



BR BIBLICAL RECORDER

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WHEREVER YOU GO, WE GO

Missionary couple takes on many roles

By **KATE GREGORY** | **IMB**

Wherever you go, we go. First Baptist Church in Oxford, Miss., made this commitment to Jeff and Liesa Holeman long before they began serving as International Mission Board (IMB) missionaries in 2008. It started a decade earlier when Jeff became student minister at the church, located in the town of the University of Mississippi. He led the youth group to make return missions trips to Brazil.

Matter of time

In 2003, during a Sunday morning service at Oxford, Jeff felt called to overseas missions fulltime.

Jeff jokingly says he did what he was supposed to do by going home and telling

Liesa, who had been at home caring for a sick child, “We’re going to be missionaries.”

“It didn’t go well,” he smiles. It wasn’t that Liesa didn’t feel a tug toward missions, but she thought that would be later in life after their children were grown. In the meantime, she thought she would continue to work as a criminal investigator for Mississippi’s state tax commission, and the couple would spend their children’s formative years doing student ministry together.

It turned out they would, just not how she had thought.

The Holemans stayed in Oxford for the next few years until they took their two children with them on the church’s mission trip to Brazil in 2006. The children responded so well that the family then

went on a trip to Southeast Asia to help lead activities for the children of missionaries during a retreat.

Talking with the missionary families gave Liesa the reassurance she needed about raising a family on the international mission field, and the Holemans were appointed by IMB at the end of 2007.

First Baptist, Oxford, partnered with the Holemans where they first served in Peru. Then, in the three years since the Holemans have begun serving as cluster strategy leaders in Oaxaca, Mexico, the Oxford church has adopted the Tlacolula Valley Zapotec people group in that area.

“They didn’t just send us,” Jeff says, “they want to be a part.”

“We have a huge support group behind us ... they don’t let go of us,” he says.

[See Go page 8](#)

Moldova partnership increases passion for missions

By **K. ALLAN BLUME** | *BR* Editor

Bobby Blanton’s recent visit to Moldova was his third in a four-year international partnership of two churches. The multi-level relationship between Lake Norman Baptist Church (LNBC) in Huntersville and Agape Church in Chisinau, Moldova, has become more relational than either church originally expected.

The Lake Norman church, where Blanton is senior pastor, works with a network of pastors in Moldova to spread the gospel by equipping leaders, providing jobs, ministering to orphans and delivering nutritious meals to families in need. But every layer of the partnership is rooted in disciple-making.

“Discipleship has been my focus in ministry this year,” Blanton said. As he prayed about what he should teach the Moldovan pastors during the Sept. 7-13 mission trip, his burden was to encourage these pastors in disciple-making.

The theme “was born out of what God has been doing in my life, and what I have been investing in our staff and church membership recently,”

[See Moldova page 9](#)

SUPPORT A MISSIONARY

Consider an amount based on the average cost of supporting a missionary:

\$51,400 a year

\$4,283 a month

\$988 a week

\$141 a day

Photo above: Some of the youngsters that Liesa Holeman visits at a children’s home will return home with their families after a couple months of specialized care, so she has learned to take every opportunity to share the love of Jesus with them. (IMB photo)

Celebrate the One who holds everything together

Take a few minutes in your Christmas celebration to look at Jesus Christ in a different way.

The apostle Paul described the incomparable nature of Christ to the Christians who met in the city of Colossae. In the first chapter of the letter to the Colossians he described Jesus as “*the image of the invisible God*,” in verse 15. Paul said Jesus created everything. Verse 16 reads, “... *all things have been created through Him and for Him*.” In the next verse he made an astounding statement, “... *in Him all things hold together*.”

The words “hold together” are one word in the original Greek language of scripture. The King James Bible translates this, “consist.” Here’s the meaning: Jesus is the glue that holds everything in place. The consistency of everything stays intact where He is worshiped as Lord. Without Him, everything falls apart; everything comes unglued.

Christmas is about the One who holds everything together. The child whose birth we celebrate is the One who keeps order in a rebellious society. He injects civility into the world of uncivilized men and women whose fallen tendency is to tear things apart.

Not only is Jesus the One who holds everything together, He is also the Divine Contractor who reconstructs lives that have been ripped apart by sin. That’s why He endured the cross. He paid the price for our salvation so we could be forgiven, put back together, restored.

Notice two important truths. First,

no one and nothing can hold this crazy world together except Jesus. No politician, no ideology, no religion, no amount

of money, no power – nothing keeps the world from coming unglued, except Jesus. Second, no one and no thing has the power to put broken lives back together, except Jesus.

So, when Jesus is welcomed into our lives and His principles are woven into our culture, we see order in both worlds. He holds everything together.

When Jesus is uninvited, pushed out of our personal life or forced out of the social order, everything falls apart. The evidence for this is overwhelming.

Those who reject our celebration of Christmas are completely blind to the truth that they are rejecting the One who is “order.” In ignorance they are dismissing the One who keeps chaos from becoming commonplace. They do not know that God loves them enough to bring order into their bewildered lives. That’s why we proclaim Him!

Our international impact

Are we really serious about the Great Commission? We’re about to find out. The significance of the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering (LMCO) is being tested right now. In a few weeks we will know if our churches “get it” or if the LMCO is just another one of those routine things we do.

In 2009 Southern Baptists hit a high mark, supporting 5,600 missionaries on the international mission field through

the International Mission Board (IMB). Since then, reduced financial support for missions through the Cooperative Program and LMCO has forced IMB leaders to decrease the number of missionaries to about 4,800. That number needs to be reduced again to at least 4,200 – perhaps to 4,000 – by early 2016 in order to operate within the offerings we give our missions personnel.

So IMB is cutting personnel at least 12.5 percent and up to 16.5 percent, depending on how many missionaries respond to the Voluntary Retirement Incentive they were offered in September, and depending on how many additional missionaries will be eliminated due to trimming some positions in 2016.

IMB has already reduced the work force more than 14 percent since 2009. Our low giving patterns now require another 12.5 to 16.5 percent reduction (4,800 to 4,200 or 4,000) this year.

If churches are serious about responding to the immediate crisis, each church needs an LMCO offering that is 12.5 to 16.5 percent higher than last year’s LMCO

gifts. That does not allow for increasing our missionary force. It only permits the status quo.

If we want our missionary force to return to 2009 standards, churches should consider an LMCO that is 33 percent above last year’s gifts. Excessive? Impossible? Not at all. Our God specializes in doing the impossible.

IMB President David Platt reminds church leaders, “It’s actually the local church that is the agent that God has promised to use for accomplishing the Great Commission.” The cutbacks are not an IMB problem. This is a local church problem. The local church is both the source of missionary funding and the beginning point for the mission vision.

Remember, IMB does not send out missionaries. Local churches send missionaries; IMB’s role is to serve the local church by facilitating international missions. I hope we still believe that.

The staff of your *Biblical Recorder* wishes you a very joyous celebration of the birth of Jesus – the One who redeems and holds everything together. **BR**

5 Facts about Lottie Moon

Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

Every December for the past 127 years, Southern Baptist churches around the world collect millions of dollars for missions through the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. Here are five facts about the missionary Lottie Moon:

1. Charlotte Digges “Lottie” Moon was born in 1840 to a family of affluent tobacco farmers. She was well-educated and became one of the first women to earn a Master of Arts degrees at an institution in the southern U.S. On July 7, 1873, the Foreign Mission Board officially appointed Lottie as a missionary to China, where she would serve and work for forty years.

2. When she first came to China, Moon had a rather snobby view of the Chinese, considering the people and their ways to be inferior to Americans.

But in 1885 Moon moved to the countryside and became the first American woman to attempt to live exactly as the Chinese did, adopting their dress and language and showing a greater appreciation for their culture. Her efforts helped to ingratiate her with her Chinese neighbors. Moon told the Mission Board, “I am more and more impressed by the belief that to win these people to God, we must first win them to ourselves. We need to go out and live among them, manifesting the gentle and loving spirit of our Lord. ... We need to make friends before we can make converts.”

3. In 1888, a handful of women dedicated to the cause of missions founded Woman’s Missionary Union.

Moon suggested they collect a Christmas offering to send missionaries to China and to help her and support her work. That initial Christmas offering collected \$3,315 (roughly \$75,000 in 2015 dollars) and was named for Lottie Moon in 1918. Since it’s inception almost \$4 billion has been collected for the fund, including \$154 million in 2013.

4. Affected by the famine caused by the conflict and plagues in China, Moon often shared her meager food and finances with the people around her. This affected her health and in 1912 she weighed only 50 pounds. Her friends and colleagues attempted to send her back to the U.S. but she died en route at the age of 72.

5. Moon’s life has been memorialized in a motion picture (“The Lottie Moon Story”), books, a cookbook, children’s biographies, playlets, Christmas cards, and recordings. In China, a monument to her was erected in the yard of Dengzhou Baptist Church in 1915, bearing her name, a brief explanation that she was an American missionary, and the words “How she loved us.” Moon is also honored with a feast day (December 22) on the liturgical calendar of the Episcopal Church (USA).

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Should we not be more like the wise men?

Every year around this time, Gloria and I spend time reflecting on the Christmas story. We rejoice with the angel who proclaimed the good news, we are in awe of God's glory as the shepherds were, and we feel grateful like Mary did when she found a place of shelter in the stable.

This year in particular, however, we feel the determination of the wise men who made the decision to follow a star. This star was not an ordinary star.

This particular star led them to the King of kings, the Lord of lords. In reflecting on this story, have you ever wondered what compelled these men to pick up and embark on a journey that many scholars believe spanned a few years?

Could it have been security? Were they so certain of the outcome of their search that they were willing to leave their hometowns, their families and pos-

sible loss of life? Surely, these men would have felt more secure if they had stayed at home instead of leaving to follow after a star.



MILTON A. HOLLIFIELD JR.
BSC executive
director-treasurer

But no, the wise men knew that what lay at the end of their journey was worth far more than their own comfort. Though it must have seemed irrational, they were willing to risk wasting years of their lives on a journey to find the one, true King.

Should we not be more like these wise men? Are we willing to lay aside our comforts – and even our plans for our life – to be a committed Christ follower? Can we not give our entire life to Him who promises to lead us through whatever struggles and triumphs we might encounter on the path of life? Isn't that what Jesus meant in Luke 9:23-25? This invitation was not intended only for those who want to make an "A+" in following Jesus.

In comparison, think about this, Jesus has not asked

us to do anything more than what He was willing to do for us. He came not only to be the babe of Bethlehem in the manger, but to become the Savior of those He created.

Jesus came to live in total surrender and die a purposeful death on a criminal's cross. He, who never sinned, became sin for us so that the cost of our spiritual redemption could be paid in full. Jesus gave the greatest gift so that our lives, our eternal destiny could change.

This Christmas season, will you ask God for the same determination to follow Him and worship Him as the wise men demonstrated?

I am confident that as we seek Him all the more, we will see the beauty of the One who loved us enough to give Himself for us at Christmastime.

"Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is He who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him'" Matthew 2:1-2 (NKJV). **BR**

BAPTIST PERSPECTIVES: UNDERSTANDING YOUR FAITH

What Baptists believe about the Bible

What do Baptists believe about the Bible? The overwhelming majority of Baptists, including the author of this column, believe that the Bible is an inspired and authoritative revelation from God. It is trustworthy and does not err. It should serve as the norm for all of life, including not only what happens in church worship or personal devotion, but in cultural engagement and public activity.

Why do Baptists believe this? There are a number of ways to answer the "why" question, and a number of biblical passages to which we could turn, but for the purposes of this article, we will rely upon 2 Timothy 3:10-17. As Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, he was a prisoner in Rome. His cell was probably a hole in the ground, and he probably did not have a bed, toilet or even a light.

He was facing imminent death and was "passing the baton" to younger men in the ministry. This difficult situation is one that highlights the significance of every word of Paul's letter.

At the beginning of the passage, Paul makes clear to Timothy that the context of Christian life and ministry is one of opposition (10-12). Next, he points out that the opposition we face will come from "evil men" who are outside of the church and from "impostors" who are inside of the church (13). Then, finally, in light of such opposition, Paul gives his counsel to Timothy:

But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, "and that from childhood you

have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (15-17)."



BRUCE ASHFORD

In the face of opposition, Paul counsels Timothy to cling to the revealed word of God. This written word will profit Timothy and the church by teaching them to walk in the truth (doctrine), pointing out to them when they have wandered off the path (reproof), helping them get back on the path (correction), and guiding them as they stay on that path for the rest of their lives (instruction in righteousness).

God's revealed word serves as a norm for the totality of our lives. It provides for us the "true story of the whole world," a grand overarching narrative that teaches us about God and about ourselves.

It teaches us where we came from, what has gone wrong, and how God through Christ saves us from what has gone wrong. It shapes us into the type of people who can be witnesses to Christ, in both our words and actions, even – and especially – when we face opposition.

(EDITOR'S NOTE – Bruce Ashford is provost, dean of faculty and professor of theology and culture at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. This is part of a series of columns highlighting perspectives from Southern Baptists about various topics relating to doctrine. It appears regularly in the print publication and online.) **BR**

Submissions for Tar Heel Voices

Please send no more than 300 words, along with contact information, to editor@BRnow.org or Biblical Recorder, P.O. Box 1185, Cary, NC 27512-1185.

Only one letter from the same writer will be published in a 90-day period.

All submissions will be edited by Recorder style guidelines. Have questions? Call (919) 847-2127.

P.K. PREACHER'S KIDS

BY DAVID AYERS



New team aims to help churches in revitalization efforts

By CHAD AUSTIN | BSC Communications

The story still haunts Milton A. Hollifield Jr. to this day.

It came from an illustration during a sermon Hollifield heard preached years ago by former Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) President Jim Henry. Henry told of a time when he was visiting another city to preach. While there, Henry noticed a church in the distance that appeared to be closed down.

Curious, Henry went closer. The church's doors were indeed closed, and a sign hung on the boarded-up door. Again, Henry went closer.

"Closed," the sign read. "Gone out of business. Forgot what the business was."

Hollifield, executive director-treasurer of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina (BSC), hopes the formation of a new team at the convention will help other churches avoid a similar fate.

The goal of the new church health and revitalization team is to help struggling churches become vibrant congregations that are focused on the mission of God. Hollifield announced the new team during his report to messengers at this year's BSC Annual Meeting in Greensboro, following approval by the Executive Committee of the BSC Board of Directors.

"We're trying to help churches understand what the business is all about – reaching and discipling people," Hollifield said.

"I'm very excited about this team and how churches are going to be helped with the people that we will have working across the state."

Brian Upshaw, who recently led the BSC's disciple-making team, became the team leader for the new team Dec. 1. Upshaw will work with a team of contract workers throughout the state who will work with individual churches in revitalization efforts.

"I believe church revitalization is critical to the mission of God," Upshaw said.

"It's important to see the local church healthy, outwardly focused and to be the sending agency God wants us to be."

The new team will be part of the BSC's evangelism and discipleship group led Lynn Sasser, executive leader.

"This is not a church growth program, per se," Sasser said.

"This is a program that is intended to help churches grow by doing the right things, focusing on the right areas and by making disciples."

The church health and revitalization team will focus on four priorities – disciple-making, church health, church planting and missions mobilization – which align with the convention's ongoing strategy of "impacting lostness through disciple-making."

"Church revitalization is not compartmentalized," Sasser said. "It's a very

broad approach that intersects with all the work that we do at the convention."

The team will employ a three-fold process in working with churches. Those phases include a focus on developing a church's leadership, internal ministry and external mission, utilizing both individual coaching and team consultation.

In the coming months, Upshaw will begin to discover, enlist and train contract workers throughout the state who will work with individual churches. Sasser said the team hopes to enlist 10-12 workers by the first half of 2016, with plans to increase that number as the team works with more churches. Upshaw will also be

developing a number of resources to assist the contract workers in their efforts.

BSC leaders said they became convinced of the need for a church health and revitalization team as they examined the statistics and data from research conducted on the overall decline of church health. The numbers, they said, were staggering.

Citing research conducted by the North American Board (NAMB), only 27 percent of SBC churches experienced

growth between 2007 and 2012. Additionally, other research showed that across all denominational lines, approximately 3,500 churches close each year.

NAMB research also shows that 70-75 percent of SBC churches in North America are either plateaued or declining, and an additional 10-15 percent of SBC churches are either at or near risk. Taken together, those figures suggest that an estimated 80-90 percent of churches are in need of revitalization.

More alarming, BSC leaders said, is that most churches do not know they need help or where to turn to get it.

BSC leaders also spoke with representatives from other state conventions and found that those that were making progress related to church revitalization had an individual or team in place devoted solely to that task.

"I am excited about this team, and I felt like this was a step we had to make," Sasser said. "This is a hard work, this is a difficult work, and it's not a quick work."

"But the No. 1 thing that had to happen for us to move forward successfully is that we had to have someone on our staff dedicated to church revitalization."

(EDITOR'S NOTE – Contact Brian Upshaw at buphsaw@ncbaptist.org or (800) 395-5102, ext. 5632.) **BR**



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Texas refugee battle grows as Baptists continue ministry

By **SETH BROWN** | BR Content Editor

Despite the legal battle Texas leaders wage with the federal government over the resettlement of Syrian refugees, many Baptists retain their tireless commitment to share the gospel with their Muslim neighbors.

Texas has received 238 refugees from Syria since 2012, ranking it second highest in the nation, according to a National Public Radio report. Another 21 Syrians were slated to arrive by Dec. 11. Hundreds more will likely follow in the coming year.

In September, President Barack Obama ordered his administration to prepare for the admittance of up to 10,000 Syrian refugees in fiscal year 2016, due to the humanitarian crisis created by Syria's civil war.

A few days after the Nov. 13 terror attack in Paris, France, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott joined 30 other state governors in a call to halt the resettlement of Syrian refugees until stricter immigration policies could be implemented.

"We're not going to accept any more refugees from this dangerous zone," he said.

A Syrian passport was found near the site of one of the Paris bombings, and Islamic militants supporters have allegedly expressed intent to infiltrate the West while posing as refugees, prompting heightened safety concerns by many state leaders.

Ken Paxton, Texas Attorney General, filed a lawsuit against the federal government Dec. 2 to stop the relocation of Syrian refugees into the state, saying resettlement agencies failed to consult with state authorities in advance. The suit also requested a temporary restraining order against refugees from Syria until the matter was settled.

On Dec. 4 the request for a restraining order was withdrawn, but the suit for advance notice continues, according to the Attorney General's website.

U.S. presidential hopeful Sen. Ted Cruz announced Dec. 8, in a joint press conference with Gov. Abbott, a piece of legislation that would require the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement to notify all states of incoming, eligible refugees 21 days in advance of their arrival.

The bill, called the State Refugee Security Act of 2015, would also allow governors to reject refugees if he or she were not satisfied with the eligibility vetting process.

In addition, Cruz proposed a three-year moratorium on the resettlement of refugees from any country where terrorist groups control a significant amount of territory.

Attorney General Paxton made a second attempt at blocking incoming Syrian refugees by federal suit, but U.S. District Judge David Godbey rejected the action Dec. 9.

In the request, Paxton cited reports allegedly confirming attempts by Islamic militants to infiltrate the U.S. through the refugee program. Godbey said the reports were "largely speculative hearsay."

Tim Ahlen, pastor of Forest Meadow Baptist Church in Dallas and unreached people groups consultant for the Dallas Baptist Association, said the legal action to block refugees was "a misguided attempt to pander to the fears of American people for political gain."

Forest Meadow encounters many Muslim refugees – some Syrian – through their church planting efforts and English-as-Second-Language program, according to Ahlen, who also serves as the executive director for a collaborative church planting effort called the Great Commission Initiative.

Twelve Syrian refugees were scheduled to arrive in Dallas and Houston Dec. 7, though resettlement agencies have not confirmed their arrival.

Another nine were slated for reloca-

tion to Texas on Dec. 10, according to news reports.

Nathan Lino, lead pastor of Northeast Houston Baptist Church and president of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, said ministry to Syrian refugees is complex, and political controversy has created a "crisis of belief."

He explained in a blog post on the church's website: "In our culture's crisis of belief, two main lines of argument have broken out: one that advocates national security and one that urges compassion and hospitality to Muslim refugees."

Lino, a graduate of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., was a trustee for the International Mission Board (IMB) for eight years. He said part of his time with the IMB

spent on the North Africa and Middle East strategy committee. He has taken numerous trips to the region.

"They are my great passion," said Lino. "I've stood on a mountain overlooking Syria and heard the ka-boom of a bomb, and I've watched the mushroom cloud rise in the air. Women and children were murdered by that bomb, men trying to provide for their

families too. ... If my mind has been conformed to the mind of Christ, I am, like Him, going to look at humans suffering and feel lots of compassion and grief and be moved to do something about it."

Lino's view is shared by his congregation as they reach out to refugees in their city in practical, evangelistic ways.

Though the ministry is important, he said, it's not easy.

One of the difficulties in ministering to Syrian refugees is finding them. "Our city is huge," he said, "and it's not advertised where they are."

Four to six members of the church are normally devoted to locating and engaging refugees. They cooperate with the local resettling agency to find out names and phone numbers for incoming refugees.

Volunteers often pick them up from

the airport and help refugees move into their new homes.

The team helps war-weary families acclimate to life in the U.S. Learning public transportation schedules and registering children for school are small but vital activities that Northeast Houston church members help newly arrived families accomplish.

Life for non-English speaking refugees can be difficult and overwhelming. Volunteers do their best to build relationships with them, "so we can get to the gospel over time," said Lino.

The church has also put together more than 150 shoeboxes with presents for refugee children in Houston. The boxes include contact information for the family that gathered the gifts. They hope to befriend the children and their families.

Though Northeast Houston's outreach is close to his heart, national security is an equal concern for Lino.

"I have had personal encounters with Muslim radicals in Iraq, the West Bank, Egypt, Libya and Sudan," he said.

"I've also encountered them in London, Paris and Marseille. I've been told not a few times, 'when we get done in these countries, we will come to America and the blood of your children will flow.'"

He continued, "I have major concerns about our national security. I want refugees and immigrants of any kind to be thoroughly vetted. I think those who want to be considered for asylum in our country should recognize that terrorists are hard to detect and practice the same religion as the asylum seekers, and therefore understand and accept our desire for asylum seekers to be properly vetted."

Immigration policies are not abstract for Lino, they're personal. He was born in South Africa, and his family immigrated to the U.S. when he was in middle school.

"My family was vetted by the U.S., and I'm grateful," he said. "I do not think it is at all un-Christian to protect my wife, children, aging parents, loved ones and the nation to which I've pledged allegiance." **BR**



NATHAN LINO

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Send Network offers free e-books for church planters

By **SETH BROWN** | BR Content Editor

The Send Network of the North American Mission Board (NAMB) has released a free e-book, called *Send: Bible Studies for Releasing the Church*. The resource, available at sendnetwork.com/ebooks, stands in a line of more than 20 e-books written by church planters for church planters.

Dustin Willis, director of events for NAMB, said, “We really just want to see people succeed in their mission. ... This is just a simple way to put practical resources out there for them.”

The goal is for healthy churches to plant more churches, Willis continued, and that means helping everyday missionaries, church leaders and lead church planters implement their gifts and talents on mission.

“We want to do everything we can to resource around that idea,” he said.

Much of the content is theological in nature, but it is practical as well. That’s by design, said Willis.

The latest release is a six-week Bible

study that includes follow-up questions and assessments to aid Christians as they discover how to fully engage in the mission of God.

It’s intended to mobilize small-groups or church planting teams.

Other Send Network e-books are targeted at individual church leaders, or specific roles in the church, such as “Nuts & Bolts: Getting Started as a Church Planter” or “Partners in Planting: Help & Encouragement for Church Planting Wives.”

Willis emphasized the real-world benefit of the resources. “We’re not the experts,” he said. “We want to point our pastors and planters to other pastors and planters who have been there and done that.”

More resources are scheduled for release in the coming months, such as a peer-to-peer coaching e-book, written by Dino Senesi, director of coaching for the Send Network. Additional e-books related to military church planting and biblical counseling are slated for release as well. **BR**

NEWS BRIEFS

Women in combat: DOD change spurs discussion

(Baptist Press) In a Dec. 3 announcement, Defense Secretary Ashton Carter said “there will be no exceptions” to permitting women to enter elite combat forces “as long as they qualify and meet the standards,” according to *The Washington Post*. Owen Strachan, president of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, said, “We men ask women to provide for us, to do all the work around the house, to disciple the kids and even to die for us. These are shameful days.” Mimi Haddad, president of Christians for Biblical Equality, said scripture and history both point to the qualification of women for combat service.

SACS lifts Louisiana College probation

(Louisiana Baptist College) The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools’ Commission on Colleges (SACS) has removed Louisiana College from probation. SACS placed the Baptist-affiliated college on probation in June 2014, citing issues related to trustee governance, institutional integrity, personnel policies and audit findings that pertain to some financial control matters and student financial aid. Rick Brewer, president of Louisiana College, said Dec. 8, “Due to the hard work of former interim president Dr. Argile Smith and his senior administrative team, [SACS] removed every citation but one.”

Falwell’s guns, ‘Muslims’ remarks spark debate

(Baptist Press) Jerry Falwell Jr. revealed he carries a concealed weapon, and urged students (age 21 and up) to do the same at Liberty University, where he is president. Falwell referenced “Muslims” and the terrorist attack that left 14 people dead in San Bernardino, Calif. “Let’s teach ’em a lesson if they ever show up here,” Falwell said during convocation Dec. 4 at the Virginia university, two days after the Dec. 2 shooting. Falwell’s remarks were reported by *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, Fox News, CNN and an array of media across the country. Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe called Falwell’s comments “rash and repugnant.”

Study: New churches appeal to unreached

(LifeWay Research) More than 4,000 new churches opened their doors in 2014, outpacing the 3,700 that closed, according to estimates from LifeWay Research, based on input from 34 denominational statisticians. On average 42 percent of those worshipping at churches launched since 2008 previously never attended church or hadn’t attended in many years, LifeWay found in an analysis of 843 such churches from 17 denominations and church planting networks. The church planting study indicates newly planted churches are more effective than existing ones at drawing people who aren’t connected with a church, said Ed Stetzer, LifeWay Research executive director.

Full stories available online at BRnow.org.

Russell Moore’s critique of Trump draws media focus

By **DAVID ROACH** | Baptist Press

Southern Baptist ethicist Russell Moore has renewed his criticism of Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump, drawing a wave of media attention for denouncing the businessman’s proposal to temporarily prevent all Muslims from entering the U.S.

“Anyone who cares an iota about religious liberty” should denounce Trump’s “reckless, demagogic rhetoric,” Moore, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC), wrote in a Dec. 7 blog post that had been shared 17,000 times on Facebook by the morning of Dec. 9. In addition, the post was republished by *The Washington Post* and *The Christian Post*.

Media outlets across the country reported on Moore’s comments, and he appeared on CNN Dec. 8 to discuss Trump.

A Dec. 7 press release from Trump’s campaign said the candidate is “calling for a total and complete shut-down of Muslims entering the United States until our country’s representatives can figure out what is going

on.” The release cited a Center for Security Policy poll that surveyed 600 Muslims in the U.S. this summer, according to the group’s website, and found 25 percent believed “violence against Americans here in the United States can be justified as part of the global jihad.”

Moore wrote that government has “a limited authority” and “cannot exalt itself as a lord over the conscience.”

“The government should close the borders to anyone suspected of even a passing involvement with any radical cell or terrorist network,” Moore wrote. “But the government should not penalize law-abiding people, especially those who are American citizens, for holding their religious convictions.”

Baptists long have regarded religious liberty as a Bible-based principle, Moore wrote, noting that Revolutionary-era Baptist preacher John Leland – for whom the ERLC’s Washington office is named – specifically defended the religious liberty of Muslims.

“Make no mistake,” Moore wrote. “A government that can shut down mosques simply because they are mosques can shut down Bible studies because they are

Bible studies. A government that can close the borders to all Muslims simply on the basis of their religious belief can do the same thing for evangelical Christians.”

On CNN, Moore said Trump’s proposal sounds more like “a science fiction movie released for Christmas-time” than rhetoric from “the presidential race for the office held by leaders such as Washington and Lincoln.”

Moore continued, “The freedom of religion is not a government grant. Donald Trump did not give it to us, and he can’t take it away. God gave us freedom of religion and conscience.”

Some voters likely support Trump “because he is giving an appearance of strength and toughness over a president who seems not to know what to do,” Moore said. But Trump’s proposal to protect America by asking people, in effect, to “hand over [their] freedoms” is “a bad bargain.”

“What we need is to have somebody deal with the repressive regimes and structures in the Middle East, and protect the homeland from terror, and do it within the framework of the U.S. Constitution,” Moore said.

See Trump page 16

Free BR subscription aims to inform, strengthen churches

By CHAD AUSTIN | BSC Communications

Joining a new church can be overwhelming. There's a lot to learn about the church, the staff, various ministries and the denomination to which it belongs.

Southern Baptist churches are experiencing an increase in members who are coming from other denominations and have a limited understanding of Southern Baptist's background and beliefs.

A new service being offered by the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina (BSC) and the *Biblical Recorder* aims to help those new members better understand what it means to be a Southern Baptist and part of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC).

Beginning in January, new members of Southern Baptist churches in North Carolina coming from non-SBC backgrounds will be eligible to receive a free, one-year subscription to the *Biblical Recorder*, the state's longstanding Baptist news journal.

The goal of the program is to strengthen churches by informing and educating new church members about the missions and ministries of the SBC, BSC and affiliated churches. Cooperation is at the heart of all that Southern Baptists do in missions and ministry. The BSC and the

Biblical Recorder want to help new Southern Baptists better understand how we cooperate locally, statewide, across the nation and around the world.

"Our desire is to invest in these new members who are joining our churches to help them understand the value of all we do as Southern Baptists to fulfill the Great Commission," said Milton A. Holifield Jr., executive director-treasurer of the BSC.

Allan Blume, editor of the *Biblical Recorder*, said the free subscription program will help these new Baptists better understand things like Southern Baptists' strong support of missions through the Cooperative Program, its network of seminaries and work of entities such as the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC).

"People will often say, 'I didn't realize Southern Baptists had this much going on,'" Blume said. "This is an opportunity for us to assist churches in communicating to these new members who we are as a denomination and how we work together as North Carolina Baptists and as Southern Baptists."

Additionally, Blume said the *Biblical Recorder* plans to run a series of articles throughout 2016 that highlight the beliefs and history of Baptists.



Churches are asked to contact the *Biblical Recorder* to submit the names and addresses of members of their congregations who are eligible for the free sub-

scriptions. The only requirement for the free subscription is that individuals be new members of a Southern Baptist church and be from a non-SBC church background.

For more information or to submit subscription information, contact Liz Tablazon, circulation manager for the *Biblical Recorder*, at (919) 459-5693 or liz@BRnow.org. Subscription information may also be submitted at newBR@ncbaptist.org.

"We hope churches will take advantage of this opportunity to get the *Biblical Recorder* into the hands of more of their members," Blume said.

"I'm grateful to partner with our state convention to make this program possible because I believe it will ultimately help strengthen churches and encourage them in their Great Commission mission." **BR**

LGBT rights group contests N.C. religious freedom bill

By SETH BROWN | BR Content Editor

A law passed earlier this year, allowing N.C. government officials to opt out of performing marriage ceremonies due to sincerely held religious objections, has been challenged in a federal suit by the Campaign for Southern Equality and others, according to the *Citizen-Times*.

The Asheville-based LGBT rights group claims Senate Bill Two is unconstitutional, saying it allows magistrates who oppose same-sex marriage to place their religious beliefs above their sworn duty.

The N.C. bill was passed June 11 after being vetoed by Gov. Pat McCrory and subsequently overridden by the General Assembly.

Two weeks later the U.S. Supreme Court decided same-sex marriage is a 14th Amendment right, making it legal in all 50 states.

Meghann Burke, an attorney in the suit, told the *Citizen-Times*, "Senate Bill

Two seeks to undermine the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling and uses taxpayer funds to promote a single, particular religious viewpoint.

"... When a magistrate is acting within his or her official capacity, he or she is the government. Government has no right to establish, promote, or respect a particular religious viewpoint."

The lawsuit states, "[Senate Bill Two] deliberately and maliciously, compromises, impairs, and violates the constitutional integrity of the judicial system that must guarantee due process of the law to gay and lesbian citizens."

Tami Fitzgerald, executive director of the North Carolina Values Coalition, said, "While these activists may now have a right to homosexual marriage, they do not have a right to force dissenters to perform it," according to a *Citizen-Times* report.

The suit was filed Dec. 9 in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of North Carolina. **BR**



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Continued from page 1

“That’s a two-way street. We value our relationship with one another. Just because we’re out of sight, we’re not out of mind. We know this because of the way they love us.”

Earlier this year, a mission team from Oxford spent a week alongside Jeff and Liesa, teaching English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) and leading medical clinics. For some on the team, their children had been in Liesa’s preschool class at the Oxford church and in the youth group led by Jeff. For others, they had taught the Holemans’ children in Sunday School.

Oxford member Buster Hale had been part of Jeff’s first mission trip to Brazil. He’s served alongside him on trips to both Peru and Mexico.

“We’ve watched Jeff and Liesa grow,” he says. “We’ve been a part of raising them in the Lord.”

Jeff and Liesa met while attending Ole Miss and became a part of the Oxford church.

“That’s who first invested in me – my church,” Liesa says. “We want other churches to do the same ... God called the church to do this. And we as missionaries have a responsibility to help our churches touch, feel and understand our stories ... to help them understand the importance of going to the nations.

“When they sent us,” Liesa says, “they told us they would come alongside us. It’s amazing to see that they sent us, and now they are coming themselves.

“They invested in me. I want to take the time to invest in others.”

Jeff’s home church, First Baptist Church of Yazoo City, Miss., also had taught him the value of international missions. Yazoo City member Gene A. Triggs had served as chairman for the Foreign Mission Board (now IMB) for four years. Layman Lawrence Owen Cooper had been president of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1973-74. And, the church was home to comedian Jerry Clower for 34 years.

Mission: Make God known

The Holemans mentor dozens of students and young adults from across the U.S. serving in Oaxaca as summer, semester and two-year missionaries, many of whom return to the mission field for extended terms of service.

Sarah Toles from The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, Ala., worked with the Holemans for four months as a Hands On missionary in Oaxaca before returning to Birmingham to work as a nurse. This year, she went back to Oaxaca on a short-term mission trip to help medical professionals from First Baptist, Oxford, conduct medical clinics there.

“They’re like family,” she says of the Holemans. “They would invite us to their home. They would check in with us to make sure we were connecting not only there but with loved ones back home.”

A student minister at heart, Jeff realizes the impact short-term missions can make.

“God uses short-term missions to open our minds and hearts about what it means to be available to God and to question, ‘Why am I here?’

“We were created to make Him known,” Jeff says. “Our role is making His Name known around the world. Obedience is asking, ‘Where do You want me to go to do that?’”

Nearly every unreached people group in Mexico is represented in the U.S., Jeff says. “My prayer is that U.S.



IMB missionary Liesa Holeman is led by Angel, a blind boy who has grown up at the Casa Hogar children’s home. His positive attitude is an inspiration to Holeman, as well as the other children there who face physical disabilities. (IMB photo)

churches become aware that cross-cultural missions isn’t just something they can do in other countries, it’s something they can do in their own cities, and it will equip these people groups to share the gospel in their own countries.”

Similarly, the Holemans have helped Oaxaca Christians to intensify their evangelistic efforts both in Oaxaca and abroad. Jeff guided Iglesia Biblica Evangelica Lluvias de Gracia in Oaxaca to plan a trip to Guatemala.

“‘I’ll get you connected,’ Jeff told us,” says Juanita Perez, a member of the Oaxaca church. “He’s just full of resources.

“Oaxaca’s been so blessed by missionaries,” says Juanita, noting the student teams and missionaries who have served there. “Now, it’s our turn to go.”

Declare His glory among the nations

Find resources for churches at imb.org/offering and hispanos.imb.org/lottie (Spanish language) to learn more about and promote the Lottie Moon offering. While Southern Baptists are encouraged to give to the offering through their churches, a Donate Now option is available for individual online gifts.

(EDITOR’S NOTE – Kate Gregory writes for IMB.) **BR**

“We have a huge support group behind us ... they don’t let go.”
– Jeff Holeman

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Moldova

Continued from page 1

Blanton said. “We want to make disciples who will make disciples. So I tried to lay a foundation of what a disciple is and how a disciple is different from a simple believer. I tried to encourage those guys to invest themselves more narrowly into individuals who will make disciples.”

Most of the pastors live in remote villages. Resources are very limited and economic opportunities are marginal. They have no Bible training so they appreciate every opportunity to learn and fellowship.

“Those guys are really the salt of the earth,” said Blanton. “I’m so humbled to be around those men. When I stand there and try to offer what little I can as far as teaching and training, I realize they have studied the Bible and they know the Bible. But I feel like I can give them a little breadth of understanding and how to approach some passages.”

In addition to the Bible teaching, Blanton brought two large duffel bags of men’s clothing for the pastors. The idea came from a woman at LNBC whose husband died this year. She wanted to donate his clothes to pastors in Moldova. “Those pastors just grabbed it up,” he said. “They had big smiles on their faces and were so pleased.”

Ron Hoppe is LNBC’s volunteer missions coordinator. He manages the Moldova partnership and other mission activities for the church. He is supportive of Blanton’s focus on discipleship. “The natural overflow of [disciple-making] will be increased passion and energy that is directed to missions. That’s the essence of being a disciple. Discipleship and missions are two sides of the same spiritual formation coin,” he said.

Food ministry

In September 2014 LNBC volunteers packed 70,000 dehydrated meals in cooperation with Feed the Hunger (feedthehunger.org), a ministry based in Burlington. Through a generous arrangement with FedEx, 40,000 of those meal packets were shipped to Moldova and were distributed by more than a dozen pastors and their churches throughout the year. The *Biblical Recorder* reported on this project in the April 11, 2015, edition and on *BRnow.org*, posted April 7, 2015.

“It is encouraging to us to see how something as simple as a meal packet was able to be used in a number of scenarios,” Hoppe said. “They’re not just handing out a meal. It is a tool for these pastors to reach out and to spread the gospel and to demonstrate the gospel in action in their communities.”

Pastors are using the meal packets to reach out to families, providing children



A group learns how to package food at Lake Norman Baptist Church in Huntersville. (Contributed photo)

and adults with much-needed nutrition in the poorest country in Europe. Sometimes teams from LNBC assist with special distribution events. The meals open many doors for building relationships, according to the pastors.

But the real work for the food ministry happens between mission trips, Hoppe emphasized. On Oct. 30-31 LNBC held a second pack-a-thon. More than 500 volunteers packed 125,000 meals this year, compared to the 300 volunteers who packed 70,000 meals the previous year. “I believe this increased volunteer participation is a reflection of being able to share with them how the meals packed in 2014 were being used and the impact they were having on ministries in diverse places,” he said.

Meals packed in 2014 were shared with people in the greater Charlotte area, in Greensboro and Siler City. The meals were used an outreach tool by a new church plant in West Virginia and most recently helped to feed families displaced from their homes as a result of the flooding in South Carolina. Other meals went to Moldova, Ukraine and Haiti.

“This is an initiative in which the entire church family can participate,” Hoppe added. He saw five-year-old children and 85 year-old adults working at the pack-a-thon.

“But the packing of meals is not the end of the effort; it is really just the beginning,” he said. Meals packed this year will go primarily to Haiti and Moldova. LNBC teams will be part of the larger distribution of meals to those who need both physical and spiritual food. The total cost of each six-meal packet is only \$1.56.

As the meals were packed into shipping boxes, a slip of paper containing a scripture and the names of everyone involved in packing those particular meals was placed in each box. As the boxes are delivered and opened, those slips of paper will be returned to LNBC. Everyone who packed the meals will get a report on

where ‘their’ meals went. They will see photos and hear stories about how the food was used.

This is not an isolated effort according to Hoppe. “At Lake Norman in all of our missions efforts – whether they are overseas, local or somewhere in the United States – we’re focused on not doing events. We’re looking to form relationships and partnerships. That may be at the Charlotte Rescue Mission or in very modest facilities in Moldova. We want to journey with those partners.”

Employment ministry

The journey includes other outreach thrusts. Hoppe said the leadership of LNBC asks, “In everything we do, are we really being effective, not just in relieving sort of a stress or a need that exists today, but are we considering how we can encourage and support the work so that it will go forward in an efficient way?” Simply doing charitable work is not acceptable. They want to see lasting change.

Adequate employment is a great need in Moldova. LNBC works with small business leaders to find gainful employment for men in a rehabilitation ministry center who are struggling with addictions. The church is partnering with a boot maker in a very modest facility with the goal of employing these men. Hoppe said, “This little boot making operation provides a few of the men with something meaningful to do and some basic financial support. They’re being productive and able to gain some self-worth. It also generates resources for that ministry and has the potential to expand the ministry.”

Orphan ministry

Another concern Hoppe discussed is the orphanage structure in Eastern Europe. It has been a significant part of the social order, but it is changing. “The orphanage system in Eastern Europe is breaking down,” he said. “Governments

want to get these children out of the large, old facilities that need significant repair. Sadly, many of these kids are being returned to the families they were taken away from.”

When the children are between ages 15 to 17 the orphanage requires them to leave. “What happens to them when they are forced to leave?” Hoppe asks. “The system says, ‘we’ve brought you as far as we are going to bring you, and you are on your own.’”

Moldova is one of the leading locations for sex trafficking, he adds. Alcoholism is rampant. Suicide is at a high rate among young men. In response LNBC is developing a foster care system for Christian families in Eastern Europe and in the United States. “They need a solid family structure that is speaking the Word of God to them. At the end of the day if it does not center around the gospel, it’s not going to be successful,” Hoppe said. The long term goal is that orphans who go through the foster care system will get vocational training, be able to support themselves and to become independent.

The church has also embraced a strong conviction about adoption that the Moldova partnership has strengthened. He said, “At Lake Norman we have a very deep, deep commitment to supporting life – whether that’s through our local pregnancy center, or through families in our church who are actively involved in hosting international orphans. Sometimes the outflow of hosting is adoption.”

LNBC has a strong record of adoption both within the church and modeling adoption to others in their community. Many of the internationals their families adopt have special needs. They hope some of the children they are working with in Moldova will be adopted by families in the states.

Blanton said LNBC believes packing food, distributing food, adoption, orphan care and equipping pastors are part of disciple-making. **BR**

500 follow Christ at Columbus County crusade

GO Tell Ministries

Amid calls from emergency personnel to stay home during a 1,000-year flood, more than 800 people made commitments to Christ during the Rick Gage GO TELL Columbus County, N.C., Carolina Crusade on Oct. 4-7. At least 500 of those decisions were for salvation.

The total four-day attendance at the South Columbus High School Gymnasium in Tabor City was estimated to be above 10,000.

The GO TELL and BMX bike teams spoke to 4,000 students in seven school assemblies. Youth evangelist Steve Paysen challenged students to be winners in the game of life.

Other guest speakers included Tony Nolan and Adrian Despres with NewSong as musical guests.

Crusade chair Brenda Jolly said, "After a year of intensive planning, work, organizing, training and praying with all of our hearts, we opened the first night of the crusade amidst predictions of the '1,000-year flood' at South Columbus High School Gymnasium – not the football stadium as we had planned for all those months. We held off making the final decision of whether to proceed or not until 3 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 4, mainly due to county emergency agencies broadcasting for people to stay off the roads for their own safety."

Some pressed to cancel the event for the protection of those who would drive to the crusade.

The executive team prayed and decided to go forward, changing the venue to the gym rather than the outdoor stadium.



A four-day attendance in Columbus County, N.C., during a Rick Gage GO TELL crusade is estimated to be more than 10,000 people. (Contributed photo)

Jolly said, "Instead of canceling, we flooded the airways and social media with the confirmation that the crusade would go on, but for everyone to make wise choices about their personal safety, and if the roads in their area were not safe, please stay home and pray!"

The decision was confirmed when more than 400 counselors walked in the arena, with their Bibles, umbrellas and smiles.

"I could barely believe my eyes when people began to arrive and we actually needed an overflow room to hold the audience," she said. Approximately 1,200 people attended the opening night and 80 decisions for Christ were listed.

"Each night the crowd grew – as did decisions – with the culmination of over 300 decisions on Wednesday night," Jolly said.

Decisions recorded by counselors totaled more than 800 people of "all ages, walks of life, races and gender. Other opportunities surrounding the week of the

crusade yielded 25 decisions at the North Carolina Boys and Girls Home and 19 at two prisons."

Adding the decisions made prior to the crusade from messages preached by Rick Gage and Steve Paysen to those registered at the crusade, the total decisions for Christ were estimated to be close to 1,000.

"To me, it was as if God said, 'OK, you have worked, planned and executed on every level possible. Now step aside and watch what I am going to do' – and, boy, did He," Jolly said.

The benefits of the event extended beyond the public gatherings, according to area leaders. Christians are reported to be networking together now as never before – regardless of denominations, races, cultures or other boundaries.

Jolly listed a variety of decisions that included:

- A news reporter covered the GO TELL Columbus story from the beginning. Conviction set in, and on

See Crusade page 15

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Baptists respond to ‘prayer shaming’ after Calif. massacre

By SETH BROWN | BR Content Editor

In bold letters, the sentence “God isn’t fixing this” dominated the Dec. 3 cover of the *New York Daily News*. Images of tweets from Republican leaders surrounded the headline, displaying sympathetic “thoughts and prayers” for the people affected by a Dec. 2 mass shooting.

The massacre occurred in San Bernardino, Calif., at Inland Regional Center, a state-run facility for individuals with developmental disabilities. Two heavily armed assailants dressed in tactical attire opened fire at a party located inside the building, killing 14 and wounding 17 more, according to the *Los Angeles Times*.

“Our prayers are with the victims, their families, and the first responders in San Bernardino who willingly go into harm’s way to save others,” said GOP presidential candidate Sen. Ted Cruz shortly after the massacre was reported.

The scathing subhead for the article, written by Rich Shapiro, called Cruz and others “cowards who could truly end gun scourge” that “continue to hide behind meaningless platitudes.”

Russell Moore, president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, said in a *Washington Post* article, “I’m hard-pressed to think of a more cynical and exploitative headline at a time of national mourning.”

Shapiro wrote in the first line of the *NY Daily* story, “Prayers aren’t working,” and quoted a tweet referring to gun control by Connecticut Sen. Chris Murphy, “Your ‘thoughts’ should be about steps to take to stop this carnage. Your ‘prayers’ should be for forgiveness if you do nothing – again.”

Emma Green, in an article for *The Atlantic*, called the sharp critique “prayer shaming.”

She said, “There’s a clear claim being made here, and one with an edge: Democrats care about doing something and taking action while Republicans waste time offering meaningless prayers.”

Albert Mohler Jr., president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., addressed the issue in his podcast, *The Briefing*, early Dec. 3.

He began by pointing out the oddity of a politi-

cally liberal news outlet demeaning Republican leaders for reacting to a tragedy by sharing “thoughts and prayers” since Democratic leaders, such as U.S. Vice President Joe Biden and Chelsea Clinton, daughter of Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, made similar statements only months ago after a mass shooting in Oregon.

“This cynicism offers a view into just how much religion and politics have changed in the United States,” said Green.

Mohler declared, “It tells us something about our contemporary political scene and about the continued secularization of America that the words ‘thoughts and prayers’ have now become a matter of political debate.”

Yet, the issue is not wholly political, said Mohler.

“From a Christian perspective we have to understand that more than a response to the phrase ‘thoughts and prayers’ is at work here,” said Mohler. “*The New York Daily News* after all, in that screaming headline, declared ‘God isn’t fixing this.’ That is something Christians need to note very, very carefully.”

Though the issue has been politicized, it is not political at its root. There is a deep moral longing in all people for the problems of this world to be solved, according to Mohler. He continued, “Christians looking at this have to understand that nothing – no law, no political action – can actually solve the problem – can ‘fix it,’ as the *New York Daily News* demands – because the problem is in the human heart, not just in the events that come with horrifying headlines.”

The insufficiency for governmental, educational, psychological and other solutions to truly fix the problem of human violence points to the necessity and propriety of prayer in the face of murderous evil, according to Mohler.

“[The Christian] reflex to prayer is not a matter of public gesture, it is a matter of heartfelt concern, or at least it certainly ought to be,” he added. “We are both humbled and horrified from the biblical perspective in understanding the brokenness of the human heart that is reflected in the brokenness of the world.”

Only God can, and one day will, “fix it.” Yet, that doesn’t preclude the necessity for Americans to have a meaningful discussion about gun control, Mohler implied.

“[W]here there is the possibility of doing something that will really decrease the potential for human evil,” said Mohler, “we ought rightly to do it.”

Moore agrees: “I have no objection to people making the case for tightened gun control – even if I don’t agree with all their proposed solutions.

“Let’s have that debate. ... The ‘prayer-shaming’ on social media, however, is not really about that

Daily News Twitter photo

debate at all.

“What most meant by ‘do something’ was to, well, express an opinion about gun control on Twitter. Ironically, enough, the ‘Don’t Just Pray There, Do Something’ meme will actually keep things from happening.”

He concluded, “We do believe that God can intervene, to comfort the hurting and even to energize ourselves and others for right action. For those who don’t believe in the power of prayer, the last thing any of us should want is social pressure to pretend to pray.

“What we can expect, though, is for neighbors to express in whatever ways they have, ‘We love one another, and we hurt for one another.’ When that becomes just another culture war battlefield, we’ve lost more than a set of policy proposals.

“We’ve lost the social cohesion we need to do anything.” **BR**



Christians among victims in California attack

By SOPHIA LEE | World News Service

Two weeks before he died, Nicholas Thalasinis, a 52-year-old Messianic Jew, engaged in a heated discussion about the nature of Islam with his colleague Syed Farook. That day, the two San Bernardino County restaurant inspectors argued about whether Islam is a peaceful religion – Thalasinis said it isn’t, and Farook disagreed, saying Americans don’t understand Islam, according to a friend who overheard the debate.

On Dec. 2, Farook strapped on black tactical gear, loaded up assault rifles, and charged into a local social services center with his young wife, Tashfeen Malik, and sprayed about 75 rounds into a room where his co-workers were holding a holiday banquet. Officials now say Malik

pledged allegiance to Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) using a Facebook account under a fake name.

At least one of the bullets fired by Farook and Malik hit and killed Thalasinis. He is one of 14 victims who died that day. His wife, Jennifer Thalasinis, also a Messianic Jew, said her husband became born again two years ago and was always evangelizing: “He wanted to serve the Lord and bring more people to the Lord.” He also was a passionate defender of Israel and his other conservative political and religious views. She believes her husband was “martyred for his faith and beliefs.”

As terror, chaos, and speculation fills San Bernardino, a mostly working-class community in Southern California, stories of the victims are also trickling out through sorrowing loved ones. Late Dec. 3, authorities released the 14

shooting victims’ names: 12 were county employees, the youngest 26, the oldest 60. Most were Farook’s friends and colleagues.

Bennetta Betbadal, a 46-year-old county health inspector, was 18 when she fled Islamic extremism and persecution of Christians after the Iranian Revolution, according to a statement released by her family: “It is the ultimate irony that her life would be stolen from her by what appears to be the same type of extremism that she fled so many years ago.” She and her family came to New York first, but she eventually met and married her husband Arlen Vedehey, a police officer, in California. They have three children aged 10, 12, and 15.

When Michael Raymond Wetzel, a 37-year-old supervising environmental health specialist, went silent after

the shooting, his wife Renee Wetzel, a stay-at-home mother with six children, quickly turned to her friend’s mommy blog for prayers: “My husband was in a meeting and a shooter came in. There are multiple people dead/shot. I can’t get a hold of him. Please pray that he is OK.”

Once she learned her husband was one of the victims, she posted Psalm 61:2 on Facebook: “When my heart is overwhelmed; lead me to the rock that is higher than I.”

Wetzel’s updated Facebook profile picture shows a sunlit, smiling family with the oldest son holding the youngest baby daughter, who wore a pink flower headband.

An online fundraiser for the widow and her family on the blog, Lil’ Mamas, racked up more than \$60,000 in donations within a day. **BR**

Completion of Ark theme park expected July 2016

By **KRISTEN LOWRY** | Kentucky Today/Baptist Press

Modern-day construction crews will finish in about a year what it took Noah a century to do: build an ark. Work on the life-sized replica of Noah's Ark is expected to be completed and opened for visitors on July 7, 2016.

The infrastructure of the mammoth boat rises above a rural swath of rolling farmland in Williamstown, Ky., about a half hour south of Cincinnati. Cranes are doing the heavy lifting, putting massive wooden beams in place some four stories high.

Ken Ham, co-founder and CEO of Answers in Genesis, said the Ark Encounter theme park is opening on schedule despite the state of Kentucky refusing to provide a hoped-for package of tax incentives.

Answers in Genesis, the company building the ark, already operates a Creation Museum in nearby Petersburg.

The Ark Encounter will be open for "40 days and 40 nights" during its first 40 days of operation, in reference to the 40 days and 40 nights of rain described in the Bible as the flood commenced.

When completed, the ark is expected to be the largest timber-frame building in the world at 510 feet long.



"It's really not commonplace for a conservative Christian organization to actually be building such a world-class, professional themed attraction as the Ark Encounter," Ham said. "But by the grace of God, we are thrilled and thankful that we've been entrusted with such a project as this."

The project will cost a total of \$102.7 million, and will feature 132 exhibit bays with an "educational and entertaining" Christian message.

Ham said the Ark Encounter will offer an opportunity for Kentucky churches to reach out to out-of-town visitors, as well as friends and neighbors.

"We look on the Ark ... as really a facility for the church," Ham said.

"It's really for God's people to use to bring others to help make the Christian message real to them and to start up a conversation."

The Ark Encounter is expected to draw between 1.4 and 2.2 million visitors a year, boosting the economy for the region.

The state of Kentucky initially approved a tax incentive package worth millions for the Ark Encounter, but reversed their decision last year due to the religious nature of the theme park.

The tourism incentive would have allowed the project to recover 25 percent of development costs through sales tax rebates after the Ark opens.

The ark's builders are suing in federal court to get the incentive back and Ham says he expects the judge to rule at any time.

Tickets will go on sale to the general public beginning Jan. 19, 2016. They will be \$40 for adults, \$28 for children and \$31 for seniors. Parking is \$10.

(EDITOR'S NOTE – Kristen Lowry writes for Kentucky Today's Frankfort bureau. Kentucky Today is a news resource of the Kentucky Baptist Convention.) **BR**

ERLC trip highlights complexity in Israel

By **TOM STRODE** | Baptist Press

American Christians need humility and helpful information to think biblically about modern Israel, pastors said after touring the Middle East country as part of a Southern Baptist delegation.

The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission led the Nov. 9-16 tour to equip Southern Baptist pastors and leaders regarding issues in Israel and to acquaint them with the work of the entity's new international religious freedom office, which is located in the Middle East. The trip – organized and fully funded by the Philos Project – also included six ERLC staff members in its party of more than 20.

ERLC President Russell Moore described leading the delegation in partnership with the Middle East office as an honor.

"At a time where the lands where our Father Abraham and our Brother Paul once walked are now killing grounds where the people of the cross are being slaughtered, we are determined to be a witness for religious liberty around the world for the sake of the gospel," Moore told Baptist Press in a written statement. The trip's goals included helping participants gain a deeper understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Syrian refugee crisis and international religious freedom, according to the ERLC. The tour was filled not only with visits to

important religious and national sites but conversations with government authorities and diverse religious leaders.

Southern Baptist pastors Nathan Lino and David Prince came away from the trip with a greater appreciation for the complexity of the issues in Israel and for their importance to pastors and churches.

Pastors of Southern Baptist churches "need to be renewed in a proper discipleship of our members regarding Israel and the Middle East," said Lino, lead pastor of Northeast Houston Baptist Church.

"The absence of discipleship on this matter has created a void that has been filled with misinformation and unbiblical thinking amongst God's people," Lino said in an email interview with BP. "And because the subject of Israel and the Middle East is so central to the Christian narrative, and is by God's design intricately related to what is happening in the world today, pastors cannot afford to let this subject matter go unaddressed."

Experiencing the complexities involved in the Israeli/Palestinian dispute was humbling, Prince said in a Nov. 24 post for the ERLC's Canon & Culture blog.

He realized "the tendency of Americans to watch cable news channels and make snap judgments about what ought to be done in the Middle East conflict is audacious hubris," said Prince, the pastor for preaching and vision of Ashland

See ERLC page 16

THE SERMON PEOPLE DISREGARD THE MOST

It seems to me that messages on forgiveness are the most disregarded messages all. Perhaps it's because we've talked about it so much, or because most don't really want to hear it again. Or maybe there's another reason altogether.

Surprisingly, we often don't want to let go of the hurt, pain or bitterness someone has caused, no matter how much damage it's done. Even though we know forgiveness is at the very heart of God, we still refuse to forgive. So when we hear a message on forgiveness it's easier to tune it out than to do something about it.

Several years ago, I came across the following words on forgiveness. Now, when I present a message on the subject, I always include it. It's amazing how many times I've been asked for a copy. Why? Because the Neal Anderson said it in a way that's hard to ignore in "The Christ Centered Marriage." I think you'll agree.

I CANNOT play the martyr role when I forgive – because Jesus did not forgive me that way. I cannot settle the score first before I forgive – because Jesus did not forgive me that way. I cannot keep a running tally of grievances – because Jesus did not forgive me that way. I cannot forgive with my lips and then bring it up again when

I need the advantage of some clout – because Jesus did not forgive me that way.

I cannot forgive and then tell all the right people about it – because Jesus did not forgive me that way. I cannot go through all the motions of forgiveness, then harbor resentment for weeks, months, years – because Jesus

did not forgive me that way.

I CAN forget the score and erase the tally of rights and wrongs – because Jesus forgave me that way. I can keep loving and respecting the one who hurt me – because Jesus forgave me that way. I can look for signs of genuine repentance – because Jesus forgave me that way.

I can take the first step to bring about reconciliation – because Jesus forgave me that way. I can release all the resentment that clings to the past – because Jesus forgave me that way. I can thaw out the frozen bitterness deep inside and begin to relieve the other's pain – because Jesus forgave me that way. I can be kind and compassionate, forgiving another – just as in Christ Jesus God forgave me.

(EDITOR'S NOTE – Eddie Thompson is a consultant on family evangelism and discipleship for the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina. Contact him at ethompson@ncbaptist.org or (800) 395-5102, ext. 5644.)



EDDIE THOMPSON

LifeWay completes sale of downtown Nashville campus

By ART TOALSTON | Baptist Press

LifeWay has completed the sale of its 14.5-acre campus in downtown Nashville.

“Although this momentous event is cause for thanksgiving, it is also bittersweet,” Thom S. Rainer, president of LifeWay Christian Resources, wrote in an email to the Southern Baptist entity’s trustees and employees Nov. 24 after the sale was announced around 5 p.m.

“LifeWay has served the bride of Christ from this property for more than 100 years,” Rainer wrote.

“Those of us who serve today continue an unbroken line of tens of thousands of employees who have stewarded the responsibility to produce trustworthy Christian resources for the church. And, we will continue to do so into the future, but from a new location.”

The sale was announced in a joint news release from LifeWay and Southwest Value Partners, a private real estate investment firm based in San Diego.

The news release noted that LifeWay “will continue to occupy a portion of the campus over the near term until it determines the permanent location of its corporate headquarters.”

A sale price of \$125 million cash was stated by an attorney for Southwest Value Partners to *The Tennessean* daily newspaper, but the joint news release did not disclose a purchase price.

According to the news release, the LifeWay campus “is broadly entitled for mixed-use purposes that may include hotel, entertainment, commercial and creative office, and residential.”

Rainer, in the news release, stated, “I am confident Southwest Value Partners will continue to steward this campus in a way that is most beneficial to downtown Nashville and those who live, work and visit here.

“We have found their leaders to be professional, thorough and possessing the highest integrity,” Rainer wrote. “The addition of Southwest to the downtown community will be great for Nashville.

“LifeWay hopes to keep our head-

quarters in downtown Nashville, so I am excited about having Southwest Value Partners not only as stewards of our current campus, but as neighbors moving forward.”

LifeWay reopened its search for a new location Nov. 16 when it stepped away from the purchase of a 1.5-acre site owned by Nashville’s Metro Development and Housing Agency across the Cumberland River from Nissan Stadium, home of the NFL Tennessee Titans.

In a letter to LifeWay employees, Rainer noted at the time, “The property is a great downtown location, and would be an exciting place for our new building. But, we have concluded it’s not the best location for LifeWay.

“We simply have found other potential downtown properties that are a better fit for LifeWay’s future.”

LifeWay was named the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention when it was established by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1891 after the SBC’s annual meeting in Birmingham, Ala.

It has used LifeWay as its corporate name since 1998.

With a total workforce of more than 4,000 employees in 29 states, LifeWay provides Sunday School literature and discipleship resources to churches throughout the SBC.

Its other services include LifeWay Research; B&H Publishing Group trade and academic books; various online services to churches; 186 LifeWay stores across the country; and a national conference center in Black Mountain, N.C.

LifeWay stated in July that its new headquarters would encompass 216,000 square feet in facilities best suited for the ministry’s future.

The property sold by LifeWay, located near Nashville’s historic rail lines, encompasses nine buildings with more than 1 million square feet of office, warehouse and parking space.

About 1,100 of LifeWay’s employees work in the downtown offices, utilizing about a third of the workspace.

The 1914 Frost Building on the campus, named for founder J.M. Frost, is on



BP photo

the National Register of Historic Places. Other key parts of the campus are the Sullivan Tower (named for James L. Sullivan, the Sunday School Board’s president from 1953-75), built in phases from 1941-53; Draper Tower (named for LifeWay’s president emeritus, James T. Draper Jr., formerly called the Centennial Tower), opened in 1991 for the entity’s 100th anniversary; and the LifeWay Plaza entrance, opened in 2002.

Cary Mack, one of the co-managing partners who will oversee Southwest Value Partners’ development of the site, said in the joint news release with LifeWay, “It has been a pleasure and a privilege to work with Dr. Rainer, LifeWay and many others in Nashville to complete our purchase of the LifeWay campus. It is an exceptional site with a valuable legacy and enormous potential, and we are excited to be a part of its transforma-

tion into an excellent environment that respects the authenticity and character of Nashville.”

Mark Schlossberg, the other co-managing partner, stated, “We have long respected Nashville as a great market with great people, and over the past weeks have spent many hours working with some of Nashville’s finest professionals and stakeholders to understand the opportunities and best use of the LifeWay site.

“We have learned much about what Nashville needs and wants, and look forward to sharing our plans and milestones.

“It’s a great project, and we are fully committed to its success.”

(EDITOR’S NOTE – Art Toalston is senior editor of Baptist Press, the news service of the Southern Baptist Convention.) **BR**

Submissions

The *Biblical Recorder* is pleased to publish staff changes, church news and events with a statewide interest. Please send information immediately following an event, or for opportunity corner, send at least two months in advance. Include cost and contact information in your email or correspondence.

All submissions will be subjected to *Biblical Recorder* styles and guidelines and will be edited. Send to dianna@BRnow.org or *Biblical Recorder*, P.O. Box 1185, Cary, NC 27512. Call (919) 847-2127.

CHURCH NEWS

Olive Chapel Baptist Church, Apex

Olive Chapel Baptist Church, Apex, celebrated its 165th birthday of the church at a special homecoming service Nov. 1. There was special music, food and fellowship in addition to the message delivered by Ken Keathley of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (SEBTS). Keathley previously served the church as interim pastor and attended SEBTS with Olive Chapel’s current pastor, Paul Arnold. Several former members and staff were in attendance.

December 27 BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE January 3

Strengthened by God’s Power

Focal passage: Ephesians 3:14-21

When we read the theologically rich letter to the church in Ephesus, we get the sense that these early Christians needed gospel encouragement. Like us, this church found herself in a world of hostility toward the Christian faith. One of the great themes of Ephesians is that Christ has given powerful gifts to His church to, among other things, stand against the onslaughts of the defeated one and his allies.

The Christian life is war. In Ephesians 6:12 we are reminded that we wrestle with the cosmic powers of the present darkness. If we are honest, this is a tiring thought. But the Good News is, we will not be overdone.

God does not leave us on our own but empowers us through His Spirit. We war with the power of God’s strength. And on the cross, Christ defeated the powers of evil. In the resurrection, their defeat was sealed. In the gospel, we have an announcement that it is finished, Christ has won!

So, while we may be weak in body, we

are strong in spirit. When we are brought to our knees in fatigue from the war, we find that we are in the appropriate position for prayer. For this reason, we pray “... according to the riches of his glory,” that God would grant us “to be strengthened with power through his Spirit” in the depths of our souls (Ephesians 3:16).

The Good News is that God is able to “... do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us.” Though we are weak, He is strong. This juxtaposition of power and weakness, shows that victory is a gift of grace. When we realize this truth, we can triumphantly proclaim, “to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (Ephesians 3:20-21).

What gives us the power to fight when there is no fight left within us? We are empowered by the spirit of God. We are also encouraged to endure, when the Spirit reminds us that Jesus’ victory is our victory.



MATT CAPPS
Pastor, Fairview Baptist Church, Apex

Equipped with God’s Gifts

Focal passage: 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

There is a strange idea in the American church, namely, that the church is a body of believers with a gifted pastor or pastors equipped to do the ministry. At first glance, one might not see the error in this ministry philosophy. Certainly, the pastors are gifted. However, according to Ephesians 4:12, the pastors are called to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. Therefore, it is more biblical to conclude that the church is not just a body with gifted pastors, but also a body of supernaturally gifted believers.

God has uniquely gifted each person in the church to serve Him. No one pastor has all the gifts necessary to fulfill the ministry of the church. In fact, Jesus Christ is the only individual who ever walked the earth that embodied all of the spiritual gifts. This is why the church is referred to as the body of Christ.

A body is made up of different parts,

each one fulfilling its specific purpose for the health of the whole.

In 1 Corinthians 12, the apostle Paul reminds us that there are a variety of gifts and services. The common thread that holds the entire body together is the same God who empowers each one. And each one is empowered to work together in order to bring God the glory. In fact, if only one person were gifted in the church for ministry, it would be hard for that individual to not receive the glory for their service. This is the root cause of the error that Paul is addressing in this passage.

The Corinthians church had begun elevating certain gifts over others, and thus, the body was not functioning properly. We are all called to use the gifts God has given us for the common good. Valuing the various gifts God has granted the church helps guard against the natural envy, rivalry and superiority that comes with elevating certain gifts over others.

Let us remember, the church is a body of supernaturally gifted individuals to bring God glory through collected ministry. It is God who has gifted each one according to His sovereign will.

December 27 EXPLORE THE BIBLE January 3

The King Tempted

Focal passage: Matthew 4:1-10

I sat in a massive ballroom surrounded by 4,000 college students as a speaker commented on the warfare language often used in sports. He said, “I hear people say, ‘It’s a battle out there. It’s a war.’ No it’s not! It’s a game! Meanwhile there is a real spiritual war being fought every day, but you don’t have time to fight the real war because you are too busy with your pretend ‘war.’”

John Piper spoke those words 15 years ago. They rocked me to the core then and still rock me today.

Do you think about the Christian life as war? The scriptures paint two battle-grounds on which this war takes place.

First, there is the external war against Satan and his fallen angels in this broken world (Ephesians 2:1-3).

Second, there is the internal war that takes place in our hearts.

James captures the bloody battlefield of the heart asking, “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this that your passions are at war within you?” (James 4:1).

We often lose the external battles with temptation from without because we first

lost the internal battles of idolatry from within.

Not so with Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus didn’t need to feed on bread because He was feasting on His Father’s will.

He didn’t need to test the Father’s protection because He was fulfilling His Father’s plan. He didn’t need Satan to give him a wicked crown because His crown was on the other side of His cross.

Jesus won the external battle because He won the internal battle. He was the truer and better Adam who recognized the Serpent’s lies and defeated them with His Father’s truth.

He was the truer and better Israel, the faithful Son of God who trusted and obeyed His Father’s word.

He ate the feast of the Father’s will and washed it down with the cup of the Father’s wrath so that He might be the tempted as we are, but without sin (Hebrews 4:15).

We win our war by trusting in the victory of Christ in our place.



CLINT DARST
Pastor, Freedom Church, Lincoln

The King’s Expectations

Focal passage: Matthew 5:1-16

I remember walking through a small suburban church in Greensboro when I heard music begin. I was shocked because I felt certain the person singing was the pop star John Legend. The vocals were, like Legend’s, unbelievably unique and powerful.

So I rushed into the sanctuary half expecting to see the mega-star only to discover that the breathtaking vocals were coming from an unassuming young man that was quite contrary to my expectations. After picking my jaw up off the sanctuary floor, I was able to take in the amazing experience and enjoy it.

I feel a little bit like this every time I come to the Beatitudes.

I get all amped up, “OK, Jesus is about to show us what Kingdom life looks like. He is going to show us how followers of the King are to live. Lets go!” And then I read what the blessed life looks like and my jaw hits the floor.

The blessed are those who are poor in

spirit, not rich in spirit? They are those who mourn, not those who celebrate?

The blessed are the meek, not the impressive? They hunger and thirst for righteousness? They are not those who are already the most righteous? They are merciful, not powerful? Blessed are those who are pure in heart, not the strong in heart?

Can they really be the peacemakers, not the leaders? The blessed are persecuted, not successful?

And then – much like I did that Sunday morning, after processing the shock – I am able to take in the beauty of it all.

I see that Kingdom life is founded on the grace of God, hence Jesus beginning with those who are “poor in Spirit,” (3) and ends with the gladness of God’s people as they receive their great reward in heaven (12).

This is the Kingdom life Jesus has called us to.

This is what it means to be salt and light in the world. Followers of Jesus live out Kingdom life and transform the world by displaying God’s grace for God’s glory – causing passers-by to look at us and be shocked by the song that bursts forth from our community of faith.

Crusade

Continued from page 10

Monday night he surrendered his life to Christ.

- A husband, wife and teenage son whose family was facing divorce were reunited in the counseling room, and divorce proceedings were dropped.

- Hundreds of teens – football players, cheerleaders – all races, all ages, responded to God’s call, streaming down the bleachers and folding chairs.

- A man traveled from two hours away because a friend begged him to come “just one night.” This man lost his son in April to suicide, lost his fiancée to another man in September and had purchased a gun to take his own life.

- An 82-year-old man who had spent his entire life in church, even serving as a deacon, trusted Christ as his Savior. He never felt sure he was saved. Now he knows.

A young counselor was driving his car through a bad neighborhood. Stretched across the road in front of him, were five black teens, blocking the road. In fear he said he “hit the gas pedal.”

All but one scattered off the road. As he drove toward the sole teen in the street, he slowed down and opened his window partially to hear what the guy would say. The teen called him “a fool” and identified himself as a gangster. He drove off.

That night at the crusade, the young driver watched as hundreds of people entered the counseling room. His eyes met the eyes of the same black teen he had encountered earlier that day in the street.

The “gangster” came because there was free pizza and stayed to ultimately meet God face to face. The black teen extended his hand to the counselor and apologized for his actions earlier that day. He gave his life to Christ.

So did a friend who came with him.

“There are many stories that are still coming in ... Everywhere I go, people are commenting on the amazing changes in people’s lives,” said Jolly.

“The vision of people almost running to the altar will

be forever burned in my brain and heart, and I am a new person because of what I’ve seen and felt as a member of the best team God ever put together to do His work.

“The real work has just begun. Stay tuned as you will hear much more from our county and what we are going to do, with God’s help, to turn the tide against the enemy and win the battle for God,” Jolly concluded.

Outreach Co-Chair Bo Shaw said, “I had a great experience with the GO TELL Crusade.

“All the planning and preparations were worth its reward with more than 850 souls saved. Wow! [I’m] still excited that God allowed me to be part of the process. ... I intend on using every tool possible, as God allows, to win souls.”

Visit gotellministries.com.

(EDITOR’S NOTE – David B. Heller, director of missions for the Columbus Baptist Association, submitted this story that was written by the staff of Go Tell Ministries, Inc. Atlanta, Ga. Allan Blume, BR editor, contributed to this story.) **BR**

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS

Pastor

Hollywood Baptist Church, a cooperating Southern Baptist church, seeks God’s will in finding a **Full-Time Pastor** who has a heart for people, is evangelistic and mission-minded. Send resumes to Hollywood Baptist Church, Pastor Search Committee, PO Box 1400, Cornelia, GA 30531, or email to timneamp@windstream.net by Friday, January 8, 2016.

Bellview Baptist Church of Woodruff, SC, is seeking a **Senior Pastor**. The candidate should have at least three years of experience as a senior pastor, have a seminary degree from a Southern Baptist seminary, and be willing to relocate to within a 10 mile radius of the church. Information about our church and church family, as well as a list of our desired qualifications can be found on our website at www.bellviewbaptistchurch.org/#/contact-us. Resumes including statement of faith, references, DVD/CD can be mailed to Pastor Search Committee, Bellview Baptist Church, 901 Bellview Rd., Woodruff, SC 29388, or emailed to secretary@bellviewbaptistchurch.org no later than 12/31/15.

Church Staff

Bethany Baptist Church, Winston-Salem, NC, is seeking a **part-time Minister of Music** to plan, direct, and coordinate worship for both contemporary and traditional services. See website for more details: www.bethany.ws (3-5 years experience is desired).

Millers Creek Baptist Church, a conservative SBC church, near Wilkesboro, NC, is prayerfully seeking God’s man to serve as **Worship Pastor**. The full-time position is focused on leading the church in worship through choral, praise team, audio/visual/lighting ministries and includes various pastoral roles of visitation and outreach. Experience and a music degree from a college/seminary is preferred, but not required. Send cover letter and resume to Millers Creek Baptist Church, PO Box 559, Millers Creek, NC 28651, or by email to shannon.critcher@millerscreekbaptist.org. Resumes will be received through January 15.

Germanton Baptist Church is seeking a **part-time children and youth pastor**. Candidates should have a clear sense of calling from God to lead children and youth according to God’s inerrant and infallible Word. A full job description is available upon request. Please send your resume to GBC Children/Youth Pastor Search Committee, 1120 Willow St., Germanton, NC 27019, or email germantonbaptistchurch@windstream.net.

Bethel Baptist Church is looking for a **part-time worship leader** who will be able to lead a blended worship service. You can view our website, bbnc.net, to find out more about us or email questions to info@bbnc.net. Interested applicants should email their resumes to info@bbnc.net too.

Full-Time Minister of Music/Discipleship/Education needed for blended worship services for a progressive and growing church affiliated with SBC in Western North Carolina. A masters of music, or equivalent experience, is required. Duties will include planning, developing and implementing the music program, as well as, discipleship/educational/ministry needs as directed by the church. Knowledge of current computer technology is required. Submit resumes to: Newfound Baptist Church, Attn: Search Committee, PO Box 6, Leicester, NC 28748, or reply electronically to tomsels@att.net. A complete job description is posted on our website at www.newfoundbaptist.com >Ministries>Music.

Small town SBC church is prayerfully seeking a **full-time Associate Pastor**, a man who loves God and his neighbor, who knows God and desires that people come to know God and inherit eternal life. He must exhibit the qualifications found in 2 Timothy 3:1-7. KMBC has a children’s day care ministry, two worship services, and a multi-generational congregation seeking the advancement of God’s Kingdom through prayer, disciple-making, and ministries that are committed to an intentionally evangelistic church strategy. We need someone whose heart’s desire it to “rejoice at all times, pray ceaselessly and be thankful in all circumstances,” and who zealously desires the Holy Spirit to gift Christ’s Body to do the work of the ministry. We believe we are in the beginning stages of revival, and we are praying for a man who will allow God to use him as a “living sacrifice.” We expect no less of ourselves. Submit resumes to: kenlymbc@centurylink.net or Kenly Missionary Baptist Church, PO Box 237, Kenly, NC 27542.

First Baptist Church of Maggie Valley, NC, is seeking a **full-time Youth/Worship Leader**. Please send resume to the attention of: Dr. Mike Odom, PO Box 369, Maggie Valley, NC 28751.

Eastside Baptist Church, Shelby, NC (Southern Baptist/1963 Faith & Message) seeks **full-time Minister of Music and Education**. Responsible for all music programs as well as training and education. Job description/requirements: www.eastsidebaptistshelby.org. Send letter of interest and resume attention: Personal Committee, 1165 Wyke Rd. Shelby, NC 28150, or officeebc@carolina.rr.com.

Associate Pastor of Worship and Discipleship. First Baptist Church of Mount Olive, AL, is seeking a minister of music and education, to lead a growing congregation in blended worship, and discipleship programs. Bachelor’s degree required and two to five years experience preferred. Send resumes to Stephanie@fbcmo.org.

Miscellaneous

Great gift for pastor and wife, for Anniversary, Birthday, Christmas – a **Biblical Tour of Israel** led by an experienced BSCNC pastor, May 10-20, 2016. For color brochure and information call 252-937-9811, ext 223, or email mclouer@englewoodbaptist.com.

NCBAM needs intergenerational teams to build wheel chair ramps during Rampin’ Up! April 30 and May 7, 2016. Call North Carolina Baptist Aging Ministry: 877-506-2226.

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ERLC

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Avenue Baptist Church in Lexington, Ky.

“More than being pro-Israel or pro-Palestinian, Christians must be pro-Jesus as they think about the conflict,” he wrote, acknowledging, however, that “knowing the best way to be pro-Jesus is not easy.”

“Too often, pro-Israel, pro-Palestinian, pro-peace, or even pro-Jesus descriptors function merely as shibboleths,” Prince wrote. “This kind of lazy sloganeering does not address any of the real and vital issues. It takes a multilayered complex situation and makes it neat and tidy. Too often this kind of approach is not the fruit of critical thinking and engagement but rather a simplistic way to avoid thinking about the issues.”

Each of the various groups in the region has a “completely opposite story” of those told by other groups, Prince said. Christians should care about the welfare of God’s image bearers in the Middle East, he wrote.

“Taking ‘every thought captive to obey Christ’ (2 Corinthians 10:5) demands being informed and takes deliberate prayerful effort,” said Prince, also associate professor for Christian preaching and pastoral ministry at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

The pastors and leaders on the ERLC trip heard from and/or dialogued with a senior peace negotiator with the Israeli government; a former member of the Knesset, Israel’s legislature; Bethlehem Bible College’s president; an Arab Muslim teacher; a Messianic Jew from the Jerusalem Institute of Justice; a Palestinian journalist; and other experts.

The ERLC group also met with David Saperstein, U.S. ambassador at large for international religious freedom. Saperstein was in Israel during the same time period.

In addition, the trip included Moore teaching at important biblical sites, as well as a briefing on the Syrian civil war at Israel’s border with that country, a visit to a Galilean medical center in which Syrians fleeing the conflict are being treated and meals in homes.

The trip served as part of the ERLC’s effort to help Southern Baptist Convention pastors and leaders gain “a global understanding of the issues facing the church today” and as an opportunity to launch the entity’s international office, said ERLC Executive Vice President Philip Bethancourt. The leaders on the trip “were able to experience the epicenter of challenges in the Middle East,” he told

BP in an email, “while getting exposed to the work” of Travis Wussow, director of international justice and religious freedom in the ERLC’s office in the Middle East.

The trip proved helpful to Wussow. It was a great opportunity to meet with the ERLC team in Israel “to collaborate on strategy for the region and to plan for projects and priorities for the next 12-18 months,” he told BP by email.

The Philos Project is a New York-based organization that attempts to foster constructive Christian engagement in the Middle East. The ERLC tour was among those it organized in its first year of such trips, said Luke Moon, the Philos Proj-

ect’s deputy director.

The project sponsors the trips by Christian leaders to Israel to enable them to hear from experts with the Jewish left and right, Arab Christians, Muslims, Orthodox Jews and others “to help them understand the complexity of what’s going on in Israel” and communicate what they learn to their constituencies, Moon told BP.

Prince’s blog post may be accessed online at canonandculture.com/pro-jesus-thoughts-about-the-israel-palestinian-conflict/.

(EDITOR’S NOTE – Tom Strobe is Washington bureau chief for Baptist Press, the Southern Baptist Convention’s news service.) **BR**

Trump

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Amid discussion of Trump’s latest comments, Moore tweeted a link to an op-ed he wrote for *The New York Times* in September, arguing “evangelicals and other social conservatives” must “repudiate everything they believe” to support Trump.

He noted Trump’s apparent character flaws, his support of gambling, his past support of abortion rights – though

Trump now says he is pro-life – and his “slurs against Hispanic immigrants.”

“We should ... count the cost of following Donald Trump,” Moore wrote. “To do so would mean that we’ve decided to join the other side of the culture war, that image and celebrity and money and power and social Darwinist ‘winning’ trump the conservation of moral principles and a just society.” **BR**

JOY

Merry Christmas

from **BR** BIBLICAL RECORDER staff

I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: today a Savior, who is Messiah the Lord, was born for you in the city of David.

Luke 2:10-11