

# BAPTISTS Today

## A call for unity

New Baptist Covenant  
participants embrace  
common commitments

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**Honoring Walker Knight**

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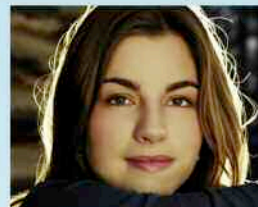


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Cover photo by Rod Reilly. The Morehouse College Glee Club brings joy to the Celebration of a New Baptist Covenant. **Page 10**

## welcome

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# Knight's dream becomes reality

Baptist news journal to celebrate 25 years, honor founding editor

**D**ECATUR, Ga. — Next month marks the 25th anniversary of the national news journal *Baptists Today*. The first issue, dated April 1983 and then called *SBC Today*, was produced under the capable guidance of veteran journalist Walker L. Knight.

On April 3, 2008, friends and supporters will gather in Atlanta to mark the publication's milestone and to pay tribute to the founding editor who made great personal sacrifices to launch the uniquely autonomous Baptist news journal.

Knight, now 84, lives in Decatur, Ga., and remains active in Oakhurst Baptist Church where the publication was started. He has been a key leader in the innovative congregation, known for its commitment to social justice, since joining in 1959.

To understand and appreciate the lifelong commitments of Walker Knight, who set a new standard for Baptist journalists, requires a trip back through his personal journey.

Walker's father deserted his family. But before his painful departure, he exposed young Walker, the oldest of nine children, to the hectic pace of the newsroom where his father was managing editor of the *Henderson Gleaner-Journal* in Kentucky.

Even his name, Walker Lee, came from the paper's publisher and business manager. When World War II pulled away needed staff, Walker became a teenaged reporter by day while finishing high school at night.

"It was hard working for your daddy," he recalled recently.

In 1943, after completing high school and the year after his father disappeared, Walker joined the Army and edited an Air Corp weekly in Tyler, Texas, before serving in China as a radio operator.

With his military service complete, Walker headed to Baylor University where he earned a journalism degree followed by a stint as editor of a county newspaper in Marlin, Texas.

In 1950, he was called as associate editor of the Texas newspaper, *Baptist Standard*. His dual callings to journalism and ministry



were meshed.

Even now, Walker vividly remembers as a youth hearing Oscar Johnson speak at Ridgecrest Baptist Assembly on Jesus' beatitude, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness." Johnson said it meant to "see things set right," Walker recalled.

"I think that has characterized my ministry," said Walker. "Trying to set things right."

That perspective remained with Walker throughout his many years as a Christian journalist. At the *Standard*, he served first with editor David Gardner and then E.S. James, a father figure known to tackle the tough issues of his day.

"E.S. James changed Baptist newspapers," Walker recalled. "My idea of being an editor was shaped by him."

In 1959, Walker moved to Atlanta to work with the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board where he became the editor of the popular and oft-times controversial magazine, *Home Missions*.

Walker told the mission stories in the social context needed for proper understand-

ing. He addressed, head-on, issues such as the struggle for racial and gender equality, the Jesus Movement and changing attitudes about human sexuality. He even wrote an article asking if Native Americans should trust white Baptist missionaries.

"We frankly dealt with most subjects," Walker recalled.

To provide a more personal and emotional connection, Walker hired talented photographer Don Rutledge and gifted writers like Dallas Lee to enhance the magazine's appeal. College students in particular were drawn to the relevant and challenging publication.

Not every Southern Baptist, however, was pleased. Attempts to censor Walker or tame his journalistic instincts were met with the strong defense of HMB President Arthur Rutledge, who repeatedly stated: "Walker is a man of integrity and should be trusted as editor."

That same support did not continue, Walker noted, when Bill Tanner became HMB president in 1977.

"He kept calling me into his office," Walker recalled. He would hold up the latest edition of the magazine and ask, "What does this have to do with home missions?"

Walker's answer was that mission stories could only be understood properly in their social context. But he knew his explanations were unconvincing.

Over the next few years, Walker remembers having casual conversations with other Baptist journalists about the need for a truly autonomous news journal unrestricted by geography, narrow topics and heavy-handed denominational executives. It grew into a dream for him.

In late 1982, a group of ministers concerned about the redirection of the Southern Baptist Convention sent Larry McSwain from Louisville, Ky., to hear Walker's dream for a new publication. Any new initiative, Walker told him, would have to be three things: autonomous, national and Baptist.

When news of the conversation leaked out and the group of ministers agreed to raise some funds, Walker announced that he

would leave the Home Mission Board in early 1983.

At age 59, with the full support of his wife, Nell, he accepted a 50 percent reduction in salary to create the independent news journal from scratch. Nell continued working at the Home Mission Board as an assistant to longtime family friend Don Hammonds.

With nothing more than a dream, a big dose of courage and some promises of start-up funding, Walker and Nell went to their most trusted source of inspiration, support and community — the Oakhurst congregation.

In a tradition borrowed from the Church of the Savior in Washington, D.C., Walker “sounded a call” before his Oakhurst family. He announced the start of a new publication and asked if others might feel led to help.

The response was overwhelming. Forty-five fellow church members — 12 of whom had journalism experience — offered their time and talents. Oakhurst also provided office space and an initial gift of \$5,000 to purchase the needed equipment to begin publication.

The first issue — dated April 1983 —

rolled off the presses. The dream had become a reality.

In recording the early history of *Baptists Today*, Walker made this observation about the role he hoped the new publication would fill:

“[I] saw SBC periodicals as either narrow in focus such as mission magazines or narrow in circulation such as state papers. The new publication would be a non-profit [organization], governed by a board of directors, and operating as an autonomous unit, thus avoiding the pressures to report less than the truth by either distortion or by avoidance of the unpleasant.”

To that end, Walker, along with his associates and volunteers, birthed and grew a new kind of Baptist publication that could never fall under the thumb of a denominational executive or any censor.

Ongoing financial support, especially from laypersons, has been the lifeblood of *Baptists Today* — which continues its mission as an autonomous, national Baptist news journal a quarter-century later.

Walker served as editor from the founding in 1983 until 1988 when Jack U. Harwell began a nine-year tenure as editor. Walker continued as publisher during the

early part of Jack’s service and returned as interim editor in 1997.

Although the news journal has gone through various changes over the past 25 years, the work of each editor has been built on the realized dream and strong journalistic foundation of Walker L. Knight. Both printer’s ink and Baptist courage run through his veins. **BT**

## join us!

Founding Editor Walker Knight and the Oakhurst Baptist Church will be recognized during the 25th Anniversary Celebration of *Baptists Today* on Thursday, April 3, at the Loudermilk Center in Atlanta. An address by Daniel Vestal, executive coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, will follow the presentation of the eighth annual Judson-Rice Award to Walker Knight. For dinner reservations (\$25) and other details, visit [www.baptiststoday.org](http://www.baptiststoday.org) or call 1-877-752-5658 or 478-301-5655.



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# Quotation

## “ remarks ”

*EDITOR'S NOTE: These quotations come from or are in response to the historic Celebration of a New Baptist Covenant, Jan. 30-Feb. 1, in Atlanta.*

“To be a ‘child of the South’ and not understand and not appreciate the significance of this kind of event for the future is beyond my comprehension.

—Church historian and Baylor University professor Doug Weaver

“[Respectfulness] runs out of steam at the 50-yard line. But love, like Forrest Gump, runs all the way down the field, through the end zone and into the parking lot.”

—Pastor Julie Pennington-Russell of First Baptist Church, Decatur, Ga.

“People who say they are Baptists usually are.”

—Program co-chair Jimmy Allen, responding to a question from a Baptist Press reporter about how organizers define a Baptist

“We thought he was a pretty good example of a devout Baptist and a follower of Christ.”

—President Bill Clinton about President Jimmy Carter, who has been criticized by fundamentalist Baptists

“Some have questioned our motives. Some have criticized us at every turn.”

—David Goatley, executive director of the Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Convention and president of the North American Baptist Fellowship

“I’m not used to that.”

—African-American pastor William Shaw, president of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., on being given an assigned topic and a 25-minute time limit to preach

“What do you get the person who has everything? Nothing. But you don’t have the guts to pull it off, do you?”

—Sociologist, author and speaker Tony Campolo

“It is a long-haul ministry. It is not a quick fix or a Band-Aid.”

—Cara Lynn Vogel, of Woman’s Missionary Union of North Carolina, on tackling poverty

“I don’t get into [the age of the earth]. We had a trial in my home state.”

—Environmental activist and former Vice President Al Gore, jokingly referencing the 1925 Scopes Trial in Dayton, Tenn.

“People in Antioch asked, ‘What is this? People of different faiths on the same bus?’”

—Pastor Gerald Durley, of Providence Missionary Baptist Church in Atlanta, on traveling internationally with Christian, Jewish and Muslim clergy from the U.S.

“It’s a moral issue when the public hospitals of this country are having trouble keeping their doors open. This country needs a commitment to universal access to care, and we need it soon.”

—Former U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher

“The reason that we have to put love above everything else is because we see through a glass darkly and know in part. The reason we have to love each other is because all of us might be wrong.

—Former President Bill Clinton

“Baptists tend to run before they are sent. Prayer is the personal communication with the divine.

—Lloyd Allen, professor of church history and spiritual formation at Mercer University’s McAfee School of Theology

“Just as it is ludicrous to suggest that we hire more morticians to treat cancer and AIDS, it is ludicrous to hire more police and jailors and to build more prisons to handle nonviolent drug offenders.”

—Wendell Griffen, judge in the Arkansas Court of Appeals

“We have no problem going to see the sick. But if someone says it’s time to go visit a person who is incarcerated, we don’t want to do it.”

—Dee Dee Coleman, pastor of Russell Street Missionary Baptist Church in Detroit, who created Wings of Faith in 2002 with the goal of returning imprisoned persons to society and limiting their odds of going back

“Whether we have a wall or a zone or a rickety fence or whatever, we must continue to have at least a strand or two of barbed-wire to keep the institutions of religion from cozying up to the institutions of government.”

—Professor James Dunn of Wake Forest University Divinity School

# editorial

## After the celebration: Now what?

By John Pierce

In his closing address at the Celebration of a New Baptist Covenant Feb. 1, former President Bill Clinton was gracious, inspiring, insightful, biblically-astute — and, as promised, politically nonpartisan.

Much of his focus, however, was on the division in the Southern Baptist Convention over the last quarter-century between fundamentalists and moderates that led to the formation of new, more inclusive Baptist ways of belonging.

Not only have many recovering Southern Baptists — affiliated with groups like the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, the Alliance of Baptists, the Baptist General Association of Virginia and/or the Baptist General Convention of Texas — already moved on, but many others in attendance at the Celebration have had no previous SBC ties.

They are happily involved with other denominational groups such as the American Baptist Churches, USA (whose breakup with Southern Baptists occurred more than 160 years ago over slavery) and/or various historically black National Baptist groups.

That is not to suggest every Baptist group doesn't know something about the pain of exclusion and division.

An effort to reach across racial divides

and build respectful relationships was a major aspect of and attraction to the New Baptist Covenant. The Celebration was a step forward to new relationships, not a backward step to ones that painfully failed.

The purpose of the New Baptist Covenant was/is not about the impossible task of reconciling alienated former Southern Baptists with those who know not reconciliation, only dominance. In fact, the very week of the Celebration, one agency board of the non-participating SBC pushed out a trustee over the “crime” of dissenting opinion from the majority.

Despite the repeated questioning of reporters and the attention given to the subject in President Clinton's address, the historic gathering was not about the SBC at all.

The larger conglomeration of “other Baptists” of varied hues and histories came together in Atlanta to build new, hopeful relationships based on mutual trust and respect, not to revisit old ones severed by suspicion and condemnation.

The New Baptist Covenant is about a promising future of inclusion and coopera-

tion. While certainly imperfect and without a completely cohesive message, the Celebration was enriching and inspiring in so many ways.

Worship was uplifting, abundant and varied in style. Many wonderful gifts and talents were shared.

In special interest sessions, Baptists with similar concerns — yet often previously unacquainted — tackled some of the most challenging issues facing churches and communities today.

Now, after the throngs of Baptists have vacated the Georgia World Congress Center, the dominant question remains: What does this gathering mean for the future?

The answer will not come immediately, but over time.

The significance will be defined and determined by the growing relationships and cooperative ministry efforts that occur outside the glaring spotlight of an Atlanta stage. **BT**



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# Why I read *Baptists Today*

By K. Hollyn Hollman

In a recent edition of *Baptists Today*, editor John Pierce told the story of a hippie college professor who challenged those in his class to think outside of the box. Although differing ideologically from the professor, he said, "The lesson for me is that one should never discount what can be learned from others — even those with very different starting points."

This appreciation and understanding of our differences is displayed in the breadth of stories featured in *Baptists Today*. As *BT* celebrates its 25th year, I am reminded of how consistently the publication demonstrates the variety and richness of Baptist life.

*BT* is an excellent resource for original features, in-depth interviews and wire stories. By focusing on a diversity of people, events and institutions, readers gain a more substantial view of Baptist life.

The news journal features conversations with various Baptist leaders, which in the past have included Dr. Bill J. Leonard, founding dean of Wake



K. Hollyn Hollman

1983

25  
YEARS

2008

Forest Divinity School, and Neville Callam, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance.

Leonard and Callam are two Baptist leaders from different countries and backgrounds leading Baptist institutions, and sharing a deep commitment to the Baptist tradition. By exploring their words and work, *BT* provides a glimpse into important, current manifestations of the Baptist experience.

Not just on Sunday mornings and not only in houses of worship, but on any given day of the week and all over the world, Baptists are involved in a variety of religious, cultural, political and educational movements.

Denominational disputes and controversies are aspects of Baptist life that often make headlines. While such issues are covered, *BT* also sheds light on items of interest to the Baptist community that do not always see prime time.

As one who works for a Baptist entity that serves 15 denominational bodies, each with distinct characteristics, I also appreciate the attention *BT* gives to exploring cooperative work among Baptists. *BT* helps promote cooperation among Baptists by reporting on the latest events in the lives of individuals, congregations and Baptist institutions. Its "In the Know" section helps me to stay connected to individuals and churches within our member bodies and in the larger Baptist community.

From features on Free Will Baptists to educating about the principle of religious liberty, *BT* accurately pushes its readers to think beyond any narrow assumptions about Baptists today. By doing so, it continues to remind us of that valuable lesson its editor learned in college that we should never discount what we can learn from each other. **BT**

—K. Hollyn Hollman is general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty in Washington, D.C.

## *Baptists Today* invites you to attend The 25th Anniversary Celebration and Annual Judson-Rice Dinner

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**FOUNDING EDITOR WALKER KNIGHT**



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**Daniel Vestal**  
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Note: This celebration conveniently precedes the annual meeting of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Georgia, April 4-5, at First Baptist Church of Decatur, Ga. Georgians are encouraged to attend both events in the Atlanta area.

# New Baptist Covenant Celebration draws thousands seeking unity, cooperation

ATLANTA — Fifteen thousand participants in the New Baptist Covenant convocation arrived in Atlanta Jan. 30 seeking unity in Christ and departed Feb. 1 wondering where their quest will lead.

In the meantime, they demonstrated racial, theological and geographic harmony as they prayed, sang, listened to sermons and attended workshops focusing on ministry to the people Jesus called “the least of these” in society.

The unprecedented event brought together diverse Baptists representing 30 groups affiliated with the North American Baptist Fellowship, the regional affiliate of the Baptist World Alliance.

They heard from two former U.S. presidents, Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton, and a former vice president, Al Gore — all Baptists. Participants scaled a 163-year-old wall that has divided the denomination since U.S. Baptists parted company over slavery more than a decade before the Civil War.

As women and men of numerous races sat side-by-side through sermons and hugged and laughed in hallways, they embodied a dream-come-true for Baptists who dreamed of racial reconciliation in their denomination.

“This is the most momentous event of my religious life,” declared an emotional Carter, a son of the South and a lifelong Baptist.

“For the first time in more than 160 years, we are convening a major gathering of Baptists throughout an entire continent, without any threat to our unity caused by differences of our race or politics or geography or the legalistic interpretation of Scripture,” said Carter, who co-chaired the gathering with Mercer University President Bill Underwood.

Carter’s euphoria echoed the aspiration of another Baptist from Georgia, and the convocation fulfilled the prophecy of Martin Luther King Jr., Underwood told the crowd.

“Forty-five years ago, a native son of



**Shared prayer and other acts of worship drew the diverse Baptists together, as did personal relationships.**  
Photos by Rod Reilly.

Atlanta, a Baptist pastor, shared with all of us his dream: One day, on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners would be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood,” Underwood said to sustained applause.

“Today, here on those red hills of Georgia, Baptists have come together to take a step in the long and difficult journey toward achieving Dr. King’s great dream. After generations of putting up walls between us — separation, division by geography, by theology, but most of all division by race — a new day is dawning. ... Today, we all sit down together at the table of Christian brotherhood and sisterhood.”

Leaders of most of the participating groups first affirmed the New Baptist Covenant in April 2006, when Carter and Underwood invited them to Atlanta to talk about bridging Baptists’ racial, theological and geographic divisions by working together “to promote peace with justice, to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, care for the sick and marginalized, welcome the strangers among us, and



promote religious liberty and respect for religious diversity.”

That effort piggybacked on a historic gathering of the four predominantly African-American Baptist conventions three years ago, plus ongoing discussions of unity within the North American Baptist Fellowship, NABF President David Goatley said.

“The New Baptist Covenant is a public witness to our common commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed,” explained Goatley, executive director of the Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Convention.

“Never before have Baptists on this scale sought to cross the boundaries we choose to live behind — ethnicity, ideology, theology ... We are at the threshold of great possibilities,” Goatley said.

Prior to the convocation, critics suggested one of those possibilities was politics. They claimed organizers stacked the program

in favor of Democrats, citing the presence not only of Carter, but also Clinton and Gore.

Carter refuted that charge in a news conference, noting the all-Baptist program also featured Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa.

Organizers invited Republican presidential candidate and former Baptist pastor Mike Huckabee, who accepted and then declined months ago, as well as Sen. Lindsay Graham, R-S.C., who bowed out at the last minute to campaign for another presidential candidate who attends a Baptist church, John McCain.

Georgia's Republican governor, Sonny Perdue, a Baptist layman, welcomed the crowd during the convocation's opening session.

In that session, Carter made a promise that also sounded like a warning to other speakers. Imploring the diverse Baptists to make unity the distinctive element of their gathering, he pledged, "There will be no criticism of others — let me say again — no criticism of others or exclusion of any Christians who would seek to join this cause."

Near the end of the meeting, he told reporters the convocation lived up to his nonpolitical billing.

"We have deliberately avoided any identification by politics," he declared. "It's been a wonderful mixture of cohesive, different groups. All of us, so far as I know, have been completely unified."

Plenary sessions focused on creating Baptist unity by following Jesus' mandate set out in his first sermon: "to preach good news to the poor ... to proclaim freedom and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Clinton even called for unity toward the Southern Baptist Convention. The SBC pulled out of the Baptist World Alliance — the organizational common denominator for all the groups affiliated with the New Baptist Covenant — several years ago, citing alleged "liberalism."

Clinton described the rift with the SBC as competing interpretations of the New Testament Epistle of James, "that people would know our faith by our works."

Baptists who gained control of the SBC focused on "works" related to issues such as opposition to abortion, the Equal Rights Amendment and gay rights, he noted, while "more progressive Baptists" focused on fighting poverty, protecting the environment and

providing housing for poor people, he said.

"I say this in good conscience: We all believe we are doing what we can. But so do they. They read the obligations of Scripture in a different way," he noted.

Calling for humility and respect, Clinton urged: "We should not let our response to the people who disagree with us be dictated by what they say about us or even how they treat people we care for. If there is any chance that this covenant can become an embracing one, that there can be a whole community, then there has to be a chance that we can find love."

Other speakers amplified the unity theme from a range of perspectives:

**Christian oneness centers** on fulfilling Jesus' "radical mission," stressed William Shaw, president of the National Baptist Convention, USA, one of the four African-American conventions, and pastor of White Rock Baptist Church in Philadelphia.

Jesus wasn't satisfied merely to bring relief to the persecuted and victimized, he explained, noting Jesus "concretized" his mission by seeking to reverse the structures and situations that caused oppression.

The heart of that quest is establishing justice and uprooting injustice, Shaw noted. "When God made mankind, he made us male and female — in his image. To do injustice to anybody is to do injustice to the reality of God, because we are in his image, and his image is not to be demeaned."

That calls Baptists to seek change in society, he added. "You can't embrace the mission of Jesus and not encounter the reality of injustice. He came not with actions of charity. He came to change. ... Justice says we need to change the structures of victimization."

**Love is the key** to unity, claimed Julie Pennington-Russell, pastor of First Baptist Church of Decatur, Ga. She accepted an assignment to speak on respecting diversity, but she said respect isn't sufficient to build unity.

Respect alone "has no power to change something that is broken between you and me," she said. "Only love can do that. ... Let love take you by the hand and lead you like a child to a new way of seeing that brother or sister, and look for Jesus in the face of that person."

**Marian Wright Edelman** called for Baptists to unify around protecting children.

She cited a litany of statistics that reveal the depth of poverty, neglect and risk that describe the United States' 13 million children in poverty, noting they add up to a national catastrophe.

"They are not acts of God," said Edelman, founder of the Children's Defense Fund. "They are our choices as citizens and as a nation. We created them; we can and must change them."

**Noted author Tony Campolo** said Jesus pronounced his priorities in Luke 4, beginning with preaching good news to the poor.

"Do you think Jesus meant what he said, or do you think he was kidding?" he asked.

"There is nothing wrong with making a million dollars. I wish you all would make a million dollars. There is nothing wrong with making it, but there is something wrong with keeping it," he said. "My Bible tells me in 1 John 3:17, 'If anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need but shuts off his compassion from him — how can God's love reside in him?'"

**Gore called for Baptists** to protect the environment, pleading for participants in the convocation to make creation care one of their major initiatives.

See **COVENANT** page 12 >

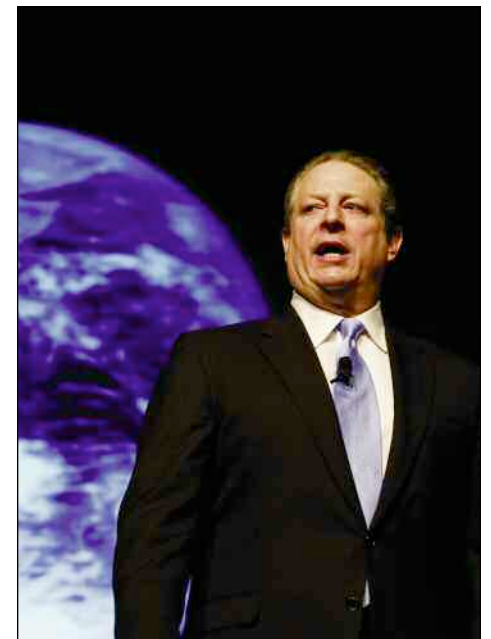


Photo by Rod Reilly.

*"In every crisis there is an opportunity ... to do things better," former Vice President Al Gore told fellow Baptists.*

➤ COVENANT from page 11

The former vice president and Nobel laureate discussed the research behind his Oscar-winning documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, during a luncheon attended by 2,500 participants.

“There is a distinct possibility that one of the messages coming out of this gathering and this new covenant is creation care — that we who are Baptists of like mind and attempting in our lives to the best of our abilities to glorify God, are not going to countenance the continued heaping of contempt on God’s creation.”

**Ironically, the world** — for the first time in history — began producing enough food to eliminate hunger altogether in the 1960s, Grassley said, noting one in seven people worldwide goes to bed hungry each night.

“Unfortunately, this condition, this increased food productivity, has not solved hunger throughout the entire world,” he said. “Poverty, war, natural disasters contribute to the cycle of hunger. But we also confront 21st-century complexities that affect a whole-some, stable and deliverable food supply.”

Grassley said increasing free trade will help alleviate hunger worldwide, but Christians in the United States should begin focusing on practical ways of alleviating hunger themselves. “If ever there was a time for unity, now is the moment-building consensus between agriculturalists and conservationists, and building the food supply can create sustainable farming methods that protect the environment.”

**The presence of “strangers”** in the world provides a point for Baptist unity, stressed Joel Gregory, a professor of preaching at Baylor University’s Truett Theological Seminary.

“Behind us, in front of us, ahead of us we meet the face of the stranger in the word of God,” he said. “It is not a marginal issue. It’s a central concern.”

Unfortunately, Christians often try to care for strangers, foreigners and outsiders in the abstract, Gregory said, but “behind every generalization is God’s particularity — that person in front of me right now.”

**Another group that needs** the force of Baptist unity is composed of the 47 million Americans who do not have medical insurance, said former Surgeon General David



**Students thank Oklahoma layman Bob Stephenson (center) for funding an educational program that drew 200 students from 16 divinity or theology schools to the Celebration. Photo by Rod Reilly.**

Satcher, of the Morehouse School of Medicine.

Inequities persist in the United States’ health-care system, he noted. “An African-American baby is 2 1/2 times as likely to die in the first year of life as a majority baby,” and globally, child-mortality disparities between the wealthiest and poorest countries are far worse.

“For me, that is not a political issue; it’s a moral issue,” he said.

**Setting the captive free** also is a moral issue, echoed Charles G. Adams, pastor of Hartford Baptist Church in Detroit. If Baptists do not share freedom with others, “then our souls will be destroyed and our freedom with it,” he said.

“We are filled with the Spirit only to empty ourselves in the liberation of others,” he said. “We are loved only to love others. We are free only to accept the responsibility of setting others free.”

Convocation participants fleshed out the repeated calls for unity through ministry in 32 special-interest sessions. They featured practical applications of the unity/service theme.

Those sessions are likely to provide the backbone of structure for fleshing out what the convocation means and how participants will continue what began in Atlanta, predicted Jimmy Allen, program chairman for the event.

Ministerial students who attended each session took notes on the outcomes and proposals for cooperation in ministry, he said. They also gathered e-mail addresses of participants who want to continue collaboration

on a range of poverty, racial, equality, peace-making and other policy issues.

“Where we go from here will be very important,” Carter told reporters. “People stop me and say, ‘We don’t want this to be just a moment, but a movement.’”

This spring, the convocation leadership group will reconvene in Atlanta to consider hundreds of suggestions and discuss how to follow up, he said.

The answer will not be creating yet another Baptist convention, Allen added. “This movement will not be centralized. It can’t be. ... We’re not an organized structure. We’re stimulating and reflecting a movement of God that is bigger than us.”

Answers likely will include opportunities for individuals, congregations and larger Baptist groups “to add our voice to common commitment” to implement the ideas for ministry that surfaced in Atlanta, Carter said.

Historian Walter Shurden, recently retired director of the Center for Baptist Studies at Mercer University and one of the early organizers of the convocation, said the event could become “a major step in racial reconciliation and gender recognition of Baptists in North America.”

“I’ve never been to a Baptist meeting where there was the equality as well as the presence [of multi-racial, multi-gender participation],” he said. “It bears the marks of the ministry of Jesus.” **BT**

—John Pierce contributed to this article. Additional coverage can be found at [www.baptiststoday.org](http://www.baptiststoday.org) and [www.newbaptistcelebration.org](http://www.newbaptistcelebration.org).

# In rare public address, novelist Grisham calls on fellow Baptists to respect diversity

By John Pierce

ATLANTA — Best-selling author John Grisham contrasted the Mississippi Baptist church of his childhood with the greater openness of his current congregation, University Baptist Church in Charlottesville, Va., during a rare public address concluding the Jan. 31 evening session of the Celebration of a New Baptist Covenant.

In a message titled, “Respecting Diversity,” Grisham told of how his childhood church was not open to racial diversity or the inclusion of women in leadership roles. The biblical cases for exclusion were based on literal interpretations of selected scripture passages, he said.

“Even as a child, I didn’t understand this,” he said.

Grisham acknowledged women as “the backbone of the church,” yet they were not permitted to hold certain positions of spiritual leadership. He suggested, however, that not all members agreed with such literal interpretations.

“My mother may have paid lip service to this submission stuff,” he said, “but she really didn’t believe it.”

In fact, he said, even those who found biblical justification for racial segregation and male dominance had limits to their insistence on literal interpretation.

“When Paul told Timothy to have a little wine ...,” Grisham said to laughter and applause. “Well, some things were not so

literal. There was wiggle room after all.”

In choosing a church today, Grisham said, he expects more openness to diversity.

“If there is a hint of discrimination,” he said, “my wife would go somewhere else and take me with her.”

Grisham said the move toward openness has not occurred in all Baptist churches.

“Sadly, in many ways and in many

of the attention.

Grisham, who opened the address by telling of his frustration in trying to define and defend his Baptist faith to a reporter during a book tour, concluded with three suggestions.

To get off the defensive and to restore the good name, he said, Baptists should first truly respect diversity.

“God made all of us, loves us equally and expects us to love each other equally without respect to gender, race, sexual orientation or other religions,” he said.

Second, he said the church must stay out of politics.

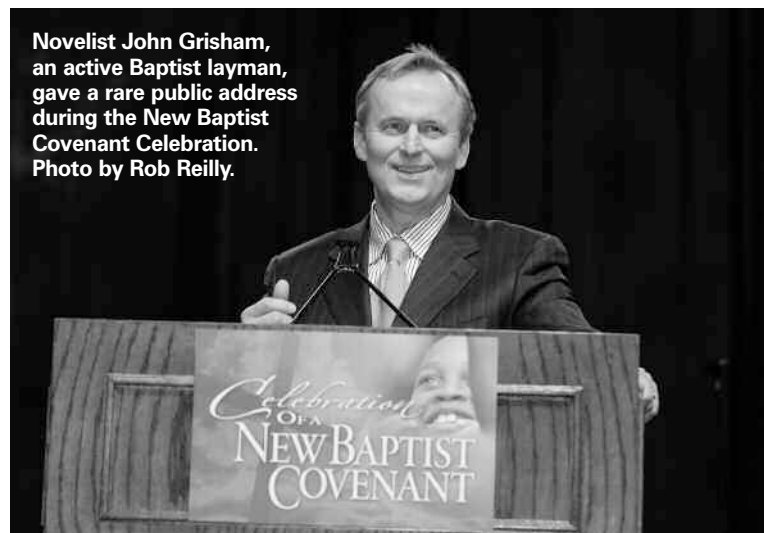
“As a church, our mission is to serve God through teaching, preaching and serving others,” he said. “When the church gets involved in politics, it alienates many of the very people we are called to serve, and those who push politics will pay a price.”

Third, Grisham urged fellow Baptists to spend as much time out on the streets in ministry as in the church.

“Jesus preached more and taught more about helping the poor and the sick and the hungry than he did about heaven and hell,” he said. “Shouldn’t that tell us something?”

Grisham said Christians are needed by the sick, the homeless, neglected seniors, scarred war veterans, impoverished children, refugees, immigrants and prisoners.

“We cannot pick and choose,” he said. “We need to get on with the business of serving others.” **BT**



**Novelist John Grisham, an active Baptist layman, gave a rare public address during the New Baptist Covenant Celebration. Photo by Rob Reilly.**

places that church still exists today,” he said.

Grisham said the name Baptist is not widely respected in many circles because it is associated with exclusion.

“The reason is because, for so long, so many Baptists have worked so hard to exclude so many.”

Clearly alluding to but not naming the fundamentalist-controlled Southern Baptist Convention, which did not formally participate in the historic Atlanta gathering, Grisham said the “largest Baptist convention” affirms biblical inerrancy and gets most

## Baptist World Alliance plans world youth conference in Germany

WASHINGTON (ABP) — The Baptist World Alliance has scheduled its next global youth conference for July 20-Aug. 3 in Leipzig, Germany.

Thousands of teenagers are expected to gather in the central German city to “join together in worship and in missions and to see what God is doing among youth around the world,” organizers said.

Past BWA youth conferences were in 1998 in Houston and in 2004 in Hong Kong, drawing 8,000 and 4,000 people, respectively. This year’s host city is notable as the home of the Thomaskirche (St. Thomas Church), the Lutheran church where famed composer Johann Sebastian Bach worked as organist and choirmaster. It is also the location of Leipzig University,

which was founded in 1409 and is one of Europe’s oldest universities.

Events at the conference will include worship services, concerts and evening sessions with keynote speakers. Opportunities to participate in mission projects throughout Europe prior to and following the conference will also be available, organizers said. Early registration will end March 31. **BT**

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 Hawes, William, Burke, Va.  
 Haynes, Henry/Betty, Vinita, Okla.  
 Hays, George H, Liberty, Mo.  
 Hays, Wilma, Camilla, Ga.  
 Hazel, Mr./Mrs. Robert, Baton Rouge, La.  
 Heard, Phil/Dorothy, Madison, Fla.  
 Heath, Neil/Anne, Macon, Ga.  
 Hedrick Jr., Norman, Richmond, Va.  
 Hefner, Fred/Janice, Macon, Ga.  
 Helms, Frances E., Candler, N.C.  
 Henderson, W.F., Cumming, Ga.  
 Henry, E.L., Baton Rouge, La.  
 Herring, Jack, Summerville, Ga.  
 Herring, John, Albemarle, N.C.  
 Herron, Don, Heath, Texas  
 Hester, Versie, Huntsville, Ala.  
 Hiers, Gene/Reba, Metter, Ga.  
 Highfill, Mr./Mrs. Richard E., Garland, Texas  
 Hightower, Brenda J., Mobile, Ala.  
 Hill, Les/Jan, Lexington, Ky.  
 Hill, Tom/Joan, Canton, Ga.  
 Hines, Mary L., Birmingham, Ala.  
 Hinson, Charles/Shirley, Valdese, N.C.  
 Hinson, Keith, Oakboro, N.C.  
 Hippius, Richard/Sherril, Cordova, Tenn.  
 Hixson, Floyd M., Fresno, Calif.  
 Hobbs, Dan, Norman, Okla.  
 Hobbs, Dewey, Winston-Salem, N.C.  
 Hobbs, Jerry, Norman, Okla.  
 Hodges, Sam, Dallas, Texas  
 Hogan, Jane H., Athens, Ga.  
 Hollaway, Ernest L., Hermitage, Tenn.  
 Holmes, Cynthia, St. Louis, Mo.  
 Hooker, William Hamilton/Charlene, Las Vegas, Nev.  
 Hooper, Dr./Mrs.W.L., Bolivar, Mo.  
 Horner, Bill, Lewisburg, Tenn.  
 Hoskins, Barbara A., Kingsport, Tenn.  
 Houston, Bessie F., Ringgold, Ga.  
 Houston, Douglas W., Starkville, Miss.  
 Howell, Joe/Virginia, Hartselle, Ala.  
 Howle, Bill, Wickliffe, Ky.  
 Howle, David, Plainview, Texas  
 Hudson, David E., Augusta, Ga.  
 Hudson, R.D., Hendersonville, N.C.  
 Hudson, Robert R., Silver Spring, Md.  
 Huff, Clara, Wilmington, N.C.  
 Huff, James A., Oklahoma City, Okla.  
 Hunt, Alma, Roanoke, Va.  
 Hurst, C.R., Tyler, Texas  
 Hux, Mary B., Reidsville, N.C.  
 Isbell III, John, Fort Payne, Ala.  
 Ivey, Marilyn S., Knoxville, Tenn.  
 Jackson, Murl/Gwen, Chattanooga, Tenn.  
 Jacobs, Walter/Jean, Greenville, S.C.  
 James Jr, J.W., Richmond, Va.  
 James, Glen W., Cookeville, Tenn.  
 James, Mary M., Edmond, Okla.  
 Janson, Kathryn G., Alexandria, Va.  
 Jarvis, Holly, Waco, Texas  
 Jeffcoat, Bob/Elaine, Durham, N.C.  
 Jenkins, Linda, Yazoo City, Miss.  
 Jenkins, Woody, Goochland, Va.  
 Jennings, Martha, Muskogee, Okla.  
 Jennings, Theron/Sherry, Carrollton, Ga.  
 Johnson, Carroll/JoAnne, San Antonio, Texas  
 Johnson, Charles/Carleen, Sikeston, Mo.  
 Johnson, J. Gilmer, Asheville, N.C.  
 Johnson, J. Katherine, Scottsdale, Ariz.  
 Johnson, Jim/Joan, Box Springs, Ga.  
 Johnson, Lavaughn/Peggy, Dadeville, Ala.  
 Johnson, Raymond/Mary, Lizella, Ga.  
 Johnson, Paul B., Buies Creek, N.C.  
 Jones, Barry W., Athens, Ga.  
 Jones, Jamie, Fayetteville, Ariz.  
 Jones, Joseph M., Huntsville, Ala.  
 Jones, Mr./Mrs. William D., Owens Cross Roads, Ala.  
 Jones, Peter Rhea, Atlanta, Ga.  
 Jones, Sherwood, Dalton, Ga.  
 Jones, Thomas D., Pamplin, Va.  
 Jordan, Monty/Diane, Brentwood, Tenn.  
 Joyce, J. Daniel, Houston, Texas  
 Junker, Bill/Patsy, Brentwood, Tenn.  
 Kahn, Mr./Mrs. Jack H., Plano, Texas

## INFORMATION

- Keadle, Jackie C., Forsyth, Ga.  
 Keller, Charles W., Broussard, La.  
 Kelly, Earl, Jackson, Miss.  
 Kemp Jr., H.B., Columbia, S.C.  
 Kennedy, Lalah, Claxton, Ga.  
 Kenney Jr., Leslie, Desoto, Texas  
 Kent, Thomas I., Atlanta, Ga.  
 Kersey, Gerald, Lawrenceville, Ga.  
 Kessler, A.B., Shreveport, La.  
 Key, Fred/Doris, Albuquerque, N.M.  
 Keys, Marilynn T., Little Rock, Ark.  
 Kidd, Bill/Anne Hester, Washington, N.C.  
 Killebrew, Horace, Kennesaw, Ga.  
 Killian, W. Harold, Greenville, S.C.  
 Kilpatrick, Allie C., Milledgeville, Ga.  
 King, Chester C., Demorest, Ga.  
 King, Tom, Tallahassee, Fla.  
 Kirkland, J. Frank, Americus, Ga.  
 Kirkpatrick, Kathryn S., Waynesville, N.C.  
 Kiser, Cleve, Fayetteville, Ga.  
 Kluttz, Joyce, Concord, N.C.  
 Knight, James R., Cullman, Ala.  
 Knight, Walker, Decatur, Ga.  
 Knowles, Larry, Riegelwood, N.C.  
 Koiner, J. Michael, San Antonio, Texas  
 Kong, Mary Eleanor, Honolulu, Hawaii  
 Kuhn, Mr./Mrs. Charles L., Marietta, Ga.  
 Ladd, R.E., Pinehurst, Texas  
 Lam, Virginia, Tucker, Ga.  
 Lamb, Bob/Rhea, Shelby, N.C.  
 Lancaster, Jeanne, Houston, Texas  
 Landers, Burnell, Independence, Mo.  
 Landon, Rick/Judy, Lexington, Ky.  
 Laney, Reid H., Burlington, N.C.  
 Langdon, Kenneth, Gainesville, Fla.  
 Langford, Henry Victor, Richmond, Va.  
 Langston, Eugene/Sara, Pensacola, Fla.  
 Lark, H.J., Pickens, S.C.  
 Lasater, Roberts, Charlotte, N.C.  
 Latimer, James, Denver, Colo.  
 Lawrence, John/Anne, Raleigh, N.C.  
 Lawton, Ben R., Corpus Christi, Texas  
 Leach, Barbara M., Rome, Ga.  
 Lee, Clyde, White Marsh, Md.  
 Lee, Grace, Pineville, La.  
 Lennon, Robert/Anne, Wilmington, N.C.  
 Lesch, Marie/Gomer, Bowling Green, Ky.  
 LeVines, Tom/Shirley, Palmyra, Va.  
 Levy, Jan, Radford, Va.  
 Lewis, James, Louisville, Ky.  
 Lewis, David H., Penhook, Va.  
 Lewis, Edward, Timmonsville, S.C.  
 Lewis, James A., Kissimmee, Fla.  
 Lewis, Paul/Marsha, Macon, Ga.  
 Lewis, Rhonda, Gonzales, La.  
 Light, Sandra S., Lexington, S.C.  
 Limbaugh, R. Leslie, St. Louis, Mo.  
 Lingafelt, Charles, Gretna, Va.  
 Little, James/Daisy, Hartselle, Ala.  
 Little Jr., W.J., Jackson, N.C.  
 Little, Lolete, Birmingham, Ala.  
 Lockhart, James E., St. Louis, Mo.  
 Loftin, Elliott, Lincolnton, N.C.  
 Loftin Jr., Robert, Nashville, Tenn.  
 Logan, Walter H., Greenwood, S.C.  
 Logue, Tom, Little Rock, Ark.  
 Long, Jody/Julie, Macon, Ga.  
 Longshore, Bob, Mesquite, Texas  
 Love, LaVerne, Lubbock, Texas  
 Lovegren, August, Cedartown, Ga.  
 Lovegren, Norman, New Orleans, La.  
 Lowe, Bruce, Dallas, Texas  
 Lowe, Nancy, Little Rock, Ark.  
 Lunceford, Malcolm, Richmond, Ky.  
 Lunsford, Dan, Mars Hill, N.C.  
 Maddux, Charles/Fannie Louise, Pembroke, Ky.  
 Magness, Bonner/Clara, Lufkin, Texas  
 Mallow, Ronald/Sonia, Frederick, Md.  
 Maloch, Jim, Little Rock, Ark.  
 Malone, Bill/Drexel, Shawnee, Okla.  
 Maner, Charles/Kimberly, Gastonia, N.C.  
 Marchman, Ray, Greensboro, Ga.  
 Maret, Randall T., Dalton, Ga.  
 Marion, Russ/Gail, Clemson, S.C.  
 Marler, Parkes, Forest, Miss.  
 Marquez, Grace E., Birmingham, Ala.  
 Marshall, George/Charlotte, Athens, Ga.  
 Martin Jr, William, Raleigh, N.C.  
 Martin, Fred, Pensacola, Fla.  
 Martin, Patricia B., Huntsville, Ala.  
 Mason, Tom P., Frankfort, Ky.  
 Massey, Charles/Carolyn, Tifton, Ga.  
 Massey, Kathryn R., Cary, N.C.  
 Matthews, Jerry T., North Augusta, S.C.  
 Matthews, Mr./Mrs. Ron, Bartlesville, Okla.  
 Matthews, Rick, Winston-Salem, N.C.  
 Mattox, William H., Elgin, S.C.  
 May, Walton/Margaret, Richmond, Va.  
 Mayfield, Mrs. Melvin, Little Rock, Ark.  
 McAbee, Harold/Rochelle, Lizella, Ga.  
 McAfee, Carolyn, Macon, Ga.  
 McAfee, Tom/Julie, Juliette, Ga.  
 McCain, Charles S., Shreveport, La.  
 McCall, Emmanuel, Atlanta, Ga.  
 McCall Jr., P.L., Society Hill, S.C.  
 McCall, Mr./Mrs. Richard, Kansas City, Mo.  
 McCall, W. Reaves, Hartsville, S.C.  
 McCartney, Evelyn, Vero Beach, Fla.  
 McClanahan, Rosalind, Birmingham, Ala.  
 McClure, A., Falls Church, Va.  
 McCormick, Gwenn, Morriston, Fla.  
 McCracken, Alden/Linda, Clemson, S.C.  
 McCracken, Benny, West Yellowstone, Mont.  
 McCrory, Frank, Birmingham, Ala.  
 McElligott, Shelby, Pensacola, Fla.  
 McElrath, Hugh T., Penney Farms, Fla.  
 McFadden, Isabel, Cleveland, Tenn.  
 McKinley, Hugh/Rebecca, Apex, N.C.  
 McKinney, Eugene, San Antonio, Texas  
 McKinney, W.H./June, Athens, Ga.  
 McLane, Henry/Barbara, Williamsburg, Va.  
 McLean, W. Legette, Laurinburg, N.C.  
 McPhaul, Mary O., LaFayette, La.  
 McSween Jr., James C., Newport, Tenn.  
 Melton, Max/Martha, Monroe, N.C.  
 Miles, Andrew, Lyons, Ga.  
 Miles, Bertie, Blackshear, Ga.  
 Miller, David/Elaine, Abilene, Texas  
 Miller, Fred S., Columbia, S.C.  
 Milling, Robert, Atlanta, Ga.  
 Mills, James F., Augusta, Ga.  
 Mitchell, Harold M., North Myrtle Beach, S.C.  
 Monk, Mollie L., Meridan, Miss.  
 Montacute, Paul, Falls Church, Va.  
 Mooney Jr., Mr./Mrs. M.H., Sandy Springs, Ga.  
 Moore, Jean B., Owensboro, Ky.  
 Moore, Mrs. John A., Brownwood, Texas  
 Moore, Paul G., Greenville, S.C.  
 Morgan, Bruce/Emma, Gainesville, Ga.  
 Morgan, Dennis/Polly, Bainbridge, Ga.  
 Morrison Jr., A.L., Montgomery, Ala.  
 Morse, Martha, San Antonio, Texas  
 Morton, Jack/Ann White, Cumming, Ga.  
 Morton, Thelma, Charlotte, N.C.  
 Moses, Austin, Austin, Texas  
 Moses, Judith, Little Rock, Ark.  
 Mullally, Mike/Vickey, Jonesboro, Ark.  
 Mullin, James O., Weatherford, Texas  
 Murphree, Garvice/Dorothy, Asheville, N.C.  
 Myers, David A., Signal Mountain, Tenn.  
 Myers, Emily, Macon, Ga.  
 Myers, Harold E., Talbot, Tenn.  
 Naish, Jane, Clayton, Ga.  
 Naramore, Penny, Alabaster, Ala.  
 Neal, Jeff, Anderson, S.C.  
 Neal, William/Judy, Stone Mountain, Ga.  
 Nelson, Bardin H., Bryan, Texas  
 Nelson, Morgan, Roswell, N.M.  
 Nelson, Paul/Virginia, Arlington, Va.  
 Nelson, Robert H., Albany, Ga.  
 NeSmith, Mrs. H.G., Oneonta, Ala.  
 Nettles Jr., William C., Salem, S.C.  
 Newberry, Dan/Sue, Columbus, Ga.  
 Newman, Van, Columbia, S.C.  
 Nichols Jr., Dr./Mrs.F.T., Savannah, Ga.  
 Nimmons, Billy, Dalton, Ga.  
 Nolan, Paul/Anne, Signal Mountain, Tenn.  
 Noles, Thomas/Shirley, Milledgeville, Ga.  
 Norman, Onida L., Davis, Calif.  
 Norris, Beth, Seagrove, N.C.  
 Northcutt, LeGrande/Cassandra, Longview, Texas  
 Norton, Sidney, Gaffney, S.C.  
 Nunnelley, Amber, Ochatsee, Ala.  
 Nutt, Jackie, Raleigh, N.C.  
 O'Leary, Ruth S., South Pittsburgh, Tenn.  
 O'Neal, Tom/Amelia, New Market, Tenn.  
 Olive, David, Bluefield, Va.  
 Oliver Jr., John, Richmond, Va.  
 Otto, Francis R., Macon, Ga.  
 Outland, William R., Washington, N.C.  
 Pace, Steven, Phenix City, Ala.  
 Padgett, Dan/Polly, Westville, Fla.  
 Page, Jimmy/Joyce, Ormond Beach, Fla.  
 Parks, Keith/Helen Jean, Richardson, Texas  
 Parris, Robert/Paula, Dunwoody, Ga.  
 Patterson, Wayne/Cheryl, Clemson, S.C.  
 Patton, Mr./Mrs. Willard, College Station, Texas  
 Paulson, Gayle, Commerce, Ga.  
 Paulson, Marlin, Fort Oglethorpe, Ga.  
 Peacock, Julia Deane, Crestview, Fla.  
 Peck, Helen D., Atlanta, Ga.  
 Peebles, John E., Jefferson, Ga.  
 Pentecost, Julian, Richmond, Va.  
 Perkins, Henry, Clemson, S.C.  
 Perrin, Tom, Tallahassee, Fla.  
 Peters, John E., Columbia, S.C.  
 Phillips, Harold/Gwen, Liberty, Mo.  
 Pierce, John/Teresa, Macon, Ga.  
 Pipkin, Joseph M., Orlando, Fla.  
 Pitchford, Roy W., Alexandria, La.  
 Pittard, Roger/Elizabeth, Richmond, Va.  
 Pitts, Bill/Ruth, Waco, Texas  
 Poole, Gene/Carol, Charlotte, N.C.  
 Porter, Nathan, Crawford, Texas  
 Porter, Walter/Mary Lynn, Dadeville, Ala.  
 Poss, Ann D., Cuthbert, Ga.  
 Potts, Robert J., Columbus, Ga.  
 Powell, Bill/Sara, Hartwell, Ga.  
 Powers, Mr./Mrs. Joe C., Midwest City, Okla.  
 Poythress, Mary J., Houston, Texas  
 Prager, Ray E., Grand Junction, Colo.  
 Price, Marshall, Winston-Salem, N.C.  
 Prichard, Lev/Ella, Corpus Christi, Texas  
 Priest, Nibby, Henderson, Ky.  
 Prince, John R., Raleigh, N.C.  
 Proctor, T.G., Clemson, S.C.  
 Pryor, Dorothy M., Decatur, Ga.  
 Puryear, Dr./Mrs. James B., Augusta, Ga.  
 Queen, Mike/Bobbie, Wilmington, N.C.  
 Quisenberry, Virgil/Judy, Central, S.C.  
 Raborn, Mr./Mrs. Wiley B., Baton Rouge, La.  
 Ragans, Sherrill, Tallahassee, Fla.  
 Ragsdale, John G., Little Rock, Ark.  
 Ramsey, Jed/Frances, Beaumont, Texas  
 Ratliff, Joseph/Joan, Greensboro, N.C.  
 Ratterree, Mack/Laura, Atlanta, Ga.  
 Rauch, Robert/Ruth, Moorsville, N.C.  
 Ray, Annelu M., Carthage, N.C.  
 Ray, Dan, Greer, S.C.  
 Reagan, Jimmy M., Houston, Texas  
 Reeve, Jackson, Cumming, Ga.  
 Renfro, Mr./Mrs. Grady W., Knoxville, Tenn.  
 Rentz Jr., Ben A., Charlotte, N.C.  
 Reynolds, Sam A., Atlanta, Ga.  
 Rhodes, James/Verna, Columbia, Mo.  
 Rhodes, William S., Atlanta, Ga.  
 Rice, Norman, Birmingham, Ala.  
 Rich, J.T., Clemson, S.C.  
 Riley, Dan/Jackie, Macon, Ga.  
 Rivers, Ernest/Louise, College Station, Texas  
 Rivers, Jim, Morehead City, N.C.  
 Roberts, J.W./Mildred, Fayetteville, Ga.  
 Roberts, Jack, Kenbridge, Va.



Roberts, Leta Faye, Dalton, Ga.  
 Robinson, John, Springdale, Ark.  
 Robinson, Ron/Carol, Cape Girardeau, Mo.  
 Rockwell, Bruce L., Monroe, Va.  
 Roda, Jane E., Asheville, N.C.  
 Roddy, James R., Candler, N.C.  
 Roden, William H., Coker Creek, Tenn.  
 Rogers, James/Mary Ann, Memphis, Tenn.  
 Rogers, Elton/Beverly, Colonial Heights, Va.  
 Rogers, John/Jean, Bainbridge, Ga.  
 Rogers, Lynn, Colonial Heights, Va.  
 Rogers, Tad, Trumann, Ark.  
 Ross, Joan L, Dalton, Ga.  
 Ross, Robert L., Tulsa, Okla.  
 Roth, Benjamin, Woodstock, Ga.  
 Rowell, Edd/Ruth, Macon, Ga.  
 Royal, Mr./Mrs. A. Lee, Charlotte, N.C.  
 Rudert, Barry/Rosalie, St. Louis, Mo.  
 Rutland, S.F., Charlotte, N.C.  
 Salsler, Coy, Houston, Texas  
 Sample, Mr./Mrs. George, Greenville, Tenn.  
 Sanders, Drayton/Mary Etta, Dalton, Ga.  
 Sanders, Sandra H., Bogart, Ga.  
 Sandford, Rob/Bettina, Norfolk, Va.  
 Sapp, Clarence, Houston, Texas  
 Sasser, C.G., Conway, S.C.  
 Savage, Stanley/Andrea, Moultrie, Ga.  
 Savell, Bill/Jan, Maryville, Tenn.  
 Scaggs, Robert A., North Augusta, S.C.  
 Schaaf, Jim/Beverly, Macon, Ga.  
 Schuler, Henry C., Metropolis, Ill.  
 Schultheiss, Eloise, High Point, N.C.  
 Schutte Jr., Herb/Alice, Lilburn, Ga.  
 Segars, Don, Lawrenceville, Ga.  
 Seymoor, Robert/Pearl, Chapel Hill, N.C.  
 Sharpe, James V., Middlesboro, Ky.  
 Shauf, Elton/Rebecca, Cordele, Ga.  
 Shaw, Jack A., Spring Hill, Tenn.  
 Shelby, David R., Knoxville, Tenn.  
 Shell, Dr./Mrs. E. Wayne, Auburn, Ala.  
 Shelley, Don/Susan, Greenville, S.C.  
 Sherwood, Johnnie D., Vero Beach, Fla.  
 Shipley, Hal/Jean, Murray, Ky.  
 Shore, Steve/Darlene, Apex, N.C.  
 Shriver, George H., Statesboro, Ga.  
 Shurden, Walter/Kay, Macon, Ga.  
 Simmons, Rose A., Watkinsville, Ga.  
 Simms, Helen, Richmond, Va.  
 Simpson, Vivian, Buies Creek, N.C.  
 Sims, Leon, Tallahassee, Fla.  
 Sims, Robert/Sara, Tyler, Ala.  
 Singleton, Mary, Hendersonville, N.C.  
 Skelton, Virginia C., Clemson, S.C.  
 Small, Martha H., Baton Rouge, La.  
 Small, R. Lephon, Florence, S.C.  
 Smartt, Walter H., Rising Fawn, Ga.  
 Smith, Roy/Charlotte Cook, Winston Salem, N.C.  
 Smith, David M., Houston, Texas  
 Smith, Gene S., Sumter, S.C.  
 Smith, Guy A., Midland, Ga.  
 Smith, Iris H., Cairo, Ga.  
 Smith, Janie W., Richmond, Va.  
 Smith, Joel, Phenix City, Ala.  
 Smith, John B., Montrose, Va.  
 Smith, Johnny J., Zebulon, N.C.  
 Smith Jr., W.J., Charlotte, N.C.  
 Smith, Kathryn M., Little Rock, Ark.  
 Smith, L.E., Bowling Green, Ky.  
 Smith, Mary Elizabeth/Bob, Macon, Ga.  
 Smith, Neron, Raymond, Miss.  
 Smith, Oxford, Eclectic, Ala.  
 Smith, W. Ches, Tifton, Ga.  
 Smith, Walter E., Arden, N.C.  
 Smitherman, Johnny/Kathy, Hoover, Ala.  
 Snell, Carolyn R., Hattiesburg, Miss.  
 Snider, Aubrey J./Patricia A., Bradenton, Fla.  
 Snider, Ted L., Little Rock, Ark.  
 Snyder, Milton, Milledgeville, Ga.  
 Soroka, Alexander, Colonial Heights, Va.  
 Spencer, W. Jesse, Rockingham, N.C.  
 Sphar, Elizabeth, Lexington, Ky.

Spinks, Calvin/Charlene, LaGrange, Ga.  
 Spivey, Bryant, Elgin, S.C.  
 Spratt, J. Lee, Columbia, S.C.  
 Sprawls, Perry/Charlottea, Montreat, N.C.  
 Stafford, Thomas/Catharine, Jonesboro, Ark.  
 Stallings, David/Grace, Cairo, Ga.  
 Stancil, D.H., Memphis, Tenn.  
 Stanfield, David/Jean, Greensboro, N.C.  
 Stanfield, Margarette, Luling, Texas  
 Stanton, James, Gadsden, Ala.  
 Steinig, Ronald D., Lawton, Okla.  
 Stella, Tony/Mary, Pearland, Texas  
 Stephens, Ann, Decatur, Ga.  
 Stephenson, Dr./Mrs. Henry L, Washington, N.C.  
 Stephenson, Robert L., Norman, Okla.  
 Stevens, Lila, Two Harbors, Minn.  
 Stevens, R.L., Raleigh, N.C.  
 Stevens, Velma, Fort Worth, Texas  
 Storey, I. Harold, Rome, Ga.  
 Strange, James/Carolyn, Tampa, Fla.  
 Strawn, Bud, St. Petersburg, Fla.  
 Street, Gail, Columbus, Miss.  
 Strickland, Ann, Pendleton, S.C.  
 Strickland, Clarissa, Lilburn, Ga.  
 Stripling, W.S., Norcross, Ga.  
 Summerville, Jim/Marion, Chapel Hill, N.C.  
 Swann, Patricia, Cave Spring, Ga.  
 Swedenburg, Mary, Hoover, Ala.  
 Tate, Marvin E., Louisville, Ky.  
 Taylor, Gloria J., Fairbanks, Alaska  
 Taylor, Nathan/Bryn, Richmond, Va.  
 Teal, Mr./Mrs. Dewey, Carrollton, Ga.  
 Terry, Thomas R., Blackville, S.C.  
 Thomas, P. Leon, Southport, N.C.  
 Thomas, Pheroba, Fort Payne, Ala.  
 Thomas, William, Lafayette, Ala.  
 Thomason, Ben, Winston-Salem, N.C.  
 Thomason, Robert/Catherine, Clinton, S.C.  
 Thompson, Alec, Forsyth, Ga.  
 Thompson, Pam/Raymond, Birmingham, Ala.  
 Tice, John D., Rocky Face, Ga.  
 Tichenor, W.B., Columbia, Mo.  
 Tilley, Clyde/Nancy, Seymour, Tenn.  
 Tilley, Jim/Claire, Hartselle, Ala.  
 Tillman, Earl/Carolyn, Rome, Ga.  
 Timmerman, Ed/Sarah, Cairo, Ga.  
 Todd, George/Helen, Vero Beach, Fla.  
 Tolbert, Malcolm, Baton Rouge, La.  
 Tonks, A.R., Brentwood, Tenn.  
 Torbert, John W., Pineville, La.  
 Townley, Mrs. Durrelle T., Pensacola, Fla.  
 Travis, Kenneth, Smyrna, Ga.  
 Trawick, William/Margaret, Stone Mountain, Ga.  
 Trot, Mildred, Montgomery, Ala.  
 Troy, Laura, Atlanta, Ga.  
 Tucker, Fred, Hoover, Ala.  
 Tucker, Julia B., Albany, Ga.  
 Tucker, Keithen/Sarah, Macon, Ga.  
 Tull, Howard M., Slidell, La.  
 Turnage, Becky, Washington, N.C.  
 Turner, Bill/Earlene Rentz, Lancaster, Ky.  
 Tuttle, Walter/Beverly, Wake Forest, N.C.  
 Twine, H. Edgar, Tampa, Fla.  
 Tyler, Mrs. Charles L., Belfast, Maine  
 Tyndall, Robert/Llew, Washington, N.C.  
 Upchurch, James/Wilma, Carrollton, Ga.  
 Utley, Sue M., Jackson, Tenn.  
 Vaughn, Joe F., Richmond, Va.  
 Vazquez, A.M./Elaine, Macon, Ga.  
 Vick, Lucy H., Cincinnati, Ohio  
 Vinson, Bill/Dotty, Knoxville, Tenn.  
 Viperman, David E., Rock Hill, S.C.  
 Wade, Del/Clark, Winterville, Ga.  
 Wainwright, Jack/Carol, Greensboro, Fla.  
 Walden, F. Pruet, Forest City, N.C.  
 Waldrop, Glen G., Atlanta, Ga.  
 Walker, Brent/Nancy, Falls Church, Va.  
 Walker, Charles, Tallahassee, Fla.  
 Walker, Charles O., Jasper, Ga.  
 Walker, Mary Suthell, Sprindale, N.C.  
 Walker, Roy E., Whiteville, N.C.

Wallace, Billy C., Stillwater, Okla.  
 Wallace, James O., San Antonio, Texas  
 Wallin, Sadie, Mars Hill, N.C.  
 Ward, Carolyn, Marietta, Ga.  
 Ward, James/Ruth, York, Pa.  
 Ward, William, Weaverville, N.C.  
 Ware, Todd, Monroe, Ga.  
 Warren, Don, Spruce Pine, N.C.  
 Warren, Reggie, Carrollton, Va.  
 Washburn, David, Durham, N.C.  
 Watson, E.C./Mary Anne, Elgin, S.C.  
 Watson, Jane, Monroe, La.  
 Watson, Yin, Bolivar, Mo.  
 Watt, Joseph R., Hawkinsville, Ga.  
 Watts, Mildred A., Leland, N.C.  
 Watts, Philip/Barbara, Birmingham, Ala.  
 Weaver, Milford A., Martinsville, Va.  
 Webb, Len/Marian, Crestwood, Ky.  
 Webb, Wallace/Alma, Dunedin, Fla.  
 Weeks, Robert, Bullard, Texas  
 Welborn, Charles, Anderson, S.C.  
 Welch, Carroll B., Madison Heights, Va.  
 Wells, Olen, West York, Ill  
 Wentz, Mary/Wendell, Rockwall, Texas  
 West, G. Allen, Louisville, Ky.  
 Whitaker, Dr./Mrs. Bruce, Raleigh, N.C.  
 Whitaker, Dan/Joyce, Ringgold, Ga.  
 White, Clement/Carole, St. Petersburg, Fla.  
 White, Eugene, Stanleytown, Va.  
 White, Mr./Mrs. Reuben, Marietta, Ga.  
 White, Virginia L Swaim, Arlington, Va.  
 Whitfield, Bryan J., Macon, Ga.  
 Whitson, Charles, LaFayette, Ala.  
 Wilbanks, Wayne/Nicky, Commerce, Ga.  
 Wilbanks, Willena F., Tallahassee, Fla.  
 Wiley, Mrs. Thomas, Tupelo, Miss.  
 Wiley, Paul G., Springfield, Va.  
 Wilkinson, J.A., Seabrook, Texas  
 Williams, Charles A., Carrollton, Ga.  
 Williams, Claude, Durham, N.C.  
 Williams, Claude/Charlotte, Athens, Ga.  
 Williams, Donnie, Ardmore, Okla.  
 Williams, James/Susan, Montgomery, Ala.  
 Williams, Joe P., Louisville, Ky.  
 Williams, Mr./Mrs. Donald D., Timonium, Md.  
 Williams, Pat, Snellville, Ga.  
 Williams, Paul/Mary Ann, Orange Park, Fla.  
 Williams, Preston, Montezuma, Ga.  
 Williams, Richard M., Suffolk, Va.  
 Williams, Richard Pharr, Decatur, Ga.  
 Williams, W. Fred, Greensboro, N.C.  
 Williams, Woodie/Winnie, Seneca, S.C.  
 Williamson, James, Macon, Ga.  
 Williamson, M.J., Conyers, Ga.  
 Willis, Tommie /Lucy, Birmingham, Ala.  
 Wilson, Chappell, Marietta, Ga.  
 Wilson, Charles E., Sylacauga, Ala.  
 Wilson, Charlie/Jill, Aliceville, Ala.  
 Wilson, David/Ann, Maryville, Tenn.  
 Wilson, Dr./Mrs. O.R., Florence, S.C.  
 Wilson, Frances, Statesville, N.C.  
 Wilson, Glenn, Wilsonville, Ala.  
 Wilson, Henry/Faye, Gravel Switch, Ky.  
 Wilson, Hilda C., Dunn, N.C.  
 Wilson Jr., Robert/Charlie Faye, Pensacola, Fla.  
 Wilson, Mary, Shreveport, La.  
 Wilson, Oliver, Wilsonville, Ala.  
 Wilson, Tom/Allie, Charlotte, N.C.  
 Windham, Mrs. Roland H., Aiken, S.C.  
 Withers, Sara, McDonough, Ga.  
 Wood, Wade/Barbara, Gray, Ga.  
 Woodson, Robert/Carolyn, Stone Mountain, Ga.  
 Wright, Charles/Mary, Midland, Texas  
 Wright, Randy, Spartanburg, S.C.  
 Wyatt, Dr./Mrs. Roy, Knoxville, Tenn.  
 Yancey, Lucille, Clinton, N.C.  
 Yarbrough, Leroy, San Antonio, Texas  
 Yates, James F., Yazoo City, Miss.  
 Yoo, Jim Dai/Soo Hi, St. Charles, Mo.  
 Young, Donald E., Macon, Ga.  
 Yue, Sing Chi, Bakersfield, Calif.

## back-row birdie

## Baptist like me

By Keith D. Herron

Since there are only three former U.S. presidents alive these days, whenever two of them agree to co-host a meeting calling on thousands of Baptists from groups all over the nation to meet in Atlanta under the canopy of a very big Baptist tent, it's a big deal ... a very big deal. In fact, it's quite extraordinary that two of the three former presidents are Baptists. So compelling was the invitation by these two mega-Baptists that every significant Baptist group was represented with the exception of the world's largest Baptist body that instead condemned the meeting from its inception. That kind of collaborative disenlightenment continues to amaze me for its dogged unwillingness to join any party they don't dominate.

Was I there? Absolutely! But what I found intriguing was Birdie's announcement last fall that she too was planning to go by pronouncing, "How can it be a party unless I show up?" And with that, she made her plans to be there. Birdie even talked Sophia, her American Baptist neighbor, into coming along. In the Midwest, former Southern Baptists (also known as "refugees of fundamentalism") have found true kinship with the American Baptists who have served this region for at least as long and probably better than Southern Baptists ever did. As a result of our cultural split with the Fundie-Baptists, we rediscovered our Baptist cousins with whom we can trace our shared lineage.

Birdie and Sophia each stated their own reasons for attending. Birdie went to meet Presidents Carter and Clinton — not just to hear them speak, but to *meet* them. Sophia, on the other hand, is a long-time African-American member of an American Baptist congregation and she went to see her National Baptist sisters welcomed in a meeting that brought us all together. "We've been distant cousins since we got off the slave boats ... it's high time we got together!" She beamed when she told

me this as we sat in the terminal waiting to board our flight.

"Birdie, what makes you think you'll meet our two distinguished Baptist Presidents? I've seen President Carter at a few book signings, and the Secret Service keep a close eye on who gets near him. You don't look menacing to me, but I know you well."

That last line and its unspoken inference didn't go unnoticed, but she let it dangle, as she knew I would know she heard me. Silence can be as intimidating as any word spoken, and Birdie was deft in knowing when to use them both.

"Pastor, maybe you feel their sentinel presence because you're the kind they most want to monitor closely. I'm pure in heart! I only have love and adoration to bestow on Jimmy and Bill."

"I know you're not uninformed, and you're anything but clumsy in delicate social matters, but you can't call them 'Jimmy' and 'Bill.' They're our former presidents, and they deserve to be called in a more dignified manner!"

"My lord, you don't know diddly about being a Baptist! Of course I know I shouldn't call them by their first names. Even I know they are to be respected. I *do* respect them both. But they're also my Baptist brothers. We share something in common. We're like family!" Sophia watched in horror as Birdie and I bantered back and forth because in her church, the pastor was more revered than

Birdie's unique type of love.

"So what is it you want most from our Baptist brothers who also happen to be former presidents deserving of our highest esteem and honor?"

"Easy, Mister Tall Steeple Preacher. I want an autograph from each one of them ... something in their own hand ... something that indicates we were in each other's presence and they were gracious and humble enough to pause for five seconds and recognize we are really just two human beings created in the image of God who happen to share a faith story."

I pressed harder ... "I don't know what kind of numbers each Baptist group will bring, but it's bound to be big. The Southern Baptists alone claim more than 15 million members if you can believe that number."

"Well, then, it's good they're not coming! Listen Rev, I figure Presidents Carter and Clinton won't get to shake everybody's hand and personally tell them how glad they are we came, but there's surely going to be *somebody* they'll want to meet. How dumb can you be? They're *politicians!* They're your equal in terms of getting out and pressing the flesh. I figure they'd love to meet a few of us, so I mean to hang out where they'll likely be. And when they show up, I plan to step up proudly and look them in the eye and say, "Thank you for making yourself available to serve our country. Thank you for caring enough to make your gifts available to

God. Thank you for calling all us Baptists together for this grand purpose."

For once the tear in the corner of Birdie's eye stopped me from saying anything in reply. Even Sophia was silent as she entered into this holy moment. "God bless Jimmy and Bill," I prayed silently, "God bless our Baptist presidents." **BT**

—Keith D. Herron is pastor of Holmeswood Baptist Church in Kansas City, Mo.



# 2008 Formations Commentary

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

## LESSONS FOR: Sunday, April 6-27, 2008

Written by Kathy Manis Findley, a former pastor and now executive director of Safe Places in Little Rock, Ark.



April 6, 2008

## Unfinished business

Acts 1:15-26

Is what you're doing worth giving your life for? Sometimes a person takes on a challenge and leaves the task unfinished. One individual may put forth a valiant effort, but face insurmountable obstacles. Another might begin with good intentions and lose heart. Someone else might make an irreparable mistake and not get a second chance. Another person might simply fail and not understand why, while another might purposely say: "I quit. I don't care anymore."

Ask any 10 people, and you will hear 10 different reasons for unfinished business. In today's text, Peter stands among a group of about 120 believers and gives every painful detail of the failure of Judas to finish God's business. Peter describes Judas as "one of our number" . . . one who "shared in this ministry" (v. 17). Peter might be saying this is so serious a betrayal that the "wickedness" of Judas gets him exactly what he deserves (v. 18). Instead of finishing God's business, Judas spilled his intestines in a field — an appropriate outcome for such a wicked person!

Perhaps Peter seems a bit harsh in judging Judas, given his own mistakes. As the disciples followed Jesus from the day of John's baptism to the day Jesus was taken up out of their presence, they probably made many mistakes as individuals. The ones we most remember, however, are the betrayal by Judas and the three-fold denial by Peter.

Still, when we place our own judgment

on those two disciples and their actions, we often feel contempt for Judas and understanding for Peter.

*Discuss: Have you ever left a task or a mission unfinished? If yes, how do you feel about having done so?*

As told by Peter, today's story indicates Judas probably fell into the category of those who say: "I quit! I don't care about this. What's in it for me, anyway?"

Peter's point is that Judas had a place of leadership among the disciples of Jesus, but by his actions abdicated that position. Peter uses one of David's psalms to reinforce his conviction: "May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it . . . May another take his place of leadership" (v. 20).

Regardless of what happened in the past, however, the critical business in this story is to choose someone to take the leadership position Judas once held. Two men meet the criteria: Barsabbas and Matthias. The group follows two well-defined steps in making this important decision. (1) They pray and (2) they cast lots. Presumably, the group believes their prayer will influence the casting of the lots.

Matthias is the winner of the lot casting. Perhaps he is also an answer to the disciples' prayer. So they now move forward in what they call the "apostolic ministry" (v. 25). It is now their destiny to attend to the unfinished business ahead.

Certainly, the disciples had been through a great deal as they walked with Jesus to his death and on to his resurrection. Being mortals, they will now make a life-altering choice about how they will deal with this unfinished business. One choice would be to return to normal life and forget the events that had changed their existence.

The second choice changes the course of human existence for generations to come. This is the choice the disciples make, and the result of that choice will soon bring the sound of a rushing, mighty wind from heaven. It is one of those life-changing moments.

*Discuss: Can you recall a personal decision that was life altering for you? How would life be different if you had not made that particular decision?*

A wise person once posed this question to a group of students: "Is what you are doing worth giving your life for?" He went on to say that whatever a person does literally shortens life by some measure.

Peter speaks as if he believes the unfinished mission ahead is definitely worth giving his life to accomplish. The disciples could have given up, despondent because they thought their journey with Jesus should have accomplished the ultimate dream. They might have said, "We failed the first time, so what's the use? What if we fail?"

*Reflect: How much do I fear failure? Does fear keep me from dreaming?*

More times than not, one who follows after must finish the work of someone who came before. Many times, someone has a dream but never sees the fulfillment of that dream. Instead, the dream is committed into the hands of another person.

On April 3, 1968 — the day before his assassination — Martin Luther King Jr. essentially said to his hearers that they were to continue the quest for the dream; to finish the unfinished business: "I just want to do God's will. And he's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land."

In concluding our thoughts on unfinished business, consider the enduring words of Abraham Lincoln in *The Gettysburg Address*: "It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced."

*Discuss: How can you relate Lincoln's words to the work of the church? What do you see as the church's "unfinished business"? How is your faith community working on that unfinished business?*



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April 13, 2008

## Unimaginable power

Acts 2:1-21

Here is Peter, the same man who 50 days before denied Jesus, now proclaiming the amazing events to come and claiming unimaginable power. Perhaps in an attempt to assert some authority he feels he does not deserve, he calls upon Joel the prophet to speak on his behalf.

No doubt, Peter has not forgotten his recent actions, actions that may remind him of his humanity. “Who am I to speak to these people and proclaim Jesus the Messiah?” is perhaps a question that lingers in Peter’s mind. “Who am I to proclaim that God raised him from the dead?” (v. 24).

With these self-reflective questions, Peter does not rely upon his own authority. Instead he calls upon the prophet Joel and quotes what is perhaps the clearest prophesy concerning the outpouring of the Holy Spirit: “In the last days ... I will pour out my Spirit.” With these power-filled words, Peter takes what is happening in those moments and makes a powerful declaration: there is a mission ahead. That mission is nothing less than the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

*Discuss: Do you think Peter felt he had the authority to speak? Why or why not? Why do you think Peter quoted the prophet Joel rather than speaking to the crowd in his own words?*

So where is Peter coming from?

Remember that some very important events preceded his address. We might call it Peter’s inaugural day or the day the church was launched. We could mark it as the day of mighty wind and flames of fire!

It is the day of Pentecost — the day when the group is gathered together to try to figure out what had happened, what it all meant and what they should do next. Seeing tongues of fire is an unusual, even frightening, happening. The scripture says they are “amazed and perplexed” (v. 12).

Jews from every nation who have come to Jerusalem are hearing the “wonders of God” in their own languages, an event that causes them to say that these people have simply had “too much wine” (v. 13). At that moment Peter stands up and begins to speak, affirming first that “these men are not drunk, as you suppose.”

Peter’s quotation from the prophet Joel

sets a powerful tone for this message. Without holding back, Peter stresses that there is a challenge ahead, and that there would be more than enough Spirit power available to meet the challenge (vv. 17-18). He wants to make sure the people know that if they are willing, God is able to provide whatever they need for the days to come.

Peter’s declaration of the church’s mission would require enormous dedication, unwavering commitment and perseverance. It would be a mission dependent on the outpouring of the Spirit on all the people, a mission built upon the prophetic words of God’s “sons and daughters.” It would require the seeing of visions and the dreaming of dreams (vv. 17-18).

*Discuss: What do you see as the mission of today’s church? Do you think the church’s mission still requires strong commitment and perseverance? Why or why not?*

Never escaping from the shadow of having denied the Messiah, Peter makes it clear that this divine mission is not for the faint of heart or those who lack the Spirit’s unimaginable power. He is perhaps trying to make this point by using haunting images: “wonders in heaven and signs on the earth,” “blood and fire and billows of smoke,” “a sun turned to darkness,” “a moon turned to blood.” Take heed, Peter might say, the church’s mission is not for the weak.

But is not this mission for “everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord”? Is the church’s mission only for those who are divinely chosen? Is it only for those with unique power?

There is no doubt that these disciples to whom Jesus appeared after the resurrection can claim a kind of “anointing” for the mission ahead. They are, of course, the ones who saw many signs and “proofs” that Jesus was alive. They are the ones who heard Jesus speak the words that are forever etched in the church’s collective memory: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses.” And then he was taken up before their eyes into a cloud.

If being witnesses to the glory of God is what bestows this unimaginable power, then these who saw and heard him are the only ones who will possess it. People like us, who came after, are on our own. Yet, we still hang on to Peter’s words from the prophet: “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.”

Consider the implications of such a prophecy. Consider the promise of unimagin-

able power not just for a few, but for all people. Consider the responsibility of receiving this sacred gift called the Spirit.

*Discuss: Do you believe that only a few receive unimaginable power or that all Christians have such power? Does the church of today need “unimaginable power” to fulfill its mission? If so, why? Do you believe the church’s mission is for “everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord”? Why or why not?*

April 20, 2008

## Unfeigned devotion

Acts 2:37-47

Peter continues in this passage engaging hearers in powerful ways. It is not strong enough to simply say to the people that Jesus is Lord. Peter chooses to say it this way: “Let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (v. 36).

“Whom you crucified” seems to be the stabbing phrase Peter uses it to make a forceful point, perhaps intending to cut to the core and set off a sense of guilt in the people. If that is his intent, it works. The first verse of today’s text tells us that when the people hear Peter’s words, they are “cut to the heart” and say: “Brothers, what shall we do?” (v. 37).

So we blew it. What do we do to make up for that? So we failed. How shall we pick ourselves up and try again? So we disappointed ourselves and others. How can we make amends? We were present at the most important time in the history of humankind, and we played a part in crucifying the Son of God. How do we even begin to move on from this?

*Reflect: Can I identify times in my life when the words in the preceding paragraph described me? How did I move on after feeling like I had failed?*

Guilt. Regret. Shame. Sometimes moving on feels all but impossible. When a person feels like a failure, moving on sometimes feels completely out of the question. Sitting in the depths of a valley of regret makes climbing to the top of a mountain seem far beyond reach. But in those times when there is not enough hope for moving on, perhaps there is grace for it.

Peter hears the question, “What shall we do?” and gives an immediate reply. He needs no time to ponder any sort of restitution requirement in order for the people to move on. Peter simply says those grace-words we



know so well: “Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (v. 38).

What Peter says next is the most amazing part of all: “You’ll be on probationary status for six months so that we can be certain of your motives.” “We’ll be watching to see if your repentance is genuine, and then decide what to do with you.” “We’ll be able to discern by your good works whether or not you’re worthy of reinstatement.”

Peter’s response is none of the above. His response instead is plain and simple grace: “You will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” And even beyond that, Peter tells them this promise is not only for them, but also for their children and “for all whom the Lord our God will call” (v. 39).

*Discuss: What is your response to this passage that began by saying the people were the crucifiers and ended with an offer of forgiveness? How do think the people responded?*

Clearly, many respond positively to the message of grace and repentance because the story tells us that about 3,000 of those present are baptized. From that number a fellowship of grace emerges, and the story of their fellowship has intrigued every generation of Christians to this day.

Most of us have never seen or experienced their kind of fellowship. For many, it can only be a dream. For others, it is impractical and impossible. Some try to replicate it in today’s world, while others fear it. Is it a description of a genuine community of unfeigned devotion, some might ask, or is it a cult-like group of people living out a religious fantasy? Here is the description of the fellowship of grace:

- They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to breaking bread and to prayer.
- The apostles did wonders and miracles, and everyone was filled with awe.
- All the believers were together.
- They had everything in common, selling their possessions and giving to everyone as he or she had need.
- They met together every day in the temple courts.
- They broke bread in their homes and ate together.
- They had glad and sincere hearts.
- They praised God and enjoyed the favor of all the people.

Without any doubt, this description sounds like unfeigned devotion, an idyllic life. It

sounds like a life of faith, community and devotion that is not available to us. Yet, Peter promised this would be “for their children, and “for all whom the Lord our God will call” (v. 39).

Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, also called Saint Edith Stein, was a Carmelite nun who left behind a legacy of devotion she lived out in the face of atrocity. She was taken from the Echt Carmel in the Netherlands on Aug. 2, 1942, and transported to the death camp of Auschwitz where she died in the gas chambers on Aug. 9. Her devotion comes through clearly in her writings: “In order to be an image of God, the spirit must turn to what is eternal, hold it in spirit ... and embrace it in the will. The limitless loving devotion to God, and the gift God makes of Himself to you, are the highest elevation of which the heart is capable; it is the highest degree of prayer. The souls that have reached this point are truly the heart of the Church.”

*Discuss: If you were asked to describe in a paragraph your personal devotion to Christ and the church, what would you write?*

April 27, 2008

## Uncompromising witness

Acts 4:23-31

Peter and John have just gotten out of big trouble. Their unbridled devotion has resulted in their uncompromising witness, and they definitely have made an impression on the powerful ones (4:1-21). Not just a few of the “big shots” are troubled. Peter and John raised the ire of the priests and the temple guard and the Sadducees; the rulers, elders and teachers of the law; the high priest and his entire family of priests.

This is worrisome behavior — worrisome enough that they throw Peter and John in jail. The charge is teaching the people, proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus and healing a crippled beggar (3:1-16). After incarcerating, questioning and threatening, the “leadership” still cannot decide what to do with Peter and John. It is probably that hint of uncompromising witness in verse 20 that makes it so difficult: “Judge for yourselves whether it is right ... to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard” (4:21).

This looks like an impasse, which brings us to today’s text that begins with Peter and

John being released. As Peter and John report to the people about all that has happened, a prayer meeting spontaneously breaks out.

What a powerful prayer it is! When the people hear the story of what has happened to Peter and John, “they raise their voices together in prayer to God.” This is no weak prayer. It comes from the collective hearts of a powerful people, a people who have received from God the power to live in the midst of the enemies of the Gospel.

*Discuss: Do you believe that Christians of today live in the midst of enemies of the Gospel? Why or why not? Have you personally ever faced a situation in which you felt your faith was challenged? If so, how did you face that challenge?*

Listen to the power of the people’s prayer. In one unified voice they name their “Sovereign Lord” as one who created all things. “Why do the nations rage and the people plot ... Why do the kings and rulers of the earth stand against our Lord and against the Lord’s Anointed One?” (4:25-26).

Having earned a place of leadership through trial and tribulation, Peter might have prayed for the people. John might have led this prayer. The group gathered there might have chosen the leader they considered most eloquent to pray.

What happens instead is arguably the most powerful expression of collective prayer in all of scripture. It is the prayer the people pray together. It is “The People’s Prayer.” And therein is the power of it.

From the heart of God’s people emerges a prayer that calls upon strength to persevere, boldness to bear witness without compromise and the tangible power of God to heal. No author’s commentary can describe more eloquently what this prayer expresses: “And now, Lord, consider their threat and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus” (4:29-30).

“The People’s Prayer” becomes their declaration of faith — unwavering and uncompromising faith. The prayer literally bears witness to the fact that these people believe their lives should proclaim the resurrected Christ. No turning back! No holding back!

The result of this prayer is something most of us have probably never witnessed. “After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of



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God boldly.”

Ultimately, every person makes his or her own choice about those things that deserve uncompromising dedication. Sadly, some individuals never find that cause or life passion or faith commitment that gives life ultimate meaning. Most of us can name persons — perhaps famous persons — who clearly lived for something greater than themselves. Often we venerate them. Sometimes we envy them or try to become like them. Most of the time we simply wish for the kind of courage that made them famous.

American journalist and abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison made the injustice of slavery his life's mission. In the first issue of his abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator*, published in 1831, Garrison wrote these words as a part of his famous open letter: “I will be as harsh as truth, and as uncompromising as justice. On this subject, I do not wish to think, or speak, or write, with moderation ... urge me not to use moderation in a cause like the present. I am in earnest — I will not equivocate — I will not excuse — I will not retreat a single inch — And I will be heard.”

*Reflect: Is being uncompromising in my Christian witness something I can achieve? BT*

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# The Resource Page

... creative and practical ideas

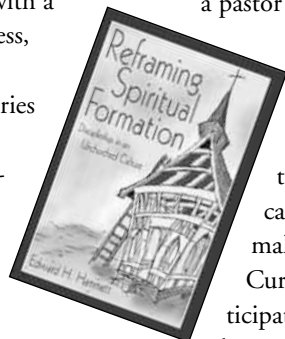
Brought to you this month  
by Edward Hammett



## Transformed lives and churches

- How does the message of Christ enter an increasingly secular culture?
- How does the powerful and transforming message of Christ penetrate and permeate an apathetic church membership and an ill-equipped and disillusioned, if not depressed, clergy?
- What does it take to transform lives filled with shame, pain, aimlessness, loneliness, isolation and lostness?
- How long will our church leaders continue to fight to keep those things that are not transforming lives?
- Are we fighting to retain our jobs and/or comfort levels or to keep us from being intentional in taking risks, being creative, and trusting the Holy Spirit and following him into the places of brokenness in our world?
- What drives and fuels our debates or passions to preserve: transforming lives or preserving our jobs or institutions?
- What leadership skills and Christian virtues and gifts are required if we are to be about transforming lives?
- What would a church look like with a membership focused on selflessness, gratitude, obedience and love?
- What types of leaders and ministries would this kind of church have?
- What type of worship and equipping would nurture this transformation and celebrate the transforming power and presence of Christ?
- How can we move from where we are to where God would have us be?

Author Dallas Willard addressed these and other issues in a recent conference



### for more information

- Reaching People Under 40 While Keeping People Over 60*, Edward Hammett
- Reframing Spiritual Formation*, Edward Hammett
- Renovation of the Heart*, Dallas Willard
- Spiritual Leadership in a Secular Age*, Edward Hammett
- The Quest for Vitality in Religion*, Findley Edge
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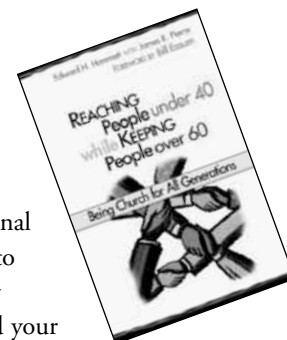
I attended. He is convinced that transformed churches begin with a transformed pastor — a pastor who understands, models and proclaims that the call to salvation, the call to discipleship and the call to ministry are one call. He believes that if pastors are not disciples first, they cannot and will not be disciple makers. Current research suggests that participating in church activities usually does not produce healthy, mature and reproducing disciples. There is a disconnect between what the church wants to provide in programming and ministries — often based on tradition more than effectiveness — and

what people will respond to and what will transform those who participate.

Transformed churches will only come when we have leaders with transformed lives, values, behaviors, attitudes, beliefs and relationships. Discipleship permeates all of life. It's not just about what we memorize from the scriptures; it's about a shift from selfishness and self-centeredness to selflessness, gratitude, obedience and love.

For leaders and churches wanting to make the shifts of heart called for by Willard, and more importantly by Christ, consider the following:

- Set up accountability for someone to ask the tough questions.
- Enlist a professional Christian coach to help you identify needed shifts and your plans for moving through them.
- Read the work of Dallas Willard and other authors concerned about life change and becoming effective witnesses in a 21st century world.
- In consultation with church leaders, create a plan on what it will take to build a regenerative membership of disciples and disciple makers.
- Join with a group of persons on a similar journey.
- Keep a written journal about what the Spirit is saying to you, what shifts you are being called to make and your plans to make them happen. **BT**



**THE RESOURCE PAGE** is provided by the Congregational Life office of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in partnership with Baptists Today and for those dedicated lay leaders working in the educational ministries of local churches. This month's page was written by Edward Hammett, author, church consultant and leadership coach with the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina. **Resource Page Archives are now available at <http://www.thefellowship.info/>**

**Resources/Church-Resources/Baptists-Today-resource-page.**

First Baptist Church of Hyattsville, Md., is seeking a **pastor**. The applicant must be an ordained minister and possess an M. Div from an accredited theological seminary. To request an application package, contact: Pastoral Search Committee, c/o Kent York, 4228 Oglethorpe St., Hyattsville, MD 20781 or [kenteyork716@yahoo.com](mailto:kenteyork716@yahoo.com). Applications must be postmarked no later than Monday, March 31.

Meadow Oaks Baptist Church in Temple, Texas, seeks a full-time **pastor**. Located between Waco and Austin on the I-35 corridor, MOBC is a small, moderate Baptist church that prefers the 1963 *Baptist Faith and Message* and maintains affiliations with the Baptist General Convention of Texas and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. The preferred candidate will possess strong preaching and pastoral care skills, will be committed to outreach, and will hold an M.Div. or its equivalent from an accredited seminary or graduate program in religion. Interested persons should send their vita to: K.W. Johnson, Pastor Search Committee Chairman, at [kwjohanson@vvm.com](mailto:kwjohanson@vvm.com) or 4501 Hickory, Temple, TX 76502.

Mount Zion Baptist Church of Macon, Ga., is receiving résumés for **senior pastor**. We are seeking an experienced minister of the gospel with strong leadership skills and a heart for the people of the community of faith to help lead our church to the next step in its bright future. The candidate needs to possess excellent preaching skills, have a stable work history, and be able to work with and love people of all ages. Mount Zion is a historic, 175-year-old church affiliated with the SBC and CBF. Weekly attendance is 225-250. Mail résumés by April 15 to: Chairman of Pastor Search Committee, Mount Zion Baptist Church, 7015 Rivoli Rd., Macon, GA 31210.

**Music Pastor:** First Baptist Church of DeLand, Fla., with both traditional and contemporary worship services, seeks a gifted man or woman who can shepherd our entire worship/arts ministry. Candidates should have a degree in music. Experience is preferred. Send résumés with references to: Jeannie Maddox, Search Committee Chair, at [jcmaddox84@aol.com](mailto:jcmaddox84@aol.com).

Oakmont Baptist Church in Greenville, N.C., a 1200-resident member missional congregation (CBF, SBC and other ecumenical partnerships), seeks a full-time **minister of education** to serve with six other full-time ministers. This minister will lead the church in its outreach and evangelism efforts, guide the work of three Bible study hours on Sunday, work with church ministry teams, and serve as the resource person for our singles ministry. He/she will evidence a clear calling to educational ministry, and demonstrate strong organizational skills and a growing faith. Minimum qualifications include a Master of Divinity or Christian Education and five years experience in educational ministry. Experience with multiple Sunday Schools is preferred. Send a letter of introduction, résumé and references to: [beth@oakmontchurch.com](mailto:beth@oakmontchurch.com) or Minister of Education Search Team, Oakmont Baptist Church, 1100 Red Banks Rd., Greenville, NC 27858.

First Baptist Church of Jefferson City, Mo., affiliated with CBF and BGCM, is seeking an **associate pastor of discipleship**. This minister will develop, administer and promote an effective and holistic discipleship ministry for adults of all ages and life situations that will enhance spiritual formation and growth. A bachelor's degree in a related field is required; a master's is preferred. A complete job description is available at [www.fbcjc.org](http://www.fbcjc.org). Please send résumés to: Dr. Doyle Sager, Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church, 301 E. Capitol Ave., Jefferson City, MO 65101 or [doyle@fbcjc.org](mailto:doyle@fbcjc.org).

First Baptist Church of Sylva, N.C., located near Western Carolina University, is seeking a full-time **minister of youth (grades 6-12) and young adults (to age 25) and their families**. A seminary degree (or near completion) is required, with salary based on experience and education. The church has a vibrant youth program with an active, supportive youth committee and a strong commitment from the membership. Mail résumé to: First Baptist Church of Sylva, P.O. Drawer 1024, Sylva, NC 28779.

**Minister to Students and Families:** First Baptist Church of Hopewell is a growing, moderate church affiliated with the Petersburg Baptist Association, Baptist General Association of Virginia and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. We have great possibility and potential with an average attendance of 350 between the traditional and contemporary worship services. We have lots of children and youth who are looking for someone to minister alongside of them and build relationships with them. If you have a passion for the future of the church and want to be a part of a growing ministry, please send your résumé to: [jeff.raymond@fbchopewell.org](mailto:jeff.raymond@fbchopewell.org) or Search Team, First Baptist Church, 401 N. 2nd Ave., Hopewell, VA 23860.

Green Valley Baptist Church, Hoover, Ala., is seeking a full-time **youth minister** for middle school and high school students. A seminary degree is required. Send résumé to: Rob Hardman, Green Valley Baptist Church, 1815 Patton Chapel Rd., Hoover, AL 35226 or [youthpastor@gvbc.org](mailto:youthpastor@gvbc.org).

First Baptist Church, Spruce Pine, N.C., a mid-sized moderate church in the western North Carolina mountains, is prayerfully seeking a **children and youth minister** who will be responsible for leading/coordinating a full program for children and youth with parents and staff (discipleship, music, special events, missions). Candidate should be energetic and enthusiastic with good communication skills. Mail résumés to: Search Committee Attn.: Karen Phillips, Chairperson, First Baptist Church, 125 Tappan St., Spruce Pine, NC 28777.

**Minister to Children, Youth and Families:** First Baptist Church, Whiteville, a mid-sized moderate church in southeastern North Carolina, is prayerfully seeking a minister who will be responsible for leading/coordinating a well-rounded program of ministry and missions with children, youth and their families, as well as serving as part of a ministry team to lead the congregation in its service to Christ. Send résumés to: Kendell Cameron, First Baptist Church, 412 N. Madison St., Whiteville, NC 28472.

**Minister to Young Families:** Main Street Baptist Church, Hattiesburg, Miss. Responsibilities with children birth through sixth grade and their families. College degree and previous experience required; seminary preferred. Send résumé to: Dr. Jon Stubblefield, pastor, at [drjon@mainstreetbaptistchurch.org](mailto:drjon@mainstreetbaptistchurch.org).

First Baptist Church of Jefferson City, Mo., affiliated with CBF and BGCM, is seeking an **associate pastor of children and families**. This minister will develop, administer and promote a seamless ministry spanning birth through childhood that will help cultivate strong, godly families and loving relationships in our fellowship and community. A bachelor's degree in a related field is required; a master's is preferred. A complete job description is available at [www.fbcjc.org](http://www.fbcjc.org). Please send résumés to: Dr. Doyle Sager, Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church, 301 E. Capitol Ave., Jefferson City, MO 65101 or [doyle@fbcjc.org](mailto:doyle@fbcjc.org).

Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas, seeks a full-time **minister of missions**. Wilshire is affiliated with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Baptist General Convention of Texas. Desired qualifications include excellent organizational and communication skills, enthusiasm for missions, an ability to inspire a passion for missions in others, and experience leading mission trips and events. Send résumés by March 31 to: Mark Wingfield, associate pastor, Wilshire Baptist Church, 4316 Abrams Rd., Dallas TX 75214 or [mwingfield@wilshirebc.org](mailto:mwingfield@wilshirebc.org).

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**Minister to Youth**

South Main Baptist Church, Houston, Texas (smbc.org), is seeking a minister to youth. We are in ministry partnership with the Baptist General Convention of Texas, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Baptist World Alliance. We encourage applications from both men and women. We seek a person who enjoys working with youth and draws energy from these relationships.

This minister will:

- Develop relationships with youth.
- Lead the Christian education ministries and programs for youth grades 6-12.
- Recruit, enlist and equip youth leadership, including Sunday school leadership.
- Provide training and educational resources for youth ministry workers.
- Supervise youth ministry staff and volunteers.
- Plan, coordinate and conduct programs and events for youth and their families.
- Serve as a member of the pastoral team, reporting to the pastor.
- Promote the youth ministry both within the church and in the community.

The preferred candidate will:

- Have a passion for helping youth discover Christ and grow in faith.
- Work effectively as a key part of the pastoral leadership team.
- Hold an earned seminary degree.
- Be skilled at organizing programs and events in a volunteer setting.
- Communicate effectively in both written correspondence and oral presentations.

*\*Compensation is competitive for the market and experience level of the successful candidate.*

Résumés:

[pastoroffice@smbc.org](mailto:pastoroffice@smbc.org)

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# faith experience

## My odyssey in practical Christianity

By John Roy

This month we turn our eyes and attention toward the cross and empty tomb. From the *History Channel* to *Newsweek*, stories will abound about Jesus and what brought about his demise. From sacrifice to myth, the angles and stories are too many to number.

Who is to blame for the death of Jesus? Was it the Jews, the Romans or the politically ambitious? Was it Pilot or Judas? Was it the cheering crowd or the silent allies who are to blame for this life cut short? Of course there are those who will rise up and say this was God's purpose, so who's to blame is of little relevance. Yet we are a generation raised on *Law and Order* and there must be a culprit; the finger must be pointed at someone. Could it be, however, the finger does not point at someone but at behavior?



Could the closed mind be guilty of crucifying the open arms of Jesus? It is no crime to have a closed mind. Even today it is not a crime to make your mind up and stay on a particular course. Another description of a closed mind might be determination, which is more of a virtue than a vice. In religious circles the closed mind is often considered valuable. Persons established in their beliefs and no longer blown around by the winds of false doctrine are praised. Being anchored to the truth, oddly enough, is a virtue with a nasty side effect. Yet it is sad when the church is the most productive laboratory for the closed mind. We forget it was the close-minded religious leaders who paraded Jesus toward the cross.

Indifference is not a crime either. On its best day indifference is seen as ambivalence, pulled in two directions. On its worst day it is nothing more than complacency.

As Martin Luther King wrote, "In the end we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends."

Complacency is the sound of silence, the result of investing too much in this world and not enough in the one to come. It is when courage is traded for compromise and truth for safety.

I am a vanilla Christian. Because I was raised in this faith, I have been baptized into practical Christianity. "All things in moderation" ... "Don't rock the boat" ... "Attitude determines altitude" ... These are the sensibilities I inherited from years of Sunday school, church camp and seminary. They have served me well; my map has provided me good safe, reliable direction. Nevertheless, in the pursuit of faithfulness my mind was inadvertently closed. My personal faith became my private faith and, in time, I grew silent in the name of peace and pragmatism.

While we will never be arrested for a closed mind or publicly shunned for indifference, there is a price for practical faith. In the end at least two behaviors — legal but malignant — contributed to the death of Jesus. Jesus died because good people kept quiet and because others could not trade the tried and true for the new and better.

Of course the resurrection is God's answer to our indifference. We can remain quiet, prudent and practical, but God will make some noise. The empty tomb is God's not-so-subtle way of saying, "Don't mock the new until you have given it a chance." On resurrection morning, minds were expanded to believe the impossible and hearts were granted courage to live boldly. The empty cross and empty tomb remind us there is even hope for those of us with closed minds and silent voices. **BT**

—John Roy is pastor of Pelham Road Baptist Church in Greenville, S.C.

# in the know

*Keeping up with people, places and events*

## PEOPLE

**Candace Cox** is chief investment officer for the ABC Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board.

**John Daugherty** is pastor of First Baptist Church of Fort Myers, Fla. He was coordinator for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Louisiana.

**Carolyn Erwin-Johnson** has joined American Baptist Churches National Ministries as a communications associate.

**Randel Everett** was elected as executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, succeeding Charles Wade who retired Jan. 31. Everett comes from the pastorate of the First Baptist Church of Newport News, Va. He has also served as president of the John Leland Center for Theological Studies in Arlington, Va.

**William C. Gaventa Jr.** received the highest honor, the COMISS Medal, from the ecumenical network for chaplain and pastoral care ministry. Gaventa, a longtime American Baptist institutional chaplain, works with persons with developmental disabilities and those who serve them.

**Ircel Harrison** will complete his service as coordinator for the Tennessee Cooperative Baptist Fellowship on Dec. 31. He was the group's first full-time coordinator beginning in September 1998.

**Janice Haywood** retired Jan. 15 as team leader for church ministries at the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina where she served 31 years. She is a childhood ministry specialist and author of *Enduring Connections: Creating a Preschool and Children's Ministry* (2007, Chalice).

**Mabel Claire Maddrey** died Jan. 14 at age 100. She was a deacon at the First Baptist churches of Raleigh, N.C., and Ahoskie, N.C. She served on the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee and as president of the Woman's Missionary Union of N.C. In 1998, she was featured in a *New York Times* article about First Baptist Raleigh and other churches leaving the SBC over women in ministry issues.

**C.F. McDowell III** is senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Laurinburg, N.C. He comes from Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina where he served as executive vice president of special ministries.

**Perkin F. Simpson** is vice president of finance for the American Baptist Foundation.

**Tom Stocks** is field strategist for the Virginia Baptist Mission Board serving in the Valley Region. He had served as pastor of Rosalind Hills Baptist Church in Roanoke, Va., since 1989.

**Tim Willis** will retire June 30 from the staff of First Baptist Church of Clemson, S.C., where he has done college ministry for four years. Earlier he served as a Baptist campus minister at Clemson University and in Texas. He plans to work as an intentional interim pastor.

## PLACES

**Baptist Women in Ministry of Georgia** is receiving nominations until March 15 for Distinguished Churchwoman of the Year. Nominations should be mailed to: Deedra Rich, 322 Valley Brook Crossing, Decatur, Ga. 30033.

**Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina** has created the Randall and Lou Lolley Fund for theological education. Randall Lolley is former president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C. **BT**

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# the lighter side

## Singing harmony

By Brett Younger

I confess that I usually sing the melody, but not too many Sundays ago I sat by Jeff Newton. During the second stanza of “My Jesus, I Love Thee” I realized that while I was making a dull unison contribution, Jeff was taking off on the tenor line. By the time we got to “If ever I loved thee, my Jesus, ’tis now,” I was doing my best to add the bass line. Unison is easier, but at the best churches — in our best moments — we sing harmony.

Churches should be more spirited harmonization than unthinking agreement, more Baskin Robbins than plain vanilla. Not “My way or the highway,” but “Our way is spaghetti junction.” Diversity is more complicated, but it’s also more interesting. It’s a small church that only has room for one set of opinions.

When visitors come, we should be able to say, “We’ve got people like you. We have Huckabees and Hillaries. We drive Lexuses, Escorts and don’t drive at all. We watch *Washington Week in Review* and *American Gladiators*. We listen to Mendelssohn and Willie Nelson. We went to *The Great Debaters* and *Alvin and the Chipmunks*. We have Dallas Cowboys fans and those who have learned to keep their opinions to themselves.”

We sing harmony, because we’re the church. The best churches encourage creativity and new ideas. It takes courage to bless a variety of opinions, but Carlyle Marney said, “The church that has not lost its courage will never have to advertise its location.”

We sing harmony, because we’re Baptist. One of the best things about having no creed but the Bible is that you end up meeting such interesting people at church. The people with whom we disagree are often the ones from whom we can learn the most. In real Baptist churches, members are forever saying, “I won’t let our differences get in the way of our friendship.”

We sing harmony, because we’re following Jesus. If you take seriously the hard questions of discipleship, you have to make room for answers that aren’t always simple.



Illustration by Scott Brooks

The Kingdom of God is bigger than we have imagined. When we discover a difference of opinion it’s an opportunity to go beyond merely tolerating one another to celebrating our diversity.

When people suggest that churches have to be all this or all that, those who sing harmony know it isn’t true. A choir with only tenors isn’t really a choir. Christ’s followers listen carefully to one another and add our different parts to the one song.

Christians have different perspectives on the incarnation, but we all sing “Silent Night.” Christians have a variety of ideas on the atonement, but we all sing “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.” Christians may

disagree on what the resurrection looked like, but we all sing “Christ the Lord is Risen Today.” Christians have different lists of who gets into heaven, but we sing “Amazing Grace” together.

The best churches are big enough for everyone who wants to sing of Christ. What holds us together is the affirmation “Jesus is Lord.” God calls us to be loyal to Christ before anything else — even before our opinions. We don’t have to sing the same notes at the same time. We just have to sing the song of God’s love together. **BT**

—Brett Younger is pastor of Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas.

# readers' responses

## Minister reflects on Celebration

EDITOR: Being anything but cynical requires trusting in a future that usually doesn't seem likely.

Today I am not cynical.

For the first time since I realized the Southern Baptist Convention would cease being the way through which God called me as a female teenager to a lifetime of vocational ministry, I feel proud and grateful to be a Baptist.

For the first time in my adult life, I feel as though I can confidently say to the world as well as to my unchurched neighbor that I am one of "those Baptists" who cares about the state of our world and am resolved to do something to help. And along with other kindred spirits — the likes of which met in Atlanta — I am building relational bridges to share concerns and plan strategies to address them.

I have already spoken with two other pastor friends, who had similarly positive responses to the gathering, about an urgent need to come together and begin the process locally.

Beyond acquiring a new sense of moderate Baptist identity, my inner spirit was fed in Atlanta. I was deeply moved by the convictions of others in the face of their weariness and loneliness.

I shouldn't have been surprised to discover that some highly visible public servants have been deeply discouraged, but I was. Perhaps I have been so consumed by my own troubles that I didn't bother to think about the fact that others in "high places" might have similar ones. Through them, I was reminded of why I do what I do.

Two and a half days spent with more moderate Baptists than I have ever seen in one place gave me a glimpse of what could be if we did a better job combining forces, albeit our weak, broken, weary, spiritually deprived ones.

The New Baptist Covenant Celebration

gave this tired body and soul a good shot of spiritual adrenaline. It is the only event in my 52 years that has had this effect on me, but it might have been enough to keep me going.

*Connie Stinson, Arlington, Va.  
(Stinson is pastor of Luther Rice Memorial Baptist Church in Silver Spring, Md.)*

## Recognition is worthy cause

EDITOR: Walker Knight did not ask me if he could begin a new Baptist news journal back in 1983, but he did tell me he was going to start one. I remember being less supportive than I should have been.

I was thinking of the void he would create by moving to this new position. I recognize now how perceptive he was. The current *Baptists Today* news journal is a stunning tribute to Walker's perceptive insights concerning the religious needs of 21st-century Baptists.

*Baptists Today* is planning to celebrate this year's 25th anniversary of Walker's decision. I have accepted current editor John Pierce's invitation to chair the anniversary celebration committee because I trust so implicitly in his leadership, have deep confidence in the purpose of *Baptists Today* and want to honor Walker for his courageous decision.

There will be a 25th anniversary ban-

quet on Thursday, April 3, 2008, in the Loudermilk Center in downtown Atlanta. We hope to gather several hundred supporters of *Baptists Today* for this festive occasion.

Daniel Vestal will be our featured speaker, and special tribute and acclaim will be given Walker Knight. Please prayerfully consider:

- Making plans to attend the April 3 banquet and enlisting others from your church and community.
- Promoting attendance in your congregation.
- Becoming an individual sponsor or leading your church to be a sponsor by sending a designated gift of \$250 to *Baptists Today*, P.O. Box 6318, Macon, GA 31208.

We want as much table fellowship with as many supporters as we can assemble. And the sponsorships will help bear the costs of this wonderful opportunity to celebrate our news journal and its founder.

Dinner reservations and additional information are available by calling 1-877-752-5658 or by visiting [www.baptists.today.org](http://www.baptists.today.org). I look forward to seeing you on the first Thursday evening in April in Atlanta.

*J. Truett Gannon, Stone Mountain, Ga.  
(Truett Gannon is retired as pastor of Smoke Rise Baptist Church in Stone Mountain, Ga., and as professor at McAfee School of Theology.)*

## Gator sports mix-up

EDITOR: I enjoyed reading your article on Mars Hill College (February 2008, page 4). In fact, I enjoy reading all your articles.

I was surprised when you opened your comments on Mars Hill with an illustration from the University of Florida, where I retired as Baptist campus minister in 1999 after 27 years — and as Gator chaplain of all sports in 2003 after 17 years.

Correction: It was two national

basketball championships with a national football championship tucked in between, not vice-versa. I was still active with the football team for their first national championship in '96, but had to watch from our seats in the stadium for the next three national championships.

It was a great feeling of satisfaction to know I was where God wanted me to be, touching the lives of great young people of great talent. Keep up the good work.

*Otto M. Spangler, Gainesville, Fla.  
(Editor's note: Thanks, Otto. Sorry for the error. The basketball is the round one, right?)*

This forum gives readers a chance to participate in respectful, though often passionate, dialogue on important issues. Your opinion is welcomed. Please include your name, address and phone number, and limit your letters to 200 words. Send by e-mail to [editor@baptiststoday.org](mailto:editor@baptiststoday.org), by fax to (478) 301-5021, or by mail to Editor, *Baptists Today*, P.O. Box 6318, Macon, GA 31208-6318.

## The fine art of sleeping in church

By John Pierce, posted Jan. 22, 2008  
[www.bteditor.blogspot.com](http://www.bteditor.blogspot.com)

The video of former President Bill Clinton nodding off in church was all over the Internet and morning news shows. The setting was a Jan. 20 service honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at Convent Avenue Baptist Church in Harlem, N.Y.

I come to President Clinton's defense with both empathy and advice. It has happened to everyone except maybe some pagan who has never experienced a long service in a warm sanctuary with padded chairs or pews.

Plus, Marty King III was speaking. Sadly, he didn't get the oratory skills of his late father. Those went to little sister

Bernice.

Though a longtime Baptist, Bro. Clinton seems to have forgotten the trusted three-step plan for sleeping in church.

Instead, he tried unsuccessfully to hide behind the wide preacher. But the wide lens caught him.

For such situations in the future, I offer this advice to both former Presidents who sit on stages during significant services and ordinary pew riders like many of us.

Step one: Place your hands together with fingertips to your nose. This provides both support of the head and the appearance of praying.

Step two: Upon closing your eyes, move your lips a little so people will

think you are praying and therefore more spiritual than sleepy.

Step three: Each time you awaken, nod in affirmation and hope that the preacher just said something with which you should agree. The former President did this step well. But his omission of the first two made the nodding unconvincing.

However, there will be many opportunities in the future for him and the rest of us to work on more refined ways to catch a few Zs in church. It is amazing that after all these years so few have perfected it completely.

Oh, there is one more word of advice: Unless you attend a loud Pentecostal or contemporary service, keep your chin up enough so that you don't snore. **BT**

## Not happy? Get older

By Tony Cartledge, posted Feb. 6, 2008  
[www.tonycartledge.com](http://www.tonycartledge.com)

A line from an old song by Donovan says "Happiness runs in a circular motion ..."

Actually, scientists say, happiness follows a U-shaped path. A recent study shows that people are happiest their younger and older years, and most miserable during middle age.

The study, which incorporated data from two million people in 80 nations, found that people are least happy (or most depressed) at about age 44. In the U.S., women are gloomiest at age 40, while men hit the bottom around 50.

The researchers, at Dartmouth College in Hanover, N.H., and the University of Warwick in Coventry, England, weren't sure what to make of

the data, because it happens around the world and across the board: to men and women, to single and married people, to rich and poor and to people with and without children.

Andrew Oswald of Warwick said "one possibility is that individuals learn to adapt to their strengths and weaknesses, and in midlife quell their infeasible aspirations" — which sounds a lot like jargon for recognizing limitations and giving up on dreams, which can be pretty depressing.

Several factors come to mind. It's my observation that folks in middle age tend to have the most responsibilities and stress in regard to both family and work.

They're deepest in debt, and under the greatest pressure to perform. Their bodies are beginning to show the inexorable effects of aging, and they begin to realize that dreams of sailing around the world, hiking to Machu Picchu, or exploring the Galapagos may never happen.

Younger folks still have so much energy and so much life ahead of them that happiness comes easier. Older folks, generally, have learned to make peace with their place in life, and inner peace is directly correlated to a sense of happiness.

I've always said that growing old is not a bad thing and certainly beats the alternative. And there's more to being old than holding an AARP card and getting senior discounts.

The psalmist spoke of faithful folk in their senior years: "In old age they still produce fruit; they are always green and full of sap" (Psalm 92:14 NRSV).

Speak at as many senior adult events as I have, and you'll see what I mean.

So, if you're middle-aged and miserable, don't let those sore knees and cranky co-workers get you down — you can't get any younger, but getting old is really a good thing. **BT**



**2008 Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Georgia  
 GENERAL ASSEMBLY • April 4-5 • FBC Decatur**  
 Diana Garland, Ph.D., Dean, School of Social Work, Baylor University

<p><b>April 4, Friday</b>          10:00 - 12:00 Coordinating Council          12:00 - 1:00 Lunch for Coordinating Council          1:00 - 2:30 First Session Breakouts          2:30 - 3:00 Resource Fair &amp; Break          3:00 - 4:30 Second Session Breakouts          5:00 - 6:30 Dinner/Business Session          6:45 Pre-Service Music          7:00 Worship: <i>Will Jesus Stand for Us? (Acts 6)</i>          8:30 Dessert Reception</p>	<p><b>April 5, Saturday</b>          7:30 - 9:00 Breakfast          9:00 - 9:30 Resource Fair          9:45 - 10:45 Worship: <i>Who Brought the Tuna Fish Sandwiches? (John 6:1-14)</i>          10:45 - 11:00 Break          11:00 Networks</p> <p><b>Hotels:</b> Double Tree Hotel, 2061 North Druid Hills Rd, 404-321-4174; Holiday Inn Express, 2183 North Decatur Rd, 404-320-0888</p>
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# Outspoken Burleson resigns from IMB

By Hannah Elliott  
*Associated Baptist Press*

GAINESVILLE, Fla. (ABP) — Wade Burleson, the prominent pastor and blogger who railed against what he saw as an excessive narrowing of parameters within the Southern Baptist Convention, has resigned from his position as a trustee of the SBC's International Mission Board.

Burleson, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Enid, Okla., said he also plans to write a book about recent disputes in the denomination.

His resignation came after a Jan. 29 plenary session at the board's meeting in Gainesville. At the meeting, Burleson read a letter he had originally sent to IMB Chairman John Floyd in December. The letter was an apology for violating a rule against board members publicly criticizing IMB policies.

Burleson said the letter was a "good-faith effort" to "apologize for people being offended" and to "live at peace with everyone." But, he said, it became clear during the meeting that the apology would not work, and he quit on the spot.

"I am resigning because I am a distraction to the work of the IMB board," he said Jan. 30. "It was the work of last night's letter to the IMB board to [allow me to] stop being a distraction, and it was not accepted. But I will not go away. I will continue to work to effect change in the Southern Baptist Convention."

The resignation was not planned long in advance, Burleson said, but was prompted by the events of the meeting. Soon after receiving the letter last December, Burleson said, Floyd told him it was an insufficient apology, but that board leaders would present it to the full panel at the Gainesville meeting.

When the IMB executive committee did not report the letter during the Jan. 29 session, Burleson requested and was allowed to read it to the full board.

"I do admit that I have in the past intentionally violated our newly revised internal standards of conduct," Burleson said in the letter. "In particular, I publicly disagreed with certain actions taken by this board, rather than speaking in supportive

terms or staying silent on matters about which I disagreed. ... I want you to know that I never expressed my dissent out of a desire to harm the work of the IMB or any of you, my fellow trustees and brothers and sisters in Christ. Instead, I did so out of an exercise of my conscience."

Burleson said in the letter that he wanted to get along with trustees and would "no longer violate, intentionally or otherwise, our new trustee standards of conduct. If I find myself in disagreement with a policy or proposed policy of the board, I will express my disagreement using the channels that are available — for example, plenary-forum sessions, trustee-forum sessions, and private communication with fellow trustees — but will not take my disagreement outside of those confines to the blogosphere or world at large."

Burleson has long clashed with some of his colleagues on the board. In 2005, IMB trustees voted not to appoint missionary candidates who said they practice "private prayer language" or who have not received "biblical baptism." Burleson protested, saying the board should not create doctrinal requirements for missionaries narrower than the strictures in the SBC's *Baptist Faith and Message* doctrinal statement. He also wrote on his blog that some trustees should not conduct secret meetings to plan the board's formal sessions.

Then, in January of 2006, several trustees requested that Burleson be removed from the mission board. They later rescinded their motion but placed limitations on his involvement with the board, effectively barring him from executive sessions and committee meetings. Other trustees complained that Burleson had broken confidentiality agreements by blogging about IMB business.

Burleson said in the December letter that if the apology was accepted, he would shut down his blog, and if he disagreed with an IMB policy in the future, he would resign.

After allowing Burleson to read the

letter Jan. 29, Burleson said, Floyd told the group the executive committee did not accept the apology. He then dismissed all non-board members to enter a closed session.

Floyd reportedly then told the board the apology was insufficient because Burleson did not apologize for violating the newer standards of trustee conduct that prohibited any public dissent of board-approved actions. Those standards were adopted in 2006, and Burleson has said he intentionally violated them by blogging about his disapproval of the new restrictions on missionaries.

"I intentionally violated that policy for a higher moral good. It is a matter of conscience for me," he said. "I said, 'I will always apologize for people being offended — I want to be at peace with everyone — but I cannot apologize for breaking that policy.'"

It was "the worst policy in the history of the SBC," he added.

"The narrowing of these doctrinal parameters of cooperative mission work is dangerous to our convention and threatens our belief in the historic Baptist principles of the sufficiency of Scripture, cooperative missions, and religious liberty," he said in his resignation letter, posted on his blog ([kerussocharis.blogspot.com](http://kerussocharis.blogspot.com)). "Worse, the 2006 revised trustee standard of conduct that prohibits public dissent is unconscionable, unbaptistic, and will one day be viewed by Baptist historians as a tragic mistake."

Burleson said he plans to spend the time he'll gain from not participating as an IMB trustee by documenting other missteps by convention leaders.

"The point of the book is not a tell-all of the IMB, though there will be illustrations from the dangerous effects of stifling dissent, moving beyond the [*Baptist Faith and Message*] on doctrinal policy and attacking people who disagree," he said. "It is a wake-up call to Southern Baptists that we better start cooperating despite our differences, or we will dry up and shrivel away as a convention." **BT**

— Robert Marus contributed to this story.



Wade Burleson



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# slowing down *to a snail's pace*

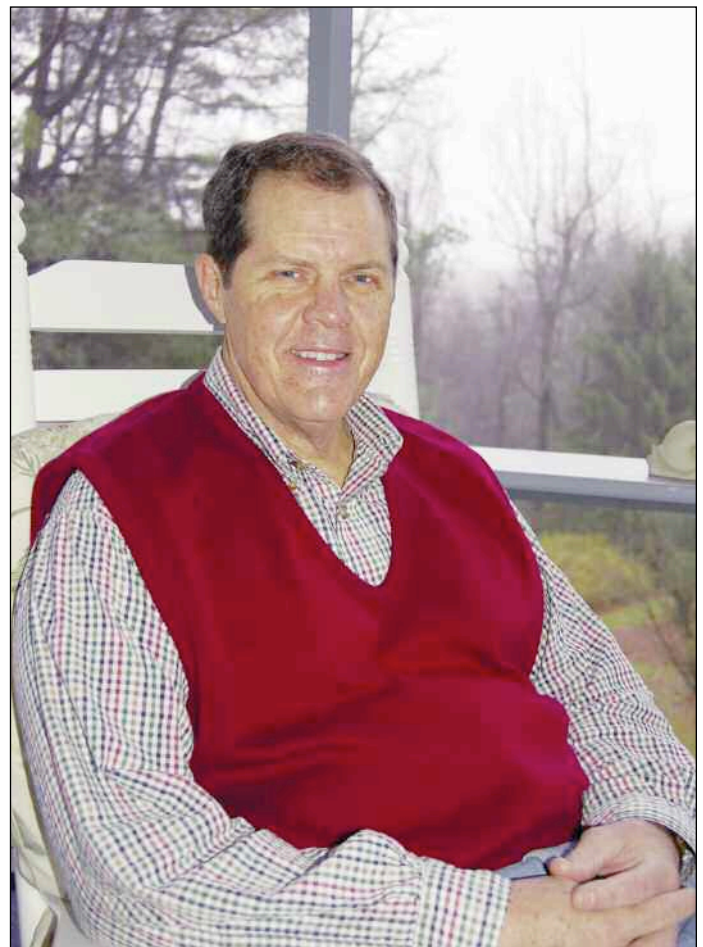
## Baptist pastor helping others to find rest and restoration

SALUDA, N.C. — After 34 years of pastoral ministry, mostly in two upstate South Carolina churches, Randy Wright headed in a new direction early last year. He now labors so others can rest.

“I have only been here for a year, but have heard testimonies that are very inspiring,” said Wright, who completed a 22-year pastorate at Fernwood Baptist Church in Spartanburg, S.C., the end of 2006 to become executive director of The Snail’s Pace retreat center in Saluda, N.C. “I have met some incredible, deeply spiritual people.”

For several years, Wright had taken advantage of the spiritual and emotional benefits of getting away for rest and restoration in the relaxed setting near the quaint mountain town the late crooner Perry Como liked to call home. The Snail’s Pace is comprised of three houses — and a one-person “hermitage” or studio — offering retreats for individuals and small groups.

In 2005, he was asked to join the female-dominated board of directors. The ministry had begun in the late ‘60s when two women, Connie Furrer and Frances Dudley, discovered a shared calling to begin a retreat center.





The two Episcopalians started saving money in snail-shaped ceramic banks to purchase the century-old “little house” with a welcoming front porch. Two other houses were added to the four-acre site in following years.

Both Wright and assistant director Linda Welch are trained spiritual directors available to provide their services or simply a place for those retreating. Some persons come individually, others as a group.

“A spiritual director is someone you can talk to about what you sense God is doing in your life,” said Wright, noting that the concept is not well known among many Baptists. “It is someone who is willing to walk alongside you — to listen and ask questions.”

Wright said the role of a spiritual director is different from that of a counselor or other mental health professional. “Spiritual direction is focused on listening to God and trying to understand how God is active in your life.”

The discipline of spiritual direction, both formally and informally, has been significant in his own life, said Wright. That practice, along with other benefits of retreating is something he is eager to share with others — especially ministers who tend to spend a lot of emotional and spiritual energy that is not replaced.

“I’m trying to get pastors to come here, saying: ‘Let us take care of you for a change.’”

The ecumenical retreat center is owned and operated by a non-profit board and relies on donations and suggested fees for guests. Details are available at [www.snailspace.org](http://www.snailspace.org).

“There has been a lot of pain and agonies shared here as well as joy and discoveries,” said Wright.

One woman returns each year on the anniversary of when she once attempted suicide. It has become a way of joyfully celebrating her life.

Church staffs come for planning. Preachers come for sermon preparation. Women’s groups, Sunday school classes and church leadership councils visit too.

An Episcopal search committee seeking a new bishop did their deliberations at The Snail’s Pace as well.

“Mostly, we provide the hospitality — not the program, but the place and the meals,” said Wright. “I think we do it well.”

The daily routines have changed for Wright — who lives at the center most of the week — from his time in pastoral



ministry. He simply sees what needs to be done at the retreat center and does it.

He has built a rock garden and repaired a deck overlooking hemlocks and rhododendrons. He has improved a walkway, tiled floors and added fresh paint as needed.

“I’ve done stuff I didn’t know how to do,” said Wright, who helps in the kitchen as well.

“Meals are important here,” he said. “A lot of what I do is around the table and in the kitchen.”

At one point last year, Wright recalled, he was washing dishes after a group dinner and thinking this was a different career path than he anticipated while earning two seminary degrees and gaining pastoral experience. But he was having fun.

“At the heart of it, service with a purpose is all we are called to do,” said Wright, relaxed and eager to help others to make that discovery. **BT**

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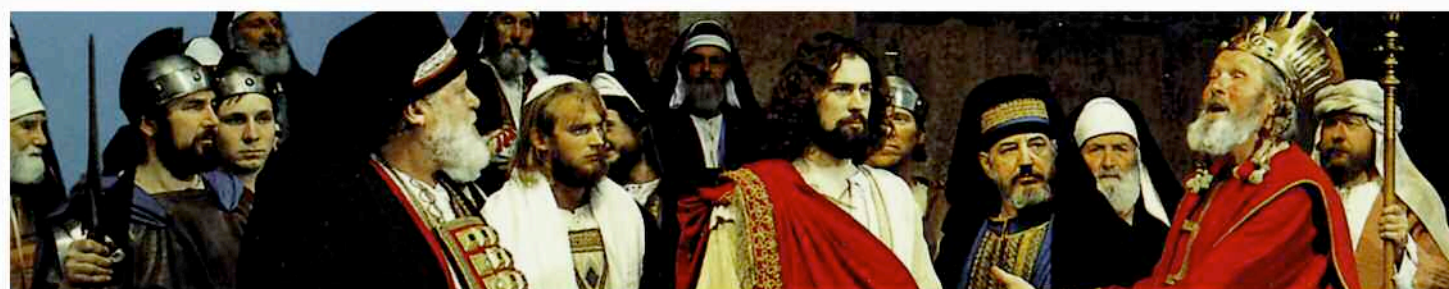
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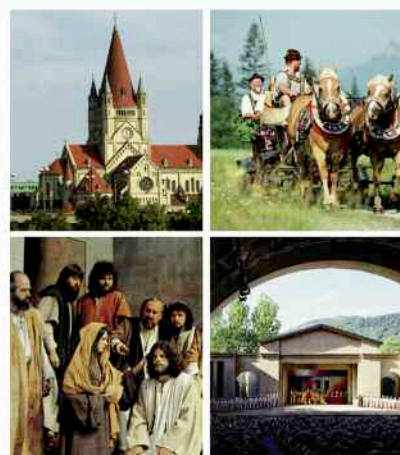
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# the media shelf

Reviews by John Pierce

## What Should We Believe About Jesus?

E.B. Self

Ben Self is a Baylor, Harvard and Vanderbilt-trained pastor/professor. He takes a close look into the life and teachings of Jesus.



Self provides insight into how various world religions view Jesus and explores the picture of Jesus offered in the Gospel accounts. His writing is scholarly, but highly readable.

This book is a good resource for teaching and preaching about the central figure of our faith. In chapter four, he explores the various ways the death of Jesus is interpreted with insights into the strength and weaknesses of each theory.

As Self notes: "With a person as powerful and as profound as Jesus, there are many interpretations."

Chapter six could be a jumping-off place

for a teaching or preaching series on the various titles/roles of Jesus, including teacher, prophet, priest, king, Son of Man, Son of God, Messiah and Savior.

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## Fed Up with Fundamentalism

A Historical, Theological and Personal Appraisal of Christian Fundamentalism

Leroy Seat

Longtime Baptist missionary Leroy Seat is fed up with fundamentalism. But he is being thoughtful and reflective about it.

His work is not a rant, but rational and amazingly thorough. One gets the sense this book had been growing within the author and needed to be written even if no one read it.

But we should read it. It is a careful and detailed blend of testimony, Baptist history, Christian ethics and theological reflection

from one who recalls and interprets the significant shift in Southern Baptist life over the last three decades that affected him personally.

Seat and his wife, June, served 38 years as Southern Baptist missionaries to Japan where he, for the last eight years, was chancellor of the 10,000-student Seinan Gakuin University.

He began writing this book on Sept. 1, 2004, his last day of employment with the Southern Baptist International Mission Board.

"The final years of our missionary career," he writes, "were clouded by a strong shift to Christian conservatism, interpreted by many as fundamentalism, and we were caught in the stormy winds of change which led to our being forced to retire as Southern Baptist missionaries."

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# a job well done

## Dedicated Gulfport volunteers leave lasting impression

**G**ULFPORT, Miss. — North Carolina Baptists who spent a year or more in Gulfport helping victims of Hurricane Katrina say they'll probably take a little time off, but feel sure God has more for them to do.

After rebuilding more than 700 homes in the Gulfport area, N.C. Baptist Men (NCBM) officially wrapped up relief efforts in the area Jan. 12-13. Local officials such as Mayor Brent Warr showered praise on the Tar Heel volunteers, who returned the keys to an old armory they completely refurbished to use as headquarters for the rebuilding efforts.

Eddie and Martha Williams, of Liberty Hill Baptist Church in Spruce Pine, N.C., coordinated efforts in Gulfport. They described their 28-month commitment as an exciting journey.

"I think God has used this to train us for something else," said Eddie Williams, always looking ahead.

He was among the first N.C. Baptists to arrive in Gulfport after the hurricane hit in August 2005. Martha joined him in October.

In the early days three couples worked and lived in Gulfport, sleeping briefly each night in recreational vehicles or trailers in a parking lot. The staff eventually grew to 16.

"God put a lot of good people in our pathway," Eddie Williams said.

Others who served long-term in Gulfport were Gary and Edith Holland, Elmer and Barbara Farlow, Curtis and Joyce Thrift, Don and Syble Freeman, J.E. and Betsy Skinner, Scott and Janet Daughtry, Tom Kimball, Bobby Suggs, and Charles Abernethy.

Martha Williams said that whenever someone was leaving, God would send someone to take their place. During the summer of 2006, more than 1,000 N.C. volunteers were working in the Gulfport area each week. At the operation's highest point, more than 1,200 volunteers were helping.

Eddie Williams oversaw the entire operation to make sure everything was running smoothly. He was willing to do whatever



**Gulfport mayor Brent Warr talks with Eddie and Martha Williams about N.C. Baptist relief efforts that rebuilt more than 700 homes.**

needed to be done.

"I wouldn't ask anything of the volunteers that I wouldn't do myself," he said.

Martha Williams, who previously worked as a controller, entered data and made sure the finances were in order. She will long remember the elderly men and women who needed help.

"Over and over they'd say, 'Without your help, I don't know where I'd be,'" she said. "I'll never forget their faces and their love for us."

Eddie Williams said he will always remember the kindness of the people. He said it wasn't uncommon for N.C. Baptists in their well-known yellow shirts and hats to be stopped in a grocery store or at a traffic light by someone wanting to thank them.

Now the Williamses plan to help NCBM leaders launch a new missions warehouse and operational center in Red Springs, N.C.

Gary and Edith Holland, members at Windy Gap Baptist Church in Franklin, N.C., were the rebuilding coordinators for the Gulfport mission. They arrived in late 2005.

The couple matched volunteer work

teams with needs and made sure materials were on-site, so teams could start working as soon as they arrived.

Edith Holland said they encouraged volunteers to listen to the Gulfport residents who "all have a Katrina story to tell."

J.E. and Betsy Skinner of Memorial Baptist Church in Williamston, N.C., served as warehouse coordinators until December 2006. They were replaced by Curtis and Joyce Thrift, members of Emmaus Baptist Church in Pittsboro.

While most of the volunteers were N.C. Baptists, workers came from 42 states and several other countries to help rebuild Gulfport. Many came back multiple times. In all, more than 30,000 volunteers helped storm victims in and around Gulfport.

"The Lord's blessed so much," Joyce Thrift said. "He just kept sending people."

The Thrifts said serving God in missions is a blessing. And Curtis warned: "If you don't want to go back, don't go the first time." **BT**

—Steve DeVane is managing editor of the *Biblical Recorder* where this article first appeared. Used by permission.

## guest commentary

# Baptists find renewed message

By Joe Phelps

**F**ifteen thousand ministers and laypersons representing churches across the land met recently in Atlanta under the banner of the New Baptist Covenant to offer a progressive voice for Baptists. All Baptists in North America were invited, and every major group signed on except Southern Baptists.

This ground-breaking event affecting millions of Baptists received no coverage in my part of the country, but was an image-changing, agenda-shifting event worth the attention of people even beyond Baptist borders.

That black, white and Hispanic Baptist groups met together seems hardly significant, though it was a historic first meeting of its kind. The three-day event was organized and orchestrated by a cross-section of leaders from participating conventions and fellowships.

There were obvious differences in practices (the crowd more animated and participatory when black pastors spoke; quiet and reflective for a white speaker) and in beliefs (we differ on who can preach, who can join and what the text says here or there).

But differences were tolerated, even welcomed, because of what united us. I think we were being brought together by a deeper understanding of the Baptist concept of conversion.

For too long, personal conversion has been the sum total of the Baptist message: become a disciple, then go make disciples. My childhood memories as a Baptist are of conversion sermons three times a week (twice on Sundays, once on Wednesday).

We were also encouraged to do good

deeds but, truth be told, it was too often a kind of bait and switch: we mostly did good things in order to impress non-believers in hopes that they might be attracted to the faith and be converted. We were conversion machines.

The New Baptist Covenant recognizes there is more to Jesus' message than saving souls for heaven. Jesus' inaugural sermon quotes from the prophet Isaiah about good news for the poor, blind, prisoners and oppressed, and proclaims a new day.

Converted people — that is, those who respond to the call to be Jesus' disciples — are charged to re-enact his sacrificial, healing compassion for the least and last in our world.

We progressive Baptists still seek to convert people, not only to an ideology, but also to active participation in caring, healing, becoming good news for broken people, and not merely as a ploy for recruitment.

With so many Baptists in the U.S., this new self-understanding could have many hopeful, helpful implications for our community.

Coupled with this deeper, more faithful understanding of conversion is a deeper understanding of one of Baptists' most cherished principles: the separation of church and state.

Baptist children are taught that our forebears championed the Bill of Rights' First Amendment that protects both religion and government from each other.

Somewhere along the way, however, we falsely assumed that this Baptist hallmark limited our voice in the public square. We were told that politics and religion don't mix, that churches should only focus on personal conversions instead of worrying about today's needs.

The notion that politics and religion

form a toxic cocktail was exacerbated in the last two decades when fundamentalist Baptists used partisan politics as a way to promote their particular religious agenda. They rewrote history to their liking, turned the First Amendment disestablishment clause on its ear and worked to restore the U.S. to its supposed place as a Christian nation.

Progressive Baptists wanted no part of this bastardized history or this partisan scripting of politics. So some worried when politicians were invited to the Atlanta gathering, fearing that partisan politicking and electioneering would creep into the agenda.

What we are discovering is that there is a profound difference between sectarian partisan politics that seek power and politics that selflessly focus on the common good of all people regardless of religion or practice.

The New Baptist Covenant was political but not partisan. It focused on Jesus' concerns for poverty, child welfare, equality, the environment and other issues that affect the common good.

It never once came close to promoting one candidate or party over the other, but rather held up those concerns we believe Jesus would champion. This approach felt faithful to our Baptist heritage and to the people of our communities who need us to be our best. **BT**

—Joe Phelps is pastor of Highland Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky.



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Marcus Kimmie, 8, eats at a church supper at Broadway United Methodist Church in Cleveland. Many churches have revamped the traditional church supper to meet the changing needs of busy families. Religion News Service photo by Lynn Ischay/*The Plain Dealer* of Cleveland.

## Church suppers change to meet changing needs

AKRON, Ohio — Andrew Hamilton can still taste the homemade apple, cherry and peach pies that capped off the church suppers of his youth in Lakeville, Mass.

Those were the days when children played on their own for hours while adults spent Sunday afternoons in conversation. The church seemed like one big family, said Hamilton, 44, pastor of Akron's Springfield Church of the Brethren.

**E**very Thursday night, his church opens its weekly supper to the community, and about a third of those who attend aren't even church members. It's all part "of an authentic witness sharing the basic necessities of life with people in the community," he said.

Still, those leisurely feasts of food and fellowship are few and far between. Today's church supper is a different meal, one that often features a simpler menu — sandwiches and soup or fast food — and has a more complex purpose.

Churches still offer meals to promote the joy of community, but they also hold them to evangelize, serve

the needy and to encourage people to come to programs.

"The church supper has extended beyond Sunday," said Psyche Williams-Forsen, assistant professor of American studies at the University of Maryland. "Many churches are finding more creative uses for the church supper."

Ask religious leaders about the church suppers of their youth and they smile and gaze off into the distance. People who grew up in the 1960s or earlier remember a simpler lifestyle before 24/7 superstores, travel soccer tournaments and wall-size televisions with hundreds of cable channels.

*What separates many of the church suppers today from meals offered in past generations is that they are open to the community.*

At that time, many Christians not only reserved what they considered the Lord's Day for church, but they also stayed after the morning service to share a community meal.

In many Baptist and Pentecostal churches, people would stay all day. The noon meal was a bridge between morning and afternoon or evening services.

Then came the rise of Sunday shopping and the movement of women into the work force in large numbers. Few people were willing to devote entire Sundays to church.

Now in many churches, clergy say, some congregants don't let the door hit them on the way out to children's activities, movies, shopping trips or televised sports.

"We allow other things to crowd in. Breaking bread together was a form of fellowship," said Rodney Maiden of Providence Baptist Church in Cleveland. "I do think something is missing" without the opportunity for table fellowship.

Some congregations have made adjustments to make it easier for members to attend church suppers.

A couple of years ago, Westlake United Methodist Church started providing the

main dish at its quarterly potluck suppers. That allows young parents to bring an appetizer or dessert, or even come empty-handed.

Since the change, attendance has almost doubled, from 50 to 100 people, with more young families, said Judy Wismar Claycomb, the church's pastor.

Deaconess Judy Hoshek of the Northeast Ohio Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America said making sure people don't have to worry about preparing dinner is one reason for the growing popularity of a weekly Lenten program that offers a meal beforehand.

More than half of the 204 synod churches now offer it.

The meals are simple soup and a sandwich so they offer busy church members sustenance and the chance for fellowship and spiritual reflection without burdening volunteers with the responsibility of preparing something elaborate, she said.

Broadway United Methodist Church in Cleveland offers weekly meals after religious-education programs on Wednesday nights. The menu can be as simple as hot dogs and chips.

Last year, the church began a quarterly

family dinner after Sunday services. On those days, worship attendance often increases from around 35 people to more than 50.

Like the church suppers of days past, the meals provide time for conversation and a way to get to know one another, Yvonne Conner said.

"This is what people really respond to," she said. "And we have good food."

What separates many of the church suppers today from meals offered in past generations is that they are open to the community. In Cleveland, St. Luke's Episcopal Church invites members and neighbors to its family night every Wednesday.

David Bargetzi, rector of St. Luke's, sees this combination church supper-neighborhood outreach program as an expression of Christian community that dates to ancient times.

About a third or more of the 100 to 120 weekly diners are among the 60 to 80 people who worship on Sundays. The homeless, working poor and other neighborhood folks also come for meals, such as roast pork.

Bargetzi stands at the door greeting people by name, while "prayer waitresses" walk around asking people for prayer requests.

A 63-year-old man on Social Security who lives up the street and worships at St. Luke's said he enjoys leaving the house and seeing people he knows at the suppers.

"Everybody's real friendly," said Lee, who declined to give his last name. "Some churches you go to, they treat you like you're a piece of dirt. Here, they treat everybody the same." **BT**

—David Briggs writes for  
The Plain Dealer in Cleveland.



Markesha Kimmie, 10, arranges Kool-Aid for a supper at Broadway United Methodist Church in Cleveland. Religion News Service photo by Lynn Ischay/*The Plain Dealer* of Cleveland.

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