

JANUARY 2018, VOL. 155, ISSUE 1

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Ark. Baptist College, New President Part Ways

By Bob Allen
Baptist News Global

A historically black Baptist college that also has ties to a state Cooperative Baptist Fellowship organization is losing its president after a little more than a year. Arkansas Baptist College announced Dec. 18 that it has terminated President Joseph Jones for “lack of transparency” with the board of trustees. Jones told *Diverse*, a news magazine that covers higher education, he resigned and is considering legal action.

ABC hired Jones effective Sept. 1, 2016, to succeed Fitz Hill, a football coach turned college president. Hill was credited with saving the school founded in 1884 by black Baptists before running into financial problems related to rapid growth, inadequate infrastructure and resulting debt. The only historically black Baptist school west of the Mississippi, ABC was started by the Colored Baptists of Arkansas and still receives support from the Consolidated Missionary Baptist State Convention, a state organization affiliated with the National Baptist Convention USA.

Just a week before the vote on Jones, *Diverse*, founded in 1984 as Black Issues In Higher Education, profiled the new president’s new strategic plan titled “The Way, The Truth,

The Life” to address institutional weaknesses and uphold the school’s Christian identity. Other recent media reports said the school located in Little Rock’s Central High School district is having problems meeting payroll obligations.

Details of Jones’s departure are unclear, but board chair Kenneth Harris, a retired professor at Henderson State University, said in a statement Dec. 18 that trustees have lost confidence in his ability to lead.

ABC and CBF of Arkansas joined in a partnership in August 2007 when the state CBF organization moved offices to a 19th-century home on campus restored as part of the previous president’s focus on urban neighborhood revitalization. The multifaceted partnership includes supporting the school’s vision to provide a college education to the underserved and promote economic growth in the neighborhood, mission projects related to construction, literacy and prison ministries and reform and modeling healthy race relations as part of the New Baptist Covenant movement launched by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter.

“CBF Arkansas values our 10-year partnership with Arkansas Baptist College, its leadership, faculty, staff, students, mission and location,” said Ray Higgins, executive coordinator of the network of 23 churches plus individuals across Arkansas that partner with the 1,800-church Fellowship.

“The college has a remarkable history of educating and preparing students for careers, for life and for service,” Higgins added. “During this past decade especially, ABC has experienced renewed growth and development. We continue to partner with and pray for ABC in her mission of ‘growing hope’ through providing the transformational experiences of a college education.”

Hill, former head football coach at San Jose State University and assistant for the Arkansas Razorbacks, led ABC as president for 10 years. He now heads the Scott Ford Center for Entrepreneurship and Community Development, an entrepreneurship initiative of ABC, and serves on the state board of education. ◀◀



Joseph Jones.
(Baptist News Global)



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Oops

The December issue misstated the name of the foundation that The Baptist Home created in 2000 to support its work. It is The Baptist Home Foundation. We apologize for any confusion.

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LETTER

from the editor

Brian Kaylor

BEATING BAD BILLS

With the start of a new year, state lawmakers will return to their chambers for a new legislative session. Christians should pay attention to bills under consideration. Although the debates and tweets in Washington, D.C., capture more media attention, laws passed in statehouses often have a more direct and immediate impact on the lives of those in our communities. When people do not pay attention and advocate, legislators can sneak in provisions for special interest donors at the expense of the common good.

Already it seems obvious there are a number of important issues to track in 2018. For instance, Kansans will soon have a new governor once the U.S. Senate confirms Sam Brownback as the next U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom. It's critical that the new administration hears the concerns of Christians. We shouldn't wait until we're upset to show up. Communicating priorities early — and letting lawmakers know when we appreciate something good they did — gives our voices more credibility when we push them to reject a bad bill. And there will be plenty of bad bills!

In Missouri, a key issue lawmakers will likely address is a repeal of one of last year's bad bills, SB 43. That new law makes it easier for employers, landlords and others to discriminate. The sponsor of the bill wrote it after he was sued for discrimination as his rent-to-own business refused to rent to residents in a majority black neighborhood and a supervisor regularly used the 'n-word' and other racial slurs. Now, that state senator will be able to discriminate without worrying so much about lawsuits.

But there's a hitch. Last fall, the

public learned that the administration of Governor Eric Greitens had been warned by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in February — before lawmakers passed the bad bill — that the bill would put Missouri out of compliance with federal anti-discrimination laws. Yet, that warning was not communicated to lawmakers. Then, in July, the Greitens administration received another HUD letter noting that since Greitens had signed the bill

“As Christians we must advocate for our neighbors, for ‘the least of these,’ for the common good.”

into law, Missouri would lose \$500,000 per year in federal funding to the Fair Housing Assistance Program unless lawmakers repeal or substantially change the law before March 1. Even that warning was not communicated by the administration until journalists discovered the HUD letters in October.

The same lawmakers who passed SB 43 and the same governor who signed it will now need to clean up their mess. I'm hopeful they will. But it will help if people of faith speak out and demand their lawmakers act quickly to repeal SB 43 and restore Missouri's legal protections against discrimination.

Thankfully, many Christians were on the record last year opposing SB 43 before its passage. Wallace Hartsfield Sr., pastor

emeritus of Metropolitan Missionary Baptist Church in Kansas City, Mo., was among those voices. Hartsfield, who is black, was joined by Missouri NAACP leaders and other clergy members in denouncing the bill.

“This bill makes it easy to discriminate, and those in a protected class would no longer have any protection,” Hartsfield declared during a June rally. “We can't afford to take Missouri's civil rights back to 1961. I'm almost 90. I do not want to live through this tragedy twice. I will hope and I will pray that things will get better in our state.”

Sadly, the Missouri Baptist Convention passed a resolution in October — after the letters from HUD became public — praising SB 43 due to a religious clause, but remained silent about the weakening of racial and other discrimination protections. If we cheer something we think helps us even while it hurts our brothers and sisters, that's not the promotion of religious liberty but, at best, selfish indifference like that of those who walked past the man on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho.

The passage of SB 43 didn't put me at risk. But I cannot remain silent while my neighbors face discrimination simply because God made them another color. Unlike rich donors just buying favors for themselves, as Christians we must advocate for our neighbors, for ‘the least of these,’ for the common good.

►► Brian Kaylor is editor & president of Word&Way.



brianKaylor

Repeal of “Johnson Amendment” Fails — For Now

As the U.S. House and Senate worked to reconcile their different versions of a tax reform bill in December, an unpopular initiative to allow nonprofits to engage in partisan politics was stripped from the final bill. The provision to repeal the political activity ban — or what opponents of it call the “Johnson Amendment” to cast it as a partisan effort even though it passed overwhelmingly in 1954 with bipartisan support — had previously passed the House but was not included in the Senate’s version. When the new bill merging the two versions was released on Dec. 15, the repeal of the political activity ban was not included.

Spearheading the efforts to preserve the political activity ban was the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, which represents 15 Baptist bodies, including American Baptist Churches USA, Churchnet, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, National Baptist Convention of America and National Baptist Convention USA. In April, 99 religious groups — including several Baptist denominations — signed an open letter urging members of Congress to keep the ‘Johnson Amendment.’ More than 4,000 faith leaders — including more than 1,000 Baptists — from all 50 states signed a letter delivered to Congress in August that also called for preserving the current law.

Amanda Tyler, executive director of BJC, praised the removal of the political activity ban repeal from the final tax bill. She argued that “one thing Americans won’t have to worry about is whether their house of worship or local charitable nonprofit will be turned into a PAC.”

“This is a big win for churches, synagogues, mosques, all other 501(c)(3) nonprofits and the people who rely on them as a vital part of our society,” Tyler added. “Now all those committed to protecting the independence and nonpartisanship of our 501(c)(3) sector need to stay alert for other attempts to change the law.” ◀◀

Amanda Tyler talks about the “Johnson Amendment” at First Baptist Church in Columbia, Mo., on October 29. (Brian Kaylor/Word&Way)



The Baptist Home

Calendar of Upcoming Events

•Conference on Moral Injury: January 16, 2018•

Library Center Auditorium, 4653 S. Campbell Ave., Springfield, MO
The Baptist Home and Oxford Healthcare will be hosting a conference on Moral Injury from 8:30 am - 10:30 am. The conference will focus on the role of chaplains and social workers as caregivers to veterans at end of life dealing with the effects of moral injury.

Contact: Tommy Goode
 tgoode@thebaptisthome.org, (417) 860-3471

•Arcadia Valley Open House: January 25, 2018•

The Baptist Home-Arcadia Valley Campus, Ironton, Missouri
The Baptist Home-Arcadia Valley will be hosting an Open House for those interested in touring the newly renovated Assisted Living Wing with one-bedroom and studio apartments. Begins at 2:00 p.m. Refreshments will be served.

Contact: Sherri Snider, ssnider@thebaptisthome.org, (573) 546-7429

•Ashland Campus Dedication: April 20, 2018*•

**Date is tentative.*

Contact: Todd Pridemore
 tpridemore@thebaptisthome.org, (573) 289-0715

•Chillicothe Charity Golf Tournament: May 18, 2018•

Green Hills Golf Course, Chillicothe, MO
Registration at 10:00 a.m. Tee Time at 11:00 a.m.
Contact: Ruthie Meyers
 rmeyers@thebaptisthome.org, (660) 646-6219

•Chillicothe HomeComing: June 9, 2018•

The Baptist Home-Chillicothe Campus, Chillicothe, MO, 10 am - 2 pm
A festive celebration emphasizing visits with residents from home churches and families. Traditional bake sale benefits residents. Music and entertainment with barbeque lunch served in and around the gazebo.
Contact: Connie Garber
 cgarber@thebaptisthome.org, (660) 646-6219

•Ashland Charity Golf Tournament: June 15, 2018•

Eagle Knoll Golf Course, Hartsburg, MO
Registration at 7:30 a.m. Tee Time at 8:30 a.m.
Contact: Todd Pridemore
 tpridemore@thebaptisthome.org, (573) 289-0715



For questions or additional information contact:

The Baptist Home • 866.454.2709 • desk@thebaptisthome.org • www.thebaptisthome.org/events

NEWS BRIEFS

MIDEAST CHRISTIANS REACT TO JERUSALEM MOVE

On Dec. 6, U.S. President Donald Trump changed U.S. policy to name Jerusalem as Israel's capital and pledging to move the U.S. embassy there. Although some prominent Christian leaders in the U.S. praised the move, Mideast Christians — including those in Israel — roundly criticized the declaration.

A group of 13 patriarchs and heads of churches in Jerusalem penned a joint statement arguing the move “will yield increased hatred, conflict, violence and suffering in Jerusalem and the Holy Land, moving us farther from the goal of unity and deeper toward destructive division.”

Baptist theologian Yohanna Katanacho, academic dean at Nazareth Evangelical College and professor of biblical studies at Bethlehem Bible College, argued at ComeAndSee.com, “I don’t believe that the recent decision of moving the embassy is compatible with the blessing of Micah, which is rooted in his vision for promoting peace and justice to Jerusalem, and from Jerusalem to the rest of the world. I hope that Trump will further reflect on the issue of Jerusalem and seek to be a true messenger of blessing to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to all those who love Jerusalem.”



Yohanna Katanacho speaks at the 2015 Baptist World Congress in South Africa. (Brian Kaylor)

Botrus Mansour, another Baptist leader in Nazareth, told Christianity Today that Trump's move is “a bad idea” that will hurt the Palestinian people. Mansour added: “Jesus makes it clear that specific places of worship are not important but rather that people matter. ... When the Psalmist asks us to ‘pray for the peace of Jerusalem,’ it involves acting to preserve the human dignity of everyone living

there.”

Additionally, Christians in Bethlehem protested the announcement by turning off their Christmas lights while Pope Tawadros II, the head of the Coptic Church in Egypt, protested by cancelling a meeting with U.S. Vice President Mike Pence previously scheduled to occur later in December. Pence later postponed his Middle East trip to January.

WEALTHIEST 1 PERCENT OWN 40 PERCENT OF U.S. WEALTH

A new study finds wealth inequality in the United States is getting worse. Economist Edward Woolf at New York University examined data from the federal Survey of Consumer Finances, which goes back to 1962. He found the wealthiest one percent of Americans now own 40 percent of the nation's wealth, and the wealthiest 20 percent own 90 percent of the U.S.'s wealth. According to data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the wealth gap in the U.S. is worse than in any other nation, with the next worst country being Germany where the top one percent owns 25 percent of the nation's wealth.

SUPREME COURT HEARS CAKE CASE

The nine justices of the U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments on Dec. 5 in a key religion case involving a baker who refused to make a cake for a reception of a same-sex couple in Colorado. Lower courts upheld Colorado's verdict that the baker violated state anti-discrimination laws. Baptists split in the *Masterpiece Cakeshop* case with the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty supporting Colorado and the same-sex couple while the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission backed the baker. Both groups argued their position upheld religious liberty. During arguments, the justices appeared split, with Justice Anthony Kennedy perhaps posed to provide the crucial swing vote. A final ruling is expected before the end of June.

NEW TAX OVERHAUL MAY HURT CHARITABLE GIVING

A sweeping tax overhaul bill signed into law by President Donald Trump on Dec.

20 may hurt religious and other charitable giving. A provision in the bill doubles the standard tax deduction, which will now rise to \$12,000 for individuals or \$24,000 for couples. Experts in taxes and charitable giving note this could reduce the incentive to give to charities since fewer taxpayers will itemize their deductions to move beyond the standard deduction. The Tax Policy Center estimated that tax filers claiming itemized deductions would drop from more than 46 million to under 20 million.

The United Way of Greater St. Louis told the New York Times that the change in the standard deduction could lead to a drop of up to \$169 million annually in Missouri and \$432 million annually in Illinois. Giving to religious charities could be particularly hurt since that remains the largest nonprofit sector and since religious individuals are more likely to give.

CONGRESSIONAL MEMBERS RESIGN AMID SCANDALS

After months of high-power men in the entertainment and news industries losing their jobs amid allegations of sexual assault and harassment, consequences for similar behavior hit Capitol Hill in December.

On Dec. 5, Democratic Rep. John Conyers of Michigan, who had been in Congress since 1965, announced his immediate resignation after weeks of controversy as four women accused him of sexual assault and harassment. One of the women accused Conyers, a Baptist, of groping her while in church.

On Dec. 7, Democratic Senator Al Franken of Minnesota announced he would resign following weeks of controversy as eight women accused him of sexual assault.

On Dec. 8, Republican Rep. Trent Franks of Arizona announced his immediate resignation following reports of sexual misconduct toward two female staffers. A Baptist, he had been in office since 2003.

On Dec. 14, Republican Rep. Blake Farenthold of Texas, in office since 2011, announced he would not seek reelection in 2018 after multiple staffers — both women and men — accused him of sexual harassment.

On Dec. 16, Democratic Rep. Ruben Kihuen of Nevada, in his first congressional term, announced he would not seek reelection in 2018 after two women accused him of sexual assault and harassment.

PASTOR TO LEAD OKLA. CONVENTION



*Hance Dilbeck
(Baptist Press)*

Hance Dilbeck will serve as the ninth executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma. On Dec. 11, the BGCO's board unanimously elected Dilbeck, pastor of Quail Springs Baptist Church in Oklahoma City. A native of Oklahoma, he graduated from Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee and Southwestern

Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Anthony Jordan, who has led the BGCO for 22 years, announced on Sept. 12 he would retire on April 15, 2018. Jordan and his wife, Polla, have been members at Quail Springs. Jordan, a graduate of Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Mo., was ordained into the ministry by Pleasant Grove Baptist Church in Lebanon, Mo., and served in several leadership roles in Missouri before returning to his native Oklahoma.

PRESIDENT OF WILLIAMS COLLEGE IN ARK. RESIGNS

Tom Jones resigned as president of Williams Baptist College in Walnut Ridge, Ark., in December to join the executive management team at the California Baptist Foundation. Jones, the sixth president of the 76-year-old school, had served since 2012. Kenneth Startup, WBC history professor and former academic dean, will serve as interim president. WBC previously announced it would become Williams Baptist University in July of 2018. The school is operated by the Arkansas Baptist Convention.

ABCUSA ANNOUNCES '19, '21 BIENNIALS

Lee Sptizer, general secretary of American Baptist Churches USA announced the locations for the next two biennial gatherings of ABCUSA. The next Biennial Mission Summit will be June 21-23, 2019

in Virginia Beach, Va., to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the regional group American Baptist Churches of the South.

In 2021, ABCUS will hold its Biennial Mission Summit in San Juan, Puerto Rico. ABCUSA last held a biennial there in 2011 and decided to return to offer support and encouragement to the local body, Iglesias Bautistas de Puerto Rico, after the devastation in 2017 from Hurricane Maria. The new ABCUSA president, Josue Gómez-Menéndez, is the first president from Puerto Rico. He was elected last summer at the 2017 Biennial Mission Summit in Portland, Ore., and started his term Jan. 1.

JONES TOPS MOORE IN AL SENATE RACE

For the first time in 25 years, a Democrat won a U.S. Senate seat in Alabama. On Dec. 12, former U.S. Attorney Doug Jones defeated former state Supreme Court Chief Justice Roy Moore with a 49.9 – 48.4 percent split. Jones, a Methodist, was best known for successfully prosecuting two Ku Klux Klan members for participation in the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala., that killed four black girls attending Sunday School 30 years earlier.

Moore, a member of First Baptist Church in Gallant, Ala., has twice been removed from the Alabama Supreme Court for violating court orders. He previously defeated Sen. Luther Strange in the Republican primary after Strange was appointed to the seat when President Donald Trump named Sen. Jeff Sessions as U.S. Attorney General. Moore, however, found himself under attack following multiple allegations of sexual assault and

harassment. As of a week after the election, Moore still refused to concede despite the margin far exceeding the amount that triggers a recount.

Among religious voters, a strong split occurred along racial lines. Among those self-identifying as white evangelical Christians, 80 percent backed Moore while 18 percent went for Jones. Black evangelicals, on the other hand, went 95 percent for Jones.

STATE CONVENTIONS SEEK TO SELL BUILDINGS

Baptist Press noted a trend among Southern Baptist state conventions — downsizing convention buildings. At least 12 out of 42 have attempted to sell their buildings in the last decade, with eight of those since 2015. Among the conventions that have relocated are those in Alabama, the Dakotas, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Ohio, Tennessee and Texas (BGCT). States where the convention is or has attempted to sell their buildings include Colorado, Missouri, Montana and Wyoming.



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The Baptist Home Foundation

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NEWSLETTER

January 2018

What's Coming in 2018?

Did you know...

While the population of people 60 plus will increase from 231 million to 395 million between 2000 and 2050 in the global North, the older population in the global South will increase from **374 million to 1.6 billion** during the same period. (Global Aging: Emerging Challenges, Alexandra Crampton, Boston University, August 2009.)

The Baptist Home Foundation (TBH-F) is committed to providing support to our brothers and sisters around the world as they work to provide the best possible care to the aging in their midst. We are currently at work in nine countries across the globe.

Belarus

- The House of Mercy was invited recently to present its ministry to the disabled at a Ukrainian conference in Lutsk, Ukraine. This is the first out-of-country platform for them and shows their growing reputation as the only evangelical eldercare campus in this socialist country.

Cuba

- TBH-F is working on the model for actions with the retired ministers and widows of Cuban Baptist churches at their request as well as identifying national senior adult leadership.
- TBH-F has been given medical supplies for the

nursing home at Santiago in the Eastern Convention. Preparation is being made for transfer to them as opportunities arise.

El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua

- Plans continue for the largest Validation Therapy training TBH-F has done to date for leadership in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua in February 2018.

Guatemala

- The Eldercare Team of the Guatemalan Convention will be doing a strategic tour of their country in January, sharing about the work of elderly that is beginning. With a grant from TBH-F, they will be providing a luncheon meeting and inviting churches and individuals to join them in this ministry.

Moldova

- Follow-up requests have come that include partnering with SBU's Center for Global Connections to place students at the nursing home.
- The Moldova video showing the September work is found on our YouTube Channel, TheBaptistHome1.

Ukraine

- Grants from TBH-F are on their way to two ministries in Ukraine in January: 1) Good Samaritan House of Mercy at Kam'yanka, who are completing

their campus, and 2) Kyiv House of Mercy, a new work near the capital city.

China

- The Baptist Home Foundation Board approved \$26,200 in funding for the Wei Tang Church in Baishan City, China. It has been transferred and will be finding its way to the church field.

Upcoming Partnerships

India

- For the first time, we have had a conversation with a trusted partner in northeast India, home to 7,000 evangelical churches, hospitals and schools. For the past five years, the women of the churches have been praying for a "The Baptist Home." A leading Christian hospital has a geriatric ward composed of forgotten, homeless and destitute aging persons. Coaching and training are our next steps. As a side note, this hospital has an accompanying nursing school and a Christian liberal arts university is in the making.

We are excited about the work God is bringing to us. We covet your prayers as we work to meet the challenges that lay ahead.

There are four places to learn more about our Global Aging Missions work, 1) TBH-F Facebook page, www.facebook.com/TheBaptistHomeFoundation, 2) Every other month in the Word&Way, 3) Each quarter in The Baptist Home Newsletter and 4) On our website, www.thebaptisthome.org/foundation.

Information provided by Dr. Roger Hatfield who serves as the Global Aging Missions Specialist for The Baptist Home.



SOUTHERN BAPTIST 'CONSERVATIVE TAKEOVER' LEADER SUBJECT OF SEX ABUSE SUIT

By Adelle M. Banks
Religion News Service

Paul Pressler, who was instrumental in the conservative takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention in the late 1970s and early '80s, is fighting a lawsuit by a former office assistant who alleges the onetime Texas appeals court judge sexually abused him over the course of several decades. The \$1 million suit was filed Oct. 18 by Gareld Duane Rollins Jr. in the District Court in Harris County, Texas, and first reported in December.

The plaintiff, now in his 50s, claims he was abused by Pressler starting when he was in his midteens, continuing when he was hired as a "boy Friday" in the judge's home office and ending around 2014 when Rollins was rearrested and imprisoned for driving while intoxicated.

In a court document responding to the claims, Pressler and his wife, Nancy, a co-defendant, "categorically deny each and every allegation." Pressler's attorney, Ted Tredennick, said the suit's claims cannot be taken seriously.

"Mr. Rollins is clearly a deeply troubled man, with a track record of multiple felonies and incarceration, and it is the height of irresponsibility that anyone would present such a bizarre and frivolous case," Ted Tredennick said.

The 40-page suit describes sexual acts that allegedly occurred around the time Pressler enrolled Rollins in a Bible study at First Baptist Church in Houston. The suit says Pressler told Rollins that he should consider the alleged rape "our secret, our freedom, no one but God would understand."

The suit was filed by Rollins's attorney, Daniel Shea, a Houston lawyer and former Catholic deacon who previously represented young men who alleged they were sexually abused by a seminarian who fled to his native Colombia after the charges arose. That case was settled in 2008.

Legal documents filed in the suit against Pressler, now 87, contain letters he wrote on behalf of Rollins to a parole board reviewing

his status after he was charged with forgery and driving under the influence. The suit says Rollins turned to drugs and alcohol — leading to multiple DUI arrests — as a response to the alleged abuse. In one letter, Pressler mentions plans to employ Rollins after the younger man was granted parole and released from rehab.



Paul Pressler poses for a photo in his home in Houston on May 30, 2004. (Michael Stravato/Associated Press)

The suit also names as defendants Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and its president, Paige Patterson, and Houston's First Baptist Church, and claims they are liable for their professional, personal or denominational connections with Pressler.

The legal document also goes into the movement led by Pressler and Patterson starting in 1979 that turned the Southern Baptist Convention in a more conservative direction after deep theological battles. It claims that the movement was focused on power, which the suit called "a key ingredient in the abuse of children and women."

Mark Lanier, a Houston lawyer representing Patterson and his seminary, rejected the allegations, saying they are "riddled with errors and

falsehoods."

"We will diligently defend the fine reputation of Dr. Patterson and SWBTS in court," he said.

Jared Woodfill, who along with his Houston-based Woodfill Law Firm was also named as a defendant, said Rollins's suit has no grounds. The suit describes Woodfill as a principal of the firm that succeeded one whose leadership he shared with Pressler.

"This is a frivolous lawsuit filed by an ex-con in an attempt to extort money from the Pressler family, Paige Patterson, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, First Baptist Church of Houston and me," he said. "We will fight this case until we win and justice is served."

The church responded to RNS with a statement saying the allegations about it date to the 1980s and "we do not believe that any former or current staff members had knowledge of or involvement with any of the conduct forming the basis of the allegations."

Rollins's suit, which seeks relief for alleged "severe mental injuries," claims the other defendants were "co-conspirators" or "joint enterprisers" or otherwise liable for their professional, personal or denominational connections with Pressler.

"There are no allegations that any of the other defendants were physical perpetrators," Shea said. ◀◀

Note: Since the news broke in early December about the lawsuit, the plaintiff's attorney, Daniel Shea, told the Texas Monitor that multiple other people have contacted him to share similar allegations against Pressler. Shea added that the litigation may be amended to name other alleged victims. Shea also spoke more about the case to Baptist News Global: tinyurl.com/BNG-Pressler.

POLL FINDS GENERATIONAL DIVIDE ON ISRAEL

A new poll from the Southern Baptist Convention's LifeWay Research finds a significant generational split among U.S. evangelicals regarding the nation of Israel. Chosen People Ministries and author Joel C. Rosenberg helped underwrite the survey, which was released in December.

While 67 percent of U.S. evangelicals overall have a positive view of Israel, that number could drop in the future since younger evangelicals are less supportive. Among older evangelicals 65 and up, 76

percent have a positive view of Israel. However, among younger evangelicals 18-34, only 58 percent do. Forty-one percent of younger evangelicals do not have strong opinions about Israel.

"For the most part, younger evangelicals are indifferent about Israel," said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research.

However, the generational shift may reflect opinions about the treatment of Palestinians, rather than merely

indifference. While half of older evangelicals disagree with claims that Israel has been unfair to Palestinians, only one-third of younger evangelicals disagree. Additionally, while only 54 percent of older evangelicals say Christians need to do more to care for Palestinians, two-thirds of younger evangelicals believe that.

The survey also found another group of evangelicals holding less positive views of Israel. Only 50 percent of black evangelicals have a positive view of Israel. ◀◀

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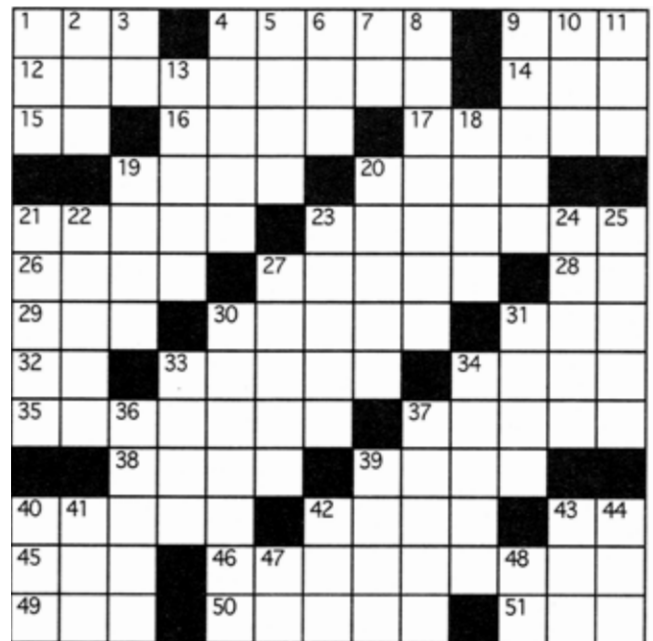
Across

1. "Then _____ was wroth with the seer" (2 Chron. 16:10)
4. "I do _____ today and tomorrow" (Luke 13:32)
9. "Behold, the _____ of the Lord cometh" (Isa. 13:9)
12. "His brethren ... Gilalai, Maai, _____ and Judah" (Neh. 12:36)
14. "Which are blackish by reason of the _____" (Job 6:16)
15. "_____ shall be as gods" (Gen. 3:5)
16. Elliptical
17. Relatives
19. "Thou shalt be for _____ to the fire" (Ezek. 21:32)
20. Primary reproductive female caste of social insects
21. "I will _____ the other bullock" (1 Kings 18:23)
23. "He hath _____ the dough" (Hos. 7:4)
26. "Gather a certain _____ every day" (Ex. 16:4)
27. Makes warm
28. Northeastern area of the U.S., abbr.
29. "This is _____ of the Hebrews' children" (Ex. 2:6)
30. "The black horses ... go forth into the _____ country" (Zech. 6:6)
31. A poem
32. King of Bashan (1 Kings 4:19)
33. "All the _____ thereof shall be burned with the fire" (Micah 1:7)
34. Mimicked
35. "I am like a _____" (Ps. 102:6)
37. Snow vehicles
38. "And _____ gave names to all cattle" (Gen. 2:20)

39. "_____ was a tiller of the ground" (Gen. 4:2)
40. "O thou fairest among _____" (Song of Sol. 1:8)
42. "Set it upon a _____" (Num. 21:8)
43. On or about, abbr.
45. "And he smote them _____ and thigh" (Judg. 15:8)
46. "To the _____ of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 2:14)
49. Albert, Allen and Alex, for short
50. "The magicians and astrologers that were in all his _____" (Dan. 1:20)
51. "As it was in the days of _____" (Luke 17:26)

Down

1. "Not willing that _____ should perish" (2 Pet. 3:9)
2. "_____ this great sight" (Ex. 3:3)
3. Preposition
4. "The people did hide themselves in _____" (1 Sam. 13:6)
5. Single
6. Religion, abbr.
7. Electrical engineer, abbr.
8. "In the hand of him that _____ thee" (Ezek. 28:9)
9. "When they had _____" (John 21:15)
10. "The _____ of violence is in their hands" (Isa. 59:6)
11. Affirmative
13. "They brought down the king from the _____ of the Lord" (2 Kings 11:19)
18. Belonging to Una
19. Festival
20. Small flying insects
21. Sag



See answers on page 31

22. "The _____ of the mountains is his pasture" (Job 39:8)
23. "The name of the third _____ — Happuch" (Job 42:14)
24. "On the seventh day God _____ his work" (Gen. 2:2)
25. "Repented not of their _____" (Rev. 16:11)
27. "Then _____ king of Gezer came up to help" (Josh. 10:33)
30. "They chose Stephen ... and Philip, and Prochorus and _____" (Acts 6:5)
31. "His ears are _____ unto their prayers" (1 Pet. 3:12)
33. "_____ me under the shadow of they wings" (Ps. 69:8)
34. "An _____ unto my mother's children" (Ps 69:8)
36. "Give us of your oil; for our _____ are gone out" (Matt. 25:8)
37. "John also was baptizing in Aenon near to _____" (John 3:23)
39. "Their visage is blacker than a _____" (Lam. 4:8)
40. World Hockey Association, abbr.
41. "All the best of the _____, and all the best of the wine" (Num. 18:12)
42. Teacher-parent organization, abbr.
43. "One of the villages in the plain of _____" (Neh. 6:2)
44. "When she was past _____" (Heb. 11:11)
47. "God shall _____ with you" (Gen. 48:21)
48. "The Lord shut him _____" (Gen. 7:16)



Uploading

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

By Brian Kaylor
Word&Way Editor

“Free speech is under assault in America,” Jerry Johnson, president of the National Religious Broadcasters, declared at a press conference in Washington, D.C., on Dec. 7. “And this is happening on the internet.”

Thus, Johnson announced the NRB’s new initiative, Internet Freedom Watch, to monitor and expose internet censorship. Johnson said the NRB was founded in 1944 “in response to corporate censorship of evangelical radio ministries” and would use the new initiative to “defend free speech” amid “a new censorship threat, again, from the corporate realm.” A former president of Criswell College in Dallas, Texas, Johnson also previously taught at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., and Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo.

Johnson specifically criticized Apple, Facebook, Google and Twitter for having “bowed” to pressure “to expunge opposing viewpoints from the marketplace of ideas.” He pointed to Apple removing an app for Chuck Colson’s “Manhattan Declaration” in 2010, Facebook briefly removing a post by Mike Huckabee supporting Chick-fil-A in 2012 and YouTube and Twitter actions against conservative politicians and activists.



Jerry Johnson speaks about Internet Freedom Watch on Dec. 7. (National Religious Broadcasters)

“It is unacceptable for these titans to discriminate against users just because their viewpoints are not congruent with ideas popular in Silicon Valley,” Johnson declared. “We call on these platforms to afford their users nothing less than the free speech and free exercise of religion rights embodied in the First Amendment as interpreted by the U.S. Supreme Court.”

Republican U.S. Senator Ted Cruz of Texas, a member of First Baptist Church

in Houston, joined Johnson and other conservative activists at the NRB’s press conference. He noted that free speech protections exist for unpopular opinions, including opinions posted online.

“You actually don’t need the First Amendment for popular beliefs,” Cruz said. “The free speech protections of the First Amendment were designed to protect unpopular beliefs.”

Beyond the NRB, other faith leaders also are keeping on an eye on internet policies. Jennifer Hawks, associate general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, sees internet access and usage as important for religious expression today. An 80-year-old organization that advocates for religious liberty for all, the BJC represents 15 Baptist bodies, including American



Jennifer Hawks

Baptist Churches USA, Churchnet, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, National Baptist Convention of America and National Baptist Convention USA.

“From livestreaming worship services to accessing religious texts, the internet is an essential tool that enables religious communities to live out their faith, support fellow believers and evangelize among nonbelievers,” Hawks explained. “If corporations can arbitrarily limit access to this modern-day town square, our freedom to engage in religious expression online could be curtailed.”

INTERNATIONAL INTERNET FREEDOM

While concerns exist regarding internet polices in the U.S., religious liberty advocates see even more significant violations of internet freedoms in other

countries. Nathan Wineinger, director of policy relations for 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative, has been tracking this issue carefully as part of 21 Wilberforce’s advocacy in Washington, D.C., for international religious liberty. He pointed out that technology can play an important part in spreading the gospel, discipling people and organizing ministries to help people.

“We believe that technology is useful for religious liberty and that it can be used against religious liberty,” he said. “The printing press changed the world and was used by religious believers to disseminate religious ideas.”

“People around the world — particularly in religious communities — are discriminated against,” he added. “But the internet provides an opportunity for individuals — including and especially Christians — to coordinate their actions, to learn about their beliefs, to share the gospel. Technology is becoming more and more a part of religious expression.”

Wineinger pointed to China as “the most extreme” example of government efforts to monitor internet activity and punish those viewed as undermining the power of the government. Human rights lawyers are disappearing, he said, and “prisoners of conscience” suffer in a prison system where “unlike American prisons, those incarcerated have no expectation of humane treatment and no legal recourse for mistreatment.” He noted “a lot of coordination for house churches happens through the internet.” Thus, internet restrictions are “cutting people off from access to information, including information about churches, about beliefs.”

“If you’re in China today and you want to go to Facebook, if you want to go to Google, if you want to go to any Western website, then you will be stopped by their firewall,” Wineinger explained.

Elijah Brown, the new general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, noted that internet restrictions globally impact many Baptists. Pointing to the analysis by Freedom House, an organization that studies democratic and political freedoms, that ranks 21 countries as “Not Internet Free” and another 28 countries as just “Partly Free,” Brown talked about the



Nathan Wineinger

Baptists in those countries. Between those two categories, he identified 89 BWA member bodies with 75,800 churches and 16 million members.

“Government restriction on internet content and internet usage remains a pressing reality for many around the world, including millions of BWA Baptists,” he said. “For 16 million Baptists, internet restrictions have significant negative ramifications, including the ability of these individuals, churches and denominations to freely share the gospel, communicate with one another, pursue additional online theological reflection or more fully engage in pursuing peace and community wellbeing within their countries.”

“Within the 21 countries in the world with the most significant internet restrictions, there are 24 BWA member bodies representing 1.4 million Baptists and 10,500 churches,” Brown added. “This includes countries in the European Baptist Federation (Belarus, Egypt, Russia, Syria, Uzbekistan), the All Africa Baptist Fellowship (Ethiopia, the Gambia, Sudan), the All Asia Pacific Federation (Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam) and the Union of Baptists in Latin America (Venezuela). There are 65 additional BWA member bodies in 24 countries, representing



Elijah Brown

14.7 million Baptists and 65,300 churches

who also find themselves in contexts of only partial

internet freedom.”

Brown, who started his BWA role on Jan. 1, has long worked as an advocate for religious liberty. He noted that churches and individuals in countries with internet limitations “must carefully consider their emails and social media posts, knowing they may well be scrutinized by the government.”

Such restrictions can also “lead to real-world negative ramifications,” Brown added as he recounted two recent cases in Russia. In March 2017, Baptist leader Sergei Suprunenko was fined 5,000 rubles for creating a public online newspaper about the work of the Council of Churches Baptist. In July 2017, Baptist leader Sergei Stepanov was fined 10,000 rubles after posting an invitation to a church’s Easter worship service on social media.

“Monitored emails in one Asian country I visited in 2017 actively prevents clear communication and ministry engagement,” Brown added. “Blocked websites and government-sponsored

online misinformation campaigns prevent Baptists, along with all citizens, from being able to fully and freely participate in the life of their country.”

For Brown and other religious liberty advocates, internet firewalls are like the Berlin Wall for a new generation, restricting flow of information and cutting off religious communities.

“While there will be those who misappropriate and abuse internet freedom,” Brown said, “there is a danger in government-maintained internet firewalls, government-sponsored misinformation campaigns, email and social media posts tracked by government security agencies and the use of embedded internet technology by some governments to track down individuals to fine, arrest or bring harm.”

Both Brown and Wineinger believe Christians in the U.S. should care about the internet restrictions on believers in other nations.

“We are called to care about all the tongues and tribes in the world,” Wineinger said. “We need care about the people who are suffering in Bangladesh, we need to care about the people who are suffering in China, we need to care about the policies that are causing hardship.” ◀◀



Complete

100%

INTERNET RULES COULD THROTTLE RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

By **Brian Kaylor**
Word&Way Editor



On Dec. 14, the U.S. Federal Communications Commission voted 3-2 to rollback “net neutrality” principles governing internet access—and this could threaten religious liberty and free speech rights of religious websites. Net neutrality requires internet service providers — like AT&T, CenturyLink and Mediacom — to treat all internet content equally, thus not intentionally slowing down, blocking or charging more money from websites based on content or user.

Without the protections of net neutrality, internet service providers could create “paid prioritization” where they demand payment for websites to be in a “fast lane,” with nonpaying sites loading much slower, if at all. For small organizations — like Word&Way — who cannot pay the fees for faster service, such “throttling” of a site to make it load slower could drive many people to abandon the site and find information on faster sites. For websites — like wordandway.org — that offer a religious or ideological perspective, such opinions could find them targeted by providers opposed to the published viewpoints.

R. Mitch Randall, the new executive director

of the Baptist Center for Ethics, sees the removal of net neutrality as a potential threat to religious websites. A key part of BCE’s work is EthicsDaily.com, where they post news articles, columns, videos and other resources.

“For small nonprofits, such as the Baptist Center for Ethics and EthicsDaily.com, the elimination of net neutrality has the potential to be devastating,” Randall said.

A pastor in Oklahoma until he started at BCE on Jan. 1, Randall previously chaired the board of directors of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty. He views net neutrality as a religious liberty issue.

“Not only will faster connectivity be given to larger organizations with more resources, it places internet providers with the potential to discriminate against religious groups or content they deem offensive,” Randall explained. “For example, an internet provider with religious or political principles that guide their business practices could, in theory, limit connection speeds for organizations that were critical or in opposition of their beliefs. This scenario has frightening consequences, as it could be a serious infringement upon religious liberty and freedom of speech.”

Curtis Ramsey-Lucas, editor of The Christian Citizen magazine, shares similar concerns about losing net neutrality protections. A publication of the American Baptist Home Mission Societies, The Christian Citizen publishes both print

and online editions.

Ramsey-Lucas fears “the possibilities for preferential treatment and prioritization of content” that may “lead to the stifling of voices, including religious voices.”

“Given the lack of competition in the broadband service market, there is cause for religious nonprofits and publications like The Christian Citizen to be concerned with how the repeal of net neutrality rules will affect our ability to communicate with and reach internet users,” he said.

Ramsey-Lucas did, however, appreciate that part of the FCC’s vote on Dec. 14 would empower the Federal Trade Commission to “police the internet,” which he said “tempers my concerns.” He also noted that all major internet service providers have “committed not to block, throttle or unfairly discriminate against lawful content.”

“The FTC can and should hold internet providers to their public promises to maintain an open internet, thereby insuring a diversity of voices — including religious voices — are able to continue to use the internet effectively to reach audiences,” Ramsey-Lucas added.

The debate about how the internet should be regulated — if at all — started in the 1980s. By the early 2000s, many legislators and activists believed broadband internet should be treated as a common carrier service like telegrams and the phone network. That common carrier status prohibits preferential

CURTIS RAMSEY-LUCAS



R. MITCH RANDALL

treatment.

Yet, early attempts to codify net neutrality principles failed. In 2008, the FCC ruled Comcast was illegally throttling access to BitTorrent uploads (a way of sharing files over the internet). However, Comcast sued and won a ruling in 2010 that the FCC lacked jurisdiction. Later that year, the FCC passed its “Open Internet Order” establishing some net neutrality principles. However, a lawsuit by Verizon led to a 2014 court ruling vacating part of the 2010 FCC rules.

After Congress failed to act during the public debate following the 2014 ruling, the FCC in 2015 passed its “Title II Net Neutrality Rules” that reclassified broadband internet service as a common carrier like the phone network. A court ruling in 2016 upheld the new rules, which prevents internet service providers from blocking or throttling data

2014 and 2015 — and then again as the FCC prepared to vote on Dec. 14.

On Nov. 28, Bishop Christopher Coyne, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Communications, issued a statement reiterating the position of Catholic leaders in supporting net neutrality. He spoke out as the FCC prepared for its December vote, insisting that “robust internet protections are vital” to the work of Catholic parishes, schools and other institutions.

“Strong net neutrality protections are critical to the faith community to function and connect with our members, essential to protect and enhance the ability of vulnerable communities to use advanced technology and necessary for any organization that seeks to organize, advocate for justice or bear witness in the crowded and over-commercialized media environment,” Coyne argued.

humanity,” the faith leaders expressed their “strong support for domestic policies that enhance, and do not curtail, those rights.” The letter connects the idea of “an open internet” to the promotion of individual freedoms, human dignity and human rights.

The Christian Coalition, a politically-active conservative group started by televangelist Pat Robertson, calls net neutrality “a founding principle of the internet” on a page about the topic on its website. For more than a decade, the group has encouraged members to advocate for net neutrality protections.

“Net Neutrality protects your freedom to view websites without restriction, or regulation by the government or [internet service providers],” CC argued. “Independent voices and political groups are especially vulnerable.”

CC said, for instance, that without net



**“ For small nonprofits ...
the elimination of net neutrality has
THE POTENTIAL TO BE DEVASTATING.”
- Mitch Randall**

or creating paid prioritization to load paying sites more quickly. That 2015 set of rules is what the FCC — with new leadership under the new presidential administration — voted to repeal in December, thus returning the principle of net neutrality to a voluntary idea that internet service providers are not legally compelled to follow.

RELIGIOUS SUPPORT FOR NET NEUTRALITY

Many religious groups across the political and theological spectrums have voiced support for the principle of net neutrality. Some groups started their advocacy efforts in the early 2000s, with many others speaking out during the FCC and congressional debate in

“Without open internet principles which prohibit paid prioritization, we might be forced to pay fees to ensure that our high-bandwidth content receives fair treatment on the internet,” he added. “Nonprofit communities, both religious and secular, cannot afford to pay to compete with profitable commercialized content.”

On Dec. 4, several religious groups released a letter to the FCC similarly urging the preservation of net neutrality. Among those signing the statement were the Islamic Society of North America, the National Council of Churches, Presbyterian Church (USA) Office of Public Witness and Religion Communicators Council. Calling communication “one of God’s great gifts to

neutrality protections, “a cable company with a pro-choice board of directors” could target pro-life websites if “it doesn’t like a pro-life organization using its high-speed network to encourage pro-life activities.”

William Barber II, a progressive pastor in North Carolina who launched the “Moral Mondays” effort in that state, called net neutrality “a very important social justice issue” in a video for faithfulinternet.org, an advocacy campaign site launched by the United Church of Christ and the Stanford Center for Internet and Society.

“The web is a place where all Americans have equal voice, regards of color, regards of economic status or belief,” Barber said. “And we need to keep it that way.”

While religious leaders, free speech advocates and many others speak out for net neutrality, internet service providers have spent hundreds of millions of dollars in the past decade lobbying the FCC and Congress to kill net neutrality rules. Some critics of governmental regulations have also advocated against net neutrality.

POSTAL ADVOCACY

The issue of net neutrality is not the first time that religious communicators have worried about governmental decisions that could hinder efforts to publish religious information. Throughout the 1970s and '80s, leaders of Baptist and other religious nonprofit publications advocated against changes to postage rates that threatened to put nonprofit publications out of business. Then-Word&Way Editor Bob Terry hit the topic nearly annually in a column as he worried about dramatic price hikes, noted necessary adjustments to Word&Way subscription rates and urged governmental leaders not to kill nonprofit publications like Word&Way.

In the Aug. 19, 1976 issue, Terry noted rising postal rates — “a 400 percent increase in just five years” — “threatens to destroy every nonprofit, religious publication.” Due to the sudden increase in costs, he explained that Word&Way needed to either raise more money or stop printing for several weeks a year. He quickly added that “not to print would be disastrous” since Baptists “depend on the state Baptist paper to carry the news, information and opinions.”

In the Aug. 31, 1978 issue, Terry complained that postal rates continued to rise even though nonprofit publications were barred from selling advertising space that covered more than 10 percent of the publication's space (a rule still in place). Throughout the 1980s, nonprofit postal rates continued to increase dramatically — and some publications went out of print as a result. Word&Way's subscription rates climbed in response, increasing by a larger percentage during the 13-year period from 1976-89 than during the previous 80 years.

Terry did not just complain about the rates in his column. He also advocated for better governmental policies. He noted in the Aug. 25, 1977 issue that “we presented our plight to Congressmen in Washington recently,” but he did not expect them to act soon. Following a sudden 189 percent hike due to a congressional debate over the national budget, Terry wrote in the Jan. 14, 1982 issue that he was “working with other editors of nonprofit publications” to push lawmakers

to return to the previous rate schedule as the U.S. Senate worked on a new budget.

In March of 1986, Terry testified in Washington, D.C., during a hearing for the Postal Rate Commission. As the immediate past president at the time of the Southern Baptist Press Association, he spoke on behalf of Southern Baptist publications across the country, which he called “critical to the welfare of the denomination.”

“Without this news and information available to interested members, they cannot exercise soul liberty,” Terry said as he noted the importance of Baptist publications to individual Baptists. “Take away the common base of information and one sows the seeds of destruction for all the ministries supported by the 14 million people who make up our national denomination.”

Editors of other Baptist publications during the 1970s and '80s joined Terry in speaking out against the postal hikes on nonprofit rates, including Jack Brymer of the Florida Baptist Witness, Lynn Clayton of the Baptist Message in Louisiana, Marv Knox of the Western Recorder in Kentucky, R. G. Puckett of the Biblical Recorder in North Carolina, Al Schackleford of the Indiana Baptist and Presnall Wood of the Baptist Standard in Texas. Most publications responded to the dramatic increases in postal costs by increasing subscription prices, with some also cutting the number of issues or even reducing staff positions. The editors and the Southern Baptist Convention's Baptist Press tracked legislative proposals regarding postal rates and even encouraged readers to contact congressional members debating postal increases.

Three decades later, those publications run news websites — and some, like Florida Baptist Witness and Baptist Standard, now only publish online. With new publishing platforms come new challenges as lawmakers in

Washington, D.C., against policies that could harm religious nonprofit publications.

Knox, who served as editor

of the Baptist Standard after leading the Western Recorder, recounted the postal rate advocacy from decades ago. He noted that the publications at the time highlighted

“how we contributed to the common good,” unlike commercial publications operating “for their own profit.” Now the field coordinator for Fellowship Southwest, a regional body of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship launched in 2017, he sees parallels between the issues of nonprofit postal rates and net neutrality.

“It's actually the same point, but in a different technology era,” Knox explained. “They can regulate you out of business or, in this case, deregulate you out of business.”

Knox noted that much of CBF's communication efforts — like videos or even photos — would not load at old dial-up speeds and consumers have become accustomed to higher internet speeds. Thus, for religious organizations like CBF, a loss in internet speed “could render some aspects of our communication as obsolete or unable to meet the basic needs of our constituency.” ◀◀

NOW WHAT?

Although the FCC voted to rollback their net neutrality rules, there are still ways to advocate for a return to net neutrality protections. You can contact your members of Congress to:

1. Urge them to use the Congressional Review Act, which allows Congress to reverse a regulatory action within 60 legislative days. A simple majority vote by both the House and Senate would send a resolution of disapproval to the President's desk.
2. Urge them to pass their own law creating net neutrality protections. Although Congress previously debated the topic with bipartisan bills, no effort passed both the House and Senate.

In addition to possible congressional actions, court challenges to the FCC's move have been filed. State-level legislation promoting net neutrality could also emerge. Additionally, the FCC under new leadership could in the future return to the previous rules. If Congress passed a law, then the rules would not swing back-and-forth with FCC leadership changes.



KNOX

SOME EVANGELICALS SAY DROP 'EVANGELICAL'

By Jeff Brumley
Baptist News Global

Thinking of ditching the term “evangelical” to identify yourself as Christian? Get in line. Clergy, scholars, congregational coaches and innumerable laypeople are expressing increasing anger and disgust that the once respected term no longer describes their commitment to Christ and church.

The central culprit identified in news stories, op-ed pieces and social media is politics. What used to inspire born-again Christians to share their faith has, instead, come to describe a politically conservative, mostly white Christian who supports Republican candidates and causes.

“I think the word has gotten very dirty and needs a bath, but I am not sure it can be saved,” said Bill Wilson, founder and director of the Center for Healthy Churches. “There is a sense in which the word has had its day and is no longer a valid way of describing a faith community.”

A simple Google search uncovers a string of articles, some dating back several years and others much more recent, reporting that “evangelical” has become practically unrecognizable as a useful religious term. Headlines differ but largely share in the “Why I’m No Longer an Evangelical” theme.

In a 2016 piece for Christianity Today, pastor and sociologist Tony Campolo explained that public confusion with the word “evangelical” has led him and others to reject it altogether. Campolo wrote, “To the secular society, which we are trying to reach with the salvation story, the label functions as a barrier to people hearing that story.”

So, Campolo and others are describing themselves, and an organization they created, as “Red Letter Christians.” The idea is to communicate their focus on the words of Jesus — traditionally printed in red ink in Bibles. Jesus’s actions and words should be the starting point for interpreting scripture and sharing and defining the faith. Campolo wrote that he has abandoned the word, but not the traditional beliefs,

of evangelicalism.

“I still believe ... that salvation comes through a personal relationship with Christ; that the Bible was written by persons guided by the Holy Spirit and is the authority for faith and practice; and I hold to the doctrines in the Apostle’s Creed,” he explained.

Recently published research shows that Campolo and his colleagues are far from alone.

The Southern Baptist Convention’s LifeWay Research announced in December that many of those who do continue to identify themselves as evangelicals are not clear about the word’s meaning. It also uncovered a large group who hold to evangelical beliefs while shunning the term. LifeWay found that about a quarter of Americans — most of them white, Republican churchgoers who live in the

EVANGELICALS ACROSS AMERICA

Among people living in each region



South — say they are evangelical Christians.

“But they’re not always sure what they believe,” added a LifeWay release about its study titled “Many Who Call Themselves Evangelical Don’t Actually Hold Evangelical Beliefs.”

Evangelical beliefs, according to the study, include viewing the Bible as ultimate authority; encouraging non-Christians to accept Christ as their savior; being convicted that Jesus’s crucifixion alone removes sin; and asserting that Christ is the sole way to eternal salvation. Fewer than half of self-described evangelicals “strongly agree” with those essential beliefs, LifeWay found.

“There’s a gap between who evangelicals say they are and what they believe,” LifeWay Research Executive Director Scott McConnell said.

Many of those who seek to live the principles of evangelicalism — who LifeWay calls “evangelicals by belief” — do not go by the name. But evangelicals by belief go to church more frequently than self-identified evangelicals.

Issues of race also testify to the word’s continuing decline.

“For many African Americans, the term ‘evangelical’ is a turn-off, even though they hold evangelical beliefs,” McConnell said. “The term ‘evangelical’ is often viewed as applying to white Christians only. And that’s unfortunate.”

Some ministers say it is par for the course in Christian history for religious monikers to change or disappear as church and secular cultures evolve.

“This is a constant process,” said Brett Younger, senior minister at Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, N.Y.

Even the early Jesus followers used words for themselves that do not survive. “Christian” only came later. As “evangelical” is transformed by the culture, Younger said, Christians must look for new labels that describe their faith.

“It’s a process of renewal that keeps our faith alive. If culture dumbs down the meaning, then we look for new words.”

Besides, Christians have already experienced the abandonment of other words in modern times, Wilson said.

“Sanctuary” has been traded in for “worship center” in many congregations and some use “the teaching” to replace “sermon” because it sounds less ... well, preachy. And churches have been dropping denominational names from their signage, if not their identities, for decades.

“That kind of thing is always happening,” Wilson said. “Our language is constantly evolving.” ◀◀

Q&A

Interview:

Q&A Interview with Brian Ford, Executive Director of Churchnet

Interview by Brian Kaylor



Brian Ford has served as executive director of Churchnet (also known as the Baptist General Convention of Missouri) since April of 2017 (and he served

in a transitional role as executive director-elect for seven months before that). The third executive director of Churchnet since its founding in 2002, Ford previously served on staff at several Baptist churches in Missouri. He most recently had been pastor of Little Bonne Femme Baptist Church in Columbia, Mo., for 13 years. Word&Way Editor Brian Kaylor (who also serves as associate director of Churchnet) interviewed Ford in December.

You've been the executive director for Churchnet for almost a year and spent several months before that transitioning into the role. What have you learned and what's surprised you during that time?

I have certainly experienced a broad expression of the church. By that I mean, not only working with churches across our state, but also working with the Baptist Joint Committee and the Baptist World Alliance. Churchnet is a member body of both these national and international organizations and is engaged in ministry partnerships in Guatemala and a burgeoning partnership with Baptists in Cuba.

I've learned that God's Spirit is alive and well all across our country and world. I've also learned that we as Baptists in America have much to learn from our brothers and sisters in the faith elsewhere. I've learned the importance of sharing the stories of the global church with churches and leaders in Missouri, because we all tend to focus on our small corner of the world and God's kingdom.

I have been surprised by the many connections with pastors and leaders I come across. I guess that speaks to my age and that I've spent 20-plus years as a pastor in Missouri, but I'm always amazed at the points of connection that rise to the surface of conversations when meeting new people in Missouri and beyond.

Although my position allows me exposure to the larger Baptist family, there are moments when that world seems a bit smaller through relationships, connection and the work of the Holy Spirit.

You've been active with Midwest Baptist churches and organizations your whole life. For those who don't know you, what's a bit of your background?

I'm the son of entrepreneurial parents. I grew up in rural northwest Missouri on an 80-acre farm a few miles from Hamilton. Not only did my parents own and operate a farm, they also owned and operated an automotive repair shop. This made growing up an adventure and one of learning a myriad of skills like operating farm equipment, taking care of cattle, doing 4-wheel alignments and power steering replacements, to name a few.

My first memory of church was attending Nettleton Baptist Church where my father and my maternal grandfather were the only deacons and my mother was the church

organist and pianist. We were there anytime the church doors were open.

“ Churches and their leadership still need partners in ministry that help them engage their God-given futures with hope.

When I was 8 years old, I made a profession of faith that Jesus is Lord and was baptized at my grandfather's pond. My calling as a Jesus follower and eventually a pastor all started in the little village church. To paraphrase from John 1:46, “Can anything good come out of Nettleton?”

I graduated from J.C. Penney High School and went on to earn degrees from William Jewell College, Central Baptist Theological Seminary and Luther Seminary.

I've served in various churches, from a county seat town in Southwest Missouri to an urban church in the Kansas City metro to a college town church in central Missouri.

So, you moved from pastoring a local congregation to working for a parachurch body even as it's often claimed we're in a post-denominational era. Why do you still see the need for organizations like Churchnet?

Churches and their leadership still need partners in ministry that help them engage



Brian Ford leads a training session on strategic planning for leaders of the *Convención Bautista de Cuba Oriental* (Baptist Convention of Eastern Cuba) in Santiago de Cuba in November. A local Cuban Baptist pastor, Joey Hernández, translates. (Brian Kaylor/Word&Way)

their God-given futures with hope. The fact that we are in a post-denominational era does not change this. It does challenge each denominational network and ministry partner to focus on serving churches in practical ways that help churches grow and engage God's kingdom that is all around them.

Churchnet is structured and actively working to provide these practical helps. I believe we are an effective ministry partner that helps churches engage their futures with hope. I think we have a lot to offer and need to continue to tell our story and be present when opportunities arise.

I also think that local churches need multiple partners. In the Baptist tradition of local church autonomy, each church can partner with whomever they choose. No one partner can supply all the help and connections a local church needs. We hope that as more folks learn about the work of Churchnet, they will want to add us to

their partner list, if they haven't already.

Churchnet seems atypical when compared to most state Baptist organizations. What makes Churchnet unique and why are those differences important for the ministry?

Our network is unique in that we are all bi-vocational staff. This allows us to have personnel located in key areas throughout the state with virtual offices. All of our staff are ministers and serve in various capacities in local churches. We have "skin in the game," if you will, and believe in the transforming power of God working through Christ's body.

Thanks to one of our partners, First Baptist Church in Jefferson City, Mo, we also have a (rent-free) public office on the 6th floor — call for an appointment and stop by to see us!

We are a light organization,

administratively, and that allows us flexibility in these challenging times. This also allows us the ability to steward our resources toward serving churches and being member bodies of state-wide, national and international organizations. This gives direct access to our church partners to groups like Missouri Faith Voices, the Baptist Joint Committee and the Baptist World Alliance. ◀◀

Note: Learn more about the Churchnet at churchnet.org.

CHURCHNET INITIATIVES

Churchnet centers its work around five key areas:

Missional Collaboration:

Facilitate genuine collaboration between congregations and among church leaders for support, encouragement, resource sharing, learning opportunities and joint projects.

Strategy Development: Assist congregations as they seek God's will and shape a positive future for ministry.

Generational Engagement:

Help congregations understand, build relationships and share the gospel with new generations and cultures.

Community Involvement: Help congregations understand and engage the issues confronting people in their communities.

There are many ways to share your opinion with us and our readers. We like them all!



Here's how: Editor, PO Box 1771, Jefferson City, MO 65102 or editor@wordandway.org

Considering God AND GUNS

By Jeff Brumley
Baptist News General

More and more Americans are moving away from organized religion and toward all manner of alternative spiritual paths. And newly published research suggests that guns may be replacing God, scripture and community for many in the United States.

That largely means white adult men mostly in rural areas who have experienced, or fear they will experience, economic hardship, according to a study titled “Gun Culture in Action” by Baylor University scholars Paul Froese and F. Carson Mencken. The pair found that Americans in that population group reported the highest levels of emotional, moral and even spiritual attachments to their firearms. Froese and Mencken created a scale measuring how safe, responsible, confident and patriotic gun ownership make survey

respondents feel. Feelings of control over fate, respect and value to family and community were also examined.

“You add that up and it gives you a score which gives your level of ‘gun empowerment,’” Froese told Baptist News Global.

The higher the score, the more likely respondents were to feel restored and empowered by firearms. Greater attachment to guns also indicated lower levels of participation in church or other religious communities, he said.

“They may say they are religious and Christian, but if you dig down, they are less likely to go to church, to read the Bible or be attached to a religious community.”

That is not to say that higher levels of faith involvement dictate lower levels of gun

ownership.

“Someone active in a church community may own a gun and feel safer, but that’s not to say the gun gives them meaning and purpose,” Froese said. “What we are finding is that someone very involved in a religious community is less likely to feel strong gun empowerment.”

For their study, Froese and Mencken scoured data gathered in the Baylor Religion Study, a series of extensive studies conducted in four waves from 2008 to 2017. The research drills into American attitudes, behaviors and beliefs around religion. They used information from the 2014 wave, conducted by Gallup, for their gun study which has been published by the journal *Social Problems*.

“Guns and their inherent power restore in some people a sense of control stripped away by the economic consequences of globalism,” Mencken said in Baylor’s announcement of the study. “The ability to protect their property, families and communities is restorative.”

The data he and Froese studied came from questions on gun empowerment asked of 577 gun owners. They were asked what types of firearms they own and why they own them. They also were asked to describe their attitudes on firearm policies or proposed policies, such as background checks, mental health screening and violence in the media.

The study found that firearm owners most empowered by their guns are more likely to be white, married men in rural areas. They are politically more conservative and alienated from society.

Those men also are more likely to express extreme patriotism and, at the same time, extremely anti-government sentiments. Respondents in this category make a distinction between the military and police, whom they support, and the larger government, which they distrust.

“It is white men who own guns who say they are patriotic who are also most likely to say it’s OK to use violence against the government,” Froese said. ◀◀



Paul Froese

Read Word&Way. See the world.



In 2017, Word&Way readers read religious news from Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Canada, China, Colombia, Cuba, El Salvador, England, Estonia, France, Germany, Guatemala, Haiti, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Israel, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Moldova, Myanmar, Nigeria, Nicaragua, Palestine, Russia, South Sudan — *breath!* — Syria, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Zimbabwe — not to mention plenty of places here in the Midwest and the rest of the United States.

Word&Way. Giving you a global perspective.

PASTORS UNDERGO SECURITY TRAINING AFTER CHURCH SHOOTING

By Bobby Ross Jr.
Religion News Service

Shooting holes in a “paper bad guy” during target practice? That is easy. Defending a house of worship against a real gunman? That is a whole different story.

As he led a security training on Dec. 5 at a Dallas-area megachurch, Sgt. Mike Gurley warned against thinking that worshippers licensed to carry handguns can offer reliable protection.

“To assume they’re going to be effective in an active-shooter situation is comparable to giving me a set of golf clubs and expecting me to win the Masters,” the retired Dallas policeman told the crowd of 650 pastors and other church leaders.

The event, titled “Church Security in the 21st Century,” was held at the 42,000-member Prestonwood Baptist Church exactly a month after the worst church shooting in American history. That mass shooting occurred about 300 miles south of Plano at First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas, on Nov. 5. Twenty-six people killed.

Gurley, principal of the security firm Teamworks Consulting Inc., said even people licensed to carry firearms need specialized training to be able to respond to active-shooter situations. He urged churches to develop policies for minimum training and qualifications for anyone armed with a gun and to consider involving members with law enforcement and military experience. Helping with the security team requires just as strong a calling and “God-given talent” as any other service, he said.

“Sutherland Springs was not a gun control issue,” he added. “It was a sin issue. We have to safeguard the body of believers.”

The Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, which has 2,600-member congregations, co-sponsored the event at Prestonwood. The Rev. Jack Graham, the megachurch’s pastor and a former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, said God put the idea for the free seminar on his heart.

“One of the things a pastor is assigned to do is to guard the flock, and that includes spiritually and biblically to guard the flock,”

he said. “But I also take very seriously the assignment to watch over the flock, God’s people, in a physical way.”

When registration for the first seminar quickly filled up, the church scheduled an identical second one for a week later, said Mike Buster, Prestonwood’s executive pastor. Additional seminars are planned all over Texas.

“Obviously, it’s on the minds of every pastor and staff across the country,” Buster said of church security. “In nearly every church, they’re looking for ways to better secure their congregation and to ... develop

Baptist Church of The Colony, north of Dallas.

“It was emotional, especially when I heard about the young people, the babies, that got killed because of this craziness,” said Jenkins, explaining why he chose to attend the seminar. “And being a father and a grandfather, of course, that really hit home with me. So, it even made me want to move even further ... to make sure the people who are entering our church ... can know that they are entering into a safe haven when they come to worship.”

Michael Gossett, campus pastor for New Beginnings Baptist Church in Longview, 130 miles east of Dallas, said he immediately started praying for the families when he heard about the First Baptist Church shooting.

“It’s just — it’s tragic,” Gossett said. “Because you think about, ‘Man, how would I respond if I was the pastor at that church? How would I respond if I was the dad to one of these kids?’ It’s just heartbreaking.”

In response, the East Texas congregation is beefing up its own security team.

“We’ve been more diligent in our preparedness, because the truth is, you become somewhat complacent in your approach, and unfortunately, a tragedy such as that serves as a reminder that we do have to be diligent in being prepared,” Gossett said.

At the one-day seminar, topics ranged from “How to Incorporate Your Parking, Usher and Greeter Ministries into Your Security Plan” to “What You Can Do Right Now to Formulate a Security Plan and Assemble a Safety/Security Team” to “Creating an All-Hazards Approach to Managing Incidents.” The more time that passes, the easier it will be for church leaders to move on from the Sutherland Springs tragedy, Gurley told seminar attendees.

“It’s human nature to let this go because it hurts,” he said. “Please don’t let this feeling pass. The people on Nov. 5 were only doing one thing: They were gathering to worship. But they became the victims of a warped and twisted mind. We cannot let those people die in vain.” ◀◀



Pastor Jack Graham speaks at “Church Security in the 21st Century.”
(Bobby Ross Jr./Religion News Service)

some emergency plans, to build relationships with local law enforcement agencies as well as to have this culture of awareness with their people, and to be ready for anything that might happen.”

Prior to the Sutherland Springs massacre, church volunteer Stacey Bottolfson said her family’s Pentecostal congregation — Life Central Church in Plano — had been lackadaisical about security.

“I know that at our church, there are several people who carry in church, but we need to get a plan together in case something happens,” said Bottolfson, who came to the seminar with her husband, Tim.

What happened in South Texas inspired similar soul-searching by the Rev. James Jenkins, senior assistant pastor of Friendship



Helping Children & Youth **DEAL WITH VIOLENCE**

By Carolyn Tomlin
For Word&Way

Church and school violence can happen anywhere, anytime. Large churches and schools, medium and small ones.

Violence is no respecter of persons. No ethnic group, no economic group, no age group, no one is immune.

On Sunday, Nov. 5, in the peaceful community of Sutherland Springs, Texas, a lone gunman opened fire in the First Baptist Church, killing 26 people and injuring about 20. In this small community of about 400 residents, people knew their neighbors. Many were related family members. Among those killed were several children and youth — friends and siblings of those who survived.

From 2006 to 2016, at least 147 shootings occurred in churches — and that does not count the many more mass shootings at schools and other public places. In June 2015, Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, S.C., was the target of a white supremacist that entered a prayer service and killed nine members. In December 2012, our nation mourned the loss of 20 students and six adults at Sandy Hook School in Newtown, Conn., when a gunman used an assault weapon to gain entrance to a locked building. And our memories will never forget the earlier white supremacist terrorism when four young black girls were killed at 16th Street Church in Birmingham, Ala., in September 15, 1963.

Over the past several years, churches and Christian schools have experienced random

acts of violence. Pastors and church leaders are searching for ways to help those who survive and deal with this unexpected carnage.

How Can Churches React

Rev. Wallace S. Hartsfield II, senior pastor of Metropolitan Missionary Baptist Church in Kansas City Mo., told the Kansas City Star in November that he remembers when people viewed a house of worship as a “sacred space” and so children would even quiet down as they passed by one. Now, Hartsfield and others believe churches must take stronger measures to protect themselves. He also knows that some of the violence — like at the 2015 church shooting in Charleston — is more about race than faith.

“We have terrorism in America,” Hartfield said as he reflected in the aftermath of the Sutherland Springs shooting. “We rally against foreign enemies and a common foe, but we run to our own corners when it comes to terrorism in this county.”

So, he believes churches must do “whatever it takes.” Thus, Metropolitan contacted a company that specializes in enhancing church security.

Suggestions for Helping Children & Youth

Justin Wainscott, pastor at First Baptist Church in Jackson, Tenn., believes churches should particularly think about helping children and youth process news about violent acts — and especially be

ready if violence strikes nearby.

“First and foremost, I think we have to grieve with them and be patient with them as they try to process the pain they’ve suffered,” he said. “Then, I think we consistently show them love and joy and compassion. And finally, we keep praying for them and pointing them to Jesus, who will not only fill them with hope but will one day wipe every tear from their eyes.”

Hopefully, your church or Christian school will never experience this grief. However, if it should occur, do you have trained staff and leaders ready to help children and youth? Is there a plan in place? One of the best approaches in dealing with such a situation is to be prepared. Here are some ways to help children and youth cope:

- **Encourage strong interactions** with a safe and caring adult. Train adults who work with children to build nurturing relationships based on a sense of trust. Schedule workshops on developing trust between adults and children.
- **Teach this verse:** “When I am afraid, I will trust in you” (Psalm 56:3).
- **Allow the child to lead.** Adults may want to talk about the violent situation they have experienced. Kids may not express their feelings this way. What they saw or experienced may come out in play or drawings.
- **Learn to listen.** Listen with all your senses. If a child wants to talk, observe

their facial features, body language, hand gestures and even fidgeting. These characteristics may tell you more than the words they speak.

- **Avoid details, but be honest.** Older children may be able to understand the situation. Younger children may not. Answer questions in an honest way. Otherwise, children will make up stories that happen, which may be worse than the actual event.

- **Provide comfort animals.** Across our nation, many institutions are bringing in comfort animals when a violent situation takes place. Children who have experienced stress and suffering often respond to a gentle dog, a purring kitten or a soft bunny. Animals such as these offer unconditional love and acceptance.

- **Be truthful as to promises.** Children

depend on adults to keep them safe. Refrain from making promises that you may not be able to follow through. Instead, tell children, "I'll do everything in my power to keep you safe and protect you."

Implement These Safety Features

Steps churches and schools should take include:

- **Know your physical surroundings.** In case of a violent act, do you know the emergency exits? Are heavy metal doors separating your class from the hallway? Is there a safe room in your church for weather-related disasters? Is there an intercom or communication system throughout the building?

- **Teach children to follow instructions.** Most importantly: children should learn to obey a teacher — immediately.

Learning this important rule could be the difference in survival. A church should be a peaceful place where all people feel safe. We know, this isn't always true. Practice safety drills. Practice moving quickly and quietly. Practice following directions.

- **Keep lines of communication open between the church and home.** Children may act differently when at home with parents or caregivers, compared to being in church programs. If a child is showing unusual stress after a period of time, you may relate your feeling to the parent. Options could include a visit to the child's doctor.

Violence in churches and Christian schools appears to be rising. Keeping children safe and helping them cope with violence, if it happens, should be a concern for houses of worship. ◀◀

"Violence in churches and Christian schools appears to be rising. Keeping children safe and helping them cope with violence, if it happens, should be a concern for houses of worship."

Data on Church Violence

- 26% of church homicides occur during robberies
- 16% are spillovers from domestic relationship conflicts
- 14% are due to personal conflicts between people (other than domestic relationships)
- 11% are attributed to mental illness
- 9% are gang-related
- 6% are the result of religious bias
- 4% are drug-related
- The rest are random or scattered causes

(Carl Chinn, church security specialist: carlchinn.com)

Carolyn Tomlin writes for the Christian magazine and newspaper market. She teaches the Boot Camp for Christian Writers.



carolynTomlin

►► Media & Faith

YOUR 2018 KINDNESS BUCKET LIST



ken **Satterfield**

I can be pretty clueless in talking to the opposite sex, a different culture and — now — both older and (sadly) younger ages.

But this past year has really confused me. Regardless of the cause, discussions about hot-button topics devolve into name-calling, even among Christians.

So, I'd like to suggest a bucket list for this year. Not exactly random acts of kindness, my list focuses more specifically on kind words, random and deliberate, both spoken or written:

When someone provides good service, tell them so — specifically. Share that on a comment card, too.

Say hello to people you pass in the hall, on the street or at the mall. Upgrade it with a smile!

Compliment someone on Facebook you haven't contacted in more than six months.

Take a season (like Lent), month or week where you send a note or email to someone who has made a difference in your life each day.

Hide notes (tinyurl.com/MAF-Words1), leave a note in publications (tinyurl.com/MAF-Words2) or attach a tag (tinyurl.com/MAF-Words3) for people to find in unexpected places.

Tell your pastor something meaningful from a recent sermon. Tell your church's support staff how much you appreciate what they do. Tell the person behind you that you really enjoyed their singing.

Need help with affirmations for relationships and co-workers? Find ideas at tinyurl.com/MAF-Words4 and tinyurl.com/MAF-Words5.

Write a letter to your future self; include some favorite things. Then have a friend send it sometime later. Other letter writing ideas for National or World Letter Writing Days (Dec. 7 and Sept. 1 respectively) are at tinyurl.com/MAF-Words6. The World Needs More Love Letters (moreloveletters.com) encourages writing anonymous letters that are happy, encouraging and about the recipient.

Make a phone call instead of sending a text.

Use an app to make personalized, even handwritten, cards (tinyurl.com/MAF-Words7).

Share encouraging graphics found on Random Words of Kindness (tinyurl.com/MAF-Words8) to a friend or someone struggling.

When your team loses, say something gracious to/about your rival.

If you are really industrious, why not make these monthly, even weekly goals?

►► Ken Satterfield is marketing director for Word&Way, a former media specialist and really, really glad you read this! Find more ideas and links with the online version.

►► Ministry Voice

EVERY FOUR YEARS



steven **Jones**

Every four years, the Winter Olympics is broadcast into our homes to provide a break from mid-winter television programs. Alpine skiing, figure skating, ski jumping, speed skating, cross-country skiing, bobsledding and ice hockey have been played at every Winter Olympics since its beginning in 1924. New games have been added, such as the luge, short-track speed

skating, freestyle skiing and, oh yes, the game of all games, curling.

Nothing is more relaxing than watching teams of four men or women sliding large stones of granite down a runway of pebbled ice toward a target area (aka "the house" made of concentric circles much like a bullseye). Although players shout a lot, their opponents don't try to harm each other, and might even say "Bonspiel" after an opponent's good play.

Curling is about skill, technique and strategy. One reporter said, "Take the strategy of chess, the use of angles in billiards and the shot-making of golf ... put them on ice and you have curling."

If a team's strategy is only to knock the opponent's stones out of "the house," then that team is sure to lose. In order to win, the team must think about the shot and the shots thereafter, before curling the first stone and releasing it at the hog line. After both teams have slid and brushed 16 stones (8 each) toward the house, the team with the stone closest to the center (aka "tee") wins the round. The team that wins the majority of 8 rounds, wins the game.

Such is the nature of visionary leadership. It is focusing on the current effort and, yet, planning for the next moves at the same time. Flexibility is also very important. What is working today, may not work tomorrow.

Change is an ever-present challenge. Mark Twain said, "I'm all for progress — it's change I can't stand." We shouldn't fear change. We should accept it and seize the opportunity to make us better at doing what we believe God wants us to do.

Lord, help us to determine what is appropriate change and what is needless change. There are some changes we may not want to accept because they run counter to God's direction for our lives. Other changes we'll want to embrace to help us to do God's will even better.

►► Steven Jones is president & CEO of The Baptist Home. Learn more at thebaptisthome.org.

MESSENGERS WANTED



One of the themes emphasized through Christmas and Advent — and that we need in the new year — is hope. To hope is to have confidence in something or someone.

In Isaiah 40:1-11, hope had been a fleeting idea for God's children. They longed for any sign of hope in their lives. They were hopeless because they were experiencing great pain from being overtaken by a stronger military power and were forced to serve this foreign enemy. They pleaded with God to change their circumstances, but it seemed as if God was ignoring their cries.

But, then, God finally does speak to them and shares the plans that God has for their future. God tells them that they can have hope. In Isaiah 40, the writer announces that there is hope for God's children. There was finally good news. God, or God's representative, was on the way to free them from their captivity. Someone would serve as a conduit for God to act on the behalf of God's children and bring them physical freedom. Hope was coming.

Mark 1:1-8 carries a similar message of hope. During the timeframe that the events in Mark occur, the people of God were once again living under a certain type of hardship. Although they were free physically, they still experienced a certain bondage to the Roman government. They needed to hear a message that their lives would get better, as well.

John the Baptizer arrived on the scene

with such a message. But John's message did not simply emphasize military freedom. Yes, God was aware of the social and military challenges they faced, but the salvation that was headed their way would have implications not just for them, but for the

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The question that each of us is called to consider is are we willing to be used by God as a messenger of hope today?

entire world and future generations. John paved the way for Jesus and his message of eternal salvation.

Christmas and Advent are not just about giving presents and reconnecting with loved ones. They are about how God brings hope to people that need it. One of the ways that God brings hope to people in need is through a messenger. God's practice of using messengers did not end with Isaiah or John the Baptizer. God still uses messengers to distill hope to those who are in need.

The question that each of us is called

to consider is are we willing to be used by God as a messenger of hope today? Are you willing to stand, or sit, or tweet, or blog or Facebook the simple message that there is hope for our world? Are you willing to share the message that, although our lives may seem crazy, God has not forgotten about any of us?

Although this good news begins with the birth of a child so many years ago, that is not the end of the good news. That child, the Savior, will come back in the future to restore all things and to make all things new, including our lives and relationships. God will return for us, and God and humankind will exist together. This is the message of hope that we are privileged to share. Our world could use more of this message. Our world could use more messengers like the writer of Isaiah and John the Baptizer. Are you willing to serve as one?

► Terrell Carter is assistant professor and director of contextualized learning at Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Shawnee, Kansas, and pastor of Webster Groves Baptist Church in Webster Groves, Mo.



terrell Carter

» Faith in Action

NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS



christopherDixon

It's officially the New Year and with the rolling of the calendar, most of us have made some well-intentioned resolutions.

One of my more regular resolutions (read: year after year, regardless of whether it actually happens) is that I will run/work out more and lose some weight. Of course, some years I am more successful at this than others. Some years, I eat better/healthy meals and run, and my weight

goes down. Other years, I succumb to the irresistible pull of the ice cream in our freezer and remain a bit more "stocky" or "thick" (as my wife and son politely say) as the year progresses.

I'm almost convinced that the ice cream and candy at the grocery store that scream out, "I'm delicious; eat me!" before jumping into my grocery cart, are conspiring with or are the work of the enemy ... but that's a story for another time.

As we visit with friends at church, work and around town, I'm reminded that in regard to our spiritual life, there are many of us who resolve to spend more time in the Bible and give more sacrificially, especially with the rolling of the calendar.

In other words, this is the perfect time of year — for those of us who believe that our faith is one of action — for us to examine those very questions: Am I spending enough time daily or weekly in God's word? Am I faithful in my attendance and service to my church? Am I giving of my tithes and offerings to the Body of Christ first, as I should be?

While the questions are as old as Christianity itself (older, actually), they are questions most of us ask as seekers. And we ask because, as we attempt to follow Christ, we rightfully ask how we can serve him better, realizing that we all answer to him one day (Romans 14:10-12).

But as we begin this year and start fresh, another realization should cross our minds. That thought is that we are "not saved by works, lest any man should boast," but instead are saved by grace. It's a grace we didn't deserve and couldn't have possibly earned.

So while we resolve to put Christ first this year, may we remember that it begins with our heart, long before our hands. As the Casting Crown lyrics note, "All he ever wanted was my heart."

» Christopher Dixon is the Chief Operating Officer of eLectio Publishing (electiopublishing.com) and the pastor of West Finley Baptist Church near Fordland, Mo.

» The Shepherd Calls

TELLING EVERYONE HIS STORY



wadeParis

The arrival of radio as mass media in the early twentieth century was heralded by many sincere Christians as a gift of God for propagating the gospel. Suddenly, there was a means of communicating God's message of redemption with large audiences.

Theoretically, those noble hopes were sound.

However, like many other evangelistic shortcuts, it simply did not materialize. If one was not ready to hear the gospel, all they needed to do was turn the dial. Additionally, radio was quickly commercialized and became financially prohibitive to cash-strapped Christian organizations. Even when finances were available, producing Christian programming to compete with world news or soap operas was beyond the expertise of most churches.

This evangelistic hope arose again with the advent of television. People now did not have to just listen to those dry sermons, they could also "see" them. Alas, what was true of radio was even more true of television. Costs of producing a simple program were often more than a church's entire budget.

And, production was intimidating. The new local station in our city of Jackson, Tenn., at first gave 15 minutes a day to pastors for a devotional. However, preaching without an audience combined with the distractions of camera and light personnel (you could hear them talking to one another while you preached) proved so intimidating that pastors refused to participate; and the station dropped the spot.

The arrival of the latest mass media method — the internet — provides similar opportunities but with new twists. We can now tweet the gospel to the world for free. We can all be evangelistic programmers. For what it's worth, I confess tweeting the gospel sounds like an oxymoron. God knows I am not a fan of the internet. However, I do not wish to belittle any honorable means of proclaiming the gospel. But remember before the arrival of our modern media, the gospel was spread around the world. It is recorded in the book of Acts.

Here is the Bible's advice for doing it again: "How shall they hear without a preacher? ... How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel" (Romans 10:14). Then again, they personally went house to house telling the story of Jesus (Acts 2:46). We have become lazy witnesses. Mass media is tempting; but the best way to tell the story of Jesus is face to face, house to house.

» Wade Paris writes a weekly syndicated column, "The Shepherd Calls."



READ THE INSTRUCTIONS

In the wee hours of the morning on Dec. 25, parents everywhere were frantically assembling toys to be presented to children just a few hours hence. No doubt, about 2:00 a.m., some mom or dad remembered an old adage: “When everything else fails, read the instructions.”

Speaking of instructions, we continue to have important national conversations about the place of morality in our public life. What if we did a non-partisan, new-year inventory of how well our public servants have measured up alongside the Decalogue, God’s Big Ten, found in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5? In other words, if we claim to be a nation founded on ethical principles, let’s read the instructions, the Ten Commandments! Time and space will not allow us to elaborate on each, so let’s primarily focus on the first three statutes as a yardstick, and assume that the reader can take it from there.

The first two Commandments assert that we are to have no other gods besides the one true God. God alone — nothing else and no one else should be worshiped. Idols can be physical objects, mental or metaphysical concepts, ideologies or ideas. How many times do we hear our elected officials exalt ideology, nation, flag, political party, personal ambition or capitalism above the true Lord God?

After many years of pastoring churches, I’ve come to the sad conclusion that for many of us — politicians included — scripture is a Rorschach test. We see what we are predisposed to see. Instead of using God’s instruction as a grid to read our personal preferences, we use

our personal preferences to read God’s instruction.

But God is not a magic wand to be brandished for personal gain. George Bernard Shaw once said, “God created us in his image, and we decided to return the favor.” Listen up, politicians. We do not manage God. If our Judeo-Christian

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If we claim to be a
nation founded on
ethical principles, let’s
READ THE INSTRUCTIONS -
the Ten Commandments!

scriptures do not at some point convict and challenge us, that’s a pretty good sign our god is self-created. Anne Lamott said it best: “You can safely assume that you’ve created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do.”

And that leads naturally to the third Commandment. “You shall not take the LORD’S name in vain (use it wrongfully).” Frankly, this mandate would be much easier to obey if it only referred to cuss words. But it’s more. The statute actually warns us not to take God’s reputation (name) and drag it through the mud.

Someone recently asserted that alleged inappropriate sexual behavior with a minor is analogous to Joseph’s relationship with the Virgin Mary. There it is. The sacred, dragged through the profane — big time. It’s not enough that politicians break God’s law; they hide behind scripture, as if knowing some Bible verses (out of context) excuses bad conduct. Is it asking too much that our nation’s leaders not use God’s name as a good luck charm?

The story is told that Mark Twain once listened impatiently as a speaker droned on and on about a desire to visit the Holy Land. The pompous fellow said he wanted to climb Mt. Sinai and from there recite the Ten Commandments. Twain, who did not suffer fools gladly, finally interrupted, “Had you ever thought of just staying home and keeping the Commandments?”

Here is a humble public policy suggestion. Let’s stop worrying so much about getting the Ten Commandments posted on courthouse lawns and focus instead on getting them inscribed in our hearts and integrated into our collective national behavior. New Year’s resolution: Let’s read the instructions.



►► Doyle Sager is senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Jefferson City, Mo.

doyleSager

SMALL RELIGIOUS COLLEGES STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

By Bobby Ross, Jr.
Religion News Service

Duncan Tiemeyer chose St. Gregory's University because he wanted a faith-based education that would teach him more than how to succeed in a career. The 550-student Catholic liberal arts college in Shawnee, Okla., traces its roots to French monks who moved to Indian Territory in 1875, intent on developing the bodies, minds and souls of Native American and settler children.

"Here, we are taught not only to focus on our five-year plan but also our 100-year plan and our 500-year plan," said Tiemeyer, 22, a senior business and theology major from Houston. "What are we preparing for? Are we living our lives in a way that is getting us to the next life? Are we going to be able to go to heaven?"

However, the brand of education offered by St. Gregory's — where Benedictine monks still pray multiple times daily in a chapel beside a cemetery filled with the remains of their predecessors — came to an abrupt halt at the fall semester's end.

"It's just a tragic and sad loss, and I'm grieving for our students and faculty and staff who are working through this loss," said St. Gregory's President Michael A. Scaperlanda.

The financially strapped Roman Catholic institution, 40 miles east of Oklahoma City, is just the latest small religious college to close in an increasingly competitive higher education marketplace. Grace University, a Christian college in Omaha, Neb., will end operations in May, doomed by financial and enrollment challenges. Marygrove College, a Catholic liberal arts institution in Detroit, shut down its undergraduate programs in December. Catholic-affiliated Saint Joseph's College in Rensselaer, Ind., did not reopen in the fall.

"The transition from a mom-and-pop shop to a niche boutique has been difficult for many colleges," Scaperlanda said. "In the pre-Wal-Mart world, mom-and-pop shops could survive and thrive. In the Wal-Mart world, you need to have a niche market and very sophisticated business practices, and I think that has been difficult for many small Christian universities,

including St. Gregory's."

Roughly one-third of the small private colleges rated by Moody's Investors Service generated operating deficits in 2016, an increase from 20 percent in 2013, MarketWatch reported in June. A major reason, according



Duncan Tiemeyer at St. Gregory's University. (Bobby Ross Jr./Religion News Service)

to the financial information website: a record level of tuition discounts, "a practice that's financially riskier for small colleges that have fewer sources of revenue to rely on."

More than 60 percent of Catholic universities in the U.S. have fewer than 2,500 students, and most have "very little in the way of financial endowment," said Paula Moore, vice president of external relations for the Washington, D.C.-based Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities.

"Particularly since the beginning of the Great Recession of 2007, many ACCU-member colleges and universities have made ongoing commitments to ensure the accessibility of high-quality Catholic education by holding tuition increases at an absolute minimum and by increasing the amount of financial aid for students," Moore said.

In 1956, 300 Catholic colleges and universities served roughly 400,000 students across the nation, according to Moore. Today, that total is closer to 200 institutions, but with double the overall enrollment, she reported.

"What that tells us broadly is that there has been a certain level of contraction among our colleges," Moore added, "but that they continue to innovate and find ways to serve even greater numbers of students."

As religious colleges die, it is society that loses out, Scaperlanda said.

"Students that go to a Catholic or a Protestant or even a Jewish or Islamic university — any of those faith-foundation universities — have a framework for life and can see their role as an accountant or a nurse within the context of a deeper meaning," he said.

News of the university's closing — announced in November — brought shock and tears on campus, where a Christian cross sits atop the landmark Benedictine Hall, a castlelike structure built a century ago.

"I've been blessed with the understanding that nothing is outside of God's providence," said Emilia Lilly Bermudez, St. Gregory's dean of students. "I have to maintain calm for the sake of the students, but it's not something that I have to fake," added Bermudez, an immigrant from El Salvador and graduate of Catholic-affiliated Ave Maria University in Florida.

In its final weeks, the university focused on helping students find new educational homes, from Oklahoma Baptist University just down the street to Franciscan University of Steubenville, Ohio, a Catholic institution 1,100 miles away. Both those universities — and a number of others, both public and private — have sent recruiters to St. Gregory's.

Tiemeyer, the Student Government Association's president, created a GoFundMe page with a goal of raising \$15,000 to help the 110 faculty and staff members who lost their jobs right before Christmas. He is unsure of his own future. Tiemeyer has enough credits to graduate with his business degree. But he is four courses short of completing his theology major. While considering whether to become a priest, he has applied to go to seminary through the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City.

"We'll see if that's what God wants," Tiemeyer said. ◀◀

IRAQ PATRIARCH LOOKS TO LIFE AFTER WAR WITH ISIS

by Cathy Lynn Grossman
Religion News Service

As Iraq emerges from more than three years of war with the Islamic State group, battling an extremist “mentality” will be the key to peaceful coexistence among the country’s religious and ethnic groups, the top Chaldean Catholic Church official says. Patriarch Louis Raphael Sako, leader of the Iraq-based church, also appealed for an end to discrimination against Christians in Iraq and the reconstruction of Christian areas in the country’s north left in ruins by the war to enable Christian families to return.

Once a vibrant community that enjoyed protection and near equal rights with the Muslim majority under the rule of Saddam Hussein, the number of Iraq’s Christians has steadily dwindled since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion as they have been targeted by Islamic militants, forcing the majority to flee the country. During the Islamic State group’s onslaught across northern and western Iraq in 2014, thousands of Christians in Nineveh province, of which Mosul is the capital, fled as the extremists forced them to convert to Islam or pay a special tax, and often confiscated their property.

“They have this feeling that Islam is the completion of religion, is the only true religion and the others have been falsified,” Sako told the AP on Monday at the headquarters of the Chaldean Catholic Patriarchate of Babylon, based in Baghdad. “This is very bad, this mentality.”

Since 2003, the number of Christians in Iraq has decreased to around half a million from an estimated 1.5 million, Sako lamented. Among the more than 3 million people who have been displaced inside the country since 2014 are 120,000 Christians, all of them aided by the Church as “the government gave nothing,” he said.

“We feel that we are marginalized ... this is our land, we were here before the arrival of Islam and here the majority was

Christian,” Sako said.

Some Christians managed to return to villages and towns in Nineveh Plain outside Mosul, but none have yet returned to the city itself, where 25 churches suffered damage and were ransacked, he noted.

“Now, what we are expecting as Christians, but also as Iraqis, from the government and also the international community is security and stability, also the construction of the



Chaldean Patriarch Raphael Sako in December. (Khalid Mohammed/Associated Press)

villages, infrastructure, houses, but the priority is for security and stability otherwise people are not going back home,” he said.

“This is the responsibility of the Iraqi government, but it is also the (responsibility of the) international community and especially it is the moral responsibility of America for they are also the reason behind what we lived out during 15 years after 2003,” the patriarch added, referring to the year of the U.S.-led invasion.

The Iraqi government has declared the war against ISIS over after driving the extremists from all territory they controlled in 2014, but discrimination against Christians

by Muslims has not ended, Sako said.

During a Friday sermon in the ethnically-mixed city of Kirkuk, which was never under Islamic State control, a Sunni cleric described Christians as “infidels” and called on Muslims not to take part in Christmas celebrations and not to congratulate Christians on the occasion. The same statements are also coming out from some mosques in the northern Kurdish self-ruled region, Sako noted.

“This is bad, they are spreading hatred, this is not religion,” he said.

Asked whether such mentality is a major obstacle toward reconciliation in the country, Sako said: “Yeah, sure.”

“Daesh is done geographically, but it is not done yet ideologically,” he warned, using the Arabic acronym for the Islamic State. “So, all efforts must come together to change the concept of Daesh or Daesh interpretations, change the mentality, change the culture.”

Sako called on Muslim leaders to “update” their religious messages and interpretations.

“We are not as it was in the middle ages,” he said. “I think we are all brothers and sisters, we have to respect each other beyond our religion or ethnicity.”

Sako called for reconsidering the “unjust” laws and constitution articles that deal with minorities in Iraq as well as the education curriculums that should give a space for the history and heritage of Christianity as “it never mentions our history and heritage, which goes back 700 years before Islam.”

“This is a kind of genocide,” he said. “Genocide does not necessarily mean we kill each other but it can also be achieved by erasing the memory.”

“I think we need today to change the mentality of the culture, the education at the schools, media and look for a roadmap for the future of Iraq, but for all together not only for a group against other group,” he added. ◀◀

Record Number of Journalists in Jail Globally

A report released in December found that 2017 set a new record for the number of journalists around the world jailed for their work. The Committee to Protect Journalists, a nonprofit that promotes press freedoms, identified 262 journalists behind bars, topping the previous record of 259 in 2016. More than half of the journalists

jailed are in just three countries: Turkey (73), China (41) and Egypt (20). Other countries high on the list include Eritrea (15), Azerbaijan (10) and Vietnam (10). Three journalists are imprisoned in the Americas — one each in Ecuador, Guatemala and Venezuela.

“In a just society, no journalist should ever be imprisoned for their work and reporting critically, but 262 are paying that price,” said CPJ Executive Director Joel Simon.

“It is shameful that for the

second year in a row, a record number of journalists are behind bars. Countries that jail journalists for what they publish are violating international law and must be held accountable. The fact that repressive governments are not paying a price for throwing journalists in jail represents a failure of the international community.”

CPJ found the most common charge against journalists is being “anti-state,” a charge leveled against 74 percent of those currently in jail. Broad anti-terrorism laws are also often used against journalists. Thirty-five journalists are in prison even though they have not been publicly charged with anything. CPJ notes the “politics” beat is the most dangerous as 87 percent of the jailed journalists worked that beat. Many of the journalists in the CPJ’s database are in poor health due to the conditions of the prisons.

CPJ said the crackdown against journalists in Turkey started in 2016 and then increased following a failed coup attempt in July of that year. In addition to reporters, many professors, judges, missionaries and others have also been targeted by the government since the alleged coup attempt. CPJ also noted that the increase of journalists imprisoned in China comes as President Xi Jinping strengthened his power this year. ◀◀



Formations Bible Study Commentaries

Each week, Word&Way posts free Bible study commentaries online for use in Sunday School or small groups. Written by Michael Olmsted, the lessons follow the Formations curriculum by Smyth & Helwys. Here is a summary of the January unit. A longer commentary will be posted each week on our site under “Resources.”

Evangelism in the Old Testament

Do you remember those good old days when churches had at least one “protracted meeting” every year with an evangelist who shouted warnings of hellfire and offered the glorious hope of heaven? Those revivals saw all kinds of people, from frightened children to worried old folks, seeking the hope of God before it was too late.

But evangelism did not begin in the early days with the Great Awakenings on our East Coast, or the annual rhythm of revivals well into the 1900s. Evangelism, distinct from church meetings and

passing out tracts with a plan of salvation, began in the heart of God, who spoke the universe into reality and created a humanity that God would love and that could love him back. The biblical record is a marvelous unfolding of God’s love, most often not in pretty or easy conditions, but always possible.

We will read Isaiah, who models servanthood and shows that God’s love is never to be the property of one group of people but for all the world. Zechariah reminds us that God’s love is not conditioned by human decisions and actions, even in the darkest times.

There is a future when the ultimate state of peace and truth will be fully known, but every day in this world is an opportunity to grow in faith and invite others to experience God’s love, forgiveness, and new life. We are part of that long line of witnesses that stretch all the way from Genesis to the glorious

conclusion of Revelation.

January 7: The Servant’s Calling (Isaiah 49:1-6)

January 14: Abimelech’s Integrity (Genesis 20:1-14)

January 21: Naaman’s Healing (2 Kings 5:1, 9-17)

January 28: The Lord’s Mountain (Isaiah 2:2-4; Zechariah 8:20-13)

▶▶ Retired after almost 50 years in pastoral ministry, Michael K. Olmsted enjoys family, supply preaching and interim work, literature, history, the arts and antiques.



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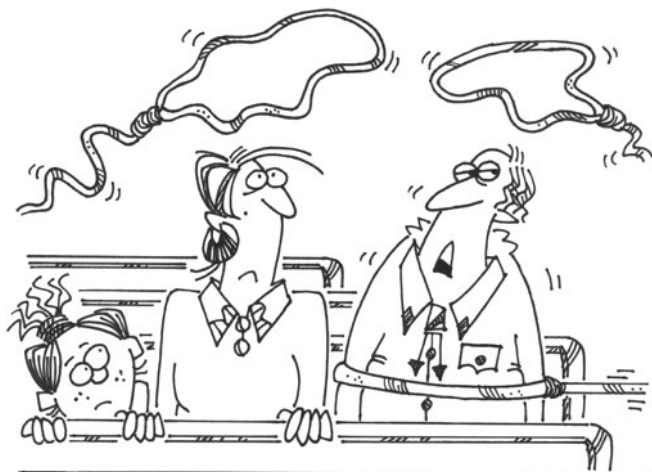
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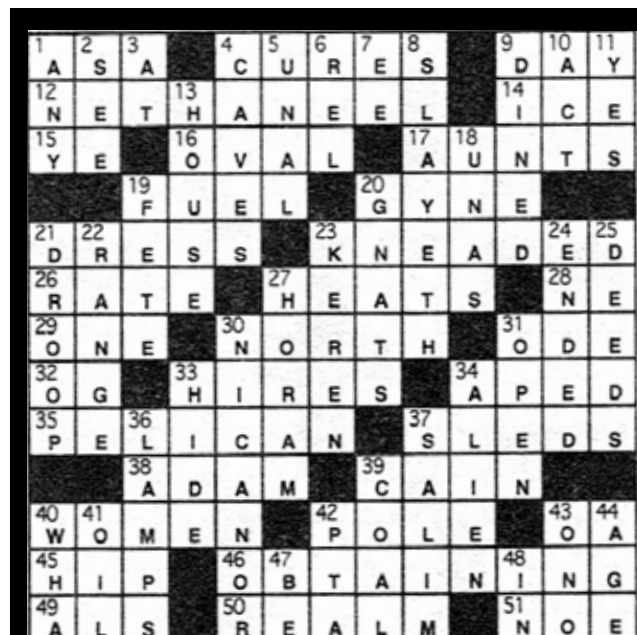
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"I knew it was a Cowboy Church...
I didn't know it was Evangelism Sunday."

FLETCHER



Answers to page 12 puzzle

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