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Arkansas Baptist State Convention

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ARKANSAS BAPTIST



news magazine

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
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Nashville, Tennessee

NOV. 4, 1997



1997
Arkansas
Baptist State
Convention

Nov. 4-5
Park Hill Church
North Little Rock

Southern Baptist workers brace for impact of El Nino

SEVERE DISRUPTIONS to normal weather patterns of countries around the Pacific Ocean threaten to add to the millions who are facing famine conditions this year.

The Southern Baptist International Mission Board is preparing contingency plans for the expected effects of El Nino, the Pacific warming of water off the western coast of South America which causes dramatic shifts in weather patterns.

"If this thing is anything like the predictions, in many areas there will be additional needs for hunger relief," reported Bill Cashion, human needs consultant with the IMB.

In Honduras, a drought has virtually eliminated any hope of a harvest for many farmers. Requests for hunger funds are being processed to assist 27 churches in helping 436 families with beans and corn for food as well as seeds for planting.

Southern Baptist missionaries Tim and Dorcas Planterson have traveled this road before. During a drought in 1994, hunger funds were used by 12 churches to build silos and loan seed to their members. The members were to pay back the seed plus 10 percent. This harvest was kept in storage silos for future needs.

The success of this previous effort rests in the fact that none of those 12 congregations have had to seek

any assistance during this current drought.

On the island of New Guinea, recent reports indicate that approximately 250 people have died due to starvation and cholera since mid-August.

Also, thick clouds of smoke from brush fires make breathing difficult in New Guinea and other Pacific nations including Malaysia, Singapore and the Southern Philippines.

Massive brush fires have also been reported in Australia. In Indonesia, aid officials estimate that up to one million people are in danger of famine due to El Nino.

While forecasts about El Nino's consequences vary, most forecasters agree that the moderate El Nino conditions will persist through the summer of 1998. Some forecasters expect this El Nino to be considerably worse than those in years past. From famine to flooding, the upheaval in global weather patterns is expected to thrust many of the world's poor into increasingly desperate need.

According to Cashion, "The effects already being felt from El Nino coupled with the terrible famine in North Korea could easily result in a need for at least \$2-3 million in additional hunger funds for Southern Baptists to respond to these catastrophes."

Hunger ministries sponsored by Southern Baptists are funded through special gifts to the Southern Baptist World Hunger Fund. Gifts to the hunger fund, which is supervised by Southern Baptist missionaries and mission volunteers, are used 100 percent for hunger ministry.

RICHMOND, VA (BP)

ARKANSAS BAPTIST

news magazine

Cover Story

ABSC annual meeting

Arkansas Baptists will gather Nov. 4-5 at Park Hill Church in North Little Rock for the 1997 Arkansas Baptist State Convention annual meeting. The theme of this year's statewide meeting is "Build the Church."



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ARKANSAS BAPTIST NEWSMAGAZINE



A Honduran farm family attempts to plant corn during drought conditions that have virtually eliminated any hope of harvest for many farmers.

Presidential reflections

Horne affirms OBU reconciliation, urges 'orderly' dialogue

Treanin Henderson

Editor, Arkansas Baptist

WHEN ARKANSAS BAPTISTS gather next week for the state convention annual meeting, Rex Horne will conclude his two years of service as Arkansas Baptist State Convention president.

Reflecting his straightforward leadership style, Horne acknowledged that the Ouachita Baptist University reconciliation effort "will be the one issue most remembered for my tenure."

Horne, pastor of Immanuel Church in Little Rock since 1990, served on the five-member Reconciliation Committee which met last year with OBU officials to develop an agreement for future cooperation between the convention and the university. That proposal, approved last year by convention messengers on a vote of 801-456, has prompted a series of proposed charter and bylaw changes which will be presented next week for messenger consideration.

Although debate over the issue for the past 12 months "has not been fun for anybody," Horne added, "if we can reach an agreement and go on together as a convention and a university, it will be a high moment - not one we would have sought, but one that good can come out of."

Horne, who will be nominated next week as an OBU trustee, voiced hope that "the agreement is ratified and passed by the convention this year." Noting that "we're living in a time both in the secular world and the religious world where people have a hard time taking things at face value," he remarked, "I think this is an issue you can take pretty much at face value.

"We've become a questioning people, which is not all bad, but a better way is to be a trusting people," Horne emphasized. "It's very simple for me. If Dr. Turner and Dr. Elrod both feel that this agreement is workable and good for both sides, that really is good enough for me." State convention executive director Emil Turner and OBU president Ben Elrod have both endorsed the reconciliation plan.

Beyond the OBU issue and other presidential responsibilities, Horne emphasized that his primary focus is on his ministry as pastor of Immanuel Church. "I've got more than I can do right where I am," he pointed out. "This is what God has called me to do."

Noting that Immanuel ranked seventh in the Southern Baptist Convention last year in Cooperative Program giving, Horne said his congregation "reflects in some measure who Arkansas Baptists are. We are Bible-believing Baptists who have been very cooperative with the work of the larger Baptist family. We are looking at how we can be most effective in reaching people for Christ.

"Arkansas Baptists are concerned about their

families. They're concerned about their churches," he noted. "I still find them deeply rooted in worship and the challenge not only to believe right but to live right."

Alluding to challenges that have accompanied Immanuel's role as the home church of President Clinton, Horne said, "In the face of criticism in recent years, we have tried to keep our focus on who we are as a church family and to focus on the Lord and His Word."

Citing this year's convention theme of "Build the Church," the ABSC president said, "I believe every Arkansas pastor wants to strengthen their church. We're charged with winning the world to Jesus Christ...Many people are desiring to get on with being on mission."

In addition to the Ouachita issue and the election of a new state convention president, Horne said another key issue messengers will address next week is approval of a state convention structure study proposal. Calling the process "a recognition that it's a healthy thing to evaluate where we are and where we want to go," he said the plan is "an attempt to be more able to assist the churches which the convention was founded to do."

Emphasizing that the structure study is an important part of the state convention's future ministry plans, Horne pointed out, "I trust the committee and administration and Executive Board to bring a good report." He encouraged Arkansas Baptists to "follow their leadership and give it a chance to succeed."

With a full agenda during the Nov. 4-5 annual meeting at Park Hill Church in North Little Rock, Horne said he is confident that state convention messengers will seek to "exercise our privilege of being Arkansas Baptists and come to the convention and vote our convictions in an orderly way."

Even amid the differing opinions over issues facing this year's convention, "I like being a friend to folks, truly being a brother in Christ," Horne shared. "I'm not going to spend my time fighting brothers and sisters in Christ. A lot of people agree with that and want to go on ministering and reaching people.

"We should be able to dialogue and abide by the vote of the convention and go back to our churches and continue to serve the Lord," he declared. "I think our people really do want to act and react in a way that reflects properly on Christ."



Arkansas Baptist State Convention president Rex Horne, pastor of Immanuel Church in Little Rock, delivers his presidential address during the 1996 ABSC annual meeting.

I'm not going to spend my time fighting brothers and sisters in Christ. A lot of people agree with that and want to go on ministering and reaching people.

REX HORNE
ABSC president

quotes

"All that God does is to build us up, draw us closer to Him and refine us to glorify Himself."

— David Verble, 30-year-old former pastor of Providence Church, Fayetteville, who resigned due to a terminal diabetic illness

"The focus of any ministry should be to bring lost people to salvation through Jesus Christ."

— John Landrum
Mississippi casino chaplain

"I think our people really do want to act and react in a way that reflects properly on Christ."

— Rex Horne
ABSC president

ARKANSAS BAPTIST

news magazine

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A Pastor's Heart



Emil Turner

ABSC Executive Director

I AM SICK and tired of convention politics."

"All that stuff is already decided, why go to the trouble?"

"I don't have time for meetings — I've got to make a living."

Have you been hearing comments like this? Or maybe these comments express your feelings? Our convention is Nov. 4 and 5. The above excuses may keep you from being a part of the most important Arkansas convention in several years. I hope you will participate. I know it is a distraction from your daily responsibilities. But I promise you our convention gives you the opportunity to shape the future of Baptist work in Arkansas. Nothing is predetermined. You have as much right to shape what our convention

does as anyone else, and you have as much responsibility as well. Take the time, study the issues, come as a messenger and vote as God leads you.

This convention promises to be a controversial one. But let me remind you that godly people can hold different opinions without being ungodly. I believe that Arkansas Baptists are godly people. We will not hurt one another nor sacrifice godliness for our opinions.

There are many of you I have not met. I hope to meet more of you Nov. 4-5 at Park Hill Church in North Little Rock.

■ Have you read *The Christian Club Guide* by Randy Brantley and Dave Hughes? (Randy and Dave published this themselves, 3rd edition, 1997). This is an excellent work for pastors, youth workers or high school students. It is a step-by-step guide to beginning a Christian club on a high school campus. Would you like the environment at the school in your community improved? This book tells you the best way to accomplish that goal.

Executive director's schedule:

Nov. 2 (a.m.) Second, Conway

Nov. 3 ABSC Pastors' Conference, Park Hill, NLR

Nov. 4-5 ABSC, Park Hill, NLR

Nov. 9 (a.m.) Leachville

President's Perspective



Rex Horne

ABSC President

OUR CONVENTION began in Tulip, Ark., nearly 150 years ago. I was in Tulip recently, narrating part of a video for our sesquicentennial celebration which will be part of our state convention meeting next year at Ouachita.

The only other thing I knew about Tulip was that my grandfather took me squirrel hunting there when I was a boy. I knew nothing then of the sacredness of that ground where the Arkansas Baptist State Convention held its first meeting.

Those shooting the segments through for sure we would have a nice, quiet time in Tulip. The reality, however, was much different. Two crop dusters were performing their acrobatics nearby. Logging trucks barreled down the road in front of the Tulip church. Filming in quiet Tulip seemed at times like the median of I-40!

Standing in front of the church at Tulip, I thought of how life is constantly

changing. The same goes for the life of our churches and convention. The SBC is restructured. Our state convention is voting on restructuring. Change is a fact of our experience.

In just a few days we will gather at Park Hill Church to conduct the business of the convention. We will hear a number of inspiring messages and reports. We will vote on a charter and bylaws amendment as it relates to Ouachita. It is my prayer and desire to see this ratified this year and next year. The agreement has the support of our executive director, Executive Board, Ouachita's president and trustees. The vote of the convention will give direction for the future.

Wednesday, Nov. 5, around noon, we will return to our church fields to serve Christ and minister to people. Some things do not change. Our God and His Word are immutable. Baptists are a diverse people and yet much alike. Our differences are few. Our agreements are many. We are a blessed people.

I have attempted to carry out the work as your president in a spirit that Christ would approve. I have also recognized in traveling our state that there are so many fine churches and believers who are Baptist. Thank you for the opportunities of getting to know many of you. I sincerely pray God's blessing upon every church in the Arkansas Baptist State Convention.

'Build the Church'

**Straight
from the
Editor**



Tremmie Henderson

Editor, Arkansas Baptist

ASARKANSAS BAPTISTS prepare to gather next week for the state convention annual meeting at Park Hill Church in North Little Rock, most participants have one topic on their minds — "the Ouachita issue." While the vote on charter and bylaw changes to implement last year's reconciliation agreement between OBU and the state convention is a vital issue that will impact convention relationships for decades to come, it is not the only item of significance during the two-day event.

Yes, every messenger should carefully evaluate the impact of the reconciliation effort, pray diligently, seek God's leadership and vote accordingly. To do otherwise would be irresponsible. But there are numerous other aspects of the meeting that should attract messengers' attention.

In addition to the traditional moments

of spiritual inspiration through music and messages, the annual meeting is a time to hear reports of what God is accomplishing through the cooperative ministry of Arkansas Baptists. The election of a new ABCS president and consideration of a proposed \$17.68 million Cooperative Program budget also merit careful and prayerful input by messengers.

Other significant proposals include the report of the Structure Study Committee which features major changes in the staff structure of ABCS Executive Board ministries. The recommendation calls for revamping the current structure from 12 departments to seven ministry teams.

Beyond the specific business items, the overall theme of this year's annual meeting is "Build the Church." Whether addressing reconciliation, restructuring or other recommendations, every messenger should consciously strive to build up the body of Christ.

God's Word calls for His followers to be "diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" — even at state convention annual meetings. Regardless of differences of opinion amid debate on key issues, every word, action and attitude should ultimately glorify Christ.

Eight former presidents endorse OBU reconciliation

IN A DISPLAY OF UNITY, eight former presidents of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention have released a statement declaring that they "strongly endorse" the reconciliation agreement between the state convention and Ouachita Baptist University. Those signing the statement ranged from former ABCS executive director Don Moore to Gov. Mike Huckabee.

The three-paragraph statement emphasized that the eight leaders "enthusiastically urge the support of all Arkansas Baptists for the amendments to the ABCS charter and bylaws to be offered for consideration of the messengers to the 1997 annual meeting on Wednesday, Nov. 5."

"Your vote for these amendments will be an endorsement of the agreement adopted by the Ouachita board of trustees and the Executive Board of the ABCS, and passed by the vote of the messengers to the annual meeting last November," the former presidents explained.

Noting that "your support will be an affirmation of the work of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention and of the efforts of Ouachita to present Christ to a needy world," the statement concluded, "Let's put this matter behind us and move forward to accomplish His purposes."

In addition to Moore and Huckabee, the statement was signed by Bernes Selph, pastor emeritus of First Church, Benton; evangelist Johnny Jackson Sr., of Little Rock; John Finn, pastor of First Church, Parkin; Dillard Miller, director of missions for Ouachita Association; Cary Heard, pastor of Park Hill Church, North Little Rock; and attorney W. H. "Buddy" Sutton, a member of Immanuel Church, Little Rock.

Absent from the list of past presidents endorsing the plan was immediate past president Ronnie Rogers, pastor of Lakeside Church, Hot Springs.

Rogers, who has been an outspoken opponent of the reconciliation agreement, recently sent a six-page letter to Arkansas Baptist pastors. Calling the proposed trustee selection process approved last year by convention messengers "fatally flawed," Rogers insisted that "the bylaws must be rejected since they protect a faulty system of trustee selection, which shifts the authority of trustee selection from autonomous to shared."

In an earlier letter to a group of pastors who have endorsed

the reconciliation plan, Rogers declared that Ouachita "is not essential to Baptist life or education." Claiming that "we can start a new school," he added, "Do you think OBU will ever be a bastion of spiritual vitality and conservative theology like Mid-America, Criswell or now our own seminaries under the compromise? If OBU walks, it is not the end. God will raise up a school."

Emphasizing that "for many of us, it is an issue of the perpetuation of the resurgence," Rogers wrote, "I believe, and am absolutely convinced that if the compromise passes, the intentional perpetuation of the resurgence in the Arkansas Baptist State Convention will have been defeated. It will be over. That is why we are so passionate about opposing the compromise and our emotions difficult to control."

Amid the debate over approving wording to implement last year's agreement, several other statewide leaders have endorsed the plan, including state convention president Rex Home, ABCS executive director Emil Turner and OBU president Ben Elrod.

Horne, pastor of Immanuel Church in Little Rock, said it is his "prayer and desire" to see the charter and bylaw changes approved. "It's very simple for me," he explained. "If Dr. Turner and Dr. Elrod both feel that this agreement is workable and good for both sides, that really is good enough for me."

Turner's endorsement took the form of a four-page letter mailed last month to several thousand Arkansas Baptists. Affirming that "Arkansas Baptists are better able to reach a lost world with OBU than without it," Turner said the agreement with Ouachita "reconciles brethren who have honest disagreements in a way that edifies the entire body of Christ."

Elrod also mailed out copies of a letter affirming the proposed charter and bylaw changes. Noting that "the agreement represents the best effort of a committed group of representatives of the convention, our trustees, the Executive Board of the ABCS, and the messengers to the 1996 annual meeting to reestablish a relationship of trust," Elrod's letter urged, "Let's get on with the work of the Kingdom! If we will work together under this agreement in a spirit of trust and cooperation, I am convinced that it will strengthen Ouachita, the ABCS, and — ultimately — the Kingdom of God." ☐



'Petty politics' opposed

I have read with a great deal of interest the articles in the *Newsmagazine* and the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* regarding Ouachita Baptist University.

The various opinions as to who will control OBU is beginning to "smack" of petty politics.

The Oct. 2 article in the *Newsmagazine* by Bill Hatfield could work both ways. He only presented his opinion that Ouachita would eventually not be governed by the state convention. I do not believe this will happen.

It is important that the college students who attend OBU be given an excellent education and I believe that as long as God-fearing men and women who are not political pawns of either the university nor the Arkansas Baptist State Convention are on the board, this will happen. Ouachita will continue to be a strong educational and spiritual institution.

J.D. Patterson
Searcy, AR

A matter of repentance

In regard to your editorial in the Oct. 16 issue of the *Newsmagazine*:

First of all, you have seemingly lumped all opponents of the Ouachita compromise into one category as mean-spirited, unwilling to seek "unity and harmony," "obsessed with criticizing the Oct. 10 action by Ouachita trustees to re-establish a self-perpetuating board" and "more interested in retribution than reconciliation." I do not consider myself to fit any of the above, but I am definitely not for the compromise.

Second, your use of II Corinthians 5:19 does not fit the context. The reconciliation spoken of there is between God and man, not man and man. When two brothers have "ought" against each other (Matt. 18:15-17), it's as much a part of the sinning brother as the one who has been sinned against if there is going to be genuine reconciliation of the two. The one who has been sinned against can forgive his brother the "70 x 7," but if the sinning brother isn't repentant of what he did, there's still no reconciliation.

Dr. Elrod said they did what they did to keep OBU "out of the political arena." But instead, it has thrust our university into the very middle of the arena and created a situation which now seems almost impossible to fix short of going back to the way it was before Oct. 10, which has stood well for the last 83 years.

Even the one who spoke for the compromise in the Oct. 2 *Newsmagazine* correctly stated that the Ouachita decision "dramatically altered the proven method of cooperation that had existed for many

years" and that "it is unacceptable to Baptists to support with their funds something they have no opportunity to direct." A "compromise," according to Webster, is supposed to be "a settlement by arbitration or by consent reached by mutual concessions." I fail to see any concessions on Ouachita's part; only on the convention's.

I think I know what would happen if the ABSC Executive Board (of which I am a member) were to one day decide they were going to be self-perpetuating and nominate their replacements instead of allowing the convention to do so. Do you think the convention would put up with it?

Pat Robinson
Cave Springs, AR

Reconciliation is better

The word has gone out. "Nothing is better than something." Thank you. I'll have something. Reconciliation!

R.B. King
Hot Springs, AR

Christ offers unity

In the Oct. 16 issue of the *Newsmagazine* there was an article dealing with Mt. Zion Association's reprimand over "alien immersion" by Highland Drive Baptist Church.

It is my understanding that Highland Drive Church adopted guidelines for accepting new members which state that "any person who has been saved [by grace, through faith in Christ alone], and has received 'believer's baptism' [water baptism, by immersion, after salvation, as a testimony (symbol) of salvation] may be presented as a candidate for membership upon their statement of those facts."

I think there is reason for us to look at all issues that tend to separate Christian brothers and sisters from each other. Certainly the church is to separate itself from the world spiritually, but in Christ we should find only unity.

I believe that God is doing many things today to bring His people together. Examples are: churches today are no longer made up of generations of members raised and continuing in the same denomination, today our churches are made up of members of cross-denominational backgrounds in the Christian faith; extraordinary work is being accomplished in bringing denominations together, e.g. Promise Keepers; whole nations are all of a sudden, after years of separation, being brought together (East and West Germany), the fall of communism in Russia.

I was raised in the Methodist Church, accepted Christ and was baptized in the

Methodist Church. I am now am a member of a Southern Baptist church; I consider myself a Christian first, who chooses to worship my Lord at a Southern Baptist church.

For me, Christ has come into my life to reconcile me to my God and to my brothers and sisters in Christ.

Bill Yancoy
Franklin, AR

Fear limits freedom

I believe that fear and ignorance are very prevalent among Southern Baptists relative to the tragic ongoing controversy of the past 20 years.

I believe that many members of Southern Baptist churches have very limited knowledge of the serious nature and extent of our problems. Most pastors do not discuss it for fear of disrupting the fellowship in their churches. Some, or all, Baptist editors are subjected to criticism and pressure if they treat the problems in any depth or with any frequency. And many members of Southern Baptist churches do not read their state Baptist papers.

I believe that fear affects many pastors and other Baptist leaders: Fear of speaking their honest convictions. Fear of utilizing the services of some good Baptist preachers and other leaders. Fear of associating with some of their Baptist brothers and sisters.

Their fear of the small, but powerful, SBC hierarchy is well-founded, because many genuine and competent Christian servants have become casualties of those bent on control and conformity within the SBC and in some state conventions.

When ignorance and fear prevail, the loss of freedom and integrity is the result. We are paying that terrible price now. In our dealings with each other I offer this scripturally based statement by Melancthon, one of Luther's contemporaries: "In essentials - unity; in non-essentials - freedom; in all things - charity."

Janie L. Jones Jr.
Fayetteville, AR

Thanks for jubilee

I would like to share about the blessing I received Saturday, Sept. 27. The Arkansas Baptist church music ministries department sponsored the Gospel Jubilee at Bryant First Southern Church. The music was outstanding. The groups singing were a great representation of groups across Arkansas. It would be well worth the trip to attend next year's concert. As for me, I'll be there.

Joan Myers
Little Rock, AR

Arkansas network affiliates earn top awards

TWO CHRISTIAN cable network affiliates led by Arkansas Baptists have received top honors from their respective national broadcasting networks.

ACTS of Fort Smith, which is owned and operated by First Church in Fort Smith, was named "Affiliate of the Year" by the Southern Baptist North American Mission Board during its recent 1997 ACTS affiliates meeting in Dallas.

Family 45 Television, a privately-owned Centeron company led by general manager Bryan Holland, pastor of Gum Springs Church in Siloam Springs, also received the "Affiliate of the Year" honor from FamilyNet at the same meeting.

The ACTS Network is a satellite cable network that reaches into more than 24 million homes throughout the United States. It started its operation as part of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1984 and the Fort Smith affiliate went on line in the spring of 1985. Family 45 has been in operation for three years as part of the 24-hour-a-day FamilyNet broadcast network that reaches about 34 million homes nationally.

The honor was the eighth ACTS award for the Fort Smith affiliate and its second Affiliate of the Year honor. It also has won awards for "Fort Smith Alive," the "Brazil Mission '89" documentary and for its promotional programming.

Carl Riggins, executive director of the Fort Smith affiliate, also has served as director of media ministry at First Church, Fort Smith, since 1984.

"I was humbled and surprised that we would receive it a second time," said Riggins. "When we receive these awards, it's as if the Lord is saying, 'I'll give you the desires of your heart if you'll trust me.' We feel proud but humbled that the Lord could use us."

Stan Grubb, NAMB's affiliate relations associate for ACTS, noted that ACTS of Fort Smith is "the premier example of what we like to see in affiliates."

"They're actively involved in the community, not just with Baptist churches, but with all denominations," Grubb said. "I love to see people do what they are doing in their community."



Carl Riggins (holding plaque), executive director of ACTS of Fort Smith, accepts the "Affiliate of the Year" award from North American Mission Board Media Technology Group representatives (from left) David Clark, Stan Grubb and Deborah Key.

During the awards ceremony, Fort Smith Alive, which features interviews of area people and highlights historical events and human interest stories, also was recognized.

"Typically we will interview new pastors and new ministries in the area,"

said Riggins. "This week we are airing an interview with Janet Huckabee, but primarily it is local people and ministries."

First Church's Sunday morning worship telecast also was cited as a pioneer television ministry. When Fort Smith television station KFSA went on the air in 1953 as Arkansas' first TV station, First Church also went on the air. The church has televised the Sunday morning worship

each week, making it one of the longest-running live church programs in the nation.

While the Fort Smith affiliate is among the most long-lived broadcast ministries, Family 45 Television is among the newest. Family 45's honor as affiliate of the year for FamilyNet excited general manager Holland.

"We were just thrilled," he remarked. "When you do Christian programming and family programming, you don't get a lot of recognition. For them to pick us

out of 125 affiliates in the nation...well, we were thrilled. We've worked hard to attain it."

Risa Hubbard, NAMB affiliate relations associate for FamilyNet, noted that Family 45 "has made impressive strides in program production, sales and penetration" in its three years of operation.

"Northwest Arkansas is the third fastest-growing area in the United States," Hubbard said, adding Holland "has made great efforts to get the station on all the cable systems in its broadcast area, covering 100,000 cable and broadcast television households. It is rare for a low-power station to have this much cable coverage."

Hubbard also pointed out that Family 45 "produces and airs local church, sports and health programs and mixes these programs with the family and Christian programming from FamilyNet to create a great line-up," with only one other full-time staff member—Holland's wife, Jan, who serves as the station's sales manager.

"What we do is take the best stuff from FamilyNet and insert local church services and local events," said Holland, who began his career as a cable television engineer. "For instance...we do a ton of high school sports—close to 30 football games this year and people really watch."

Holland said the tape-delayed high school sports combined with "a block of outdoor programs sent by FamilyNet" are the among the affiliate's biggest viewing draws. "FamilyNet is a really good source for Christian family programming. Our job is to use the best of what they give us and the best of local opportunities."

“When you do Christian programming and family programming, you don't get a lot of recognition. For them to pick us out of 125 affiliates in the nation... well, we were thrilled. We've worked hard to attain it.”

BRYAN HOLLAND
General manager,
Family 45 Television

Arkansas 'vampires'

Role-playing games can lead to occult activity

Russell M. Dilday

Associate Editor, Arkansas Baptist

THIS HALLOWEEN, watch out for the spooks, goblins, witches, werewolves and vampires knocking at your door looking for candy. By the way, if you live in North Little Rock, pay attention to the vampires. They may be real.

On many Friday nights, teens and young adults, many dressed in black, meet at Lakewood Village shopping center in North Little Rock to engage in their favorite fantasy — playing vampire through any of several role-playing games now on the market.

And, while many players call it a game of fun or relaxation, the game has serious — sometimes dangerous — side effects, opponents insist.

Vic (not his real name), 16, began playing in 1996. He said there is "a series of several different kinds of games. One of them is called Vampire Masquerade, there's Werewolf, The Apocalypse and Mage — The Ascension." The most popular series, agreed many, is published by the White Wolf company.

"They're all supposed to take place in a gothic-punk setting," he said. "The gist of the game is to create a character that is a personality you would know and would be something fun to do or act out. You get to create physical attributes, social standing and how smart the character is."

"The game lets me relax," said an 18-year-old youth who called himself "Lister," a name from a pseudo-ego in one of the games. "I come here to be away from my parents. It's fun. A lot of times we don't play, we just socialize. I should be here next week, unless I'm grounded."

Players typically congregate at Lakewood Village's fountain area or at the nearby Books-a-Million bookstore. Recently, say observers, they have met in Burns Park.

Like Lister, most participants describe the games as "harmless. There is no physical violence," he emphasized. "Everything should be settled by 'Rock, Scissors, Paper.'"

Games hold danger

But the games can hold danger, says Bill Viser, associate professor of religion at Ouachita Baptist University. "It would be a misnomer to say it's innocent."

Viser, author of *The Darkness Among Us*, a Christian view of the occult, said he has worked with "several youth and adults who have been deeply involved in

the occult" as a licensed counselor.

The danger, he noted, is that participants "may be playing on different levels. In one sense, you may have a kid go in as a harmless diversion, but another, who may be a manipulator or abuser, may be there to take advantage of younger kids." He said players "are looking for a sense of belonging and power. Even in the old Bela Lugosi films, a theme was the power Dracula had over his victims."

"A lot of people that play these kind of take it too far into what they do," said Vic. "They act out their character toward people that aren't playing the game or just take on the identity of their character, which is kind of weird."

Julie, a local teen, knows several players. "One is my ex-boyfriend's best friend and he takes it too far. He got dental work to make his teeth pointy. He was one of my best friends but (when he played the games) he just looked straight through me like I wasn't there."

Viser emphasized that the danger also can turn physical. Some players use the games as a prelude to "blood cult" activities — the ritualistic ingestion of another's or one's own blood — as part of the role-playing. He said he has known of a counseling client "anemic from blood loss" from blood cult activities.

"Well, some of the kids draw blood later," admitted Lister, when asked about an active local blood cult. "They go to somebody's house if they do blood. They usually don't do it here. We actually do it where you have little teeth marks."

Blood ingestion isn't always a docile activity. Last year, 13-year-old Summer Nix of Spartanburg, S.C., met an 18-year-old man from Nevada through a vampire website chat room. The on-line friendship developed into a romance.

The man took Nix and a girlfriend to Nevada, where his vampire group would gather in old buildings, cutting each other and drinking each other's blood. During one session, a man leaned over as if to kiss Nix. He bit into her lips and began to suck her blood. She drew back with holes through the skin, swollen lips and a bruise.

After she complained, she was sent home, but her friend stayed to marry the cult leader.

Vic said participants keep their rituals secret. "I've heard a lot about the blood cult they have going around out there, but I never wanted to know about that. They like to harass you when you know something about them.

"They just use their own blood," he said. "They cut themselves and suck their own blood. That way, if the police get involved, they can't arrest them. It's kind of like a religious belief for them...that it makes them more powerful and stronger."

Vic's friend, Juan, agreed. "A lot of them want to believe they're more than just humans." — He said members of vampire cults "don't think they're vampires that melt in the sunlight or get killed by a stake. They just think they can prolong their life through the use of blood."

How does an Arkansas vampire make the cuts for a blood-letting? Like any other vampire — by using fangs. Participants may order a set from a website or can have them specially set by the owner of "Children of the Night," who Lister says is a retired North Little Rock dentist. "His sets start at \$65 for the cheapest set, plus \$10 for setting the teeth," he said.

Vampirism business growing

Vampirism has become big business. Besides games, websites and paraphernalia, Viser noted that more than "3,000 movies have been made" on the Dracula theme made popular by Bram Stoker's book and that the television show "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" is popular.

Literary vampires also can read up on the subject. Many buy literature from Books-a-Million's occult and new age section, where vampire books share shelf space with dozens of tomes like *The Book of Witchcraft*, *The Magician's Companion*, and *The Necronomicon*, also known as the satanic bible.

Participants also can find supporting books and game cards from White Wolf, Lister explained. "They've created an alternate earth and nicknamed it the World of Darkness. That's why a lot of folks have a problem with this.

"A lot of church groups think it's devil worship," he said. "Some of them come up here and try to preach to us. It's always fun because you get all of these people and get them to believe you're Satan. That's always a laugh for me. I have the utmost contempt for most religions. I don't want them bothering me."

"If you want to go up there and preach to them, it's not going to have much effect," said Vic, who urged Christians to start relationships first. "If you just go up and talk to them, that's better."

Vic knows. Christian friends invited him to a DiscipleNow weekend at First Church in Sherwood last summer, where he accepted Christ.

He warned potential witnesses that vampire role-playing is growing. "How many depends. There are a few people, though, who get into the games to get into something else, like a blood cult."

Hereafter Houses

Churches give audiences visually dramatic glimpses of hell, heaven

Russell N. Dilday

Associate Editor, Arkansas Baptist

FOR THREE NIGHTS this fall, Life Line Church in Little Rock will use a most unconventional evangelist to greet guests at the church. It's Satan.

As participants enter the church's "Hereafter House" dramatic tour, to be held Oct. 30-Nov. 1, they are greeted by a demon guide and the Prince of Darkness himself.

"Welcome to my home!" the handsome, well-dressed actor who portrays the devil tells guests. "I can offer you riches, houses, worldly pleasures... whatever you desire. All I ask in exchange is your soul."

Participants are led through a biblical representation of hell by the demon, finally ending up in Satan's throne room where they see a hideous portrayal of the devil.

The tour then resumes, but in heaven, where groups are treated to biblical stories, a feast room with snacks, a gospel presentation and finally to a representation of the heavenly throne featuring Christ.

Life Line is one of several Southern Baptist churches in Arkansas and across the nation using a Hereafter House-style production to give audiences a realistic view of eternal life with and without Jesus.

Even with the use of Satan as a witness, thousands have accepted Christ in recent years at these Halloween alternative productions, also known by such names as "Judgment House," "Hell House" and "The Verdict."

Derek Combs, minister to students at Life Line, said the production "wasn't received real well at first, but a few key leaders became convinced that an alternative to traditional haunted houses was needed to get more teenagers thinking about eternity more than getting them scared."

Life Line member Greg Rudkin is directing the presentation, expected to draw more than 1,000. He noted that the effort will include about 100 volunteers, with the specific goal of presenting the gospel. "If we can reach one person

through this, it's worth it. We at least want to plant the seed."

Rudkin said the Life Line effort has resulted in 300 to 400 professions of faith from 1988-95, the last time it was performed until this year.

"Every person fills out an information card after they go through," Combs explained. "If they are from a different town, we mail those to churches there. We get a lot of response. We've pushed through as many as 2,400 and that has kept us here till 4 in the morning."

Lakeside Church in Hot Springs has also offered a Hereafter House since 1991, said director Pat Bledsoe, growing from a first-year audience of 150 to hosting more than 3,000 annually with 200 to 300 people making decisions for Christ each year. "Every year we haven't been able to take in everyone and on the peak nights people are almost begging to be let in."

The format, said Bledsoe, is effective. "People need something visual nowadays, something they can understand," she said. "This is a contemporary way to reach people with the gospel. People are geared to sound bites on TV and this will give them not only the gospel message but the emotion behind it — the terror of hell and the glory of heaven — using sound, music and lights."

Bledsoe said the production, scheduled for Wednesday through Saturday this year, "uses every square inch of the church," all on a budget of only \$1,200.

She noted that Lakeside's first priority for the House also is as a community witness "to people that wouldn't come to church services. I guess people, at Halloween, are looking at the spirit world and this gives them the biblical answer to what eternity is like."

Rudkin noted that the inspiration for Life Line's Hereafter House came from a similar production of the same name held at First Church in Bentonville. Rudkin said the Bentonville congregation probably began the Hereafter



Volunteers at Life Line Church in Little Rock prepare the "Heavenly Throne Room" for the Halloween-time production of "Hereafter House," a dramatic journey through hell and heaven.

House concept nationally, a point that First Church member Cheryl Webb acknowledged.

"I don't know of any church that did it before us," said Webb, who has served as an actor and director for the First Church production, which ran from 1979 to 1993. It is being scheduled again by the church for a 1998 presentation.

Webb said the church's vision was to provide a biblical statement on eternal life. "The main thing to keep in mind is it's Bible-based. It's not just a Halloween scare house. We wanted to show that hell is a real place and heaven is a real place."

Webb said the church offers a Hereafter House manual that includes production ideas and a videotape of a Hereafter House performance that includes a praise session following a performance. The package is available to interested churches for a suggested \$10 donation by calling 501-273-3379.

Several Arkansas Baptist churches also are offering other alternatives to traditional Halloween activities with a harvest theme. Jamey Ballard, youth minister at Crystal Hill Church in Little Rock, said although the church's "Harvest Fest" is targeted to children, it gives the church's youth a missions outlet.

"The reason we did it as a youth group is to offer the youth a place to go other than the parties they are invited to by classmates," he said. "They have drinking and music that doesn't glorify God."

Ballard said Harvest Fest activities will include games, free food and a first-time concert for adults.

Now in its third year, Ballard cited the outreach provided by the event. "There was one family that came and, on the way out, stopped one of the ladies and said, 'How do we get invited to church?' One of their girls got saved and was baptized."

"We encourage our adults to be there and introduce themselves," he explained. "That's where our ministry comes in. We try to present the gospel...but we also try to be friends."



At death's door, pastor urges...

'Look for the miracles'

Russell N. Dilday

Associate Editor, Arkansas Baptist

DAVID VERBLE is dying. I guess we all are, but his time, say his doctors, is shorter than many of us expect to have.

Responding to a tip that a young pastor in Fayetteville was near death from a diabetic condition, I also was told that he had a tremendous testimony to share through his trials.

I dreaded making the call last week and put it off for days. How do you make a cold contact to tell someone he's news-worthy because of his impending death?

When I had worked up my nerve, I made the call — and made a new friend — and gained fresh insights about bravery, joy and faith in God.

Verble, pastor of Providence Church in Fayetteville, resigned his position Sept. 14 following two years as pastor of the congregation, citing his inability to perform his duties because of health concerns.

"I'm extremely weak and have trouble doing basic tasks," he said. "I'm wheelchair bound and my legs are paralyzed from the waist down. I am completely sightless and I have severe nerve damage caused by a Parkinson's disease-like effect."

At age 30, Verble can recite a litany of operations and medical procedures that began with his first eye surgery — on his wedding day — at age 22. "In the eight years since then, I've encountered total loss of my eyesight and have gone through 17 eye surgeries. I went through a kidney transplant after my natural kidneys failed and have had heart problems."

He currently uses peritoneal dialysis, "where a catheter is placed into the stomach cavity, you leave it in four hours, then drain it. It seems to be working."

'A surface hardship'

He called his deteriorating health a "surface hardship" that forced his resignation. "I could not physically keep up with the demands of the job.

"That was hard," he explained. "It was my first pastorate and it was a dream

come true. All my life that's what I wanted to do, even when I denied that's what I wanted to do.

"When I proposed to my wife, Julie, she said, 'Yes, but I don't feel like a preacher's wife,'" Verble recalled. "I said,

'You're not going to be a preacher's wife, you're going to be a youth minister's wife.' She replied, 'No, if I marry you, I'm going to be a preacher's wife.' And she was right. God had revealed it to her."

Verble's mention of his wife led me to the point I dreaded most in our interview. I had been told that his life expectancy was very short. "What do the doctors say about your future?"

"They don't look too brightly on it," he answered as matter-of-factly as if I had asked him about the weather.

"They've had to bite their tongues already once. I was supposed to die a month ago. I was close to death. I was in a coma for three days in July.

"I was at death's door and there was nothing they could do," he said. "I looked horrible, my systems were shutting down and I had gotten an infection in my spinal cord. They said I wouldn't make it through the night, so they said, 'Call in the family.' The next morning I was sitting up and talking.

"There was a point where I felt like saying, 'God, take me now' and there was a definite moment where I felt He would," he remarked. "I won't live a long time — anywhere from a month to a year. It's frightening in a way — not death, but to leave behind what I have here." The Verbles have a six-year-old son and a 20-month-old daughter.

He also is saddened by leaving behind his dreams. "There's a down side as far

as the dreams that you have to let go of....God allowed me to see my dream fulfilled of being in the pastorate in a good church. My church was successful and I don't know why.

"When I became pastor of the church, they averaged 12 in Sunday School and 15 to 20 in worship. I thought, 'Lord, why I am I taking this church?' But that's what He wanted. That was less than two years ago. We are now running about 100 in Sunday School and 125 to 130 in worship and we baptized almost 40 people this year."

A new ministry

Although he has relinquished his pastoral ministry at Providence, he said he and his family have gained a new ministry. "Another thing we had to give up were finances. I was the only breadwinner. The church has allowed us to stay until they find another pastor, which is a huge blessing.

"But all of a sudden we had no weekly salary," he said. "I asked God, 'What are we going to do?' God gave me an absolute confirmation the first Sunday we went to another church to speak. They took up a love offering and it was the exact amount of my weekly paycheck.

"The blessing that came out of having to resign is that, like one of our friends said, 'You've gone from a single-church ministry to a multi-church ministry.'"

"We now spend every week going to other churches, sharing our testimony and the message we get across in,

regardless of circumstances, joy is still available," he said. "With all of the health problems and struggles we've had, it still makes each day a joy to see that God is still doing something."

One of those things that God did was bring his father to know Jesus Christ last month. "I grew up never knowing my biological father. Having experienced health problems, I wondered how many had come from my father."

The Verbles located his father through directory assistance and a meeting was arranged at a mall in California. "He proved impossible to miss. He had pink hair and a pair of earrings. It was quite a shock. I don't think life should be boring, but pink hair?"

"There's a down side as far as the dreams that you have to let go of....God allowed me to see my dream fulfilled of being in the pastorate in a good church."

"God can also take someone like me... through trial after trial. If He can do that and still keep a smile on my face and the laughter in my voice, then I believe God is more glorified."

Verble soon learned about another part of his father's life. "He told me he was proud of me for being a minister and said, 'We have a lot of things in common. I'm a priest.'"

"I'd never seen a priest with pink hair, so I asked, 'What kind of priest?' He told me 'satanic.'" Verble recalled. "I wanted to get up and run, but I said, 'I'm going to try to convert you.' He said, 'Whatever you do, don't try to convert me.'"

"This man stood for everything I stood against. I had to force myself to like him and spend time with him. He asked, 'Why is it that you still treat me with love and respect?' He ended up moving here and was at church every time the doors were open. He finally got up in front of the church and renounced Satan; he renounced all those practices down to numerology and astrology, saying it's deadly."

"To glorify God"

With his health continuing to decline, I asked Verble if he knew why this was happening to him. "To glorify God," he answered. "All that God does is to build us up, draw us closer to Him and refine us to glorify Himself."

"I have friends that say, 'We're praying for healing.' I say, 'Fine. Pray, pray, pray, but if I'm not healed, don't think He can't heal.' It is my total belief that God sometimes can be more glorified through not healing than through healing."

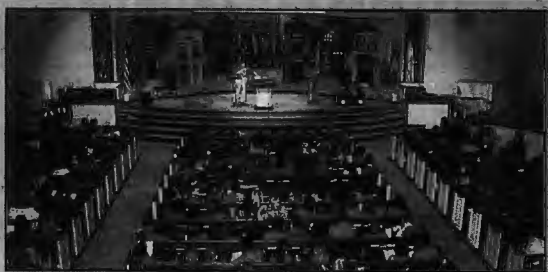
"God can do it," Verble emphasized. "God can also take someone like me and take me through trial after trial. If He can do that and still keep a smile on my face and the laughter in my voice, then I believe God is more glorified."

He emphasized that God also can be glorified through life. "Life, whether it is easy or hard, is a gift. We expect a certain amount of time. When that time is short, we think we've been cheated. That's wrong. We don't deserve any time. Every day we get is a gift. If Jesus, who owed me nothing, suffered and did what He did for me, how can I, who owes Him everything, not suffer for Him?"

Concluding our interview, I remarked that he had shed no tears for his situation. "No tears," he confirmed. "What I cry for is those who refuse to believe that Jesus is the answer."

"It rains on the just and the unjust," he emphasized. "I learned that God is still God. The Bible promises that He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow, and I see it in a whole new way now."

He also shared that his now sightless eyes "are fixed on Jesus. If our eyes are focused on Jesus, we will keep our joy and we can get through anything. Look for the miracles. The joys on earth outnumber the trials."



GA Spectacular challenges girls to involvement in missions activities

GATHERING for Arkansas Baptists' 1997 Girls in Action Spectacular, 1,078 participants were challenged by event coordinator Sandy Wisdom-Martin and Dan and Gretchen Sowell, international missionaries to Zambia, to return home and become more deeply involved in sharing with others that "God loves all people." The statewide event, held Oct. 11 at Immanuel Church in Little Rock, focused on the theme, "Come Go With Me."

The GAs were reminded by missions leaders that sharing God's love will help others desire to learn about, participate in and support missions. Participants were equipped to return home and "tell" through conferences on volunteer, international and state missions led by Joe and Sherry Bratton, Jennifer Cloyd, Phyllis Dupree, Katsy McAlister, Deanie Nichols, Marion Reynolds, Dan and Gretchen Sowell, Greg Stanley, Rena Treat and Kristyn Ross. Kaye Miller served as on-site coordinator for the Spectacular which was sponsored by Arkansas Baptist Woman's Missionary Union. Monica Keathley led music for the event.

Several of the GAs, wearing their royal blue "Come Go With Me" T-shirts, noted that the Spectacular was very special to them because it aided them in learning more about missions. Trisha Whitehead of Calvary Church in Harrisburg said it was an event where she could come and learn not only more about Jesus but about the foods and cultures of other countries. "I also have learned new music today," she added.

Mallory Kenney of First Church in Siloam Springs and Sarah Styers of Baring Cross Church in North Little Rock both said the event had given them the opportunity to meet other GAs, as well as learning more about Jesus. "We also learned that we don't have to go to Africa to do missions but we can do missions right at home."

Lenny Burton of First Church in Tuckerman, who was attending her first Spectacular as a GA leader, remarked, "I am excited that I could bring these young girls here today to learn more about missions and how they can grow in service to the Lord."



"Pint of Grace" (left) performs for their peers while "Daisy" shares ministry ideas.



CHURCH LIFE

Central Church of Jonesboro recently approved plans to purchase 46.3 acres of land at a cost of \$950,000. The church plans to relocate on this property which is located at the intersection of Highway 1B and Forest Hill Road.

South Caraway Mission of Jonesboro, sponsored by First Church of Jonesboro, broke ground Oct. 5 for a new 6,576-square-foot facility that will include a sanctuary, offices and classrooms. The facility will be located just south of U.S. 63 bypass on South Caraway Road. Jerry Wilcox is serving as interim pastor.

West Rock Church in Little Rock held its 65th anniversary homecoming celebration Oct. 26 with activities that included Sunday School, a celebration worship service, dinner-on-the-grounds, a praise service of music and testimonies and rededication of the church's newly redecorated auditorium. The church was originally established as Nall's Memorial Church. R. Gayle Bone is pastor.

Bllytheville First Church hosted Celebration '97 Oct. 13 for churches in Mississippi County Association. State convention president Rex Horne, pastor of Immanuel Church in Little Rock, was the featured speaker for the event which emphasized missions, evangelism and worship. A special offering was taken for the Dixie Jackson State Missions Offering. Host pastor Bill Fuller said the celebration was planned in cooperation with the associational Brotherhood.

Brookwood First Church of Little Rock recently held a "Pizza Penny Party" in which members brought \$175 in pennies to be rolled as part of the church's \$250 gift to the Dixie Jackson State Missions Offering.

TRANSITIONS

Morgan Cox began serving Oct. 26 as pastor of Freeman Heights Church in Berryville, going there from First Church of Augusta. He previously was pastor of First Church of Sledge, Miss. Cox is a graduate of Hendrix College and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He and his wife, Liz, have two children, Louis and Celeste.

Roy Parker will retire Oct. 31 as pastor of Beech Street First Church in Texarkana. Parker, a Southern Baptist minister for 30 years, and his wife, Laura, will continue to reside in Texarkana. He

may be contacted at 333 Links Drive, Apt. 401, Texarkana, AR 71854; phone 870-773-1084.

Jim Black resigned as pastor of Ruddell Hill Church of Batesville Oct. 12 to become full-time chaplain for White River Medical Center in Batesville. Black, who served the Ruddell Hill Church for 16 years, was honored with a fellowship luncheon, presented with a monetary gift and a rocking chair was placed in the church nursery in his honor by the couples Sunday School class. Black will be available to serve as either a supply or interim pastor. He may be contacted at 870-793-1413 or 870-793-4034.

Marc Reeves joined the staff of Immanuel Church in Paragould Oct. 19 as associate pastor with responsibilities in the areas of education, outreach and evangelism. A graduate of Arkansas State University, he previously served 16 years on the staff of Oak Grove Heights Church near Paragould. Reeves and his wife, Loretta, have two sons, Eric and Jon.

Shannon Byrd has joined the staff of First Church of Bay as music and youth director. He is a student at Williams Baptist College.

OBITUARIES

John H. Miller of Camden died Oct. 9 at age 83. He was a member of First Church of Camden where he served as an active deacon for a number of years. Miller, who had practiced medicine in the Camden area for 50 years, was active in mission work, assisting in starting several churches in Camden and taking several volunteer medical trips to the San Blas Islands. He also had been a medical missionary to Canton, China, and served in the U.S. Army as a field surgeon in World War II. Survivors are his wife, Mary Jane McCuiston Miller; three children, Jane Ellen Rowland of Mulberry, John Miller Jr. of Camden and Paul Miller of Lubbock, Texas; one brother; two sisters; eight grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren. Memorials may be made to First Church of Camden.

Jim Barber of Lake City died Oct. 13 at age 57. His funeral services were held Oct. 15 at First Church of Lake City where he served as a deacon and Sunday School teacher. He also was a trustee for the Arkansas Baptist Foundation. Memorials may be made to Living Water International in Houston, Texas.

Edward Lee Gibson, 48, of Mount Ida died Sept. 26 while hunting near Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada. His funeral services were held Oct. 20 at Lake Ouachita Church near Mount Ida where he was a member. He was a retired business owner, a Vietnam veteran, a former school board member, a counselor for the Prevention of Suicide and Drugs and a past president of both the Mount Ida Chamber of Commerce and Montgomery County Industrial Development. He is survived by one daughter, Michelle Ortiz-Fleming of Mount Ida; one son, Lance Edward Gibson of Mount Ida; his parents, Lee Roy and Anna Jean Gibson of Waldron; two sisters; and two grandchildren.

MILESTONES

Charles H. Jones was recognized Oct. 12 by Southside Church of Fordyce for 27 years of ministry as pastor. He and his wife, Imojean, were honored at a noon luncheon and presented with a love offering. The couple have seven children, 18 grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.

Marsha Strange recently was honored by Davis Elementary School in Bryant as Teacher of the Year. She also recently earned the First Place National Award for Excellence in Teaching Economics. Strange is a member of First Church in Little Rock where she is involved in the singles' ministry.

Ruby Walker was honored Oct. 19 by Elixir Church of Harrison in recognition of her 90th birthday. The congregation hosted a dinner and contributed to the World Hunger Offering in honor of Walker who is a charter member of the church. Pastor Joe Gomez coordinated the day which was attended by 17 family members, including four sons, Bob Walker of Harrison, Dale Walker of Bixby, Okla., James Walker of Little Rock and John Walker of Anderson, S.C.

ORDINATIONS

Paragould First Church ordained Cody McDaniel as a deacon Sept. 19.

Jenny Lind First Church ordained associate pastor Daniel Clark to the gospel ministry Sept. 28.

Stamps First Church ordained youth minister Todd Jones to the gospel ministry Oct. 12.

Booneville First Church ordained Bobby Rogers as a deacon Oct. 19.

Central Church of North Little Rock ordained Tom May, Ron Moore, Randy Johnson and Clayton Vaden as deacons Oct. 19.

Pine Bluff First Church recently ordained John A. Bost as a deacon.



▲ Midway Church recently broke ground to begin construction on a multipurpose building. The 3,600-square-foot facility will house a kitchen, classrooms and an area for fellowship, recreation and worship. Breaking ground were building committee members (left to right) David Miller, Eldridge Brown, chairman Don Reed, Bill Wilson, Jerome Miller and pastor Stefan Eubanks.

▼ First Church of Maumelle launched its 20th anniversary observance with a Sept. 27 dinner at Maumelle Country Club. The Sunday worship service was followed by a luncheon and gospel music program featuring The Arkansans. Weekend speakers were pastor John Matthews and former pastors Steve Wilkes and Marty Brown. Providing special music were former ministers of music Bob Ethers, Stephen Cole and James Burleson.

arkansas album



▲ Members of First Church in Center Ridge took part in a work day at Reynolds Park Church in Parsgould Oct. 11. Youth group members painted a Sunday School classroom and mowed while adults framed ductwork and landscaped. Center Ridge pastor Bob Ulrey said his congregation has helped support the Parsgould mission financially for two years and was "charged" by the effort.

▼ Union Church near El Dorado broke ground Oct. 5 for a 4,500-square-foot family life center projected to cost \$120,000. Plans call for the facility to be completed debt-free. A \$31,000 special building fund offering was given on groundbreaking Sunday. Participants were (left to right) pastor Steve Pelz, Jimmy Greer, B.R. Cates, Terry Etheridge, Mike Brazzel, Tommy Sandifer, Steve Huitt and Randy Crain.



First, Batesville, celebrates 150th with 'Brush Arbor Day'

A sesquicentennial celebration activities for First Church in Batesville Oct. 12. The event was held at Independence Association's Bethesda Camp.

Sunday School classes in tents, worship in an open-air tabernacle and dinner-on-the-grounds provided an old-fashioned air to the event. Children were entertained with face painting, horseback riding, riding in a horse-drawn wagon and releasing helium balloons containing Scripture verses and anniversary notes. Worship service features included "memorial moments" from former pastors John Holston, Russell Hunt and Bob Parker.



Event coordinator Tanya Hill Wright said other anniversary activities included a photo day, "sesquicentennial moments" in worship services, a historical drama, a tea, an old-fashioned day, a quilt, a commemorative quilt and the publication of a "Sesqui" history book.

Encouraging members to praise God for the blessings they have believed on this church, pastor Don Hunt said the wonders of the Holy Spirit believers who gathered to help organize the Bethesda church 150 years ago dreamed there would be approximately 500 members gathered 150 years later to worship and praise God.

FOUNDATION

Foundation: Year-end charitable gifts can produce tax savings

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT encourages charitable giving by providing several significant tax benefits for gifts to qualified charities, explain officers at the Arkansas Baptist Foundation. As the end of the year approaches, those tax benefits take on increasing importance as people look for ways to reduce their tax burden.

"Baptists should use the end of the year as a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the ways in which their lives have been blessed by their churches and our Baptist agencies and institutions," commented Foundation president David Moore. "This can also serve as a tremendous opportunity for them to acknowledge those blessings by planning a year-end gift."

Moore cited "a variety of ways in which these gifts can be made. For those who itemize their deductions, a gift of cash is still the most popular method of obtaining the charitable income tax deduction. However, there are other assets that provide equal or greater benefits through charitable gifts.

"For example, a gift of appreciated stock to a church or other charity yields a deduction equal to its fair market value," Moore explained. "Additionally, any capital gains tax which would normally be due is bypassed, since the charity is a tax-exempt organization."

He also emphasized that "real estate that has increased in value is treated similarly to appreciated stock. Taxpayers can receive a charitable deduction for the full fair market value of the property and bypass any capital gains tax due on such property which is given to charity. Also, some gifts of personal property can

provide a charitable income tax deduction.

"Year-end charitable remainder trusts and gift annuities are tools by which a Baptist person can give cash or appreciated property to charity, yet still retain a yearly income from the gift," Moore added. "These types of gifts also allow one to receive an immediate

income tax deduction, which makes them even more beneficial."

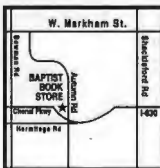
Moore affirmed that Foundation staff members "want Baptists in Arkansas to know that we exist to serve them."

For additional information about year-end giving, contact the Arkansas Baptist Foundation at 501-376-0732 or toll-free at 1-800-798-0969.

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Tax seminars offer information to save ministers money

A SERIES of three tax seminars to be held in December will offer tax advice to ministers and church treasurers "and can save you money on taxes," said James Walker.

Walker, director of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention stewardship and annuity department, said the seminars "will inform ministers of the latest tax developments and the things that they can

and cannot do when filing their taxes. It will also help church treasurers, enabling them to know how to correctly report salaries and benefits."

The seminars will be held at the following dates and locations: Matthews Memorial Church in Pine Bluff, Dec. 9 at 10 a.m.; Life Line Church in Little Rock, Dec. 9 at 6:30 p.m.; and Williams Baptist College, Dec. 10 at 10 a.m.

The program will be led by Curtis Crofton, regional director for the Southern Baptist Annuity Board, who also will give an update on the latest tax laws affecting ministers and churches.

Emphasizing that there is no seminar fee, Walker noted that ministers "not only can save taxes by properly observing IRS codes," but they "can save money by attending this seminar."

For more information, contact Walker at the ABSC stewardship and annuity department toll-free in state at 1-800-838-ABSC or locally in Little Rock at 376-4791, ext. 5114.

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MK prayer calendar

■ Nov. 1: Michelle Vaughn, OBU Box 3933, Arkadelphia, AR 71998-0001; sophomore from Brazil.

■ Nov. 3: Neil Langston, OBU Box 4260; junior from Botswana.

■ Nov. 21: Malaika Johnson, OBU Box 4590; sophomore from Zimbabwe.

■ Nov. 23: Marci Smith, OBU Box 3455; sophomore from Guatemala.

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SEMINARIES

Seminary trustees approve variety of programs, projects

TRUSTEES of Southern Baptists' six seminaries approved a variety of business items during recent board meetings.

■ **SOUTHERN SEMINARY:** Trustees of Southern Seminary unanimously approved creation of a four-year college during their Oct. 13-14 meeting.

The James P. Boyce College of the Bible will be the first four-year Bible college associated with the six Southern Baptist seminaries, although two seminaries have undergraduate-type baccalaureate programs. The Boyce college, set to open Aug. 1, 1998, will replace the academic program of the seminary's Boyce Bible School which currently offers associate degrees and certificate programs. The existing Boyce off-campus centers will continue to offer the current certificate programs.

■ **GOLDEN GATE SEMINARY:** Golden Gate could become the first school in the nation to offer a master of theology degree via the Internet under plans approved by seminary trustees Oct. 14.

Pending approval by the seminary's accrediting agencies, the master of theology on the Internet will begin as a three-year pilot program in the fall of 1998. Designed to be completed in two to four years, the degree program will consist of courses totalling 28 semester hours, a thesis and weekly on-line dialogues among students and faculty.

■ **NEW ORLEANS SEMINARY:** Round-the-clock prayer and Internet computer technology joined forces at New Orleans Seminary Oct. 9 when a 24-hour intercessory prayer center officially opened on campus.

With the electronic address nobtspray@juno.com, a prayergram for "Southern Baptist missionaries worldwide" went out via the Internet. Messages are monitored daily by volunteers, who download the e-mail and send responses.

■ **SOUTHWESTERN SEMINARY:** Two new degrees in religious education were approved by Southwestern Seminary trustees Oct. 22: a doctor of educational ministry and master of arts in Christian school education.

Trustees also endorsed and participated in the work of Southwestern's "presidential committee on theological education in the 21st century" and changed the name of the school of religious education to the school of educational ministries.

■ **MIDWESTERN SEMINARY:** For the third time in recent years, Midwestern Seminary trustees expressed their objection to abortion, dealing specifically with the call for an honest portrayal of partial-birth abortion by government leaders.

Consideration of a resolution on the subject prompted an extended discussion Oct. 21 during the regular board meeting in Kansas City, Mo. Basing their concerns

on "the sacredness of human life and the command of the church to defend the defenseless," the resolution appealed to federal and Missouri state government leaders to stop the "barbaric and inhumane killing of innocent babies" through partial-birth abortion. It also called on all Southern Baptists and Christians to call and write their elected officials until the practice is banned.

■ **SOUTHEASTERN SEMINARY:** Construction is set to begin by mid-November on two seminary housing projects following action taken by Southeastern Seminary trustees Oct. 14.

Trustees voted to request approval from the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee to acquire a \$2.65 million loan needed to complete the funding of a 76-unit apartment complex.

In other action, trustees re-elected Dale Thompson, pastor of First Church, Fort Smith, as board chairman.

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Williams Baptist College

Christian concert: Contemporary Christian artist Rebecca St. James will perform in concert Jan. 30 at WBC's Southerland-Mabee Center. Ticket information is available by contacting the WBC office of student affairs at 870-886-6741, ext. 115.

Scholarship established: A \$61,000 gift from the estate of Minnie Mays has established a new scholarship at Williams Baptist College. Mays served for 75 years as Sunday School secretary at First

Church in Pocahontas. Mays, who died last year, requested that primary preference for the scholarship be given to Williams students from First Church of Pocahontas, followed by others from Randolph County.

Stallings crowned Miss WBC: Tasha Stallings, a junior from Paragould, has been crowned Miss Williams Baptist College 1997-98. She is the daughter of Paul and Phyllis Stallings. First runner-up was Rachel Hinkson, a freshman from Benton, and second runner-up was Erika Steele, a sophomore from Doniphan, Mo.

Ouachita Baptist University

Homecoming activities: A Saturday afternoon football game, class reunions, campus tours and a musical variety show are among the many activities planned for Homecoming Weekend at Ouachita Baptist University on Nov. 7-8. The theme for this year's activities is "Reaching to New Heights." The celebration includes the 19th annual Tiger Tunes, a musical variety program which will be staged Nov. 6-8 at 7:30 p.m. in Jones Performing Arts Center. Pre-game homecoming ceremonies will begin at 1:30 p.m. on Saturday, followed by a 2 p.m. football game between the Ouachita Tigers and Harding Bisons.

Ouachita coach honored: OBU swimming and diving coach Jim Dann has been chosen for induction into the NAIA Hall of Fame. Dann, 45, has served as the head coach at Ouachita since 1981 and has led the Tiger Sharks and Lady Tiger Sharks to outstanding team finishes. He has guided the efforts of 67 All American men and women swimmers and divers, along with four national champions.

Folklife Collection: Ouachita's Riley-Hickingbotham Library has recently acquired additional sources for its Folklife Collection, including various gifts in the forms of video and audio tapes, transcripts and pictures. Mame Ruth Abernathy of Hot Springs donated family records to the Folklife Collection, one of the state's largest collections of material focusing on the life and culture of inhabitants of southwest Arkansas.

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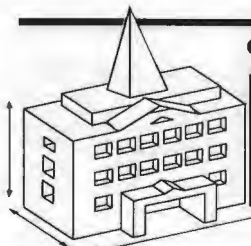


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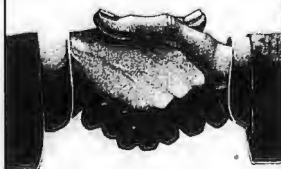
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Students Ryan Hankins, Meredith Kelly and Lendy Seaberry (foreground, left to right) rake leaves for Mrs. M.C. Condray, who visits at her door with OBU president Ben Elrod. The team was one of 24 that worked during the "Tiger Serve Day" service project Oct. 18.

OBU students perform community service at second 'Tiger Serve Day'

THE CENTER for the Family and Community at Ouachita Baptist University hosted Tiger Serve Day Oct. 18, with more than 150 students, faculty and staff performing community service.

Participants raked leaves, trimmed trees and shrubs and did minor repair work on homes and businesses as part of the day's activities.

Also known as "Into the Streets," it was the second such event led by the center. In March, it sponsored a similar effort that resulted in students, faculty and staff performing 7,000 hours of disaster relief work following a March 1 tornado that destroyed part of the city.

The center is a community service branch of the university. Center director Ian Cosh, who also directs the school's Baptist Student Union, said the center's aim is to provide students with an introduction to community service. "We hope that students will like the experience so much that they will involve themselves in regular community service."

Cosh said participants were required prior to the event to find their own place of service and to personally secure many of the materials needed.

Cosh reported that 151 participants formed into 24 teams and performed 473 hours of service in a variety of ways.

"We had a group work at Central Primary School on playground equipment and several teams that worked on elderly people's homes," he said. "Other groups picked up trash on the streets, one group hauled and stacked firewood, the

international students raked leaves at Feaster Park and others worked at the Humane Society and Courage House, a shelter for women."

Aaron Black, an OBU senior from Damascus, serves on the center's task force. He said the response to Serve Day "was overwhelmingly positive. They felt they did something good."

Christian obligation

Black noted that many participants served because of a perceived "Christian obligation. It's our Christian obligation for churches and people of any faith to better your community."

"Students have so much energy," Black added. "When you see students that have grown up in Christian homes and it is their first time to volunteer...and know that it won't be their last because that has been a good experience, that's what matters."

"My feedback has been that after they've actually worked and see how people appreciate the work, it is usually a positive experience for the students," Cosh noted. "It's fun and enjoyable, yet practical and they discover the joy of serving. What we hope would happen is that through this, people would take on other small opportunities for service."

Cosh noted that center leaders hope to establish the ministry more permanently on campus. "This is a way that the school is being deliberate and structured in its service," he said. "For the first time, if a member of the community needs help, there will be a door."

Baptist chaplain in Mississippi evaluates gambling's impact

ON THE FIFTH ANNIVERSARY of legalized gambling in Mississippi, gamblers continue to flock to the Mississippi Gulf Coast, bringing their problems with them.

When they've hit rock bottom during those years, a helping hand has been available.

"We're staying busy," said John Landrum, a Gulf Coast pastor who resigned his church shortly after the first casino opened to begin a full-time ministry. Chaplain in the Mississippi Beach, with his wife, Linda.

"The (local) economy is booming. You can't get around that," Landrum said, "but the human needs that go along with legalized gambling are also rising.

"There are a lot of marital problems among both casino patrons and casino employees. We know the stress that gambling can place on a patron's marriage, but we don't often consider the stress on a casino employee's marriage. "Their personal problems are

heightened because of the pressure under which they work," Landrum explained. "You wouldn't believe all the government and casino regulations they must follow to the letter, and every move they make is videotaped by the casino security system."

Noting that "many of our churches have felt the direct, personal impact of gambling," Landrum's advice to communities considering legalized gambling is simple: "Do everything you can to keep it out. If it's there, do everything you can to minister to people affected by it.

"Everywhere there is a casino, there should be someone who sees the situation as a ministry," he emphasized.

"I liken it to other ministry opportunities that have been put before us as Christians," he remarked. "You can have a ministry to homosexuals without agreeing with the lifestyle; the focus of any ministry should be to bring lost people to salvation through Jesus Christ."

According to Keith Fulton, pastor of Mount Carmel Baptist Church, which is just across the county line from Silver Star Casino, "This is a moral issue, not an economic or entertainment issue. While we want to confront the sin, we need to act redemptively toward the sinner.

"Just because a person works in a casino doesn't mean they have committed an unpardonable sin," Fulton added. "We don't want to condone it, but rather confront the person with Jesus Christ."

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Missionary widow recounts comfort from Bible, friends

IT HAS BEEN six months since Sherry Blackwell's missionary husband, "Boots," died following an automobile accident on an isolated Brazilian highway. She was left on her own after 28 years of marriage to raise five teenage children.

Well, not entirely alone. Blackwell, whose family made Brazil their home in 1981, experienced God's sustaining love from His Word and from fellow Christians.

"It's amazing how I just wanted — more than any other time in my life — to see what God would say to me and how He would help me through His Word," Blackwell said.

"And every time — it never failed — I went to the Psalms and it was like God wrapped His arms around me, just comforting me through His Word."

"The psalmist would talk about how deep in sorrow he was and about the problems he was facing and yet how God brought him out of it. And I just claimed that every time I read it and said I know He will bring me out of it."

She said the Psalms confirmed that God "does have a future for me and a plan and there is life after this — even though you feel like there's not."

Blackwell said she has "finally gotten to the point where I feel like I can think about the future without it being so over-

whelming. But for the first couple of months I couldn't even think about the future. I just took a day at a time."

For at least two months, someone called her every day. "To me, it was just God's way of saying I haven't left you alone — and it was through His people that He encouraged me and let me feel love."

"I'm just so thankful that when the Lord nudged someone to pick up the phone and call, they did," she reflected, "because I know how guilty I've been in the past of not doing that. But now I can see the other side — and you never know what it means to the other person."

Through her family's tragic experience, Blackwell has learned the importance of encouraging others whenever she can. She said she has been greatly strengthened by thousands of cards and notes telling her someone was praying for her. "I was so amazed at how many people I didn't even know were praying for me and would write to let me."

Her experiences have helped deepen Blackwell's relationship with God. "It's closer now because I've had to depend on Him. I don't know how people make it if they don't have the Lord."

"After all that I've been through and seeing how God has taken care of me through this," she added, "I know without a doubt that He's going to continue taking care of me." ALEXANDRIA, LA (BP)

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By Randy Maxwell, pastor,
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We can learn how to deal
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Many young people ignore the wisdom of an older generation, but their warnings should be taken seriously. Evidence is all around us — rising rates of divorce and crime, declining church attendance, and troubling court decisions.

Our text shows a similar decline in the ethics and religious practices of the children of Israel who had returned to Jerusalem after the years of the Babylonian bondage. They returned with the purpose of restoring the temple. When they arrived, opposition from nearby residents and a preoccupation with their own interests caused their faith in God to falter. As a result, it took them nearly 20 years to complete the temple.

In Ezra 8 we read of more than 1,700 men of Israel going with Ezra from Babylon to Jerusalem. Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the law of the Lord. Perhaps he was expecting to find some neglect of the law when he arrived in Jerusalem, but it seems he found the situation worse than he had expected.

The people of Israel were no longer separate,

or set apart from the pagans. Indeed, some of the Israelites had taken pagan wives which was strictly forbidden in God's law. God knew that pagan spouses would turn His holy people away from Him. Even the priests and the religious leaders had violated God's law in this matter — not only had the leaders failed to enforce the law, they were some of its chief offenders!

Ezra reacted immediately and intensely to the distressing news. He not only tore his clothes, but tore out bits of his hair and beard. He was horrified and speechless with dismay. Accepting the suggestion of Shecaniah, Ezra issued a proclamation for all the men of Israel to gather in Jerusalem. As the men gathered, Ezra, the priest, pointed out the fact of their sin.

As the assembly heard the accusations, they responded by confessing their sin. A plan was formulated to rectify their actions. The authority demonstrated that day was not Ezra's, but belonged to God Himself. That same authority should be in control in our churches today.

Life and Work Is it okay to be an imitator?

By Marilyn Dusek, member,
First Church, Benton

Basic passage:

John 14:12-14; 15:12-17;
16:17-28; 1 John 5:13-15

Focal passage:

John 14:12-14; 15:12-17;
16:17-28; 1 John 5:13-15

Central truth:

Christians are to pray in
Jesus' name.

Imitation is not a complimentary word in my vocabulary. Imitation sour cream means the baked potato is less than delicious; imitation leather shoes are not as comfortable as the real thing; and imitation money is good only if I am playing Monopoly. I tend to equate imitation with "false" or "fake."

When John records Jesus' words to believers in chapter 14 to "do what I have been doing," he is telling me to be an imitator. Is it any wonder that this command elicits mixed feelings?

Jesus continues this thought in chapter 15 by telling me exactly what He commands: "that you love one another as I have loved you." Does this mean that Jesus expects me to love my family even when they are grumpy? Does He command me to love my fellow church member even when he votes against me on the new church year schedule? Am I to love a fellow employee whose lifestyle is causing her tremendous despair? Yes, "in Jesus' name" and "as I have loved you" indicate that I am to imitate His kind of love

which means dying to self.

When I pray "in Jesus' name," I am telling God that I am willing to turn loose of my selfish plans, my willful desires and my own agenda. Deciding to follow Jesus is a beginning, not an end. Each day that decision to follow Him must be made against a new backdrop of challenges, obstacles and opportunities. To pray "in Jesus' name" is to tell God that I want to be useful to Him ("to bear fruit").

I would be a fake to presume to pray "in Jesus' name" if I did not have a relationship with Him as my Savior. The passage in 1 John assures me that I do not need to be afraid to pray to God, but that I can approach Him with "confidence." I can talk to Him about anything as long as I have the attitude of "not my will, but Your will be done."

Holy Father, help us to be imitators of Jesus our Savior: to think like Him, to act like Him, to love like Him. Thank you for the good gifts you are so ready to give us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Some 13 years have passed between the end of chapter 16 and the events we read in chapter 17. Abram stands as a 99-year-old man at this particular time. It should also be noted that "covenant" is a key concept in Genesis 17. It's impossible to read this section of Scripture and not be confronted with the fact that the events represent the making of a covenant between the Lord and Abram. A promise that Abram will have a number of descendants is once again reflected.

In verse 1 God identifies Himself to Abram as "God Almighty." The title suggests that Abram served a God whose nature was both lofty and powerful. The Lord reminded Abram who He was and what He was about. Such a significant revelation renewed the covenant. In turn, Abram was once again challenged to place himself under the Lord's power and to exhibit a wholehearted devotion to the Lord.

In the presence of God we are changed. Abram was aware of the closeness of God and in turn we are told that he fell face down before

the Almighty (Gen. 17:3). The patriarch's physical posture shows outwardly the deep reverence and respect he had for God. Certainly there were those before him and there would be many after him who would also be moved by being in the awesome presence of God. We too should recognize that we serve no small God. As we worship Him, our hearts should reflect similar love and reverence. He truly is great!

Abram will no longer be called by the same name. God gives the new name, Abraham, to the patriarch. The name "Abraham" itself carries the idea of "father of a multitude." A wordplay seems evident at this point. Abram's new name would symbolize God's promise and future purposes for him.

This covenant relationship was initiated by the Lord. Frequently, the pronoun "my" is used to designate this dimension of the covenant (vv. 2,4,7,9,10,13,14,19,21). Abraham obeyed God and was circumcised as an outward sign of the eternal covenant.

Explore the Bible A new name

By Ken Shaddox, pastor,
First Church, Fordyce

Basic passage:

Genesis 17:1-27

Focal passage:

Genesis 17:1-5, 9-10

Central truth:

The reaffirmation of God's
covenant with Abram was
marked by a name change.

A stream never rises above its headwater." This proverb reminds us of the importance of leadership. If a worthwhile project gets accomplished, it happens because someone took the reins of leadership and motivated people to work together and get it done.

When God's people were finally able to return to their homeland, those who first returned to Jerusalem enthusiastically began to rebuild the temple. But they soon lost their zeal, and the temple lay partially built until the prophets Haggai and Zechariah recharged their batteries and got the project back on track.

Yet, even after the temple had been completed, their batteries grew weak. The people began to ignore the law. Their faithfulness to Yahweh was growing weak. Even after Ezra's leadership, the need for recharging was seen again. So God called Nehemiah who at the time was serving as a cup bearer to the Persian king.

When word reached Nehemiah, he did not act impulsively. He thought, planned and prayed

for four months before he took his problem to the king. He approached the king and asked permission to go to Judah to help his people. He also asked for letters to the governors in the area to assure safety in his travel. Nehemiah even asked for an even more costly favor when he asked for some timber from the king's forest.

Nehemiah had two messages that would encourage his hearers in the work of rebuilding the walls of the city. First, he was sure that God was helping him. Secondly, he had the support of the king. The people responded to Nehemiah's leadership, and began the work of rebuilding those walls. Nehemiah proved himself to be a great leader, for good leaders inspire their people as well as involve themselves in the work at hand.

Today we also need leaders with a vision and with the power of the Holy Spirit to lead us to do the work God has called for us to do. Indeed, God-sized tasks require God-sized work that can only be accomplished when God's people are stirred by His appointed leaders.

One of the saddest questions I have ever heard was asked when I was making a hospital visit recently. The person posing the question was an elderly patient whose mother and father had died many years ago. Her husband had preceded her in death and her children lived quite a distance from our town. Members of her Sunday School class were themselves too elderly to come to the hospital to visit her. No wonder she asked her question: "Is anybody out there praying for me?"

The time had passed in her life when she knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that someone personally cared for her enough to call her name at a mealtime prayer and ask God to be with her. No longer did a child kneel by his bed at night to thank God for her. Did anyone remember to ask God's strength for her during his devotional and prayer time?

Jesus knew how much we need someone to pray for us. On the last night before His crucifixion, he prayed in John 17 for those who believed in Him at that time. He also prayed for

those who would hear of Him and believe much later (you and me).

When an individual is going through a difficult experience, sometimes we feel inadequate in knowing how to pray for them. The best solution is to follow Jesus' example in what He prayed that night: 1. Keep them together in their devotion to God (v. 11). 2. Protect them from temptations (v. 15). 3. Help their lifestyle to be one of light and salt to the world (v. 18). 4. Let them know that God loves them (vs. 26).

Will it make any difference to God if I pray for someone who is sick or who has a need or who is unsaved? Will it help that person? James says that the prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. The blessing of the prayer not only touches the person with the need, but often allows God to use the person offering the prayer as His tool in meeting the need.

Prayers can be taken for granted. Is anybody out there praying for you? Is there anybody for whom you need to pray?

Has your faith ever been tested? All of us have experienced such occasion. Realistically, our faith may be tested at different points (James 1:2-4). As one approaches Genesis 18-20, there is the record of the continuing pilgrimage of Abraham and Sarah. In these chapters a series of challenges is encountered by the patriarch and his family. Our faith can be strengthened, enhanced and refined by means of such tests.

Special attention is given in the early part of Genesis 18 to Sarah's disbelief in the midst of a challenging situation. We're told that Abraham entertained three men as his guests (Gen. 18:2). The hospitality that Abraham exhibited to these visitors was not unusual or out of place in the culture of that day. As this distinguished company stood before Abraham they focused attention on the real purpose of their visit. This was not just a delegation of men. The pronoun "He" in verse 10 indicates the Lord's personal presence as the announcement was made that Sarah would have a son. This announcement was

overheard by Sarah and her response was one of laughter and disbelief (Gen. 18:12). How could she bear a child considering her advanced age? God indicated that an heir would be given.

In verse 22 and following, Abraham was confronted with another type of situation. As the visitors departed toward Sodom, a word was given concerning an approaching judgment on the residents of that city. The wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah was no secret (Gen. 18:20). Abraham pleaded boldly, through prayer, for God to spare the city for the sake of any in the city who were righteous. We can learn a lesson about the place and practice of intercessory prayer as we study the example of Abraham at this point. Humble intercession also is needed today.

In chapter 20 Abraham makes some bad decisions. Through unfortunate events, Abraham shows that while he was a man of great faith, he also was a man who possessed clay feet. He reverts to living by his own cunning ways rather than trusting the Lord.

Family Bible Make a difference

By Randy Maxwell, pastor,
Mount Olive Church, Crossett

Basic passage:

Nehemiah 1, 2

Focal passage:

Nehemiah 2:4-8, 15-18

Central truth:

Good leaders inspire their people to work on God-sized tasks.

Life and Work Is anybody out there?

By Marilyn Dusek, member,
First Church, Benton

Basic passage:

John 17:9-19; James 5:13-18

Focal passage:

John 17:9-11, 16, 18, 20-21,
26; James 5:14-18

Central truth:

Jesus expects us to follow His example by praying for others.

Explore the Bible When faith is tested

By Ken Shaddox, pastor,
First Church, Fordyce

Basic passage:

Genesis 18-20

Focal passage:

Genesis 18:9-14, 22-26;
20:2, 11-13

Central truth:

The Christian pilgrimage includes times where our faith is tested.

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3555 mails 'The Mormon Puzzle' video to SBC churches

NASHVILLE, TN (BP)—The Baptist Sunday School Board is mailing five copies of a 70-minute video, "The Mormon Puzzle," to more than 35,000 Southern Baptist churches. The video, produced by the North American Mission Board, was introduced at the 1997 Southern Baptist Convention. It was designed as a resource for SBC messengers who will attend the 1998 convention meeting in Salt Lake City.

"The Sunday School Board has hit a grand slam for interfaith witness. I am thrilled by this monumental contribution," remarked Phil Roberts, director of NAMB's interfaith witness division. "This gift from the board ensures that every SBC church will have this valuable tool not only for the 1998 SBC but to assist church members in witnessing to Mormons in their communities."

Additional copies of the video may be purchased through Baptist Book Stores or by calling 1-800-233-1123.

Clinton vetoes abortion ban for second time

WASHINGTON (BP)—President Clinton again has vetoed a bill banning the partial-birth abortion procedure. It was the second time in 18 months Clinton had rejected the Partial-birth Abortion Ban Act, which would have imposed fines and up to two years in prison for doctors performing the controversial procedure.

He vetoed the legislation, Clinton said in a written statement, because it "does not contain an exception to the measure's ban that will adequately protect the lives and health of the small group of women in tragic circumstances who need an abortion performed at a late stage of pregnancy to avert death or serious injury. The bill does include an exception to protect the mother's life."

More than 400 physicians, including former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, have said the procedure "is never medically necessary to protect a mother's health or her future fertility. On the contrary, this procedure can pose a significant threat to both." The American Medical Association endorsed the legislation earlier this year.

Southwestern avoids faculty trial with settlement

FORT WORTH, TX (ABP)—Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary apparently has avoided a faculty trial by coming to terms with a professor removed from his classroom for criticizing seminary administrators.

Jeff Pool, 45, an assistant professor of systematic theology, will not return to the classroom. But he will receive salary and benefits through the current academic year, which ends next July 31.

Seminary administrators pulled Pool from his teaching duties just before the seminary's fall term started in late August. That action followed Pool's public charges of "academic censorship" against the seminary.

According to a prepared statement from Tommy Lea, dean of the seminary's School of Theology, "Dr. Pool has shown himself to be a capable scholar in his disciplines of systematic theology. He has demonstrated commendable interest in his students. However, the parties have agreed that Dr. Pool should exercise his teaching ministry in another institutional setting."

"I really was removed from teaching not because of my teaching, but because I voiced dissent about actions of the administrators of this institution," Pool said. "It is vital that Baptists do not lose the principle of internal criticism. If there is no self-criticism, how do we call ourselves to account for our actions?"

CBF appoints council for endorsement of chaplains

ATLANTA (ABP)—The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship began a process to endorse chaplains for industry and the armed forces during a meeting of the group's Coordinating Council Oct. 16-18.

The Fellowship voted at its general assembly this summer to declare itself an endorsing body for chaplains. Most agencies which employ chaplains require that they be endorsed by a denomination or other official religious body.

The Coordinating Council appointed a "council on endorsement" to establish and administer policies for endorsing chaplains, counselors and other ministers in specialized settings. Staff member Gary Baldrige said 85 persons had contacted CBF about chaplaincy endorsement since the CBF action in June.

NEWS DIGEST