

“This certain hope of being saved is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls, connecting us with God himself. . .”

— Hebrews 6:19 (TLB)

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Newsjournal for Louisiana Baptists

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June 1, 2017



Berean Baptist Church photos

Crowley's Regina Istre was baptized on May 21 by Berean Baptist Church Pastor Dennis Smith shortly after her two children were baptized in a portable baptistery.

In a special service Regina Istre, her two children and nine others were baptized at Berean Baptist Church in Crowley May 21.

Change of location results in changes of heart

BY BRIAN BLACKWELL
Message Staff Writer

CROWLEY — Regina Istre received a late Mother's Day present, but the delay did not lessen her joy.

The mother of two was ecstatic May 21 to see her children baptized, and moments later followed them in this step of obedience as well.

"It was wonderful to have them walk alongside me on this special day," said Istre, who gave her heart to Christ and

committed to live for Him during a worship service at Berean Baptist Church April 16, the same day as her children. "Knowing that we all will be walking with God in Heaven is something that I can rejoice in. This was a blessing and a great family memory we always will share.

"Before we accepted Christ we weren't whole," she continued. "But since April 16th when we decided to put Christ in our lives, the change has been evident."

MORE CHANGES

Istre and her two children were among nine people baptized in a portable baptistery at the multi-ethnic Berean Baptist Church in Crowley. The special service included a presentation of a certificate of church membership and a shirt containing the church name and logo.

"We hold our baptisms outside as a way to reach people who may be passing

See **BAPTISM** on 2

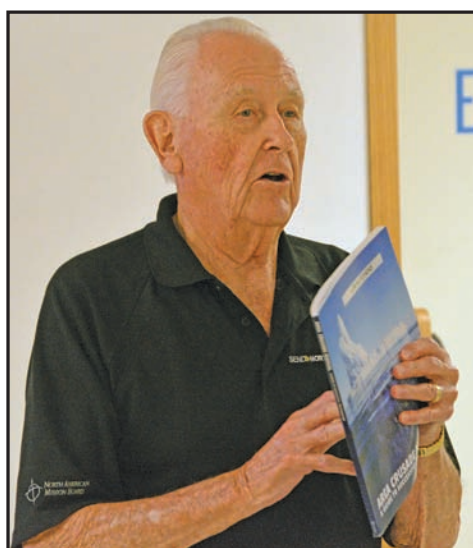
NAMB tells court McRaney controversy is 'ecclesiastical'

BY JONI HANNIGAN
Special to the Message

ABERDEEN, Miss. — Claiming state and federal courts have no jurisdiction in "ecclesiastical matters," the Southern Baptist Convention's North American Mission Board filed an official response May 18 to a lawsuit by a former state convention leader which accused the mission board of ongoing interference in the minister's employment relationships and continued business dealings.

Will McRaney, formerly the executive director of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware (BCMD), filed the 7-page lawsuit April 7 in Winston County, Miss., alleging numerous instances of "slander and/or libel." He also claimed "intentional interference by NAMB leaders" had caused him to be "uninvited" to a large mission emphasis scheduled there in October of 2016 and to the Florida Baptist Pastors' Conference in November of 2016.

See **MCRANEY** on 9



Brian Blackwell photo

J.W. Hutchens shares about impact a crusade can have on a community.

Plan a crusade, plan to pray, Graham rep says

BY BRIAN BLACKWELL
Message Staff Writer

PINEVILLE — As more and more Louisiana Baptists commit to "pray for every home and share Christ with every person" as part of the 2017-2018 Harvest evangelism initiative, a representative with the Billy Graham Evangelism Association told directors of missions and pastors from around the state that as much as prayer plays a role in mass evangelism, planning is critical, too.

ORGANIZATION IS KEY

"Plan it like an iceberg," J.W. Hutchens said at the Baptist Mission Center in

Pineville, Tuesday, May 16, saying, like an iceberg, so much about a crusade is not readily apparent.

"The evangelist is only 10 percent of it," he emphasized. "Preparation is 50 percent of a crusade. Forty percent is follow-up."

PLANNED PRAYER, TOO

But he also underscored the importance of intentional and regular prayer.

"If you do not plan on having a great prayer structure for your crusade, don't have a crusade," "Prayer God blesses. When you have a crusade, bathe it in prayer."

See **CRUSADE** on 3

11 Reasons to Not Drink Alcohol

1. God said to be sober (1 Thessalonians 5:6-8; 1 Peter 5:8 NKJV). The Greek word "nepho" means wineless, free from intoxicants.
2. We are to love God with all our minds (Mark 12:30). Alcohol impairs that mind.
3. It is expensive (Proverbs 23:21).
4. It makes you do foolish things you would never do in your right mind (Proverbs 23:29-35).
5. It is dangerous and addictive (Proverbs 20:1).
6. It hurts your testimony; you influence others to drink; you often harm others (Romans 14:21).
7. Drugs should not be used for recreation and pleasure.
8. Never take that first drink, and you will never become a problem drinker.
9. Drinking supports an industry that has destroyed untold thousands.
10. Not drinking is prudent and wise (Proverbs 20:1; 22:3).
11. You should rely on God, not drugs (Psalm 11:1).

-David R. Brumbelow, author of *Ancient Wine and the Bible: The Case for Abstinence*.
gulfcoastpastor.blogspot.com
(Permission granted to reprint.)

Questions about the Bible and Alcohol? Find answers in *"Ancient Wine and the Bible."*

Also see: "Wit & Wisdom of Pastor Joe Brumbelow"

EDITOR'S NOTE: This advertisement is consistent with the Southern Baptist Convention's 2006 Resolution on alcohol.

Baptism from page one

by and wonder why people are in going underwater and back up seconds later," said Berean Baptist Pastor Dennis Smith. "Those who do pass by we pray have a receptive heart and see the excitement we have for what God has birthed here at Berean Baptist Church."

FAST START

Smith started Berean Baptist Church in his home with his wife, Shareca, two sons, Dennis Jr. and Patrick, mother-in-law, Patricia Robinson, and family friend, Brenda Johnson, in September 2013.

An associate pastor at Israelite Baptist Church in Crowley at the time, Smith was encouraged to explore the possibility of planting a church after meeting with his pastor, Alan Knuckles, director of missions for Acadia Baptist Association, and Ernie Davis, pastor of Olivet Christian Church in Lafayette.

Within a week of meeting in his home, Smith was offered the opportunity to move the church into a building two blocks from his home. The church grew and six months

later was drawing around 20 for worship and Bible study.

PEOPLE FOCUS & LOCUS

By May 2016, Smith and his congregation decided to move from its shopping center location to a church building closer to a residential section of Crowley, where they have remained to this day.

"It's like the growth of the church has taken off," Smith said. "Now we are in the community and able to have a real physical presence that we didn't have at our other location."

Since moving one year ago, the church has held a number of outreach events. Most recently, they hosted an Easter egg hunt that drew more than 200 people.

The congregation also has started a community garden. Working with area agencies, the church holds a class every Wednesday on nutrition led by a representative from the LSU Ag Center. After each class, attendees work in the garden and are able to pick some produce to take home with them.

"What we do is a lot of work but very exciting," Smith



A woman is overcome with emotions during a baptismal service at Berean Baptist Church in Crowley. The church baptized nine people during a special baptism service May 21.

said. "It's a great reward to see development of a ministry and seeing people who have never been really involved to jump right in and serve. The Lord has called us to be something different than people are used to seeing in this community and that's a church really passionate about not only ministering to the spiritual man but also to the physical person."

GOD IS GOOD

A bi-vocational pastor, Smith has worked 25 years at CenterPoint Energy, a natural gas company. He said working a secular job allows him to practice what he preaches, which is being a light for Christ in one's daily place of employment.

"It's challenge trying to stay

prepared for ministry and working my other job," Smith said. "I try to stay engaged with the people at my secular job and be a witness for Christ there. Without a supportive church family that includes my wife and sons, it would be much more difficult to have a healthy balance of my secular job and my church job."

As he looks toward the future, Smith is quick to emphasize the congregation's growth, numerically and spiritually, is not anything he has done, but only God's favor.

"It's amazing because when we left our previous location, I told our church, 'The Lord wants to show Himself throughout the process,'" he said.

"He moved in a mighty way. It was nobody but God who worked it out and is still doing so to this today."

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Crusade from page one

COOPERATE FOR SUCCESS

Hutchens said crusades can range from just a few hundred in attendance to as many as 40,000, and both large- and medium-sized events require a concerted effort of many churches focused on drawing the lost to hear about Christ.

He said bringing multiple churches together to partner in a crusade will create buzz in the community and display a spirit of oneness to those outside the church walls, many who may be hurt and wounded.

Building on that, Hutchens encouraged the directors of missions and pastors in attendance to hold an information meeting to initiate the crusade.

Engage as many leaders as possible in the months ahead, he urged.

He also told the gathered leaders to plan on training a steering committee, as well as enrolling counselors in a four-week course about sharing the Gospel, so they will be familiar with the process when the time comes during the crusade.

UNITY, REVIVAL & AWAKENING

After the crusade, blessings likely will follow, Hutchens offered, within congregations and around them.

The community will be saturated in prayer, unity will be evident among area churches and hundreds of people will be trained in evangelism and anxious to put it to use, he said.

"Once people are trained in how to share their faith, they have a change in lifestyle," Hutchens explained, adding that unity leads to

revival among believers. "And the community notices that."

MOMENTUM BUILDING

The majority of Harvest events will take place in 2018, but a few already have been completed this year, including:

-- Student Night, Jan. 24, during the Louisiana Baptists Evangelism Conference, Temple Baptist Church, Ruston (dozens came forward for prayer: 34 persons made spiritual decisions - 10 repented for salvation, 13 repented to restore their fellowship with Christ, nine made other commitments, two declared a call to vocational ministry);

-- a Hope, Love and Freedom spiritual renewal event for believers, April 3-5, at Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond (200 attended the first night, building to more than 700 the final night); and,

-- the Real Hope crusade, April 30-May 3, at Jonesboro-Hodge High School and Winnfield Middle School (700 attended each night of the four-day revival; 25 repented in making first-time public professions of faith in Jesus, 35 repented and recommitted their lives to Christ, two surrendered to career ministry).

Lonnie Wascom, director of missions for the Northshore Baptist Association of churches that hosted the crusade at Southeastern Louisiana University, said they plan to pull off a different Harvest event in 2018, but said the planning committee from his association had not decided an exact type yet.

"There's something about the synergy among churches

that come together," Wascom said. "Whether prayer walking, holding a joint revival, or, coordinating a mobile home park outreach, unity builds a certain dynamic, and, it creates a movement of God."

HOPE IS ON THE WAY

Robert Daniel, director of missions for Big Creek, Central Louisiana and North Rapides associations, said the combined Area Planning Committee is pursuing several event ideas, but has yet to finalize on the details.

He indicated the churches likely will have some block parties and other outreach efforts leading up to the main Harvest event, which will likely take place in 2018.

"The Harvest is important because we want our community to know that Jesus is the only way to eternal life and his plan of salvation is available to everyone," Daniel said. "We believe Harvest is something we can use to impact central Louisiana and God's kingdom."

Meanwhile, the churches



Brian Blackwell photo

Wayne Jenkins, Louisiana Baptists evangelism and church growth director, addresses pastors and directors of missions during a recent meeting about the Harvest evangelism initiative.

of the Red River Baptist Association just finished hosting a crusade on May 21-27.

MORE IS NEEDED

Buddy Willis, director of missions for LaSalle Baptist Association, said the Harvest

is needed because revival among churches and the community is needed.

"Drugs and alcohol are among the problems everywhere I go," Willis said. "These people are looking for hope. If they put Jesus in their heart, He can truly satisfy them."

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Camp USA: An international mission trip at home

BY BRIAN BLACKWELL

Message Staff Writer

PINEVILLE – Twenty-six Louisiana Baptist churches are just two months away from hosting an international mission trip in their home state.

Around 50 South Korean children are expected to participate in the ninth annual Camp USA, a two-week midsummer adventure for elementary and middle school students. They will spend July 14-23 in central Louisiana and the remainder of their time in Ponchatoula.

A partnership of REACH Missions and the Korean Baptist Church Development Board, the camp involves 25 churches in Big Creek, Central Louisiana and North Rapides Baptist Associations, along with First Baptist Church in Ponchatoula.

UNIQUE EXPERIENCE

The children will participate in Vacation Bible School, games, English classes and other activities at CENLA area churches and the Tall Timbers Baptist Conference Center in



Brian Blackwell photo

Fifty South Korean children will be coming to Louisiana July 14-23 for the ninth annual Camp USA. The children will split their time in Central Louisiana and end their visit in Ponchatoula.

Woodworth.

After a week in central Louisiana, the campers will depart for southeast Louisiana where the South Koreans will enjoy recreational activities and excursions and take part in a music camp at First Baptist Ponchatoula with children of the church. The week will conclude with a musical performance July 30, 6:30 p.m., in the First Baptist

Ponchatoula worship center. The campers return the next day to their country.

SHAPING HEARTS FOR MISSIONS

"Camp USA is a truly unique children's activity which heightens the awareness of different cultures at a very young age," said David Cranford, pastor of First Baptist Ponchatoula. "It

primes the missions pump in the hearts of young people.

"The vision of heaven from Revelation speaks of 'a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb,'" he continued. "Camp USA is a small picture of that great tapestry as we are united with our brothers and sisters from South Korea."

Tim Hisaw, pastor of Tioga First Baptist Church, said one of the highlights for the South Korean children is staying in host homes of Louisiana families. Requirements for host homes that are still needed include housing one to two children, providing transportation to and from the camp and exhibiting Christian principles during the week.

"It's a great opportunity to learn about a different culture for the Koreans as well as the host homes," Hisaw said. "With social media, relationships that are established here in the homes can be maintained over

time. For many of the campers, their favorite part of the trip is the home stay, where some of them get to for the first time interact with an American family."

DOING MORE, TOGETHER

Camp USA is one of the events the Big Creek, Central Louisiana and North Rapides Baptist Association of churches participate in together. Hisaw said this effort displays what an association is all about.

"It's wonderful to see churches in our area individually cooperate to accomplish something they couldn't do alone," Hisaw said. "Each year the churches see this as a great mission opportunity that brings missions from across several continents to right here in central Louisiana."

Anyone interested in serving as a host family should contact First Baptist Ponchatoula, 985.386.3075, or Tioga First Baptist, tim@tiogafbc.com or 318.640.4760.

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'Connecting the dots' for a Christian home

By JERRY & BAYNE POUNDS

Louisiana College

PINEVILLE – As children, most of us enjoyed a simple game that not only stimulated our minds but kept us from mischief.

The pencil and paper activity was called "Connect the Dots." This activity always involved some type of drawing which contained a sequence of numbered dots.

The purpose was to begin with the first dot and draw a line to the second dot and so on. Soon, an outline of an object was revealed. An additional lagniappe, usually, was having extended time to color in the drawing.

Designed for children, this activity also captivates adults and allows one idea to be associated with another in order to find a "big picture."

So, let's connect some dots about "Christian homes."

Dot 1: God created the family for evangelism and discipleship.

As believers, we would find

it difficult to oppose the idea that our homes should be Christian. The fact is, however, that individual members of the home are Christian, and the family unit then testifies to following Christ or not. The Bible states that the way we live our lives will either make the Gospel attractive or repulsive to others (see Titus 2).

In Genesis 2:28, the Bible reveals that God's plan is for a man to leave his father and mother and join his wife. In this union, two individual people become one and the home is built. God created an incomparable "connect-the-dots" by establishing the home in order to glorify Himself.

Yet, earthly families are broken and fallen – divorced, dysfunctional, abusive, separated by prison – and have been since Adam. Even the first family was devastated by sin and murder. On this earth, we can be free from the power of sin through Christ, but we will not be free from the presence of sin until heaven.

The good news, however, is the home was not estab-

lished then or now to flounder on its own. This would not be the work or intent of a loving Heavenly Father. From the beginning, God planned for each believer to be joined together in a larger family – the church – in order to provide support, love, direction, and encouragement. This leads us to the second dot to connect.

Dot 2: The church equips parents to be evangelists and disciplers.

The local church is charged with the spiritual responsibility to minister to and support each "type" of family. The nuclear family—Dad, Mom, two children—has been joined by single parent families, extended families, childless families, stepfamilies, grandparent families, each with different dynamics within its structure.

The needs, goals, and concerns may be different in each family, but our focus as the church must remain on equipping families to be disciple making families.

Ephesians 4:12 teaches that God has called out those in the

church who will "equip the saints for the work of ministry." The replication continues as parents are equipped in their spiritual responsibilities to serve and minister within their families.

The father is the spiritual leader, and the mother supports her husband in disciplining their children. Where there is no father/mother, then the church has the profound opportunity and responsibility of stepping in to meet these needs – being brothers and sisters in the Lord, and helping others come to know a loving Heavenly Father.

Dots 3 & 4 & 5, & so on: Christian faith will be passed on to next generation.

"Shema Yisrael" ("Hear, Israel") is the first two words of a section of the Torah. This declaration of faith serves as the foundation of the morning and evening Jewish prayer services (see Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

These verses instruct us to disciple our children from the moment they awake until the moment they are asleep, in order that our faith, the faith of our

Christian homes, is passed down from one generation to another.

Psalm 145, and many other passages of Scripture, describes how faithfully pointing those coming behind us to a trustworthy Heavenly Father produces a next godly generation who will faithfully honor and praise God.

This ultimate version of "connect-the-dots" begins with God creating the home, then providing the church to disciple parents and caregivers, in order that the Christian faith is passed down to and through the children, from one generation to another. The end result is a beautiful picture of how your family can become a Christ honoring home, passing on the faith to the next generation. What a picture! What a testimony!

Jerry & Bayne Pounds, both PhDs, are professors of psychology at Louisiana College. Their "Christian Home" column is part of a series of commentaries provided by Louisiana College relating to the Southern Baptist Convention's calendar of Special Emphasis Sundays.

*When my father died,
I felt the agony of an incomplete story. You know the one, the one where
the alcoholic father sobers up and reaches out in reconciliation to his son.
That story never happened. And when he died it seemed as if my life
blew away into a thousand little pieces. Is this really the story?*



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Live to 'give glory to God,' Kelley tells NOBTS grads

BY MARILYN STEWART
NOBTS Communications

NEW ORLEANS — God's holiness, sovereignty and glory were underscored to New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary graduates for their new chapters in ministry by President Chuck Kelley during commencement May 13.

"You are to so live your lives that those who see you will give glory to God because of the way you are living," Kelley exhorted the seminary's 144 graduates.

Focusing on God's nature with a walk through Scripture, Kelley began with John 1 and Isaiah 6 to show God's holiness; Psalm 139 to demonstrate God's sovereignty; and Revelation 5 to remind that glory belongs to Christ.

Kelley concluded by

encouraging graduates to let Scripture animate their lives and ministries, saying, "Leave with His Word in your heart, in your mind, and coming out of your mouth."

SPECIAL HONOR

Steve Lemke was recognized for his 20 years of service in his final graduation as provost, receiving a standing ovation.

He will transition to the role of vice president for institutional assessment Aug. 1 and was named provost emeritus.

"I pray regularly for you," Lemke told the graduates. "I pray that God will enable you to be strong and powerful in your ministry and for the Kingdom, that God will use you in a power-

ful way."

Lemke looked back to a similar role his father played when, as Louisiana Tech's graduation marshal, his father led the procession into the commencement ceremonies. Following in a similar role as his father, Lemke said, made his graduation duty at NOBTS "very special for me."

Kelley, praising Lemke for his service, said that under Lemke's leadership NOBTS had experienced "unprecedented enrollment," added degree programs and expanded the accessibility of theological education. Lemke is the best qualified candidate to now move into the position of overseeing the seminary's accreditation, Kelley said.

Paul Gregoire, the seminary's registrar, was recog-



Gary D. Myers photo

During New Orleans Seminary's commencement May 13, President Chuck Kelley challenged members of the 2017 graduating class to bring glory to God with the way they live.

nized for 30 years of service, marking his 105th graduation to superintend.

"Graduation would not take place without him," Lemke said of Gregoire.

ADVANCED DEGREES

These seven graduates from Louisiana were among the 144 students to receive degrees at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary commencement

ceremonies May 13 were Nathan Young, Covington, Doctor of Ministry; Christina Sebastian, Homer, Doctor of Philosophy; Phil Weaver, Hammond, Doctor of Philosophy; Holly Barnette, Kilbourne, Master of Divinity; Ronnie Williams, II, Natchitoches, Master of Divinity; James Douglas, West Monroe, Master of Theological Studies and Eboni Johnson, Marrero, Master of Arts in Christian Education

The 113 master's degrees included 68 M.Div. degrees, 29 with specializations, 31 doctorates, four Ph.D., 21 D.Min., five D.Ed.Min degrees and one doctor of musical arts.

Sixty-eight M.Div. degrees, 29 with specializations, were also among the conferred.

ANGOLA & ST. GABRIEL, TOO

NOBTS/Leavell College granted 63 bachelor degrees, including bachelor of arts in Christian ministry degrees to nine Louisiana State Penitentiary inmates at Angola, one at Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women in St. Gabriel and two at Phillips State Prison in Buford, Ga.

GRADUATION GIFTS

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From prison to praise, NOBTS grad sees God's hand



Boyd Guy photo

Tara Garcia visits with mentors and professors as close as "family" on graduation day at New Orleans Seminary. Garcia earned her degree through the NOBTS extension center at Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women. Garcia (left) is pictured with (left to right); Sandy Vandercook, Leavell College professor of English; Rhonda Kelley, wife of NOBTS President Chuck Kelley; and Debi Sharkey, chaplain and director of the NOBTS extension center at the women's prison.

BY MARILYN STEWART
NOBTS Communications

NEW ORLEANS – Standing in front of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary's Leavell Chapel on graduation day, Tara Garcia looked back with fondness on her undergraduate experience. But unlike the graduates lined up beside her, Garcia earned her degree inside prison walls.

Garcia completed every class except one prior to her release in January from the Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women in St. Gabriel.

"I don't think you grasp how many lives are changed because of what you have done," Garcia said she tells her NOBTS professors. "Prison, for me, outside of accepting Christ as my Savior, is probably the best thing that's ever happened to me."

Last year's graduating class of 13 marked the first conferral of degrees by NOBTS' extension center at the women's prison. Soon after, the extensive flooding in Louisiana in August 2016 forced the evacuation of resi-

dents to various facilities across the state.

The extenuating circumstances prompted Garcia to ask for a six-month early release, which was denied. In chapel the following Sunday, Garcia faced a moment of truth.

"I asked myself, 'Who am I doing this for?'" Garcia said regarding her education. "Is it for me? Or is it for the Lord?"

Debi Sharkey, chaplain and director of the NOBTS center at the prison, said Garcia's testimony that Sunday morning indicated how much she had grown in the Lord. Days before receiving the letter denying early release, Garcia had "mishandled" a different situation and responded at first with grumbling and complaining, then confessed her failure to trust the Lord, Sharkey recounted.

The letter denying early release was "a test the Lord knew she was ready to pass," Sharkey said.

"Tara gave a testimony in the church service about how she wasn't happy about the letter that said she would not be released," Sharkey said. "Then she said, 'You know what? God is in control and I need to trust God.'"

Three days later, Garcia was released. She beams when telling the story and points to a comparison with the biblical Joseph, saying, "Man says no, but God has the final say."

Sandra Vandercook, professor of English at the seminary's Leavell College, knew from Garcia's first paper she had potential.

"What I came to know about Tara is that she is exceptional in her desire to do well in all areas of her life," Vandercook said. "She asked the hard questions, questions that would push her to improve in her writing."

High grades, mentoring others and a motivation to excel characterized Garcia's efforts, Vandercook said.

"Most importantly, Tara never wavered in her understanding that her sovereign God had orchestrated her life," Vandercook said.

Lined up for the graduation processional in the shadow of Leavell Chapel's 170-foot steeple, Garcia reminisced about a paper she once wrote on the problem of evil and suffering. In the paper, Garcia included how the steeple was the lone light shining for miles around in the early weeks following Hurricane Katrina's devastation in 2005.

Though her first time to step on campus was the day before graduation, Garcia said she feels connected to the heartache and loss the campus suffered.

"People say sometimes God has to take everything away from you to make you realize what you have. [In prison] you lose everything.... You either learn to become dependent on God and figure [out] who you really are and transform into a different person while you're there or you conform to the society you're in."

Looking back, Garcia sees God's hand at work. She was permitted to enroll in classes typically reserved for inmates with 10 years or more left to serve. Special permission was granted also for her to take the final course online after the early release came through. While graduation at the four NOBTS prison extension centers is held within prison walls, Garcia is the only graduate from a prison-based program to walk across the Leavell Chapel stage to receive her degree.

Asked about God's faithfulness, Garcia grew thoughtful. "Had He not been faithful, I would not be able to count prison as a blessing." With a new job and a future she hopes someday includes a master's degree, Garcia said she is intent on sharing her journey and her Savior with those around her.

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McRaney from page one

BACKGROUND

Previously McRaney publicized claims on his website and through communications with reporters that NAMB's president, Kevin Ezell, had initially become involved in his affairs by unfairly inserting himself into the business of the Maryland convention – a move McRaney said resulted in his June 8, 2015, termination.

NAMB acknowledged in its 10-page response it did notify BCMD on Dec. 2, 2014 of its intent to terminate its church planting and evangelism partnership agreement with BCMD effective the following year, which meant cutting \$1 million in funding from the state, but denied any wrongdoing in its actions, claiming, "NAMB was entitled to issue such notice under the SPA [Strategic Partnership Agreement] given the facts and circumstances as they existed at the time."

"Those facts included Plaintiff's causing BCMD to violate the agreement and his efforts to hinder and interfere with the SPA," NAMB's response reads.

McRaney, in an interview, said he became increasingly marginalized and estranged from NAMB leadership when he asked questions about a new SPA the entity desired state conventions to sign.

At that time, BCMD contributions through the Cooperative Program to national causes typically resulted in a distribution of about \$1 million to NAMB.

McRaney said there was talk among state leaders about responding to NAMB's threat to withhold \$1 million in funding by simply sending BCMD's Cooperative Program funds directly to the SBC, distributing normal percentages to all SBC entities except NAMB, and keeping the \$1 million NAMB would have received to make up for the \$1 million shortfall NAMB was threatening to create.

He said this proposal likely mobilized NAMB to act quickly to pressure BCMD to terminate him.

"This new SPA was designed by NAMB and contained numerous changes that gave NAMB more controls over the financial resources and the hiring, supervising and firing of staff positions of the state conventions, and eliminated all jointly-funded staff positions," McRaney alleges in his lawsuit.

NAMB's legal response comes nearly a year after NAMB trustees in June 2016 adopted a recommendation indicating they had investigated the issues

involved in McRaney's termination from BCMD and were "satisfied that this matter has been reviewed thoroughly and consider this matter concluded."

In its response, though NAMB denies publishing any defamatory statement regarding McRaney or interfering with his "alleged business or contractual relationships," it also argues on several counts it is protected by "absolute privilege," and/or "qualified privilege" to publish negative statements about McRaney.

MCRANEY RESPONDS

McRaney told the Louisiana Baptist Message he is "saddened" by the NAMB response he believes is "full of deceptions and false statements."

"My hope is that God's Word and the word of love would have guided this, and I'm disappointed that truth hasn't won out," he said. "It's beneath them -- the North American Mission Board and their attorneys -- to write this kind of reply."

Responding to NAMB's assertions they had offered to meet with him, McRaney said he would rather they had done the "biblical" thing -- he says he had requested for 20 months before he felt he had no other option but file his lawsuit -- which would have been to admit wrongdoing and make restitution.

As for NAMB's claim this is an "ecclesiastical" matter not in the court's jurisdiction because of a "ministerial exemption," McRaney said Southern Baptist agencies and entities, unlike other denominations, are autonomous.

"There is no hierarchy in the SBC," McRaney said. "I did not work for or report to NAMB. I was never an employee of NAMB as it related to my work in Maryland."

At the root of his lawsuit, McRaney said are two issues that beg for answers:

-- "Will Southern Baptists and the courts tolerate Dr. Ezell's lies and interference with state partners and executive directors and then to continue to damage ministers by posting pictures and making calls to interfere with their employment?"

-- Will NAMB trustees actually seek truth and administer justice or whether they want a court to seek truth and administer justice for them?

McRaney, in his lawsuit, references evidence given to him by a "national SBC agency board member" which shows an 8 x 10 mug shot of the former state executive taped inside the ledge of the front desk

at NAMB's headquarters in Alpharetta, Ga., apparently for security purposes.

"It was sad and a reflection on the character and person of Kevin Ezell to instruct someone to take my picture print it and put it up or to just give approval to it," McRaney said.

NAMB's response acknowledges McRaney's photo was "situated" in its reception area at some time, but denies causing "additional damage" to him.

McRaney -- who earned two degrees from New Orleans Seminary: a doctor of philosophy degree in evangelism and discipleship in 1992 and a master of divinity degree in biblical studies in 1989 -- disagrees. "Posting my picture was continuing harm," he said. "It was vindictive. It was as if I was a criminal or dangerous. It was a warning against me and I am the one who has already been victimized by the strong-arming of Kevin Ezell and the North American Mission Board."

FLORIDA LEADER AFFIRMS MCRANEY'S CLAIM

Without naming the president of the Florida Baptist Pastors' Conference, McRaney's legal filing accuses Ezell of continuing to interfere with his employ-

ment possibilities as recently as November of 2016.

McRaney claims Ezell called an influential pastor, who in turn called the pastors' conference president to interfere with him speaking.

Joel Breidenbaugh, pastor of First Baptist Sweetwater in Longwood, Fla., and the president of the 2016 Florida Baptist Pastors' Conference, confirmed he received a phone call from an influential Florida Baptist pastor about McRaney's participation in the pastors' conference.

"I was contacted by a Florida pastor who had received a call from Kevin Ezell, who was really upset that I was having Will McRaney as a speaker for the pastors' conference," Breidenbaugh said. "The implication was I should not have him speak, but if he did, I was to ensure he would not bring up anything about NAMB and his role in Maryland-Delaware."

ABOUT MCRANEY

Originally from Dade City, Fla., McRaney was unanimously recommended for the Maryland post in 2013, after serving as team strategist for Florida Baptist Convention's English-speaking church planting team in Jacksonville, Fla. Previously he

directed the convention's evangelism strategy department.

He was a professor of evangelism and church planting at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1996-2007, and also has served as adjunct professor of evangelism and church planting at Liberty Baptist Seminary in Lynchburg, Va., and as adjunct professor at Denver Seminary and Colorado Christian University.

McRaney was the founding pastor of Life Church in Mandeville, La., 1997-99; lead pastor at Daybreak Community Church in Littleton, Colo., 1992-1996; and pastor of Jackson Avenue Baptist Church in Pascagoula, Miss., 1987-1991.

LAGNIAPPE

NAMB is asking for dismissal of the lawsuit, but also asks that if it proceeds the case be transferred from the U.S. District Court Northern District of Mississippi to the U.S. District Court Northern District of Georgia, where NAMB's corporate offices are located.

For more information, go to NAMB.net and WillMcRaney.com.

Joni B. Hannigan is a veteran Southern Baptist journalist living in Jacksonville, Fla.

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HOMECOMING

■ Emmanuel Baptist Church, Monroe: **75th Anniversary**, June 4, 10 a.m. Meet & Greet, 10:30 a.m. worship service. Dinner on the grounds will follow the service. Special Music: **Preston Allen**, choir director. Pastor: Terry Mims.

■ Mt. Gilead Baptist Church, Vivian: 157th Anniversary/Homecoming, June 4, 10 a.m. Covered dish luncheon provided by the church to follow the service. Speaker: **Ed Baswell**. Special Music: **Simple Faith, from Largo, Florida**. Pastor: Bill Treadway

■ Lanier Baptist Church, Baton Rouge: **60th Anniversary**, June 4, 10:20 a.m. **Greg O'Neil and Tim Hill** (former music ministers) will be leading the worship service. Lanier will begin with worship in its newly renovated sanctuary. Former pastors and ministers will be in attendance. Afterward, they will have dinner on the grounds, the dinner provided by the church. Pastor: Michael Ferguson.

■ Briarwood Baptist Church, Saline: **Homecoming**, June 11. Speaker: **Scotty McDowell**. Pastor: Trey Ethridge.

REVIVAL

■ Lake St. John Community Baptist Church, Ferriday: **Revival**, May 31-June 3, 6:30 p.m. Evangelist: **Scotty McDowell**. Pastor: Mark Richardson.

■ Fellowship Baptist Church, Mansfield: **Revival**, June 2-4, Friday and Saturday, 6:30 p.m.; Sunday, 9 a.m.; Evangelist: **David Permenter**. Music: **Pam Whitlock and Vicki Davis**. Pastor: Weyland Gauntt.

■ New Bethel Baptist Church, Arcadia: **Revival**, June 2-4, Friday and Saturday, 6:30 p.m. Sunday, 11 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. Evangelist: **Joe Aulds**. Music: **Price Harris**. Pastor: Steve Beard.

■ First Baptist Church, Many: **Revival**, June 2-4. Speaker: Johnathan Bost, Sunday, 6 p.m.; Wilton Anthony, Monday, 6:30 p.m.; Wayne Chance, Tuesday, 6:30 p.m.; Kevin Inman, Wednesday, 6:30 p.m. Special Music: Four Days Late (Monday-Wednesday).



Louisiana College President Rick Brewer (right) is congratulated by Charleston Southern University President Jairy Hunter as he receives his alma mater's Distinguished Alumnus of the Year Award May 5. For the full story go online to <http://baptistmessage.com/brewer-honored-alma-mater-charleston-southern-university/>

Pastor: Jonathan Bost.

■ Martin Baptist Church, Coushatta: **Soul-winning commitment Sunday**, June 4, Evangelist: **Sam Moore**. Pastor: Richard Kauffman.

■ Benson Baptist Church, Benson: **Revival**, June 4-7. Evangelist: **Lyndon Longoria**. Special Music: **Kerry Longoria**. Pastor: Delmon Rogers.

■ Liberty Baptist Church, Linville: **Revival**, June 4-8. Evangelist: **Rubin Weaver**. Music: **Stevie and Sue Pace**. Pastor: Paul King.

■ Antioch Baptist Church, Florien: **Revival**, June 4-7, Sunday, 11 a.m. & 6 p.m. Monday-Wednesday, 7 p.m. Evangelist: **The Mackey Willis Family**. Pastor: John Sparks.

LAGNIAPPE

■ If your church has an **organ that it no longer needs and would donate it to a church that flooded**, please contact Tommy Hayes at 225.362.2464 of Gray's Creek Baptist Church, Denham Springs.

■ Trinity Baptist Church, Hammond: **Wade Hammond Concert**, June 4, 5 p.m. Join us for some great music and a great time as we worship. Pastor: Derek Wall.

■ South Winnfield Baptist Church, Winnfield: **Scotty McDowell speaking**, June 4, at the a.m. & p.m. service. Pastor: Jack Miller.

■ First Baptist Church, Pineville: **First@First Business Leader Luncheon**, June 5, noon. Speaker: **Chuck Kelley, President of the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary**. Cost: \$10 and you may pay at the door. Please RSVP to Melinda Langford (mlangford@fbcpineville.net). Pastor: Stewart Holloway.

■ Beulah Baptist Church, Oak Grove: **Ben Waites in concert**, June 11, 10 a.m. Pastor: Kenny Herring.

■ University Baptist Church, Baton Rouge: **The Foto Sisters in concert**, June 11, 10:30 a.m. Pastor: Mike Massar.

■ First Baptist Church, Olla: **Sanctuary Quartet in concert**, June 11 6 p.m. Pastor: Johnnie Phillips.

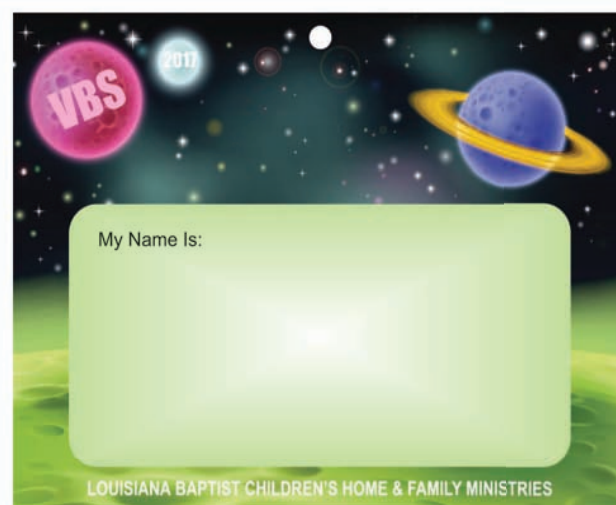
■ Weston Baptist Church, Jonesboro: **Scotty McDowell speaking**, June 11, 6 p.m. Pastor: Stan Foster.

■ Fish Bayou Baptist Church, Crowville: **Ben Waites in concert**, June 18, 10 a.m. Pastor: Jim Goodman.

■ Antioch Baptist Church, Farmerville: **Jordan Family Band in concert**, June 18, 11:30 a.m. Pastor: Rubin Weaver.

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Scripture Crypto

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

ihbqlh my pmot, ihbqlh my hsxw bmlehlt,

ihbqlh my cgh zmfzxtxmf.

ugxwxuuxqft cglhh:cbm

Clues:
A = U; I = B

Answer to May 18 Scripture Crypto:
James four:twelve

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