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with thee, and
will keep thee
in all places
whither thou
goest.*

— Genesis 28:15 (KJV)

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April 20, 2017

Lottie Moon giving slumps, on pace for historic drop

BY WILL HALL

Message Editor

RICHMOND (LBM) —The Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee has released data showing relatively stable Cooperative Program giving but a flagging Lottie Moon Christmas Offering that is trending toward a record single-year fall.

Comparing receipts from Oct. 2016 through Mar. 2017 with totals for the same period a year ago, gifts through the Cooperative

Program, Southern Baptists' primary channel for funding all national causes, are down less than one percent, or about \$967,597 below last year.

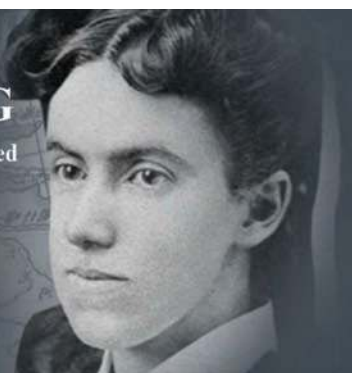
By contrast, contributions to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, which benefits only the International Mission Board, Southern Baptists' overseas-missionary-sending entity, have tumbled almost \$13.5 million, a nearly 12 percent drop, for the same time frame.

See **LMCO** on 7

LOTTIE MOON CHRISTMAS OFFERING

After record giving last year, receipts have tumbled almost \$13.5 million, nearly 12 percent. This is the third month in a row for the special offering to plunge:

January - **\$4.72 million**
February - **\$4.17 million**
March - **\$4.59 million**



Luter tells governor, legislators, 'Take it to God in prayer'

BY BRIAN BLACKWELL

Message Staff Writer

BATON ROUGE — Prior to the start of the second day of the 2017 Louisiana Legislative Session, Franklin Avenue Baptist Church Pastor Fred Luter told elected officials that when facing major decisions, follow Jesus' example and consult with the Father.

"Throughout His time here on earth, whenever Jesus had a choice to make, He always — without fail — consulted with His Father," Luter said during his keynote address

Douglas Collier photo

Keynote speaker Fred Luter, pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans, told Gov. John Bel Edwards and legislators

to "learn a lesson from Jesus and take it to God in prayer" at the 53rd annual Governor's Prayer Breakfast April 11 in Baton Rouge.

See **BREAKFAST** on 4

At Celebration, God uses new life for one to impact many

BY BRIAN BLACKWELL

Message Staff Writer

NEW ORLEANS — For years, James Fletcher struggled with drug addiction, resentment toward others and separation from his brother who was sentenced to serve life at the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola.

But in late 2015, Fletcher found hope in Christ at Celebration Church, marking

the beginning of an awakening in his own life, and also a revival among many of his family members.

"I let those strongholds take over my life and had to realize forgiveness is one of the biggest things I need to have," said Fletcher, who was baptized in January 2016. "I was so dependent on the things of the world to hide my

See **CELEBRATION** on 8



Checkerz Williams, pastor of Celebration Church River Parishes campus, baptizes James Fletcher. After his baptism, his mother and wife, Elisha, accepted Christ and were both baptized within a six-month period. His grandmother who has made a decision plans to follow through with baptism as well.

Final paperwork officially births CENLA Pregnancy Center



Brian Blackwell photo

Peter Lemoine, an attorney from Cottonport, and Ed Tarpley, an attorney from Alexandria, and others watch as Brian Gunter, pastor of First Baptist Pollock, signs articles of incorporation for a pregnancy care center at noon Thursday, March 30, at the Baptist Mission Center.

BY BRIAN BLACKWELL
Message Staff Writer

PINEVILLE – Supporters of the first pregnancy care center in central Louisiana have signed articles of incorporation, paving the way for an entity that could save the lives of many unborn children.

During a special ceremony Thursday, March 30, at the Baptist Mission Center in Pineville, a room full of pastors, physicians and other pro-life supporters gathered to finalize paperwork to make the formation of the CENLA Pregnancy Center official. With a targeted opening of late this year, volunteers will provide medical and educational services, and spiritually minister to pregnant women and their unborn children.

“Our goal is to save lives and save souls,” said Brian Gunter, pastor of First Baptist Church in Pollock. “We want to save the lives of the children but we also want to share the Gospel with the parents. We want to not only

teach about choosing life but we also want to teach about marriage and the role of a mom and dad in the home. We will offer free classes from everything to maternity care to caring for the newborn to parenting to pre-marital counseling.”

Since his church began praying in January 2014 for the establishment of a pregnancy care center in central Louisiana, the idea has far exceeded what Gunter or his congregation could have imagined.

Originally, they pondered setting up such a center in the back of their church property.

However, God had other plans.

Hundreds of churches, business leaders and other pro-life advocates in central Louisiana learned of the idea, contributing money and other forms of support to help make it happen.

By December 2016, a nine-person board of trustees formed, comprised of members from Big Creek, Central Louisiana and North Rapides Baptist Associations.

Recently, Gunter and the board members were approached by a group of non-Southern Baptist business leaders – many who are Catholic – who had planned

on opening a similar facility. However, after learning about Louisiana Baptists’ plans, they opted to instead throw all of their support toward the facility that adheres to the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message statement.

Gunter said the beauty of the center is that while Baptists, Catholics and Presbyterians may have differing viewpoints of a number of theological issues, they rally behind the issue of pro-life.

“We have support beyond the Southern Baptist community,” Gunter said. “We want this to be a center that is 100 percent pro-life, from conception to natural death. Anyone that is 100 percent pro-life, we want their support.”

Now that the articles of incorporation have been filed, the CENLA Pregnancy Center will be operating as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization.

The actual location will be finalized in the coming months, but there are several strong possibilities in Alexandria-Pineville, including the Baptist Mission Center.

Among those volunteering at the center will be three pro-life physicians, and, volunteers who will teach classes

See PREGNANCY on 6

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Louisiana Baptist women celebrate missions at annual meeting



Marilyn Stewart photo

Cindy Townsend, former LBC women's missions and ministry director now serving as executive-treasurer of the Mississippi Baptist Convention's WMU and women's ministries, challenged attendees to shine the light on Jesus.

By MARILYN STEWART

Regional Reporter

MANDEVILLE – A “Grounded, Growing, and Bearing Fruit” theme called women to live on mission at the Women's Missionary Union Missions Celebration and 117th annual meeting, March 31-April 1, at First Baptist, Mandeville.

Cindy Townsend, former LBC women's missions and ministry director now serving as executive-treasurer of the Mississippi Baptist Convention's WMU and women's ministries, challenged attendees to shine the light on Jesus.

“We are to go to our corner of Louisiana and we are to put the spotlight on Jesus,” Townsend said. “If we put the spotlight on him, he will draw them unto himself.”

More than 150 guests attended the event led by speakers Gibbie McMillan, Louisiana Baptists men's ministry and disaster relief

strategist; Gina Roberts, International Mission Board; and, Lena Plunk, WMU ministry consultant for mobilization, Birmingham, Alabama.

A special collection benefiting the Mississippi River Christmas Ministry, an evangelistic effort serving families along the river, filled 38 backpacks with toys, schools supplies, hygiene items, and Bibles to be given away.

Other activities included a missions fair highlighting ministries around the world, a Louisiana Baptist Nursing Fellowship prayer breakfast, and a focused prayer time for missions.

Officers were elected in a brief business session during the event: Cameron Mullins, First Lafayette, president; Dot Chappelle, Pleasant Grove, Jonesville, vice-president; Carolyn Fountain, Franklin Ave., New Orleans, recording secretary; Susan Cheatwood,

See WMU on 9

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Doug Collier photos

Ricky Skaggs, a Southern Baptist from Nashville, Tenn., led the crowd in a number of tunes including his hit song "Somebody's Praying" and "You Are My Sunshine" written by former Governor Jimmie Davis.



U.S. Congressman Mike Johnson (right) and Louisiana Baptists Executive Director David Hankins converse during the 53rd Annual Governor's Prayer Breakfast in Baton Rouge.

Breakfast from page one

at the 53rd Annual Louisiana Governor's Prayer Breakfast.

"If you are in a dilemma, if you are in a predicament, if you need to do something, but you just don't know what to do, learn a lesson from Jesus and take it to God in prayer."

Luter said when facing a major decision, one cannot stay neutral. Therefore, he said, every person should consider the sorrow, solitude, submission and strength Jesus showed in the Garden of Gethsemane, on the night he was handed over to authorities for his eventual crucifixion.

"On this Christian journey, there will be points in your life when you will face situations that don't make any sense," Luter said. "When things don't make sense, when there are things in your life you don't understand, just like Jesus you will find yourself in sorrow."

Luter said at times believers may feel all alone, as Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane. But, he also emphasized that God pledged not to abandon them.

"He promised to never leave us alone," he said. "Yes, we've been through the flood, we've been through the hurricanes, we've been through the shootings. But He promised never to forsake us."

Luter's message was part



Doug Collier photo

Jay Johnston, associate pastor of First Baptist Church, Covington, who also served as chairman of the 53rd Annual Louisiana Governor's Prayer Breakfast steering committee, prays with Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards during the breakfast.

of a morning centered on prayer and Scripture reading at the Raising Cane's River Center.

Other pastors were joined by elected officials and key civic leaders to share Scripture passages, prayers and short messages.

Louisiana Baptists on the program included Jay Johnston, associate pastor of First Baptist Church, Covington; Waylon Bailey, senior pastor of First Baptist Church, Covington; Tom Harrison, executive pastor, Broadmoor Baptist

Church, Shreveport; Jim Wallace, minister of education and administration for First Baptist Church, Minden; Rick Brewer, president of Louisiana College, and Jason Coffey, a member of First Baptist, Covington.

SPIRIT-LED MUSIC

Ricky Skaggs and his wife Sharon, Southern Baptists from Nashville, Tenn., led the crowd in a number of tunes including "You Are My Sunshine" written by former Governor Jimmie Davis.

He also encouraged the crowd with how God has spoken to him about Louisiana.

"The wind of the Spirit is going to hit this state and flood the souls and hearts of people," said Skaggs, a member of the First Baptist Church, Hendersonville, Tenn. "And I believe there will be a great revival, it's going to start in this state and go all over the world."

"I'm believing the Lord wants to pour out his Spirit without measure!"

PRAYER WORKS, SO PRAY

In his address, Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards said during the past 15 months when the state faced challenges associated with record flooding and the fatal shootings of Baton Rouge law enforcement officers, he has felt the power of prayer from others like never before.

"Every day as governor I feel it," he said. "People are praying for our state, praying for our leaders, praying for me – and based on the year we had last year, please don't stop."

See **BREAKFAST** on 9

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ERLC officers fault politics, Moore blames 'prosperity gospel' in 'Seeking Unity'

By WILL HALL

Message Editor

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (LBM) —Trustees and the embattled president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission issued separate comments in a joint "Seeking Unity in the Southern Baptist Convention" statement published by *Baptist Press*, March 20.

The combined official release, meant to sooth "tensions in our denomination over the state of American politics and the role of religion," comes about three months after Moore issued an online article, "Election year thoughts at Christmastime," to address criticisms; and, follows by about a month the actions taken by the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention to form two committees — one from members of the Cooperative Program committee and the other composed of the trustee officers — to study actions by national entities that are causing churches to withhold support for national causes.

THEN

In the December statement issued just by Moore, he urged "after a divisive election" that readers "try to see where there are misunderstandings," and he confessed to "one situation" when he was "pointed in my criticisms," and described the target of his harsh words "a handful of political operatives" and apologized to "pastors and friends" who thought he was "criticizing anyone who voted for Donald Trump."

"[I]f that's what you heard me say, that was not at all my question, and I apologize," he wrote.

NOW

In the recent joint statement, ERLC trustee officers cited the "challenging political" cycle and Southern Baptists' disagreement with Moore's "delivery, tactics and approach" for the denominational rift which has made national headlines. They described his leadership "in this difficult context" alternately as

bold and prophetic, and, saying they had encouraged him to engage in "private efforts" at reconciliation "rather than public comments," they endorsed his leadership of the ERLC.

"He will continue to do so with the confidence of our support," they ended.

Moore, for his part, faulted his failure to "separate out categories of people well" and his use of words "particularly in social media, that were at times overly broad or unnecessarily harsh."

Likewise, he said he was not "intending to talk about Southern Baptists" but was meaning to target "most often prosperity gospel teachers." He did not explain whether these were the "political operatives" he previously identified or in addition to them.

Blaming himself for not separating out "categories of people well" in his personal and political attacks, he confessed "I wounded some, including close friends." He also said he regretted his "contextless or unhelpful posts on social media," but that he could not "go back and change time, and I cannot apologize for my underlying convictions."

"But I can — and do — apologize for failing to distinguish between people who shouldn't have been in the same category with those who put politics over the gospel and for using words, particularly in social media, that were at times overly broad or unnecessarily harsh. That is a failure on my part," he wrote.

WHAT CAUSED THE FLAP?

While Moore's apology was published in *Baptist Press*, and also made in private with individuals, his harsh criticisms were printed as scathing editorials in such media as *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*, and subsequently were propagated in many other outlets.

Also, while he has apologized for those times when he appeared to target a group of leaders he assures did not include Southern Baptists, some of his most vitriolic condemnations were pointed to Christians at large — if they supported then-candidate Donald Trump:

— In a September 2015 editorial, "Have evangelicals who support Trump lost their values?" printed in *The New York Times*, Moore called evangelicals' support for Trump "illogical" and declared "these voters must repudiate everything they believe."

— In a January 2016 article in *Roll Call*, a Washington, D.C., newspaper that covers politics in the nation's capital, Moore declared his disdain for Trump's (and ostensibly Cruz's) evangelical supporters, saying, "Ted Cruz is leading in the 'Jerry Falwell' wing, Marco Rubio is leading the 'Billy Graham' wing and Trump is leading the 'Jimmy Swaggart' wing."

— In a February 2016 opinion piece published in *The Washington Post*, Moore said "this election makes me hate the word 'evangelical,'" asserting that self-identified evangelicals (by implication Trump supporters) "may well be drunk right now, and haven't been into a church since someone invited them to Vacation Bible School sometime back when *Seinfeld* was in first-run episodes." He also asked people to stop referring to him as an "evangelical."

— He even declared the Bible Belt (a map marked in Southern Baptist red) as populated by "almost Christianity" a kind of "God-and-Country civil religion that prizes cultural conservatism more than theological fidelity."

SBC LEADERS RESPOND

SBC President Steve Gaines, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in the Memphis, Tenn. area, responded to the most recent ERLC press release, telling *Baptist Press* he was "grateful for the statement from Dr. Russell Moore and the ERLC executive committee."

In written comments, he said the ERLC is assigned with "a very difficult task. Indeed it is impossible to please everyone regarding issues of conviction and conscience."

"I know Dr. Moore to be a very godly servant of Jesus Christ. He has preached at Bellevue Baptist Church and he did a wonderful job," he added.

"Regarding his work at the ERLC, I have agreed with most of his statements, especially those regarding the sanctity of human life, the sacredness of heterosexual, monogamous marriage and religious liberty," Gaines continued. "However, I have disagreed with some of the statements he made during the election and I especially disagreed with the tone with which he made some of those statements. I have discussed all of this privately with him. He has genuinely apologized for his mistakes and that is good enough for me."

In response to the "Seeking Unity" statement, former SBC President Jack Graham tweeted, "This is a gracious and unifying statement from @drmoore."

Graham is pastor of Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano, Texas, which announced in February it had escrowed money budgeted for the Cooperative Program, specifically because of concerns with the direction of the SBC, including "various significant positions taken by the leadership of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission."

David Hankins, executive director of the Louisiana Baptist Convention, told the *Baptist Message*, "I commend Dr. Moore for confessing his failings that led to the serious breach of fellowship among Southern Baptists."

"I trust we will see improved relationships with Dr. Moore marked by respect for rank and file Southern Baptists and a willingness to hear their opinions on matters of moral and social concern," he said.

Louisiana Baptists were among the first groups to formally raise questions relating to the developing spate of controversies entangling SBC entities.

A motion asking the LBC Executive Board to "study the recent actions of the SBC Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission with regard to issues of concern to Louisiana Baptists" was referred to the LBC Executive Board with a near-unanimous raise of ballots by messengers at their annual meeting in November 2016.

See **ERLC** on 6



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Pregnancy from page 2

on such subjects as maternity care, caring for newborn children and parenting from God's perspective.

Dr. David Spence, obstetrician-gynecologist at Rapides Regional Medical Center in Alexandria, will serve as the lead physician at the clinic.

For the past 35 years, Spence has delivered nearly 8,000 babies and is excited about how he could play a part in a female opting to forgo abortion as a result of visiting the CENLA Pregnancy Center.

"I came here to Alexandria in 1990 and couldn't believe there was such an abortion issue in a state that is so pro-life," said Spence, a member of Our Lady of Prompt Succor Catholic Church in Alexandria.

"I deal with so many young girls who are pregnant and get such peer pressure from their parents or boyfriend to go through with the abortion," he explained. "Now, I'm excited we are making a push toward this center and how it will give them an option for life. Instead of going to Shreveport or Baton Rouge to abort the baby, it will give them the opportunity where they have the support and medical care to make another decision."

For more information on how to donate money or other resources to the CENLA Pregnancy Center, contact the Baptist Mission Center at 318.445.5772.



Brian Blackwell photo

Philip Robertson, pastor of Philadelphia Baptist Church, Deville, and Clay Fuqua, campus pastor of the congregation's Horseshoe Drive location in Alexandria, present a check Tuesday, April 11, for the CENLA Pregnancy Center to Brian Gunter, pastor of First Baptist Church, Pollock, and Robert Daniel, director of missions for Big Creek, Central Louisiana and North Rapides Baptist Associations. A Sunday school class from the Horseshoe Drive campus spearheaded an effort to collect spare change to support the center, which Gunter visualized and has championed as a compassion ministry for Central Louisiana. During December and January, the class of 25 members with help from others at the campus collected \$1,268.56 in plastic pink and blue baby bottles. When the center opens later this year, volunteers will provide medical and educational services, and spiritually minister to pregnant women and their unborn children.

ERLC from page 5

NEXT STEPS

Only one of the two panels formed by SBC Executive Committee members has announced any details about its intentions.

Baptist Press published March 6 that the ad hoc panel formed by the Cooperative Program committee would calendar a date for its first meeting by March 18.

However, there have been no further announcements about future actions by this group.

The ad hoc panel comprising SBC Executive Committee trustee officers has not released any information about its intentions.

Meanwhile, the officers of the Louisiana Baptist Convention Executive Board met April 6 to chart a path forward for their inquiry. According to state staff, the officers will bring a suggested strategy to the full Executive Board during its spring meeting May 2 at the Tall Timbers Baptist Conference Center in Woodworth.

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LMCO from page one

Importantly, these figures reflect only funds received through the SBC Executive Committee – some LMCO gifts are donated directly to the IMB.

Also, the accounting year for the LMCO is June 1 through May 31, but the difference with the SBC Executive Committee fiscal year does not change the negative trend in LMCO giving.

According to past reports out of Nashville, March is the third month in a row for the special offering to plunge, with successive falls of \$4.72 million, \$4.17 million and \$4.59 million, respectively.

The \$13.5 million drop comes after record giving last year, \$165.8 million, when Southern Baptists responded generously with hopes of keeping missionaries in the field after the Richmond-based IMB announced terminations were necessary to balance the budget.

The previous high was \$154 million in 2013, but the 2014 LMCO was close, totaling just more than \$153 million.

IMB MUM

The *Baptist Message* sought information about whether LMCO funds received directly by the IMB somehow offset the tumbling contributions forwarded through the SBC Executive Committee; and, likewise, asked for comment about what essentially was a wild reversal of fortune (almost \$24 million) from October 1, 2016, when reports showed donations were about \$10.4 million above the record pace of the previous year.

But Terri Willis, national relations team leader for the IMB, replied by email that the IMB “traditionally doesn’t comment about LMCO or other numbers until the fiscal year is over.”

Regardless, the IMB announced in November 2016 that the 2017 budget was balanced on the basis of a “responsible” projection of \$170.5 million for the 2016 LMCO, taking precaution to include only 96 percent of this projection, or \$163.1 million, in the actual financial plan.

Now, with only two months remaining in the

accounting year, the current shortfall likely means the IMB will not hit even this lowered target, and perhaps will miss the mark of \$155 million, set as the official 2016 goal.

RELATED NEWS

The IMB’s LMCO woes could worsen the Southern Baptists’ already weakened overseas missionary force.

During the entity’s last trustee meeting, IMB staff informed trustees about personnel losses that were even greater than reported when a two-phase termination process was completed in April 2016.

Previously, the IMB had published that the offer of early retirement (Voluntary Retirement Incentive) combined with other transition opportunities (described as a Hand Raising Opportunity) had produced 983 volunteers among 4,800 field missionaries and 149 separations among 450 Richmond staff (including 30 firings among the communication team).

This left the IMB with 3,817 missionaries and 301 support persons when terminations ended in April 2016.

But in materials available to trustees March 1, the IMB staff noted the organization had ended 2016 with

only 3,596 persons serving abroad, meaning the IMB had dropped another 221 people from the field, even after adding some replacements following the VRI and HRO. This left the field missionary force at its lowest level since 1985.

Meanwhile, the support staff had risen slightly to 306.

PINPOINTING PROBLEMS

The IMB’s spiraling LMCO troubles accompany accounts out of the SBC Executive Committee’s February meeting that two panels were being formed — one from members of the Cooperative Program committee and the other composed of the trustee officers — to investigate concerns Southern Baptists had expressed (some in context of defunding) about the direction of the Convention because of actions taken by national entities.

Both the IMB and the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission have come under fire for signing onto a friend of the court brief (also known as “amicus curiae” brief) that supported the construction of a Muslim mosque in New Jersey. The ERLC also is accused of taking “various significant positions ... that do not reflect the beliefs and values of many in the Southern Baptist Convention” and its

president, Russell Moore, has received backlash from Southern Baptists and other evangelicals for hateful insults about Christians who held political views that differed from his during the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign.

Baptist Press, Southern Baptists’ official news service, reported in its coverage of the proceedings that “churches have taken or are considering ... action over concerns related to multiple SBC entities.”

Subsequent news reports from multiple sources indicated at least 100 congregations are withholding contributions normally given through the Cooperative Program and that 49 congregations chose to withdraw membership from the SBC last year—more than eight times the normal amount of such requests.

ONE EXAMPLE

As a result of the amicus curiae brief matter, the First Baptist Church in Morristown, Tennessee, has escrowed its Cooperative Program gifts for national causes while still distributing money for support of state missions and ministries. FBC Morristown is described as the fifth largest contributor of gifts through the Cooperative Program from Tennessee.

The pastor, a former

president of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, also resigned as an IMB trustee over the matter.

The IMB subsequently announced it had “revised our processes,” such that IMB President David Platt and General Counsel Derek Gaubatz no longer will submit friend of the court briefs without trustee approval.

CALENDAR NOTE

The IMB’s next regularly scheduled trustee meeting will be held June 12 in Phoenix, Arizona, the day prior to the start of the 2017 SBC Annual Meeting.

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Celebration from page one

feelings, but once I took it to the Lord, He took away those burdens and anxiety.

IT ONLY TAKES A SPARK

Fletcher also shared how God used his faith to touch the lives of those close to him.

"Now, a lot of my family members have accepted Christ," he exclaimed, "and we are so excited about what He is doing with us."

After his baptism, his mother, Veronica Singleton, and wife, Elisha, accepted Christ and both were baptized within a six-month period. His grandmother, Janet Richard, was redeemed in March and has plans to follow through with baptism in April.

Fletcher, who recently became a youth ministry volunteer for Celebration Church's River Parishes campus in LaPlace, said God has shown him in the past 15 months that He can use one life to impact many.

"Being able to share my story with my youth, family members and others in the community is a great feel-

ing," Fletcher said. "People see how great the Lord is and what a difference He has made in my life. They want to then follow the Lord. It's like a gravitational pull."

EVANGELISTIC HEARTBEAT

In the past two years, Celebration Church has experienced more than 500 baptisms annually, combined among its nine campuses in the New Orleans, Northshore and Baton Rouge areas.

Also, the single congregation in multiple locations has recorded more than 1,100 and 1,250 professions of faith, respectively, in 2015 and 2016.

In 2017, through just the first 12 weeks of 2017, Celebration Church has baptized 89 people and counseled 359 individuals who made professions of faith. The goal for the year is 700 baptisms, which if reached would set an all-time record, surpassing the all-time high in 2015 of 552.

Dennis Watson, pastor of Celebration Church and is found on the Metairie campus most days, attributes the

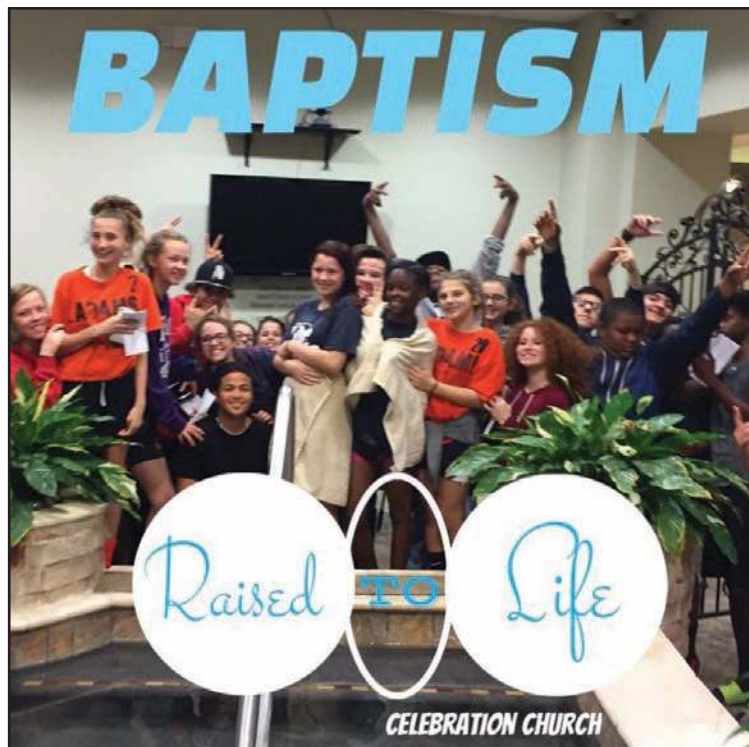
growing number of baptisms and professions of faith at the church's several locations to being intentional about equipping members to share their faith.

He pointed to a recent initiative to illustrate how simple it is to prepare others to share Christ around them.

Earlier this year, he and his staff began requiring members to write down the details about how they came to saving knowledge of Jesus. In turn, pastors and other leaders from the church assess the inputs, and return instructions via e-mail with hints on how to start a conversation that leads to presenting their testimony with people they interact with on a regular basis.

Since launching the campaign in February, hundreds of members have turned in their write-ups for feedback.

"By having them write down their story, we are able to turn around to affirm their story of what the Lord has done in their life and encourage them to share this with others," Watson said. "By sharing ways to share their story, it then becomes a natural transition to invite friends and others to church as well."



MISSIONS IS THE PULSE

Watson said the congregation's health and growth in evangelism is a reflection of the members' passion for missions.

In December 2016, Celebration Church started two new campuses – one in the Covington/Mandeville area and another in St. Gabriel. They hope to launch another campus in New Orleans East in April 2018.

Celebration Church also supports church plants around the country, in Florida and Texas, and even internationally, in Costa Rica.

Celebration Church also has trained more than 5,000 pastors in other nations in the span of 5 years – and has been

inspired by the Holy Spirit to train 1,000 pastors in the Dominican Republic in the next 10 years, seeking to spark revival in the country.

"We can help take that nation for Christ," Watson said. "It can revolutionize the country. We could see a great spiritual awakening in the Dominican Republic and other nations as well."

GOD'S VISION GUIDES

"I knew God had called me here in 1989 to pastor and start a church in New Orleans, I wanted to be faithful in that," he continued.

"There is no way we could have dreamed where we are now. It's just God -- the favor and blessing of the Lord."

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WMU from page 3

Magnolia Baptist, Saline, assistant recording secretary; and Brenda Blackman, First Lafayette, scholarship committee chair.

Janie Wise, Louisiana Baptists women's missions and ministry strategist, pointed to the importance of every believer making missions a priority.

"We live in a state where one out of every two persons is lost," Wise said. "If we're going to reach the world, we have to reach the states."

EQUIPPED FOR THE TASK

At the missions brunch, concluding the weekend event, Townsend told listeners that to be equipped for missional living they must remain: "In His Word, on His mission, by His grace,

and for His glory."

Townsend recounted her visit to "Speaker's Corner" in Hyde Park, London, where large crowds gathered in the open-air, free speech venue to direct hate speech toward America and toward biblical, traditional marriage. Nearby, a man with a sign reading "Jesus is Lord" sat quietly talking to individuals and leading them to faith in Christ, Townsend said.

Like the man in the park, every woman who serves God faithfully can make an impact, Townsend said, adding that when the task seems overwhelming, remember "who you are."

"Who are we?" Townsend asked. "We are women in His word. We are women on His mission. We are women who can only do

it by His grace. And why do we do it? For His glory."

A LIFESTYLE OF MINISTRY

"If you are a follower of Christ, you're called to live a lifestyle of ministry," Plunk told listeners in the Saturday morning session. She then asked, "What does that look like on a daily basis?"

Start with a broken heart for others, Plunk said, adding that a missional lifestyle is centered on true compassion, true humility and true meekness.

Take note of people encountered daily whether it's at the coffee shop, the grocery store, or nail salon, Plunk said.

"The most important encounter in ministry is not the encounter with you, but their encounter with Jesus," Plunk said. "And you're simply called to set up that encounter. Prepare yourself to set up that encounter by clothing yourself in Christ and arming yourself with the truth of the Scripture. And in doing these things, you will be prepared to live a missional lifestyle."



Marilyn Stewart photo

Speaking at the WMU Annual Meeting, Lena Plunk, WMU ministry consultant for mobilization in Birmingham, Alabama, told the crowd people must live a "lifestyle of ministry."

Breakfast from page 4

Edwards encouraged all in attendance and watching on the livestream broadcast to make a concerted effort to pray Friday, April 14, when Christians remember the day Jesus died on the cross.

"While there is never a bad time to pray, there is never a better time to pray than holy week and particularly Good Friday at 3 p.m.," he said. "I'm encouraging you at 3 o'clock this Friday to offer a prayer of thanksgiving because we are blessed in ways we can take assurance from."

SHARE LOVE & RESPECT

Johnston, who served

as chairman of the prayer breakfast steering committee, closed the event by challenging everyone to offer uplifting words to anyone they encounter.

"I have found the greatest opportunity we can offer someone is a word of encouragement," he said. "So I pray today that as business takes place at the state capitol, as business leaders go back to their business, that we will find it in ourselves to be encouragers of each other."

"We may have different views but we can treat each other here in Louisiana with love, kindness and respect."

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ON THE MOVE

- New Life Baptist Church, DeRidder: **Lynn P. Clayton** has announced his **April 30 retirement**, after 14 years as founding pastor. He was previously editor of the Louisiana Baptist Message for 28 years. He and his wife Leah plan to reside in DeRidder.
- **Collin (wife Gina) Wimberly** is the new pastor at Trinity Heights Baptist Church, Shreveport.
- **Larry Bernal** has resigned as pastor of Bethesda Baptist Church, Ida.
- **Billy Stevens** has resigned as pastor of Willow Point Baptist Church, Shreveport.
- **Jeremy Brister** has resigned as pastor of Oak Grove Baptist Church, Bentley.
- **Jason, wife Tracy, Ogle** is the new pastor at Bethlehem Baptist Church, Albany.
- **James Summerlin** is the new associate pastor to students at First Baptist Church, Hammond.
- **Dustin Pierce** is the new youth pastor at Trinity Baptist Church, Hammond.
- **Judd Roark** has resigned as pastor at South Side Baptist Church, Bastrop.

IN REMEMBRANCE

- **Miguel “Papi” Barrios of Bernice** passed away March 29 in West Monroe at the age of 80. Burial services were at First Baptist Church of Farmerville on Saturday, April 1. Reginaldo DeLeon officiated. Interment followed at Shiloh Cemetery in the Shiloh Community. Barrios was born July 5, 1936 in Guatemala. He was the founder of the Iglesia Bautista Nazaret and a former church planter for the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. A truly hard-worker, a caring pastor, and a great church planter, he planted Iglesia Bautista Betel between Farmerville and Bernice; Misión Bautista de Forest in Forest; Misión Bautista Belén in Ruston; a mission in Athens; Misión Bautista Filadelfia in Simsboro; a mission in Minden, and Iglesia Bautista Nazaret in Bernice. He also planted churches in Texas and Illinois. In 1983, he came to Monroe to serve as associational church planter and pastor of the small mission started by Alvin Rosenow, his wife Ruth and in-laws, IMB missionaries, James and Susan Ware. He faithfully served the Hispanic population in Northeast Louisiana -- Tallulah, Columbia, Transylvania, Bastrop, Bonita, Rayville and Ruston. He is preceded in death by: His first wife, Oralia Barrios; a granddaughter, Alexandra; and a great-grand-daughter, Willow. He is survived by: his wife Maria Y. Barrios; a son, Miguel Barrios and wife Melba Pietri de Barrios, from Dorado, Puerto Rico; daughters Brenda Barrios Lambert of Winston Salem, N.C. and Mary Barrios from Farmerville; five grandchildren -- Miguel E., Selena, Jonathan, Dennis Jr., and Courtnee; seven great-grandchildren; and special nephews Berner Requena, Axel Requena and Donald Rodriguez.
- **Robert (Murphy) Brantley**, 89, passed away on March 5 in Baton Rouge. He was born July 29, 1927 in Walnut Grove, MS to Jennie May Cox and John Jackson Brantley and was a resident of Covington for 45 years. He was a United States Army veteran of WW II and a graduate of William Carey College in Hattiesburg, Miss. A Baptist minister for over 50 years, he was the long-time pastor at Collins Boulevard Baptist Church and also served Countryside Baptist Church in the old Chappapeela Association. The beloved husband of Exie Burns Brantley

for 63 years, he is survived by one daughter Freda Brantley; Little (Jack), his grandson Luke N. Little; two brothers William O. “Bill” Brantley and Louis “Gary” Brantley; and two sisters Janice Brantley Boozer and Eula May Brantley Duroux. He was preceded in death by his parents; six brothers Lamar, Billie, Roy, Dewitt, JB and Abner Brantley; and two sisters Mabel Beard and Genevieve Wallace.

HOMEcoming

- Bonita Road Baptist Church, Bastrop: **63rd Homecoming**, April 30, 10:30-noon. Speaker: **Brian McAllister**. Worship: **The Lisemby**s. Pastor: Casey Johnson.
- Hebron Baptist Church, Denham Springs: 180th Homecoming, May 7, 10 a.m. Speaker: Rob Burns.
- Maryland Baptist Church, St. Joseph: **75th Homecoming**, May 7, 10:45 a.m. Lunch will be served following the worship service. Special Music: **Brothers in Christ**. Pastor: Larry Foster.
- Bethel Baptist Church, Franklinton: **110th anniversary**, May 7, 10:30 a.m. A potluck dinner will follow services. Everyone is welcomed. Pastor: Joseph Kelley.
- First Baptist Church, Morgan City: **85th homecoming**. May 7, 10:45 a.m. Speaker: **Wayne Jenkins**. Pastor: Brent Romero.

REVIVAL

- Bethel Baptist Church, Colfax: **Spring Revival**, April 23-26, Sunday, 10:45 a.m. & 6 p.m. Monday-Wednesday 6:30 p.m. Evangelist: **Scotly McDowell, chalk artist**. Pastor: Carl Gulde.
- Wayside Baptist Church, Pollock: **Revival**, April 23-26; Sunday, 11:00 a.m. & 6:00 p.m.; Monday – Wednesday, 6:30 p.m. Speaker: **Lloyd Whitman**. Music: **Joey Beck**. Nursery will be provided. Please come and join us. Pastor: Kevin Simmons.
- Fish Bayou Baptist Church, Crowville: **Revival**, April 24, 7 p.m. Speaker: **Kelly Clark**. Special Music: **Wolleson’s Sister’s (Amanda & Julie)**. Pastor: Jim Goodman.
- First Baptist Church, Jonesboro: **Area-wide Crusade**, April 29-May 3; April 29, **Prayer Rally at Dodson High School Gym**, 6 p.m.; April 30, **Jonesboro-Hodge High School Gym**, 6 p.m.; May 1, **Jonesboro-Hodge High School Gym**, 6 p.m.; May 2, **Winnfield Middle School Gym**, 6 p.m.; May 3, **Winnfield Middle School Gym**, 6 p.m. Evangelist: **Bill Britt**. Music: **ODE**. Pastor: Stuart Toms.
- Cecilia Baptist Mission, Cecilia: **Revival**, April 30- May 3. Evangelist: **Lyndon Longoria**. Special music: **Kerry Longoria**. Pastor: Peter Vidrine.
- Bethel Baptist Church, Bastrop: **Revival**, April 30 – May 3, Sunday service begins at 6 p.m. Monday – Wednesday 7 p.m. Evangelist: **Rubin Weaver**. Pastor: Joe Don Hawthorn.
- Fellowship Baptist Church, Mansfield: **Revival**, May 2-4, Friday and Saturday, 6:30 p.m.; Sunday, 9 a.m. Evangelist: **David Permenter**. Music: **Pam Whitlock and Vicki Davis**. Pastor: Weyland Gauntt.
- Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, Columbia: **Revival**, May 7-10, Sunday, 6 p.m. Monday-Wednesday, 7 p.m. Evangelist: Bill Robertson. Special Music: **Ben Waites**. Pastor: Jerry Hendrixson.

LAGNIAPPE

- First Baptist Church, Winnfield: **Senior Adult**

Revival Luncheon, April 20, 11:30 a.m. in the Fireside Room. This will be the last session before our area wide Crusade, so don’t miss it. This will be a covered-dish style luncheon. **The Foto Sisters in concert**, April 23, 6 p.m. Sign up in the church office if you plan to attend this event. Or call 318.628.3544. Women’s Salad Luncheon, April 29, 11 a.m. in FBC’s Fireside Room. Speaker: Sandra Morehart, “It’s Not About the Periwinkles.” **The 37th Annual Max Kelley Memorial Bar-B-Cue**, April 30, 11a.m.-1p.m. Pick-up only. Cost: \$10 per plate (half of a bar-b-cue chicken, potato salad, and “Skid Row” baked beans. Pastor: Steven Smithson.

- First Baptist Church, DeRidder: **Louisiana Baptists Singing Ministers and Singing Women in concert**, April 20, 6:30 p.m. Cost: Free. A love offering will be taken. Every dollar collected goes toward the B.B. McKinney & Carroll Lowe and Teresa Thomason Scholarships. The McKinney & Lowe scholarships are awarded annually to two students at Louisiana College and two students at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary who are pursuing a degree towards a career as Minister of Music/Worship Leader. The Thomason Scholarship is awarded to a participant in the Louisiana Baptist State Piano Festival for the purpose of further collegiate studies. Checks can be made out to the Louisiana Baptist Foundation. For more information, call 337.463.9047. Pastor: Josh Eubanks.
- Northeast Baptist School, Monroe: **9th Annual Golf Tournament**, April 21, Chennault Park. Registration/lunch will be at noon with a 1 p.m., shotgun start. This is a 4-Man scramble. Cost: \$100 per person. Registration forms available at the Associations Center, the School, or online at www.nelba.net. For more information call the school at 318.325.2077 or log onto www.mynbs.org.
- First Baptist Church, Bossier: **Jeremy Camp in concert**, April 21, 7 p.m. The concert will also feature Citizen Way. For more information, call 318.746.7940. Pastor: Brad Jurkovich.
- First Baptist Church, Anacoco: **The Issacs in**

concert, April 21, 7 p.m. There is no cost. A love offering will be taken. Pastor: Durhl Davis.

- Lakeshore Baptist Church, Monroe: **Gospel concert featuring Sisters Four, Blessed Assurance and Southern Revelation**, April 21 at 7 p.m. A love offering will be taken. Pastor: William Smith.
- Coteau Baptist Church, Houma: **Secret Church Simulcast with David Platt**, April 21, 5 p.m. cost: \$10 per person; Second Harvest Food Bank, April 29, 7 a.m. Pastor: Wayne Hunt.
- Cypress Baptist Church, Benton: **Christian standup comedian Tim Hawkins Live**, April 22, 7 p.m. Tickets can be purchased at timhawkins.brushfireapp.com/events/435477. Pastor: John Fream.
- Fair Park Baptist Church, West Monroe: **Fifth Annual Race2Grace 5k, 10k, and 1 mile fun run**, April 22. Proceeds from the race will help FPBC kids attend Centri-Kid Camp this summer. Pastor: Waymond Warren.
- Holmesville Baptist Church, Downs ville: **Celebration Sunday honoring Pastor Jerry Whitman**, April 23, 10:30 a.m. Following the services there will be dinner on the grounds. Concord Union Baptist Association Director of Missions will present Whitman with a plaque for his 40 years as pastor. A church wide fellowship will be held on Sunday, April 23, 2017 to celebrate this milestone in our church’s history and to recognize his dedication to our church and the community. Pastor: Jerry Whitman.
- Bethany Baptist Church, Columbia: **The Sanctuary Quartet**, April 23, 6 p.m. Pastor: Brian Rankin.
- First Baptist Church, Covington: **‘A Southern Gospel Concert’ featuring the Mark Trammell Quartet and Allison Speer**, April 28, 7 p.m. (doors open at 6 p.m.) Cost: \$15 (general admission). For more information, call the church at 985.892.2149. Pastor: Waylon Bailey.
- Houston River Baptist Church, Sulphur:

Come to the Well Women’s Conference, April 29, 9 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. Doors open at 8:15 a.m. Cost: \$30. Pastor: Lonnie Gothrup

- First Baptist Church, New Orleans: **Life-way’s Main** April 29, 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Cost: \$59. Speakers: Darryl Strawberry, Russell Moore, Fred Luter, Rick Burgess, Eric Geiger, Robby Gallaty, Brodie Croyell, Brad Stine and more. For tickets or more information, go life-way.com/Mainevent or call 800.254.2022 Pastor: David Crosby.
- Toledo Bend Baptist Resort Ministry, Zwolle: **12th annual Toledo Bend Children’s Fishing Derby**, April 29, 8:30 a.m. – 2 p.m. at San Miguel Park beach area. Kids, ages 3-15, come join the fun. Preschoolers must have a parent or guardian present and school-age children groups must have at least one adult for each 5 children. Bring a fishing pole or rod and reel and some bait (not provided). There will be a complimentary lunch on the grounds. For more information, call Mary Gore at 318.452.9731 or Toledo Bend Baptist Resort Ministry at 318.645.6601.
- First Baptist Church, Haughton: **Love Worth Fighting For Marriage Conference**, April 30, 4-7:30 p.m. Speaker: Kirk Cameron. Musician: Warren Barfield. Cost: \$40 per couple and tickets are on sale in the church office. Pastor: Gevan Spinney.
- Bethlehem Baptist Church, Albany: **A joint fifth Sunday singing with Blood River**, April 30, 5 p.m. with a fellowship following. Pastor: Preston Nix.
- Hebron Baptist Church, Bush: **Ben Waites in concert**, April 30, 10:30 a.m. Following services, the youth will have their fundraiser lunch. Pastor: Reggie Ogea.
- First Baptist Church, Pineville: **First@First Business Leader Luncheon**, May 1, noon. Speaker: Ricky Belgard, Philadelphia Baptist Church. Cost: \$10 and you may pay at the door. Please RSVP to Melinda Langford (mlangford@fbcpineville.net). Pastor: Stewart Holloway.

Scripture Crypto

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.

msx yk sfq ak tihk afcz wmqvkd, msx tihk

afcz yzkqvzks, bvilm qzkdrmdkx mjmisdq qvk

tfzx jfx fw qvkiz wmqvkd, bvf qvzkwfk jmpk

qvkg cr qf xkdftmqifs, md ak dkk.

dklfsv lvzfsiltd qvizqa:dkpks

Clues:
F = O; D = S

Answer to April 6 Scripture Crypto:
Jeremiah twenty-eight: sixteen

LC continues to innovate missions & ministries, and engineering

BY BRIAN BLACKWELL
Message Staff Writer

PINEVILLE – Louisiana College celebrated several “firsts” Monday, April 10.

During a press conference, the school announced a new degree, new scholarship and the grand opening of its first engineering classroom.

To equip young men and women called to be marketplace missionaries from central Louisiana to the ends of the earth, LC will offer a new bachelor’s degree in missions and ministries. Those who qualify as freshmen automatically will receive \$6,000 annually through the Dr. Fred Lowery Scholarship, named after the retired pastor of First Baptist Church in Bossier City.

The degree will be offered through the School of Missions and Ministries, formerly the Division of Christian Studies. This school will have emphases on apologetics, biblical studies, church planting, evangelism, missions and pastoral ministry.

“I see God lifting up, even in this room, young people

a good number in this room who want to do that. I believe we’re going to see 10, 20, 30 students, together, go and plant churches based on what they learn here.”

Lowery said the need for training Christian college students to make a difference in the world has not been greater.

“We can’t keep doing church like we’ve been doing church or we won’t reach this generation,” Lowery said. “I am just excited about the missions and ministries program because that’s what you want to see happen. You want to train these precious young men and

young women to realize this is a new day, it’s a different culture, and we have to be willing to change.

“This program is exciting because of what can happen in the future,” he continued. “Encouraging and training pastors, missionaries, church planters and worship leaders is critical today,” he continued, “and I believe it’s more critical than ever before.”



Fred Lowery, a retired pastor from First Baptist Church in Bossier City, talks about the purpose of the scholarship named in his honor.

who say, ‘I want to be like Paul, to be a tentmaker,’” said LC President Rick Brewer. “To go to an Omaha, a Kansas City, a Houston, a Dallas, a Los Angeles and plant churches and share the Gospel, but not to have to count and depend upon income from those people you are trying to reach.

“I believe there’s a generation wanting to do that,” said Brewer. “And I believe there’s



Submitted photo

Louisiana College President Rick Brewer and other college officials hold a ribbon cutting for the school’s new engineering classroom April 10, 2017

“You’re taking this responsibility seriously, and I want to thank you for your vision and willingness not to do just things as usual, but to be looking at the future, and to be interested in making a difference in the lives of every student and heading them in the right direction.”

NEW ENGINEERING CLASSROOM

School officials also held a ribbon cutting, dedication and

open house of the recently outfitted Tara Terrill Engineering Classroom in Cavanaugh Hall.

In September 2015, Brewer and Louisiana Tech President Les Guice finalized a 3+2 agreement, which allows qualified students to complete three years of pre-engineering classes at LC and finish the remaining two years at Louisiana Tech. Upon completion, the student will have earned two Bachelor of Science degrees in five years.

KIDS CAMP I
JUNE 12-15

KIDS CAMP II
JUNE 19-22

KIDS CAMP III
JULY 31 - AUGUST 2

LOUISIANA BAPTISTS

Tall Timbers
Baptist Conference Center

SUMMER CAMPS

For registration information, please call
318.445.6797
or to download registration forms and information go to
www.talltimbersbcc.org/summer-camps

High Pursuit Camp
June 29 - July 1 Casey Johnson

Clear Camp I
July 3 - 7 Vince Smith

Clear Camp II
July 10 - 14 Algernon Tennyson

Clear Camp III
July 17 - 21 Eddie Briery

Sponsored by: STUDENT MINISTRY CLEARCAMPS

"Dive In"
Girls Mission Camp
July 23 - 26

DIVE IN RA CAMP
2017
JULY 26 - 29