



THE BAPTIST MESSAGE

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Brian Blackwell photo

Pastor Fred Luter has seen Franklin Avenue Baptist Church grow from 65 members when he began serving as pastor in 1986 to nearly 3,100 in attendance for its Sunday morning worship service at its new location in New Orleans. The new \$35 million facility includes a 3,500-seat worship center, fellowship hall, offices, kitchen, Sunday school rooms and youth and children's areas. Luter is excited about the new possibilities of ministry that exist since the church relocated in December.

'TALK OF THE TOWN'

New facilities, ministry area for Franklin Avenue

By Brian Blackwell
Message Staff Writer

NEW ORLEANS – Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans celebrated a new chapter in ministry Dec. 9 when congregants gathered for the first worship service in their new home, six miles from where they had ministered for 21 years.

"It's the talk of the town," Pastor Fred Luter told the *Baptist Message*. "The New

Orleans East area is excited about us being here and we are excited as well. It is one of the most populated areas of the city, and we are excited about doing all we can to revitalize the community. The excitement level was so high that we decided to have several weeks of special dedication services in December to celebrate all that God has done through this move."

The new \$35 million facility includes a 3,500-seat wor-

ship center, a fellowship hall, offices, a kitchen, conference rooms, Sunday school rooms and youth and children's areas.

The property also has 1,200 parking spaces, a dramatic increase from the 25 spots available at its former location, 2515 Franklin Avenue. Averaging nearly 3,100 for morning services, the congregation formerly had to lease a nearby parking lot to accommodate

See FRANKLIN AVENUE, page 4

ECON 2019 renews focus on reaching 'next generation'

By Brian Blackwell
Message Staff Writer

COVINGTON – Ed Newton, pastor of the Community Bible Church, San Antonio, Texas, will emphasize reaching the lost of the next generation during Student Night, Jan. 28, at the 2019 Louisiana Baptist Evangelism Conference.

The pre-session will begin at 5:30 p.m. in "The Rock" youth building of First Baptist, Covington, and feature a pizza party, games and music by an area youth choir. The main session will follow immediately afterward with music presented by the First Covington choir and a message by Newton.

Keith Manuel, evangelism and church growth director for Louisiana Baptists, said Student Night will build on the challenge

"to share Christ with others" presented in November during the 2018 Youth Evangelism Celebration in Alexandria.

"We are investing in a nationwide youth speaker for churches to come and be part of a large evangelistic event that is absolutely free," Manuel said. "While we are targeting students, this night is for everyone as we seek a great harvest of the lost."

Newton spoke at Student Night as part of ECON 2017, held at Temple Baptist Church, Ruston, when dozens of students came forward at the invitation.



Ed Newton will be the speaker for ECON 2019 Student Night.

See ECON, page 9

Cancer battle brings victory in Vidalia

By Brian Blackwell
Message Staff Writer

VIDALIA – Alton Pecanty was in a hospital room battling cancer when he called his neighbor, Pastor Wes Faulk, to discuss his eternal future.

During the course of the conversation, Pecanty placed his trust in Christ. Afterward he asked to be baptized alongside his wife, Betty, at the First Baptist Church, Vidalia, as a public statement of his faith.

See VICTORY, page 2

Victory from page one

Betty had committed to live for Christ years before, but had not been obedient in being baptized.

On Nov. 25, Faulk beamed with joy after he baptized Alton, 78, and Betty, 74, calling the moment one of the most special in his 14 years of serving as a pastor.

"In the midst of a recent medical crisis from a hospital room in Houston, Mr. Alton, or 'chicken man' as we call him, shared with me how

he had not trusted Jesus before," Faulk recalled.

"Right there on life support, he prayed a sinner's prayer and promised to get baptized when he returned to town. He made good on his promise and was excited to be accompanied by his wife, who accepted Christ years ago but had failed to follow through with baptism herself."

Betty said the baptism was the most memorable moment since they were married 56 years ago.

"I wanted to do this for a long time, and when my husband accepted Christ I knew this was the perfect time for the two of us to be baptized," she said. "I am so thankful he made that decision to accept Christ and now we can spend eternity together in Heaven. I wouldn't trade it for the world and would encourage anyone to get saved today, because it's not too late."

Alton and Betty Pecanty are among 36 people baptized since Faulk became pastor at First

See VICTORY, page 12



Brian Blackwell photo

Pastor Wes Faulk baptizes his neighbor, Alton Pecanty, at the First Baptist Church, Vidalia, November 25. He also baptized Pecanty's wife, Betty. Faulk said the baptisms reiterate the importance of forming a relationship with a neighbor or friend and consistently sharing Christ with them – a mission his congregation has embraced since he became pastor of First Baptist Vidalia in 2016.

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Franklin Avenue from page one

worshippers' cars on Sundays.

"That first Sunday at our new location our members came and hugged me to thank me for the parking," Luter laughed. "People are really excited about finally not having to get to church early to find a spot to park."

Luter began serving at Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in September 1986 when the congregation consisted of only 65 members, mostly women, who were faithful attenders.

Just before Hurricane Katrina made landfall in 2005, the church had become the largest Southern Baptist congregation in Louisiana, with more than 8,300 members and averaging 5,855 in weekly worship attendance.

The church had purchased 90 acres of land near the former Six Flags to build larger facilities to accommodate the growth, but Katrina derailed those plans and scattered members across the country.

Many came together to form "remote" congregations, meeting on other church campuses – First Baptist Church, New Orleans, Istrouma Baptist Church, Baton Rouge,

Florida Boulevard Baptist Church, Baton Rouge, and First Baptist Church, Houston – until repairs were completed on Franklin Avenue Baptist's facilities in April 2008.

In the aftermath of Katrina, Luter led a rejuvenation of the congregation at its former home, growing to nearly 5,900 members with an average of 4,760 in Sunday services by the time he was elected president of the Southern Baptist Convention in 2012. He was the first African-American to hold that post.

When land became available in East New Orleans, the congregation opted to build a new home there.

The church has started its outreach in the new mission field by holding backyard Bible clubs in an apartment complex.

Luter said next in the plan is to expand into the surrounding neighborhood, knocking on every door to introduce the congregation to neighbors and build rapport in the community.

"My prayer is God would use us to reach more lost and unchurched people," he said. "Back when I first started at Franklin Avenue I had no clue about how to



Brian Blackwell photo

Pastor Fred Luter stands in Franklin Avenue Baptist Church's new 3,500-seat, 126,000-square-foot worship center. The recently completed \$35 million facility includes a fellowship hall, offices, a kitchen, conference rooms, Sunday school rooms, plus youth and children's areas.

pastor. I had not been one before and I was just excited to have a congregation that wanted me to

be their pastor. I did not imagine the growth we would experience. But I have learned if you are

faithful to God and his Word, He will be faithful to you.

"To God be the glory."

FORWARD WRITTEN BY FRED LUTER, JR., SENIOR PASTOR OF FRANKLIN AVENUE BAPTIST CHURCH/NEW ORLEANS'

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Greater New Antioch flourishes from the (re)start

By **Brian Blackwell**
Message Staff Writer

MONROE – Greater New Antioch Baptist Church accepted God's call to take a leap of faith in late June and move from their longtime home to another area of Monroe, and the blessings have been supernal.

Since relocating, the Lord has blessed the obedience of the African-American church re-plant with a 20 percent increase in attendance, including 15 new members by baptism since moving.

The success of the relocated congregation might have been foreseen from the huge welcome the congregation received at the new location, when more than 750 individuals from the community attended the initial service.

The June 24 service was a combination of the launch of Greater New Antioch and the dissolution of College Place Baptist (a predominantly Anglo congregation), which was transferring its property to the incoming group.

Now running an average of 150 in morning worship, Greater New Antioch members truly understand the importance of them taking the step of faith to move.

"We all had the emotional attachment to the old

building we had been in for 20 years but we prayed the Lord would open the door to move," said Pastor John Russell. "My members had faith in the leadership and vision of the pastor. But most of all, we trusted God.

"It's been a blessing to have acquired this property in the way we have and to continue the ministry," he continued. "The field is so big in this area. It's just awesome to know we have a chance to play a part in seeing a great harvest in our community."

NEW BEGINNINGS

Russell was installed as pastor January 7 at a time when he believed God was calling his church to find a new location. Two weeks later, he learned College Place Baptist Church was closing its doors after 74 years of ministry, but was seeking another church to continue meeting in its building.

Initially, he met with College Place Baptist Pastor Stan Wyatt and James Jenkins, Louisiana Baptist church planting director, Russell said. Then lay leaders from both congregations came together and all involved felt the Holy Spirit was leading the two churches to move ahead. A unanimous vote by the Greater

New Antioch Baptist was the final confirmation from God they were to make the move from southern part of Monroe to the northeast area of the city near the campus of the University of Louisiana-Monroe.

On June 24, the few remaining members of College Place Baptist shed tears of joy with congregants from Greater New Antioch Baptist, each remembering the past but also looking to the future of renewed ministry to this vital community.

"It was very emotional during that time for the members of College Place," Russell said. "We thought

See (RE)START, page 6



Brian Blackwell photo

Pastor John Russell has seen his predominantly African-American congregation, increase in attendance and baptisms since relocating Greater New Antioch Baptist Church from another area of Monroe in June.



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(RE)START from page 5

honoring them was important because they had spent so many years in this community and the university. That evening I was in the back getting things lined up and when I walked into the sanctuary I was like, 'Wow! I had a moment where it hit me that this was really happening.'

Since their first worship service at the new location, the church has hosted 110 children for Vacation Bible School, held a block party, coordinated a Trunk or Treat in October for 150 who attended and distributed clothing to the less fortunate.

"There are a lot of needy people in this community and we want to provide for physical and spiritual needs alike," Russell said.

NEW LIFE

The relocation of Greater New Antioch Baptist was an answer to prayer in more ways than one for Janet

Campbell. For many years, Janet attended services at the former location, but her husband, Mark, opted to remain at home. During a worship service in July at its new location, Mark felt led to restore his fellowship with Christ and he joined Greater New Antioch Baptist.

"When I saw Mark coming down the aisle, it was a shock to me," Campbell said. "To see him there brought tears of joy because I had prayed for so long that he would come to church with me. Now, we're sitting together on Sundays and praying together at home. And we have a common mission to reach our surrounding community for Jesus."

Ronald Hunter, a member of the church for 22 years, believes the Greater New Antioch Baptist is positioned to reap a great harvest in its community.

"We are seeing people come nearly every Sunday from this neighborhood and other areas," said Hunter,



Submitted photo

Members of Greater New Antioch Baptist Church worship at their new location in Monroe. Since moving, the congregation has embraced its neighborhood by hosting a Vacation Bible School, block party, Trunk or Treat and food distribution.

who attends with his wife, JoAnne. "We have a heart for those around us and go into stores to invite people to come join us for the marvelous things God is doing here at Greater New Antioch Baptist.

"But I believe even with the growth our church has just begun to see the kind of growth God will bless us with," he continued. "God put us there for a number of reasons, but that is one of the biggest reasons is to

get his Word out from our church into the neighborhoods so He will be glorified and the Holy Ghost will put a fire into all of us for God's purpose. We can't wait to witness the multitudes of lives that will be changed."



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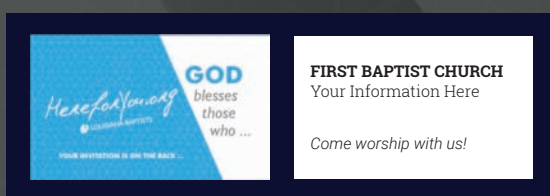
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McGee completes noteworthy career at LC



Byron McGee

By Norm Miller

Louisiana College News

PINEVILLE – During the 35 years he invested his life on the Hill in Pineville, Byron McGee became inextricably linked with Louisiana College.

A 1979 alumnus, McGee worked in the school's admissions office for more than three decades and then in alumni relations before concluding his tenure by serving three years as vice president for

institutional advancement.

"In one sense it seems like 35 years have passed, and in another it seems just like yesterday," said McGee, whose last official day was Dec. 31. "I've made some great friends and worked with great colleagues. The people working here now are doing a great job under Dr. Brewer's leadership."

"The relationships I have made over the years mean the most to me. I met my wife Cay here. All

my children went to school here. It's been a great time. Louisiana College has been my life, and I will cherish the memories very much," he said.

McGee shared these sentiments Nov. 15, during the annual dinner of the Board of Visitors.

"Byron went from recruiting thousands of

students to hundreds of donors," said Rick Brewer, Louisiana College president. "He's done a great job. He's one of the most easy-going people I've ever worked with. The past three years of my service at Louisiana College have been effective, embold-

See MCGEE, page 14

LC thankful for growing donor base

By Norm Miller

Louisiana College News

PINEVILLE (LCNews) — Membership with the Board of Visitors is growing, individual donations are on the rise in volume and amount, and in general, Louisiana College's donor base is on the upswing.

"As the turnaround at Louisiana College continues since 2015, alumni, donors, and friends are getting on board -- and some back on board -- with the new direction on the Hill in Pineville," said LC President Rick Brewer. "We appreciate the return of so many prayer partners and financial supporters."

The college recently received a substantial gift from the Cason Foundation, and within two weeks, the Foundation doubled the gift, Brewer

said. "Words fall short in expressing how grateful we are for the open-handed generosity of Edgar and Flo Cason."

"We've heard about the good things happening at Louisiana College," Flo Cason said. "And when we met with Rick and Cathy, Edgar and I were convinced that LC is in the very best of hands."

Edgar Cason told LCNews: "Our consideration for Louisiana College is two-fold: We fully endorse the college's vision for 'Preparing Graduates and Transforming Lives' as we wholeheartedly support the leadership of President

Rick Brewer and his leadership team."

Though such financial consideration of LC "is important and appreciated, I am also equally gratified that increasing numbers of our stakeholders and

See DONOR, page 14

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John 8:36

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6:00 - 6:45 pm	Dinner
7:00 pm	Worship and Evening Activities
9:30 pm	Adventure Race
Saturday	
7:00-8:00 am	Quiet Time and Breakfast
8:00 am - Noon	Worship, Morning Activities, Off-Site Mission Projects
2:30 pm	M-Now Concludes

M-NOW is an exciting mission opportunity for all teens in grades 7-12. Formally known as Voyage, M-NOW is a retreat that stands for Missions Now. M-NOW is designed to engage students in mission action and witnessing so they may discover similar needs in the context of their own communities.

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Worship, breakout conferences, IMB missionaries, off-site mission projects in Alexandria and Pineville

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Fairhope, AL



Fred Luter
New Orleans, LA



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New Orleans, LA



Lee Strobel
Woodlands, TX



Argile Smith
Biloxi, MS



Ed Newton
San Antonio, TX



David Phelps
Nashville, TN

SESSIONS

SESSION 1: Monday Afternoon

1:30 Session Begins
Prayer
Music: First, Covington
Welcome/Prayer
Message: Chip Luter
Music: First, Covington
Message: Fred Luter

3:55 Prayer

SESSION 2: Monday Evening

5:30 Student Night Begins
7:00 Session Begins
Welcome/Prayer
Music: First, Covington
Message: Ed Newton

8:15 Prayer

SESSION 3: Tuesday Morning

9:00 Session Begins
Welcome/Prayer
Music: First, Covington
Welcome
Message: Eric Hankins
Music: First, Covington
Message: David Hankins

11:30 Prayer

SESSION 4: Tuesday Afternoon

1:30 Session Begins
Welcome/Prayer
Music: David Phelps
Message: Argile Smith
Breakout Sessions

3:10 Breakout 1

4:05 Breakout 2

4:50 Dismiss

SESSION 5: Tuesday Evening

6:30 Pre-Session:
Southeast Louisiana Church Orchestra

7:00 Session Begins
Welcome/Prayer
Music: David Phelps and
Community Choir
Message: Lee Strobel

8:35 Dismiss

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ECON from page one

By the time the service ended 34 spiritual decisions had been recorded: 10 individuals repented for salvation, 13 repented to restore fellowship with Christ, 9 others made other commitments and 2 more declared a call to vocational ministry.

Newton, who also will be the main speaker at the 2019 YEC in Alexandria, has served as pastor of the 27,000-member, multi-site Community Bible Church since January 2016.

No stranger to student evangelism, Newton has served as a youth pastor, faculty member at Student Leadership University in Orlando, Fla., and executive director of the LIFT TOUR, an extension of Student Leadership University in partnership with LifeWay Students.

For those unable to attend Student Night, the event will be livestreamed beginning at 7 p.m.

Churches can log onto louisiananbaptists.org/livestream and follow instructions from there for access. Last year, numerous churches hosted rallies via livestream.

"ECON is an equipping time not just for pastors but for everyone," Manuel said. "We move it around to a different site each year so as many Louisiana Baptists as possible have a chance to get top notch training so they can reach their neighbors, co-workers, family and friends with the Gospel."

Other events

Student Night will be among several focuses at ECON on reaching the next generation. The conference Jan. 28-29 will feature messages by fathers David and Eric Hankins and Fred and Chip Luter; Argile Smith, senior pastor of Parkway Baptist Church, Biloxi, Mississippi; and Lee Strobel, an atheist-



Message file photo

Youth and student ministers gather at the front of the worship center in Temple Baptist Church in Ruston following a time of decision, Jan. 23 2017. The student night session, which was preceded by a pizza party and special music, took place during the first day of the 2017 Evangelism Conference. At the conclusion of the decision time, 34 spiritual decisions were recorded: 10 individuals repented for salvation, 13 repented to restore fellowship with Christ, 9 others made other commitments and 2 more declared a call to vocational ministry.

turned-Christ follower who authored the best-selling book "The Case for Christ." The praise and worship lineup includes

David Phelps, an award-winning Gospel artist from Nashville, Tennessee, and, combined choirs.

Other events at ECON

include: the state Senior Adult Luncheon featuring Phelps in concert; breakout sessions; and, various fellowships.

ECON

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GROUP 1 SCHEDULE

- 11:30 Lunch 1 in Fellowship Hall
- 12:30 Special Program in Central Hall
- 1:30 David Phelps Concert in Worship Center
- 2:30 Argile Smith
- 3:10 Senior Adult Breakouts Begin

GROUP 2 SCHEDULE

- 11:30 Special Program in Central Hall
- 12:30 Lunch 2 in Fellowship Hall
- 1:30 David Phelps Concert in Worship Center
- 2:30 Argile Smith
- 3:10 Senior Adult Breakouts Begin

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'Loving the people' is key to First Melville's revitalization

By Kirbi Cochran
Message Staff Writer

MELVILLE – For more than a decade, the First Baptist Church in Melville had declined in numbers, dwindling to just nine members as recently as 2015 and at risk of closing its doors for good. But in just three years, the congregation has experienced revitalization with more than 30 worshipers regularly attending Sunday services.

Pastor Nathaniel Dutton told the *Baptist Message* he sensed a spiritual malaise among the members during his first Sunday in the pulpit in December 2015.

"They were in a deep funk," said Dutton, "They were playing church: Come Sunday morning -- come to Sunday school, come in and listen to the service -- and go home.

"That was their church life," he said.

Dutton said the key to his revitalization approach has been to love them, "and they are responding to that," adding that now congregants are sharing love with each other

and have created a "good fellowship" that draws others.

Dutton also focused on growing each member's relationship with Christ, keeping his messages simple with a clear life application.

"My heart's desire is to see all their progress," Dutton shared. "They have come to a place where if you mention a need for prayer, they are ready to pray right then -- even in the middle of a service."

Dutton credited a series of revivals throughout the association for helping his church as well as other congregations in the area to renew spiritually.

Revival services were held at a different church sixteen nights in a row and Dutton was involved in the planning and led worship each evening as well.

"We've got this thing backward," Dutton observed. "Most people think a revival is when you win over a lot of people to the Lord and get them baptized, but that's not a revival, that's evangelism.

"A revival is when a

See REVITALIZATION, page 13



Louisiana Notables

EDITOR'S NOTE: Do you have a Revival, Homecoming, a new pastor, a community outreach or a concert? The Baptist Message would love to share your church news with the rest of the state. It is very easy to do, just send in your information (who, what, where and when) to philip@baptistmessage.com or call 318.449.4345. To get your event in the paper, please submit your information three weeks prior to the event.

ON THE MOVE

■ **Randall Gill** has been called as pastor of New Bethlehem Baptist Church, Denham Springs.

■ **Chris Camp** is the new pastor at Big Cane Baptist Church,

■ **Lonnie Wascom** has been called as the interim pastor of Walker Baptist Church, Walker.

■ **Larry Baldridge** is the new pastor at Life Point Church, Cottonport.

■ **Jack Varnado** has been called as the interim pastor of Red Oak Baptist Church, Livingston.

■ **Brian Prucey** is retiring as pastor of Elm Grove Baptist Church, Bossier City.

■ **Shelby (wife Summer) Thomas** is the new youth pastor at Bethany Baptist Church, Bethany.

■ **James Snyder** moves from youth pastor to interim pastor at Elm Grove Baptist Church, Bossier City.

■ **Courtney Rainey** resigned as pastor at

Greenacres Baptist Church, Bastrop.

REVIVAL

■ **First Baptist Church, Robeline: Revival**, January 20-23, Sunday 10:30 a.m. and 6 p.m. Monday-Wednesday, 6:30 p.m. Evangelist: **Sam Moore**. Special Music: **WeR-Called**. Pastor: Brian Ray.

■ **First Baptist Church, Haynesville: Revival**, January 27-30, Sunday, 10:45 a.m. & 6 p.m.; Monday-Wednesday, 6 p.m. Evangelist: The Lisembys. Bring your friends, family and the lost for a week of uplifting music, and encouraging preaching of salvation. Pastor: Jeff Tinsley.

LAGNIAPPE

■ **Daniel Hall** is available to fill the pulpit as either an interim or a full-time pastor of a Southern Baptist Church, preferably in Union or Lincoln Parish. He has served in the ministry for the past 40 years. You may contact him by calling 318.278.9546 or email him at candihall2014@gmail.com.

■ **Brookwood Baptist Church, Shreveport:** Seeking to fill the **full-time position of Discipleship Pastor**. The Discipleship Pastor will work in cooperation with the ministry staff of Brookwood to develop a clear path to discipleship by overseeing all environments designated to encourage and equip God's people towards becoming: biblically literate, spirit led, gospel centered, and culturally engaged followers of Jesus

Christ. Please send all résumés to openpositions@brookwoodbaptist.com. Pastor: David Rice.

■ **Calvary Baptist Church, Shreveport: 2019 Night of Praise**, January 11, 6 p.m. Featuring **Price Harris Ministries** with **Cal-lep Lewis, Summer Grove Baptist Choir, The Needhams, The Allen Family, Bo Shed, Monk Trio, Larry Alton Trio**. Pastor: John Lary.

■ **Baptist Association of Greater Baptist Rouge, Baton Rouge: Disaster relief meeting for all blue hat and/or church DR coordinators**, January 15, 7:00-8:30 p.m. at the BAGBR Office, which is located at 10560 Airline Highway, Baton Rouge 70816. RSVP randy@bagbr.org or contact Randy Osborn at 225.296.3943 or 225.614.8707 (cell). Director of Missions: Tommy Middleton.

■ **Airline Baptist Church, Bossier City: Louisiana Baptist Singing Men in concert**, January 18, 6:30 p.m. Pastor: Terry Young.

■ **Alto Baptist Church, Alto: Bring a Friend Day**, January 20, 10:30 a.m. **Brothers in Christ will be in concert**. A crock pot luck lunch will follow the morning worship service. Music Minister: Jay Ellerman. Pastor: Alan Miller.

■ **Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, New Orleans: Disaster relief ministry training**, January 25-26, 8 a.m.-2 p.m. For more information or to register go to <https://louisianabaptists.org/event/2019-disaster-relief-training-new-orleans/> Pastor: Fred Luter.

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.

emo fpx xmbh tfdx jbev, b go dbhq? fvj emo fpx

xmbh jrdllhrxsxj rv gs? mbus xmbh rv ybj: cbp r dmfcq

osx upfrds mrg cbp xms msqu bc mrd tbhvxsfvts.

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Clues:
J = D; F = A

Answer to December 13 Crypto:
First Timothy four: eight

(Copy and post this friendly reminder)

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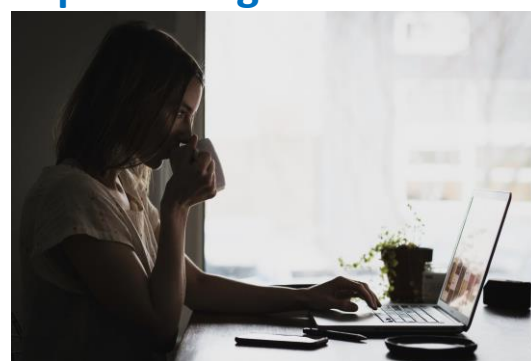
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- **Is a loved one already in a nursing home or receiving care? Find out why it may not be too late to save their estate!**

Harvest Fest plants Gospel seeds in Crowley

By **Brian Blackwell**
Message Staff Writer

CROWLEY – Reaching some of the 100,000 people who attend the annual International Rice Festival seemed daunting, but members of the First Baptist Church in Crowley embraced the challenge using jambalaya, antique tractor demonstrations and train rides to plant Gospel seeds in the community.

The 15th annual Harvest Fest, held on the grounds of First Baptist Crowley, drew nearly 15,000 people who enjoyed a wide selection of Cajun foods, Zydeco music, family activities such as a petting zoo and bouncy houses and more. While organizers did not see many commitments to Christ at the festival, the results usually are seen several months later, they said.

“For many people, it’s an introduction to our church,” said Michael Dougherty, one



Brian Blackwell photo

A member of the First Baptist Church, Crowley, paints a young girl's face during Harvest Fest. The event drew nearly 15,000 people to the church campus during the International Rice Festival in this south Louisiana community.

of the Harvest Fest coordinators. “The harvest is seen not the following weekend, but 6-9 months down the road. When we see someone come to Christ it makes all the hard work of planning months in advance worth it.

The festival began in 1995 when a few church members served water on the church grounds to Rice Festival goers. Through the years, the congregation added activities and has used Harvest Fest to build a bridge between the

community and the congregation.

“We wanted the festival to show folks that our church is normal,” Pastor Cullen Clark said. “When we finally do see a person visit our church who came to the Harvest Festival, it’s not this huge leap for them because they already are familiar with us.

Alan Knuckles, pastor at First Baptist Crowley from 1993-2000, returns every year to volunteer at Harvest Fest. He enjoys the camaraderie between the church members and those attending the festival.

“An event like this builds relationships with the people in the community which opens doors for evangelism and personal ministry,” Knuckles said. “This Harvest Fest event during the Rice Festival has changed the

whole relationship of FBC to the community of Crowley and surrounding areas. FBC is respected like never before because of the effort put forth by the people to make the Rice Festival a family friendly event.”

Among the people who have put their faith in Christ after attending Harvest Fest is Mona Dupuis, who attended the inaugural one.

“We knew years ago that this was a safe place to take our kids and for us to enjoy a good time away from a lot of the other activities at the Rice Festival,” said Dupuis, who now cooks during the Harvest Festival. “Now, I get to give back by being a part of this wonderful outreach to our community. When you know your service helps someone find an eternal place in heaven it’s so fulfilling.”

Victory from page 2

Baptist Vidalia in 2016. He said the baptisms represent his members’ mindset of loving their neighbors for Christ.

The congregation, whose average attendance is 400 on Sunday mornings, carries out acts of kindness for school district employees, first respond-

ers and city officials, and provides meals for those attending weekly meetings for Celebrate Recovery, a Christ-centered, 12-step recovery program for anyone struggling with hurt, pain or addiction of any kind. Members also have participated in disaster relief trips to Baton Rouge, Houston and the North Carolina coast.

“We don’t want to be the First Baptist Church of Vidalia but the First Baptist Church for Vidalia,” Faulk said. “I’m so thankful and proud of my church for embracing this vision and loving on our community and others across the state and world. We are seeing the Spirit of God move through our church and out into the community, and seeing neighbors trust Jesus -- the most important decision of their lives.”

Faulk said Pecanty has since been blessed to learn he is now cancer free.

“Alton is joyful with everyone he meets,” Faulk added. “His example is one we can all follow – it is never too late to trust Jesus. Likewise, his response shows the importance of never taking for granted an opportunity to share the Gospel with neighbors.”

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First Bossier rises from the ashes

By **Brian Blackwell**
Message Staff Writer

BOSSIER CITY - Members of the First Baptist Church in Bossier City are facing a “new normal” after a fire destroyed 75 percent of their facilities, but Pastor Brad Jurkovich believes the congregation’s greatest days are ahead.

“We will move forward and rebuild,” Jurkovich said Dec. 16 during the first Sunday worship service following the devastating fire. “And I believe God will use First Bossier to reach thousands for Jesus in the coming years.”

On Dec. 10 a three-alarm fire began at 5:30 a.m., originating with an uninterruptible power supply backup battery for a computer. The flames began in an office space near Faith Chapel — the original worship center — and spread quickly to the attic and other buildings including the childcare center and various youth facilities. About 65 firefighters fought the blaze, finally extinguishing it about 3:30 p.m. that same day.

The congregation held a meeting in the Bossier Civic Center on Wednesday, Dec. 12, to pray, worship and organize for recovery, but the Sunday service was the first post-fire gathering on campus.

There was an extended time for expressing gratitude to first responders and thanking officials for their support Dec. 16, but Jurkov-

ich brought the service back into focus, calling this time in the life of the congregation “a generational moment.”

“How we respond these first seven days, how we respond these next seven months, will really set a tone for the future of this ministry with our prayer, our faith, our hope,” he said. “I get excited about dreaming of building and developing ministry to reach even more people for Jesus.”

During the Jan. 6 service Jurkovich said church staff met with their insurance company to determine how to clear the damage, and he outlined plans for its children’s and student ministries and adult Bible study groups:

-- The children’s ministry will use part of the Tiny Town preschool area, the foyer and additional preschool space until a new children’s facility is built.

-- The student ministry will meet in an area near the worship center for Sunday morning Bible study and Wednesday night worship until a new facility is constructed for them.

-- Adult Bible study groups will use a nearby facility and the Bossier Civic Center, located about a block behind the First Bossier campus, until a new multi-purpose venue is erected.

Funding will be provided by insurance money and gifts that members give toward the building projects.

Jurkovich said the church hopes to unveil the plans for its new facilities by Easter



First Bossier photo

Brad Jurkovich, pastor of First Baptist Church, Bossier, offers thanks and words of hope during a Dec. 16, 2018 worship service, seven days after a three-alarm fire destroyed 75 percent of the campus facilities. Jurkovich told members the congregation would move forward and rebuild and that “the church’s greatest days are ahead of it.”

and to break ground soon afterward.

Additionally, the church established a new mission emphasis in the days following the fire. After the Dec. 16 service, more than 300 ladies from First Bossier came forward to sign up to be a part of First Women Strong. They inaugurated the ministry by delivering food to fire

stations throughout Bossier City and Shreveport as a way of expressing gratitude to the first responders.

“I want to say to all the kids in the room today, one day soon you will have a brand new children’s facility that will rock,” he said during the Dec. 16 service. “To all the students today, one day soon you will have a brand new

student facility that will rock. While there will be a “new normal” for First Bossier it will be exciting to see people step up, serve, give and grow as we reach people for Jesus and rebuild this campus for the future.”

First Bossier has requested information on assisting the church should be sent to heather@firstbossier.com.

Revitalization from page 11

church gets right with God, and then you will have evangelism because the church has got right,” Dutton insisted. “What we saw was churches coming together, praying together, worshiping together, and now they can go out in the community and bring them in.”

Dutton said revival among his congregation has given him the opportunity to baptize five new believers so far.

Jacob Crawford, the

director of missions for the Louisiana Baptist Association, told the *Baptist Message*, “God brought the right pastor at the right time,” in commenting about the spiritual renewal of First Melville.

“A lot of churches who need revitalization are filled with great people, but they have just become complacent,” he said. “Pastor Dutton is bringing solid biblical leadership and just loving the people.”



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McGee from page 7

ened, and supported because of Byron McGee. We have some big shoes to fill. We're going to miss him."

Brewer told the Board of Visitors his "hat is off" to McGee for having worked one job for 35 years, but added, "I think he's too young to retire." He also lauded McGee for playing a key role in launching the college's Board of Visitors in September 2015.

"Our Board of Visitors grew from zero to almost 190 people in large part because of Byron's people skills and the almost countless relationships he has established over the years," Brewer said.

Brewer told attendees that he "wanted to honor Byron's commitment and faithful service" to Louisiana College by naming the offices where admissions counselors, recruiters, and financial aid employees work the "Byron L. McGee Admissions Suite."

Amid a standing ovation, McGee approached the podium and began to respond when his 18-month-old granddaughter Livy wanted her granddaddy to hold her.

"C'mon, you can come up here and be with me," he beckoned.

With toddler in arms, McGee told the group what a privilege he con-

sidered the experience of getting to know each of them better, "Because I've realized just what great individuals you are. You've got a heart for this school. You've got a heart for people to better themselves."

APPRECIATIVE OF LC

He also expressed appreciation for what Louisiana College has done "for me and my family. I consider it a true privilege to have the opportunity to work here over these years."

McGee thanked the Board of Visitors' for their support of him, but shared special gratitude for their efforts on behalf of LC students.

"There cannot be enough help for our students. They need it. They deserve it," he said.

McGee also was fêted at a Nov. 29 dinner held in his honor.

LC baseball coach Mike Byrnes shared at the event that McGee would "from time-to-time lead our team in pre-game devotionals and did a great job."

Byrnes presented McGee with a baseball jersey bearing an "11," the number worn by McGee's son, Walt, who played baseball for LC.

Tracy Gunter, a 1990 alumnus who majored in business, told LCNews that McGee was "the most steady and constant presence in the LC environment that I can think of. He was the first person I ever met from Louisiana College."

"Byron was also the first person from LC that my wife Susan (LC, 1990) ever met, too. Byron was

a good friend and confidant. He was with us every step of the way."

With a "unique ability to genuinely connect with students, Byron wore his professional hat very well," Gunter said. "Louisiana College was blessed with Byron because there are thousands of others who have been impacted by him and have the same story that I do. My campus visits won't feel the same knowing that Byron is not around."

McGee told the dinner crowd, "This roomful of people means the world to me. I know you as friends. I know you as alums. I know you as colleagues. I know you as employees. Those on the president's leadership team - Dr. Brewer and the team - what a great group of folks to work with."

"I couldn't be happier for the direction of the college. The school is going in a good way," he said. "We overcame some hurdles and I'm tickled to death to have been a part of that."

McGee said he will enjoy seeing where Loui-

siana College "goes from here because it's vital that Louisiana College continue."

"Now more than ever, I'm convinced that we need Christian higher education at this time in our culture," McGee told the audience.

"There are some great schools in this state. I'm not putting any of those down," he said. "But this school is the school that young people should be coming to because they're going to get a great education, and on top of that, they're going to learn from Christian professors, from a Christian perspective, from a Christian worldview."

Louisiana College needs "people who will continue to support it, and I just know the good Lord is going to continue to bless this school for years to come," he said.

"I truly, truly appreciate everything this school has done for me. This school has been my home. I went to school here for four-and-a-half years, left for three years, and came back for 35," McGee said. "Louisiana College is a special place."

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Donor from page 7

friends in the region endorse and support what we are attempting to accomplish at Louisiana College," Brewer said.

Brewer noted that the Board of Visitors he launched in 2015 has grown to 187 members who contribute almost \$250K annually in direct tuition support for students.

The recently established 2020 campaign seeks 20

donors who will commit to giving \$20K by the year 2020. Brewer said eight already have joined.

Exclusive of the Cason gift, recent donations to LC came in amounts of \$100K, \$50K, \$20K, and \$10K.

"We are privileged to have friends like the Casons and so many more," Brewer said. "Offering a college education is not something we can accomplish in a vacuum. We need and appreciate all the financial and prayer support we receive from an ever-broadening base."

Brewer said he is "deeply appreciative of those who tell us they love and support Louisiana College, and pray for us, too. We value these affirmations. But when people step up and give of their means so generously and sacrificially, we are humbled as well as encouraged that the college is headed back in the right direction."

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with Kevin Richard

MARCH 1-2, 2019 | WOMEN'S RETREAT
with Rachel Norris, Speaker & Potter

JUNE 5-8, 2019 | KID'S CAMP
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JUNE & JULY | YOUTH CAMPS
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July 8-12 | July 15-19

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New rules help churches avoid 'parking tax'

By Will Hall
Message Editor

WASHINGTON (LBM)—The Treasury Department issued rules in December 2018 intended to ease the tax burden for churches and charities that offer “reserved parking” to employees.

The action was taken in response to a bill Congress passed in December 2017 requiring non-profits to pay up to a 21 percent tax on transportation and parking benefits provided to employees.

Two rules in particular offer specific relief and remedy for tax year 2018:

-- “Until March 31, 2019, taxpayers that have reserved employee spots ... may change their parking arrangements (changing signage, access, etc.) to decrease or eliminate their reserved employee spots and treat those parking spots as not reserved employee spots for purposes of this notice retroactively to January 1, 2018.”

-- Also, there will be no penalty for failure to pay estimated taxes on designated parking in 2018.

Ultimately, only repeal of the parking tax on non-profits will provide permanent relief. In the meantime, churches may find helpful information from this IRS notice: <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-drop/n-18-99.pdf>.

MacDonald drops out of Pastors Conference

CHICAGO (LBM)—James MacDonald, pastor of the Harvest Bible Church in Chicago, has withdrawn as a speaker for the 2019 SBC Pastors’ Conference.

The Dec. 17 announcement that MacDonald “was stepping away from all outside speaking engagements for a season,” was made by conference president Danny Wood, pastor of Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Birmingham.

The change followed claims made by former

Harvest pastors and staff members published Dec. 13 by *World Magazine*, alleging a pattern of intimidation and mismanagement against MacDonald.

According to *World*, the disputes appeared to be reconciled in 2014 with an apology from MacDonald and a pledge to improve oversight by the church’s elders.

But now the former Harvest leaders say they were “misled” and that there is “no evidence that the character issues involving MacDonald have been resolved.”

In 2012, MacDonald was at the center of a debate about moral behavior because of his participation in casino gambling, a practice he later reported he had ceased, according to the *Christian Examiner*.

Later, he was a member of then-candidate Donald Trump’s Evangelical Executive Advisory Board but resigned from it in October 2016 after news broke about Trump’s vulgar language about a woman, as reported by *Christianity Today*. He subsequently published an article, “Is Donald Trump truly repentant and does it even matter.”

Baptist Press stated MacDonald “has spoken at least four times since 2012” at the SBC Pastors’ Conference and that at the 2015 event he “an-

CULTURAL NEWS

nounced Harvest would begin cooperating with the SBC.”

China’s population reaches tipping point

BEIJING (LBM)—Two researchers have reported that China’s population has shrunk for the first time in 70 years.

Yi Fuxian, a researcher at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Su Jian, an economist with Peking University, used information from China’s National Health Commission to determine that only 10.3 million people were born in China last year, while 11.6 million died.

“The Chinese population has started to decrease for the first time since the founding of New China in 1949, the aging problem has accelerated, and economic vitality has weakened,” Yi told the *Agence France-Presse*.

The news follows recent reports of losses from China’s work force totaling about 20 million from 2011-2016 and revised United Nations estimates that India’s population will overtake China’s in 2024, an event projected to happen in 2050 as recently as recently as a dozen years ago.

China replaced its one-child policy in 2016, allowing couples to have two children in response to depopulation concerns. However, the researchers said the state action was too late and the downward trend is irreversible due to a shrinking number of women of child-bearing age and a growing hesitancy to have larger families because of

the high costs of living.

China’s shrinking population has implications for its economic vitality as well as for the worldwide economy, with predictions now that India, not China, will overtake the U.S. economy.

It is less clear what impact the looming population crisis will have on missions and ministries to the country.

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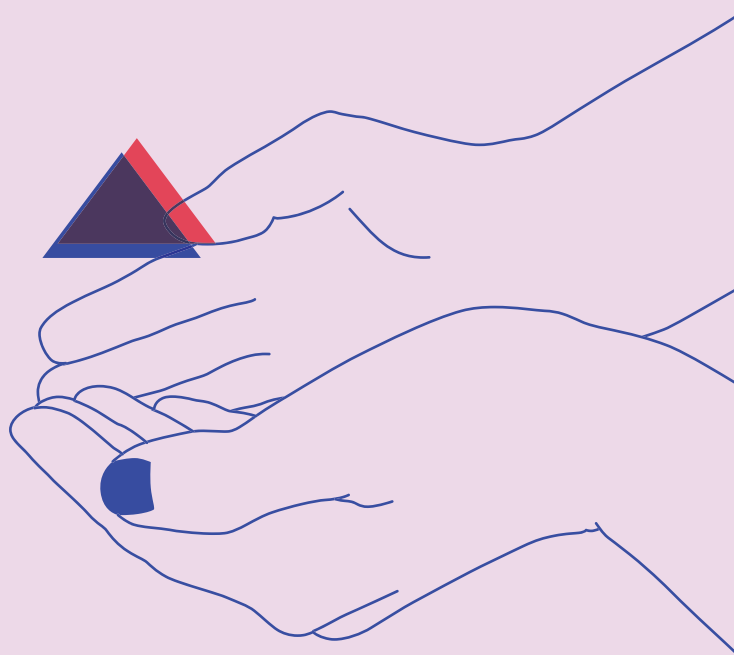
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