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– Matthew 6:34 (TLB)

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March 10, 2016

IMB exodus: 1,132 missionaries & staff take ‘voluntary’ pink slips

BY WILL HALL

Message Editor

ALEXANDRIA – Southern Baptists’ overseas mission forces will be reduced to levels not seen since 1993 with the departure of about 22 percent of its personnel, including 983 missionaries leaving the field and 149 severing ties from various state-side assignments.



David Platt

International Mission Board President David Platt announced the 1,132 terminations Feb. 24, stressing the “voluntary” nature of most of the departures.

However, 30 communicators with approximately 500 years of IMB service among them, which included bringing IMB communications into the Internet age, were fired in January.

Platt said in a *Baptist Press* report the team was “way behind in developing the digital mindset” and “struggled to form new methods for reaching a changing audience.” Yet the group included award-winning writers and photographers who are featured speakers at national conferences for their expertise.

See **IMB** on 6



Elizabeth Hill rises up from baptism by Church of Addis lead pastor Tom Shepard on Feb. 21. The church has baptized 300 people, mostly adult Catholics.



Mark H. Hunter photos

George Hill rises from baptism by Tom Shepard, lead pastor at the Church at Addis while worship leader Ben Harris assists and Hill’s wife, Elizabeth, who was also baptized, watches.

Addis growing like First Century Church

BY MARK H. HUNTER

Regional Reporter

ADDIS – When Elizabeth Hill was asked why she and her husband George were baptized at The Church at Addis by Pastor Thomas Shepard, her face broke into big smile.

“God brought us here,” Elizabeth Hill, 53, said, following the Feb. 21 service. “This is like a First Century church.”

Her husband of 16 years, George Hill, 79, a lifelong Presby-

terian and a well-known, retired businessman, agreed. He opened his worn Bible to Acts 2:47, and read aloud, “And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” Well, that’s what’s going on right here. If not daily at least weekly.”

Hill pointed to the front of the sanctuary where Shepard and several members were visiting with a young married couple who’d come forward to join and a young woman seeking baptism.

“This is a dynamic church and

I want to be a part of it,” Hill said.

Shepard said they’ve baptized around 300 people, mostly adult Catholics, and he baptizes someone nearly every Sunday.

“We have a massive amount of adult Catholics baptized,” Shepard said. “We’re saturated with Catholics in this area.”

“I was raised a Catholic so coming from that background I’m able to convey the message in a way that they are able to come to

See **ADDIS** on 8



Brian Blackwell photo

Louis Charrier, a legendary Louisiana Baptist church planter, first felt the call to plant churches while attending the 1986 Louisiana Baptist Convention Annual Meeting in Lake Charles. To date, he has planted 17 churches.

Charrier answers the call to plant churches

BY BRIAN BLACKWELL

Message Staff Writer

WASHINGTON – The ‘Engergizer Bunny’ has nothing on church planter Louis Charrier.

On any given Sunday morning, he is preaching from the pulpit at Washington Baptist Church, a congregation he has pastored since 1994.

Later, Charrier travels

25 miles south to New Life Church in Arnaudville, where he will lead a Bible study.

In between, he even stops off to visit with a prospect who recently attended a service at the third church he pastors, Bayou Life Church in Cottonport.

While juggling three churches at once can present

See **CHARRIER** on 5

State DR teams offer a helping hand, love of Christ to storm victims

BY STAFF

Baptist Message

SOUTHEAST LOUISIANA — As he visited with homeowners affected by a powerful tornado that badly damaged more than 200 homes in LaPlace, Gibbie McMillan, Louisiana Baptist Disaster Relief director, was reminded again of why Louisiana Baptist Disaster Relief exists — to show the love of Christ in a tragic situation. Among those he met was Pat

Murphy, a single woman living alone in the LaPlace area. When McMillan arrived on the scene, Murphy's two sisters were being assisted by a disaster relief team in removing debris from her yard.

"She moved to LaPlace after Hurricane Katrina where she lost her home in New Orleans," McMillan said. "She wept as the team prayed with her and her sisters."

Murphy was served by a large team of Louisiana Baptist

Disaster Relief volunteers from throughout the state. Hours after a series of tornadoes touched down in a number of southeast Louisiana communities, the disaster relief teams were on standby, ready for activation.

At least 12 tornadoes touched down in the state Feb. 23, the National Weather Service confirmed.

Convent, LaPlace, Paincourtville and Livingston Parish sustained the most significant damage with winds of 111-135 miles per hour according to the NWS.

The killer storm that ripped through the Assumption and St. James parish communities of Paincourtville and Convent carved a path 21 miles long and 300 to 350 yards wide. At Convent, the tornado leveled much of Sugar Hill RV Park, killed two people and injured more than 30.

Louisiana Baptist Disaster Relief teams concentrated their efforts in LaPlace, Reserve, Napoleonville, Livingston and Convent — the work included cleaning up debris, placing tarps on homes and working on damaged roofs.

First Baptist Church of LaPlace and Celebration Church's River Campuses, also in LaPlace, were among the churches who served as an area for drop off and distribution of supplies for storm victims.

First Baptist Church in LaPlace became the base of operations for the New Orleans Baptist Association's disaster relief efforts. Several members from the church participated in assessing damage. The association organized disaster relief supplies and workers and the North American Mission Board contributed two pallets of tarps and wooden slats for securing damaged roofs, according to a blog by Billy Puckett, community ministries director for the association.

"God answered prayers for help by sending His Church to serve, comfort and encourage," Puckett said. "Those that came to serve in the name of Christ were a great testimony to the goodness of our God."

"Please continue to pray for those in LaPlace that have been affected by this disaster," he continued. "Pray for the church in LaPlace, that the body of Christ would continue to serve in the strength that the Lord provides."

Meanwhile, Celebration Church partnered with other ministries including Samaritan's Purse as well as individuals to give out more than 8,000 feet of tarp, 250 cleaning kits, 13 pallets of bottled water, dozens of rakes, 100 brooms and 100 mops. Hope Reigns, the rapid response team from Eight Days of Hope, a national DR organi-

zation, provided coordination with Celebration Church as work orders came in on damaged homes.

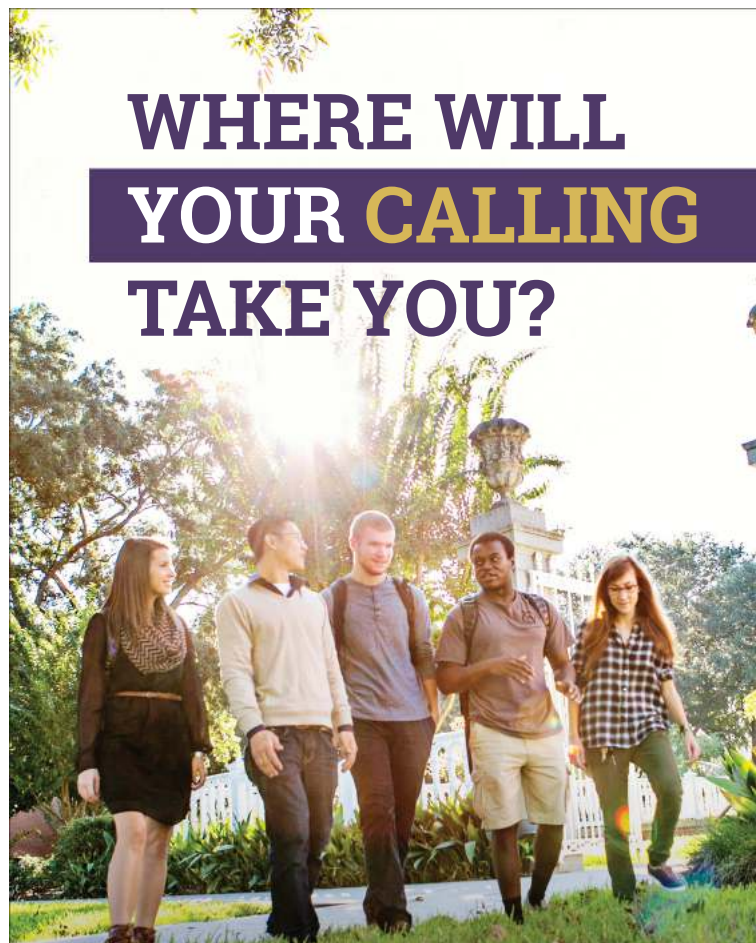
Individuals coming to the church received physical supplies, but they also received an invitation from a volunteer to pray for them.

Pastor Checkerz Williams said many were emotional and grateful, including one woman who, after receiving storm supplies, returned to Celebration Church to help other storm victims over a four-day period, until the center closed Feb. 28. The woman also attended a service that day at the church.


"She was so moved by the love she experienced that she came back to serve," Williams said. "It's very moving and let's us know that our labor is not in vain when you see the impact it has on that individual. It's a great testimony to the way the Lord draws people together in times of crisis. We saw the power of the Lord working in that moment."

Celebration Church has now transitioned to long-term recovery operations. Williams said as FEMA provides information regarding those who were uninsured or under insured he is working closely with St. John the Baptist Parish to coordinate rebuild efforts.

See RELIEF on 15



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Pro-life prayer vigil slated for March 12 in Shreveport/Bossier

BY BRIAN BLACKWELL
Message Staff Writer

SHREVEPORT/BOSSIER CITY – Two multi-denominational, pro-life prayer vigils are scheduled for March 12 -- one at a former abortion clinic in Bossier City and another in Shreveport, which is one of only two remaining clinics still perform abortions in the state.

The goal of the vigils, according to co-organizer Brian Gunter, pastor of First Baptist Church Pollock, is to bring together different denominations and groups from around the state to pray peacefully for all abortions to end in Louisiana.

"My goal is when we get to the Shreveport clinic we would have the sidewalk surrounding the building with a line of people hand-in-hand, shoulder-to-shoulder praying," said Gunter. "We need to pray the Supreme Court will uphold the Fifth Circuit's ruling. We need to pray God would change the heart of the doctor performing abortions inside the Shreveport clinic. And we need to pray God would cleanse our state of the blight of abortion."

Chris Davis, director of 40 Days for Life in Shreveport-Bossier, is also an organizer.

The first vigil begins at 10 a.m. at 1505 Doctors Drive in Bossier City, the site of Bossier City Medical Suite. At the completion of the first vigil, the group will travel for a second at 210 Kings Highway in Shreveport, where Hope Medical Group for Women is located.

KSLA-TV in Shreveport reported Saturday a handful of pro-choice demonstrators gathered outside Hope Medical Group for Women, holding up signs containing messages of support for the clinic.

According to a Feb. 26 article in the *Los Angeles Times*, Hope Medical Group for Women performs the largest number of abortions in Louisiana. *The Times* reported the clinic's abortionist does not have hospital admitting privileges and he is nearing retirement age.

The Times also reported the clinic's administrator Kathaleen Pittman said she did not know how much longer the center would remain open.



Hope Medical Group for Women in Shreveport will be the site of one of two prayer vigils on March 12.

"We're now down to two clinics and two physicians serving approximately 10,000 women across the state," she said. "It's just not sustainable."

Earlier in the month, Causeway Medical Clinic in Metairie shut its doors.

On Feb. 25, the *Baton Rouge Advocate* reported the Delta Clinic of Baton Rouge on Colonial Drive stopped performing abortions and now only gives abortion counseling. Also on that same day, a receptionist who answered the phone at Bossier City Medical Suite said their facility was no longer performing abortions, which Louisiana Right to Life was able to confirm.

Both facilities remain open, offering services but just offer services that do not include abortions.

This leaves just Hope

Medical Group for Women and Women's Health Care Center in New Orleans as the only two clinics performing abortions in the state.

Gunter is hopeful when the women who is considering entering Hope Medical Group for Women on Saturday see such a large group praying for them, they will reconsider their decision and not have an abortion.

He added if any woman on Saturday feels led to change her mind, Gunter's family will adopt her child.

"I can't do this for every woman and child, but we can do that for at least one," Gunter said. "In the eight years I have worked with the pro-life movement, the saddest thing I have seen is the regret of the women after having an abortion. It's not something they look back on and say I did the right thing."

"We want those women who are considering an abortion to know we love them, we are praying for them and there is another option out there other than going through with this procedure," Gunter added.

As each abortion clinic shuts down in the state, the goal of Gunter and other pro-life advocates is to have an emergency pregnancy care clinic in its place.

Though most metropolitan areas in the state already have an emergency pregnancy care clinic in operation, the Alexandria-Pineville area is currently without such a facility.

Gunter is working to change that face and is hopeful a location in Alexandria or Pineville will be secured by later this year.

Already, First Baptist Pollock has sought advice and help of pro-life advocates in the state, as well as researched requirements to establish this ministry. His congregation also has secured donations from local businesses and a fully-functioning ultrasound machine.

Churches will primarily fund the clinic.

The church hosted a well-attended prayer breakfast on Oct. 24, in which a number of pro-life advocates joined in the cause.

"These women need care and this care at this facility will be free," Gunter said. "This will cost us a lot as churches but we are going to do it because we care for them. We want them to know there is another way other than abortion."

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LBCH will unveil first new cottage in 40 years April 22

BY STAFF

Baptist Message

MONROE – Under construction for the last seven months, a new cottage -- the first in 40 years -- is ready to be unveiled according to Louisiana Baptist Children's Home President and CEO Perry Hancock.

Designed to provide transitional living for women and their children as they prepare for independent living, the cottage is scheduled to be dedicated April 22 at 10:30 a.m. Hancock informed trustees as the Home's spring board meeting.

The HomePlace Cottages, which are located at Martin Village, provide homeless women and their children housing for up to one year at no cost to the residents.

While there, the women receive training for a high school equivalency degree and are given life and employment skills training through the Christian Women's Job Corps.

Two more cottages are planned for the near future as additional funds become available.

Proceeds from the Brenda Hall Abney Golf Classic, sponsored by Roy O. Martin Lumber Company in Alexandria, is the major funding source for the cottages.

Hancock said he had received numerous comments about the positive impact the HomePlace ministry has made on the women.

"Many of our churches are providing support for the women," Hancock said. "Several employers from the area are providing jobs and our women are gaining the confidence and a sense of independence that they need."

In other news, Hancock updated trustees on the renovation that will begin soon on Peace Cottage. This cottage will receive new flooring, an updated kitchen and the removal of paneling inside the home.

Each cottage serves as a



Louisiana Baptist Children's Home photo

The HomePlace Cottages, which are located at Martin Village, provide homeless women and their children housing for up to one year at no cost to the residents. It is one of three new cottages to be built in Monroe and this will be the first new one in 40 years.

home for five to seven children and two house parents.

Once work on these cottages is completed, all eight residences built in the 1970s will have been updated.

Grace and Feazell cottages were the first to receive renovations in 2013. Since then, Joy, Rucker, Love, Hope and Faith also have been renovated.

Hancock also shared an update on foster care and adoption efforts by the Chil-

dren's Home. Currently, the Children's Home has social workers in Baton Rouge, Monroe, New Orleans and Shreveport.

In 2015, the foster care and adoption program served 219 children, including 85 off-campus. The program began three years ago.

On April 8-9, the Children's Home along with several churches and faith-based organizations from throughout the U.S., will host the Em-

power to Connect Conference simulcast in locations throughout Louisiana.

Those locations along with registration information can be found at connect127.org.

The two-day conference is designed to help adoptive and foster care parents, ministry leaders, churches and professionals better understand how to connect with "children from hard places" in order to help them heal and become all God desires them to be.

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Charrier from page one

a challenge, Charrier said the rewards outweigh any drawbacks.

"What keeps me going is the calling," Charrier said. "If you start to think about the plans for the week or month, it can be overwhelming. You have to take the task at hand one day at a time. God will call you and supply all you need."

Charrier first felt the call to plant churches while attending the 1986 Louisiana Baptist Convention Annual Meeting at First Baptist Church in Lake Charles. The emphasis that year was Mission 90, which was a campaign with a goal to start 250 missions and ministries throughout the next five years.

He came back to Miller French Baptist Church in Iota, where he served as pastor, with a burden for and a passion to plant churches throughout Louisiana.

That passion turned into what would be a long history of planting 17 churches throughout the state.

His story will be told in-depth when a book "Witness Among the Cajuns" is released, with a targeted release during the 2016 Louisiana Baptist Convention annual meeting.

The first church he planted met in one of the most unlikely places – a refurbished bus in one of the church members' backyard. Members of

Hathaway Baptist Mission 10 miles north of Jennings worked for several weeks to turn the bus into a place to worship. Though it sat idle the entire time of its existence, it was in constant use.

"Most of the people coming to our church were children, so one of the members asked why they didn't just meet in a bus that was no longer in use," Charrier recalls. "We saw the numbers grow and from there 'the church inside the bus' was born."

For the next 30 years, Charrier continued to obey God's calling to plant churches, no matter the location or type. He has planted Cowboy churches, Cajun congregations, African-American churches and even Hispanic ones. Many of those churches still are meeting today.

While he usually takes on 3-4 at one time and stays at each church anywhere from 2-5 years before handing off the baton to someone else, one has stayed constant throughout – Washington Baptist Church, located about 25 miles north of Lafayette.

It served as a hub for missions, instilling a mind and heart for missions in its members.

Whenever Charrier starts a new church or performs an outreach effort such as Bible study, construction projects,

See CHARRIER on 11



Philip Timothy photo

At the 2015 Louisiana Evangelism Conference at First Baptist Church in Lafayette, Louis Charrier offers a prayer in both French and English. Directly behind him is Louisiana Baptists Executive Director David Hankins. Over the last 30 years, Charrier, who is considered to be one of the most prolific church planters in Louisiana, has planted Cowboy churches, Cajun congregations, African-American churches and even Hispanic ones. Presently, he is pastoring three churches in the Acadiana region.

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IMB from page one

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

Platt declared in September 2015 his goal of 600-800 terminations, including personnel "here and overseas," saying such were needed in order to balance IMB's books after the agency had spent \$210 million more than it received from 2010-2014.

He rejected the notion of using natural attrition (retirements and other separations) as too slow. IMB loses approximately 300 missionaries a year, which would have meant reaching its goal of 4,200 missionaries (600 fewer) in two years. Instead, his plan targeted missionaries who were at least 50 years old in order to reduce personnel levels now, while still hiring new missionaries.

Platt indicated in earlier discussions his reason for hiring novices while releasing seasoned field personnel (each having at least five years of experience), was his desire to keep faith with churches that were sending missionary candidates to the IMB.

IMB spokesperson Julie

McGowan confirmed to *The Baptist Message* that IMB hired 403 first-time missionaries in 2015 (136 for long-term appointments and 267 for short-term assignments) and projected another 340 initiates will be appointed in 2016 (135 long-term and 205 short-term).

Platt said the missionary sending agency had met its goal of 600-800 terminations during its first phase of reductions, which offered an enhanced set of separation benefits called the Voluntary Retirement Incentive (the financial particulars were withheld from the public by IMB). This package was taken by 702 missionaries on the field and 109 who were working in a myriad of capacities in the United States (811 total).

Moreover, when phase two was offered (called the Hand Raising Opportunity) another 281 missionaries took a reduced severance deal after turning down the enhanced VRI offer, and another 40 stateside did the same, presumably including the 30 fired communicators who were not aware their positions would be eliminated when the VRI was being tendered.

In the end, despite taking

these drastic measures in order to deal with deficit spending, the personnel reduction will necessitate continued overspending by the IMB for at least one more year.

The 2016 budget included a planned \$23 million shortfall, covered by operating reserves, for the costs of terminating 600-800 personnel, IMB reported. However, actual departures (1,132) exceeded estimates by nearly 42 percent and possibly could drive the deficit toward \$33 million.

NOT QUITE TRANSPARENT

Platt told a group of Southern Baptist journalists Feb. 16 he had assured all IMB missionaries they did not have to leave the mission field if they sensed "the Lord" was telling them to stay.

He went further to say "many of our personnel instead of calling the VRI the voluntary retirement incentive started calling it the voluntary reemployment initiative because they really saw, 'This is not me stepping off the sidelines in missions. This is stepping into a new phase, new place of involvement in missions.'"

However, Platt balked at allowing the terminated missionaries the freedom to tell Southern Baptists for themselves how they viewed the situation.

According to a missionary who wishes to remain anonymous, a paragraph included in the VRI release states "Missionaries will not directly or indirectly at any time, make any disparaging remark, either oral or in writing, regarding IMB or any affiliated entity or any of their respective employees, officers, directors, affiliates, or agents, either individually or in any representative capacity. Notwithstanding the foregoing, this provision shall not preclude Missionaries from making truthful statements to any government agency or pursuant to any lawful subpoena."

When asked by *The Baptist Message* during a Feb. 16 question and answer time whether he would grant missionaries permission to share "truthful statements" with Southern Baptists similar to the freedom they had to share "truthful statements" with the government, Platt refused.

Saying at first he did not understand the question, Platt followed up by saying the verbiage was "pretty standard procedure."

But when pressed, he insisted that "for the good of not just the IMB but the SBC" he was "going to encourage our missionaries to do everything that legally they've agreed to do."

"I am confident that what has carried out, people have signed, is legally for their good, for the good of the IMB and for the mission of the IMB and so I encourage everybody to do exactly what they said they were going to do," he added.

Trustees likewise are prevented from expressing concerns publicly.

A document published by *Baptist Press* outlines the

IMB's guidelines for trustees, including the statement that "trustees are to speak in positive and supportive terms as they interpret and report on actions by the Board, regardless of whether they personally support the action."

EEOC CONSIDERATIONS

The insistence that missionary terminations were voluntary, and, the imposition of an oath of secrecy on former IMB personnel likely have to do with the specific targeting of 50 year olds in the force reductions.

The Age Discrimination in Employment Act forbids age discrimination against people 40 years old or more, and the Older Workers Benefit Protection Act adds the specific requirement that an employee must make a "knowing and voluntary" informed choice whether or not to sign a waiver of these protections when terminated for age.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the national entity charged with enforcing labor laws, requires that waivers must:

- be written to be clearly understood;
- specify rights or claims arising under the law and must expressly spell out "Age Discrimination in Employment Act," and not simply refer to it by ADEA;
- provide 21 days to consider the offer;
- give employees seven days to revoke the waiver;
- not require an employee to surrender rights and claims that may arise after the date the waiver is put into force; and,
- be supported by "consideration" (pay and benefits) in addition to that to which the employee already is entitled.

Additionally, when a group of employees is termi-

See IMB on 7



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"Children are a blessing and a gift from the Lord." Psalm 127:3

IMB from page 6

nated, each one must be given written notice of layoff and at least 45 days to consider the waiver before signing it, and the waiver must specify eligibility terms and state definite time limits.

Employers also must inform these individuals about the “decisional unit” (class of employees) from which the employer chose who would and would not be terminated, and, provide a table listing the job titles and ages of all individuals who were terminated as well as those who were not terminated in each decisional unit.

Although the IMB is required to give this table of information to those who are leaving, the agency declined to give the same information to *The Baptist Message*.

In response to a request for the EEOC information, McGowan wrote back that “IMB complies with applicable EEOC reporting requirements.” She also said the request was denied “to safeguard the privacy information of its employees,” and the data is “for EEOC use only.”

PLATT’S PLIGHT

Platt, who turns 37 in July, faces a number of imposing challenges in leading the Southern Baptist Convention’s largest evangelism entity, while having limited executive experience and evangelistic success.

He came to the IMB in the fall of 2014 having served eight years as senior pastor of The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, Ala.

The year prior to his arrival, the congregation averaged 5,047 in weekly worship attendance and



Baptist Press photo

With the departure of about 22 percent of its personnel, including 983 missionaries leaving the field, the eliminations of its Richmond Communications Center and 149 severing ties from various stateside assignments, the total number of personnel to no longer be employed by the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention is now 1,132. The IMB’s overseas mission forces has been reduced to levels not seen since 1993

baptized 159 new believers, according to data extracted from the Southern Baptist Convention’s Annual Church Profile database. In his last year with the church, attendance averaged 4,608 and 58 converts were baptized, an internal church document shows, and the proposed budget for the next year was about \$9.3 million.

Meanwhile, the reported IMB budget for 2015-2016 exceeds \$304 million, and information shared at the SBC Annual Meeting last year indicated more than 190,000 baptisms and 13,000 church starts resulted because of the work of IMB missionaries (2013 data collected in 2014 reported in the 2015 SBC Annual).

Both numbers are down from highs of more than 600,000 baptisms reported for 2006 and nearly 27,000 church plants in 2007, although it is not known how much of the respective drops are due to changes to reporting procedures that began in 2009.

However, Platt has brought aboard three IMB outsiders to assist him with the organizational reset – Sebastian Traeger, Rodney Freeman and Lukas Naugle.

Traeger is described in an IMB press release as

“an entrepreneur, business professional and management consultant” who led several businesses focused on communications (Village Phone), self-publishing (Christianity.com) and crowd funding (Razoo.com). He was a member of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., and served as an elder with the Reformed congregation before coming to the IMB in 2014.

Freeman was an executive with two international pharmaceutical companies, according to Baptist Press, managing budgets of \$1 billion (Merck) and \$120 million (Schering-Plough),

and leading staffs of 950 and 490 personnel, respectively. He was a member, deacon and Sunday school teacher of Somerset Hills Baptist Church in Basking Ridge, N.J.

Naugle was a rebranding consultant (ChangeGoat.com) who named such clients as Together for the Gospel and The Gospel Coalition (both groups advocate Reformed theology), as well as Darrin Patrick (an Acts 29 church planter) and Radical (Platt’s book and resource website). Naugle was a member of Redemption Church in Phoenix, Ariz., a non-SBC Reformed congregation.



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Addis from page one

the understanding that Jesus Christ is not necessarily the Lord of their life," Shepard said. "They know a lot about Jesus Christ but actually submitting to that truth and saying 'I'm going to make him the Lord of my life and to follow through with baptism' – a lot of people come to this place and say, 'I need to nail that down.'"

Earlier this year, Shepard said, they baptized three elderly Catholics in three consecutive weeks.

"Mr. Tuiller, a 90-year-old gentleman, came forward because his 80-year-old wife came forward because her 80-year-old friend – who she went to Catholic school with – came forward and got saved and got baptized," Shepard said. "So we baptized all three of them in a row week after week after week."

"We don't baptize a lot of children because we want them to understand completely their decision to follow Christ," Shepard.

Just before Shepard baptized the Hills, he told them and the congregation, "There is a time in our life when we have to draw a line in the sand and answer Jesus' question, 'Are you going to follow me or are you going to follow the world?' The Hills are both longtime Christians but they want to publicly express their faith as a believer in Christ."

George Hill, after the service, told how he was sprinkled as an infant.

"But I really became a Christian about 40 years ago, when I surrendered to him," Hill said. "I'm being baptized now because the sprinkling system of baptism isn't in the Bible and the immersion system is what they did in the Bible so I'm re-doing it the right way."

"I kept thinking about how the Spirit descended like a dove on Jesus and was hoping the same thing would happen to me," he said with a grin. "I was very glad to get it done."



Mark H. Hunter photo

The newest members of the Church at Addis, Elizabeth and George Hill, pose with Pastor Tom Shepard who baptized them Feb. 21. The Hills said the Church at Addis was 'a dynamic church and they wanted to be a part of it.'

FIRST CENTURY DISCIPLESHIP

Shepard took over what was then First Baptist of Addis in 2010, after the congregation had dwindled to an elderly handful meeting in a small, 1957 brick sanctuary located on 3.5 acres along-

side of La. 1. He applied what he called First Century discipleship with 21st Century social media and community outreaches and soon they were holding two services.

The Louisiana Baptist Convention loaned them a circus tent where they met

for about a year. In 2012 they built a 10,000 square foot steel building. One Sunday service of about 300 soon turned into two services and now they are seeking to purchase an adjoining forested lot to increase their parking.

Tommy Middleton, Director of Missions for the Baptist Association of Greater Baton Rouge, speaks highly of Shepard's growing ministry.

"Tom has been doing a great work," Middleton said. "His focal point is discipleship and he is using social media effectively. Old school evangelism, sharing the gospel, discipleship, but using current social media technologies to be more effective in connecting with people."

Middleton compared Shepard's multiple outreaches to fishing at night with a trotline.

"They have a lot of hooks in the water," Middleton said. "The more hooks you have in the water the greater the chances you catch fish. They are working for as many opportunities to engage the culture as possible."

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Speaker encouraged by students' response at Collegiate Conference

BY BRIAN BLACKWELL
Message Staff Writer

ALEXANDRIA – Despite news reports and surveys saying the Millennial generation is not committed to the church, Michael Wood came away encouraged by this generation of students attending the recent Collegiate Evangelism Conference.

"I'm so encouraged hearing from so many of you who have put your yes on the table," Wood told a crowd of around 700, mostly college students from Baptist Collegiate Ministries throughout the state. "Whatever it is, the answer is yes. Wherever it takes me, the answer is yes."

Wood, who is pastor at First Baptist Church in West Monroe, challenged the students throughout the two-day conference at Calvary Baptist Church in Alexandria to make a difference for Christ in the near and far places.

Citing Nehemiah 2:8,

Wood said the prophet Nehemiah was presented with a mission to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. He said Nehemiah realized what his mission was after four months of praying and fasting and thus

approached the king to seek permission and funding to carry out the task.

"Rebuilt walls stand on the foundation of God's presence and power," Wood said. "And they are framed with a clear mission."

Likewise, students are tasked with a similar mission today, he said

... advancing the kingdom of God by rebuilding one life at a time.

He also said too often, this mission is muddled up with activity. He said that interferes with Christ's commandment to take the gospel to the nations.

"So I ask you today, does that truth move you to rebuild lives?" Wood asked. "Now is the time. We're done with excuses. We're done with apathy. The God of creation gives



Speaker Michael Wood



Brian Blackwell photo

A crowd of more than 700 students participated in this year's two-day Collegiate Evangelism Conference held at Calvary Baptist Church in Alexandria. Speaker Michael Wood, pastor at First Baptist Church in West Monroe, challenged the students to make a difference for Christ in the near and the far places.

you a clear mission," he said. "He says I'm not sending you out on your own, I'm with you in this. Let it be said of this generation they were faithful, they knew God was with them."

Wood's messages were part of a conference Feb. 19-20 that included testimonies from Baptist Collegiate Ministry students from around the state, worship by The City Harmonic, a late-night fellowship and small group prayer times.

STUDENTS OPEN UP

Conference organizer Chad McClurg said the fellowship among the students reflected the close-knit nature of the state.

"For this year our theme was Near and Far," said McClurg, director of the BCM at the University of Louisiana at Monroe. "Our hope out of everything we did was to inspire our students that taking the gospel starts with those near and ends with those who are

far away. The students after the conference talked about everything from going to mission trips to getting called to ministry to sharing with international students in their class. So I think we

See CEC on 10

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10 Collegiate Evangelism Conference

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accomplished our purpose.”

During a time of student testimonies – about various ministries BCM members can be a part of throughout the year – Noah Whirley from LSU shared about a mission trip he took with others to Chinatown of New York last Christmas. He said it’s a way God has called Christians to fulfill the Great Commission.

“Whenever we have those breaks in the school year, what better way than to use them to share Christ,” he said. “It’s re-

ally easy for us to think I need to go to mission trips out of the country. The truth is we have people in our own backyard who have never heard of Jesus before.”

Hunter Humble, a member of the BCM at Louisiana Tech University, talked about his time as a member of the Go Louisiana (GOLA) VBS team. In its eighth year, GOLA VBS is part of an emphasis by the Baptist Collegiate Ministry in Louisiana.

GOLA VBS allows college students to serve on teams that spend the summer sharing God’s love through Vacation Bible School at Louisiana Baptist churches.

“All the churches where we served have one thing in common,” Humble said. “It was that they love to share the love of Christ. During GOLA, we answered the call God has given us.”

Grace Kerr, a member of the BCM at LSU, said even though this was the third year to attend CEC, she said the fellowship with students around the state never gets old. She added that Wood’s messages caused her to pause



Brian Blackwell photo

Students share during the Collegiate Evangelism Conference about a missions trip they took during Christmas 2015 to Chinatown of New York. The conference also included testimonies from other students, music by the City Harmonic and several messages by guest speaker Michael Wood, a pastor at First Baptist West Monroe.

and reflect on the short time she has to make an impact as a college student.

“I liked how he talked about the Lord has us here for such a time as this,” Kerr said. “All aspects of the conference reinforce that we have a mission field and no matter where we are, whether it’s in our dorm or overseas, Jesus’ name needs to be shared with people.”

Jacob Anderson, a member of the BCM at the University of Louisiana at Monroe, said CEC reminded him of his purpose.

“We have this opportu-

nity in college that we won’t have later because this of this season of life,” Anderson said. “And that made me pause and think on the fact that we are called as college students to do what needs to be done for Christ.”

NO NEED TO FEAR

Mark Robinson, state BCM director for Louisiana Baptists, closed CEC with a word of encouragement for students struggling with the fear of losing their TOPS funding for next year.

On Feb. 11, Louisiana’s

colleges and universities received an unprecedented notice by email from the Louisiana Office of Student Financial Aid that said it was suspending all payments of funds from TOPS, or Taylor Opportunity Program for Students. The decision was reversed the following day, but Commissioner of Administration Jay Dardenne announced the program was \$28 million short of the scholarship funds necessary to last until the end of the semester. Legislators are discussing the fate of TOPS right now during their special session.

Robinson told the students that when they are overcome with fear, they should recite the words “When I am afraid, I will trust in the Lord.” He added that if any students do indeed lose funding, the end result could be God moving them to another campus and state for a greater purpose.

“When I saw that announcement I thought what an opportunity it was for God to show his power,” Robinson said. “Right now this situation we’ve got is an incredible storm. It is a financial storm.

“As a believer we can pray,” he said. “If we do that, we have victory.”

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Brian Blackwell photo

Students gather in small groups for a time of prayer during the annual Collegiate Evangelism Conference at Calvary Baptist Church in Alexandria. More than 700 students attended this year’s event.

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Charrier from page 5

prayer walking or Vacation Bible School at a plant, several members will accompany him. This congregation that averages between 70 and 80 on Sunday mornings mostly recently has sponsored a church plant in Lafayette – Freedom Biker Church.

During the summer, his church joins other teams from the state to travel to several towns in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, Canada, as they minister with a church for door-to-door surveys, Vacation Bible School and student ministry. Called Cajun Connection, this outreach aims to connect the culture of Louisiana with its northern roots.

Cajuns are descendents of the French Canadians who came to Louisiana 250 years ago.

He feels blessed that his congregation not only allows him to pastor Washington Baptist Church while splitting time with other churches, but also embraces this mindset.

“Not too many churches would let you go to plant other church plants and keep your job as pastor at their church,” Charrier said. “They are allowing me to still plant churches to fulfill the Great Commission. They see they have a part in that.

“I’m the only pastor they have had,” he continued. “From the start, that is all they have seen. So whenever I share I am leaving to start another church, they are behind me and very supportive.

“Missions is at the very heart of Washington Baptist Church,” he said. “As I was starting these churches, I was praying that I would have this one church as my home base and that my family would be able to have that one consistent church that would be passionate about missions from the beginning. The same DNA you find at Washington Baptist Church can be duplicated at other churches.”

While at Washington Baptist Church, Charrier said outreach to the African-American community has increased effectively. Charrier was named the town’s 2014 Citizen of the Year in part because of this focus, and the mayor presented a plaque during a July town meeting.

Washington has a population of 959, with a racial makeup of 53 percent black and 43 percent white citizens.

The mayor even allowed Washington Baptist Church to host the town’s workers for a presentation of Billy Graham’s “My Hope” DVD. As a result, three people accepted Christ as their personal Lord and Savior.

In 2015, he baptized nine new believers, including three African-American. Last year, the church started Street Reach, a Wednesday ministry where Charrier and others go from home to home, basketball courts and playgrounds in Washington to invite them to the church for a meal and program at the church.

Between 30 and 35 African-Americans attend each week.

“It was very rewarding because after trying for so many years, it seemed like a closed door,” he said. “All the seeds that were planted before, when one of the African-Americans was saved, that opened the door to reaching more.”

CHURCH PLANTING LEGEND

Those who know Charrier best say his presence has been felt throughout the state.

Jacob Crawford, pastor of Life Point Church in Mansura, and the sponsor of Bayou Life Church in Cottonport, said Charrier is an example to all Louisiana Baptist church planters.

“God has continually used Brother Louis to reach south Louisiana with this gospel of Jesus Christ,” he said. “His passion for the Lord and zeal for church planting is an inspiration to us younger church planters.”

LIFE-CHANGING ENCOUNTER

Though Charrier is a seasoned church planter, there was a time in his life when he was not an active member of



Brian Blackwell photo

On any given Sunday morning, Louis Charrier is preaching from the pulpit at Washington Baptist Church, a church he has pastored since 1994. In more than 30 years of ministry, Charrier has planted 17 churches in the Acadiana region.

an evangelical church.

Raised a Roman Catholic, Charrier moved to Pineville in February 1978 when he was transferred to the city while working for Pan Am Engineering in Alexandria. A month later, he and his wife, June, were attending Calvary Baptist Church in Alexandria when they realized their need for a Savior. Pam Am Engineering is now located in the same facility where Charrier accepted Christ, as Calvary has since relocated to another area of Alexandria.

When Charrier and his wife decided to accept Jesus, they were doing more than just making a decision to convert to Christianity – they were choosing to follow a faith they knew would likely leave them ostracized from their extended family.

For several years, their families refused to associate with them. Eventually, family members saw how they were living their lives and wanted the same – which led to many of them making decisions to follow Christ, too.

Charrier did what he encourages others to do as well – never give up on the notion that Christ can change someone, even if that witnessing takes several decades.

“I never gave up,” Charrier said. “I just continued.

When they accepted, we rejoiced with them and were so happy to see them grow through the years. It’s a domino effect because the wife gets saved, who leads the husband, who leads others to the Lord. On and on it goes and spreads.”

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Join New Hope Baptist Church in Elmer, La. in recognizing **Substance Abuse Awareness Sunday** March 20, 10:45 a.m.

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Early church view on Jesus as God's Son debated at Greer-Heard Forum

By MARILYN STEWART
NOBTS Communications

NEW ORLEANS – A noted evangelical-turned-agnostic and a well-known agnostic-turned-evangelical were the featured speakers Feb. 12-13 at the 12th annual Greer-Heard Point-Counterpoint Forum at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Bart D. Ehrman, author of numerous best-selling books including *How Jesus Became God: the Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee*; *Jesus Interrupted*; and *Misquoting Jesus*, dialogued with

Michael F. Bird, a lecturer in theology at Ridley College, Melbourne, Australia and the editor of *How God Became Jesus* and author of the award-winning *The Gospel of the Lord*.

The Greer-Heard forum is a venue in which respected scholars of differing opinions dialogue on critical issues in religion, science, philosophy, or culture. It designed to help students and ministers learn to think critically and to be prepared to engage secular society.

The forum's theme, "When Did Jesus Become God?,"

posed the question of when and how the early church came to believe that Jesus was the divine Son of God. The title was a play on words of Ehrman's book *How Jesus Became God* and the book Bird edited, *How God Became Jesus* that were released on the same day two years ago by publishing houses under the same parent company.

Ehrman, a self-described "agnostic with atheistic leanings," is a University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill professor of religion who has published extensively in the fields of New Testament and early Christianity. He drew from the Gospel of Mark and other passages to make a case that no one – not Jesus' disciples, family members, or the Jewish rulers – believed Jesus was the Son of God during his lifetime. The resurrection changed everything, Ehrman said.

"The earliest Christological views, in other words, the earliest views of who Christ was, are views that at the resurrection God made Jesus a divine being," Ehrman said. "It was at the resurrection that Jesus became the Son of God."

Calling this view "adoptionist Christology," Ehrman said that believers over the next two centuries debated



Travis Milner photo

Evangelical scholar Michael Bird argues against the assertion that the Gospel of Mark presents an "adoptionist" view of Jesus' divinity during the Greer-Heard Point-Counterpoint Forum at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Later in the evening, Bird affirmed his belief in the divinity of Jesus, saying "I believe in the utter 'worship-ability' of Jesus."

what it meant to call Jesus the Son of God and gradually pushed "the moment of exaltation backwards" from the resurrection to his baptism, to his birth, and then to viewing Jesus as the pre-existent, eternal Son of God.

Bird responded by acknowledging that early Christians did engage in debate and struggled "to find the grammar, the language and the framework to express who Jesus is," but disputed that early Christianity was adoptionist.

Bird disputed also Ehrman's claim that no one knew Jesus was God's son, adding, "The demons knew."

Pointing to Jesus' baptism to say that the voice from heaven was a revelation of Jesus as God's Son rather than a sign of adoption, Bird noted that Mark's lack of details about Jesus' early years runs counter to the thought in antiquity that adoption by a deity could be earned.

Further, Bird said, if a voice identifying Jesus as God's Son indicates adoption, then "Jesus was adopted three times," referencing Jesus' baptism, transfiguration, and the declaration by the Roman centurion at the cross that Jesus was God's Son.

Regarding early groups and adoptionist ideas, only one strain of one group – the Theodotians – were authentically adoptionist, Bird said.

"What that means is, the first and earliest Christology was not adoptionist," Bird said.

Bird pointed also to adoptionism's failure theologically. Jesus' being "adopted" at some point and becoming divine falls short of what scripture teaches about grace and works and is "incongruent with the witness of the New Testament as a whole," Bird said.

"Adoptionism inevitably, inevitably, includes the belief that one can be self-justified before God and is at odds with the gospel of grace as the early church knew it," Bird said.

In the Q & A that followed, Ehrman was asked directly if he believed in Jesus as the Son of God and Savior for his sins. Ehrman said, "No, I don't believe any of that."

See FORUM on 16



Travis Milner photo

Noted agnostic author and professor Bart Ehrman speaks about early Christian views regarding the divinity of Jesus during the Greer-Heard Point-Counterpoint Forum at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. During his counterpoint argument, Evangelical scholar Michael Bird disputed Ehrman's claims that "adoptionist" view of Jesus' divinity is presented in the Gospel of Mark.

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FYI LOUISIANA NOTABLES

13

ON THE MOVE

- **Matt Duff** resigns as Worship leader at Vidalia First Baptist Church.
- **Taylor Freeland** is new as pastor at Tillou Baptist Church, Bastrop.
- **Bill Haley** is new as music minister at Clark Springs Baptist Church, Eros.
- **Charles Dupree** resigned as pastor at New Chapel Hill Baptist Church, West Monroe.

HOMECOMING

- Cotile Baptist Church, Boyce: **34th Annual Homecoming**, March 13, 11 a.m. Speaker: **Braden Martin**. **Paul's Journey** will be in concert at 1:30 p.m. A love offering will be taken. The church is located at 8735 Hwy 1200, Boyce, LA. Pastor: Johnny Miller.
- Calvary Baptist Church, Slidell: **55th anniversary**, March 13, 11 a.m. There will be a luncheon after the services. Pastor: Arron McGuffee.
- Trinity Baptist Church, Oak Grove: **54th anniversary**, March 13. This will also begin our **Spring Revival**, March 13-16, Sunday, 10:15 a.m.; Sunday evening, 6 p.m., and Monday-Wednesday, 6:30 p.m. Evangelist: **Bill Robertson**. Music: **Ben Waites** will provide music Sunday morning while **Richard Ainsworth** will direct music Sunday evening through Wednesday. Pastor: Rayburn McLarrin.

REVIVAL

- Cotile Baptist Church, Boyce: **Revival**, March 10-12, 7 p.m. Speaker: **Braden Martin**. Pastor: Johnny Miller.
- First Baptist Church, Larose: **Revival**, March 13-16, Music: **The Mackey Willis Family**. Pastor: Gary Hanberry.
- Maple Springs Baptist Church, Logansport: **Revival** March 13-16, Sunday 11 a.m. and 6 p.m. Monday-Wednesday 6:30 p.m. Evangelist: **Scotty McDowell**, **Chalk artist**. Pastor: Lee McClintock.
- Pleasant Grove Baptist Church, Castor: **Revival**, March 13-16, Evangelist: **Joe Aulds**. Pastor: Don Slack.
- Hunter Magnolia Baptist Church, Converse: **Revival**, March 13-16. Evangelist: **Lyndon Longoria**. Pastor: Amador Santos.
- Keithville First Baptist Church: **Revival**, March 18-20. Friday and Saturday, 6 p.m. Sunday, 10:15 a.m. & 6 p.m. Speaker: **Brian Richards**. Music: **Price Harris**. Pastor: Mike Stowell.
- South Lafourche Baptist Church, Cut Off: **2nd Annual Gulf Coast Revival**, March 20-21, March 20, 10:45 a.m., Speaker: **Titus Terrebonne**, Associate Pastor South Lafourche Baptist Church; March 20, 6:30 p.m. Speaker: **Ryan Melson**, pastor of West Bank Baptist Church; and March 21, 6:30 p.m. Speaker: **Fred Luter**, pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church and former president of the Southern Baptist Convention. Pastor: Shane Terrebonne.
- First Baptist Church, Olla: **Revival**, March 20-23. Music: **The**

Mackey Willis Family. Pastor: Johnnie Phillips.

- First Baptist Church, Hornbeck: **Spring Revival**, March 20-23. Sunday 11 a.m. and 6 p.m. Monday-Wednesday, 6:30 p.m. Pastor: Jack Bell.
- Natalbany Baptist Church, Natalbany: **Spring Revival**, March 20-23, 10:15 a.m. Sunday morning and 6:30 p.m. Sunday-Wednesday. Speaker: **Preston Nix**. Pastor: Rodney Taylor.
- Camp Creek Baptist Church, Spearsville: **Easter Sunday**, March 27, 8 a.m. Evangelist: **Joe Aulds**.

LAGNIAPPE

- Christ Covenant Church, Baton Rouge: **Phillip, wife Juanita, Yoho** is retiring from the pastoral ministry April 1, 2016 at Christ Covenant Church in Baton Rouge after more than 30 years of service. A reception will be held in their honor on Sunday, April 10, 2016 at Christ Covenant Church. Pastor: Bradley Aucoin.
- First Baptist Church, Ponchatoula: **Ladies' Retreat at Camp Garaywa in Clinton, MS**, March 11-12. Cost: \$90 and includes lodging and food. Speaker: Cyndi Grace. For more information, contact Annette Gordon at 985.386.6473. Pastor: David Cranford.
- Greenwell Springs Baptist Church, Greenwell Springs: **Chonda Pierce Focus On The Funny Tour with Karyn Williams**, March 12, 7 p.m. Tickets: Available at www.iTickets.com and available by calling 800.965.9324. Pastor: Jeff Meyers.
- First Baptist Church, St. Francisville: **Spring Women's Conference - Grace for the Journey**, March 11-12. Cost: \$20 for a one day ticket and \$40 for two day weekend ticket. For more information, call 225.635.6111. Pastor: Joel Williams.
- First Baptist Church, Pineville: **Church Security Planning & Intruder Awareness/Response Conference** presented by Strategos International, March 11-12, 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. Cost: \$159 for both days or \$99 for one day. For more information, call 318.448.8221 or click on this link <http://intruderresponse.com/course-schedule/2-day-or-1-day-church-security-planning-intruder-response-course-7/> to register. Pastor: Stewart Holloway.
- Walker Baptist Church, Walker: **20th Annual Women's Conference sponsored by the women's ministry**, March 12, 9 a.m.- 4 p.m. Speaker: **Cindi Wood, Livin' Th' Dream**. Cost: \$20 which includes continental breakfast and lunch. Pastor: Richard Blue.
- First Baptist Church, Many: **The Laminin's in concert**, March 13, 6 p.m. A love offering will be taken. Pastor: Jonathan Bost.
- Temple Baptist Church, Ruston: **Community-wide Easter Service**, March 13, 6 p.m. Pastor: Reggie Bridges.
- First Baptist Church, Farmerville: **Small Choir Festival**, March 14, 7 p.m. Pastor: Kurt Auger.
- First Baptist Church, Winnsboro: **The Steeles in concert**, March 17, 6:30 p.m. A love offering will be taken. Pastor: Craig Beeman.
- First Baptist Church, Jena: **Women's Conference**, March 18-19, FBC

Family Life Center. Speaker: **Sara Horn**. Cost: \$10 and tickets may be purchase at the church office during office hours. This conference is open to all churches in the area. Pastor: Dominick C. DiCarlo, Jr.

■ Temple Baptist Church, Ruston: **2016 North Louisiana Disaster Relief Training**, March 18-19, 8 a.m. - 4 p.m. [depending on courses]. This training is sponsored by Rolling Hills Ministries and the Louisiana Baptist Convention. COST: The cost of a first-time attendee is \$28 (including \$8 for a background check) and the cost for a renewal is \$13 (including \$8 for a background check). All attendees are required this year to have background checks in order to complete train. Training fee includes training materials, hat, shirt, ID badge, meal and background checks. To register, email rollinghills33@bellsouth.net or call 318.251.0065. Pastor: Reggie Bridges.

■ First Baptist Church, West Monroe: **First West NELA Egg Drop**, March 19, 10:30 a.m. at West Monroe High School and Sterlington High School. Seventy thousand eggs will be dropped from a hot air balloon at the two campuses for the First West NELA Egg Drop. For more information, go to <http://www.first-west.cc/event/806379-2016-03-19-first-west-nela-egg-drop/> Pastor: Michael Wood.

■ First Baptist Church, Vidalia: **Children's Community wide Easter Egg Hunt**, March 19, 11 a.m. - 1 p.m. at Concordia Parish Recreational Building (the old baseball fields). This is for children up to the fifth grade.

■ His Church, Pineville: **Children's Easter Fellowship**, March 19, 1 p.m. There will be an Easter egg hunt and egg-knocking contest at the church His Kids ministry (3 years old through 6th grade); Easter Sunday, March 27, 8 a.m. at the church and Contemporary Celebration, 10:30 a.m. at Guinn Auditorium on the campus of Louisiana College. Pastor: Steve Speer.

■ Cook Baptist Church, Ruston: **Glow in the Dark Easter Egg-travaganza**, March 19, 5-7:30 p.m.

■ First Baptist Church, Luling: **Community Easter Egg Hunt**, March 19, 11 a.m. - 2 p.m. on the church campus. There will be hot dogs, nachos, popcorn, snow cones, games, inflatables, candy, prizes and the Easter egg hunt. This is free for the community. The event is being sponsored by FBC Luling and the Weekday Early Education Preschool. **Community Easter Sunrise Services**, March 27, 6:45 a.m. on West Bridge Park Levee. Bring lawn chairs. Free full breakfast, 7:30 a.m. at a local church that will be announced at the sunrise service. The sunrise service is being sponsored by several area churching including FBC Luling. For more information on these two events as well as regular services, go to www.fbcluling.org. Pastor: Tim Buford.

■ Hebron Baptist Church, Denham Springs: **Tim Timmons in concert** featuring songs from his new album 'Awake Our Souls', March 19, 7 p.m.

■ First Baptist Church, Pineville: **Generation Hymns Concert**, March 19, 6:30 p.m. at Guinn Auditorium and March 20 at 10:15 a.m. at FBC Pineville. The concert will feature **FBC Pineville children, youth and adult choirs and orchestra, Voices of LC, LC Wind Ensemble, LC President Rick Brewer and Octavia Williams**. Following the concert on Sunday there will be a **picnic and Easter Egg Hunt** at 11:30 a.m. on church grounds. **Easter Worship Service**, March 27, 10:15 a.m. Come celebrate the risen Savior with special music and a special message. Pastor: Stewart Holloway.

■ Woodland Park Baptist Church, Hammond: **Easter Eggstravaganza** March 20, 4:30 p.m. There will be an **Easter Egg Hunt and family picnic**. Good Friday service, March 25, 7 p.m. Special Music: **WPBC Adult Choir led by music minister Bryan McDonald**. Speaker: **Scott E. Thompson**.

■ First Baptist Church, Jena: **The Cross of Christ**, March 20, 11 a.m. Arranged by Cliff Duren, the FBC Sanctuary Choir and friends will present their **Easter cantata on Palm Sunday**. Pastor: Dominick C. DiCarlo, Jr.

■ Hillcrest Baptist Church, Franklinton: **Easter Celebration**, March 20, 10 a.m. A musical celebration will be presented by members of the Sanctuary Choir, Praise Team, Youth and Children's Choir. Join us immediately following services in the Christian Life Center for Dinner on the Grounds. Pastor: Andrew Voss.

■ Grace Memorial Baptist Church, Slidell: **Forever Glorified presented by adult choir and orchestra**, March 20, 10:15 a.m. Pastor Bob Heustess.

■ New Hope Baptist Church, Elmer: **Recognizing substance abuse awareness**, March 20, 10:45 .m. The church will recognize one year of Celebrate Recovery ministry. Guest Speaker: **A member from the Duck Commander's church in West Monroe**. At 4 p.m., First Baptist Church Ville Platte's worship team will perform and there will be testimonies from those in recovery. A meal will follow the evening service. For more information, call the church at 318.659.4527.

■ Trinity Baptist Church, Natchitoches: **Community Candle-light Lord's Supper**, March 25, 6 p.m.; **Crimson Love: an Easter musical and drama**, March 27, 10:30 a.m. presented by the Sanctuary Choir and Easter Dramatists; **I Saw Him, a dramatic Easter presentation by Parable** (the youth performing arts team) April 3, 6 p.m.; Children's Spring Musical, presented by the children's choir and drama, April 10, 10:30 a.m. Pastor: Joshua Currie.

Scripture Crypto

By CHERYL VAUGHN
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The Scripture Crypto is a Bible verse in which one letter has been substituted for another, thus encoding the verse. To find out what the verse is, you must determine what each letter is a substitute for. An "a," for example, may stand for a "t" in this week's issue of the ScriptureCrypto. Next week, "a" could stand for a "d." Each week, each letter is different. Solve by trial and error. The answer will be given next week. Note: All numerals, such as those in the scripture reference after the verse, are spelled out.

ldy mh nalqq glna mvju kqvfahn vd fah nhphdfa

ylm, ldy mh nalqq eh kqhld, ldy lsfhugluy mh nalqq

kvbh rdfv fah klbi.

djbehun farufm-vdh:fghdfm-svju

Clues:
N = S; H = E

Answer to February 25 Scripture Crypto:
Galatians five:one

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NOBTS preaching prof leading Evangelical Homiletics society

BY MARILYN STEWART
NOBTS Communications

NEW ORLEANS – New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary preaching professor Dennis Phelps is serving as the 2015-2016 president of the Evangelical Homiletics Society.

EHS promotes the exchange of ideas related to instruction in biblical preaching, academic publication in homiletics and the effective communication of the Gospel from a biblical-theological standpoint.

Phelps joined the NOBTS faculty in 2006 and occupies the J.D. Grey Chair of Preaching. He has 19 years in theological education, including 10 at Bethel Seminary in St. Paul, Minn., and more than 21 years in pastoral ministry. In addition to his teaching duties, Phelps also leads the alumni relations office at NOBTS.

Phelps is a frequent guest presenter at preaching conferences, including a pastors' preaching and evangelism conference in Belarus, and has appeared regularly at the E-4 Preaching Conference, a collaborative expository preaching conference hosted by the Louisiana Baptist Convention, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans Seminary

and Louisiana College.

EHS will mark its 20-year anniversary when it convenes in October at Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. Phelps assumed EHS' presidency at last fall's annual meeting in Fort Worth, having served the previous year as vice president.

Phelps was among the society's founders. "Almost 20 years ago many of us gathered at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary outside of Boston to organize a professional scholarly society specifically for evangelical homiletics with a high view of Scripture and salvation by faith in Jesus Christ alone," he recounted.

"It has been fascinating to watch the group grow, to see the respected contributions made to national and international scholarship, and to encourage the next generation across several evangelical cultures," Phelps said. "To serve as the current president of the Evangelical Homiletics Society is quite humbling and exhilarating."

Phelps holds a Ph.D. in preaching from Southwestern Seminary, a master of divinity in pastoral ministries, theology and in biblical studies from New Orleans Seminary and a bachelor's degree from Louisiana

College. EHS produces the Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society.

Membership is open to homiletics professors and instructors, pastors, evangelists and others committed to the organization's goals.

An associate membership is available for graduate students.

"Preaching and Politics" is the theme of the EHS conference Oct. 13-15 at Southwestern Seminary with special guests James Meeks of Salem Baptist Church in Chicago; Robert Jeffress of First Baptist Church in Dallas; and Ralph West of The Church Without Walls in Houston. For information, visit ehomiletics.com.



Boyd Guy photo

Dennis Phelps, professor of preaching at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, speaks to seminary students during weekly chapel services in the Leavell Chapel.

Relief from page 2

Williams encourage individuals and groups to follow the church's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/CelebrationRPC) to learn about upcoming opportunities to come to LaPlace to work on homes. The church also has set up a donation page for anyone wishing to give financially.

Tom Long, southeast regional disaster relief coordinator, said much of the teams' work was ending by the first week of March, though he expects work in Napoleonville and Livingston should continue for a little while longer.

Long said the teams have completed more than 100 jobs at affected homes – each one a work of love through Christ.

"Our people are just a tremendous group that are

willing to sit and listen to anyone in need," Long said. "Every need is different but every need is important. The people who are hurting want someone to listen to them."

McMillan said that while most work is winding down in southeast Louisiana, individuals can pray and donate to future disaster relief causes.

"The biggest needs are being available to go or give," McMillan said. "There are still some needs of people in those areas. We are doing what we can to help them pick up the pieces."

More information on how to donate and possibly become a disaster relief team member can be found at <http://louisianabaptists.org/category/resources/disaster-relief/>.

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Forum from page 12

Ehrman said he became an agnostic twenty years ago for reasons unrelated to his studies as a textual critic.

“The reason I left Christianity altogether is unrelated to my scholarship,” Ehrman said. “I simply could no longer believe that there was a God who was active in a world where there was just so much pain, misery and suffering.”

Bird followed up with his testimony of being raised in a non-Christian home that was unsympathetic to Christianity and said his conversion changed his life. When people ask

why he is a Christian, Bird said he likes to respond by telling why he remains a Christian: “I believe in the utter ‘worship-ability’ of Jesus.”

ENGAGING AN UNBELIEVING WORLD

More than 600 attended the event that included presentations the following day by Simon Gathercole, Cambridge University; Larry W. Hurtado, University of Edinburgh; Dale Martin, Yale University; and Jennifer Wright Knust, Boston

School of Theology.

“At NOBTS we believe conversational apologetics is an essential component of a strategy to share the gospel with an unbelieving world,” said NOBTS president Chuck Kelley. “We believe providing an opportunity to engage unbelievers is a part of the educational process. We don’t just read the books. We listen to the arguments and respond.”

Kelley said the forum allows students to engage speakers directly in Q & A sessions or over lunch as well as providing interaction with

non-believers throughout the conference.

“Because the event is open to the public at large, the chapel is always full of all sorts of people with all sorts of opinions,” Kelley said. “Seminary students may find themselves sitting next to atheists, agnostics, or skeptics.”

The forum is made possible through the gifts of William Heard, a Louisiana Baptist layperson, and his wife, Carolyn Greer Heard. Carolyn Greer Heard passed away Feb. 14, the day after the conference.

LouisianaBaptists.org/2016CampOverview



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