



THE BAPTIST MESSAGE

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Brian Blackwell photo

BAGBR Director of Missions Tommy Middleton, former Lanier Baptist pastor T.W. Terral, NOBTS President Jamie Dew and Louisiana Baptists missions and ministry team director John Hebert enjoyed ribbon cutting ceremonies at the new Adoniram Judson, Jr. Missions and Ministry Center Annex.

BAGBR dedicates annex to T.W. & Iris Terral

By Brian Blackwell
Message Staff Writer

BATON ROUGE (LBM) – After nearly 10 years of praying and planning, the Baptist Association of Greater Baton Rouge has opened its new Adoniram Judson, Jr. Missions and Ministries Center Annex.

Pastors, seminary staff and other Louisiana Baptist leaders from around the state gathered Sept. 9 at the BAGBR office to mark the official opening of the facility that was dedicated in honor of T.W. and Iris Terral. He is a former pastor of Lanier Baptist Church in Baton Rouge and was instrumental in starting the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary extension center inside the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola.



Brian Blackwell photo

T.W. Terral and Tommy Middleton were among those on hand to celebrate the opening of the new Adoniram Judson, Jr. Missions and Ministries Center Annex, which is dedicated to Terral and his wife, Iris.

Tommy Middleton, director of missions for BAGBR, told the *Baptist Message* Terral was “due” the honor because of his contributions to Kingdom

work in the state.

“We stand on the shoulders of T.W. Terral,” Middleton said. “He’s been

See ANNEX, page 4

Grandfather ‘births’ granddaughter at Walker

By Brian Blackwell
Message Staff Writer

WALKER (LBM) – Minister of students, Ray McCon, lifted his hands upward in celebration after he baptized his granddaughter, Lila Silk, at Walker Baptist Church, Sept. 8.

“Baptizing my granddaughter immediately gave me a feeling of joy,” McCon told the *Baptist Message*. “It was gratifying to know that we as her family had laid down a spiritual foundation that made this possible.

Silk turned to Christ after an invitation was issued during a worship service Aug. 11, when the church baptized 14 new converts. McCon was ecstatic knowing his granddaughter took that step of faith to publicly declare her relationship with Christ.

“After she walked up out of the baptistery I raised both hands in the air in victory, and our congregation cheered,” he continued. “All I could think was God has blessed me. He gave me that privi-

lege and I was honored to have that opportunity.”

McCon also baptized two of his “legacy kids” – children of youth who participated in the youth group during the early days of his 21 years of continuous ministry at Walker.

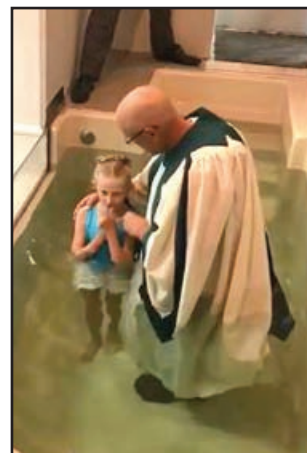
A month earlier, McCon baptized five additional “legacy kids” on a day when nine other new converts stirred the waters. The church has baptized 20 since January, the most since 2011 when they ended the year with 21.

Silk and the two “legacy kids” who were baptized Sept. 8 were among the hundreds of Southern Baptist churches who participated in Baptism Sunday, a special emphasis on the Southern Baptist Convention calendar.

Steve Horn, executive director for Louisiana Baptists, was encouraged to see churches like Walker Baptist take part in this nationwide initiative.

“I want to thank every pastor who led their

See BIRTHS, page 6



In this screen shot from a Facebook video, Ray McCon, minister of students at Walker Baptist Church, baptizes his granddaughter, Lila Silk, Sept. 8. Silk is among a wave of new converts baptized since August at Walker Baptist.

NOBTS, LC sign articulation agreement

By Gary D. Myers
NOBTS Communications

NEW ORLEANS (NOBTS News) – New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and Louisiana

College recently signed an articulation agreement designed to help God-called men and women save time and money as they prepare for ministry.

The agreement, signed

by NOBTS president Jamie Dew and LC president Rick Brewer, paves the way for Mission & Ministries majors from LC to

See AGREEMENT, page 5

Skills of a church planter: Create ownership (Part 2)

ALEXANDRIA (LBM) – Acts 28 describes the Apostle Paul’s first imprisonment in Rome as a sort of home confinement with a live-in guard and that for “two whole years” he was “able to welcome all who came to see him.”

One of the “all” who was with him during much of that time was Timothy, who already was a



JOHN HEBERT
Team Leader
Louisiana Baptist
Missions & Ministry

recognized evangelist and overseer among the churches in Europe and Asia Minor, but he still was growing in spiritual maturity under the tutelage of Paul.

They first met on Paul’s second missionary journey and throughout the following 14 years, or so, Timothy progressed in leadership and was sent by

Paul to be his representative to Corinth and later to Thessalonica. Finally, Paul sent Timothy to Philippi and told the church there, “I have no one else like him” (Philippians 2:20), acknowledging his extensive personal investment in developing Timothy to serve as a leader.

Indeed, Timothy’s path of leadership growth is a prime example of how leaders are developed over time through the passing along of wisdom

from leader to follower combined with situational opportunities that allow a follower to test and develop his or her own skills.

This time-honored approach requires patience from mentors – with coaching as needed while allowing the follower to experience success and failure (part of creating ownership).

But the key to success for the mentor depends in large part on recruitment, or selection.

Not every person can do the job.

But it’s obvious that on his second missionary journey that Paul saw something very special in Timothy because within a relatively short time of meeting him, he asked the lad (16 years old at the

time) to join the missionary team he was leading.

Not everyone is capable of leading, so choosing good recruits is essential because of the time a leader must invest in that person.

In his book, “Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun,” Wes Roberts declared, “If all Huns were blind, a one-eyed warrior would be their king.” The insinuation, of course, is that for blind Huns a one-eyed King would do. But that is a low bar for leadership.

Be careful not to recruit “one-eyed kings” -- leaders with limited ability. Effective leaders either already have developed, or, are capable of developing a robust leadership skill set. Moreover, leaders largely are known for the kind of leaders they develop and launch into leadership positions.

It’s obvious that Timothy was not a “one-eyed king” but instead, was a young man of much potential. “The brothers at Lysstra and Iconium spoke well of him,” Luke reported in Acts 16:2.

See OWNERSHIP, page 7

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Manuel shares good news at LC Great Commission Seminar

By **Brian Blackwell**
Message Staff Writer

PINEVILLE (LBM)--In a day when fewer young professionals nationwide are attending worship services as consistently as prior generations, Louisiana Baptist young adults are bucking the trend, Keith Manuel said during the C3: Christ, Church, Culture Apologetics Conference in Louisiana College's Guinn Auditorium, Sept. 9.

The C3 Apologetics Conference is part of LC's Great Commission Seminar.

"God is doing some great things in and through our Millennials," he said. "And I believe we can reach this state through the things they love."

Citing a Barna study, Manuel said 47 percent of Millennials (those born between 1981 and 1996)



Marvin Jones, assistant professor of theology and church history at Louisiana College, is coordinator for the C3 Apologetics Conference.

and 27 percent of Generation Z (those born between 1997 and 2012) agree that "it is wrong to share one's personal beliefs with someone of a different faith in hopes that they will one day share the same faith."

However, during his travels around the state, Manuel said he gathered

much hope for the faithfulness of Louisiana Baptist students.

Manuel believes the next generation of Christ followers will become passionate about evangelism, participation in mission trips, service to their community and helping the less fortunate.

"I hope you're learning to pray while you're here, that your prayer life is enhanced," Manuel said. "The way that your prayer life is enhanced is to read the Bible."

Marvin Jones, assistant professor of theology and church history and coordinator of the C3 Apologetic Conferences, said Manuel was the perfect choice to lead off the 2019-20 series.

"Dr. Keith Manuel was the obvious choice for the kickoff of the C3 Conference on Millennials and how they impact

See C3, page 6



Brian Blackwell photo

Keith Manuel, evangelism and church growth team director for Louisiana Baptists, said during the C3 Conference that God is moving among young adults in the state.

IMPART. TRUTH. TODAY.

"... we will tell the next generation ...
even the children not yet born ..."

Ps 78:4,6 NLT

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State Goal:

\$1,700,000

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Annex from page one

impacting the work in this area for six decades. His footprint is quite large, spiritually, and he is deserving of great honor."

The facility will house a church planting incubator – where new church starts can use space for offices and worship, a New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary extension center, a pastoral ministry training space, and, a Louisiana Baptist disaster relief "hub" that will offer shower and

preparation areas.

Jamie Dew, president of NOBTS, told the crowd at the ribbon cutting that the seminary was excited to have such a facility that will support the equipping of future ministry leaders.

"We exist for you," he said. "You folks are the ones that are on the front lines. You folks are the ones doing Kingdom work and that God is using in a mighty way. Our job is to come alongside and train, sup-

port, and help and to enable and to empower. We have a desire to see an army, a generation of people, coming out of our campus back into our churches, back into the broken parts of this world, and there serve Christ and serve those people."

Under the direction of Mike Shumock, who serves as missions builder strategist for Louisiana Baptists and is the coordinator for Baptist Builders, a construction missions group, teams worked since January with Louisiana Baptists to frame and install sheetrock, electrical wiring and plumbing systems inside the 1,700-square-foot facility.

Volunteers included members from Istrouma Baptist Church, Baton Rouge, Florida Boulevard Baptist Church, Baton Rouge, Faith Baptist Church, Livonia, First Baptist Church, Livingston, First Baptist Church, Sumrall, and First Baptist Church, Crosby, Mississippi.

"The vision of the church as being an incubator is what drew us to this project," Shumock said. "This



Ministry leaders from across the state pray for Baptist Association of Greater Baton Rouge team members who are participating in upcoming international missions trips.

was in the area of missions to help start new churches and help them grow to the point where they could turn around get their own facilities."

Shumock said the BAGBR project is the fifth one undertaken by Baptist Builder volunteers this year:

— In May, Mississippi Baptists helped rebuild a 5,000-square-foot education facility for Suburban Baptist Church in New Orleans, which lost several of its buildings after an EF-3 tornado touched down in the area Feb. 7, 2017.

— In early June, a team from Franklin Creek Baptist Association in Alabama, with assistance from a Wisconsin Baptist volunteer, helped the Korean Baptist Church in Leesville build a 3,000-square-foot multipurpose facility.

— In late June, members of El Renuevo Hispanic

Baptist Church in Lafayette finished Moreauville Community Church's 2,880-square-foot worship center and food pantry.

Other projects planned for 2019 include construction of a 1,200-square-foot addition to the worship center for Greys Creek Baptist Church in Denham Springs, which was heavily damaged in the flood of 2016; building an 8,000-square-foot multi-purpose facility at First Baptist Church in Napoleonville; constructing a 20,000-square-foot multi-purpose facility at First Baptist Church in Port Barre; and, building a 3,000-square-foot multi-purpose facility at Korean Baptist Church in Leesville.

To learn more about volunteering with the Baptist Builders call 225.975.0848 or visit facebook.com/groups/baptistbuilders

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At 5 p.m., a variety of wild game dishes will be available to enjoy, as well as booths and demonstrations related to outdoor sports. At 7 p.m. the program begins with guest speaker Gevan Spinney, Pastor, First Baptist, Haughton, and co-host of the outdoor show "The Way it Was" on the Pursuit Channel.

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 E-mail: abccamp@abccamp.com Website: www.abccamp.com

GUEST SPEAKER

GEVAN SPINNEY

Pastor, First Baptist Haughton

Co-Host of Outdoor show 'The Way it Was'

Agreement from page one

apply a portion of their undergraduate coursework to the Accelerated Master of Divinity program at NOBTS (Accelerated M.Div.).

The program reduces educational redundancy and the time it takes to complete the M.Div. by leveraging the quality biblical studies and ministry instruction students receive at LC.

Students who are approved for this advanced standing can complete the M.Div. degree at NOBTS faster than students who are not eligible for the program.

According to Dew, the main goal of the agreement is to advance the gospel by helping God-called men and women complete their ministry preparation in a timely manner.

"With an eye towards advancing Christ's Kingdom, it is absolutely vital that we provide efficient avenues for our students to receive theological preparation," Dew said. "As such, we are excited about our

partnership with Louisiana College that enables students to expedite their education by qualifying for advanced standing in the M.Div. program at NOBTS."

"Collaboration is a vital strategy to help place qualified ministers in the work of God's kingdom in a timely manner. We appreciate the vision of Dr. Dew and his cooperation in such an endeavor," Louisiana College President Rick Brewer said. "We both see this as a win-win for each institution. But more than that, this is also win-win for God-called students and our spiritually needy world that urgently needs to see and hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

Qualifying students can receive advanced standing for up to 25 percent of the M.Div. degree.

This allows Accelerated M.Div. students to enter NOBTS with a significant number of hours toward the 84-hour standard M.Div. Since students are not charged advanced



NOBTS file photo

An agreement signed by Louisiana College and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary will allow LC missions & ministries majors to apply a portion of their undergrad coursework to the Accelerated Master of Divinity at NOBTS.

M.Div. credits, they are able to save thousands of dollars while completing a degree.

In preparation for the agreement, the two schools worked together to identify courses at LC which were comparable or equivalent to NOBTS courses. NOBTS then matched the qualifying courses with courses in the NOBTS M.Div. pro-

gram.

LC students and graduates must meet additional requirements to qualify for the Accelerated M.Div. Potential Accelerated M.Div. students must apply to NOBTS and meet all the admissions requirements for the school.

Students must have earned a "B" or higher in a qualifying undergradu-

ate course to receive credit toward a master's course. In addition, the credits can only be applied to the Accelerated M.Div. program within five years of a student's baccalaureate graduation.

For more information and a complete list of qualifying courses, visit www.nobts.edu/acceleratedmdiv.

JANUARY BIBLE STUDY 2020 PREVIEWS /// JEREMIAH: FAITHFUL TO THE MISSION

JEREMIAH FAITHFUL TO THE MISSION



Led by **DENNIS COLE**
Professor of Old Testament and Archaeology
Occupying the McFarland Chair of Archaeology
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary



JEFF INGRAM
Louisiana Baptists
Adult Ministry & Church Administration Strategist
Jeff.Ingram@louisianabaptists.org



Louisiana Baptist Convention
1250 MacArthur Drive • P.O. Box 311 • Alexandria, LA 71303
Phone: 800.622.6549

Mon. **14** 9:30am - 12:00pm
Oct.

NOBTS • Providence Learning Center
3939 Gentilly Boulevard, New Orleans, LA
New Orleans Baptist Association
AMS, Leroy Fountain • 504.282.1428

Mon. **14** 6:00pm - 8:30pm
Oct.

Bayou Baptist Association Office
4494 West Main Street, Gray, LA 70539
Bayou Baptist Association
AMS, Joe Arnold • 985.868.7352

Tue. **15** 6:00pm - 8:30pm
Oct.

First Baptist Church, Greensburg
6260 Highway 10, Greensburg, LA 70441
Baptists Associations of Southeast LA
AMS, Stan Statham • 985.839.3827

Wed. **16** 10:30am - 1:30pm
Oct.

Louisiana Baptist Building (lunch provided)
1250 MacArthur Drive, Alexandria, LA 71303
CenLa Baptist Association
AMS, Darryl Stagg • 318.449.4353

Thu. **17** 9:30am - 12:00pm
Oct.

Northwest LA Baptist Association Office
5875 West 70th St., Shreveport, LA 71129
Northwest La Baptist Association
AMS, Lane Moore • 318.686.5786

Thu. **17** 6:00pm - 8:30pm
Oct.

Morehouse, Northeast Louisiana
Baptist Association Office
7103 DeSiard St., Monroe, LA 71203
Morehouse, Northeast LA Baptist Associations
AMS, Jerry Price • 318.537.9548

MORE INFORMATION AND REGISTRATION ///
LouisianaBaptists.org/JBSpreview

*Printable registration forms are also available online.



Births from page one

church to participate in Baptism Sunday either by baptizing or preaching on baptism," Horn said. "As a

pastor, I adopted a philosophy to preach specifically on the subject of baptism at least once a year. Calling

people to believe and to be baptized is basic to the Great Commission. I pray now that our churches will seek to disciple those who were baptized, which leads to further evangelism."

Pastor of Family Life, Justin Woulard, said the baptisms at Walker Baptist reflect a spiritual revival happening within the congregation. Like McCon, Woulard recently was blessed to baptize a loved one: his son, Judah.

"I picked him up and hugged him because I thought I might start crying," Woulard, who serves as pastor of Family Life, Woulard said of the Aug. 11 baptism. "I had seen so many people in our church pour into him and disciple him the last couple



Submitted photo

Ray McCon (seated left), minister of students, and Justin Woulard, pastor of Family Life, pose with 10 of the 15 students baptized on Sunday, Aug. 11 at Walker Baptist Church.

of years that this moment just made me, as a proud father, tear up."

The church, which averages 310, combined, for its two Sunday morning worship services, offers dis-

cipleship classes for children, youth, senior adults and others. Some members also volunteer bi-weekly at the church's food pantry to help provide food to needy residents of the city. Others provide Bibles for distribution in Belarus and some take a mission trip to do community outreach with a church in New York City.

"I've been praying for revival in our state," Interim Pastor Lonnie Wascom said. "I don't care who He starts with but I don't want Him to leave us out. We are excited about what God has in store for Walker Baptist and we are praying we continue to be obedient to His plan for us."

Look at baptismessage.com for more photos of baptisms across Louisiana on Baptism Sunday.

C3 from page 3

the church," Jones said. "His studies which are supported by his personal ministry to Millennials are groundbreaking in that he, unlike most of his contemporaries who study Millennial patterns, sees a bright future for the church and for Millennials relating to the Church. Keith's presentation was relevant to the topic, including new statistical analysis, behavioral insights, and passion for this generation. I am thankful for Keith's friendship through the years and grateful for his ministry to Louisiana Baptist and Louisiana College."

Dates for the next C3 Conference will be announced as details are finalized.



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WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS FOR THE CHURCHES?

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- Church members will see their Cooperative Program and Georgia Barnette gifts at work seeding God's truth in their communities.

For more info on how your church can connect with Here for You, visit LouisianaBaptists.org/HereForYou and enter the password **luke1423**.

Students see 'M-azing' growth at 2019 M-fuge

By Brian Blackwell
Message Staff Writer

PINEVILLE – Many students entered the recent Ministry Fuge camp at Louisiana College looking for an opportunity to serve others and left having had an encounter with Christ.

Six campers repented for salvation, eight repented to restore fellowship with the Lord, three indicated a Holy Spirit call to ministry and eight made some other spiritual decision, according to Carol Pipes, media representative for LifeWay Christian Resources.

Throughout the week of July 15-19, the 115 middle and high school students from churches in Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas enjoyed a time of worship and Bible study at the Pineville campus each morning and then dispersed into smaller teams to minister

throughout the community.

Students held Backyard Bible clubs in Pineville at the Wardville campus of the Gathering Place, and in Alexandria packed boxes at the Food Bank of Central Louisiana and spruced up the grounds and facilities at the Hope House for battered women.

"We are pleased to continue hosting Lifeway's M-Fuge summer camps on our campus," Louisiana College President Rick Brewer told the *Baptist Message*. "Plans include an expansion of M-Fuge camp offerings at the College in future years offering more high school students the opportunity to experience our campus while responding to the Lord in service and worship."

Since 1995, LifeWay Christian Resource's M-Fuge camps have given students an opportunity to participate in Bible



Brian Blackwell photo

A student helps pack boxes at the Food Bank of Central Louisiana during M-Fuge, hosted by Louisiana College in Pineville, July 15-19. The camp allows students to serve at ministry sites throughout Alexandria and Pineville.

study and share the Gospel through mission activities. M-Fuge is part of four FUGE camps that take students out of their normal routines and place them into an environment focused on life change through a relationship with Christ. FUGE camps

See M-FUGE, page 8

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Ownership from page 2

The mistake made too often by leaders is to just "fill the position."

Don't recruit people just to fill positions.

Set a goal to find individuals capable of leading – those who are receptive of the vision, and, responsive to the intrinsic motivation of "taking charge" while you train them for the task, give them freedom to complete the job and hold them accountable for the results (the process of

creating ownership).

Give them ongoing encouragement and coaching, but let them work to solve the problems. Then celebrate the victories as they become an extension of your ministry.

Then find other recruits and "rewind and repeat."

Developing effective leaders takes time. But if done right, you, too, will be able to say of your mentee, "I have no one else like him."

(Copy and post this friendly reminder)

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Christian woman needed to serve in HomePlace, a transitional living ministry for homeless children and their mothers. This full-time position in Monroe includes salary, housing, benefits, paid vacation and training. Must have a sense of call and commitment to a ministry of service to children and families. Position requires 24-hour work schedule.

Please send résumé to Susan Clark at sclark@lbch.org or contact at 318.343.2244.





LC photo

Since 1979, LifeWay's FUGE Camps have seen God work in the lives of more than 1.7 million students and adults. During the week of July 15-19, 115 middle and high school students from churches in Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas enjoyed a time of worship and Bible study on the Louisiana College campus and then dispersed into smaller teams to minister throughout the community.



Brian Blackwell photo

M-Fuge allows students to serve Christ at numerous ministry sites in Alexandria and Pineville, such as the Gathering Place's Wardville campus in Pineville. These students do community outreach at the church, which includes face painting.

OCTOBER 18-19, 2019
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MINISTERS' WIVES' RETREAT
'19

Speaker:
Leighann McCoy

Musicians/Worship Leaders:
Lana & Josh Carver

LouisianaBaptists.org/MWR

M-Fuge from page 7

are for students having completed 6th grade through 12th grade. Youth pastors can choose from one of four programs at FUGE — Centrifuge, M-Fuge, X-Fuge and X-Fuge on Mission.

This year's theme for all four FUGE camps was "Restored" which focused on how God sent a perfect Savior as the remedy to repair what was broken.

Cassie Cook, an eleventh grader from Ephesus Baptist Church in Forest, Mississippi, enjoyed painting faces of children from the Wardville neighborhood at the Gathering Place.

"I've had a blast and have loved the opportunity to get involved with where Christ is at work," Cook said. "This week has reminded me that it's important to communicate Jesus' love with everyone."

Teresa Thomas, an adult leader with the First Baptist Church in Lumberton, North Carolina, enjoyed watching her students step out of their comfort zones to share the Gospel.

"It's so important for them to be the hands and feet of Christ, and I'm thankful this camp has allowed them to put it into practice," Thomas said. "They will, hopefully, come back to their own community even more fired up to share Him."

Democratic Party chooses 'godless' over 'God-fearing'

By Will Hall

Message Executive Editor

SAN FRANCISCO (LBM)—The Democratic National Committee has passed a resolution praising the religiously unaffiliated while at the same time condemning people of faith who do not support a liberal political agenda.

In the "Resolution Regarding Religiously Unaffiliated Demographic" the DNC cited the growth of the number of religiously unaffiliated among Democrats, calling the demographic "the largest religious group within the Democratic Party," and praising the fact that they "share the Democratic Party's values, with 70% voting for Democrats, 80% supporting same-sex marriage, and 61% saying immigrants make American society stronger."

Meanwhile, in the same resolution, the DNC denounced those who use their "religious views" to define their "morals, values, and patriotism" and rebuked anyone who believes "religious liberty" protects these views against the competing views of the LGBT community and other opposing groups.

The resolution was championed with the DNC by the Secular Coalition of America, a group that lobbies for atheists, agnostics and humanists.



RESEARCH: Students who delay dating are better adjusted than peers

ATHENS, Ga. (LBM)—Researchers with the College of Public Health of the University of Georgia have found that "non-dating" adolescents are less likely

to exhibit depression and are rated above their peers in social skills and leadership ability.

The importance of the study is embedded in statistics that show 56 percent of girls and 49 percent of boys who are 15 years old report having had at least one special romantic relationship in the previous 18 months.

The study involved nearly 600 sophomores who were compared as four groups with regard to dating (low, increasing, high, frequent) to see how they "differed on emotional, interpersonal, and adaptive skills," using teacher observations in the three areas and student self-reports (positive relationships, depression and suicidal ideation).

The data showed that "adolescents who were not in a romantic relationship had good social skills and low depression" compared to peers who dated.



The Arizona Supreme Court voted 4-3 in favor of Christian artists Joanna Duka (left) and Breanna Koski, owners of Brush & Nib Studio. The court said a Phoenix measure was coercive, stating in the majority opinion that "an individual has autonomy over his or her speech and thus may not be forced to speak a message he or she does not wish to say." Alliance Defending Freedom photo

Arizona Supreme Court rules in favor of Christian artists

PHOENIX (LBM) — The Arizona Supreme Court has ruled in favor of Christian friends who serve homosexuals among the clientele of their calligraphy and hand-painting business, but ran afoul of a city ordinance by refusing to honor same-sex weddings with their artwork.

State law prohibits businesses from dis-

CULTURAL NEWS

criminating, but does not include homosexuality as a protected class. However, Phoenix is one of four Arizona cities that passed ordinances that offer special rights regarding sexual orientation and do not allow exceptions for religious convictions with regard to providing services for same-sex weddings.

Consequently, the owners of the Brush and Nib Studio, Joanna Duka and Breanna Koski, faced

finances up to \$2,500 and six months in jail for each day they refused to comply with the ordinance with regard to using their talents to create wedding invitations for same-sex couples.

The Arizona Supreme Court voted 4-3 that the Phoenix measure was coercive, stating in the majority opinion that "an individual has autonomy over his or her speech and thus may not be forced to speak a message he or she does not wish to say." The court cited the pre-

cedent of the federal First Amendment in making a narrow the application of its ruling, limited to only the creation of custom wedding invitations by Duka and Koski. Consequently, other Christian business owners will need to file separate lawsuits if they feel municipal ordinances infringe upon their religious beliefs regarding same-sex weddings.

The city is considering a potential appeal, with the mayor describing the religious beliefs of Duka and Koski as "hate."

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First Baptist Church, Tallulah, LA is seeking a full-time pastor. Please mail résumés to First Baptist Church, 700 Bayou Dr., Tallulah, LA 71282 or email fbctallulah@att.net.

SEEKING CHILDREN'S DIRECTOR
Gloster Baptist Church, 6892 Highway 5, Gloster, LA. Part-time-20 hours per week. Duties shall include directing and coordinating all children's ministry programs and events for children ages kindergarten-5th grade.
Please contact our search committee at studentministersearch@glosterbaptist.org or by calling David Means at 318.933.5356.

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Ebenezer Baptist Church of Jonesboro, LA is currently seeking God's person to serve in the role of full time Minister of Worship and Families. The ideal person would have proficiency in music as well as experience directing a choir, including special events, leading worship, teaching/ministering to families, and other ministry experience. Some Theological education is preferred but not required.
Email résumés to: office@ebcchurch.com
Mail-in résumés to: Ebenezer Baptist Church 211 Ebenezer Church Road Jonesboro, LA 71251

EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH, EL DORADO, AR SEEKS A FULL-TIME PASTOR
Ebenezer Baptist Church, AR is in search of a full-time Pastor. Please send cover letter and résumés to Pastor Search Committee, 1942 North Wyatt Drive • El Dorado, AR 71730 or e-mail your résumé to myebcchurch@yahoo.com. Résumés will be taken until November 1, 2019.

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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

■ Colt Waagner, David Ray Robertson, Dustin Cunningham were licensed to the gospel ministry during the final night of the Hot August Night Revival at Old Zion Hill Baptist Church, Independence. Pastor: Gary Dennis.

■ Jay Foster is the new interim pastor at Bethesda Baptist Church, Ida.

■ Ren Watkins has left Broadmoor Baptist Church, Shreveport as middle school minister for First Baptist Church, Moss Bluff.

■ Michael Sanders is the new pastor at West Lake Baptist Church, Doynline.

■ David Martin has retired from Hopewell Baptist Church, Spearsville.

■ John Rushing is the new pastor at Sardis Baptist Church, Farmerville.

HOMECOMING

■ Glenmora Baptist Church, Glenmora: 125th Homecoming Celebration, September 27-29, Friday, 6:30 p.m. Speaker: Todd Burnaman; Saturday, 6:30 p.m. Speaker: Neil Treme; Sunday, 11 a.m. Speaker: Jeremy Blocker. Dinner on the grounds will follow the Sunday worship service. If you have any questions or need directions please call 318.748.4565, Glenmora Baptist Church, 910 9th St., Glenmora, La 71433. Pastor: Neil Treme.

■ Oak Hill Baptist Church, Bastrop: 65th Homecoming, September 29, 10:30 a.m. Speaker: Chad Tingle will bring a message in song. Pastor: Andy Myrick.

■ Conway Baptist Church, Marion: Homecoming, September 29, 10 a.m. (Southern Revelation in concert), 11 a.m. Memorial and Worship service. Lunch will follow in the Family Life Center. Guest Speaker: J.E. Brown. The church is located north of Farmerville at 4323 Hwy 549. Friends and families of present and former members are invited to attend. Pastor: Paul Carter.

■ Magnolia Baptist Church, Holden: 100th Anniversary Celebration, September 29, 10:30 a.m. dinner on the grounds will follow the service. The church is located at 21445 LA Hwy. 442, Holden, LA. Pastor: Berkley Boyd.

■ Alto Baptist Church, Alto: Homecoming Celebration, September 29, 10:30 a.m. Dinner will follow the worship service. Speaker: Steve Horn, Executive Director of Louisiana Baptist Convention. Pastor: Alan Miller.

■ Jamestown Baptist Church, Jamestown: Homecoming, September 29, 10:30 a.m. There will be a covered-dish lunch following the worship service. Guest Speaker: Kent Lenard. The church is located at 5852 Hwy 154, Jamestown LA 71045. Pastor: Stan Foster.

■ Prosperity Baptist Church, Jonesville: 88th Homecoming Celebration, October 6, Sunday School 10 a.m. and Worship, 10:45 a.m. A covered dish meal will follow the worship service. Guest Speaker: XXXXX Music: Stillwater will be in concert following the meal from 1:30 – 2:30 p.m. Pastor: Tommy Sanson.

■ Main Street Baptist Church, Bogalusa: 110th Homecoming, October 6, 10:45 a.m. There will

be dinner on the grounds following the worship service. Speaker: Harold Gaddy. Pastor: Patrick Magee.

REVIVAL

■ Dixie Baptist Church, Sieper: Revival, September 25-29. Evangelist: Mackey Willis Family. Pastor: Brandon Smith.

■ First Baptist Church, Winnsboro: Harvest Day, September 29, 10:55 a.m. (morning worship); 5th Sunday Singing, 5 p.m. There will be a finger food fellowship following the evening service. A Harvest Day offering will be received.

■ Philadelphia Baptist Church at Horseshoe Drive, Alexandria: Revival, September 29-October 2, Sunday, 5:30 p.m. and Monday-Wednesday, 6:30 p.m. nightly. Evangelist: Bill Britt. Music: Ben Waites (September 30), Octavia (October 1). Pastor: Clay Fuqua.

■ First Baptist Church, Simsboro: Revival, September 29-October 2, Evangelist: 2TALK42 Ministries. Pastor: Jason Cole.

■ Chase Baptist Church, Chase: Revival, September 29 - October 3. Evangelist: Sam Moore. Pastor: Dale Goodman.

■ Mangham Baptist Church, Mangham: Revival, September 29 – October 3, 6:30 p.m. Evangelist: Casey Johnson. Pastor: Rick Aultman.

■ Pioneer Baptist Church, Pioneer: Fall Revival, October 6-9, Sunday, 9:30 a.m. (Sunday School) 10:45 a.m. (Revival Worship) and 5 p.m. (Revival Worship), Monday-Wednesday 6:30 p.m. After Sunday's PM Revival Worship there will be a fellowship meal. Speaker: Bill Robertson. Worship: Ben Waites. Pioneer is located at 6029 Broadway Street (Highway 17), Pioneer. For more information, please call 318.282.8653. Pastor: Gary Wolfe.

■ New Prospect Baptist Church, Dry Prong: Fall Revival, October 6-9, Sunday, 6 p.m.; Monday-Wednesday, 6:30 p.m. Evangelist: Dick Debusk. Music: Price Harris. Pastor: Trey Lewis.

■ Gray Baptist Church, Jefferson, Texas: Fall Revival, October 6-9, Sunday, 11 a.m. & 6 p.m.; Monday-Wednesday 6:30 p.m. nightly. Evangelist: Marvin Cooper, pastor of Bethany Baptist Church, Bethany. Worship Music: Trees Baptist praise band. Pastor: Roy Davis.

■ Longview Baptist Church, Deville: Revival – Sunday nights in October, October 6, 6 p.m., Speaker: Wayne Jones, Music: Catahoula Drive, October 13, 6 p.m., Speaker: Daryl Stagg, Music: Longview Youth Band; October 20, 6 p.m., Speaker: Tim Patrick. Music: Robbie Briggs, October 27, 6 p.m. Speaker: Andrew Scull, Music: Kortnie Scull Family. Pastor: Robby Poole.

LAGNIAPPE

■ First Baptist Church, Lafayette: The Hope Encounter Tour, September 26, 7 p.m. Worship: Danny Gokey and Coby James. Cost: \$75 (VIP), early entry (\$35), general admission, \$20. Pastor: Reggie Ogea.

■ Clara Springs Baptist Camp, Pelican: Marriage Matters Now with Steve and Debbie Wilson, September 27-28, Friday 6-8 p.m.; Saturday 8 a.m. – noon. Cost: \$50 per couple (price includes meals. Cabins are available for an additional \$60.) Register by email:318conference@gmail.com.

■ First Baptist Church, Covington: The Hope Encounter Tour, September 27, 7 p.m. Worship: Danny Gokey and Coby James. Cost: \$75 (VIP), Early entry (\$35), general admission, \$20. Pastor: Waylon Bailey.

■ First Baptist Church, Haynesville: Fifth Quar-

ter, September 27, 10 p.m. Guest Speaker: Luke Hockenjos. Pastor: Jeff Tinsley.

■ Beouf River Baptist Church Winnsboro: Men's Sportsman Event, September 28, Pastor: Kevin Goodman.

■ Chase Baptist Church, Chase: Blessing of the Hunt, September 28, doors open at 5 p.m.; dinner at 6 p.m. in the Family Life Center. Speaker: R. Larry Moyer, Founder and CEO of EvanTell. Cost: \$2.50 in advance, \$5 at the door. The church is located at 569, Hwy 3210, Chase. Pastor: Dale Goodman.

■ Mulberry Baptist Church, Houma: Beth Moore Living Proof Simulcast, September 28, 8:30 a.m. – 3:30 a.m. Cost: \$25 includes lunch and snack. To register go to mbcwomen.eventbrite.com. Pastor: Brad Simon.

■ First Baptist Church, Lafayette: Refresh 2019 – Look Up, September 28, 9 a.m. – 3 p.m. Guest Speaker: Kathy Nelson. Worship Music: Tyler and Aimee Hennessee. Childcare will be available. Register at fbclaf.org/refresh. Pastor: Reggie Ogea.

■ Friendship Baptist Church, Bienville: Southern Plainsmen in concert, September 28, 6 p.m. Pastor: Robert Leach.

■ Esler Baptist Church, Pineville: Blessing of the Hunt Sunday, September 29, Sunday School, 9:30 a.m., Worship: 10:45 a.m. Dinner on the grounds will follow the worship service. Wear your camo. Pastor: Joshua Timothy.

■ New Hope Baptist Church, Choudrant: Sanctuary Quartet in concert, September 29, 11 a.m. Pastor: Dwayne Monk.

■ Canaan Baptist Church, Spearsville: Luke Hockenjos guest speaker, September 29, 11 a.m. Pastor: Brian Williams.

■ Creston Baptist Church, Saline: Southern Plainsmen in concert, September 29, 10:30 a.m. A love offering will be taken. Pastor: Truman Leach.

■ First Baptist Church, Winnsboro: Fifth Sunday singing, September 29, 5 p.m. Finger foods to follow singing. Pastor: Craig Beeman.

■ First Baptist Church, Winnfield: The Big Sing,

September 29, 6 p.m. Benji Harlan will be conducting the 200-voice choir made up of several congregations throughout Louisiana. In addition to organ and piano, the choir will be accompanied by a brass ensemble comprised of musicians from Northwestern State University.

■ Kingston Road Baptist Church, Shreveport: Fifth Sunday Singing, September 29, 4-6 p.m. Pastor: Jeremy Spurling.

■ Grace Memorial Baptist Church, Slidell: The Voices of Louisiana College, September 29, 11 a.m. Pastor: Dennis Phelps.

Trinity Baptist Church, Oakdale: Master4 Southern Gospel Quartet in Concert, September 29, 10:45 a.m. A covered dish meal will follow the worship service. A love offering will be taken. Everyone is welcome. Pastor: Dennis LaFleur.

■ Hodge Baptist Church, Hodge: Southern Plainsmen in concert, September 29, 5 p.m. A love offering will be taken.

■ Rocky Springs Baptist Church, Lisbon: Peterson-Brown Music Celebration Concert, September 29, 5:30 p.m. Original music and poetry by David Peterson and Lane Brown. Pastor: Larry Sellers.

■ Good Pine Baptist Church, Jena: Sanctuary Quartet in concert, September 29. Pastor: Brandon Poole.

■ Philadelphia Baptist Church at Horseshoe Drive, Alexandria: Ben Waites in concert, September 30, 6:30 p.m. Pastor: Clay Fuqua.

■ First Baptist Church, Dubach: Trevor Thomas Drama Ministries, October 2, 6 p.m. Pastor: Cory Bruce.

■ Wilda Baptist Church, Boyce: Trevor Thomas Drama Ministries, October 4, 7 p.m. Pastor: Joey Rudisill.

■ Pine Grove Baptist Church, Ruby: Trevor Thomas Drama Ministries, October 5, 6 p.m. Pastor: Brent Romero.

■ Old Zion Hill Baptist Church, Independence: Joni and Friends Wheelchair Drive, October 5 & 19, 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. Each wheelchair, wheelchair parts, cushions, trays, foot and leg rests,

lap blankets, aluminum crutches, crutch tips and sleeves for crutches, canes and collapsible walkers given to Joni and Friends gets restored and gifted to someone who has only ever dreamed of mobility. The drive will take place at 129 Calhoun Street, Independence. For more information, call Kathy Hayden at 985.517.8475 or email her at kathyayden66@yahoo.com. Pastor: Gary Dennis.

■ Pioneer Baptist Church, Pioneer: Ben Waites in concert, October 6, 10:45 a.m. Pastor: Gary Wolfe.

■ Ruple Baptist Church, Haynesville: Southern Plainsmen in concert, October 6, 11 a.m. Pastor: Jerry Gill.

■ First Baptist Church, West Monroe: Refresh Conference, October 6-8. Refresh: A Night of Worship with Shane & Shane, October 6, 6-8 p.m. Special Message: David Nasser. October 9: James Merritt, Touching Lives Ministries will speak. Cost: Free. Tickets are FREE but reserve your seats now on First West's ticketing portal. Tickets will be required to enter the concert. Pastor: Michael Woods.

■ Melbourne Baptist Church, Transylvania: The Erwins in Concert, October 6, 6 p.m. Pastor: Butch Goodman.

■ First Baptist Church, Jena: Seventh Day Slumber in concert, October 7, 6 p.m. Cost: \$10 at the door. Pastor: Dominick DiCarlo Jr.

■ First Baptist Church, Pineville: First@First Business Leader Luncheon, October 7, noon. Speaker: Blake Chatelain, president/Chief Executive Officer of Red River Bank. Cost: \$10 (lunch catered by Southern Creations) and open to the business community. Please RSVP by 8 a.m. on October 7 to Lori Pruitt at lpruitt@fbcpineville.net. Pastor: Stewart Holloway.

■ First Baptist Church, Logansport: Louisiana Baptist Singing Women in concert, October 10, 6 p.m. An offering will be taken for the Teresa Thomason Scholarship. This scholarship is awarded to a participant in the LA Baptist State Piano Festival for the purpose of furthering their collegiate studies. Pastor: Shawn Thrapp.

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.

kysmp ufb dm db ydm yfbv, fbv yp kdcc xyisjeycz

njiep ydm ucssi, fbv kdcc efxypi xyp kypfx dbxs ydm

efibpi, wjx xyp gyfuu yp kdcc wjib kdxxy udip

jbajpbgyfwcp.

cjop xyipp:mprpbxppb

Clues:
U = F; D = I

Answer to September 12 Scripture Crypto:
Haggai two: seventeen

DID YOU KNOW?

Only 9% of born-again teens believe absolute truth exists.

Only 20% of students highly-churched as teens remain spiritually active by age 29.

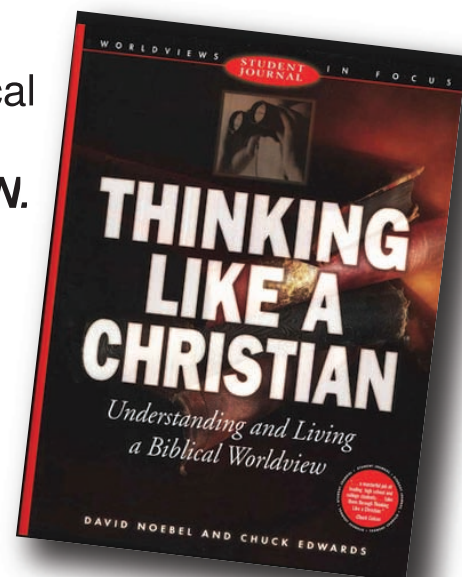
6 of 10 born-again freshmen entering public colleges abandon the Faith by the time they are seniors.

CHURCH, WE HAVE A PROBLEM. LOUISIANA COLLEGE HAS AN ANSWER.

To help remedy the alarming decline of a Christian worldview and biblical values among CHURCHED young people, Louisiana College strongly recommends the 12-lesson study book, **THINKING LIKE A CHRISTIAN**.

Several LBC churches and private Christian schools are using the resource to help develop a Christian worldview among their students.

Those successfully completing the book under supervision will be eligible to apply for our SCHAEFFER WORLDVIEW SCHOLARSHIP worth \$10K over a 4-year period. (Additional parameters and conditions apply.)

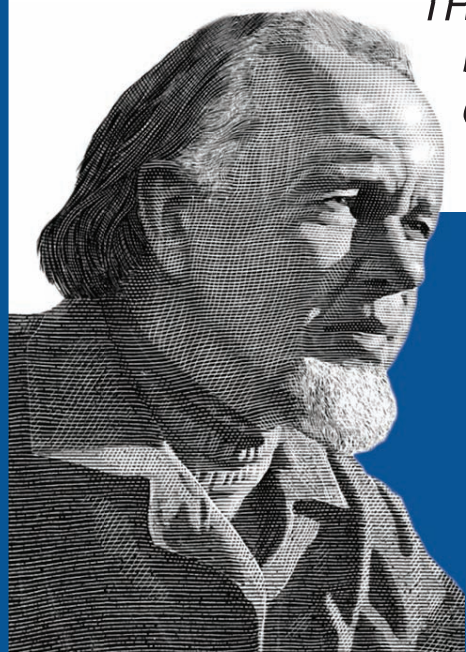


PRE-APPROVAL from LC is REQUIRED for persons interested in completing the workbook with the scholarship in view. For more information on the workbook and the scholarship, please contact Dr. Philip Caples: philip.caples@lacollege.edu or 318.487.7254.

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THINKING LIKE A CHRISTIAN workbook can help students become salt and light in a spiritually needy world as we partner with churches in engaging the culture and advancing the Kingdom of God." - **Dr. Rick Brewer**

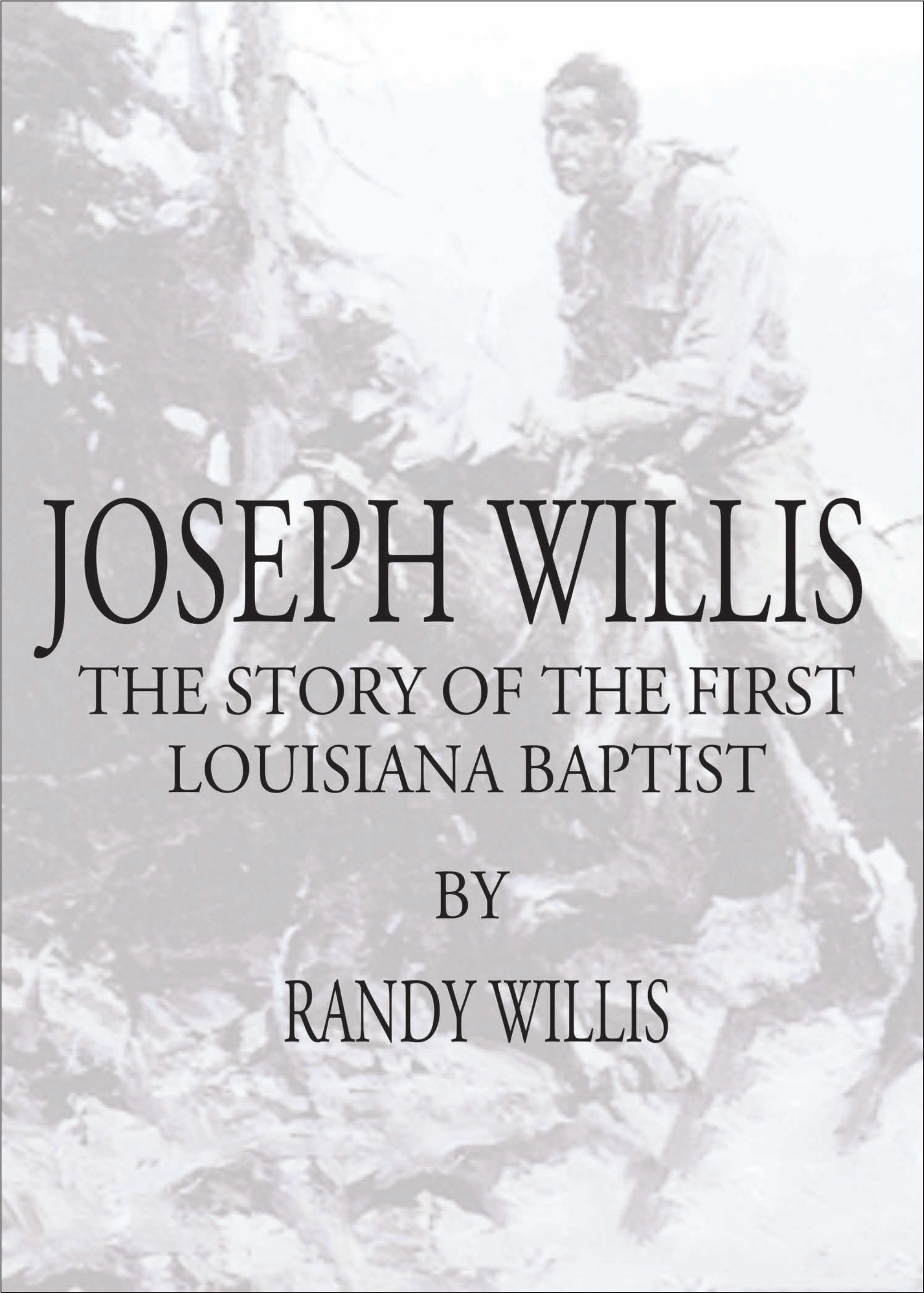
Louisiana College President



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JOSEPH WILLIS

THE STORY OF THE FIRST
LOUISIANA BAPTIST

BY
RANDY WILLIS

By Randy Willis

A LOUISIANA BAPTIST LEGACY

Joseph Willis preached the first Gospel sermon by an evangelical west of the Mississippi River.

He crossed the mighty waters astride a mule and rode into the Louisiana Territory before Oct. 1, 1800, the date Napoleon secured this vast expanse of land from Spain. The Louisiana Territory extended from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains and was largely unexplored, with many hidden and not-so-hidden dangers.

He was born a Cherokee slave to his own father, and the obstacles intensified when his family took him to court to deprive him of his inheritance in a battle that rose to involve the state governor. Ultimately, the state legislature resolved the matter in Joseph's favor, but not to the full restitution he should have received.

Nevertheless, he fought in the Revolutionary War under the most colorful of all the American generals, Francis Marion, "The Swamp Fox."

He then crossed the most hostile of territories and entered a land under the rule of a foreign government, while the dreaded Code Noir, the "Black Code," was in effect.

As the first Louisiana Baptist he preached a Gospel message that put him in constant mortal danger due to this decree's prohibitions against all religions except Catholicism. All the while he had to endure a cloud of racial and religious prejudice – even to the point that his own denomination, at first, refused to ordain him.

He lost three wives and several children in the wilderness, but stayed faithful to Christ to preaching the Gospel of His Lord and Savior.

BEGINNINGS ABROAD

Joseph Willis's story in America did not begin in this country, but in London, England, in 1606, when John Willis was born.

It is hard to trace how John Willis made his way to this new land, but it is easy to understand his flight from the old country – he faced religious persecution if he had stayed.

Nevertheless, John Willis first appeared in America, in official records at least, in Plymouth Colony, Massachusetts, in 1635, when his son John Willis, Jr., was born. He name appears again in colonial documents from Duxbury in 1637 when he married Elizabeth Hodgkins Palmer, on Jan. 2, 1637. She was the widow of William Palmer, Jr.

John Willis was later the first deacon in Plymouth Church, whose parsonage is still preserved and maintained by the Old Bridgewater Historical Society (OBHS), in West Bridgewater, Massachusetts, as the oldest parsonage in America.

John also had brothers who were immigrants to the Plymouth Colony area: Nathaniel Willis, Lawrence Willis, Jonathan Willis, and Francis Willis.

Because the population was about 400 in the 1630s, John Willis most likely knew everyone in the Plymouth Colony area when he arrived in 1635, especially its governor, William Bradford, who was the English Separatist leader of the settlers there.



Bayou Chicot's Calvary Baptist Church was established by Joseph Willis on Nov. 13, 1812. It is one of the oldest of all Louisiana Baptist churches.

It was Bradford who proclaimed Nov. 29, 1623, as a time for pilgrims, along with their Native American friends, to gather and give thanks. His proclamation contained these words: "Thanksgiving to ye Almighty God for all His blessings." This holiday later became known as Thanksgiving.

A century later, John Willis's direct descendant, Joseph Willis, married a direct descendant of William Bradford, Rachel Bradford.

* * *

John and Elizabeth Willis had nine children, and it is through their youngest, Benjamin, that Joseph's lineage is traced.

Benjamin married Susanna Whitman in 1681 in Bridgewater and they raised six children, and through Benjamin, Jr., the genealogical trail continued to Joseph.

Benjamin, Jr., wedded Mary Leonard in 1719, and they had five children, including a son, Agerton, who would become Joseph's father.

MOVE TO NORTH CAROLINA, PLANTATION WEALTH

In the early 1750s, Benjamin, Jr., and Mary moved their family to North Carolina, with aunts and uncles and their families.

They traveled by sea to New Hanover (now named Wilmington), North Carolina's most navigable seaport. Even though it was not used often for transatlantic trade, this meant that this area of the state was easily accessible from all other English settlements along the coast.

On Dec. 13, 1754, Agerton purchased 300 acres in New Hanover County (in what is now southeastern Pender County) "on the East Side of a Branch of Long Creek."

Agerton Willis was taxed on this property the next year, with records showing there were only 362 white people taxed in New Hanover that year. But public documents also show that twenty families owned a significant number of slaves there during that time.

These families, along with others like them in southeastern North Carolina, controlled the affairs of the counties in which they lived and set the standards of morals and religion. The four Willis brothers, Agerton, Daniel, Benjamin III and George, and their sister, Joanna, were part of this small, socially elite group of families.

Sometime after 1755 Agerton moved to Bladen County, and in 1758 his only son, Joseph Willis, who would blaze a path for the Gospel of Jesus Christ as a Louisiana Baptist, was born.

Most of the early Bladen County deeds before 1784 were lost due to a series of fires, and Agerton's first purchase of land in Bladen County is not in the records that exist today. However, a description of the bulk of his lands can be gleaned from later deeds that survived.

He purchased 640 acres from his brother Daniel on May 21, 1762, on the west side of the Northwest Cape Fear River. Then he bought an additional 2,560 acres between October 1766, and May 1773, on both sides of the Northwest Cape Fear River near Goodman's Swamp.

Altogether, Agerton's holdings formed a vast and nearly contiguous extent of land on both sides of the Northwest Cape Fear River, near the current Cumberland County line in present-day northwest Bladen County.

As a planter, Agerton owned slaves, some of whom were Native American. In fact, as late as the 1780s in North Carolina, a third of all slaves were Native Americans, having been subjugated by white plantation owners.

William Moreau Goins, Ph.D., wrote in an educational journal about South Carolina Indians that "When Americans think of slavery, our minds create images of Africans inhumanely crowded aboard ships plying the middle passage from Africa, or of blacks stooped to pick cotton in Southern fields. We don't conjure images of American Indians chained in coffles and marched to ports like Boston and Charleston, and then shipped to other ports in the Atlantic world. Yet Indian slavery and an Indian slave trade were ubiquitous in early America."

Cherokee and other Native Americans were traded as slaves long before any arrived from Africa. The Indian slave traders of the Carolinas engaged in slaving among the Westo, the Tuscarora, the Yamasee, and the Cherokee.

BORN A SLAVE

It was to a Cherokee slave of Agerton's that Joseph was born.

The relationship of Agerton and Joseph's mother can only be speculation because under the North Carolina laws of 1741 all interracial marriages were illegal. Regardless, Joseph was born into slave status.

Yet, it is clear from Agerton's will that

he did not consider Joseph a slave but a beloved son—in fact, his only son. However, this relationship did not sit well with some other members of the family.

From all indications, Agerton intended to free Joseph in his will, but this presented legal problems.

"An Act Concerning Servants and Slaves," the law in North Carolina, stated: "That no Negro or Mulatto Slaves shall be set free, upon any Pretense whatsoever, except for meritorious Services, to be adjudged and allowed of by the County Court and License thereupon first had and obtained."

What this meant was that Joseph could not be freed solely by Agerton's wishes.

In 1776, Agerton was only forty-nine but in poor health, and Joseph was still too young to prove "meritorious Services." Still, Agerton attempted to free him through his will written Sept. 18, 1776, and also to bequeath to him most of his property.

Just eighty days before this will was written, the Declaration of Independence had been signed, and times were very chaotic.

Unfortunately, Agerton would be dead within a year at age fifty.

THE RACE CARD

An uncle, Daniel Willis, used a crafty legal maneuver to deny Joseph his inheritance, and his freedom.

At this time in North Carolina, slaves could not own real estate. Therefore, if Joseph was not freed, he could not be a legal heir. Since Agerton had no other children, his eldest brother Daniel Willis became Agerton's "legal heir at law" under the code of primogeniture in effect in the state until 1784.

Ignoring Agerton's wish that Joseph be freed and named inheritor of his wealth, Daniel instead sent the following letter to the governor of North Carolina:

*Daniel Willis Senr. To Gov. Caswell
Respecting Admtn. & C.
Oct. 10th 1777.*

*MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCEL-
LENCY*

*I have a small favr. to beg if your Excellency will be pleased to grant it Viz. as my Deceas'd Brother Agerton Willis gave the graitest Part of his Estate to his Molata boy Joseph and as he is a born slave & not set free Agreeable to Law my Brothers heirs are not satisfied that he shall have it. I am One of the Exectrs. and by Mr. M. Grice's Directions have the Estate in my possession as the Trustee Refused giving Security that the boy should have it when off Age If he Could Inherit it and now this seting of counsel some of them Intends to Apply for Administration as graitest Creditors. I am my Brothers heir at Law and if Administration is to be obtained I will apply myself Before the Rise of the Counsel and begg your Excellency will not grant it to any off them Untill I Come your Excellency's Compliance will graitley Oblige your most Obedient Humble Servt to Command
DAN. WILLIS, SENR.*

Pray Excuse my freedm.

The term "Molata [sic] boy" used by Daniel might indicate his negative attitude toward Joseph's mixed heritage, but likely it was used more for legal emphasis in the letter. But, it could also reflect an appeal to intense feelings of hate and prejudice that existed then toward Native Americans.

Daniel Willis's petition to the court also reveals that Joseph was not of legal age (21 years old) as of the date of the will, Sept. 18, 1776. It should also be pointed out that technically this case should have proceeded to the District Superior Court at Wilmington, but this court was in abeyance until 1778, following the collapse of the court law in November 1772. Therefore, Daniel was writing to the governor and council instead.

The Bladen County tax list of 1784 indicates that the case had been decided by then -- because Agerton's property was taxed in that year under different family members' names. Even though Agerton's will had been probated and Joseph was living as if he were free, as he had always done, he was still technically a slave.

MY COUSIN'S KEEPER

But in an interesting twist, Joseph's first cousin, John Willis, the eldest son of Daniel, took steps to amend the injustice.

In November 1787, Daniel, a member of the General Assembly of North Carolina, introduced a "bill to emancipate Joseph, a Mulatto Slave, the property of the Estate of Agerton Willis, late of Bladen, deceased." The bill passed its third reading on Dec. 6, 1787, and Joseph was a free man by law at last.

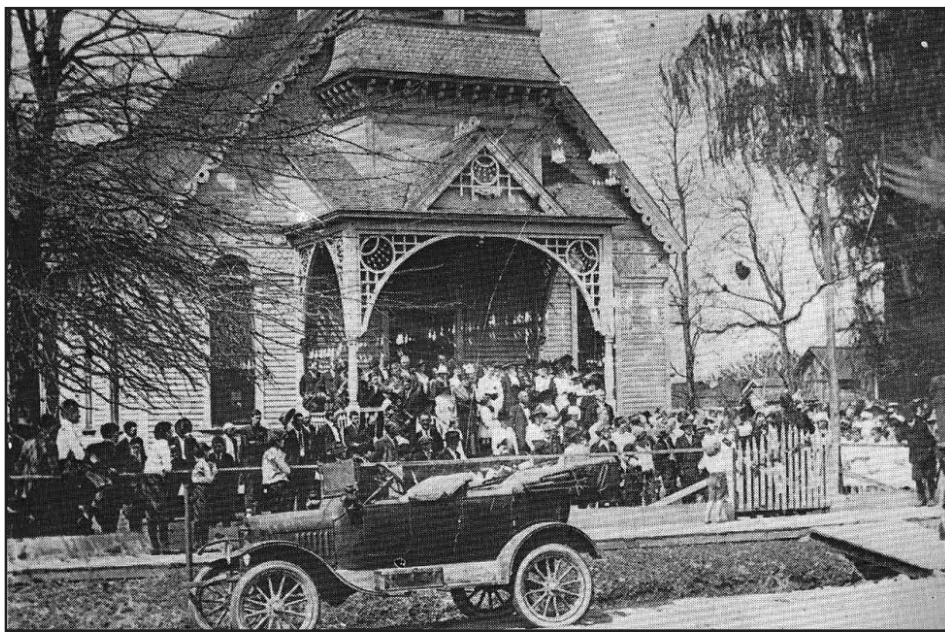
The following quotes from the settlement are of special interest:

Whereas, Agerton Willis, late of Bladen County...did by his last will and testament devise to the said Joseph his freedom and emancipation, and did also give unto the said Joseph a considerable property, both real and personal: And whereas the executor and next of kin to the said Joseph did in pursuance of the said will take counsel thereon, and were well advised that the same could not by any means take effect, but would be of prejudice to the said slave and subject him still as property of the said Agerton Willis; whereupon the said executor and next of kin, together with the heirs of the said Agerton Willis, deceased, did cause a fair and equal distribution of the said estate, as well as do equity and justice in the said case to the said Joseph, as in pursuance of their natural love and affection to the said Agerton, and did resolve on the freedom of the said Joseph and to give an equal proportion of the said estate...Joseph Willis shall henceforward be entitled to all the rights and privileges of a free person of mixed blood: provided nevertheless, that this act shall not extend to enable the said Joseph by himself or attorney, or any other person in trust for him, in any manner to commence or prosecute any suit or suits for any other property but such as may be given him by this act....

There is a lot revealed in this document.

First, note that they called themselves the "next of kin" to the said Joseph. The "fair and equal distribution" that is referred to turns out to be considerably less than the "greatest Part" [sic] mentioned in Daniel's letter ten years before. A later deed reveals that Joseph got 320 acres as settlement, and the above document indicates he also received some personal property as "consideration" for what "he may have acquired by his own industry."

The other real estate that Joseph should have received -- but did not because Agerton's full last will and testament was not followed -- is described as "unbequeathed lands of Agerton" in later deeds. The deeds on record confirm 2,490 acres should have been his. Then there is



Beulah Baptist Church was established in 1816 by Willis. This historic picture was of a prayer rally for troops fighting in World War 1 in 1918.

the matter of a vast amount of personal property that were denied him. On top of that, an additional 970 acres were deeded directly to other members of the family.

Sadly, Agerton's will is lost and we'll never know if the records that are available reveal the true wealth Joseph should have inherited.

Regardless, it is evident that Joseph Willis undoubtedly could have related to the situation of another Joseph, the one from the Bible, who said in his later life, "They meant it for evil, but God meant it for good."

SLAVERY AND NATIVE AMERICANS IN NORTH CAROLINA

According to North Carolina genealogist and historian William Perry Johnson in a letter to Greene Strother, "In North Carolina, American Indians up until the mid-1880s, were labeled Mulattos..."

In her book, "North Carolina Indian Records," Donna Spindel writes about the Native Americans of this area of the state: "The Lumbee Indians, most of whom reside in Robeson County, constitute the largest group of Indians in eastern North Carolina." Although their exact origin is a complex matter, they are undoubtedly the descendants of several tribes that occupied eastern Carolina during the earliest days of white settlement, but most have Anglo-Saxon names.

Living along the Pee Dee and Lumber rivers in present-day Robeson and adjacent counties, these Indians of mixed blood were officially designated as Lumbees by the General Assembly in 1956. But in the U.S. Censuses of 1850-1880 most Lumbee families were designated 'mulatto,' other documentation shows that sometimes they were referred to as 'black.'

Joseph's mother probably was not related to the Lumbee Native Americans as she was not a part of the indigenous peoples of this part of North Carolina.

There were no Cherokees living in Bladen County at the time of Joseph's birth in 1758. Therefore, Joseph's mother likely had been brought to Bladen County, North Carolina, perhaps by Agerton in the early to mid-1750s.

Tony Seybert writes in "Slavery and Native Americans in British North America and the United States: 1600 to 1865" that "Because of the higher transportation costs of bringing blacks from Africa, whites in the northern colonies some-

times preferred Indian slaves, especially Indian women and children, to blacks. Carolina actually exported as many or even more Indian slaves than it imported enslaved Africans prior to 1720."

NOTHING BUT A HORSE, BRIDLE AND SADDLE

Many years later in Louisiana, Joseph would tell his grandchildren, Polk Willis and Olive Willis, who were tending to him in his last days, that he left North Carolina "with nothing but a horse, bridle, and saddle."

Meanwhile, his cousin benefactor, John Willis, saw his status rise in the colonies becoming a member of the General Assembly of North Carolina; and, during the same year that he helped obtain Joseph's "legal freedom," 1787, he was appointed as one of a committee of five from North Carolina to ratify the Constitution of the United States. This was done just in time for North Carolina to enter the Union as the 12th state and to assist in the election of George Washington as the first president of the United States.

Then in 1795 John was appointed a brigadier general in the 4th Brigade of the Militia Continental Army. Five years later he moved to Natchez, Mississippi. He died there on April 3, 1802, and is buried behind the Natchez Cathedral.

Joseph's social status was much more modest given his mixed race heritage. However, he and John did share in common a deep sense of patriotism, and while John eventually rose to brigadier general, Joseph was equally proud to serve as a simple foot soldier.

THE SWAMP FOX

On June 14, 1775, the Continental Congress, convening in Philadelphia, established a Continental Army under the command of George Washington.

Proclaiming that "all men are created equal" and endowed with "certain unalienable Rights," the Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence, drafted primarily by Thomas Jefferson, on July 4, 1776.

Joseph and a friend of his from Bladen County, Ezekiel O'Quin, left for South Carolina to join up with General Francis Marion, the "Swamp Fox."

Marion operated out of the swampy forest of the Pedee region in the lower

part of South Carolina. His strategy was to surprise the enemy, cut their supply lines, kill their men, and release any American prisoners found. He and his men then retreated swiftly to the thick recesses of the deep swamps. They were very effective, and their fame was widespread.

They took great pride in themselves.

Marion's orderly book states, "Every officer to provide himself with a blue coat, faced and cuffed with scarlet cloth, and lined with scarlet; white buttons; and a white waistcoat and breeches...also, a cap and a black feather...."

Joseph would later proudly tell the family and friends, "We were called Marion men." The lessons learned with Marion served him well his entire life.

In Bladen County during 1777 it is estimated that two-thirds of the people were Tories. An oath of allegiance to North Carolina was required at that time and those refusing to take it were required to leave the state within sixty days.

Joseph Willis did not take this oath of allegiance, for he was a patriot loyal to his country, the United States of America. Loyalty was a trait Joseph Willis displayed throughout his life--loyalty to his country, loyalty to his family, and loyalty to his Savior, Jesus Christ.

"Patriots" was the name often used to describe the colonists who rebelled against British control during the American Revolution. Their leading figures declared the United States of America an independent nation in July 1776.

As a group, Patriots represented an array of social, economic, ethnic, and racial backgrounds. They included college students like Alexander Hamilton, planters like Thomas Jefferson and Joseph Willis's father and uncles, lawyers like John Adams, and just people who loved freedom, like 18-year-old Joseph Willis.

SOUTH CAROLINA

It was in South Carolina, with the Marion men, that Joseph befriended Richard Curtis, Jr., who played a significant role in Joseph's decision to go west.

In 1791, Curtis became the first Baptist minister to establish a church in Mississippi.

Sometime after 1790, his fellow Swamp Fox compatriot O'Quin followed Joseph to Louisiana as the second Baptist minister west of the Mississippi River in Louisiana.

JOSEPH WILLIS'S WIFE RACHEL BRADFORD AND HER PILGRIM ANCESTORS

Soon after the Revolutionary War, Joseph married Rachel Bradford, who was born about 1762. Their first child, Agerton, named after Joseph's father, was born around 1785, and daughter Mary was born next, in about 1787.

Louisiana census records confirm North Carolina as the place of birth for both.

The last mention of Joseph in North Carolina was in the 1788 tax record for Bladen County which listed him as owning 320 acres.

Rachel descended from William Bradford (1590-1657) who had arrived in Plymouth in 1621 aboard the Mayflower. That same year, on the death of the first governor of Plymouth, John Carver, Bradford was chosen as the leader of the

Pilgrims and served as governor for over 30 years. As noted before, he is credited as the first government leader to proclaim the Thanksgiving holiday.

Importantly, William Bradford's Mayflower pedigree did not have as much influence on Joseph's life as much as the religious movement that crossed with him on this ship.

Bradford was a committed member of what was termed a "Separatist" church. Unlike Puritans who wanted to purify the Church of England, Separatists wanted to break from it because they felt it was beyond redemption due to unbiblical doctrines and teachings. It was Bradford's Separatist views about religious freedom that would greatly influence Joseph Willis more than a century later.

By 1790, Joseph and Rachel were living in Cheraus County (now named Marlboro County), South Carolina, just southwest of Bladen County, across the state line. The 1790 census lists him as the head of the household with two females and one male over 16. In South Carolina, two more children were born to the couple: Joseph Willis Jr., born in 1792, and Rachel's last child, named after her, Rachel Willis, born circa 1794. Rachel died this same year at only 32 years old, but it is not known if she died in childbirth.

Joseph was industrious and prosperous. By 1794 he had moved to Greenville County (the Washington Circuit Court District), South Carolina, and bought 174 acres on the south side of the Reedy River. He purchased two adjoining tracts of 226 acres, Aug. 16, 1794, and 200 acres, May 8, 1775, on the Reedy River.

The total of 600 acres included 226 acres with rent houses and orchards, making Joseph, at this time, well-to-do.

Deeds pertaining to these properties give the name of Joseph's second wife as "Sarah an Irish woman."

Two children were born in South Carolina to Joseph and Sarah: Jemima Willis, circa 1796, and Sarah's last child, named "Sarah" after her, in 1798. Sarah is called Joseph's wife in a deed dated Aug. 8, 1799, but she died soon afterward.

Joseph had lost two wives in only six years, making him 45 years old and alone with five children.

Yet, he decided to venture west into a land full of uncertainty and danger for the sake of the Gospel.

He sold everything and spent it all for the cause of Christ, while deliberately placing himself in harm's way to share the message of the Good News.

BAPTIST BEGINNINGS

"Therefore, come out from them and be separate, says the Lord" (2 Corinthians 6:17).

In Greenville County, South Carolina, Joseph joined the Main Saluda Church. He also attended the Bethel Association, the most influential Baptist Association in the "Carolina Back Country," serving as a messenger from 1794 to 1796.

Main Saluda was declared extinct by 1797, and Joseph became a member of the Head of Enoree Baptist Church.

Both of these churches were rooted in the Separate Baptists, which sprang from the First Great Awakening, another driving force that would significantly influence Joseph to carry the Gospel of Jesus Christ where no preacher of the Gospel had gone before.

Head of Enoree (known as Reedy River since 1841) was also a member of the Bethel Association.

Joseph was listed in the Head of Enoree chronicles, along with William Thurston, as an "outstanding member." It was this same William Thurston who would buy Joseph's 600 acres for \$1,200 on Aug. 8, 1799 -- after Joseph returned from a trip to Mississippi in 1798 with Richard Curtis, Jr.

It was also here at Head of Enoree that Joseph

was first licensed to preach.

An interesting side note about Head of Enoree is that just a few years before Joseph became a member, the pastor, Thomas Musick, was excommunicated in 1793 for immorality.

This same man later organized Fee Fee Baptist Church in Missouri in 1807 (according to the church's history) located just across the Mississippi River near St. Louis. Fee Fee Baptist Church is the oldest Baptist church west of the Mississippi River because Calvary Baptist Church at Bayou Chicot was not established until 1812.

Nevertheless, Musick did not preach west of the Mississippi River until at least seven years after Joseph Willis did.

After a 1798 trip to Mississippi with Richard Curtis, Jr., Joseph returned to South Carolina to move his family to the Louisiana Territory and sell his South Carolina property. Never one to squander time, he helped incorporate the "Head of Enoree Baptist Society" in 1799 before leaving. It seems that he tarried until the spring of 1800 to depart on his second trip west, thereby avoiding the winter weather.

SPIRITUAL ROOTS AND THE FIRST GREAT AWAKENING

"Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?" (Psalm 85:6).

From the time Joseph heard and accepted the call to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ his sermons were filled with the echoes of First Great Awakening preachers like Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and Shubal Stearns.

This spiritual movement, from 1734 – 1750, ignited a fire for revival in the hearts of many men like Joseph.

Edwards and Whitefield, leaders of the Great Awakening, had little interest in merely engaging parishioners' minds; they wanted to see evidence of true repentance and spiritual conversion. They stirred passion among their congregations by animatedly proclaiming the joy of salvation and the need to share the love of Christ through action.

This led other pastors to change from just reading their theologically deep sermons, as was the norm in the late colonial period, to making emotional calls for repentance unto salvation by grace through faith in Christ.

Joseph Tracy, the minister and historian who gave this revival its name in his 1842 book "The Great Awakening," even saw the First Great Awakening as a precursor to the American Revolution.

The Great Awakening's influence on Joseph came through Shubal Stearns.

In 1745, Stearns heard Whitefield's cry for repentance; left the Congregationalist church; and adopted the Great Awakening's zeal for evangelism and belief in heartfelt conversion.

The next year, Stearns moved from Virginia to Sandy Creek, Guilford County, North Carolina, at the urging of the Holy Spirit, he said. Three years after Stearns's arrival and less than seventy miles from Sandy Creek, Joseph Willis made his entrance into the world.

Eighteenth-century historian Morgan Edwards wrote of Stearns, "Stearns's message was always the simple Gospel," which was "easily understood even by rude frontiersmen" particularly when the preacher himself felt overwhelmed with the importance of his subject.

Most of the frontier people of North Carolina had never heard such doctrine or observed such earnest preaching. The Separatists' great missionary zeal caused the spiritual movement to spread at a rapid pace to the other colonies.

Stearns and his followers ministered mainly to the English settlers, and seventeen years after Stearns's arrival, forty-two churches were established in and around Sandy Creek.

Baptist historian David Benedict wrote in 1813, "As soon as the Separtists [sic] arrived, they built

them a little meetinghouse, and these 16 persons formed themselves into a church, and chose Shubal Stearns for their pastor...."

Stearns remained pastor there until his death, and from this "meetinghouse" the South felt the flames of revival, the fan of which was carried west by the unlikely missionary Joseph.

In 1772 Morgan Edwards wrote that Stearns's Sandy Creek church had "spread its branches westward as far as the great river Mississippi."

After courageously fighting in the American Revolution with Francis Marion, "the Swamp Fox," Joseph Willis was the first missionary and church planter to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ West of the Mississippi River.

MISSISSIPPI MISSIONARY

As mentioned before, Joseph was a member of Head of Enoree in 1797.

Late that year or early the next, he made his first trip to Mississippi with Richard Curtis, Jr. This trip was made without his family, as it was the custom of the time to venture west, find a safe place, and then return for the family.

W. E. Paxton recorded the results of this first trip:

"They sought not in vain, for soon after their return they were visited by William Thompson, who preached unto them the Gospel of our God: and on the first Saturday in October, 1798, came William Thompson, Richard Curtis, and Joseph Willis, who constituted them into a church, subject to the government of the Cole's Creek church, calling the newly constituted arm of Cole's Creek, "The Baptist Church on Buffaloe."

This church was located near Woodville, Mississippi, near the Mississippi River and due east of Bayou Chicot, Louisiana, where Joseph would organize his first church west of the Mississippi River, Calvary Baptist.

Paxton's research shows that the country between Mississippi and South Carolina was "then infested by hostile Indians" -- a fact not likely lost on Curtis, who had experienced a Cherokee attack in 1780 during a trip to the area (family and friends on one of three long boats perished).

Because Joseph probably knew at least part of the Cherokee language, since he was half-Cherokee, Curtis doubtless valued him on this 1798 trip for what Joseph brought to the table in case of another attack as much as he respected Joseph for his passion for the Gospel.

Curtis also knew well Joseph's courage under fire, since both were Marion men together in the Revolutionary War.

After the trip with Curtis to Mississippi in 1798, Joseph returned to South Carolina for his family and to sell his property. As mentioned before, he sold all of his land to William Thurston in August 1799, indicating his preparations to leave.

THE FIRST GOSPEL SERMON EVER PREACHED BY AN EVANGELICAL WEST OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER

"Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know" (Jeremiah 33:3).

The exact date that Joseph preached in the Louisiana Territory west of the Mississippi River is not known, but what is known is it was almost three years before April 30, 1803, the date of the Louisiana Purchase, and in fact even before Oct. 1, 1800, the date Napoleon secured Louisiana from Spain.

There are three facts that confirm the above statements.

First, Joseph sold all his property in South Carolina in 1799 and is not found there in the 1800 census.

Second, in 1813, historian David Benedict, a contemporary of Joseph, wrote in his book "A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America and Other Parts of the World," that "Joseph Willis... has done much for the cause, and



Joseph Willis died on Sept.14, 1854, in Blanche, Louisiana, about three miles south of Glenmora. He is buried in the Occupy #1 Baptist Church cemetery.

spent a large fortune while engaged in the ministry, often at the hazard of his life, while the State belonged to the Spanish government."

That places Joseph Willis in Louisiana before Oct. 1, 1800.

Third, in 1854, the Louisiana Baptist Association Committee wrote in Joseph Willis's obituary, "The Gospel was proclaimed by him in these regions before the American flag was hoisted here." So that had to have been before April 30, 1803.

What is known with more exactness is that Joseph preached the Gospel at great risk to his own life.

When he crossed the Mississippi River into the Louisiana Territory, the Code Noir, or the "Black Code," was the law of the land.

This decree from King Louis XIV regulated, among other things, the condition of slavery and the activities of free people of color. It also restricted the practice of religion to Roman Catholics.

The Black Code stayed in effect until the Louisiana Purchase on April 30, 1803. But, in reality, it was a hindrance to the preaching of the Gospel for many decades after the Louisiana Purchase.

Joseph was hated because of his defiance of it, especially because it specifically forbade any ministers coming into the territory except Roman Catholics.

He seemed to revel in his rebellion, heading into the heartland of the Black Code, going as far south as Lafayette, Louisiana, while preaching the Gospel, immediately after he had crossed the mighty Mississippi

THE FIERY FURNACE

Joseph settled at Bayou Chicot, Louisiana, between 1800 and 1805, just a year before the Mississippi Baptist Association was organized.

Though he was a licensed minister, he had not yet been ordained.

He respected the authority of the church and knew being ordained would be important if he was to be effective in banding together with other believers.

Therefore, in 1810, Joseph left for Mississippi to seek ordination.

His son, Joseph, Jr., later spoke regularly of his father's crossing the Mississippi River at Natchez and how dangerous it was. Joseph, Jr., said that his father swam the mighty river riding a mule to take a shortcut and save time to preach Jesus.

After reaching Mississippi, the race card was played against him again.

Joseph had taken his letter to a local church stating that he was a member in good standing while in South Carolina.

The custom then, as now, among Baptists was to transfer church membership by a letter. But this Mississippi congregation objected to his ordination "lest the cause of Christ should suffer reproach from the humble social position of his servant."

Paxton wrote, "Such obstacles would have daunted the zeal of any man engaged in a less holy cause."

The "humble social position" of Joseph was certainly not his wealth but the fact that his skin was swarthy.

But once more Joseph's longsuffering and willingness to pay whatever price to proclaim the Gospel came into play.

It's evident his focus was not on the fiery furnace but on the "Fourth Man" in the fire: He knew the safest place in life is with the "Fourth Man"—his Savior and Lord Jesus.

Paxton wrote, "he was a simple-hearted Christian, glowing with the love of Jesus and an effective speaker."

His youngest son Aimuewell Willis said before his own death in 1937, "the secret of my father's success was personal work." He said that as a boy he saw his father go to a man in the field, hold his hand, and witness to him until he surrendered to Christ.

Today, many generations later, his influence can still be seen.

One grandchild said Joseph would be reading the Bible and talking to them as a few of them would slip away, and he would say, "Children, you can slip away from me, but not from God."

THE CHURCHES

After Joseph's rejection in Mississippi, a friendly minister advised him to obtain a recommendation from the people he worked among. This he did, and he presented it to the Mississippi Baptist Association.

The association accepted the recommendation, and a church subsequently ordained Joseph.

Right away he constituted Calvary Baptist Church, with just six members, in Bayou Chicot, Louisiana.

It is an active congregation to this day and celebrated its 200th anniversary in November 2012.

Paxton wrote, "The zeal of Father Willis, as he came to be called by the affectionate people among whom he labored, could not be bounded by the narrow limits of his own home, but he traveled far and wide."

Once when he was traveling and preaching, he stayed at an Inn. Several other men were staying there and one of them men was sick. Joseph read the Bible to him, prayed with him, and witnessed to him about Christ.

The next morning all of the men were gone very early, except for the man who was sick.

He told Joseph that the night before he had overheard the men talking about Joseph and that they had gone ahead to ambush him. He told him about another road to take, and Joseph's life was spared.

Joseph would receive warnings other times, too, just in time to avoid harm's way.

Paxton said those who loved Joseph called him the "Apostle to the Opelousas" and "Father Willis."

According to family tradition, strong determination and profound faith were his shields.

He would often walk great distances to visit and preach to small groups.

He rode logs in order to cross streams or travel downstream.

Sometimes he would return home from a mission tour as late as one o'clock in the morning and awaken his wife to prepare clothes so that he

might leave again a few hours later.

* * *

Barely seven months before Calvary Baptist was founded, Louisiana became a state – in turmoil. Great Britain considered the Louisiana Purchase illegitimate, and Congress had declared war on this then-protagonist country—The War of 1812—two months after making Louisiana a state.

Just a month and a day before Calvary Baptist Church was constituted, the Half Moon Bluff Baptist Church was organized on the Boque Chitto River, in what is now Washington Parish. So it was the first Baptist church organized in what is now Louisiana but it was east of the Mississippi River.

So Calvary Baptist Church is the first Baptist Church started in Louisiana, west of the Mississippi.

Some fifteen to twenty miles southwest of Half Moon Bluff Church, Mount Nebo Baptist Church was organized, Jan. 31, 1813.

Half Moon Bluff is extinct, but Mount Nebo remains active.

The Methodists had preceded the Baptists, establishing a church before these dates near Branch, Louisiana. But the first non-Catholic church in Louisiana was Christ Church, an Episcopal congregation, in New Orleans, holding its first service on Nov. 17, 1805, in the Cabildo.

* * *

By 1818, when Joseph and others founded the Louisiana Baptist Association at Cheneyville, he had been instrumental in founding all five of its charter members. They were Calvary, Bayou Chicot, 1812; Beulah, Cheneyville, 1816; Vermillion, Lafayette, 1817; Aimwell (southeast of Oberlin), 1817 (also called Debourn); and Plaquemine (near Branch), 1817.

In 1824, with William Wilbourn and Isham Nettles, Joseph established Zion Hill Church at Beaver Dam.

He went far and wide, establishing Antioch Primitive Baptist Church on Oct. 21, 1827, just seventeen miles from the Texas State line near Edgerly, Louisiana.

Joseph kept a diary and William Prince Ford arranged these notes in 1841.

Paxton copied them in 1858 and used them and Louisiana Baptist Association meeting minutes almost exclusively as the basis for his research about Central Louisiana Baptists.

Ford also made remarks in his duplicate notes, and one of his observations, made in 1834, is very revealing about Joseph:

It was truly affecting to hear him speak of them as his children and with all the affection of a father allude to some schisms and divisions that had arisen in the past and to warn them against the occurrence of anything of the kind in the future.

But when he spoke of the fact that two or three of them had already become extinct, his voice failed and he was compelled to give utterance to his feelings by his tears; and surely the heart must have been hard that could not be melted by the manifestation of so much affection, for he wept not alone.

Remarkably, no church ever split while Joseph was its pastor.

Baptist historian John T. Christian comments in his book "A History of Baptists of Louisiana" (1923), about other difficulties that Baptists faced:

It must steadily be borne in mind that in no other state of the Union have Baptists been compelled to face such overwhelming odds; and such long and sustained opposition... The wonder is not that at first the Baptists made slow progress, but that they made any at all.

THIRD AND FOURTH WIVES ADD TO WILLIS GENERATIONS

Between 1799 and 1802, Joseph's second wife Sarah died, and it was at Bayou Chicot that most

of Joseph's children were born to his third wife.

Joseph married a woman born in South Carolina, but whom he met in Mississippi or Louisiana. Her last name was Johnson.

They welcomed a son into this world on Jan. 6, 1804, and named him William. He is buried at Humble Cemetery (formerly, Willis Flats) next to the Bethel Baptist Church in Elizabeth, Louisiana.

Other children born to this union were Lemuel, 1812; John, 1814; Martha, 9, 1825.

There also was a Sally Willis listed in the 1850 Rapides Parish census as 48 years old and living near William Willis.

The last two known children of Joseph were born to his fourth wife, Elvy Sweat.

They were Samuel, 1836; and, Aimuewell May 1, 1837 (died Sept. 9, 1937, at age 100).

Joseph would have been about 79 years old when Aimuewell was born.

The 1850 Rapides Parish Census also records an additional four males in Joseph's household and ages which allow calculating the birth year for each: James, 1841; William, 1845; Timothy, 1847; and, Bernard, 1848.

It would be unlikely that Joseph would have a second son named William.

Moreover, Aimuewell Willis always said he was Joseph Willis's youngest son. So, these last four males most likely are Joseph's grandchildren.

Historian Ivan Wise wrote in "Footsteps of the Flock: or Origins of Louisiana Baptists" (1910) that two sons of Joseph died, "poisoned on honey and were buried a half mile from the present town of Oakdale, Louisiana."

Joseph's third wife died and is buried in an unmarked grave yet to be discovered, but probably is located at the site of the original Calvary Baptist Church, in Vandenberg Cemetery.

One historian wrote that Joseph Willis had 19 children.

Joseph's children who were still living would follow him when he would later move to Rapides Parish. Many were neighbors with him as late as 1850, as the census reveals, as well as several grandchildren who were grown by then.

-- Joseph's eldest child Agerton married Sophie Story, an Irish orphan brought from Tennessee by a Mr. Park, who then lived near Holmesville below Bunkie, Louisiana. His son, Daniel Hubbard Willis Sr., was the first of many descendants to follow Joseph into the ministry. Paxton described Daniel as "one of the most respected ministers in the Louisiana Association." He established many churches himself, and was pastor of Amiable and Spring Hill Baptist Churches for many years. In his later years, he was blind and his daughter read the Scriptures for him as he preachrd.

-- Joseph's daughter Jemima married William Dyer, and they lived on the Calcasieu River near Master's Creek.

-- Mary married Thomas Dial (her first husband was a Johnson) from South Carolina, and they both were living in Rapides Parish in 1850.

-- Joseph Willis, Jr., married Jennie Coker at Bayou Chicot and later moved to Rapides Parish and settled near Tenmile Creek.

-- Lemuel married Emeline Perkins from Tenmile Creek and settled near Glenmora in Blanche, Louisiana. The late Dr. Greene Strother, Southern Baptist missionary emeritus to China and Malaysia, was his grandson.

-- William married Rhoda Strother on the "Darbourn" on the upper reaches of the Calcasieu.

-- Aimuewell married twice and settled in Leesville. His first wife was Marguerite Leuemche, and his second wife was Lucy Foshee.

Many of the descendants of these children live in these same areas today. At least eight generations have lived in the Forest Hill area, including Joseph himself, and Oakdale, Louisiana, probably has more descendants of Joseph than any other region in the state.

PIONEER CHURCH LIFE

After moving to Spring Creek, east of the Calcasieu River near Glenmora, Louisiana, around 1828-1829, Joseph began to establish churches in that area as well.

The first he established was Amiable Baptist Church on Sept. 6, 1828, near Glenmora. Next he organized Occupy Baptist Church in 1833 near Pitkin. Then he helped constitute Spring Hill Baptist Church in 1841, near Forest Hill, when he was about 83 years old.

The Baptist churches of that day did not necessarily meet weekly because preachers would have to travel long distances. Most might have a preacher only once a month or every other month.

Discipline was stern, with members being excluded (fellowship being withdrawn by the church) for gossiping, drinking too much, quarreling, dancing, using bad language, and in one case at Amiable, for "having abused her mother."

But, the churches were also forgiving if the offender admitted the wrong and promised not to do it again. Repentance along with salvation was emphasized.

A good example is found in the Spring Hill Church minutes.

After twice promising not to "partake of ardent spirits" anymore, Robert Snoddy had the fellowship of the church withdrawn from him on May 31, 1851. A month later, Snoddy sent this letter to the church explaining his actions:

Dear Brethren, Having been overtaken in an error I set down to confess it. I did use liquor too freely, but did not say anything or do anything out of the way. In as much as I do expect to be at the conference I send you my thoughts. I did promise you that I would refrain from using the poison, but I having broken my promise I have therefore rendered myself unworthy of your fellowship and cannot murmur if you exclude me. I suppose it is no use to tell you that I have been sincerely punished for my crime in as much as I have confessed the same to you before, but I make this last request of you for forgiveness, or is your forgiveness exhausted towards me. It is necessary that I say to you that I sorely repented for my guilt, but my brethren if you have in your wisdom supposed that my life brings too much reproach on that most respectful of all causes, exclude me, exclude me, oh exclude me. But I do love the cause so well that I will try to be at the door of the temple of the Lord. Brethren, whilst you are dealing with me, do it mercifully, prayerfully, and candidly. I was presented by a beloved brother with a temperance pledge to which I replied I would think about it, but if I could have obtained enough of my heart's blood to fill my pen to write my name I would have done it. It is my determination to join it yet – and never taste another drop of the deathly cup whilst I live, at the peril of my life. Nothing more, but I request your prayers, dear brethren –



Archived photo

This historic photo shows Amiable Baptist Church and a group believed to be attending an 1895 associational meeting at the church, which is located in Glenmora. Joseph Willis established the church on Sept. 6, 1828. He would go on to establish 20 churches in Louisiana.

Robert Snoddy

Robert Snoddy was restored to membership. Four months later, he was once again reported drinking and once again excluded.

The Amiable Baptist Church minutes in 1879 declared their position in no uncertain terms:

On motion be it resolved that we as a church are willing to look over and forgive the past, and we as a church for the time to come allow no more playing or dancing among our church members. If they do, they may expect to be dealt with.

The Amiable minutes record that one dear member was admonished at a church service for dancing. He then stood in the church aisle, did a jig, and walked out.

Pastors were usually called to preach by the church for a one-year period.

In 1857, Amiable voted to give Pastor D. H. Willis \$100 "to sustain him for the next twelve months...it being the amount stated by him."

In 1833, Joseph became pastor of Occupy Baptist Church near Pitkin, Louisiana, presently located next to Tenmile Creek, and served the congregation for about 16 years.

There he married Elvy Sweat, who was many years younger than him. She is listed as age 30 in the 1850 census and Joseph as 98. But he was actually a mere 92. So, her age may be listed wrongly, too.

Joseph's son Lemuel and others said she was not good to him.

As a result of this and Joseph's failing health Lemuel and two men got him and took him to Lemuel's home in Blanche, Louisiana, where he lived the remainder of his life.

On a bed in an ox wagon used for an ambulance, he sang as the wagon rolled along to Lemuel's home, and even witnessed to the two men while lying in the back of the wagon. He preached to his last breath.

HOMECOMING IN HEAVEN

Joseph Willis died on Sept. 14, 1854, in Blanche, Louisiana, about three miles south of Glenmora. He is buried in the Occupy Baptist Church cemetery.

Twenty years after he began his ministry in Louisiana there were only ten preachers and eight Baptist churches with a membership of 150 in the entire state.

On Jan. 18, 1955, just over 100 years after his death, 250 people, among them 16 ministers, gathered in freezing weather to unveil a monument in his memory at his grave. The Louisiana Baptist Association published the following estimate of his work:

Before the church began to send missionaries into destitute regions, he at his own expense, and frequently at the risk of his life, came to these parts, preaching the Gospel of the Redeemer. For fifty years he was instant in season and out of season, preaching, exhorting, and instructing regarding not his property, his health or even his life, if he might be the means of turning sinners to Christ.

Louisiana Baptist historian Glen Lee Greene wrote in "House Upon A Rock" (1973), "In all the history of Louisiana Baptists it would be difficult, if not impossible, to find a man who suffered more reverses, who enjoyed fewer rewards, or who single-handedly achieved more enduring results for the denomination than did Joseph Willis."

EPILOGUE

In the 1850's Joseph Willis told his grandchildren Polk and Olive Willis that after the death of his wife Rachel Bradford Willis (during childbirth) he gave up his calling to preach.

He was 45 years old and alone with four small children; his Uncle Daniel Willis had taken him to court to deprive him of his inheritance because he was half-Indian; his own denomination had refused to ordain him because

of his dark skin; and, then his beloved wife Rachel had died.

He told them that at that point he questioned whether God had abandoned him.

Joseph said that he even believed he must have misunderstood what he thought was a calling to preach Jesus in the Louisiana Territory. At that point he had given up all hope.

But, Joseph shared with them that then at the lowest point in his life he had what he described as a personal encounter with Christ.

In what exact way has not been shared with subsequent generations.

But it was so powerful an experience that for the next 56 years, beginning in 1798, he risked his life to share Christ, even during the Black Code in Louisiana.

No other preacher dared to plant churches in what was known as "No Man's Land." So dangerous was this area that the Catholic church waited 50 years after Joseph did it to start a church there.

Joseph told Polk and Olive that he prayed numerous times asking Christ to reappear to him. Although He did not, Joseph never doubted his calling to preach Christ again.

Randy Willis is the foremost expert about the first Louisiana Baptist, Joseph Willis -- and is his fourth great-grandson. He is the author of "Destiny," "Carolinas Wind," "Twice a Slave," "Three Winds Blowing," "Louisiana Wind," "Beckoning Candle," "The Apostle to the Opelousas," "The Story of Joseph Willis," and many magazine and newspaper articles.

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A 'Joseph Willis' Gospel message for you

By Will Hall

Message Executive Editor

ALEXANDRIA -- Joseph Willis preached with passion the Good News that "Jesus saves!"

He believed salvation must involve a heartfelt choice to accept the gift the Holy Spirit offers each woman and man.

A great example of what is meant by a heartfelt choice was demonstrated in 1829, when a man named George Wilson was found guilty of six charges and given the death sentence.

Wilson had influential friends who petitioned President Andrew Jackson for a pardon. Jackson granted the pardon, and it was brought to the prison and given to Wilson.

To everyone's surprise, Wilson said, "I am going to hang."

No one had ever refused a pardon before, so the courts did not know what to do.

The case went all the way to the Supreme Court, and Chief Justice John Marshall gave the ruling, saying, "A pardon is a piece of paper, the value of which depends upon the acceptance by the person implicated. If he does not accept the pardon, then he must be executed."

God loves you and, yes, He has provided a pardon for you and me, paid for with Christ's own life-blood, but you have the right to refuse the pardon.

Jesus was crucified between two thieves. One said "yes" to Jesus, but the other said "no" to Him. One accepted the pardon, and the other refused it.

The question to you and me today is the same as it was 2,000 years ago.

Which thief on the cross are you?

You have the same choice.

COME

The last invitation in the Word of God is found in Revelation 22:17: "And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely."

Are you thirsty? Then come. "Let him who hears come.

And, whosoever will, come": That invitation is to you...it is to me...it is to everyone! Bring your disappointments; bring your failures; bring your fears; and, bring your heartaches.

The Holy Spirit says, "Come to Jesus." He loves you. He wants to save you. He will save you. Come to Jesus, and drink the water of life freely.

He suffered, He bled, and He died because He loves you. Listen to the still small voice, of the Holy Spirit, bidding you to come to Jesus.

Don't wait—come!

LOOK

"Look to Me, and be saved, All you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other." (Isaiah 45:22)

"All you ends of the earth" includes the Aboriginal people of the Central Australian desert.

"All you ends of the earth" are those in darkest Africa.

"All you ends of the earth" are the isolated tribes in the Amazon rain-forest in Brazil.

"All you ends of the earth" are presidents, world leaders, and kings, wherever they rule.

"All you ends of the earth" refers to the polished lawyer, the gifted doctor, and the brilliant college professor.

"All you ends of the earth" is the prostitute, and the drug dealer, and the rapist, and the thief, and the murderer.

"All you ends of the earth" is you...and me.

God's Word states, "So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived" (Numbers 21:9).

Those who looked up at it lived. They were healed and made whole.

Those who looked up at it were saved. They did not wait until they were better people. They just looked up.

Jesus tells us that this is a picture of Him being lifted up on the cross: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:14-15)

That serpent represented the sin of the people. Christ was made sin for us.

Will you look to Jesus—will you put your trust in Him—the One who died for your sins. Will you put your faith in Jesus—the One who shed His life-blood for you...and for me?

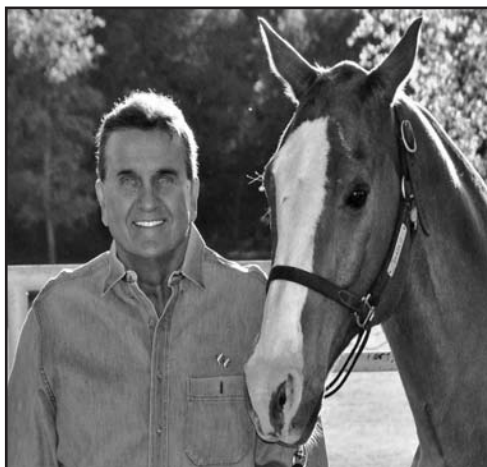
CHOOSE

Remember that two thieves on a cross faced the same question.

One rejected Him. But the other placed his faith in Jesus, asking, "Remember me when You enter Your kingdom." Jesus assured him, "Today you will be with Me in Paradise." (Luke 23:42-43)

Both of thieves were guilty, but only one put his trust in Christ.

Again, which thief are you?



Author Randy Willis, the fourth great grandson of Joseph Willis, the first Louisiana Baptist.

The third cross prepared for that day actually was meant for another criminal named Barabbas, and he represents us.

Think about that: Jesus was crucified on a cross meant for Barabbas.

In reality, it was your cross, too, and mine.

Jesus bore your cross and my cross. He took our place on that cross -- the just for the unjust; the Righteous for the unrighteous; and the sinless Lamb of God for the sinner.

Self-improvement will not qualify you for salvation, for God's Word says, "There is none

righteous, no, not one." (Romans 3:10)

Comparing yourself to others will not work either, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23)

Doing your best cannot save you, for the Scriptures record, "But we are all like an unclean thing. And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags." (Isaiah 64:6)

You can't be good enough, nor can I. That's why Jesus had to die for you and me, and for the whole world from the beginning to the end.

Come—come just as you are. Say yes to Jesus today!

There's a Scripture passage that I love, and it explains things very simply.

It says, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." (Romans 10:9-10)

You can settle this question right now by saying "yes" to Jesus.

There are no prescriptive or mandated words. Praying is just talking to the Lord.

But, if these words are how you feel in your heart, then pray:

"Lord Jesus, I come to You in prayer, to confess I am a sinner and to ask you to forgive my sins.

I confess with my mouth and believe with my heart that You are God's Son, and that You died on the cross at Calvary that I might be forgiven, and that You rose from the grave.

I turn from my life of sin and surrender to You all the rest of the days of my life. I will trust and follow you as my Lord and Savior.

In Your name, I pray. Amen!" The most famous words ever spoken are:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

"Whosoever" is you ... is me ... is everyone.

Come to Jesus. Look to Jesus. Choose Jesus. Today!

Randy Willis is a fourth great-grandson of the first Louisiana Baptist, Joseph Willis. He is a native of Longleaf, Louisiana, but now lives in Wimberley, Texas.

From master storyteller -
Randy Willis

DESTINY

This is a powerful epic with love stories, battles, testimonies, drama, politics, history, and even humor.

The book was inspired by the first the evangelical, Joseph Willis, to preach Jesus West of the Mississippi River. It is a sweeping family saga that spans four centuries. Destiny is the story of two great nations and Randy Willis's ancestor's struggle from tyranny—religious and political.

Destiny depicts real historical figures and actual events woven together with imaginary conversations with the use of the storytelling techniques of fiction.

It is free to all pastors and churches! Contact Randy Willis at randywillis@twc.com or 512.565.0161.

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