

“Unless your  
righteousness  
surpasses that of  
the scribes and  
Pharisees.”

— Matthew 5:20

# MISSISSIPPI BAPTIST Message

Newsjournal for Louisiana Baptists

Helping Louisiana Baptists impact the world for Christ



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September 24, 2015

## DAY OF PRAYER FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS



Brian Blackwell photo

Hundreds packed First Baptist Church in Pineville on Sept. 14 for a Prayer Rally for Our Police. The statewide day of prayer for law enforcement officers was called by Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal after a spike in the number of officers, including three in Louisiana, killed in the line of duty in August. Events such as this one took place all over the state in a number of Southern Baptist churches.

## Hundreds attend prayer rallies around state

BY BRIAN BLACKWELL  
Message Staff Writer

Pineville Chief of Police Don Weatherford understands the impact recent shootings of law enforcement officers have taken on his and other police forces around the country.

But he also knows how important

acts of kindness such as a Sept. 14 prayer rally for law enforcement inside First Baptist Church of Pineville can be for lifting their morale.

“It’s a tremendous outpouring of support in light of the recent tragedies,” said Weatherford, a member of Kingsville Baptist Church in Ball. “It’s humbling for us to see the com-

munity come out to support us like this.”

Nearly 1,000 people, many of whom arrived an hour early, attended the Prayer Rally for Our Police at First Pineville which coincided with Gov. Bobby Jindal’s call for a state-

See PRAYER RALLY on 14

## At St. Matthew revival, father leads his son to Christ

BY BRIAN BLACKWELL  
Message Staff Writer

OAKDALE – Billy Nichols had just delivered his sermon and given the invitation during the Sunday evening service at St. Matthew Baptist Church when 15-year-old Jacob Gordon stepped forward to indicate his need for Christ.

What transpired next was a joy not only for Gordon but the man who counseled him – none other than the church musician who was his father, Billy.

After stepping forward, Jacob Gordon made his way to a room used for counseling those who just prayed to accept Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior.

When Jacob made eye contact with his dad and Billy realized it was his son he would counsel, the two were overcome with joy.

“Anytime you are able to talk to one of your kids about salvation and see them accept Christ, you know it is a great experience,” said Billy Gordon. “We’re called to win people to Christ. When I saw it was Jacob who had raised his hand and came back for counseling, I was jumping at the chance to be the one who would talk to him.”

See REVIVAL on 11

## Georgia Barnette fuels launch of multi-media initiative

BY JOHN KYLE  
Louisiana Baptists  
Communications Director

Church planting, compassion ministries, missions education and other missions-related endeavors are what typically come to mind when one thinks of state missions.

In Louisiana, you can add multi-media outreach to the list.

*Here for You* is a multi-media evangelism strategy for local churches that has become a significant part of Louisiana

Baptists state missions efforts.

Launched in southwest Louisiana in the summer of 2014, *Here for You* is a multi-platform media strategy designed to give every person in Louisiana the opportunity to say “yes” to a relationship with Jesus.

According to Louisiana Baptists Communication Director John Kyle, the basis for *Here for You* comes from a parable of Jesus.

“In Luke 14, Jesus tells a parable that includes the admonition to ‘go into the highways and hedges and compel them

to come in.’” Kyle said. “What does this look like in 2015 and beyond? How can we get inside people’s smart phones, tablets, TV’s and other communication platforms?”

Since July 2014 the spots have aired over 7,800 times on broadcast and cable outlets in southwest and northeast Louisiana. They have generated more than 135,000 online views via the splash page and YouTube and there have been in excess of 220 searches for area churches.

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# IMB forum spotlights a unique opportunity for African Americans

BY MARILYN STEWART  
Regional Reporter

NEW ORLEANS – When it comes to international missions, the African American community may be “a sleeping giant,” said Keith Jefferson, IMB African American missional church strategist, at a recent IMB Forum at Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, New Orleans.

The event highlighted that the time is now and the opportunity great for African American churches to invest in international missions.

While a lack of missions education and exposure has been a damper to African American participation in the past, the tide is changing.

“[Awareness] is beginning to grow,” Jefferson said.

Fred Luter, Jr., host pastor, told the group of mostly African American lay persons and pastors that he participated in his first international mission trip – to Africa – while president of the Southern Baptist Convention. Luter served as president from 2012-14.

Stories from IMB leaders of Africans that asked, “Where are the people who look like us?” convicted him, Luter said.

“I was bitten by the bug of foreign missions,” Luter said. He added later, “Once you go, you always want to go back.”

Featured speakers included Tony Mathews, senior pastor of North Garland Baptist Fel-

lowship, Garland, Texas and Robert Williams, pastor of The Path Worship Center and director of Miracle Making Ministries, Inc., Augusta, Ga.

Mathews leads mission teams to Africa, India, and Ecuador where Afro-Ecuadorians, descendants of slaves, sense a kinship with African Americans, Mathews said.

With trips logged to more than 30 countries, Williams leads teams to Africa where he hopes his partnerships with missionaries there will “build a Christian buffer and slow the growth of Islam,” he said.

Jefferson said the African American community can capitalize on the fact that people around the world follow African Americans celebrities such as Michael Jackson, Michael Jordan, Beyonce, and others, to gain audience for the gospel.



Marilyn Stewart photo

Tony Mathews, senior pastor of North Garland Baptist Fellowship, Garland, Texas, was one of the plenary speakers. He emphasized that short-term mission trips provide IMB missionaries needed encouragement and build bridges to unreached people groups.

Jefferson told the group he was 41 years-old when he met an African-American missionary for the first time. Two years later, he and his wife were appointed IMB missionaries to Brazil where they

served for 16 years.

“A person shouldn’t be 41 and meeting their first [African American] missionary,” Jefferson said.

See IMB FORUM on 16

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For more information, and/or a copy of the itinerary, contact Dr. Heustess at (985) 643-6017, (985) 788-1754, or bob@discovergrace.us.



## Parent Summit 2015 October 10, 8 am - 12 pm FBC Pineville



Guest Speaker:  
Richard Ross

### Practical help for making the climb to be a F.I.R.S.T. parent.

This one day event helps equip families to walk their children and teens through four significant life milestones. This year’s Summit will focus on preparing your child for salvation and baptism, preparing for adolescence, purity for life, and giving your teen a rite of passage. Registration is \$5 per parent if registered before Sunday, October 4. Childcare is provided at no cost at the event. For more information and to register, check out the Parent Summit page at [www.fbcpineville.net](http://www.fbcpineville.net).

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# Retiring Carson will be honored at a reception Sept. 27

BY BRIAN BLACKWELL  
Message Staff Writer

WINNSBORO – In his 50 years of ministry, James Carson has pastored Baptist churches in Texas and Louisiana for 37 years.

But it's the last 13 years as director of missions for the Tri-Association that have given Carson one of the greatest joys and fulfillments of his ministerial career.

"What a privilege and blessing it has been to meet so many wonderful people and to work with some of the finest pastors of our churches," Carson said. "I still believe these three associations are the finest in the Louisiana Baptist Convention."

After serving the churches in Caldwell, Deer Creek and Richland Baptist Associations since Feb. 1, 2002, Carson has felt led to retire from his position on Sept. 30. The reason, Carson said, is because after much prayer and thought he felt led by the Lord that now is the right time.

"I have been blessed beyond measure to have made lifelong relationships with so many people through these last 50 years of ministry," he said.

To honor his time of service as director of missions, a reception is scheduled for Sept. 27 from 2 to 4 pm at the Temple Baptist Church Family Life Center in Winnsboro.

Keith Dowden, pastor of South Central Baptist Church in Wisner and chairman of

the Tri-Association Mission Committee, said Carson has served as a friend and great support to the pastors in the three associations. He expects many of those Carson impacted will attend the reception.

"Brother James has been a friend and a great supporter to the pastors in the Tri Association," Dowden said. "He has sought to be a director of missions for all the churches in the Tri Association. He has been a faithful servant for the Lord. His desire is to share the gospel of Jesus Christ to all the world."

During his time as director of missions, Carson helped the 75 churches in the three associations to become more involved in missions.

In 2006, he led the Tri-Association to adopt the Acts 1:8 model of doing missions. This approach involves spreading the gospel on the local, state, national and global level.

On the association level, Carson led the churches in Richland Association in the construction efforts to build a chapel for female inmates at Richland Detention Center and a structure for the Care and Share Ministry in Ray-

ville to store food and clothing for needy families. He also led the churches in Caldwell Association to expand a similar ministry called Caldwell House of Hope.

The association also helped fund North American Mission Board missionaries in Connecticut, Maine and Utah, and helped financially support the Second Baptist Church of Laguna Gardens in Contagem, Minas Gerais, Brazil, to build a new church building.

Carson plans to return to the church in February, to preach at the dedication of the new church building, which includes the James Carson



After 50 years of ministry, the last 13 as director of Missions for Caldwell, Deer Creek and Richland Baptist Association, James Carson is retiring Sept. 30. He will be honored at a reception at Temple Baptist Church in Winnsboro Sept. 27.

Sunday School Classroom that the members chose to name in honor of him. The trip will be his 11th consecutive year to preach in the country, with the past 10 spent as a member of the Louisiana Baptist Convention team that takes a mission trip each year to Brazil.

Carson also has been heavily involved in disaster relief efforts, serving in a variety of roles on the association, state and national level.

Under his leadership, the Tri-Association became the first chainsaw unit in Louisiana. The unit ministered in such disasters as Andrew, Ivan, Katrina, Rita, and Gustav to mention a few.

He also served as a disaster relief chaplain coordinator for Louisiana and received the

Joel Phillips Lifetime Achievement Award from the North American Mission Board Disaster Relief Ministry of the Southern Baptist Convention for his leadership in the disaster relief ministry as a chaplain coordinator.

Looking toward retirement, Carson plans includes enjoying his family, especially his two grandchildren, and to continue to serve and preach as God gives me opportunities.

"But", he said, "all of this has been accomplished through the Tri-Association to the honor and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Two of his life verses are Proverbs 3:5-6, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."

"That has been my heartbeat for over fifty years and shall continue to direct my paths of ministry in the years that are ahead until God calls me home."

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## Do as I do — The big issue for our Baptist family

An old saying goes like this: “Do as I say, not as I do.” Though many of us have said something like this to our children, we knew our parenting was weak when our lives betrayed our words of instruction.

As I see it, the big issue in Baptist life today is that for too long, key leaders, and leaders at all levels, have been unable to say, “Do as I do,” or “Do as I did.” We are now seeing the fruit of this in the staff reduction at the International Mission Board (IMB).



**RANDY ADAMS**  
Executive Director  
Northwest Baptist  
Convention

We are grieving the IMB announcement that our missionary force will be reduced by as many as 800. We are already down more than 800 field missionaries from our peak of over 5,600 in 2009. Still, with less than 4,800 field personnel, we have

been unable to fund even these reduced numbers.

An attempt to keep missionaries on the field led to huge deficit spending by the IMB, \$210 million above income over the past six years. Obviously, this cannot continue, thus the staff reduction.

Others will write and speak about how the financial crisis was and is being handled. My interest here is to address what I believe got us to where we are.

As I see it, the trouble began over 30 years ago when we began electing and selecting leaders who did not support missions through the Cooperative Program (CP).

These were godly and gifted men, but men who chose not to participate in the SBC system of mission funding that was the unique genius of our Baptist forefathers.

In those days some gave theological reasons for not supporting missions through CP, or supporting it with a pittance, and these reasons had some merit. But with the conservative resurgence, the argument of liberal drift in the SBC went away.

Still, many of those who did not support CP for reasons of liberal drift continued their lack of support even when conservatives were in control. Moreover, many of these non-CP-supporting conservatives were elected and selected to lead the SBC and her entities, entities that they did not support financially before they came to lead them. In some cases, even when they became our leaders they did not give to missions through the CP in any substantial way.

The selection of weak CP supporters to key SBC leadership roles continues to the present, not exclusively, but not uncommonly either. Interestingly, when non-CP supportive men are elected and selected to lead CP supported entities, they are now in a position to ask others for the financial support that they did not give themselves. It's a “Do as I say, not as I did/do,” kind of thing.

I believe that the primary cause of CP declining from about 10.5 percent of a church's budget in the 1980s, to about 5.5 percent today, is because of decades of leadership that has too often been selected to lead what they did not support.

The example that this has set for young pastors who have come into SBC life over the last few decades has been disastrous.

“How disastrous” you ask? Well, if the average CP giving per Baptist church was 10.5 percent, as it was 30 years ago, the IMB would have about \$85 million more per year than it currently has. And if that were the case, we'd be growing our mission force by 2,000 or more, not cutting the force by 800. And this is just the impact on the IMB.

At all levels of SBC life we would be stronger if CP giving was where it once was. We would have far more resources for church planting and evangelism in North America.

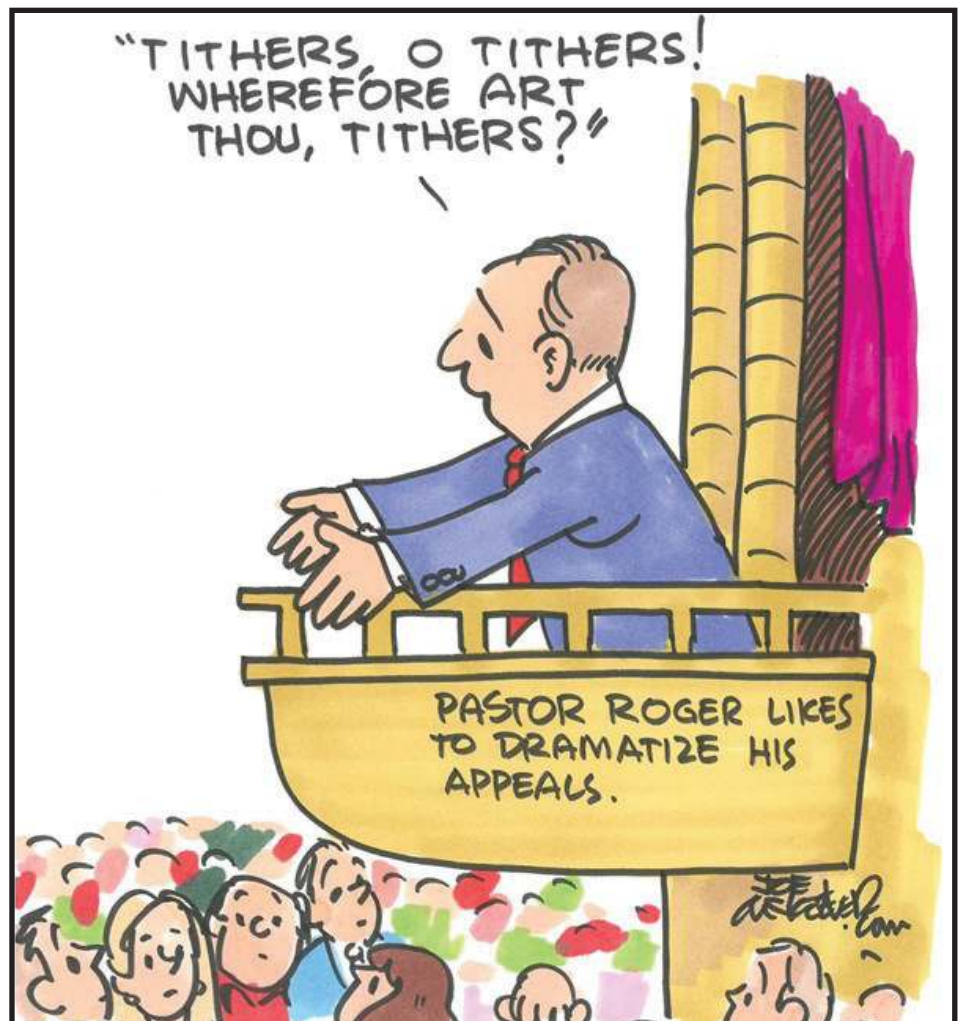
With all of our talk about evangelistic church planting in the past several years, not only have baptisms plummeted to the lowest levels since the 1940s, we are also planting fewer churches than we did a decade ago.

We need to get honest with ourselves and talk about the way things really are and not just feed off a few happy anecdotes. I know I sound quite negative, but facing reality is essential if we are to solve the problem.

I consider it most troubling, and irritating, that much of the CP discussion over the past six or seven years has centered on how we “cut the pie.” Most often this means that state conventions should send more of the CP to the national and international entities. And the states, in general, have done this.

State conventions have reduced their staffs by several hundred persons over the past several years. But please, if we don't get past “pie cutting,” and develop strategies to grow the pie, we'll continue to decline (and we are declining, seriously declining by every measurement).

And by “develop strategies to grow CP,” I mean first and foremost, select our leaders from among the thousands who believe in and support CP. And don't try to convince us that our best leaders are not found among those who



actually support the SBC cooperative system in a substantial way. That is crazy, and more than crazy, it is disrespectful of those leaders who actually put their money toward SBC missions.

We live in an age where everyone wants a quick fix to the problem. I believe the current funding problem in the SBC did not happen quickly. It has taken a few decades to get us into the shape we're in, decades of choosing one leader after another whom, if the average Baptist church followed their example of CP mission's giving, the SBC would be “out of business.”

“Do as I say, not as I do” kind of leadership regarding CP has gotten us into the shape we're in today. It didn't happen quickly and it won't be fixed quickly. It will require a pattern of selecting leaders who supported what they were asked to lead even before they were asked to lead it.

All of this said, some will say “pew warming Baptists” is where the problem really starts because giving to the local church, as a percentage of one's income, is also down. This is true. But this is also a leadership problem as we pastors haven't always done a good job of stewardship education in our churches.

And not all church leaders tithe on their income, let alone go beyond the tithe. From what I've read, poor per-

sonal stewardship by church leaders is a major problem.

We could also point to the fact the average church not only contributes less to missions through CP than they once did, they also contribute less to mission causes through all channels than they once did. This is also true. Local churches are keeping more money for local ministry than churches did a few decades ago.

But these facts do not argue against my main point that it all starts from the top, with prominent leaders in key positions. Leadership really does matter. Over time, we typically follow the example that our leaders set. By that I mean that we “do as they do,” not as they say.

I am privileged to live and serve in the Great Northwest. And in the Northwest, when we look for leaders, we look for men and women who believe so much in what we do that they support it through the CP.

I believe if I ask people to support what I fail or failed to support throughout my ministry, my leadership is greatly weakened. But if a leader can say what Paul said to the Corinthian Church — “Imitate me” (1 Cor. 4:16) — and say it with integrity, that is strong leadership. And that's what we need at all levels of leadership in Baptist life.

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# Celebrating 20-year partnership, NOBTS dedicates new facility at Angola

BY MARILYN STEWART  
Regional Reporter

ANGOLA – Celebrating a 20-year partnership that has changed lives and deployed “missionaries,” New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary/Leavell College recently dedicated a new facility with expanded classroom and library space at Louisiana State Penitentiary, Angola. The Aug. 27 dedication followed a graduation ceremony marking the program’s 278th graduate.

“This has been the most spectacular day we could ever have,” said Warden Burl Cain. “We have a new seminary building; we doubled our capacity; and, it means less victims of violent crime.”

The Joan Horner Center, an 11,000 square foot building with a computer lab, two classrooms, an auditorium and library, was named in memory of benefactor Joan Horner, founder of Premier Designs of Dallas, who with husband Andy Horner were long-time supporters of the Angola ministry. An anonymous donor provided funds for the structure.

James LeBlanc, secretary of the Louisiana Department of Corrections, echoed Cain’s correlation between the program’s success and a state-wide drop in repeat offenders, crediting as a factor the work of 35 NOBTS “missionaries,” graduates who asked to transfer to other Louisiana prisons in order to plant new inmate-led churches.

Jimmy Dukes, the NOBTS director of the prison program, said the new facility will help meet a great need.

“Other prisons and even some parish jail sheriffs want to have our missionaries,” Dukes said. “To do that, we need to recruit more students and train more students.”

The program offers the bachelor of arts in Christian ministry and non-credit certificate degrees. Dukes said the new space can accommodate twice the current enrollment and allows master-level coursework to begin.

Charles S. Kelley, Jr., NOBTS president, looked back at the program’s beginnings and noted that Cain and others who dreamed with him had the foresight to see the program’s potential.

Cain, a former educator, approached associational leaders of the Judson Baptist Association, now named the Baptist Association of Greater Baton Rouge, and seminary leader-

ship and asked them to provide educational services for the incarcerated.

“They saw what God saw,” Kelley said. “They saw that God could do a mighty work.”

John Hebert, missions and ministry director at the Louisiana Baptist Convention (LBC), told the graduates that the 1,639 churches of the LBC stand behind them, supporting the program annually through the Georgia Barnette State Missions Offering.

The center sits adjacent to the 800-seat Tudy Chapel where Kelley reminded graduates and the packed house that God has experience handling problems bigger than any they face.

“It doesn’t matter what the circumstances, when God looks at you, your past and your troubles, he says, ‘Been there. Done that. Got the t-shirt,’” Kelley said.

Kelley told the graduates that when seminary leaders wondered how they would fund the program, “God said, ‘I fed 5,000 with one little boy’s sack lunch.’” And when Hurricane Katrina’s devastation put heavy demand on all available funds, Kelley said God’s response was, “‘This program is too important to stop for a minor little flood. If I can get Noah and his family through, I can handle this.’”

Kelley reminded the graduates that they were on their way to lives of “impact, influence and significance.”

Politicians on “both sides of the aisle” are beginning to recognize that incarceration alone is not the answer and are seeing the impact the program is making, LeBlanc said. “It’s amazing what’s going on here,” he added.

NOBTS/Leavell College has active programs also at the Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women, St. Gabriel, La.; the Mississippi State Penitentiary, Parchman, Miss.; Phillips State Prison, Buford, Ga.; and the Hardee Correctional Institute, Bowling Green, Fla.

William Hall, a spokesman for the graduating class, told the crowd he knew what Angola prison was like when Cain arrived. The prison was so known for violence that it was often called the “bloodiest prison in America.”

“Warden Cain did something very few men are able to do. He let God in,” Hall said. “Isn’t it amazing what happens when Jesus comes in?”

Miguel Kelley spoke, urging his fellow graduates to stay grounded and maintain

an intimate relationship with God. Paroled after serving more than 23 years of a 44 year sentence, Miguel now works as an account executive at a firm in downtown New Orleans.

“Work hard, with an urgency,” Miguel Kelley said. “Seek God with a hunger and thirst.”

Following graduation, guests toured the Joan Horner Center and its new library, the Charles S. “Chuck” Kelley, Jr. Library. No one individual can be credited with the program’s impact, Kelley said. “It’s bigger than that,” Kelley said.

At the dedication, Kelley shared his dreams for the center’s future: \$100,000 to begin the master’s level certificate in worship ministry; a \$1 million endowment to cover tuition cost for all enrolled in the Louisiana prison programs; and a \$5 million endowment to establish the Center for Moral Rehabilitation to provide a voice within the



Guy Boyd photo

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary Registrar Paul Gregoire talks with degree candidates prior to the commencement ceremony at the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola, Aug. 27. The program awards the associate in Christian ministry and the bachelor of arts in Christian ministry degrees

national conversation for how to reduce the prison population and attain genuine rehabilitation.

“Where prison would be seen as a positive influence and

a place of healthy preparation for reentering society,” Kelley said of the program’s mission. “It’s not education alone, but a change of heart.”

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LOUISIANA BAPTISTS



# LC Fall Revival calls for students to 'Focus on Jesus'

BY BRIAN BLACKWELL  
Message Staff Writer

PINEVILLE – Curtis Zackery's message on how to change one's community, campus and world was simple yet urgent for the youth, college students and others attending the recent revival at Louisiana College.

Focus on Jesus.

Every single person, every single day needs to be reminded of the cross of Christ," Zackery said. "Because it either tells us the story of what we can be rescued from or it tells us the story of what we have been rescued from. And when both of us realize what we've been rescued from, the one who is the rescuer becomes our focus. And when He becomes our focus, He begins to change things."

Zackery was one of three guest speakers for the three-day annual revival inside LC's Guinn Auditorium. Sammy Tippit, a global evangelist with Sammy Tip-

pit Ministries, preached the first day's message and Lee Howell, founder of Awaken Men Ministries and director of St. George Island Christian Retreat Center, preached on the second day of the revival.

Zion Hill Church, the Louisiana College Chapel band and Philadelphia Baptist Church provided music and worship for each of the sessions.

Students gathered at the altar throughout the revival, coming forward to pray for a variety of issues and make personal decisions.

"Revival comes from the Holy Spirit primarily through the preaching of the Word," said LC student Landon Lingenfelter. He called the revival "beneficial," saying it was one of the best he and other students he has talked to have attended.

Philip Caples, Vice President of Integration for Faith and Learning and Assistant Professor of Preaching and

Pastoral Ministry at LC, said it was encouraging to see pastors, the campus community and others around the state attend this year's revival.

"The Gathering Place Praise Team, the Zion Hill Baptist Church Choir, and the Philadelphia Baptist Church Choir excelled in leading us each night through worship in song,"

Caples said. "Equally, Dr. Sammy Tippit, Rev. Lee Howell, and Rev. Curtis Zachary brought inspiring messages from the Lord that motivated our students and others in attendance to reboot for the new academic year. While we did not track the number of decisions each night, several of our students have shared that this revival was life changing for them.

Therefore, we continue to press on toward the mark of the upward calling in Christ Jesus as we continue to prepare students and transform lives."

LC President Rick Brewer added the revival was important because the school is "launching a new academic year focusing our attention on Christ through proclamation and praise."

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## GBO from page one

A splash page, Louisiana-Baptists.info, has been created where viewers are introduced to Louisiana Baptists, view a Gospel presentation, find a church in their area and view and share the spots via social media. Since the splash page was launched it has received more than 9,500 visitors.

*Here for You* launched its third pilot market in New Orleans and southeast Louisiana in August to coincide with the 10th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina.

"The Georgia Barnette State Missions Offering has totally underwritten the first two pilot campaigns in southwest and northeast Louisiana," Kyle continued. "While it's still early in the process, preliminary feedback from local churches in the two pilot areas has been positive."

Kyle emphasized that all of the spots are based on scripture. "The idea is to take the words of Jesus and make a practical application of a truth to a specific audience, which in the first three pilot campaigns has been young mothers."

Based on reports from a media placement firm secured for this initiative, Kyle estimates that over 90 percent of

young mothers in southwest Louisiana saw one or more of the spots at least 25 times. In northeast Louisiana the coverage jumps to 98 percent of the young mothers seeing the spots 57 or more times.

All of the *Here for You* spots can be viewed at [www.LouisianaBaptists.info](http://www.LouisianaBaptists.info).

Churches are encouraged to post the spots on their websites and Facebook pages as well as sharing them with family and friends via social media.

*Here for You* is just one of the areas featured in this year's Georgia Barnette State Missions Offering emphasis. To view all of the featured missions and ministries, visit [www.GeorgiaBarnette.org](http://www.GeorgiaBarnette.org). The goal for 2015 is \$1,800,000 all of which is used for missions and ministries in Louisiana.

"I believe *Here for You* is a great addition to our state missions efforts," Kyle said. "We're told there are approximately 2 million people in our state who do not have a relationship with Christ. *Here for You* enables us to share God's word with people we normally wouldn't reach and do so more frequently than we could otherwise."

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LOUISIANA BAPTISTS



# Fire can't break spirit of Turkey Creek Baptist, congregation rebuilds

BY BRIAN BLACKWELL  
Message Staff Writer

GILBERT – A fire in late 2013 may have destroyed the sanctuary of Turkey Creek Baptist Church but could not break apart the spirit of the congregation in the midst of rebuilding the structure 19 months later.

The fire happened in the early morning hours of Dec. 4, 2013. Though no one was injured, the incident left the congregation without a place to worship.

Kyle Spinks, who became pastor of the congregation in July 2013, said that's when his congregation began to rise to the occasion.

"Just about every help you could think of, from prayers and phone calls to monetary donations, we received," Spinks said. "We are thankful for the prayers and support. During all this process our prayer has been God would shine through us and our adversity. And we did that the best we can."

"I told our congregation that when my family and I moved out here, we prayed for the fires of revival," he continued. "They just came in a different way."

With the absence of a sanctuary the congregation had known as home for more than 90 years brought a few blessings.

While they were without a sanctuary, the congregation met in a church member's home.

Attendance fluctuated between 30 and 60 people for Sunday morning services. Church members pitched in, bringing in shorter pews, a cross and a podium that were donated.

Spinks said that he has preached in house churches overseas while on mission trips but participating in a house church in the United States was something he and the other members had not experienced often.

"It was tight inside the house but people weren't complaining," Spinks recalled. "They were still excited we were having church."

In addition to not having a traditional sanctuary, the church was forced to think of alternative locations to hold baptisms. The solution was holding the baptisms in the Boeuf River, a 20-minute journey by car from its former sanctuary.

On Sundays when a baptism was scheduled, after the worship service the members would drive out to a boat ramp alongside the river and have the baptisms. A picnic would follow the celebratory occasion.

Spinks baptized seven people within the 19 month period they were without a sanctuary. The congregation enjoyed the river baptisms so much that they have indicated a desire to have more there in the future.

"Some of the elderly members said it reminded them of their childhood, when they had to do baptisms by the river,"



Submitted photo

More than 200 people attended Turkey Creek Baptist Church's re-dedication of its sanctuary on Aug. 2. The church burned on Dec. 4, 2013. The congregation, though, rose to the occasion and, with the help of Allen Construction Company, rebuilt the structure in 19 months.

Spinks said. "Over time we may do that again. We definitely want to remember our roots to help us remember what got us from point A to point B."

"That's been our mindset," he said. "It's one thing to have roots but your roots are only to help you grow. We have this new building but we don't want to forget what brought us to this point – meeting in a house church and meeting in a river for baptisms."

Laverne Parks, a member of the church for 20 years, is thankful God kept the church unified when Satan could have torn them apart.

"God had a plan for us," Parks said. "We stayed the course and he kept us together. Now we have this beautiful facility to worship in."

"We are going to be stronger than ever," she continued. "We have gone through the fires, coming out stronger. We are looking forward to doing some more things for God and being a lighthouse for the community."

When the day came for the re-dedication of the sanctuary, nearly 200 people showed up for the grand opening and homecoming service on Aug. 2. Those in attendance worshipped in and toured the new facilities, which include a 160-seat sanctuary complete with capabilities to display videos and feed sound throughout, a fellowship hall, four Sunday school rooms and a pastor's office.

The congregation even showed unity when choosing the features of the new building, which Spinks said is a testament to their attitude of

following God's lead in a difficult situation.

"For me, the biggest thing that jumped out was we have an older congregation and people tend to get set in their ways," he said. "When we lost the building, we lost all these things everyone thought they had to have. We actually never had the first argument over designing a new building, colors, anything. People were completely happy we as a church were still there. In today's time we get so caught up in cosmetics of church that we forget the church is the people."

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LOUISIANA BAPTISTS



# LC honoring distinguished alums Hill, Brown, Hanson at homecoming

By KATHY HEGWOOD OVERTURF  
LC Alumni Director

PINEVILLE – Louisiana College's 2015 Homecoming Celebration kicks off Oct. 1 at a chapel service in Guinn Auditorium honoring this year's class of distinguished alumni, which is a diverse group of individuals from the fields of business, education and full-time ministry.

Don Hill (64), a former student body president; Becky Brown (76), a member of the first women's basketball team, the Wildcat mascot and the 1976 homecoming queen, and Dr. Gretchen Lower Hanson (81) are the three alumni who will be honored.

After graduating from LC, Hill, a businessman from Dallas, Texas, received a Masters in Statistics from Florida State University. He went on to have a

successful career in the financial industry.

He was instrumental in creating the first Credit Reporting Resources Guide. He is also one of ten people who established Salt Grass Steakhouse and later Lupe's Tortilla, two very successful restaurant chains. He and his wife Terry have been married since 1967 and they have one daughter.

Upon graduation, Brown, who is from Richland, Miss., received graduate degrees from Northwestern State University in Natchitoches and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, where she remained on staff for 20 years. In 2000, Becky founded Little Brown



Don Hill



Becky Brown



Gretchen Lower Hanson

received her PhD from the Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas. She began her teaching career in California and served as a faculty member at McNeese State University in Lake

The Distinguished Alumni will be honored again on Oct. 3 at 10 a.m. in the Granberry Conference Center along with this year's inductees in the LC Sports Hall of Fame.

The inductees in the sports hall of fame are Ben McLaughlin (10) - football; Debbie Dixon Brasher (80), women's basketball, and for only the second time in LC history, we are honoring an entire team. The 1978-79 Wildcat Basketball Team and manager will be inducted along with their legendary coaches.

Come join us for all of the events of Homecoming 2015. If you would like tickets to any events or need more information, call Kathy Hegwood Overturf at 318.487.7301 or email [kathy.overturf@lacollege.edu](mailto:kathy.overturf@lacollege.edu). You can also find information on our website at [www.lacollege.edu](http://www.lacollege.edu).

Light Ministries.

She is a published author, songwriter, musician, and well-known inspirational speaker. She has spent the past 14 summers as Bible study and worship leader at Judson Baptist Retreat in St. Francisville. She is staff evangelist at First Baptist Church, Richland, and works with the Baptist Global Response of the International Mission Board.

Dr. Hanson, who earned a degree in biology from LC,

Charles before returning to her alma mater.

She taught anatomy, physiology and biology during her tenure at LC, while helping to prepare students to take the MCAT. Since 2002, Gretchen has been a full-time homeschool teacher and administrator. Dr. Hanson has been married to her husband Steven since 1982 and they have two children. They reside in Bryan, Texas, and are members of First Baptist Church.

## Revival from page one

Jacob Gordon added that the plan of salvation made sense once his dad walked him through each step.

"I was expecting the pastor that night to pray with me but then dad got up and took me back to the room for counseling," he said. "That was a life-changing experience that I'll never forget."

The church's pastor, Dean Gunter, was on vacation the day Jacob Gordon accepted Christ. When he returned to Oakdale, he learned of the conversion.

Gunter said it's always a good thing when people accept Christ, especially between a parent and their child.

"I think it's good a father sets the example for a son and sets forth the biblical knowledge for him to learn and grow for many years to come," Gunter said.

### MEMORIES RELIVED

Nichols, who also preached for Gunter in the morning worship service, said the incident between Billy and Jacob Gor-

don brought back memories from earlier in this own life.

"I thought about my son and grandson," Nichols said. "Both of them got saved while I was preaching. When I baptized my son it took me a while because I was trying to baptize him as I was weeping with joy. Finally I got him under and brought him back up."

Those saved during the service at St. Matthew Baptist Church are among the 52,000 people Nichols has seen accept Christ during his last 12 years of career ministry.

He pastored churches in Louisiana, Tennessee and Texas before sensing a call 13 years ago to serve as a revivalist.

Among the churches Nichols started, he saw attendance increases in worship attendance in his first year as pastor to 500 at Trinity Baptist Church in Texas City, Texas. Later, he saw Victory Baptist Church in Texarkana, Texas, grow to 450 in his first year. Then he pastored for 20 years in Tennessee retiring only after he had the congregation

prepare to build a 1,300-seat worship center.

Nichols, who was born in a tent in Monroe and holds degrees from Louisiana College, LSU-Alexandria and Louisiana Baptist University in Shreveport, entered this latest area of ministry because he learned that pastors needed encouragement and a move of God in their own churches and communities.

"An old pastor came to me and asked me to do something he never asked of a preacher – to resign his church," said Nichols of the day when he was in the midst of his 20th

year at Hamill Road Baptist Church in Chattanooga, Tenn. "He said there is no problem in your church, but the problem we are having is churches are closing the doors and preachers are quitting the ministry. He said that every time we mention who can we get to go and help these churches and pastors, your name is the only one that comes up."

"I prayed five years and one night God woke me up as if to say I've answered your prayer," he continued. "You are the man. I went to that old pastor's church the next Sunday night and said I resigned

this morning from my church. He asked what am I going to do and I told him that I am going to help these preachers. I went from there and put God's ministry together and I told my wife I would be a revivalist. A revivalist goes for the purpose of getting people right with each other and God and the church changes the community. They change in the community and the community comes to see what happens."

Nichols, who recently moved back to Louisiana to continue his ministry as a revivalist in his home state, may be contacted at 318.481.1863.




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Photos by Gracie Carson and Natalie French

LC President Rick Brewer signs a memorandum of understanding on Sept. 15 that allows for a 3+2 degree program partnership as Louisiana Tech President Leslie Guice looks on. Students at LC will earn a bachelor's degree in pre-engineering in three years and then go to Louisiana Tech to earn an engineering degree in two more years.

# Louisiana College, Louisiana Tech enter into 3+2 degree program partnership

By STAFF  
Baptist Message

PINEVILLE – Louisiana College students soon will have the opportunity to earn not one but two degrees.

LC President Rick Brewer and Louisiana Tech President Leslie Guice on Sept. 15 signed a memorandum of understanding that allows for a 3+2 degree program partnership. Students at LC will earn a bachelor's degree in pre-engineering in three years and then go to Louisiana Tech to earn an engineering degree in two more years.

This new program allows

for graduates to be more marketable in a changing world, contends Brewer.

"I firmly believe that in the 21st century, success in the

marketable, and probably give them a good shot at grad school."

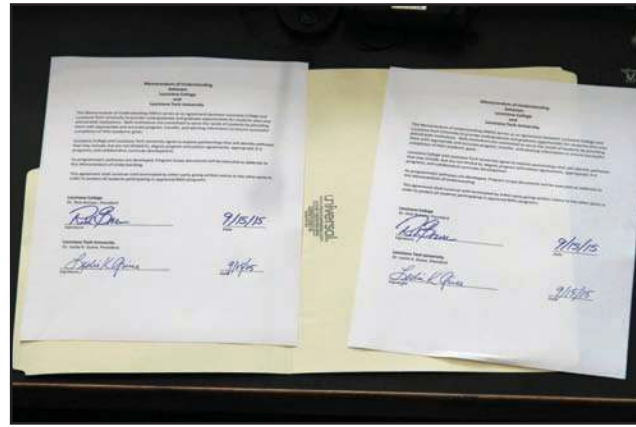
Guice called the partnership a great match, nothing that the agreement between the two

institutions is both unique and historical.

"The family spirit is very important on our campus," he said. "We have a very positive culture on our campus that I think supports student learning."

"We are larger but it will be a nice transition opportunity for students that want to get some part of their education here and

participate in some way there in Ruston or through the programs that we jointly develop to expand opportunities for these students."



community will come through efforts of collaboration," Brewer said in the press conference. "Programs like this 3+2 model will make graduates from LC and Louisiana Tech more mar-

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# After death of John Gibson, family relying on its faith, encouragement from others

BY BRIAN BLACKWELL  
Message Staff Writer

NEW ORLEANS – In the days following the death of her husband, a beloved professor at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Christi Gibson has seen the Christian community rally around her and her family.

And she now wants others to know they should feel free to reach out to others for help in overcoming a certain sin in their own lives.

“The message we hope to get out is that we must do life in community,” Christi Gibson said. “And that means having some sort of environment where we hold each other accountable, are transparent, and talk about our struggles.”

She said we must adopt the attitude that “whatever it takes for us to get real in the Christian community, we are ready to do it. We are going to walk in truth.”

## TRAGEDY

Christi Gibson arrived home from work at approximately 5:30 p.m. Aug. 24 when she discovered her husband, John, unresponsive at their home on the seminary campus. She immediately notified emergency medical services. Unfortunately, EMS responders were unable to revive him, and they pronounced him dead at the scene.

Leavell College students were notified of their professor’s death during the first class period Aug. 25 and morning classes were dismissed so students could gather in the Hardin Student Center with friends, professors, area pastors and members of the local collegiate

ministry staff as they processed the news.

## REMEMBERED AS REDEEMED

A memorial service was held on campus Sept. 8, in which several people spoke, including Gibson’s son, Trey. The memorial service can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ea4UTHaxG-0>.

During his tribute, he conveyed that his dad displayed countless examples of sacrificial love.

“The way that the Lord used my dad to impact people was incredibly far reaching and clearly evident,” he said. “The love he had for everyone was unbiased, unrelenting, and unshakable. If you want to know what it looks like to sacrificially love other people, look at my dad.”

Trey Gibson said that like his dad, every person is broken and living in a broken world. The only thing that can heal that brokenness is Jesus Christ.

He added that God has created every person for relationships and those relationships are crucial when facing life’s battles.

“Life’s race was never designed to be run alone,” he said. “My dad had struggles that he walked with alone. And due to the brokenness of sin and the lies that the enemy can tell you, he could not see a way to let people in.”

Trey Gibson said although his dad suffered with depression and addictions, his true identity was not found in brokenness of sin but in the redeeming love of Jesus.

At the end of his race, Trey Gibson said, his dad opened

See **GIBSON** on 16

# LOUISIANA NOTABLES

## HOMECOMING

■ Alto Baptist Church, Alto: **Homecoming celebration**, Sept. 27, 10:30 a.m. Dinner on the grounds will follow after the services at noon. Speaker: **Kelly Clark**. Pastor: Alan Miller.

■ Jamestown Baptist Church, Jamestown: **Homecoming**, Sept. 27, 10:30 a.m. Speaker: **Everett Geis, Sr.** A covered dish luncheon and fellowship will follow. Pastor: Everett Geis, Jr.

■ Conway Baptist Church, Farmerville: **Annual Homecoming Celebration**, Sept. 27. **The Brothers in Christ** will be in concert from 10-11 a.m. followed by the memorial and worship service. Speaker: **Joe Cannon**. Lunch will follow in the Family Life Center. Pastor: Paul Carter.

■ Grosse Tete Baptist Church: 75th Anniversary Celebration - Jesus Christ, Our Cornerstone, Sept. 26, 10 a.m. Speaker: **Howard Turner**. A jambalaya lunch will follow the service. Pastor: Mark Robinson.

■ First Baptist Church, Eros: Annual Homecoming Celebration, Sept. 27, 10 a.m. singing and special music. Speaker: **Marty Black**. There will be singing, preaching, food and fellowship. Bring a covered dish for dinner on the grounds after lunch. Pastor: Elvin Whelish.

## REVIVAL

■ Crossroads Baptist Church, Farmerville: **Revival**, Sept. 27-30, Speaker: **Joe Aulds**. Pastor: Jeff Breland.

■ Satsuma Baptist Church, Livingston: **Revival**, Oct. 3-5. Speaker: **Ron Herrod**. Pastor: Brad DeLaughter.

■ Temple Baptist Church, Springhill: **Revival**, Oct. 4-7, Speaker: **Joe Aulds**. Pastor: Kenny Rowe.

■ Bonita Road Baptist Church, Bonita: **Revival**, Oct. 4-7, Sunday, 6 p.m. and Monday thru Wednesday, 7 p.m. Evangelists: **Johnson Ross Family of Arkansas**. Pastor: John White.

■ South Lafourche Baptist Church, Cut Off: **Revival**, Oct. 4-7, Sunday, 10:45 a.m.; nightly 7 p.m. Evangelist: **Preston Nix, Professor of Evangelism and Evangelistic Preaching at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary**. Worship: **Bobby LeCompte, worship leader at Mulberry Baptist Church**. Tuesday night is pack the pew and a bring a can good to help with the church’s storehouse ministry. Pastor: Shane Terrebonne.

■ Horseshoe Baptist Church, Mer Rouge: **Revival**, Oct. 11-14; Sunday 11 a.m. & 6 p.m.; Monday-Wednesday 7 p.m. Speaker: Bodie Spicer. Pastor: Bob Lonadier

## LAGNIAPPE

■ Calvary Baptist Church, Forest Hill: **Kenneth Perkins** was ordained on

Sept. 13. Pastor: Brandon Gill.

■ Old Zion Hill Baptist Church, Independence: **World Crafts Marketplace Event, sponsored by Northshore Associational WMU**, Sept. 26, 9:30-10 a.m. Hear from a missionary speaker from Italy, a time of fellowship, shopping, door prizes, and lunch with a unique flavor. Please RSVP by Sept. 17 to [office@northshorebaptists.net](mailto:office@northshorebaptists.net) or by calling 225.567.5086.

■ North Shreve Baptist Church, Shreveport: **Pumpkin Patch**, Sept. 28-Oct. 31, Monday – Saturday, 9 a.m.-7 p.m. Sunday, 1-7 p.m. Pumpkins will be \$1 and up. There will also be photo stations and children’s activities. Pastor: Roy Davis.

■ First Baptist Church, Sulphur: **Jamie Womack: A Call to Surrender**, Oct. 2, 5:30 p.m. Sponsored by the Women’s Ministry there will be a dinner and door prizes. Cost: \$5 a ticket and a love offering will be taken. Come listen to Jamie’s testimony of God’s faithfulness even in the midst of her struggles with cerebral palsy. Pastor: Andy Buckley.

■ Satsuma Baptist Church, Livingston: **Community-wide luncheon for anyone affected by cancer**. Oct. 5, 12:30 p.m. Speaker, Ron Herrod (cancer survivor/founder of “Learning from the Darkness” ministry.) Pastor: Brad DeLaughter.

■ First Baptist Church, Pineville: **FIRST@FIRST Business Leader Luncheon**, Oct. 5, 12-1 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall. Speaker: Northwestern State University Basketball Coach Mike McConathy. Admission: \$10 (lunch included). The luncheon is held each first Monday and is open to the business community. Please RSVP to [mlangford@fbcpineville.net](mailto:mlangford@fbcpineville.net) by 8 a.m. on the day of the meeting. For more information, visit [www.fbcpineville.net](http://www.fbcpineville.net).

■ Unity Baptist Church, Pineville: **Pumpkin Patch**, Oct. 5-31, noon-8 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday; noon-6 p.m., Wednesday; 10 a.m. - 8 p.m., Saturday and 1 p.m.-6 p.m., Sunday. Cost: .50 cents to \$50 depending on the size of the pumpkin. Cash or checks only. Pastor: Jason Dubea.

■ First Baptist Church, Ponchatoula: **Live 2 Lead**: Oct. 9, 7:50 – 11:30 a.m. Speakers: **John C. Maxwell, Valorie Burton, Patrick Lencioni and Kevin Turner**. Cost: \$40; pastors and church staff \$20. Group and student discounts are available. Registration is available online at [www.northshorebaptists.net](http://www.northshorebaptists.net). For more information contact Josh Dickson at [jdickson@fbcpontchatoula.com](mailto:jdickson@fbcpontchatoula.com) or call 985.386.3075. Pastor: David Cranford.

■ Acadia Baptist Academy Reunion, Oct. 9-10. For more information contact Robert Harvison at 337.369.6561 or 337.256.3658.

■ First Baptist Church, Pineville: **Parent Summit**, Oct. 10, 8 a.m. – noon, Speaker: Richard Ross. Cost: \$5 per parents and covers all class materials, childcare, guest speaker and snacks. This one-day summit is for parents of children of all ages and helps equip families to walk the path of Legacy Milestones. For more information and to register online, go to [www.fbc-pineville.net](http://www.fbc-pineville.net). Pastor: Stewart Holloway.

## Scripture Crypto

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

jdt pml fjwl bxmd mjt mzf ojzwldp xa kjwlc’f mjzo,

jdt j cljpmlod uzotcl jsxyp mzf cxzdf; jdt mzf wljp qjf

cxkyfpl jdt qzct mxdlr.

wjppmlq pmoll:axyo

Clues:  
C = L; L = E

Answer to September 10, Scripture Crypto:  
Luke three: seventeen



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## Prayer Rally from page one

wide day of prayer for law enforcement.

The Pineville rally sponsored by Louisiana College and 28 churches in Pineville included music "God Bless America" played on the piano by LC President Rick Brewer and prayers by Weatherford and seven other ministers.

The local event initially started small, as it was supposed to be held in front of Pineville City Hall for the Pineville Police Department. But as word spread, it grew, leading to the event to be moved across the street to First Pineville's sanctuary. The event also included law enforcement officers from a number of departments and agencies – the Rapides Parish Sheriff's office, Alexandria and Pineville police departments and members of the Louisiana State Police.

Each member of law enforcement who attended received a prayer card and bookmark.

Blake Fuselier, a motorcycle officer with the Pineville Police Department and member of Calvary Baptist Church in Wood-

worth, came away encouraged.

"All of the support from the community lately, especially today, reminds me there are plenty of good people left in our world and they are the reason we do what we do," he said.

Philip Robertson was among those who prayed during the service, asking God to protect the law enforcement and grant them wisdom.

"Father we are asking you today Lord, would you pour divine wisdom into their hearts and minds," prayed Robertson, pastor of Philadelphia Baptist Church in Deville. "Lord not the world's wisdom, not man's wisdom. But Father we are asking you to impart to them the wisdom of God. I pray that you will grant these men and women wisdom and discernment in the field as they often have to make quick decisions. Give them the wisdom to know how to respond, how to react in difficult situations."

Louisiana Baptists joined law enforcement from around the state at various gatherings to pray for those protecting them.



Photo courtesy of Colfax Baptist Church

Colfax Baptist Church was the site of a prayer rally for law enforcement from Grant Parish on Sept. 14. Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal designated that day as a day of prayer for law enforcement personnel.

Among the other churches hosting prayer rallies for law enforcement on Sept. 14 and 15 were Colfax Baptist Church, Hebron Baptist Church in Denham Springs and Acadian Baptist Camp in Eunice among others.

Kevin Billiot, a state fire marshal and evangelism pastor at Alpine First Baptist Church, attended a prayer rally in Montgomery. He said gathering with fellow pastors, law enforcement and the public was humbling.

"The vast majority of our public are very supportive and have been," Billiot said. "Many have come up to me while I'm in uniform to thank me and to offer encouragement."

"My primary prayer is two-fold – for God to comfort those who mourn the loss of their loved ones killed in the line of duty and for God to bring



Brian Blackwell photo

Alexandria Police Chief Loren Lambert, a member of Longview Baptist Church in Deville, bows his head as he prays during a prayer rally for law enforcement at First Baptist Church in Pineville Sept. 14.

spiritual revival to our nation. We collectively have shunned God and we need Him to collectively return us to Him. He is our only hope, as John 14:6 states."

Steve Horn, pastor of First Baptist Church in Lafayette and Louisiana Baptist Convention president, said during each service at his church, the congregation emphasized praying for law enforcement officers. He said his heart is burdened and that violent activity against police must stop.

"We are praying," Horn said on his blog Sept. 14. "How are we praying? We had an extended time of prayer this morning as a church staff. We prayed for safety for our officers. We called individuals by

name. We prayed for the heads of law enforcement agencies in our area. We prayed for families of police. We also prayed and thanked God for two young men in our church who have felt the call of God on their lives to become police. I am thankful that even in these difficult times, God is raising up young Christians to wear the badge and take the oath to serve and protect. God bless our police everywhere."

Louisiana is second in the nation in terms of law enforcement officers killed in 2015, according to the website Officer Down Memorial Page. Nine officers have died in the line of duty this year in the state. Overall, 86 have died in the line of duty in 2015.

Old Bethel Baptist Church in Natchitoches is seeking a

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# MOMENTS

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**SEEKING A FULL TIME MUSIC/YOUTH DIRECTOR**  
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## CHILDREN'S MINISTRY COORDINATOR

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## Bethel Baptist Church in Colfax is seeking a Bi-Vocational Music Minister

Résumé can be submitted to: BethelBaptistColfax@hotmail.com or mailed to: Music Minister Search Committee Bethel Baptist Church 8789 Highway 8 • Colfax, LA 71417



## SEEKING FULL TIME SOCIAL WORKERS

The Louisiana Baptist Children's Home is seeking a full-time social worker for the Alexandria area.

The ideal candidate must possess a MSW, have previous child-welfare experience, be an active member of a Southern Baptist church, and be committed to serving God by ministering to children and families through foster care and adoption services.

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## IMB Forum from page 2

While the event focused on African American involvement, speakers stressed that every Christian is called to service.

"If you've been saved, you've been hired," Mathews told the group. "You can do this."

Mathews emphasized that short-term mission trips provide IMB missionaries needed encouragement and build bridges to unreached people groups.

"Missions should be the DNA of every church," Mathews said. He pointed to his own upbringing in a non-believing home and said, "If the Lord can send me out of the United States, he can send you."

Williams told of a lesson he learned while in seminary that God had not called him to a ministry "confined to a pulpit," but that he needed to take the gospel to those in need.

"Christianity has been reduced to a 'seat religion,'" Williams said. "But every

Christian has been called to be a missionary...the only way to do that is to get out of our seats and go to the streets."

Williams directs Miracle Making Ministries of Augusta, Ga. that includes the Zaccheus Project, a healthcare arm of ministry that treats 7,000 patients per year. Compassion ministries meet needs, but the primary task is leading others to Christ, Williams said.

"Most of all, we preach the gospel," Williams said.

On his short-term mission trips, Williams trains indigenous believers to share the gospel with their own people. Williams told of a young woman in Africa whose parents drove her away from home and out into the jungle when she came to faith in Christ. She told him, "I love Jesus...I'm not turning back," Williams said. Her continued growth in the faith is evident every time he returns to her city, Williams said.

"When people begin to

do short-term missions, they understand better the need for long-term," Jefferson said.

"And people who do short-term missions, God often calls them to long-term service."

When asked about the recent budget changes at IMB that netted staff cutbacks, Jefferson said IMB's commitment to send missionaries remains strong.

"We don't know what the future looks like, but we have a president [David Platt] who wants to send tens of thousands of missionaries around the world," Jefferson said.

Alan Duncan, IMB missionary church strategist and former IMB missionary to South Africa, reminded the group that Platt often urges Southern Baptists to "write a blank check to God for your life."

After sharing his testimony of how God led him to missions, Duncan said, "Don't put any limits on what God might say to you today. Just say yes."

## Gibson from page 13

his eyes in heaven to the warm embrace of Jesus Christ.

"His chains are gone; he has been set free," he said. "My dad is now sitting alongside all of the other saints watching us run the rest of life's race, so let's run it well."

Trey Gibson said Satan wants others to believe vulnerability, transparency and honesty bring about shame, show weakness and kill relationships. But that is not the case, he said.

"God says those things are the only way we can walk confidently in who he has created us to be," he said. "The enemy never wins. God has already won the ultimate victory and now we have to live like it."

### WIFE TELLS OTHERS, 'SEEK HELP'

Christi Gibson said that anyone struggling with any type of addiction or sin should seek help immediately.

"If there are people out there who are hiding and lying and covering up because of shame, I would encourage them to find a safe person and speak truth,"

she said, adding Jesus' words in John 8:32: And the truth will set you free.

"I hope the Christian community, whether they are speaking truth or hearing truth, will back me up on that. Jesus said that's how we are supposed to live as believers."

Since her husband's death, Christi Gibson has received encouragement from people all over the world, just at the times when she needed those uplifting words the most. These have come in the form of passages from Scripture, praise songs, hugs and food.

"We could not do this without our Christian community without us," she said. "We joke about Baptists bringing casseroles. The casseroles are really an excuse to be present. And that's what people have been."

"Support of all kinds has been pouring out," she added. "This is the church. This is the body of Christ. We have seen that without a doubt."

For the rest of the story go to [www.baptistmessage.com](http://www.baptistmessage.com).



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TEN YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF

# RITA: The Forgotten Storm



COMMEMORATIVE EDITION



SEPTEMBER 24, 2015





A Southern Baptist disaster relief volunteer cuts up a large pine tree that fell during Hurricane Rita during relief efforts in southwest Louisiana.

## Table of Contents

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## ON THE COVER

(Top) A shrimp boat lays on its side having been driven from Gulf waters by Hurricane Rita's 180 mile-per-hour winds and 10-foot storm surge. **Photo by Baptist Message.** (Center) An American flag, planted on a sandbar that was once a road leading into Holly Beach, flutters amongst the ruins that remain. Hurricane Rita totally devastated the town. **Photo by Win Henderson/FEMA.** (Center Right) Southern Baptist disaster relief volunteers Judy Price, left, of Ocala, Fla., and Sarah Jo Trimble of Pensacola, Fla., set up a sign announcing food services at a Florida Baptist feeding site in Lake Charles. **Photo by NAMB.** A grateful homeowner lets people know an SBC chainsaw crew would be removing this large tree from their yard. **Photo by Tennessee DR.**

## Credits

Layout and design of this section was by Managing Editor Philip Timothy and it was edited by Editor Will Hall and Timothy. Stories were written by Brian Blackwell and Timothy. Photos were courtesy of Baptist Press, Loy Seal of Louisiana Disaster Relief, Tennessee and Florida Disaster Relief, James Newsom of Acadian Baptist Camp, Todd Burnamann of Dry Creek Baptist Encampment, NAMB, FEMA, Louisiana National Guard, the U.S. Coast Guard, the state of Louisiana and *The Lafayette Daily Advertiser*.

## Go Online

For additional coverage of the 10-year anniversary of Hurricane Rita, which includes stories, photos and videos, go to [www.baptistmessage.com](http://www.baptistmessage.com).



Tennessee Disaster Relief photo

A group of Tennessee disaster relief workers gather around a distraught woman and lift her up in prayer after Hurricane Rita ripped through southwest Louisiana. Thousands of people were displaced from their homes and many lost their homes due to the high winds, strong storm surge and flooding.

# Amidst the destruction, Christ was exemplified

BY PHILIP TIMOTHY

*Managing Editor*

**L**AKE CHARLES – Entire towns were wiped away. Numerous fishing villages were smashed beyond recognition. Roads were impassable. Livestock by the hundreds were left stranded. Cars and trucks floated down flooded streets and the only means of getting around was by boat.

In an area known for its fabulous seafood industry and recreational fishing, the stench of dead shrimp and fish hung in the air.

On Sept. 24, Hurricane Rita, the fourth most intense Atlantic hurricane ever recorded and the most intense tropical cyclone ever observed in the Gulf of Mexico, slammed into land between Sabine Pass, Texas, and Johnson Bayou, Louisiana, as a Category 3 hurricane with 120 mile-per-hour winds and a 17- to 20-foot storm surge that sent saltwater as far as 10 miles inland.

Yet Rita is viewed as “the Forgotten Storm” because the nation’s attention, then and now, was on Katrina, which made landfall four weeks ahead of Rita on Aug. 29.

For example, during the aftermath of Katrina, two thousand newspapers wrote more than a half of a million stories about the storm for more than two years. Rita, on the other hand, garnered national headlines for only about three days.

But Rita was devastating.

Records around the Hackberry area show wind gusts reached over 180 miles per hour as the storm made its way to land. The wind and storm surge was powerful enough to unearth more than 350 graves – sending one casket 33 miles inland – and washed away an estimated 10,000 homes and camps in four parishes, while flooding homes, schools, businesses and churches in Vermilion and Iberia Parishes with up to 10 feet of water.

### UNBELIEVABLE DESTRUCTION

According to a report commissioned by the Louisiana

Recovery Authority, the hurricane caused 125 deaths, most during the evacuation, and more than \$12 billion dollars in damage, making Rita the ninth-costliest storm in U.S. history.

Oil platforms and drilling rigs in the storm’s path were shut down and workers evacuated which halted 98 percent of oil and natural gas production in the Gulf. Despite the precautions, 66 platforms were destroyed, 37 extensively damaged, 13 rigs were set adrift, 4 more were destroyed and 10 extensively damaged.

There was extensive damage to rice and sugar cane fields and to the hunting and shrimping industries.

Blanco and the state of Louisiana asked the federal government for \$34 billion to help with storm recovery.

While touring the devastation, Maj. Gen. Bennett Landreneau, head of the Louisiana National Guard, told a reporter, “This is terrible. We did not dodge the bullet. We got smashed. Whole communities are just gone.”

Iberia Parish’s Director of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness in an interview with the Gainesville Sun said, “It’s bad, worse than I’ve ever seen.”

After a briefing with Blanco in Baton Rouge, President George W. Bush was quoted as saying: “I know the people of this state have been through a lot. We ask for God’s blessings on them and their families.”

### IT COULD HAVE BEEN WORSE

Fortunately, two days earlier, residents of Cameron Parish, Calcasieu Parish, and parts of Jefferson Davis, Acadia, Iberia, Beauregard, and Vermillion parishes were ordered to evacuate ahead of the storm by Louisiana Gov. Kathleen Blanco.

Thankfully, most did.

Cameron Parish, which was in the path of Rita’s harshest winds, was obliterated. Only concrete slabs remained where towns of Creole, Cameron, Grand Chenier, Johnson Bayou and Holly Beach once stood.

See **DESTRUCTION** on 6





Photo courtesy of The Lafayette Advertiser

The town of Holly Beach on the Louisiana Gulf Coast was completely destroyed and washed away by Hurricane Rita. No homes or businesses remain of the southwest Louisiana community, once home to 300 residents and a favorite destination for thousands of tourists and fishermen.

# Forgotten by many, Rita memorable to churches, residents

By Brian Blackwell, *Message Staff Writer*

**S**OUTHWEST LOUISIANA – She’s known as the Forgotten Storm. But for those residents of southwest Louisiana who survived Hurricane Rita, the storm will always be a memory that will live on for years to come.

The hurricane made landfall at around 7:40 am between Johnson Bayou and Sabine Pass on Sept. 24, less than a month after Hurricane Katrina wreaked havoc on the southeastern part of Louisiana.

The storm reached land, it weakened, but not before dumping heavy rainfall on a widespread area of the state. More than 1 million people were without power at one time during the storm, which traveled up the central part of the state before leaving behind homes, communities, businesses and lives in need of repair.

Still, Louisiana Baptists are thankful for the light God provided through the storm and aftermath by the ministry of disaster relief teams and others who came to their aid.

“When we look at the hurricane, what we saw was lots of physical damage to properties and in the middle of that churches responded like we do with disasters,” said Bruce Baker, director of missions for the Carey Baptist Association of churches in Southwest Louisiana. “We had churches from throughout the state and country to help. And we had churches help each other. We saw the best of Christian community through that.”

## EVERYONE TOUCHED IN SOME WAY

Two days after Rita made landfall, Steve James returned to assess damage to Trinity Baptist Church in Lake Charles where he serves as pastor. Debris, water and pieces of stained glass windows filled the auditorium, which was the only part of the church that received major damage.

James wanted his congregation and the community to know that Trinity Baptist Church planned to stand up to the trying circumstances. On the Saturday following Rita, James took a



Tech Sgt Paul Flipse photos

An Air Force reserve para-rescueman from the 920th Rescue Wing scans the ravaged and flooded Louisiana landscape in the aftermath of Hurricane Rita.

piece of plywood and wrote “Services tomorrow at 10:30 come as you are” and placed it at the corner of the church’s property.

Around 125 people showed up that Sunday and met in one of the undamaged areas of the church for a time of praise and worship. The following Sunday they began to have their regular services in the largest meeting area of the church.

For several weeks they conducted three worship services, but had no Sunday school hour or evening services. This gave members the opportunity to work on their homes or the homes of their friends. Shortly after that, the church went back to their regular worship schedule, meeting in their double gym.

“For the church, Rita was a time of inconvenience not a time of catastrophe,” James said. “It allowed us the freedom to minister to the needs of other churches by financially assisting pastors and providing materials for church repairs.”

James was amazed at the resilience of his congregation.

During the time of transition the membership was faithful in their church attendance, their giving and their hospitality. The church opened its

facilities to house many groups from outside of the area, who came to help with the cleanup of Lake Charles.

“Trinity has always had a heart for reaching out to the community,” James said. “It was fun to see them live out what God had placed on their hearts, which was to help their neighbors.

“Everybody was touched in some way by Rita. Some were touched more than others,” James said. “Some people only lost a shingle, others their whole house. But, through it all, God was good in providing the materials and man power for us, as a church, to reach out to our own church family and the community. Every day we had teams cleaning up yards, putting down blue tarps, repairing roofs, cutting away downed trees, stacking and hauling away debris and rubbish and feeding people. It was a time of bringing our church together for a common cause in ministry.”

## MINISTRY BORN AFTER RITA

The civic center in the predominantly Catholic town of Gueydan had just shut down and evacuees from Katrina transferred to another site in Pin-ville because of the anticipation of Rita coming through the town. Once the storm passed, the evacuees were transported back to the civic center where they remained for weeks without electricity and little help from outside groups.

While evacuees of Katrina and Rita were living there, First Baptist Church joined churches of other denominations to provide clothing.

And in the months that followed, a vast operation developed. Donations poured into the town and they had such an abundance of leftover items that First Baptist Church decided to open a clothing ministry in October 2006, long after evacuees left.

The church expanded this ministry in 2013, when a second building was added to accommodate the growing need.

See **FORGOTTEN** on 7

**10,000**

The number of camps and houses destroyed by the destructive winds and crippling storm surge of Rita in a four parish region in southwest Louisiana.

**\$11 billion**

The assessment of damages caused by Rita to homes, communities and businesses.





Photo courtesy of NAMB

A disaster relief chaplain shares a moment of prayer with a homeowner whose home was damaged by Rita.



Photo courtesy of NAMB

Two Southern Baptist disaster relief volunteers from Florida set up a sign announcing food services at a Florida Baptist feeding site in Lake Charles after Rita.



Photo courtesy of Tennessee Disaster Relief

Southern Baptist disaster relief volunteers use a tractor to shore up the roof of a house and spread a blue tarp over it after Rita slammed into southwest Louisiana.



Photo courtesy of Florida Disaster Relief

Florida disaster relief volunteers remove a cut up tree as a chainsaw unit moved through southwest Louisiana cutting up downed trees.

# LOUISIANA DISASTER RELIEF

## Rita provided a catalyst for growth of units

**M**uch like during Hurricane Katrina four weeks before, Southern Baptist Disaster Relief teams were a powerful force in the rebuilding process in areas affected by Rita.

Disaster relief crews from throughout the US came to southwest Louisiana to help. The first team from Louisiana to respond was Rolling Hills Ministry located in Ruston.

David Abernathy, director of Rolling Hills and blue hat – leader – of the unit recalls how they were serving with Katrina operations when they received the call to go to Leesville, after serving in Hammond for several weeks after Katrina. Fatigued from serving for more than a month in Hammond, volunteers from the unit responded within 48 hours after Rita made landfall.

When they arrived at First Baptist Church in Leesville, electricity was out and the crew did not have any food on hand. The unit had exhausted their supply during Katrina and was thus unprepared to respond to another storm of such great magnitude. Abernathy's wife managed to find some Pop Tarts inside the church building to feed the crew.

The following day food did arrive and for the next three weeks the volunteers worked nearly 12 hour days. The humidity was so intense that three volunteers suffered from heat exhaustion, but that didn't stop the rest of the crew from continuing their mission.

Like past assignments, the crew delivered food in a drive-through format. Cars would line up for blocks and pull up to the feeding unit trailer to receive their meals.

Abernathy said the churches in the area along with disaster relief teams really stepped up and worked together to give a cup of cold water in Jesus' name.

"Cooperation sticks out in my mind," Abernathy said. "People would stand up for hours to give people water and food. Church involvement really rose to the occasion."

However, First Baptist Leesville was not the only church to serve as a host site for disaster relief operations. Many other churches from throughout the entire state served as staging areas and host sites.

By the time disaster relief crews had ceased operations with Katrina and Rita, volunteers had worked a total of 165,748 days, served 14,556,541 meals, completed 16,973 jobs, washed 25,826 loads of laundry, cared for 7,817 children, used 21,595 gallons of water and allowed for the use of 103,556 showers. Individual figures for each storm were not available.

Bill Holifield, pastor of First Baptist Church in Vinton at the time and now pastor of Colyell Baptist

Church in Livingston, said Katrina and Rita elevated the awareness of Louisiana Baptist Disaster Relief teams like never before. First Baptist Church served as a distribution point for the American Red Cross and hosted disaster relief teams from Arkansas, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Virginia, who were at various points through Thanksgiving working on churches like First Baptist who sustained damage from Rita.

"There had been disaster relief responses previously but none like it had ever been up to that point," said Holifield, whose church he was pastoring at the time received nearly \$40,000 total and volunteer labor from Grand Avenue Baptist Church in Ft. Smith

Ark., and Grace Community Baptist Church in Washingtonville, NY, to help make repairs to First Baptist Vinton that was damaged from the storm. "When I go back to Vinton for a visit, they still talk about those people in the yellow shirts and how they made a difference. The disaster relief teams gave a witness and helped spark a change in the heart of the people."

Ten years after Rita, the number of Louisiana Baptist Disaster Relief crews has greatly increased a presence in the state and beyond. When the storm made landfall,

Louisiana had less than 40 crews operating. Today, the state has 76 crews.

Louisiana Baptist Convention State Disaster Relief Director Gibbie McMillan, who was working with Texas Baptist Disaster Relief at the time, said Katrina and Rita both elevated the reputation of the denomination's disaster relief presence.

"Southern Baptist Disaster Relief was one of the best kept secrets it seemed like because people would rave about what the Red Cross did," he said. "But nobody knew that behind the scenes all the food the Red Cross was distributing was being prepared by Southern Baptist Disaster Relief, most of which were Texas Baptists and Southern Baptist of Texas Convention that were doing that in that area."

Loy Seal, who was state disaster relief director at the time, said Rita and Katrina motivated Louisiana to establish more of its own disaster relief teams.

"Rita and Katrina made us realize just exactly what we needed to do," Seal said. "Three days before Katrina in Louisiana we had finished our first shower trailer. We realized it wasn't enough afterwards, so we got to work creating a number of additional shower, chainsaw, feeding and other units."

Seal said managing teams responding to two different storms was a nearly 24-hour operation.

"We had to fight two wars on two fronts," Seal said. "It was different when we had to go to a second hurricane relief effort in one month. We never dreamed that would happen to us, even though it happened in Florida the year before."



A Tennessee Baptist disaster relief chainsaw team cuts up a large pine tree that fell on this house following Hurricane Rita. One of the hardest-hit areas was Cameron Parish, where authorities estimate 90 percent of the homes were destroyed and water reached 15 feet high. Lake Charles also suffered severe damage.

**165,748**

The number of days volunteers worked by the time disaster relief crews had ceased operation with Katrina and Rita

**14,556,541 million**

The number of hot meals served by volunteers following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.



# Ten years after Rita, Johnson Bayou close to rebuilding on original site

By Brian Blackwell, Message Staff Writer

**J**OHNSON BAYOU – Father’s Day has arrived and the congregation of Johnson Bayou Baptist Church has gathered for a special homecoming service.

Around 50 people, mostly current members of the church less than a mile from the Gulf Coast, are gathered at the original site of the church off Highway 82 in Cameron Parish to remember the past and celebrate the future.

The past is filled with memories of a church building severely damaged by Hurricane Rita and then completely destroyed by Hurricane Ike three years later.

The future is one of hope and plans to rebuild on the exact location where the two storms wreaked havoc on the church.

“I don’t understand why the Lord did all of that for that building and a few years later another storm came in a washed it away,” said former pastor Les Fogleman, who preached the homecoming message on June 21. “But I know one thing. He has an army. His army can come together and do mighty things.

That says they are not going to stop. They will keep on fighting. They have a community to reach. There’s no doubt they need to have a facility there.”

Fogleman was pastor of the congregation when the storm made landfall between Johnson Bayou and Sabine Pass on Sept. 24, 2005.

Fogleman had evacuated prior to the storm making landfall and was unsure of the condition of the church.

“One of deacons called and said it was bad,” said Fogleman, who already had planned to retire before the hurricane. “He thought I shouldn’t come back, that the church was destroyed. The Lord dealt with me and I couldn’t sleep.

“All I could think about was going back and fixing it,” he continued. “I had no idea what I was going to face. After I got there, the Lord confirmed quickly to me that I had to stay and rebuild that church.”

What Fogleman found was damage from 4-5 feet of floodwaters and a roof that was ripped apart. Months would pass before electricity would be restored.

However, instead of giving up, Fogleman grabbed a shovel, picked up a rake and got to work.

“It was just heart breaking to see what happened,” Fogleman said. “All the grass and

See **Johnson Bayou** on 8



Submitted photo

The church building was severely damaged by Hurricane Rita and then completely destroyed by Hurricane Ike three years later. However, 10 years after Rita, the congregation of Johnson Bayou plans to rebuild on the exact location where the two storms wreaked havoc on the church.



Submitted photo

The streets of Erath, located in Vermilion Parish, were flooded. First Abbeville was among many churches in the parish affected by the storm, which caused a surge of up to 20 feet in some areas. No one in the parish died, though nearly 10,000 livestock perished.

## Vermilion churches band together, trust God

By Brian Blackwell, Message Staff Writer

**V**ERMILION PARISH – The day following the landfall of Hurricane Rita, a bedridden Pres Riley fielded a call from a church member asking a common question of many affected by the historic storm.

“The water’s over my doorstep. What should I do?”

Riley, in the hospital after receiving several brown recluse spider bites, responded with advice to get out of her home and seek shelter at First Baptist Church in Abbeville where he served as pastor.

For a couple of weeks, Riley ministered from his hospital room to many others affected by the storm. While he was keeping in touch with his church members, those in the community and pastors offering prayers and support from

throughout the US, First Abbeville was ministering by opening up its family life center to groups from all denominational lines which came to minister in a variety of ways to the community. The only states that did not send a team to stay at the church were Alaska and Maine.

With the exception of one week, the church’s family life center hosted groups for the next two years.

The church itself suffered roof damage but the groups coming in helped repair the damages.

Throughout this time, the congregation itself was struggling.

Riley said a good percentage of his members lost their homes or were in flood zones which made the cost to rebuild so costly that they

See **Vermilion** on 8

## Survival is what this Cameron church is about

By Brian Blackwell, Message Staff Writer

**C**AMERON – First Baptist Church in Cameron is like the town – badly damaged by past hurricanes but always coming back to survive.

Hurricane Audrey nearly destroyed the town in 1957 and almost 50 years later, Hurricane Rita tried to do the same to the community that sits alongside the Gulf of Mexico.

Among the last to leave during Rita were Paul and Cyndi Sellers. Paul was on duty as a sheriff’s deputy and Cyndi was capturing the final moments of reporting for a newspaper.

The Sellers managed to escape and rode out the storm from their son’s home in Denham Springs. They returned to find their home, community and church nearly gone.

Instead of choosing to count their losses and close, the Sellers believed God wanted to continue the work of First Baptist Church in the

community.

“Paul and I always thought from the beginning that God wanted a church in Cameron,” said Cyndi Sellers, who also serves as the church treasurer. “Some people said to tear down the building and merge with another church in the parish. We said we are the parish seat and we need a church here. God continued to remind us that we were making the right decision by the way people kept showing up to help us build.”

Though the Sellers knew this was the right decision, the path to their first service back in March 2006 wasn’t an easy one.

The church sanctuary was badly damaged and had to be torn down, as did the parsonage. The remaining structures, built as separate

See **Cameron** on 8



Submitted photo

First Baptist Church in Cameron, like the town, was badly damaged by Hurricane Rita. The church’s sanctuary was so badly damaged and had to be torn down as did the parsonage. An architect from Sulphur designed a plan to convert the old gym into a new sanctuary.



# In Rita's aftermath, Robinsons seized opportunity to serve

BY PHILIP TIMOTHY

Managing Editor

**W**ESTLAKE – When asked about Hurricane Rita, the floodgates of memories burst open for 71-year-old Joanna Robinson of Westlake.

Ten years ago, she and her husband Jack, members of Bellview Baptist Church in Westlake, spent 2 ½ weeks feeding, helping and ministering to Southern Baptist disaster relief workers, members of the Coast Guard and people working at the nearby water plant.

“It sometimes seems like it was just yesterday,” recalls Robinson, who had a kidney transplant six years earlier. “It was a very taxing time but a very meaningful time because God worked through us for His glory.”

Jack Robinson, who passed away almost three years ago, was a member of the Carey Association disaster relief chainsaw crew. He had been home only two days after a strenuous stint of disaster relief work in the Covington area when he and Joanna were forced to evacuate as Rita approached southwest Louisiana.

Climbing into their 38-foot-motor home, the couple traveled 235 miles west to College Station, Texas where they rode out the storm but were back in Westlake at 6 Saturday evening to survey the damage Rita had left in her wake.

The storm had laid waste to their town.

They, like two million other people in southwest Louisiana and southeast Texas, were without electricity and were

surrounded by a whole lot of destruction. Many roads were found to be impassable because of flooding, down trees and down power poles.

“We managed to make it to the parking lot of First Baptist Church in Westlake and slept there,” said Joanna. “I got up the next morning and began fixing breakfast. We had stockpiled as much food as we could carry so I did what I do best ... I began to cook.”

“Jack met a policeman who had stayed behind and asked if he was hungry. The poor boy said he was starving and had not eaten for almost two days,” continued Joanna. “We fed him and six or seven others who came by that Sunday. Jack had grown up in Westlake and knew everybody and everybody knew him.”

The couple realized food was going to be a necessity.

So, the couple managed to get to their house where they parked their motor home at the end of their driveway, cranked up the generator and got to work. By Sunday evening, they had set up a dining facility under their carport and Joanna began to prepare meals.

By Monday they were feeding 35 to 40 men meals three times a day.

In the meantime, Jack, who got up early to help Joanna get things started for the day, hooked up with his nephew Damon Hardesty, who had stayed through the storm with the police in the local middle school, to start the cleanup process. Owner and operator of Jack Robinson Farm Service and RV's Plus and co-owner of Sun Contracting, he got two large tractors.

Jack, Hardesty, who was a member of First Baptist Church Westlake, other

volunteers and city workers cleared roadways, homes and driveways of downed trees

“Jack and Damon helped to clear many of the roads in Westlake,” said Joanna. “Jack would get up with me at 5 a.m., work all day and come to the motor home to eat around 6, help me with the dishes and fall into the bed exhausted. Believe me; neither of us had any problems falling asleep at night.”

She said her husband's only regret was the lack of being able to make connections with people through the relief work they were doing. Westlake was pretty much an empty shell.

“Jack told me, ‘We didn't have that closeness – even though it was in our own backyard. The whole idea of going out is to be with people and tell them about Jesus. Most people probably never even saw the huge trees laying on their house or in their driveway.’”

“It was terrible, but it was wonderful,” Jack told Joanna.

The strain and the heat and humidity was tough on Joanna as well as she worked alone in fixing the meals using a three-burner stove and the 80 square-foot kitchen of their motor home. Many times she could not run the air conditioner or turn on the lights because the generator was already in use. It was a challenge to say the least.

“I didn't do it, God did. Every one of those boys who came to eat offered to help me but I said, ‘no, you are needed out there clearing the roads and removing the downed trees,’” said Joanna. “He provided for my health. He gave me all the strength I needed.”

God also provided the diesel needed

to keep the generator and mobile home running.

“We would alternate plugging up the refrigerator and freezer,” Joanna said. “I can't tell you how many gallons of diesel we used to make sure it stayed running. When we ran short of fuel, more would just show up.”

God also provided for the food.

“When we would run short of food, He provided. Whether it was a loaf of bread, a dozen eggs or a bunch of shrimp from one of our friends, he always provided enough so that everyone had enough to eat. Sometimes we had some weird combinations but we ate well,” she said. “It was truly amazing to watch Him at work.”

After the evening meal, the exhausted crews would gather under the Robinson's carport and just fellowship. Because there was little lighting the couple held prayer meeting on Wednesday under their carport and on Sunday those in town gathered at First Baptist Westlake, which was within walking distance of the Robinson's house for services.

“All those that we had been feeding finally got power. We were one of the last homes to get electricity,” said Joanna with a chuckle. “I told them ‘I'm tired and this is your last meal.’ I made them a gumbo and there wasn't a drop left.”

After almost three weeks and 1,530 meals, Joanna and Jack Robinson deserved the rest.

“As I watched them leave, I said a prayer thanking God for giving Jack and I this opportunity to serve Him,” she said. “If I had to do it all over again, I wouldn't change a thing because I know this was what He wanted.”

## Destruction from page 6

Holly Beach, affectionately known as the ‘Cajun Rivera’ because of its beautiful beaches and wonderful fishing, was gone. Only the stilts that held houses above the ground remained.

All along the roadways, from the wooded stretches of southeast Texas to central Louisiana, entire pine forests were snapped in half by the force of the winds. The highways were tangled with fallen trees and downed power lines.

### MINISTERING TO THE NEEDY

Having depleted much of their resources on Katrina, the American Red Cross, the Salvation Army, state and federal officials struggled to respond to people's needs after Rita. Army and Air National Guard units rushed to assist local police, sheriff's deputies and fire departments who stayed behind for search and rescue.

Later, those same military units provided MREs (meals ready to eat), bottled water and ice for thousands of residents at various places cut off from the outside world because of flooding or impassable roads.

But the people of Southwest Louisiana, especially many Southern Baptist churches and SBC disaster relief teams,

didn't just wait for help to show up. Though exhausted from having spent three weeks in New Orleans and surrounding areas helping others in need, these teams, churches and their members rolled up their sleeves and went to work “bringing Jesus, a smile and a helping hand” to those who had stayed and those who were just returning to their own region.

“The thing that stands out to me, said Bert Langley, director of missions for Evangeline and Gulf Coast Associations when the storm hit, “in spite of the damage many of our churches sustained, they still continued to take in folks.”

“They exemplified Christ in the midst, during and after the storm,” he said. “It would have been easy for them to say, ‘look, we've got our own problems’ but they didn't. They faithfully served all those who had a great need.”

Besides the herculean efforts put forth by local churches, the Louisiana Baptist Convention led by Loy Seal, director of Louisiana's DR effort, was ‘Johnny-on-the-spot’ and in place long before other organizations could set up.

“The convention and the North American Mission Board made a great impact on this area and our community,” said Bill Holified, pastor of First Baptist Church in Vinton at the time and now pastor of Colyell Baptist Church in Livingston. “By Thursday, when FEMA

finally started arriving, we had already set up several SBC DR Teams, the Red Cross and NAMB teams at our church. The feeding team came out of the Arkansas Baptist Convention, and they came with their own chainsaw teams.”

Chainsaw teams showed up from Kansas, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Texas, Tennessee, Florida and Alabama by the following weekend along with more than 75 Baptist Student Union volunteers from Ouachita Baptist University in Arkadelphia, Ark.

“I worked closely with Tennessee and Alabama,” said Butch Guidry, the ‘Blue Hat’ from the Carey Baptist Association, “and they will always have a special place in my heart. The way they served and their heart for people made all the difference to people who were hurting and in desperate need after the storm.”

Maplewood Baptist Church in Sulphur, Topsy Baptist Church in Lake Charles, First Sulphur, and First Westlake became major command centers for disaster relief.

The parking lot at East Bayou Baptist Church in Lafayette turned into a major site for disaster relief and a Texas feeding unit produced almost 15,000 meals a day at the Lafayette Cajundome.

First Lafayette housed the doctors and nurses who treated all those staying at Cajundome as well as many of the

Southern Baptist relief workers.

Others – churches, pastors, and church members – opened up their places of worship and homes to house and feed evacuees and relief workers.

The 10 Baptist encampments in the state played a huge role in taking care of evacuees. Dry Creek Baptist Camp and Acadian Baptist Center were two of Louisiana's encampments which bore the brunt of Rita's fury.

Even though they both sustained damage, lost electricity, water and sewer, the two camps continued to minister to evacuees. ABC, which was further east, was able to house more than 400 and provided Dry Creek with assistance in the form of a trailer filled with air conditioners and generators.

“It was an incredible time of ministry,” said Todd Burnaman, director of Dry Creek. “It was the pinnacle of ministry for us. Rita changed our lives, made us stronger and better. It taught us how to do hurricane ministry.”

Town helping town; stranger helping stranger; neighbor helping neighbor; church helping church, people and denominations set aside their own needs to care and minister to others.

As Langley said, “We were being Jesus. Our churches exemplified Christ in the midst of the storm.”

See **DESTRUCTION** on 7



## Johnson Bayou from page 5

weeds had washed in and were about three feet thick all through the church. It looked like someone had just tossed the pews in there where water was standing. So I just started dragging all the stuff out."

Throughout the next five months, Fogleman lived in a donated camper on the church grounds and coordinated all of the renovations.

Groups from in Louisiana and outside the state began helping rebuild the church.

Every week, checks for various amounts came in the mail. They ranged from a small amount of money to \$5,000.

"It was through the Louisiana Baptist Convention all these people from all over the country found out about us," Fogleman said. "People would call and whoever they would talk to would say there is a lot of work going on in Johnson Bayou and they would then call me."

"It seemed like the right people would come at the right time," he continued. "It was amazing how God coordinated all these people coming in and doing all this work. We had more money when it was over with than when it started. The only things we paid for out of our pocket was air conditioning and the floor."

Though the sanctuary was severely damaged, Fogleman decided to hold Sunday morning services there in mid-October. Since all of the members had not returned to Johnson Bayou, the worshippers ranged from firemen to volunteers who were on site repairing the church. Those who worshipped in the sanctuary used 2 foot by 12 foot boards resting on 5-gallon buckets as makeshift pews.

Fogleman was unable to contact any of his church members for three weeks. Eventually he began hearing from them.

By Thanksgiving, the first group of his members returned to the church. They slowly trickled into Johnson Bayou throughout the next few months.

Life slowly was starting to return at Johnson Bayou.

Renovations to the sanctuary and some classrooms were complete by April 2006. All of the volunteers had now left, leaving church members to hold services once again inside the sanctuary.

Long-time church member Juanita Sandifer credits Fogleman as a key part of the church recovering.

"It was the sacrifice of Brother Les, living alone on the bayou without his wife or church family for many months,

that enabled our church to survive this unprecedented event," Sandifer said. "With every structure in the community in rebuilding mode, our church became the one place of solace for many. Most members returned and regular church activities including VBS and Christmas pageants continued. The community continued to work its way back to 'normalcy'."

Two years after Johnson Bayou Baptist Church was rebuilt, another tragedy struck the church and community. On Sept. 13, 2008, Hurricane Ike made landfall in Galveston, Texas, causing considerable damage to the community including destroying most of the town's buildings. Among those was Johnson Bayou Baptist Church.

Even in the midst of the heartache, the parsonage was not destroyed during the storm. Services moved to the local community center, where they continue this day.

Today, the town is showing signs of rebirth.

Since Rita made landfall in 2005, the town's elementary, junior high and senior high school – all meeting in one location – has a new building completed in time for this school year. The school is located next to the future sight of the Church.

"Most of the progress made after Rita was destroyed by Ike," said Jack Gandy, pastor of Johnson Bayou since 2007. "The road to recovery has been much slower this time, with many people deciding to not return. However, those who stayed, and those who have moved here in the years following Ike, have clearly shown the need for a church in this community. Right now, our new facilities are a dream; but with prayer and persistence, that prayer will one day be transformed into reality."

Church members like Sandifer are looking forward to the day when they can one day meet again at the location before the two hurricanes caused damage.

"Our small group of regular attendees, all life-long residents, are nearly all over 50," Sandifer said. "We have maintained our faith that God still has a ministry for us."

"We long for the day we can hold Sunday School classes in more than one room, have VBS, choir specials and Christmas programs," she said. "We miss the fellowship of past members and the Bayou as it used to be. We will continue to seek God's will and reach out to our residents, weekend beach visitors and construction-work families."



First Baptist Church Pecan Island's auditorium escaped major damage, though its front door and steps were destroyed. They also had roof damage.

## Vermilion from page 5

moved elsewhere.

"When Rita hit, it was pretty devastating for many of our church members," Riley said. "It was tough sledding for our church to lose a lot of our church members at the time. We visited people and tried to meet their needs in whatever way we could."

First Abbeville was among many churches in Vermilion Parish affected by the storm, which caused a surge of up to 20 feet in some areas. No one in the parish died, though nearly 10,000 livestock perished.

Thurman Floyd rode out the storm in Carencro, about 70 miles northeast of Pecan Island. He has served as pastor of First Baptist Church Pecan Island for 14 years.

The church's auditorium escaped major damage, though its front door and steps were destroyed. First Baptist Church in Kaplan allowed the church to worship in its facility until they repaired the damage a month later.

Floyd recalls the blessing of seven groups who helped restore the church. "They did a really good job," Floyd said. "God spared our building when many of the houses around us were destroyed. This enabled us to be a witness to people around us."

### COMING TOGETHER

The congregation of First Baptist Church and the community of Erath coming together was a memory that stands out for Terry Gullick, a member there for 28 years.

Sixteen of the 30 families who attended the church were directly affected.

Gullick stayed with her mom at a home at Cotile Lake and a residence in West Monroe during the storm before returning to assess damage to the church and finding a note on the pulpit from the pastor, informing the congregation he had resigned. The church was undergoing a remodeling program when Rita came on shore, causing damage to the building from the storm's floodwaters.

The church hosted teams from around the country and together they repaired the church. Gullick said they kept the table of remem-

brance that had watermarks of how high the waters came into the building. This is forever a reminder of the storm's damage and the compassion from Christians thereafter.

Before the storm, they had a choir and choir director. Today, they have neither.

Still, despite the setbacks, Gullick said the church is hopeful they will grow once again.

"Our church is so special," Gullick said. "It's a lot like the early church. We all just love each other and stay in one accord. What we all need is that focused prayer. I know God is faithful and He proves it every day."

For Esther Baptist Church, Rita blew out its windows and doors but didn't knock the building off its foundation.

With so much attention on the city of New Orleans and other areas affected by Katrina, Pastor Wallace Primeaux said areas affected by Rita got little attention from the national media.

The members of the church and their neighbors in Esther came together and rebuilt. The congregation met in the activities building of First Abbeville until their structure was complete.

The congregation also received money from Evangeline Baptist Association and the Louisiana Baptist Convention, which helped pay for repairs and building a hill that the church structure was moved to in case future flooding occurred.

Primeaux said the congregation stayed together and was reminded to look to the Lord for their health and needs.

"We realized how much we need each other," he said. "When you face disaster like that you realize how much you need your neighbor."

Bert Langley, director of missions for Evangeline Baptist Association that includes Vermilion Parish, said the attitude shown by those churches and communities is reflective of the spirit of the Cajun culture.

"One thing about Cajun people, they're resilient people," he said. "Even though the storms were bad and severe, Cajuns just found a way to get back in there, rebuild life and keep at it."

## Cameron from page 5

rate units, were only about 35 percent damaged and could have been remodeled without elevating, which would have been cost prohibitive. The roofs were intact and the walls were structurally sound.

An architect from Sulphur designed the renovation, converting the old gym into a new sanctuary. The baptistery stained glass window was salvaged to place in the new sanctuary.

Whenever they needed assistance, groups would show up to help. A church from Kentucky donated furniture, hymnals and pews. A church from Kansas donated \$25,000. Another church from Washington brought a large white tent that the church used for its services until the building was remodeled.

The Louisiana Baptist Convention sent \$50,000 to help pay for new air conditioning units.

"It came in small and large chunks," Cyndi Sellers said. "It was God moving in a way you could only see through disasters like that."

Today, the community has not rebounded to its pre-Rita population, thanks in part to Hurricane Ike damaging the town again in 2008. Approximately 550 people live there today, compared to 2000 in 2004.

The church itself, however, is recovering. One year after Rita, First Cameron ran 20 on Sunday morning. Now, they average 50, though earlier in the year during their 75th anniversary celebration they drew 110. Baptisms – 25 since January – are on a record pace.

To disciple the new Christians, the church plans to reintroduce Sunday school, something they have not had since September 2005.

"This is a big step for us to put in a full Sunday school," Cyndi Sellers said. "Most of our trained teachers moved away after Rita and many current members are new Christians who still need to be in a class."

Other hopeful signs are community outreach efforts that have begun, such as fall and summer festivals, movie nights, and 45 children attending the first Vacation Bible School completely managed by the church instead of help from outside groups.

"We don't know what future God has planned for Cameron and First Baptist Church, but we are ready to face that future and do whatever He wants us to do," Cyndi Sellers said. "By next year we may have 1,500 construction workers building an LNG plant here. We are ready to minister to them and to all who make Cameron their home."



## Forgotten from page 3

Now, First Baptist Church's clothing ministry sells an average of 3,500 items a month, though that number has reached as many 5,000 items some months.

Funds from the clothing ministry are used to help provide money to pay for utilities for needy families.

Margaret Freeland, who was a volunteer at the civic center in 2005 and a member at First Baptist Church, said the storm helped unify the town and help the church see a need for a ministry that didn't exist prior to Rita.

"We didn't see the need for this ministry before Katrina and Rita, but the Lord laid it on the mind of people in this church," Freeland said. "I'm thankful the Lord used this to wake up our eyes to help others in the community. The two storms in a way were a blessing."

### MINISTRY TO EVACUEES

Scenes of evacuees entering Louisiana Baptist churches were a common sight in the weeks following Rita.

First Baptist Church of DeRidder opened its activities building for some Rita evacuees, and the congregation ministered to them in many ways, including just listening to their stories.

They also ministered to a National Guard unit from Dothan, Ala., providing water and air-conditioned activities during their three-week stay there. The guardsmen gave back to the church, helping the congregation remove sheetrock, carpet and pews inside the chapel damaged by the storm.

"It was awesome to see how our congregation came together," said publications secretary Kim Hughes. "Here we had people without power and they were coming to the church to cook food and take care of those who came to us needing help. Everyone was willing to pitch in and wanted to reach out and help."

"It didn't take a lot of rallying," she stressed. "And that's how our church seems to be. If there's a need, they just reach out and minister. We are blessed, but we are blessed to be a blessing."

Further north, members of Old Anacoco Baptist Church in Leesville showed the love of Christ to a gym full of evacuees, even though the church was without power at the time.

Some of the evacuees staying at the church gym even pitched in to help out. A number of them brought their own cooking pots and prepared meals, as well as helped clean the gym. They also helped dig ditches to lay water lines to install laundry facilities and repaired a well pump.

The evacuees were a blessing to all who came in contact with them while they stayed at the church, said church member Brent Cosio.

"We've had some of those people come back and visit us since then," recalled church member Brent Cosio. "We sat around, went to Bible study and prayed about reaching out to others many times in our church before Rita."

"Now, it was time to do it. Our church was focused on something more than just their own personal needs," he continued. "We were willing to do what Christ commanded."

Philip Robertson, who was Louisiana Baptist Convention president during Rita, said churches like Old Anacoco Baptist and First Baptist DeRidder were like many churches in the state — doing everything they could to minister to those impacted.

"There is nothing that will unite people like a crisis," said Robertson, pastor of Philadelphia Baptist Church in Deville which hosted primarily



Photo courtesy of The Lafayette Advertiser

Many communities in Vermilion Parish, Jeff Davis and Cameron Parish found themselves flooded due to Rita's massive storm surge, which sent a wall of water almost nine miles inland. People with boats went out and rescued neighbors caught by the high waters.

Katrina evacuees. "So when our state dealt with both of those massive storms, you were looking at a double whammy hitting the same state within weeks. People unite and we want to take care of one another, so you definitely saw that in Rita and Katrina."

"Louisiana Baptists came together, loved one another and helped one another," he continued. "It was a time of laying aside those differences and doing what God calls us as the body of Christ he commands us to do. In some ways that coming together has continued on. You look at the last 10 years in the Louisiana Baptist Convention and I think we have been moving forward. Those two storms perhaps facilitated it."

### GRATEFUL CHURCHES

Among the campuses that sustained significant damage was East Ridge Baptist Church in Lake Charles. The congregation lost its sanctuary during Rita.

Before the hurricane, East Ridge had purchased land just a few miles away to relocate [that was delayed until October 2010]. Pastor Alan Weishampel said Rita put those plans on hold briefly while the church recovered.

Church members were joined by groups from Oregon, Tennessee and Texas during the rebuilding process.

The storm allowed East Ridge to minister to a FEMA mobile home village after the storm. His members shared the gospel with and ministered to the residents there. Leading some to accept Christ as their personal Lord and Savior until the park shut down a few years later.

"They were close enough that it was our mission field," Weishampel said. "We did what we could to share the gospel until they closed the mobile home village."

Since relocating, the morning worship services are consistently full and the church is studying plans to expand the facility.

For Grand Caillou Baptist Church in Houma, serving more than 800 people each day became the norm for about a month after Rita.

Already recovering from Katrina, the town was again hit with flooding, although it was more than 200 miles from where the storm made landfall. Floodwaters came within three inches of coming into the church's new worship facility.

The church served as a distribution point for much needed fresh drinking water, emergency food supplies, cleaning materials, Red Cross meal distribution and spiritual support.

The initial emergency response ministry lasted about a month, before making way for long-term recovery ministry.

For the next year, Grand Caillou Baptist Church housed and coordinated efforts for more 300 volunteers who came to assist in the recovery

efforts.

Many assisted in mud-out, mitigation, cutting down trees, clearing debris from homes and property and contributed to construction projects.

Other groups assisted in providing hot meals who were rebuilding homes conducting needs assessment surveys, sharing Bibles and giving away tracts.

Volunteers also went house to house praying for and encouraging people who were engulfed in a sense of overwhelming despair.

"As a result, our church became known in the community as one of the only places people could turn to when the local government agencies failed them, FEMA failed them, and things seemed hopeless," said Marcell McGee, pastor of the church at the time and now pastor of Mt. Union Baptist Church in Spearsville. "Southern Baptists, particularly from our own state, provided a quick and immediate response."

Not far from the storm's direct hit, First Baptist Church in Hackberry was forced to replace its roof and carpet because of damage from Rita.

For the next three months a team from a California church moved into Hackberry worship center and lived inside until repairs were complete. The congregation also donated Christmas gifts to every family in the town.

Margaret Shove remembers how excited she was to receive a new Bible and gift cards. She said those who helped in the rebuilding process embodied the true spirit of Christ's love.

As for the recovery of First Baptist Church, Shove said they average around 100 on Sunday mornings, which is more than before Rita. The congregation is planning to expand its parking and purchase portable buildings for classrooms.

"When Rita was happening, everyone was like brothers and sisters helping each other," Shove said. "We are better off now than before."

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### RITA AMNESIA?

Many of the people *The Baptist Message* interviewed expressed their sincere gratefulness to Southern Baptists and the way they responded during those trying times.

There was also a hint of resentment because many felt as if they had been forgotten. They said at the time they weren't looking for hand-outs, just some recognition from the outside world that, yes, a big hurricane hit them too.

In an interview with *FoxNews*, Brett Downer, editor of the *Lake Charles American Press*, summed up the feelings of many when he said, "It's called 'Rita amnesia' around here. There were a lot of well-meaning folks and organizations that call this area asking us how we did after Katrina. Of course, we were untouched [by that hurricane]."

"[Rita is] really considered a forgotten storm," Downer continued. "As far as the damage, though, it's unprecedented. Had there not been a Katrina, Hurricane Rita would have probably dominated the news."

"These are the heartiest, most resilient folks I know. They still view where they live as their version of paradise," said Mark Davis, executive director of the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana. "You sit with them long enough and you would have to agree."

The *Message* hopes this compilation of stories and photos — a broad stroke, so to speak — will help people realize the severity of Rita, the magnificent work of Southern Baptist members, churches and entities and how many seeds were planted because of this incredible outpouring of kindness and ministry.