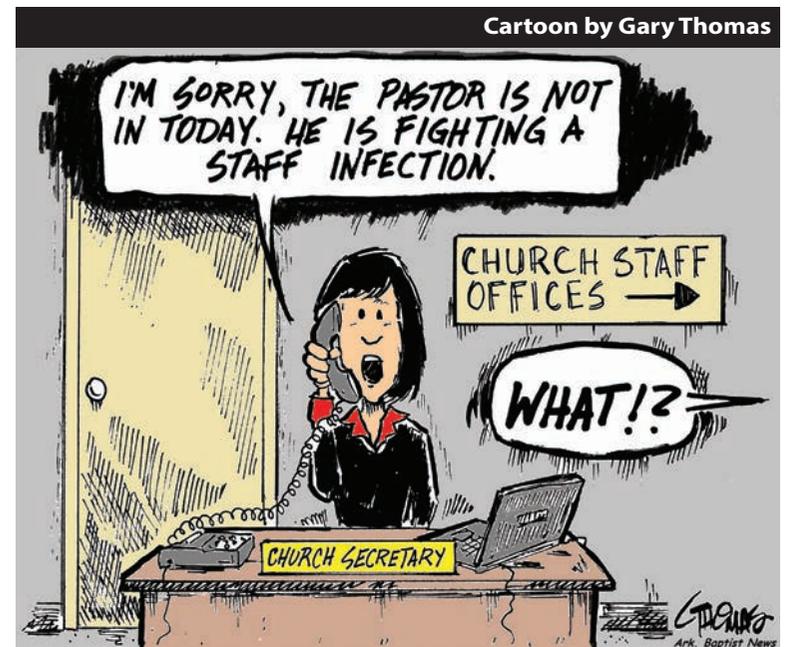
The world has experienced this onslaught of terror in practically every corner of the globe, against Jews, Chris-

tians, Shiite Muslims – you name it.

It seems we have an administration in the White House that continues to dub these terrorist attacks as random acts of violence, while at the same time it is reporting a terrorist as saying, as in the case of a terrorist in the Charlie Hebdo killings in Paris, "I have 16 hostages and I have killed four. I targeted them because they were Jewish."

Or in the recent beheadings of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians in Syria by the Islamic State because they were men "of the cross."

What can we do? The immediate answer is to pray, but in addition, we must urge our leaders to protect all people – including Christians – from



Islamic extremists.

A call to prayer around this charge was made by Rev. Samuel Rodriquez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference.

While the Feb. 21 "moment of silence" has now past, I suggest we all devote time in our daily prayers to petition the God of the universe to heal our troubled world.

The myth of Christian passivity

A sinister lie has crept into the Christian community. Leftist progressives have been pushing this ideal onto conservatives for years, and now Christians are buying into it. Terms like "tolerance," "right to choose," "civil rights," "hate speech," "discrimination" and "bullying" illustrate it. The lie is that Christians should stay out of public policy.

Unfortunately, this barrage of propaganda has defeated many Christians. They have adopted an attitude that, if left unchecked, will lead to social and political ruin. For example, instead of Christians saying, "Homosexuality



VIEWPOINT

Kim Reeder
Barton Chapel
Baptist Church
Tyronza

is a sin," they often say, "Well, I don't believe in it, but I don't think we have a right to keep them from marrying each other." Or of abortion, they say, "I don't believe in it myself, but who am I to say what a woman does with her body?"

Much of this is due to this notion that Christians should keep their religious beliefs to themselves, especially when it

involves decisions that affect other people. In fact, often when a pastor even mentions a political issue from the pulpit, a fearful hush or even visible angst is evident in the pew, even if the Bible is clear on the issue. Here is a wake-up call to all believers. Our

freedom to exercise our sincerely held religious beliefs is systematically being stripped away in almost every area of public life!

From bakers who face steep fines for not making cakes for same-sex couples, to nurses who refuse to administer abortion causing drugs because of their respect for human life, Christians across the country have been told they can believe what they want inside the church, but not exercise those beliefs outside the church. While many have tried to remain neutral in the culture war, bowing out of political debate because it might seem "unspiritual" or "unloving," leftist and progressive opponents have not done the same. While we have fearfully retreated into the church sanctuary politically, the wolves have surrounded the door, daring

us to step outside.

Christian people are often trapped in one of two extreme positions. One is the idea that faith is a hammer to conform society to a particular standard of conduct. For these Christians, the goal is to create a sense of cultural Christianity with no real burden to see lives changed by the gospel. For them, the Church is a political machine, not an agent of personal spiritual renewal.

The other extreme is just as destructive. When Christians refuse to utilize the political avenues available to stop moral decay in their communities, they adopt an extreme pacifist view that contributes to the problem. For them, faith is pseudo-shelter from reality. Our country was built on the premise that active faith could not be separated from civic duty. Unfortunately,

ly, many Christians today feel they are being "unspiritual" by becoming involved in political activities or are simply content to give up seemingly minor freedoms for the sake of "keeping the peace."

Those who say you "can't legislate morality" fail to recognize that the basic laws of society prohibiting unlawful acts (killing, rape, violence) are, in fact, based on biblical truth. In a fair and balanced debate, one can only conclude that laws at their core are issues of moral significance. The friction between progressives and people of faith, then, is not whether laws are moral, but whose morality those laws will reflect. By pushing Christians into a role of pacifism, the leftist agenda is happily leading us to moral destruction.

Some people are waking up. It's time we do the same.



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Family Matters

Quiet time

I know of no other basic Christian discipline that has helped me to consistently grow in my walk with Christ than a daily quiet time. I grew up in a Christian home going to church regularly and trusted Christ at the age of 10, but I did not begin to develop a passion and a discipline for a daily quiet time until college. My past experience of ministering to collegians revealed that most students, even those from Christian homes going to church regularly, similarly struggled with the discipline of a daily quiet time.

A “quiet time” is “an intentional daily time to grow in your relationship with Christ through Bible study and prayer.” It’s basically a time to listen to what God says as you read the Bible and a time to talk to God in prayer. One must be intentional and make it a priority in his or her schedule. Therefore, it’s the first thing I do in the morning on a daily basis with the desire to grow in my relationship with Christ (John 15:5).

You will not find the phrase “quiet time” mentioned in the Bible, although there are numerous examples in Scripture that emphasize spending consistent time in Bible reading and prayer (Deut. 6:4-9; Josh. 1:8; Psa. 1:2, 5:3; Mark 1:35; John 15:1-11; 1 Pet. 2:2). Not only do we, as parents, need to model how to grow through a quiet time, but we also need to equip our children to develop the discipline, rhythm and passion of spending consistent daily time reading the Bible and praying to God.

Here are some practical steps to guide you and your children. Prioritize by scheduling 5-10 minutes each day. Shorter, consistent times will lead to longer times. Plan what you will read daily by using a devotion book or an online Bible reading plan. Pick a place in your home that is quiet and allows you to focus. Patiently persist until it becomes an overriding discipline and passion to intentionally meet with the God of the universe.

Modeling and equipping your children to nurture a relationship with Jesus Christ through a daily quiet time will transform families for generations to come.

Ben Phillips serves on the Arkansas Baptist State Convention evangelism and church health team.



Phillips

I had the privilege of growing up in a Christian home where I watched my dad sit down at his desk every Sunday morning and write out our family’s tithe check to Bischoe Baptist Church. I did not get saved until I was 25, but his leadership stuck with me, so after I was saved, I started tithing on my and Angie’s net. Then, at age 30, Angie and I started tithing on our gross.

As an adjunct professor of preaching and pastoral ministries classes for Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, I am asked, “Should I tithe off the net or the gross?”

I always respond, “It depends on which one you want God to bless, the net or the gross.”

I teach and preach tithing at Central Baptist Church on a regular basis. Jesus says in Matt. 6:21, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” The love of money is a heart issue. I share with people publicly from the pulpit that Angie and I tithe off our gross, that we give over and above our tithe to missions and that we give over and above our tithe to Central Baptist construction projects. As a leader, I never ask our people to do something that Angie and I are not willing to do ourselves; tithing is one of those things.

I remember one time early on in my ministry at Central Baptist while preaching on tithing I said, “There are a lot of stolen vehicles sitting in the parking lot at Central today ... because many of you are robbing God of the tithe.” You could have heard a pin drop, and I thought to myself, “Well, ... that didn’t go very well.”

We challenge people at Central to take the 90-Day Challenge, which means to tithe for 90 days. After that, we tell them if they are not satisfied with their obedience to God and His blessing to come see us and we will give their tithe

The ‘tithe’

back to them. The first time we challenged folks, we had 50 new families that accepted the challenge and started tithing. So far, we have never had one person ask for their 90 days of tithing back. We have a required membership class where we explain to all the folks on the front end that they are joining us, rather than us joining them; therefore, as one of our doctrines, we teach and preach tithing from the pulpit, so don’t send me any unsigned letters in the mail.

Most Christians give less than 3 percent of their income to the Lord’s local Church; the tithe is 10 percent. Through the years as a leader of the church, I have learned that everybody likes to spend God’s money on ministry and building new buildings, but not everybody tithes and not everybody gives over and above the tithe to build buildings. I chal-

lenge pastors, associate pastors, deacons and lay folks to tithe, and to preach tithing. In most cases, the people who oppose tithing are not tithing. They are living in disobedience. I have never met a person who holds the theological view that tithing is unbiblical who actually gives 10 percent or more of his gross income to the Lord. I am sure there are some, but remember, it takes money to do ministry locally and around the world.

We have missionaries whom the International Mission Board cannot send to the field because of funding, because most people in the local Church do not tithe. God has established a system of giving that funds the sharing of the gospel locally and around the world; we just need to be obedient. I pray that you preachers stand in the pulpit this coming Sunday and “preach the paint off the walls” for His glory!

Archie Mason is president of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention and senior pastor of Central Baptist Church in Jonesboro.



PRESIDENT’S PERSPECTIVE

Archie Mason

Thanks for the memories

It seems like yesterday (May 2013) when I announced to the Arkansas Baptist Foundation board that I would retire on March 1, 2015, and Bobby Thomas was named president-elect. Many commented that this was an extremely early time for such an announcement. There were reasons for the timing, for Foundation donors and Bobby’s business clients; but that “long time” has slipped by quickly. Soon I will step down as the full-time leader of the Foundation that I love.

As a boy, I grew up in south Alabama. My parents owned a General Motors car/truck dealership, and I was groomed to be a businessman. As a result, I enjoyed math and money transactions. God called me into ministry at age 18; and for the next 26 years, I served local churches.

While I was a pastor, I could not envision that one day God would use my love of math and money management in ministry. Yet for 21 years, the Foundation has afforded me that opportunity.

God has introduced me to incredible individuals whom I would never have known were it not for the Foundation. Their generosity and attitudes have taught me so much about stewardship and life’s priorities. The list is very long; but folks like Ed Maddox, Ernest Ward, Grover Hemphill, Ed Hammons, Elma Cobb, May Adell Browning, Katie Cook, J. D. Patterson and so many more have had an enormous impact upon my life. Some of our donors have died, but I still have such fond memories of all of them.

I have had the privilege of preaching and teaching in many of the wonderful churches across our state. Those experiences would never have been possible without my position at the Foundation. I am also grateful that God

has spared me from wrecks and other problems in driving around half a million miles in this work.

The Arkansas Baptist State Convention has given us an extremely competent board. A large number of attorneys, certified public accountants, business and educational leaders, insurance and investment professionals and other such individuals have volunteered their time to make sure that our Foundation operates in a godly and prudent way.

The board has been such a blessing and encouragement to me through the years!

Best of all, I get the credit for the work that is done by an awesome staff of dedicated individuals. Most of our employees could have worked somewhere else for more money, but we were committed to serving the Lord through our Foundation ministry. God has blessed us with remarkable skills in law, accounting, investing and financial

planning; and I count it a great honor to have worked alongside such an incredible team.

In this, my last article, I wanted to say, “Thank you, Arkansas Baptists, for allowing me the privilege of serving you. I feel so honored to have served in this role. The staff, board members and donors have encouraged and motivated me in my spiritual journey. Thank you for giving me this life experience!”

As Steve Balmer said when he was contemplating retirement as the CEO of Microsoft, “I am the emblem of an old era; and even though I love what I do, I know it’s time for a new leader to take this company into the future.”

Bobby Thomas is clearly God’s man to be our new leader. I count it a great joy to call him my close friend and successor. He will serve us well! Pray for him in his new role.

David Moore is president of Arkansas Baptist Foundation.



FINANCIAL TIMES

David Moore

AAEO: Texas roots called to plant in South Dakota

Jim Burton

North American Mission Board

SIoux FALLS, S.D. – More than 180 years ago, anyone living in the Mexican-controlled Texas territory had to speak Spanish and could only attend a Roman Catholic Church. As Stephen F. Austin led the effort toward Texas independence, a friend of his, Josiah H. Bell, was equally resolute toward another objective. Bell helped form the first Protestant church in Texas.

Bell started a family tradition that today reaches to the Dakotas.

“I guess it’s in our blood,” said Jonathan Land, North American Mission Board (NAMB) church planter. He is Bell’s great-great-great-grandson, and they share deep Texas roots.

“I was born in Texas,” Land said. “There’s a reason people don’t like people from Texas. They are just so arrogant about being from Texas. I used to be that guy.”

South Dakota has taken some edge off that arrogance.

His father served Texas churches as a youth minister and pastor during Land’s childhood. At age 8, Land was asking the right questions, which led to a discussion with his dad about salvation. At the family’s breakfast table, Land prayed with his father and placed his faith in Christ. He remembers an immediate change.

“I remember the first few times it came out of my mouth,” Land said. “I am a Christian. I believe in Jesus.”

As a teenager, Land was studious, a self-described nerd. Still, he found time to get into mischief.

“I distinctly look back and remember there were some moments when my life could have gone in a number of different directions than it has now,” Land said.

By his late teens, Land felt a call to ministry. He helped serve in the youth ministry of a small church that even allowed him to preach.

After high school, Land attended McMurry University in Abilene, Texas, on an academic scholarship and played baseball. He now realizes that dur-

ing his freshman year he was worshipping baseball. Meanwhile, the pressure to keep a high grade-point average and a new dating relationship with his future wife, Shelby, caused him to rearrange some priorities. He quit baseball and soon became the interim pastor of a small West Texas church during the summer break.

“They showed me mercy each week,” Land recalled.

Making the ‘Connection’

Land enrolled at Princeton Seminary in New Jersey for graduate studies. He intended to pursue doctoral studies, but again there was a change of heart when he realized that classroom teaching might not be his thing. So the Lands returned to Texas. He became a pastor in Groom and met Doug Hixson, who was a pastor up the road in Pampa in the same Baptist association. Hixson grew up in Arkansas and served in Arkansas Bap-



tist churches prior to serving in Texas.

“We had a similar passion to reach people with the gospel, and we were actively engaged in it in West Texas,” Land said.

Hixson had moved his family to Spearfish, S.D., in 2010 to start Connection Church. Since his move, many Arkansas Baptist teams have taken trips to serve with Hixson. His passion for church planting in the Dakotas grew to the point that Hixson sent a text to Land asking what he thought about planting a church six hours away in Sioux Falls.



Jonathan and Shelby Land moved to Sioux Falls, S.D., with their daughters, Harper, 5 and Cora, 3, to plant a church. Jonathan Land is a 2015 Week of Prayer missionary for Send North America. NAMB photo by John Swain

“I had sent a credit card bill to Sioux Falls once or twice, but other than that, I had no real knowledge of it,” Land said.

Through the Dakota Baptist Convention and with Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American Missions financial support from NAMB, Land became a church planter apprentice with Hixson in Spearfish. Apprentice is one of the levels of involvement in the North American Mission Board’s Farm System. The Farm System looks to assist churches in discovering, developing and deploying the next generation of missionaries.

“That was a big deal for Doug and me,” Land recalled. “Some guys can just jump out there and do what it takes. We needed some skills to know what to do.”

After the move, Land soon became the lead church planter and worship leader at Connection Church of Spearfish’s first plant, which was in Belle Fourche. But Land’s sights were on Sioux Falls. With help from existing churches, there was door-to-door canvassing as well as multiple block parties in Sioux Falls. Those efforts generated a small group of interested people, enough for Land to drive

regularly six hours across the state to lead them.

High religious IQ

Sioux Falls is a thriving metropolitan area of 250,000 people where financial services companies help fuel the economy. Once Land and his wife moved there with their two children, they bought a fixer-upper home with meeting space and started hosting Bible studies.

“We aren’t walking into a place that has never heard the name of Jesus,” Land said. “They have a high religious IQ. The majority have not been following Jesus.”

Connection Church in Sioux Falls launched on Easter 2014 with 43 in attendance at a local elementary school.

“We gave our entire offering away to church planting and

ern Baptists in the Dakotas.

Connection Church in Sioux Falls is attracting an above-average amount of single, young adults. Their level of education varies, but they are all working in good jobs.

Land’s passion for the Dakotas and the potential for church plants there has grown rapidly.

“If we had planters and money, we could equip people to plant on a regular basis,” he said.

Land looks forward to the day when Connection Church in Sioux Falls is helping other church plants, much like Mobberly Baptist Church in Longview, Texas, which supports both Connection Church plants financially and with volunteers.

That would make his great-great-great-grandfather proud. Even better, Land is part of a multigenerational church planting legacy, one that will continue as Connection Church plants churches that will plant churches.

The goal for the 2015 Annie Armstrong Easter Offering is \$60 million. To learn more about the Week of Prayer set for March 1-8, the



Annie Armstrong,” Land said. The church now contributes 25 percent of its undesignated tithes to missions.

Within three months, they broke the 50-attendee barrier, which is a milestone for South-

Annie Armstrong Easter Offering and how your church can be mobilized to push back lostness in North America, visit anniearmstrong.com.

Jim Burton writes for the North American Mission Board.

Christian Education Guide

Can Christian ed. shape worldview?

Trennis Henderson
Ouachita Baptist University

WITH MORE THAN 4,000 colleges and universities throughout the nation, why should students consider a Christian liberal arts education?

While most universities provide students a strong, solid education, leading Christian universities offer a unique perspective and atmosphere unavail-

able on most other campuses. That distinctive aspect involves the integration of faith and learning from a Christian worldview.

Ouachita Baptist University (OBU), a Christ-centered learning community affiliated with the Arkansas Baptist State Convention, serves students from 30 states as well as missionary kids and

See **WORLDVIEW** page 9

Security major concern for parents, students when choosing college

WALNUT RIDGE – Call it a sign of the times, but campus safety is now a major factor in choosing a college. Students and their parents want to know that their college environment is a safe home away from home.

Colleges and universities assume responsibility to keep their campuses as safe as possible in the face of an array of potential threats, ranging from terrifying acts like school shootings to dangers such as storms, fires and earthquakes.

Maintaining a safe environment at Williams Baptist College is the job of Rick Norris, a former captain at the Hot Springs Police Department who joined Williams this fall as director of campus safety.

Williams is blessed with a safe campus in a rural setting, but Norris noted that the col-

lege doesn't take its safety for granted. For example, he arranged for Williams faculty and staff to receive training on handling a school-shooting scenario.

Norris said awareness is the key.

"Give students, faculty and staff as much information and training as possible on a regular basis on how to survive such an event," he said. "Repeated training in this area gives people more confidence that these incidents, though terrible to comprehend, are survivable."

In the event of a shooting in a school, church, mall or any other location, Norris said the best option is escape, evacuating the building as quickly as one can. If exit is not possible, people should find a secure location where they can lock and barricade doors to keep

the shooter at bay.

If they can't reach an exit or a secure location, Norris said those facing a shooter should fight back.

"There are many makeshift weapons in classrooms or offices. Use them," he said. "In most instances, these shooters expect a roomful of willing victims. Don't be a victim; fight back!"

Of course, campus safety touches on a broad range of other issues, as well.

"We instruct faculty, staff and students on procedures for fire safety and severe weather, along with evacuation procedures. We report lighting issues quickly to keep a well-lit campus at night for safety. And

we remain constantly alert, especially at sporting events, for crimes of opportunity," Norris noted.

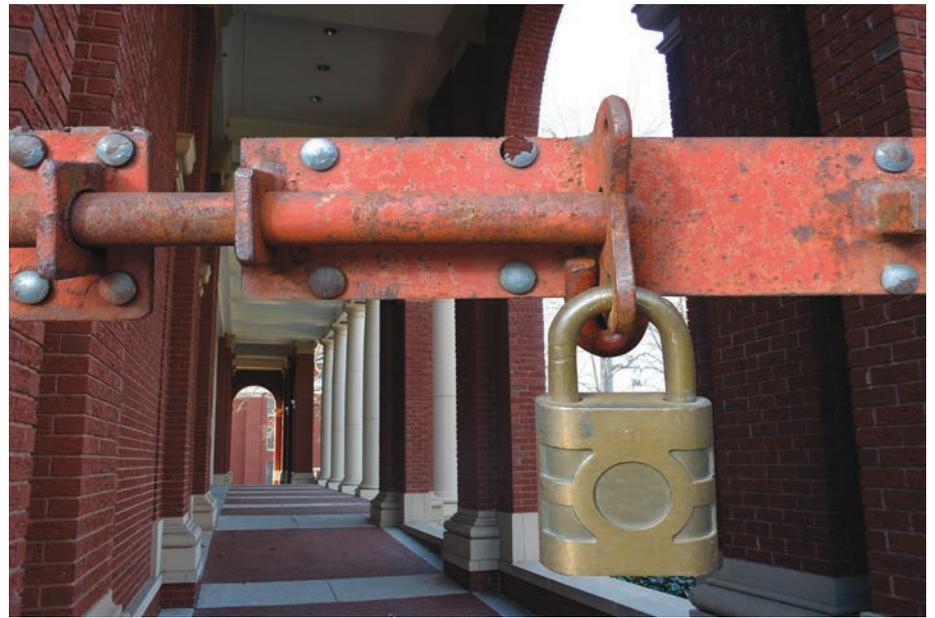
And how can students and parents determine if a campus is safe?

"See if they have an updated

campus emergency response plan, as well as area notification plans," Norris suggested. "And you should also take note of details like lighting, housing access requirements, fire exits and campus access restrictions."



Norris



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Spring Preview
March 26-27, 2015

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LEARN MORE baylor.edu/truett

WORLDVIEW

continued from page 7

international students from 30 nations. Among Ouachita's 1,500-plus students, more than 400 cite a specific interest in ministry vocations.

"The world is becoming a more and more complicated place, and if Christians are to engage with the world, it is critical that they understand both their faith in Christ and how that faith interacts with the world around them," said Danny Hays, dean of Ouachita's Pruet School of Christian Studies. "Thus the broad-ranging and faith-integrative knowledge of Christianity and the world around us that OBU's liberal arts education provides is exactly the background that young men and women need today to live as mature Christians who actively serve as leaders and difference-makers in this complex world."

In addition to core biblical classes, campus chapel services, weekly student-led Refuge worship services and university-sponsored mission trips, Ouachita's vision statement

affirms the university's commitment to fostering "a love of God and a love of learning by creating for students and other constituents dynamic growth opportunities both on campus and throughout the world."

According to Stan Poole, Ouachita's vice president for academic affairs, "In a world where Christian values can no longer be taken for granted,



faith and learning, knowledge and wisdom, information and truth. In doing so, they develop and hone a Christian worldview that can sustain them through the deepest challenges of life."

"Christian education is important because it doesn't just shape a student's worldview; it doesn't provide merely a philosophy or training for a job," said James Taylor, director of campus ministries at Ouachita. "I think Christian education is important because, at its best, it aims at developing individuals who love God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength. It doesn't just teach a Christian view of the world; it creates people who help change the world."

Why choose a Christian liberal arts university? Whether pursuing a degree and career in business, education, the sciences or the arts, it's a matter of achieving a positive balance of intellectual, spiritual and personal growth while cultivating a vibrant Christian worldview.

Trennis Henderson is vice president for communications at Ouachita Baptist University in Arkadelphia.

it's incredibly important that young adults think carefully about how their Christian faith relates to their life's work. This means students must explore the connections between





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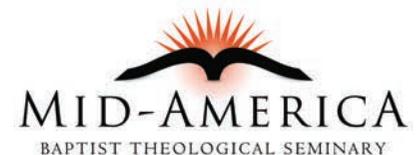
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Spurgeon Center expands Midwestern's 'For the Church' vision

KANSAS CITY (BP) – Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's launch of the new Charles Spurgeon Center for Biblical Preaching expands the seminary's "For the Church" vision by creating what its president, Jason K. Allen, said will be "an international hub" for Spurgeon studies, biblical preaching, the study of historical theology, and pastoral ministry locally and globally "for the church at large."

Allen called events leading up to the center's announcement and impending construction a "kairos moment" during the seminary's annual trustee meeting in Kansas City, Mo., Oct. 20-21. Allen expressed appreciation for Bill and Connie Jenkins of Paoli, Ind., whose generosity enabled Midwestern to move forward with the \$2.5 million construction project to house the Spurgeon Library.

The Spurgeon Library includes Spurgeon's personal collection of more than 6,000

books and hundreds of artifacts, letters and assorted materials. Midwestern Seminary



George

acquired the Spurgeon collection in 2006 from William Jewell College in Liberty, Mo., where it had resided for about 100 years.

The announcement comes on the heels of B&H Publishing's July 23 press release of Christian George's discovery and forthcoming publication of more than 400 of Spur-

geon's previously unpublished sermons. George, a Spurgeon scholar who began serving as curator of Midwestern's Spurgeon Library in August 2014, will head the Spurgeon Center.

"Without hesitation, I can tell you that this is the most significant development in Spurgeon studies in over 100 years," George said. "We believe that the Spurgeon Library and the Charles Spurgeon Center for Biblical Preaching will become a global destination – a steeple, if you will, under which scholars and students of the academy may gather but also pastors, missionaries and congregations."

Noting that one of the center's goals is furthering the cause of Christ as Spurgeon did, George said, "We at Midwestern believe that God is raising up future 'Spurgeons' who will impact this generation with the timeless truths of the Christian faith. ... We at the Spurgeon Center are

looking not only to Spurgeon, but through Spurgeon, to the Christ who is at the very center of our Center."

Through the center and library, Midwestern will continue its mission to be a seminary that "stands with the Church and for the Church," George said.

Calling the center "ground zero" for future Spurgeon studies, Allen, in a blog post titled "Reconsidering Charles Spurgeon," cited theologian Carl F. H. Henry who called Charles Haddon Spurgeon "one of

evangelical Christianity's immortals."

The Spurgeon Center for Biblical Preaching will be constructed in the space that formerly served as the seminary's chapel auditorium. The project is set to begin in late fall with the completion slated for June 2015.

"I truly believe that God has worked in this, is working in this in a powerful way ... to serve His Church," Allen said.

For more information about the Spurgeon Center, visit spurgeoncenter.com.

DBU starts Omicron Delta Kappa chapter

DALLAS – Dallas Baptist University (DBU) has established a chapter of Omicron Delta Kappa, an honor society that encourages leadership development among students.

The chapter at DBU started last fall with 18 students, faculty and staff members. Members have opportunities to serve and participate in events

such as the Christian Leadership Alliance Conference, the Washington, D.C., Leadership Trip and the Russell H. Perry Free Enterprise Award Dinner.

Omicron Delta Kappa was founded in 1914. Today, there are about 233,500 members nationwide in 382 established chapters.

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RACE

continued from page one

yet fully accepting of the idea of full social equality for African-Americans, the ABSC was committed to the concept of higher education for African-Americans throughout the late

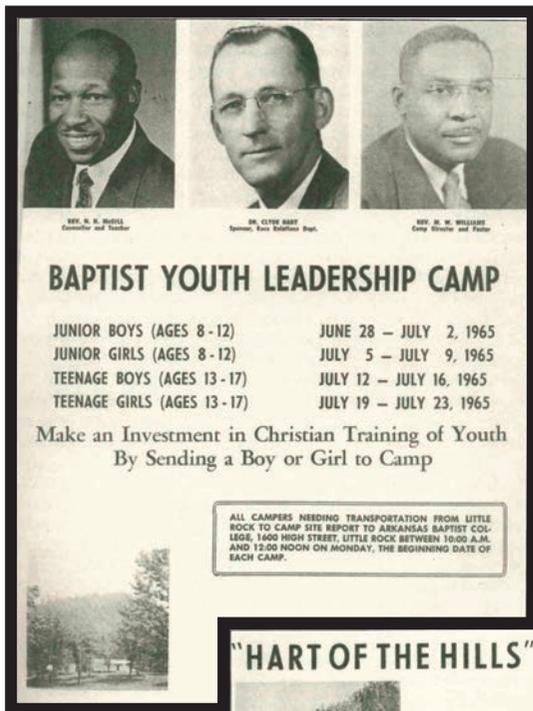
Arkansans, according to “A System and Plan.”

Using logic that is difficult to understand today, Eagle and many other ABSC leaders maintained an ironic relationship with African-Americans. Eagle, for instance, ardently fought against the practice of lynching and supported Arkansas Baptist College, while simultaneously helping herald one of the single most harmful eras of Arkansas history for African-Americans.

“A System and Plan” argues that Eagle and other Arkansas Baptists truly believed they were friends of the African-American community in Arkansas and had its best interest in mind and



Dennis Wilkins (left), former interim pastor at 47th Street Baptist Church, North Little Rock, and Willie “Bernard” Baker, pastor of New Covenant Family Ministries, North Little Rock, stand in front of 47th Street Baptist Church. The two men worked closely together to break down racial barriers by leading their respective churches to host a communitywide block party in 2013. Left are Arkansas Baptist State Convention posters from the 1960s created to promote youth and children’s camps the convention hosted for African-Americans.



19th century, a time when most parts of the South scoffed at the idea, according to “A System and Plan.”

One of the low points in Arkansas Baptist history was the signing of the “separate coach law,” by James Eagle, the 16th governor of Arkansas and former president of the ABSC. The law was the first substantial Jim Crow legislation passed in the state and eventually ushered in an era of complete segregation between white and black

considered legislation like the coach law helpful in diffusing racial conflict.

The fact that that some in Eagle’s day considered him and

others with similar opinions on African-Americans to have a “progressive social consciousness” is helpful in attempting to understand the ironic, and oftentimes unintended, racial insensitivity seen in Arkansas Baptists like Eagle during the Reconstruction and Jim Crow eras of the state.

If slavery and the Jim Crow era were the South’s darkest hours, then surely the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s was its brightest.

According to “A System and Plan,” Brooks Hayes, a U.S. congressman from Arkansas, fought to extend the rights of African-Americans from Washington. In 1949, Hayes debuted his “Arkansas Plan,” in which he called for “full civil rights to minority groups.”

Hayes was later elected president of the ABSC (1957 and 1958) and Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) (1958), symbolically signaling a repentant shift in not only Arkansas Baptist, but also Southern

Baptist, views on race.

The most notable event of the civil rights movement to take place in Arkansas was the Little Rock Desegregation Crisis in 1957.

Many Arkansas Baptist leaders spoke out in favor of the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education U.S. Supreme Court decision that declared segregation in America’s public schools unconstitutional. According to “A System and Plan,” there was only one Southern Baptist pastor in Little Rock that opposed desegregation during this time, and he eventually broke ties with the convention.

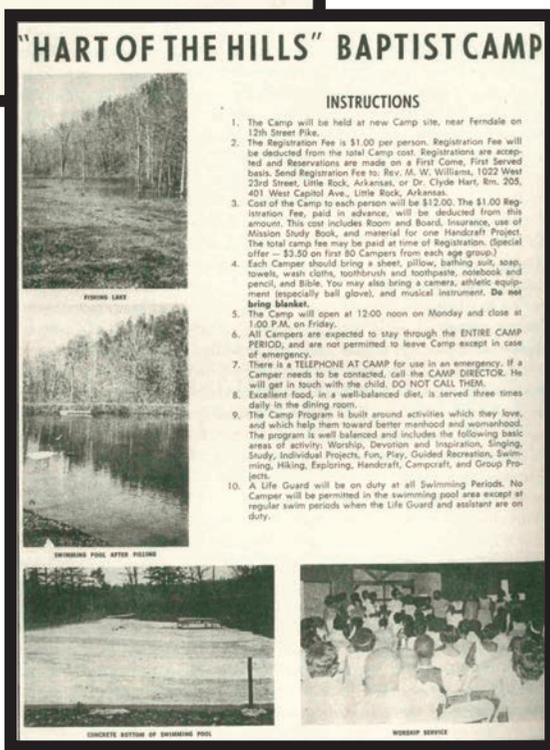
Former ABN Editor Erwin L. McDonald began his tenure at the newspaper during the Little Rock desegregation crisis. At the time, McDonald took unpopular positions on the editorial page several times. For example, prior to the integration of Little Rock

schools, McDonald argued that a simultaneous revival crusade jointly planned and promoted by white and blacks in the Pulaski County Baptist Association “points in the right direction.”

Following the creation of a new “race relations” department with the ABSC in 1957, the convention organized summer camps for African-American children and youth and began a new focus on training African-American pastors and ministry leaders. In 1974, the ABSC joined the rest of the SBC in observing a special “Race Relations Day.”

Racial tensions still exist between whites and blacks in the South. However, Arkansas Baptists are working diligently to break down such barriers to the propagation of the gospel and communion of all followers of Jesus Christ.

Contact Caleb Yarbrough at caleb@arkansasbaptist.org.



Support the ABN Endowment Fund

An endowment fund for the *Arkansas Baptist News* (ABN) has been established at the Arkansas Baptist Foundation. Consider helping to secure the future of official news journal of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention for years to come by including the ABN in your will or by making a contribution to the ABN Endowment Fund. Please contact David Moore at the Arkansas Baptist Foundation at 501-376-0732 or 800-798-0969 (toll free outside of Little Rock) for more information.

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My daughter has a dream (to serve) too

By Jacob Ricker

EVER SINCE my children were born, my prayer for them has been that the Lord would use them in a mighty and powerful way. I hope that most parents have a dream that children grow up and will make a difference in this world. I know I do, and today I started to see this happening. My wife, Holly, sent me a picture of something my 6-year-old daughter, Caitlyn, wrote for school. She had to write about her dreams for the world based on Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. I was and still am completely amazed and humbled to see my daughter's heart to serve people's needs. I believe that God is going to use Caitlyn in a very big way to reach out and meet people's needs.

Now, I know that it is God that has given Caitlyn a heart for people, but I can't help but think that Holly and I are doing something right by teaching her how much Jesus

loves her and how much He loves the world. Seeing my daughter's words got me thinking about the younger generation and serving. What would the world look like if the younger generation really understood what it meant and knew how to serve people with the love of Jesus Christ?

We live in a world where we have a "me, myself and I" mentality, and this needs to change, especially in the Church. We need to become more of the hands and feet of Christ! Paul encourages us in Philippians 2 to become other-people minded when he wrote: "Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too" (Phil. 2:3-4, NLT). For

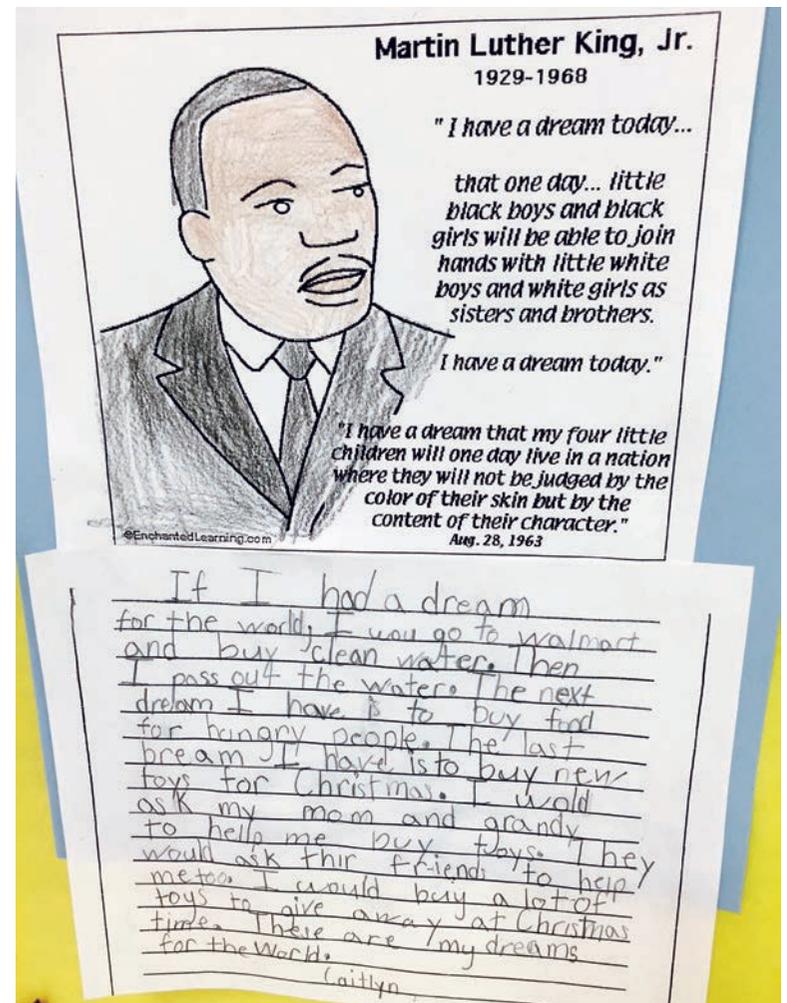
some people, serving is more natural than others; however, it is also something we can learn and grow to do in life. As I look back over the past five years, I realize there have

been three things that Holly and I have done to encourage and help grow Caitlyn's desire to be the hands and feet of Jesus. These three things are things that I believe every parent should implement in their own lives with their children so that the next generation of young people will be better at serving others in their times of need.

(1) **Teaching the importance of serving early.** Our words can have a strong impact on our children, especially when they are younger! We teach our kids the importance of using manners, doing the right things and sharing at a young age. Why not teach them the importance of serving. For the Christian/Christ-follower, serving and meeting the needs of others is important!

When Caitlyn was about 2-and-a-half years old, I began pastoring a church and I started a nonprofit organization called Never Thirst. Never Thirst delivers and passes out water in areas that have been hit with natural disasters. It was during this time I began to teach Caitlyn that there are people who sometimes need help and it is good for us to help if and when we can. If we don't teach our kids to be kind, compassionate and other-minded people, then this world will teach them differently. They will become more self-centered and selfish than they already are, and when that happens, people suffer. So teach your children to serve!

(2) **Model serving others.** Not only do we need to teach them the importance of serving, but we need to show them how to serve. If we just teach them the importance of serving but don't show them how it is done, then they will not know how to serve. Since Caitlyn was 2-and-a-half years old, she has watched me serve people at the church as a pastor and through passing out water. There have been times that she has asked me what I was doing or where I was going, and I would tell (teach) her where I was going and what I was doing. Then when I would come home, I would show her videos and pictures of where we had been and how we had served. I remember when she



Six-year-old Caitlyn Ricker helps hand out blankets at a local nursing home.

asked if she could go with me to pass out water.

She said, "Daddy, I want to do what you are doing."

It melted my heart! She was watching what I was doing and wanted to help. My friends, your kids are watching you! Model serving and watch your children come alive!

(3) **Encourage them to be involved in serving early!** Like I said, Caitlyn has been watching me serve people in different ways since she was 2-and-a-half years old. However, it wasn't until this past Christmas that I got her involved in serving people. While Caitlyn has not gone to pass out water yet, she did go with me to a local nursing home to sing and pass out blankets to the residents. Caitlyn had a great time singing and seeing the smiles on the people's faces when she handed them a blanket and told them Merry Christmas. I believe it is not enough just to teach and model serving others; we must be the hands and feet of Christ and so should our child!

You don't have to be a pastor or start a nonprofit organization to teach, model and get involved in serving people; you

can start serving anywhere and anytime. There are all kinds of opportunities to serve. Working in homeless shelters, soup kitchens or orphanages are just few ways to be the hands and feet of Christ. If your community doesn't have those things in your area, that's OK; there are other ways you can serve the people in your community. You might be able to mow an elderly person's yard for them or offer to help them fix something in their houses. Honestly, it doesn't matter, just start teaching, modeling and encouraging your children to serve.

My daughter has a dream to help people who need clean water, who are hungry and children who go without gifts at Christmas. Your children might have the same dreams or something similar. The truth is, we need to teach, model and get them involved as early as possible so we can start making a difference in this world today and not wait till tomorrow!

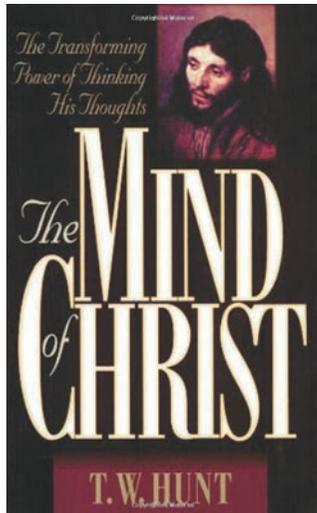
Jacob Ricker is senior pastor of First Southern Baptist Church in Bearden. This article originally appeared on Ricker's blog at jacobricker.com.

T.W. Hunt: A prayer warrior and his Arkansas ties

LEPANTO – Thomas W. “T.W.” Hunt, who died Dec. 11 at the age of 85, was widely recognized in Christian circles as an authority on prayer and was author of books such as “The Mind of Christ” and “Disciple’s Prayer Life” – and he was also the son of an Arkansas Baptist deacon.

His father, Tom Hunt, served as a deacon and Sunday school teacher at First Baptist Church, Lepanto. It was at this church that T.W. Hunt grew up and accepted Christ.

He went on to earn bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral degrees in musicology and piano and to teach music classes at the University of North Texas and, later, at Oklahoma College for Women. He taught at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary’s School of Church Music, where he transformed the way music



“The Mind of Christ” by T.W. Hunt has sold more than a half million copies since it was published in 1995.

was used for missions and developed the Music in Missions class that is still in the school’s catalog today. He also served as the first prayer consultant for the Baptist Sunday School Board (now LifeWay Christian Resources).

Hunt became recognized as an earnest prayer warrior and often was asked to speak on prayer at conferences and state conventions, sparking several thousand churches to begin or undergird their prayer ministries. He retired from LifeWay in 1994 but remained an active author and speaker for two decades.

“There was always an atmosphere of excitement when he would come to visit FBC,” said Gary Fulton, church planter strategist for the Arkansas Baptist State Convention and member of the convention’s church



T.W. Hunt leads more than 8,000 messengers of the Southern Baptist Convention in a time of prayer June 12, 2007, during the two-day annual meeting in San Antonio. Photo courtesy of Baptist Press

planting team.

Fulton, who also grew up at First Baptist, Lepanto, said his own father served as a deacon along with T.W. Hunt’s father.

“I remember his (T.W. Hunt’s) name being men-

tioned by the people because he was a local Christian/Baptist hero,” Fulton said. “Everyone looked forward to him visiting and to his next book coming out.”

He said Hunt was a “favor-

ite son” at First Baptist, and whenever he would come to visit, he would play the piano and often would speak.

Fulton described Hunt as “humble” and “unassuming.”

“He and his wife, Laverne, walked with the Lord and influenced Susan, my wife, and me very positively,” Fulton said.

He said he remembers when Hunt went to Guatemala, where Fulton and his family were serving as missionaries at the time, to speak at a spiritual enrichment retreat for missionaries.

“He was one of the first SBC leaders that I heard emphasize the importance of the spiritual disciplines of fasting and praying in order to draw closer to Christ,” Fulton said.

“FBC, Lepanto, has a very deep spiritual heritage,” Fulton added, noting that the church was the starting point for another spiritual hero – Avery Willis, missions leader and creator of the MasterLife discipleship series, whose father was a pastor at First Baptist.

“It is very significant for a church when spiritual heroes come out of local congregations,” Fulton said.

Ark. Legislature OKs anti-discrimination laws

LITTLE ROCK – The Arkansas House of Representatives approved Bill 202 on Feb. 13 that bars cities and counties from passing ordinances that would prohibit discrimination on any basis not in state law, arkansasnews.com reported.

The House vote was 58-21. The Senate previously passed the bill Feb. 9.

The action by the Arkansas Legislature follows passage of an ordinance by Eureka Springs aldermen Feb. 9 making it illegal to discriminate against homosexuals in matters concerning employment, housing, business and public accommodations, the Arkansas

Democrat-Gazette reported.

Eureka Springs rushed the passage of Ordinance 2223 so that it would become city law before the Legislature could act on the bill making such ordinances illegal, according to Democrat-Gazette reports.

Additionally, House members approved and sent to the Senate a bill that seeks to protect Arkansans from government policies that “burden” their right to exercise religion. Opponents say both measures seek to protect discrimination, particularly discrimination against homosexuals.

Gov. Asa Hutchinson said he will allow the bill to become

law without his signature. A bill becomes law in Arkansas five days after reaching the governor’s desk if the governor does not sign or veto it. Arkansas governors traditionally have used this option when they do not support a bill but do not believe they could veto, which requires a simple majority vote in both chambers.

Rep. Bob Ballinger, R-Hindsville, presented SB 202 on the Senate floor. He said the bill would prevent ordinances like one the Fayetteville City Council approved in August that included prohibitions against discrimination based on sexual orientation.

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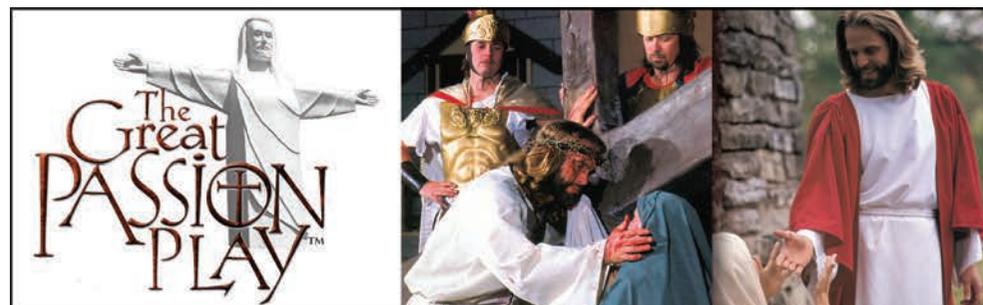
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PANCAKE BREAKFAST

The Girls in Action (GAs) of First Baptist Church, Marion, held their annual pancake breakfast to raise money for the Arkansas Baptist Home for Children in Monticello on Feb. 14. The GAs have participated the last 8 years in raising awareness and funds for the home. This year they brought in \$2,500 at their event. In the last 8 years, the GAs have given more than \$24,000 to the home. The GAs take the funds raised to the home. They minister at the home by doing things like raking leaves, pulling weeds and helping with general groundskeeping. They meet and play with the children, have lunch with them and learn about sharing Christ's love with others. This year, the GAs will visit the home in April.



Ark. Baptist Communications Conf. set for May 8 in Little Rock

LITTLE ROCK – The second Arkansas Baptist News (ABN) and Arkansas Baptist State Convention (ABSC)-sponsored communications and media conference will be held May 8 at the Baptist building in Little Rock.

The conference will be held from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. and will offer an overview and individual breakout sessions on a variety of church communications and media topics.

Topics will include church technology, public relations, graphic design and more.

The conference is free, but

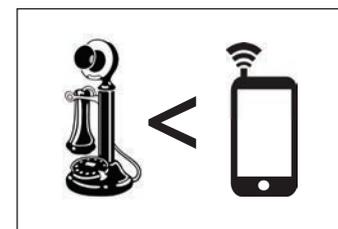
limited to 75 preregistered participants. Lunch will be provided.

Conference leaders are Tim Yarbrough, ABN editor; Jessica Vanderpool, ABN senior assistant editor; Caleb Yarbrough, ABN assistant editor; Stella Prather, director of communications for the Arkansas Baptist Children's Homes and Family Ministries, and Matt

Ramsey, ABSC director of communications.

"The conference is designed for pastors, other church staff and volunteers who want to improve their communication skills and tactics as they seek to further the gospel of Jesus Christ," said Tim Yarbrough.

For more information or to register, visit arkansasbaptist.org/abcc15.



ABN scholarship benefits students

LITTLE ROCK – The Arkansas Baptist News (ABN) is once again announcing a scholarship designed to encourage students to pursue a career in Christian communications.

"The ABN sees great value in using communications to further the cause of the gospel and wants to do whatever it can to encourage students in Arkansas to pursue this purpose through careers of journalism, advertising or

public relations," said Tim Yarbrough, ABN editor.

The scholarship is primarily being made available to Williams Baptist College and Ouachita Baptist University students.

Williams and Ouachita have agreed to provide matching funds for a scholarship to be awarded at each of the schools. Arkansas Baptist students who attend other colleges will be considered, but no matching scholarship funding will be

available, said Yarbrough.

"Applicants should have a passion for Christ and should desire to further His cause through their careers – either through vocational ministry or in the secular marketplace," he said.

The scholarship is being administered through the Arkansas Baptist Foundation.

For more information, visit abf.org and click on "Scholarships" at the bottom of the page.

Classifieds

PASTOR

Union Baptist Church, El Dorado (www.ubcdorado.net) is prayerfully seeking a **full-time pastor**. If you feel the Lord is leading you to consider ministering to God's congregation at Union, please mail your resume with internet link/CD/DVD or sample sermons to Pastor Search Committee, c/o JoAnne Greer, 649 Armer Road, El Dorado, AR 71730.

Seeking a **bi-vocational pastor**. Send resume to First Baptist Church of Lecompte, Attn: Pastor Search Committee, P.O. Box 1070, Lecompte, LA 71346. (Fifteen minutes south of Alexandria, La.) Contact 318-776-9487.

First Baptist Church, Camden, is seeking a **full-time senior pastor**. Please send resume to FBC Pastor Search Committee, 348 W. Washington St., Camden, AR 71701, or email to timgunter@fbccamden.org.

Bi-vocational or semi-retired pastor, small church in musical Ozark tourist town. Email kenw@mvtel.net. Resume to Sylamore Baptist Church, P.O. Box 1596,

Mountain View, AR 72560.

First Baptist of Tuckerman is seeking a **full-time or bi-vocational pastor**. Please send resume to FBC, P.O. Box 1188, Tuckerman, AR 72473.

Cedar Glades Baptist Church in Mountain Pine is seeking a **full-time pastor**. Please send resume to Cedar Glades Baptist Church, Pastor Search Committee, 303 Gum Springs Road, Mountain Pine, AR 71956.

New Hope Baptist Church in Jay, Okla., is prayerfully seeking a **full-time pastor**. Please send resumes to newhopebaptist-jay@gmail.com.

OTHER STAFF POSITIONS

CSU DIRECTOR, Mineral Area College: Able to lead, plan, mentor, accomplish goals, part-time, parsonage. Send resumes: Mineral Area Baptist Association, 5169 Flat River Road, Farmington, MO 63640 or ffbrammer@gmail.com.

Full-time worship/student minister – Immanuel, Fort Smith, is praying

for a dynamic worship leader who has the ability to lead young people as well. Desiring transition to blended service. Visit www.ibcfs.org or 479-782-1009.

Calvary Baptist Church, Neosho, Mo., is seeking a **full-time worship pastor**. We are a very mission-minded church. Our worship style is blended worship, with full praise band. Resumes can be sent to austinwylly@me.com.

Oaks Manor Conference and Retreat Center is seeking a couple to serve as **ministry associates** at this beautiful adult facility near Van Buren. Compensation offered includes living quarters, utilities, gas allowance and salary. Ministry includes food service, office responsibilities, outside maintenance and general hospitality for guests. Call Pete Ramsey, 479-414-4831, to visit about this ministry opportunity.

Southside Baptist Church, Paris, Texas, seeks **full-time music minister**. Blended worship service. Help with youth band on Wednesdays. Send resumes to bnorris@suddenlink.net.

First Baptist Church of Farmington is

seeking a **full-time associate pastor** with an emphasis in worship. Please email inquiries or resumes to fbcfarm@sbcglobal.net, Attn: personnel committee, or mail to Personnel Committee, 210 North A. Street, Farmington, MO 63640.

First Baptist Church, Maumelle, is seeking a **full-time church secretary** and **part-time custodian**. Send resumes to 100 Valencia Drive, Maumelle, AR 72113 Attn: Personnel Comm. or to grenwald@sbcglobal.net.

Levy church seeks **pianist**: Apply to 3501 Pike Ave., North Little Rock, 72118 or steventiner@levybaptist.com.

Southern Heights Baptist Church is currently seeking both a **full-time youth pastor** and a **full-time worship leader**. Resumes may be sent to shbc@windstream.net or to 279 Highway 221 S., Berryville, AR 72616.

Union Valley Baptist Church of Beebe is seeking a **full-time minister of music** to lead our blended worship services. Located in central Arkansas, Union Valley has an average worship attendance of 500. This

individual will be responsible for directing adult and youth choirs, as well as the praise band. Send resume to timsparks@centurytel.net.

MISCELLANEOUS

Grace Baptist Church in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, desires to begin handbell ministry. To donate a **2-3 octave set of bells**, contact Alan Moore at alan@ibcs.org.

Two condos for rent in Destin, Fla. Two bedrooms, two baths. Book now for 2015. Email: lbrammer@charter.net. Phone: 423-309-4422.

Davis Church Pew Upholstery, 30-plus years experience. Melton and Sandra Davis, Quitman, Miss., 601-776-6617.

Refurbished church buses (American Bus Sales). George Foshee - 501-767-6020.

For sale: **1994 Ford 350 Bus**, 30 passenger, asking \$10,500. Contact Gordon French: 1-870-845-6307 or 1-870-793-9301.

Ark. native Pollard dies at 77

CIRCLEVILLE, Ohio - Willis C. Pollard Jr., 77, of Circleville, Ohio, died Feb. 4. He was born Oct. 8, 1937, in Moark, Ark., to Willis C. Sr. and Cora Mae (Verdier) Pollard. He served in multiple capacities with the State Convention of Baptists in Ohio, including as



Pollard

editor of the *Ohio Baptist Messenger*.

Pollard retired from 26 years with the state convention in 2004. He also pastored Ridgewood Baptist Church in Wadsworth, Ohio, as well as churches in Texas and Missouri.

He was preceded in death by his parents; a

brother, Don Pollard, and a sister, Joyce Pollard. He is survived by his wife, Peggy Ann (Miller) Pollard; son, Boyd (Jan) Pollard; grandchildren, Emily and Zach Pollard and Isaac Fullerton; sister, Judy Shades; stepmother, Maxine Pollard and stepbrother, Paul (Caryn) Pollard and family.

A funeral service was held at Dublin Baptist Church in Dublin, Ohio, Feb. 9. Burial took place in Dublin Cemetery.

Obituaries

Thelma Angeline Anderson, 81, of Bryant, died Feb.



3. She was employed for more than 20 years with the Arkansas Baptist State Convention and was a member of Indian

Springs Baptist Church in Bryant. She was preceded in death by her parents; her husband, Delton Anderson; two daughters; three brothers, and two sisters. She is survived by two sons, a daughter, two brothers, a sister, a granddaughter and four great-grandchildren. Graveside services and burial were held Feb. 7 at Forest Hills Cemetery in Alexander.

Al Sparkman, 83, of Rogers, died Feb.



7. He pastored churches in Kentucky and Arkansas, including First Baptist Church, Crossett. He was a graduate of

Ouachita Baptist University in Arkadelphia and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. Through the radio ministry of First Baptist Church in Crossett, his sermons were broadcast to Arkansans for a number of years. Other ministries included speaking at revivals in many states, teaching and preaching on college campuses, teaching seminary extension and preaching and teaching in

New Zealand and Germany. He also served Southern Baptist entities including serving on the Arkansas Baptist State Convention Executive Board. Survivors include his wife of 62 years, Bobbie Stephens Sparkman; a daughter, a son, four grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. Memorial services were held Feb. 10 at Grace Baptist Church in Rogers.

On the move

Turner Roberts is serving on the staff of First Baptist Church, Hamburg, as youth minister, coming there from First Baptist Church, Liberty, Texas, where he was associate pastor of student ministries.

David O'Dell is serving as pastor of Second Baptist Church, Jacksonville, coming there from Hardy Street Baptist Church, Hattiesburg, Miss., where he was pastor.

John Cowling has resigned as student pastor at Park Hill Baptist Church, North Little Rock, to accept a position with a nonprofit ministry in Ruston, La.

Baptist Health to offer free health care screenings in North Little Rock

NORTH LITTLE ROCK - Baptist Health is hosting its annual Head North to Health Fair and screening event from 9 a.m. to noon Saturday, Feb. 28, at First Assembly of God, 4501 Burrow Drive, North Little Rock.

Baptist Health has hosted

the event for more than 20 years, attracting hundreds of people from across central Arkansas to receive free screenings for things such as body mass index, blood sugar, blood pressure, cholesterol and PSA for men.

In 2015, Baptist Health is

offering a limited number of free flu shots as well.

In addition, the first 50 participants will receive a complimentary goodie bag, and door prizes will be given away hourly.

For more information, visit baptist-health.com.

Staff Wanted

Arkansas Baptist Children's Homes and Family Ministries

Houseparent couple for the Baptist Home for Children in Monticello. This full-time position includes salary, medical insurance, life insurance and paid leave.

Recreational Director for the Baptist Home for Children in Monticello. This full-time position includes salary, medical insurance, life insurance and paid leave. Experience with horses is preferred.

Contact: Randy Luper, 870.367.5358 or rluper@abchomes.org.

Case Manager for the Boys Ranch in Harrison. This full-time position includes salary, medical insurance, life insurance and paid leave. A bachelors degree in a human services field or a bachelors degree and two years experience in a human services field is required.

Contact: Bill VonderMehden, 870.741.5784 or bvondermehden@abchomes.org.



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Happy Birthday!

to all the missionary kids attending college who are celebrating birthdays in the month of March.

◆ March 30: Rachel Wicker, OBU Box 4542, Arkadelphia, AR 71998-0001; Russia.



Visit arkansasbaptist.org or search @arkbaptnews on Facebook and Twitter to stay up-to-date with the latest Arkansas Baptist news

22nd annual
Camden Daffodil Festival & Garden Tour
Downtown Camden 🌸 March 6-7 🌸 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Tour tickets available downtown (special value ticket available)

🌸 Historic home tours	🌸 Arts and crafts
🌸 Four daffodil gardens	🌸 Yard, garden and food vendors
🌸 Cemetery walk	🌸 5 K run
🌸 Live musical entertainment	🌸 Antique car show
🌸 Quilt show	🌸 Choctaw Indian demonstrations
🌸 Art show and sale	
🌸 Civil War encampment	

Steak cook-off Saturday evening 🌸 Church groups welcome
For more information, call the Camden Chamber of Commerce 870.836.6426 or go to www.camdendaffodilfestival.com.
This ad paid for with a combination of state funds and private regional association funds through Arkansas' South.

ChurchTech

"Look, I am about to do something new; even now it is coming. Do you not see it?"

Isaiah 43:19 (HCSB)

Americans prefer 'live' preachers

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – Most Americans still prefer a real-live preacher to a video sermon, according to a survey from Nashville-based LifeWay Research.

About a third (35 percent) say they will only visit churches with a live sermon.

Three in 10 say a video sermon won't keep them from a church, but they still prefer live preaching. The same number say live or video sermons are fine.

Less than one percent prefer to watch a video sermon.

"The fact that many churches utilize video sermons means other factors such as relationships, preaching approach, music, relevance, and location can be more important," said Scott McConnell, vice president of LifeWay Research and author of "Multi-Site Churches: Guidance for the Movement's Next Generation."

Story compiled with information from lifewayresearch.com.



Tech tips for a smooth Sunday morning service

DO YOU use technology on Sunday mornings? Tired of those pesky technical problems in the middle of your Sunday sermon? One might think to blame the sound guys in the booth for these mishaps. But they may not always be the cause of the problems. Check out these tips to help your Sunday mornings go smoothly and bring fewer headaches for you and your congregation.

Communication. The key to a successful worship service begins with communication. The one overlooked area of communication seems to be the communication with the tech workers. Don't overlook these workers as they try to make things easier on the pastor and do several of the behind-the-scenes tasks.

The tech workers need the latest information and any changes in the worship service flow. For example, if the pastor decides to get rid of a few PowerPoint slides and doesn't tell the workers that run the presentation, then a disaster awaits. If a church uses a lot of technology in the worship service, ideally that part of the service needs to work properly.

Try to go over the flow of the service with the sound booth workers in order to help make things go smoothly. Without communication between the sound booth workers and the pastor, the technical side of things will never go right for your worship service.

Preparation. Good planning and preparation help eliminate 99 percent of the

problems that could happen on Sunday morning. When you plan, it gets very easy to forget about the technical side with all the other chaotic things happening. Just a few extra minutes to sit and think about what tech tools will be needed helps out tremendously. For example, if the speaker on Sunday knows he wants PowerPoint, plan ahead for this. Don't show up 5 minutes before the service and rush up to the sound booth and beg the workers to create your PowerPoint slide show. Bad planning on the speaker's part will always cause problems with the flow of the service on Sunday mornings.

Another example would be to make sure all of the equipment works properly before the sermon starts.

Many times people expect that the equipment will work just fine, as it did the previous Sunday, and show up right before the service starts to turn on the equipment. When the workers realize that the wireless microphone batteries are dead, it causes a major problem for the speaker.

Showing up early seems to be the simplest way to ensure everything will work correctly. Working together and helping each other out by planning ahead becomes the main goal

of the worship service.

Knowledge. Having knowledge of the equipment also makes things go smoothly. Many times problems occur due to the lack of understanding of the equipment. If a sound tech does not know a lot about the soundboard and the microphones sound really "hot," this will not be a good thing.

Another example would be if the speaker doesn't know very much about PowerPoint when creating their presentation,

resulting in the slides messing up. Don't be afraid to let someone know that you don't feel comfortable with a certain piece of equipment. The Arkansas Baptist State Convention offers free training for churches regarding the use of technology (see end of article for contact information).

Equipment. The tech workers who work every Sunday at your church usually know when to purchase a new piece of equipment. If the speaker's microphone always goes out in the middle of the sermon, it might be time to purchase a new microphone. I know that churches work on a budget, but your congregation does notice the constant sound or tech issues on Sunday mornings. Not having good equipment for Sunday morning worship service can sometimes



CHURCHTECH

Matt Ramsey
Arkansas
Baptist State
Convention

Tech Bytes

"There are unintended side effects of technology that are both depersonalizing and dehumanizing. But there are some wonderful benefits of technology that enable the mission of the church."

– Ed Stetzer, *Christianity Today*

IN A POST written for his *Christianity Today* blog "The Exchange," titled "3 Ways Technology Enables the Mission of the Church," Ed Stetzer, executive director of LifeWay Research, makes the argument that technology can be an incredible tool for spreading the gospel. Stetzer writes that technology (1) "enables communication," (2) "enables community," and (3) "enables discipleship."

Tips for managing projects in Evernote

EVERNOTE is a free workspace platform app that can support your most ambitious projects.

Keeping track of all the moving parts is essential to maintaining progress, no matter the size of your undertaking.

Whether it's a client deliverable, research for a term paper, or the novel you've been writing, Evernote is up to the task, because it's so much more than an everything bucket; it's a hub where you can accomplish your best work.

Use Evernote notes and notebooks as a framework to plan and execute your initiatives and make even the most complicated projects more manageable.

Start a new note to capture meeting minutes, get on track with a to-do list, or put together a proposal for the team. If you aren't at your computer when an idea strikes you, use the Evernote app on your phone to type out a quick note or capture a photo. There's no limit to the types of projects Evernote can enable you to take on.

– Get at Evernote.com

Contact Matt Ramsey of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention at mramsey@absc.org or call 800-838-2272, ext. 5158.

River Valley Christian Life Corps recognized for excellence

Jessica Griggs
WMU

FORT SMITH - An explosion of spiritual growth has occurred at Fort Smith Christian Women's Job Corps (CWJC) in Fort Smith. The Lord has been opening doors right and left since the site started in 1999. Ministry has tripled. In addition to CWJC, it now includes Christian Men's Job Corps (CMJC), as well as a satellite site in Charleston - which together are now known as River Valley Christian Life Corps.

The appeal? "We get comments all the time that there is nothing else like it," said Valerie Fitch,

executive director of River Valley Christian Life Corps. "Our site attracts people who will not enter the doors of a church. We meet people where they are and gain the opportunity to present the gospel."

The year 2013 by the numbers: 168 participants, 42 mentor teams, 33 salvations, 22 baptisms and 29 graduates. Since the exponential growth, River Valley Christian Life Corps expanded their location from one building to three buildings in their current location.

In 2014, there were 262 participants, 63 mentor teams,

35 salvations, 27 baptisms and 35 graduates.

"The pace of the ministry is moving so quickly that we consistently outpace our grassroots level support," stated Darin Swearingen, board chairman of River Valley Christian Life Corps. "The positive development of the entire person is exciting to witness."



Onofre

A ministry of Woman's Missionary Union (WMU), the purpose of CWJC/CMJC is to provide a Christian context in which women and men in need are equipped for life and employment - and in a missions con-

text in which women mentor women and men mentor men. CWJC/CMJC offers life skills, job skills, mentoring and Bible study.

Loucinda "Cinda" Onofre, once a self-proclaimed lost, self-destructive alcoholic, is now on her way to promise and freedom, thanks in large part to Fort Smith CWJC.

Pregnant and separated from her husband, homeless and recently released from jail, Onofre wanted more out of life than merely to survive. She wanted to thrive. With hopes and dreams in her heart, she came to CWJC.

Today, Onofre is pursuing a degree in information technology security with a desire

to combat Internet crime. She has two sons and is remarried. Fitch described one of Onofre's mentors, Linda Payne, as "family."

However, Jesus is now the most important relationship in her life. Her "greatest hope," Onofre said, "is that others will see my story, ... my journey, ... and know they, too, can overcome the afflictions of this world through our Savior Jesus Christ."

To assist her in reaching her goals, Onofre was awarded \$1,500 from the WMU Foundation through the Faye Dove Scholarship. This annual award benefits CWJC graduates who thirst for knowledge and skill development and exemplify excellence in their lives.

In addition, River Valley Christian Life Corps - formerly Fort Smith CWJC/CMJC - was recognized as the outstanding site in 2014 and received a \$1,000 grant from the WMU Foundation to assist with their goals. Fitch said the grant will be used for items such as Bible study materials, Bibles, notebooks, journals and office supplies and equipment.

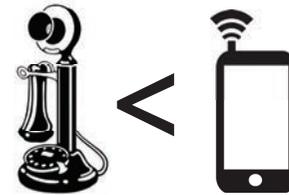
Jessica Griggs, who wrote for the Woman's Missionary Union (WMU), is a senior at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Mark your calendar!

Arkansas Baptist Communications Conference - May 8

The conference will be held at the Arkansas Baptist State Convention building in Little Rock. **Admission is free** but registration is required. Lunch will be provided.

To register, visit arkansasbaptist.org/abcc15



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Outreach rodeo series ministers to cowboy community

Jessica Vanderpool
Arkansas Baptist News

MAGNOLIA - Ministry can take a variety of forms. Last year, ministry in south Arkansas took the form of numerous young people barrel racing, pole bending, goat tying and bull riding.

Mike Launius, pastor of Rugged Cross Cowboy Church, Magnolia, serves as president of the South Arkansas Cowboy Church Association (SACCA), a network of cowboy churches in the southern region of Arkansas that are affiliated with the Arkansas Baptist State Convention (ABSC).

"The churches formed (the) association to have fellowship, rodeo activities, but most importantly, to help each other share Jesus through the rodeo arena," Launius said, adding that SACCA had a "very successful year in 2014 and (is) looking forward to more outreach and ministry 'cowboy style' in 2015."

SACCA held their first outreach youth rodeo series in the fall. Though it was dubbed a "youth" rodeo series, it was open to all ages 19 and under. The series consisted of four rodeos - three preliminary rodeos and a finals rodeo - each held at a different location. Participants took part in goat tying, pole bending, barrel racing and bull riding. They competed for points and prize money. The division winners at each rodeo received the prize money from their events; and at the finals rodeo, the participant with the most points won the Champion Buckle and other prizes.

Launius explained that the Young Guns Bull Riding Association handled all aspects of the bull riding, while



Mike Launius (above left), pastor of Rugged Cross Cowboy Church in Magnolia and president of the South Arkansas Cowboy Church Association, and Glenn Lee (above center), owner of Young Guns Bull Riding Association, present the top three bull riders their awards during the finals rodeo. Emily Smith (left) competes in the youth rodeo series.

sage at some point during the event.

"We had many responsibilities at each rodeo to make them click off as fast (as) we could, but our greatest was sharing Jesus and planting seeds for the host cowboy churches to harvest," he said.

Fifteen-year-old Allie McMahan, who along with her sister, Abby, participated in several of the rodeos, said the message/prayer times gave participants a "little bit of a boost" for when they rode. She also noted how fun it was to see friends from her own church and meet young people from other churches.

Her father, Bubba, who is a member of Rugged Cross Cowboy Church, said the rodeo series was a "good outreach for the kids and some of the parents."

Graceland Portable Buildings was the exclusive added-money sponsor for the bull riding. In addition, the ABSC partnered with SACCA to support their outreach rodeo series.

Launius said there were more than 100 entries at each rodeo except for the finals rodeo, which had 86 entries. The number of entries differed from the number of contestants because some contestants had multiple entries. In addition, more than 200 spectators came to each event; and Launius said SACCA made it a point to share the gospel during the events. Each rodeo began with prayer and included a mes-

"It's kind of a way to let some of the kids that don't have a chance to go rodeo ... to sort of get out and meet different folks and try to see how everything's run," he said.

Brent Talley, member of Cross Point Cowboy Church, Nashville, said his church hosted one of the rodeos, and he gave the devotion at the event.

His daughters, Katherine, 10, and Natalie, 7, rode in all four rodeos.

"We (Cross Point) are very excited about working with other cowboy churches across the state to have more events like this," Talley said. "It's just a great time of fellowship and realizing that we're not the only church, the only group of folks, who are trying to live our lives for Christ as well as enjoying the Western heritage that we've all grown up with - rodeoing and raising cattle and stuff."

Launius expressed his gratitude for all the cowboy churches that participated and helped with the rodeo series.

"The pastors led their people in helping at each rodeo," he said. "It wasn't for glory or fame, but to serve Jesus, so I say, 'Thank you.'"

He said SACCA plans to hold more outreach youth- and family-oriented rodeo events in 2015.

Along with many others statewide, cowboy churches in southern Arkansas include Cross Point Cowboy Church; Circle Cross Cowboy Church, Glenwood; Cross Bar C Cowboy Church, Benton; Whispering Pines Cowboy Church, Pine Bluff; Grace Cowboy Church, Warren; Calvary Trail Cowboy Church, Smackover, and Rugged Cross Cowboy Church.

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MARCH 8, 2015

There must be a special parent book out there somewhere that includes every phrase a parent should know – phrases like, “Because I said so.” In bold print would be the question, “If your friends jumped off a bridge, would you jump too?”

When I was a child, every time I began my plea that “all my friends” were doing something, my father would respond with the “if your friends” phrase.

As a parent of teens, I found myself using that same phrase.

As annoying as those words sounded, my dad was trying to teach me accountability for my actions. He didn’t care about my friends’ actions; he cared about my actions. He had set a standard for me, and he was holding me accountable to that standard!

God may not use the “if your friends” phrase, but He has definitely set a standard for His children and He will hold us accountable to it. He calls for the believer to worship Him and only Him regardless of the actions of the majority. Zephaniah 1 describes what happens

when His children follow society’s norms, rather than God’s standard.

The people of Judah and Jerusalem were guilty of worshipping the pagan Baal and of swearing to Milcom, the god of the Ammonites. The Israelites had wandered so far from God they had become entrenched in pagan thought and openly rejected all God declared holy. They were so deep into the cultural practices of paganism that the people believed God would overlook their behavior. Nothing could have been further from the truth!

The Lord declared His lamp would uncover every wicked being. He would bring His day of wrath not only upon Judah, but also upon the entire world – all because mankind chose to sin against the Lord.

Today’s society is much like that of the days of Zephaniah. There is much to lure the believer away from the holy standard of God. Christian, beware! God does and will hold His children accountable. Maybe my dad was right. Just because my friends were doing it did not mean that I had to be part of it.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Everyone accountable

ZEPHANIAH 1:1-11



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This passage screams “Christmas” to me. In fact, last Christmas I read and reread this passage. I heard sermons on it and sang Christmas carols based on it. The birth of Jesus is Christmas.

What if we thought it was only for the month of December? What if we only celebrated Jesus’ birth once a year? Oh, what we would miss! In studying Luke 1 leading up to Easter, we see a whole new picture. (God’s Word is always applicable.) We read it with different ears.

Luke 1:26-29 describes God sending an angel to Mary.

“In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. And the angel came to her and said, ‘Rejoice, favored woman! The Lord is with you.’ But she was deeply troubled by this statement, wondering what kind of greeting this could be” (Luke 1:26-29).

Mary was just a girl, but God chose her to be the mother of the Messiah.

She would continue to be a human being. She wouldn’t have any special powers or be supernatural. She had just found favor with the Lord.

She was as surprised about this turn of events as you would expect her to be. Luke 1:29 mentions she was “deeply troubled” by the angel, and that was before she knew what he was going to tell her!

Nowadays, an expectant mother is able to see what her baby will look like – if it has its father’s nose, if it has hair, etc. But Mary was able to hear what her Baby was going to “be.” Can you imagine? Beginning in Luke 1:31, the angel tells her Jesus’ name and what He would be called by others. He wasn’t just to be “Jesus,” but He would be the “Son of the Most High,” and God would give Him the throne of David. Not only that, but His kingdom would be eternal.

This was to be no ordinary Baby. Jesus was coming to save the world, and she was going to have a major part in the story. This tiny Baby she was to carry was the Messiah!

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

A birth like no other

LUKE 1:26-35



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My husband and I loved our years on the mission field. Yes, there were trials, strange illnesses and times of extreme loneliness. But overshadowing it all was watching God work in the lives of the people whom we served. One such man was King Po.

King Po had been heavily involved in a vigilante group that was determined to wipe out an unreached people group. King Po became extremely involved in “black magic.” He killed and robbed countless people. And then one day his wife took him to hear a pastor who introduced him to the saving power of Jesus Christ. King Po burned all of his black magic paraphernalia. He threw his M16 assault rifle into the fire and declared, “I am exchanging my M16 for John 3:16.” A bit corny, I know, but what he did with John 3:16 was amazing!

King Po no longer went into his enemy’s villages to persecute and kill; he went to introduce his enemies to Jesus Christ and the God who “gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16). Like Paul, King Po declared himself as the chief

of all sinners. He had been forgiven much – so much that He could not even speak of it without crying. The radical change in his life caused many of his enemies to join him in following the one true God. The Lord was indeed his great Salvation.

Zephaniah 3 describes a people much like my friend King Po. The Israelites had sinned greatly. They had forsaken the one true God.

They were prideful and arrogant. But among them was a remnant. And God declared He would bring that remnant “home.” Once there, there would be resounding joy and gladness throughout Zion. Restoration was and always will be in the Lord’s hands. No one else can forgive as much, no one else can love as much, no

one else can provide as much – the ultimate salvation. The redemption of Israel is just a foreshadowing of what is to come when we all experience the ultimate redemption and enter into our Zion, the land resounding with joy and gladness. It will be so because “Yahweh has spoken” (Zeph. 3:20).

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Our great Salvation

ZEPHANIAH 3:8-17



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Stephen and I have four children. They enjoy being together. Although they get along with each other most of the time, they don’t take correction and direction from each other very well. When Stephen or I give them correction and direction, they listen. The sound of Stephen’s voice makes them turn and obey. They know his voice; they know him. And they know he has the power to make them obey if they choose not to obey on their own. This Bible story in Mark 4 reminds me of that. Jesus’ voice has power.

Mark 4:35-41 says it all to me. I picture an old boat with worn sails, weary men trying to get comfortable and the sailor navigating his way in the water amongst the other boats. It was probably a bit chaotic.

Jesus was with them and yet He was asleep and not bothered by all the activity going on in the boat.

Mark 4:37 says, “A fierce windstorm arose.”

This storm was one of hurricane proportions, not just a thunderstorm.

This storm was disastrous. Except for the frequent lightning strikes, I imagine the sky was dark with the clouds hiding the moon. The boat was being tossed back and forth and beginning to fill with water. The men were frightened and went to wake Jesus.

They had listened to His teachings, and they had heard Him tell them who He was; although they had not all put their faith and belief in Him, they knew He had authority.

The men were shaken by this storm, and they asked Jesus in Mark 4:38 if He didn’t even care if they died!

In all of His goodness, love and power, Jesus spoke three words to the storm in Mark 4:39: “Peace! Be still!”

And at His words, the winds were silent. The sea was calm. Just as when God spoke all of creation into existence, Jesus spoke peace onto the storm.

The world has known many men of power, but the world has never known anyone with the power of Jesus.

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Power like no other

MARK 4:35-41



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