

BLUE RIDGE CHRISTIAN NEWS

Unto Us A Child Is Born



Photo courtesy of West Burnsville Baptist Church

1 And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed.
2 (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)
3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.
4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)
5 To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.
6 And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.
7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.
8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.
9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.
10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.
11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.
12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.
13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,
14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.
15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.
16 And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.
17 And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.
18 And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.
19 But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.
20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.
Luke 2:1-20



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"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace: that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation: that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!"

Isaiah 52:7 KJV



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3631 Altapass Hwy
Spruce Pine, NC
828-765-0660
altapassbaptistchurch@ccvn.com
www.altapassbaptistchurch.org

Dr. Marcus R. Benfield

Sunday School - 10:00am
Worship - 11:00am
Sunday Evening - 7:00pm
Sunday Youth Program - 7:00pm
1st & 3rd Sunday
(Conductors for Christ ages 5-11)
2nd & 4th Sunday
(Teen Discovery ages 12-18)
Wednesday - 7:00pm

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Spruce Pine United Methodist Church

11090 Hwy. 226 South
Spruce Pine, NC 28777
www.sprucepineumc.org
spumc3@bellsouth.net
828-765-7446

Pastor Rev. Jeremy Troxler

Sunday School - 10:00am
Sunday Worship - 11:00am
Choir Wednesday - 7:00pm

The mission of Spruce Pine United Methodist Church is to be a beacon on a hill spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ through: Worship, Fellowship, Education, and Nurturing Service

Horizon Church

500 East Fleming Drive
Morganton, NC
828-437-1212

**Pastors: Senior Pastor
Timothy Fortune &
Associate Pastor Mike Stroud**

Sunday Worship 10:30 AM
Wednesday 6:30PM

www.myhorizonchurch.org
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Plumtree Presbyterian Church

4527 Hwy 19E
Plumtree, NC 28664
828-765-6919
www.plumtreechurch.com

Pastor Ryan Bridgeo
pastor@plumtreechurch.com

Sunday School 9:45 am
Worship Service 11:00 am
Life Groups Tuesday-Thursday evenings, 7:00 pm
Fusion Youth Wednesday's, 6:30 pm
Healing Services 2nd Sunday of each month, 6:30 pm

John 15:16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

St. Lucien's Catholic Church

695 Summit Street
Spruce Pine, NC 28777
Phone (828) 765-2224

Sunday Mass 9:00 am
Wednesday Faith Formation
6:00 pm
Food Pantry Wed. 1:00-4:00pm

Pine Branch Baptist Church

48 Church Road
Spruce Pine, NC 28777
Phone: (828) 765-9101
www.pinebranchbaptist.net

Reverend Bobby Joe Greene

Sunday School • 9:45-10:40am
Worship Service • 10:45am
Sunday Evening • 6:30pm

A Bible-believing Fellowship
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First Advent Christian Church

211 Lenoir Road
Morganton, NC 28655
828-437-8206
www.fccmorganton.org

**Pastor Patrick Bradshaw
Associate Pastor Javier
Guzman**

pbradshawfccmorganton@gmail.com

Sunday School 10:00 AM
Sunday Worship 11:00 AM
Wed: Youth Meal 5:30PM -
Meeting 6:30PM
Adult Bible Study/Prayer 6:30PM
Choir Practice 7:15PM
Sat. Band Practice 4:30PM

Preaching Christ Crucified, Risen
and Coming Again!

The Bridge Church of WNC

207 Pinebridge Avenue
Spruce Pine, NC 28777
TBCWNC.org

Pastors - Tom & Tammy Anglin

Sunday Service 10:30AM
Wednesday Service 7:00PM
Church Office M-F
9:00AM-3:00PM

Our passion is to help connect the Body of Christ in this area in order to see the Fire of God transform our community, state, nation and world! (See John 17:21)

Berry Chapel Baptist Church

280 Chapel St.
Spruce Pine, NC 28777
828-765-6590
www.berrychapelbaptist.com

Pastor - Steve Williams

Sunday School 9:45 AM
Worship Service 11:00 AM
Sunday Evening Care Meal/
Ministry - 5:30 PM
Wednesday Evening
Service 7:00 PM

Where Everybody is Somebody
And Jesus Christ is Lord!

Morganton Seventh-day Adventist Church

2187 Jamestown Road
Morganton, NC
828-684-8212

Pastor Rick Mercer

Sabbath (Saturday)
Bible Study - 9:30 am
Sabbath Worship - 11:00 am
Vegetarian Buffet after church
Wednesday
Praise, Prayer & Proclaim -
7:00 pm
www.morgantonsda.org

Pleasant Grove Church of the Brethren

1717 Harrell Hill Road
Bakersville, NC
(828)-458-1947

Pastor: John Smith

Sunday School - 10:00 am
Worship - 11:00 am

We are a small, Christ-centered family of believers and would love to share God's Word and love with you and yours!

Banner Elk United Methodist Church

486 College Dr.
Banner Elk, NC
(828) 963-6640

Reverend Dan Brubaker

Sunday School - 10:00 am
Contemporary Service - 9:40 am
Traditional Worship Service - 11:00 am
AA Open Step Meeting - Mon. 7 pm
AA Closed Big Book Meeting - Wed. 7pm
UMW & UMM Meeting - 2nd Sat. 10:00 am
English Classes - Tues. & Thurs. 6 - 9 pm

Bakersville United Methodist Church

119 S. Mitchell Avenue
Bakersville, NC 28705
828-765-9015

**Pastors -
Dr. Louis H. Woodard, &
Rev. Gene Lanier**

Sunday School 11:00 AM
Morning Worship 10:00 AM

"Come grow with us"

Grassy Creek Baptist Church

793 Old NC 226 Hwy
Spruce Pine, NC
828-765-4620
www.grassycreekbc.org

Sunday School 10:00am
Morning Worship 11:00am
Sunday evening 6:30pm
Wednesday:
J.A.M. (Jesus and Me) 7:00pm
Seekers (young adults) 7:00pm
Mid-week worship 7:00pm
"That Mitchell County
may know Christ"

West Burnsville Baptist Church SB

222 West Burnsville Church Rd.
Burnsville, NC 28714
(828)-682-3990

Sunday School: 9:45 a.m.
Morning Service: 10:50 a.m.
Evening Service: 6:00 p.m.
Wednesday Service 6:30 p.m.

Church vision: To become passionate followers and servants of Jesus Christ while ministering to the spiritual and physical needs of our church and community.

Burkemont Baptist Church

4668 Burkemont Rd.
Morganton, NC 28655
828-437-2357

For more information,
please visit
www.burkemontbaptist.org

Dr. David Mills, Sr. Pastor

8:30am - Early Worship
9:45am - Sunday School
11:00am - Worship
6:00pm - Evening Worship

First Baptist Church of Spruce Pine

125 Tappan Street
Spruce Pine, NC 28777
828-765-9411
www.sprucepinefbc.com
www.spfbc.blogspot.com

**Dr. Rocky Branch
Senior Pastor**

Sunday School - 9:45 am
Sunday Worship - 8:30 and 11:00 am
Sunday Evening - 6:00 pm
Wednesday Evening - 6:30 pm

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Great Hope Seventh-day Adventist Church

2907d US Hwy 70 E
Morganton, NC
828-475-2040

Pastor Barry MaHorney

Sabbath (Saturday)
Bible Study-10:00am
Sabbath Worship - 11:30am
Vegetarian Buffet after church
Wednesday - Praise, Prayer &
Proclaim - 7:00pm
www.greatopesda.com

Faith Fellowship Church

Champ Ray Rd.
Mica, NC 28755
(828)-675-8284
www.ffcn.org
www.fccradio.org

Pastor: David Gillespie

Sunday School - 10:00 am
Worship Service - 10:45 am
Wednesday Bible Study - 7:00pm
"The steps of a good man are
ordered by the Lord:
And he delighteth in his way."
Psalm 37:23

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Christmas Traditions

Compiled by Barbara Harrell

Christmas is an annual festival commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ, observed most commonly on December 25 as a religious and cultural celebration among billions of people around the world. A feast central to the Christian liturgical year, it is preceded by the season of Advent or the Nativity Fast and initiates the season of Christmastide, which historically in the West lasts twelve days and culminates on Twelfth Night; in some traditions, Christmastide includes an Octave. Christmas Day is a public holiday in many of the world's nations, is celebrated religiously by a majority of Christians, as well as culturally by many non-Christians, and forms an integral part of the holiday season. In several countries, celebrating Christmas Eve has the main focus rather than Christmas Day. The Birth of the Nativity Scene. The first-ever Nativity scene recorded in history was created by St. Francis of Assisi. St. Francis was concerned that the meaning of Christmas was becoming lost as most people were more focused with the ritual of gift giving than they were of the true message of Christmas.

Christmas Tree

The Christmas tree is part of a long tradition that evergreen trees represent the continuous nature of life, even in the cold of winter. The Germans were among the earliest Christians to adopt the use of decorated trees.



Wreaths

The origins of the Advent wreath are found in the folk practices of the pre-Christian Germanic peoples who, during the cold December darkness of Eastern Europe, gathered wreaths of evergreen and lighted fires as signs of hope in a coming spring and renewed light. Christians kept these popular traditions alive, and by the 16th century Catholics and Protestants throughout Germany used these symbols to celebrate their Advent hope in Christ, the everlasting Light. From Germany the use of the Advent wreath spread to other parts of the Christian world. Traditionally, the wreath is made of four candles in a circle of evergreens with a fifth candle in the middle. Three candles are violet and the fourth is rose, but four white candles or four violet candles can also be used. Each day at home, the candles are lighted, perhaps before the evening meal-- one candle the first week, and then another each succeeding week until December 25th. A short prayer may accompany the lighting of each candle. The last candle is the middle candle. The lighting of this candle takes place on

Christmas Eve. It represents Jesus Christ being born.

Christmas carols -

The early Christmas music compositions are regarded as chants and hymns. The original carols referred to a circle dance which did not have any singing - that came later. As the church struggled against the influences of pagan customs, the singing of carols was barred from sacred services. However, outside the church, Nativity carols were written and became popular. Nearly all were simple folk songs created by people from the countryside.

Saint Francis of Assisi is credited with bringing carols into the formal worship of the church during a Christmas Midnight Mass in a cave in Greccio, in the province of Umbria in 1223. It's said that the music sung that night was more akin to what we know as carols than to hymns. Carols enjoyed further development and popularity when they were used in the mystery plays of the Middle Ages.

Wandering minstrels traveled from hamlet to castle, performing carols in the distant past. In later years, villages had their own bands of waits.

Waits were originally watchmen who patrolled the streets and byways of the old walled cities keeping guard against fire and singing out the hours of the night. During the holiday season, they would include some carols for the people along the way, although some folks complained that they would rather get a good night's sleep than have somebody singing under their window. Eventually the term was used to describe groups of musicians who sang and played for various civic events during the Christmas season.

Today, a look at a small-town newspaper lists dozens of caroling events, not just on Christmas Eve, but throughout the holiday.

Christmas star

The stars that appear in the sky today are the same ones that were there two thousand years ago. Was there a nova at the time of Jesus' birth? The exact time of His birth is not known, but astronomers cannot place a new star appearance anywhere near the possible time. Could it have been a shooting star? Again, the astronomers say it was not likely. A meteor lasts only a few seconds or minutes at best. The wise men followed the star for weeks looking for Jesus. We can rule out comets as well. They can be seen by the naked eye for a week or months. But modern astronomers know which comets were close enough to earth hundreds and thousands of years ago and there was no comet visible to humans around the time of Christ's birth.

Some star gazers suggest that if we move the birth of Jesus to the springtime of 6 B.C., we can attribute the star to the time the planets Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn were close together in the heavens. They formed a triangle in the group of stars known as Pisces.



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Good Will

By Pastor Terry Cheek Th.D.
McDowell County

I find myself struggling to write this month. So much has happened. We have experienced mass shootings, sexual immorality, unheard of distractions and frustrations. How do I write about the spirit of Christmas? How do you find the encouragement to read about Christmas? I found the answer in the series I began two months ago, HOPE! I find the strength to write, preach, teach and even worship in HOPE through Jesus Christ.

From Luke's gospel in chapter two we read about the birth of Christ. Before the incarnate birth we read beginning with verse 8 the account of angels coming to the Shepherds. What a blessed event this was. The common man, tending their flock, then suddenly the sky opens and a glorious light shines around them. The heavenly conversation is amazing to read repeatedly. But, one word stands out in my mind as I write this article. The word *eudokia*, or translated in English "good will." There is no better time to spread good will than Christmas.

God spread good will to humanity with the birth of Christ, our Messiah. Good will is understood to be delight in the life of another or others. Over thousands of years mankind has waited on their redeemer. Now, we read He has arrived and with Him comes good will.

The Church can share the good will of God's word every day of our lives. With the gospel we have an opportunity to meet, in some way the material needs of those around us. Look around, there are families struggling, children having to suffer because of bad decisions of adults. There is elderly living next door to us who only need a friendly visit. The nursing homes and hospitals are full of kind, loving and lonely folks wishing they could hear a Merry Christmas and have someone ask if they could pray with them.

I'm not trying to guilt trip anyone into anything. I realize Christmas is a busy time of the year. There is shopping, and cooking and gatherings; can you find time to spread good will in someone's life. Lori and I have found that place this year. We have committed ourselves to the local mission's center and their Christmas meal. We pray that HOPE will be given through good will. If you really want to find HOPE in the worldly mess around us, try first giving of yourself and try spreading good will. Once you see that it really works you will want to find a way to do this every day throughout the year. Merry Christmas everyone and look for HOPE from good will!

Terry Cheek is Pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Marion.



An Amazing Gift

By Pastor Dan Qurollo
Burke County

This time of year often brings a variety of emotions. For those who have lost loved ones or experienced separation, this season is a painful reminder of things they used to enjoy but are suddenly no longer able to enjoy. For, far too many, this season is dreaded because of the stress that it all entails. Others seem totally unaffected by it, while children often find themselves battling anticipation of finally being able to open their gifts. Sadly, many Christians have lost the wonder of this time of year.

For believers, this time of year should truly be something special. The more I ponder the amazing gift of Jesus Christ, the more amazed I am. I am amazed at the conditions into which the Savior was born. Though He is God, He was born in deplorable conditions. Yet His entrance into this world in such a fashion serves to remind us that He is indeed the Savior of all men.

I am amazed at the statement made by the angel to Joseph in Matthew 1:23: "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." What an incredible thought that God would dwell with those who would reject Him. Jesus was no ordinary baby; He came as God in human flesh.

I challenge you to make a conscious effort to set aside time to



quietly ponder the true nature of Christmas. Determine that this year will not be another year filled with stress, frustration, and anxiety; God never intended the season to be such. Reflect on the various scenes of Scripture and place yourself near the manger. Worship the One worthy of our praise, and you too will be amazed at all this season offers.

Pastor Dan Qurollo is pastor of Morganton Baptist Church. Check us out on our website www.morgantonbaptist.net or find us on Facebook and YouTube.



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Getting Rid of the National Anthem
Won't Improve Race Relations

By Dr. Mark Creech

First, athletes across the country took a knee during the national anthem to protest the mistreatment of minorities in America. For most, the action was deemed an improper venue for making their statement, and highly disrespectful to the nation's flag which is a symbol of the patriotic ideals and spiritual qualities of its citizens.

Now the California chapter of the NAACP is advocating we discard the national anthem because it's allegedly racist. The organization's president Alice Huffman says, "The song is wrong, it shouldn't have been there, we didn't have it 'til 1931, so it won't kill us if it goes away." Huffman says the protests at sports events are what led her to look at the lyrics and determine, "It's racist; it doesn't represent our community, it's anti-black." She believes that if we did away with the national anthem it could improve race relations.

Huffman's contentions are based in a controversy surrounding the anthem's third stanza – one most Americans know nothing about – one that's rarely, if ever sung, as the opening to an official state or athletic occasion.

The stanza includes these lyrics: "Their blood has wash'd out their foul foot-steps pollution / No refuge could save the hireling and slave / From the terror of flight or the gloom of the grave."

Some historians argue these verses are a celebration of the death of two units of black American slaves who fought for the British in exchange for their freedom in the War of 1812. Francis Scott Key, who penned the national anthem, they say, was against abolishing slavery, and an owner of slaves who referred to blacks as an inferior people. The best that can be said of Key, it's argued, is that as a Christian he advocated that Masters should treat their slaves with kindness.

The claim, therefore, is that the third stanza is reflective of Key's racism and his belief that the blood of mercenaries and slaves who fought against America would wash away the pollution of an invading British army.

Still, other historians assert that when Key mentioned "slavery" he was actually referring to the British Navy's practice of impressment, which was kidnapping American seaman and forcing them to fight on British man-of-war ships. This was a matter of utmost concern to Americans as one of the reasons for the War of 1812.

The word "hirelings" most likely referred to German Hessians who were mercenaries fighting for the British. Some add that the verses do reference slaves who fought for the British, but it doesn't treat whites any different than blacks because the fourth stanza speaks of "freemen," which would have encompassed both blacks and whites who fought for America.

Moreover, it's said that Key was a man of contradictions that did own slaves but despised slave trafficking. He was known to have freed several slaves. And as a lawyer, he represented free of charge, both black freemen and slaves in court. So, which is right? I think it's impossible to know because Key didn't specify one way or the other what he meant in the third stanza.

Nevertheless, there is one thing for which we can be certain. If we continue to look outside of ourselves, whether it be getting rid of the Confederate flag or monuments to heroes of the Old South, or doing away with the national anthem, the problems of racism will continue. Racism is a virus of the soul.

This week, I contacted my friend, Clarence Henderson, and asked his opinion about the movement to shed us of the national anthem. Henderson is a long-time civil rights activist, one of the four young black men who bravely occupied one of the seats at a Greensboro Woolworth's lunch counter in 1960. Henderson currently serves as the president of the North Carolina chapter of the Frederick Douglass Foundation.

Henderson said, "We as a country need to be more concerned about uniting America than dividing it. In the words of Dr. King, 'Unless we learn to live together as brothers we will perish together as fools.'"

Henderson added that he believed the intent of the lyrics of the anthem was meant to inspire. "Unfortunately, we have become a country that finds racism in just about everything," he said. "In order for America to continue to become a more united nation, we need to seek to resolve rather than create."

I think it's interesting the announcement to sacrifice the national anthem as an antidote to racism comes so close to the celebration of Dr. Billy Graham's 99th birthday.

Graham spoke out against racism many years ago during the height of the civil rights movement and said, "I say today there is only one possible solution [to racism] and that is a vital experience with Christ on the part of all races. In Christ, the middle wall of partition is broken down, the Bible says. There is no Jew or Gentile, or black or white or yellow or red. We could be one great brotherhood in Christ. However, until we come to recognize him as the Prince of Peace, and receive his love in our hearts, the racial tensions will increase."

Yes, that's the resolve we need – the one that can create something meaningful – the one that has the power to create the new man – the one that has the power to generate an entirely new social construct based in God's love for all people – the one that isn't simply a mere ornamenting of the exterior but goes straight to the core of the matter.

Reverend Dr. Mark Creech is Executive Director of the NC Christian Action League. You may contact him at rev.markcreech@christianactionleague.org or 919-787-0606



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Do You Know What I Know?

By Jody Griffin
Mitchell and Yancey Counties

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. (John 8:32)

Christmas is coming soon. Families are making plans for gifts and food and celebrations. But not all families are able to get excited about the Holiday season. Some are suffering. Some are crying. Some are wrestling with questions like, "Why isn't Daddy here with us?" or "When will Mommy be home?"

While it is sadly true that many children of incarcerated parents may be struggling with the answers to these questions this Christmas, it is also tragically true that there are children and loved ones of correctional employees faced with the same reality. And for these families there is no "projected release date" set as a boundary for the current period of imprisonment.

No, for these children and family members, their Daddy, Mommy, sister, brother, spouse or significant other, son or daughter will never be coming home. They are not coming home because of the decisions of one or more others to steal the futures of those charged with insuring their safety and well-being. They are not coming home because they were killed fulfilling their mission of securing the safety of the incarcerated and the professional staff that serves the incarcerated.

Do you know what I know? The truth is that a career within the walls of any correctional institution is a career that carries great risk. Just ask the families of Veronica Darden, Justin Smith, Wendy Shannon and Geoffrey Howe from Pasquotank Correctional. Just ask the family and friends of Meggan Lee Callahan of Bertie Correctional Institution.



Each of these dedicated people left home one day this year to go to work. And by the day's end, they were severely injured or killed in the line of duty.

Do you know what I know? Do you know that any day the employees of any prison go to work could be their last? And do you know what I know? Correctional employment in most states equals some of the lowest paid professionals in any field.

So, why do they do it? If the work carries risk of life and limb, and if the work promises little if any financial benefit, why would people subject themselves to such conditions? I know the answer because I have

the privilege to witness it every day...

The reason most of the people do what they do in the dark and difficult circumstances they do them in is because of the difference they can potentially make in some else's life. That's right. You read it correctly. They do what they do because they ultimately believe that public safety is worth it. They do what they do because in some way they know that this work matters, and that of those they protect, some will be changed by the experience of incarceration and find hope for a new life direction.

It is an incredible honor for me to serve as Community Funded Chaplain at Avery Mitchell Correctional Institution. Every day I witness the high level of dedication present in the commitment of Custody and Program personnel. I see the earnest expressions of those who serve in administrative roles, medical and dental technicians, mental health professionals and social workers. I see case managers scrambling to meet ever increasing caseloads and specialty staff like food service professionals who literally face the aforementioned risks every single day. Every. Single. Day.

Do you know what I know? The good people who work and the good people who volunteer to serve behind the walls and within the gates do so at great risk. They are deserving of the prayers of all people who know and value their dedicated service. They literally depend on the goodness of people in the surrounding community to pray for their protection and for the accomplishment of their mission day in and day out.

As the Christmas season approaches and you hear the popular Christmas tune, I pray that you will consider these words and answer the questions we have pondered these last few months. Do you see what I see? Do you hear what I hear? Do you know what I know?

There is a light that shines in the darkness. It is the Light of Life. His Name is Jesus. And He has promised that *"ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"*.

May the Truth of God's Word be alive in our hearts and through our lives this holiday season. God Bless you for reading, for caring and for PRAYING! Merry Christmas!

Jody Griffin is pastor of Central Baptist Church in Spruce Pine and Community Funded Chaplain at Avery-Mitchell Correctional Institution.

By Barbara Harrell

As we get ready to move into December and the Christmas season, I find that I am rather melancholy. Thinking back to childhood and the wonder of the season. My sister and I used to count the lights hung for display all the way home from Baltimore on the old Highway 11. My Dad found work up there, and we became city dwellers. (LOL) The trip back to Western North Carolina was a real highlight of the Christmas season and not every house had lights.

Years before that living on White Oak in Bakersville, we were so excited because this was the one time of year we could have candy. A trip to Harper and Cates Store with the glass counter filled with loose candy was an awesome sight to a little girl. We were allowed to pick a few pieces, and it went into the prized little brown bag, to be cherished for weeks. The Christmas tree secured from a field, where it was growing wild, and lots of tinsel and a few packages under it meant it would soon be time for Santa Claus.

But the most exciting thing was getting ready for the Christmas play. Even if I didn't have a part, this was the time to shop for that one "new" outfit of the year. The play that would tell us again how a tiny baby born in a manger in Bethlehem would become my Saviour. This was the highlight of the year as well as the season.

Looking around me today as we move into this season it brings a certain sadness that so many people have lost the wonder of this season, as we once again retell that old old story that should still fill us with awe. Too many gifts, too many lights, too much candy has left us jaded to the entire season. When my grandchildren were little I would

make individual cakes for each to decorate for Jesus' birthday. It is with much pride I have watched our children raise those grandchildren in the old traditions with the church and Jesus' birthday being the center.

This year Doug and I have focused much of our year and even paper space to the drug problems of this county and our distribution area. As we move into this season today it

looks much different. Our projects for helping humanity have changed. We are now trying to feed very hungry children who live in homes where the parents are addicted and can't even feed them, let alone fill those stockings and gift boxes. Many of these same children have at least one parent spending time in the prison system because of that same old drug problem.

I would throw out a challenge to our readers. If you are looking for a place to make a real difference this Christmas season—get involved with some of these precious children whose needs are great. Get involved with our elderly who are wasting away in these nursing and retirement homes. I see in my mind's eye a trip I made with my grandchildren who were coming to Mimi Camp this summer. It was probably the most significant thing we did. We visited the Brian Center and read to and loved on these precious ones who feel so unneeded now.

If you know someone who is struggling with addiction don't be afraid to step out and reach out your hand to help, even if it means inviting them to have a meal in your home. This is God's child deserving of God's love just as we are. Merry Christmas and God Bless each and everyone of you and let's Go Out and Make a Difference for Our Lord!!

Barbara Harrell, loving mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. Part owner Blue Ridge Christian News.



Life Lessons

By Doug Harrell

As we approach Christmas I find myself thinking back to Christmases passed and the things we did. I remember mother baking and working to fix food and goodies to take to folks in the community. We would always go out in the woods and find a pine or cedar tree to decorate with popcorn strands that we would string on a long piece of thread to make a kind of roping. The popcorn, the little strands of tinsel and a few lights later on, when we could afford them. Mother would take some of the trimmings off the tree for greenery and I would take a shotgun and shoot some mistletoe out of the oak trees out past where Clark and Gloria Drake now live in Harrell Hill. We would also gather some holly branches with the red berries on it for window decorations. Another great memory was going on our yearly shopping trip across the Iron Mountain to Johnson City to Christmas shop. We would even get to go out to eat at my great Uncle Harry's restaurant, that was the only time I can remember going out to eat during the year back then.

The most important event that would take place would be our Christmas Play at the little church on top of the hill, Pleasant Grove Church of the Brethren. Back then there were lots of youngsters in the community and we would have parts, along with the grownups, in the play. The focus of the entire community and church was around the birth of Jesus, not just gifts. There were no big displays of lights on the houses or anything like that, most of us just barely had lights in the house and many of us still had the old one-hole outhouse where our Christmas dreaming was done

looking through the Sears Catalog. Certain pages you did not tear out because you wanted to be able to look at them again. The community would get together and go Christmas Caroling. Most of the time we rode on the back of my granddad's old 51 Chevy flatbed truck, and went to the houses of those that could not get out. It seemed that everyone in the community was in a loving and happy mood. I know now, looking back, that this was not always the case though. Christmas morning was always something we anticipated for weeks, hoping to get our wished-for gift from Santa Clause and our Christmas stocking. I still have the handmade stocking that mother made for me one year and still fill it Christmas morning. The gifts were very meager in comparison to what happens today. If we were lucky we got a piece of clothing and a toy. On the Christmas that I had turned 12, I will never forget, that I got a Savage single shot, full choke 16-gauge shotgun and I thought I had hit the absolute jackpot. My dad, A D Harrell, was an avid hunter and outdoorsman and he wanted to be sure that I followed that example. So looking back, I think that was as much for him as it was for me. Today I long for the attitude of gratitude that was exhibited during Christmas of old, not the attitude of entitlement that we and our children seem to put forth today. It seems as if everyone is trying to outdo the neighbor in their decorations, gifts and whatever, over the Christmas season. I long to see the emphasis put back on the Savior's birth, not just the window lights. The reason for the season is not to make a bunch of money selling merchandise and all that, even though there is nothing wrong with that, as long as we remember the real reason... the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It is not a "Happy Holiday", it is a Happy Holy Day, the day we celebrate the birth of Jesus, The Christ. Merry Christmas to each of you.

Doug Harrell is a life-long resident of Mitchell County. Owner of Harrell Hill Farms, Inc, a member of Bear Creek Baptist Church and Publisher of the Blue Ridge Christian News.



Snow Hill Baptist Church
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Is Jesus the Center of the Universe?
(A Christmas truth)

By Pastor Dean Honeycutt
Mitchell County



Christmas is a wonderful time of the year. And for most of us Christ will be at the center of our holiday. However, for far too many people the true meaning of Christmas is lost in tradition and the deception of commercialism.

The first Christmas, the angel of the Lord brought a simple message to the shepherds keeping watch over their flock by night, "for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2: 8,11) A very simple message with profound meaning which is still true today, Jesus is the reason for the season.

Though the world at that time may not have recognized the supremacy of Christ, the angels certainly did, as they proclaimed, "glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace goodwill toward man." (v.14) "Glory to God in the highest" is used in a spatial sense the "highest heaven." As Buzz lightyear would say "to infinity and beyond." So, in all infinite space and earth Jesus Christ is the glory of God and the image of the invisible God. (Colossians 1:15; Revelation 21:23) Jesus is the center of everything seen and unseen.

Secular science tells us the observable universe is an infinite amount of space around you. In every direction it is unending. No matter how far I travel in any direction I would never reach the end, space is endless. So, where is the center of space? Secular science tells me I am at the center of my universe, the center is relative to my position. So, this model and idea places man at the center. And this is the way most people think. We tend to see ourselves in the center and our family, possessions, and needs revolving around us.

But, if we are at the center, where does that leave Jesus? That leaves Jesus revolving around us with all the other things that are going on in our life. It is sad to say but Jesus is often only one of many things in our life. It is said, if you want to know where someone's priorities lie see where they spend their money and their time.

What the world and secular science fail to realize is the spiritual reality of that which is visible and invisible. That Jesus Christ is the center of all things and is not confined by time, space, or matter, Jesus is eternal and before all things in relation to time and all things seen and not seen exist, and continue to exist, and are held together because of Jesus. In other words, Jesus is the center of all things and He is the glue that holds all things in their place. Colossians 1:16 (KJV 1900)

16 For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:

Colossians 1:17 (KJV 1900)

17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

Wow what an amazing truth. The Bible teaches Christ is supreme in all things. The way we really enjoy Christmas is putting our number one priority on the Number One priority and that is Jesus Christ. Acknowledging the supremacy of Christ keeps my focus where it needs to be. If you teach your children the supremacy of Christ then they will understand the true meaning of Christmas. If one day everything we know about traditional Christmas were taken away, Christmas would still be Christmas and have meaning and purpose. Why? Because it is based on the person of Jesus Christ and not what the world has made it out to be. May you have a wonderful Christmas, focus on Jesus Christ and your Christmas will be full because all fullness dwells in Jesus.

Pastor Dean Honeycutt shepherds Snow Hill Baptist Church in Bakersville, NC. He may be reached at 828-385-0213, snowhillbaptist@gmail.com , or visit their website at www.snowhillbaptist.com.



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A Meditation

At This Time of Year

By Timothy Eller
McDowell County



At this time of year, we must remember A few Scriptures foretelling our saviors birth.

Isaiah 7:14

"Therefore, the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel".

The was also made know in the Synoptic Gospels as the angel heralded him as Emmanuel "God with Us"

Isaiah 9:6:

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace".

The savior of the world came as a baby, king and the prince of peace.

Isaiah 43:10-13:

"Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me.

11 I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour.

12 I have declared, and have saved, and I have shewed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore, ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, that I am God.

13 Yea, before the day was I am he; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let it?"

Jesus was Immanuel God with us the savior of the world

We must remember what Christmas is about. Being with family, loving each other, and having time off and gifts matter. But without the savior of the world there would be no reason for the season. Remember Jesus this holiday season.



Tim Eller graduated from Carolina Graduate School of Divinity and has been involved in prison and jail ministry for the past fifteen years. Currently he is operating in the capacity of a servant of Jesus Christ.

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*His name shall be called Emmanuel
Prince of Peace and Godly Love*



Marlene's Meditations

An Author's View

By Marlene Houk
Burke County

Hebrews 12:2 *Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Displaying power and directing change, an author creates worlds out of nothing. A little foreshadowing here, a mountain of tension there, protagonists and an antagonist thrown in, but, everywhere, the mystery of the story suggests...

God is the Master and Creator of Storytelling. His stories are infinitely grand, as in the creation of the universe, and yet, incredibly tiny, as in the tiny earthly shell that formed the unborn baby Jesus. And, yet, Bible stories are rich with the sense of an unseen Hand that creates and directs these stories.

Such is the story of Sarah, Abraham's wife, in the Old Testament book of Genesis, the book of beginnings. Having just finished my Bible Study on Following the Footsteps of Sarah's Faith, I realized anew from the sermon's text the following Sunday morning that her path was not of her choosing. God directed her first tiny steps on the cobbled streets of ancient Ur and her last plodding steps before her final days.

Statistically, God underscores her importance by including her in five books of the Bible. He points to her significance for women everywhere as He calls her our spiritual mother and then underscores that by including 19% of all first-mentioned words in her story. Of all the colorful characters in Genesis with their larger-than-life stories, Sarah's has more first-mentioned words (in the KJV) than any other character. What a subtle yet strong way to underscore 1 Peter 3:6!

Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement.

Her story feels like Niagara Falls, plummeting to the pits of fear as she is captured, not once, but twice, by a pharaoh and a king, locked into their whims and crushed under their culture. She encounters moments of ultimate shame such as when she realizes who is at fault for their infertility. Her fury turns upon her maid, Hagar, and her anger blazes as she turns on her. And yet, the roar of her joy as she births Isaac years later soars like the plumes of the Falls, spraying everyone down through millennia with God's power and love. Her fame spreads far and wide as myriads visit her story, observing her journey from feisty fireball to a famous place in the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11. Every jot and tittle in her story weaves into itself the supreme authority of the One Who wrote it, designed to bring Sarah to a place of greater faith that would influence eternity. Through her came the earthly line of Jesus, Savior of the world. God fulfilled His promise, and her precious little boy, Isaac, became the ancestor of Jesus through King David. What significance her story reveals when seen from the aerial view of eternity and through God's eyes. Every day that Sarah heard the wail of a newborn within one of the tents in the tribe of Abraham, her heart sighed, looking forward to the day that God would, according to His promise, let her hear her own baby's cries as he entered the world...to fulfill God's story within his own life.

As God finished Sarah's faith, polishing it with His love and grace, and setting it carefully on display for all to stare and wonder, so He carefully and lovingly writes our story, each detail intricately threaded with all the traits of a grand story and yet has one single purpose, to glorify Him!

Rest in this and know that, no matter our failures, triumphs or feelings about them, God writes our story and the plots and twists of our lives are, like Sarah, to ultimately bring glory to Him!

Marlene Houk is a regular contributor to Blue Ridge Christian News. Her passion is to delve deeply into the truths of Bible women and to discuss those in Bible Studies called Backstage Pass to Bible Women. She and her husband discover joy, nurture, and challenge in their church. Her contact is marlenehouk@bellsouth.net



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Parade

By Morissa Angi
Burke County

Valdese, NC – November 27, 2017 -- The Town of Valdese is proud to announce that James Hamby, James Queen, Willard Church, and Richard Lutz will all be honored as Grand Marshals for the Valdese Annual Christmas Parade, which will be held on Saturday, December 2, at 10:00am.

Hamby, Queen, Church, and Lutz are all being honored as World War II Veterans who are still living in Valdese. "We are incredibly honored that so many WWII Veterans are able to join us as Grand Marshals of this year's Christmas Parade. These men served our country heroically and it is humbling that they accepted our invitation to kick off this year's Christmas season," States Seth Eckard, Valdese Town Manager. The Grand Marshals will be featured at the beginning of the parade lineup.

The parade will begin at the corner of Church St. and Main, and will conclude at the corner of Morgan St. and Main. "We are so excited to kick off the Holiday Season with our annual Christmas Parade. The parade is a great way to get everyone in the holiday spirit!" states Morissa Angi, Director of Community Affairs and Tourism for the Town of Valdese.

The Piedmont & Western Railroad Museum will host an open house at the Old Rock School the morning of the parade. Parade visitors are invited to view the HO scale model railroad exhibit which stretches from Marion, NC to Leadvale, TN. Admission is free, and donations are greatly appreciated.

"I would also like to thank our Valdese Merchants Association for working so hard to coordinate the professional parade floats and sponsoring the finale float with special guest SANTA!" Angi adds. "This event is a great time to come together as a community to celebrate the holidays."

Attendees are encouraged to visit the downtown merchants while they are in town for the parade. Several merchants have gone above and beyond with their Christmas window displays this year. The Valdese Merchants Association is hosting a People's Choice Award for the most festive window in downtown. The public is invited to vote for their favorite on the Town of Valdese Facebook page. The business with the most festive window will win \$100.

For further information regarding the Christmas Parade and upcoming Holiday events in Valdese go to www.visitvaldese.com or call 828-879-2129.

Morissa Angi is Director of Community Affairs and Tourism



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Reformers Unanimous

Program for Changing Habits

By Justin Norris
McDowell County

Many blessings to my brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus! My name is Justin Norris, director of the Reformers Unanimous of McDowell County. Reformers Unanimous, or as we like to call it, RU, is a Biblically based, Christ-centered recovery program designed to rescue, recover, and restore those with addictive behaviors with the power of the victorious life found only in Jesus Christ. My wife, Kayla, and I started out with what we truly felt was a calling to be missionaries to the inner city of Philadelphia. After several months of prayer and preparation, our pastor at New Manna Baptist Church, Tony Shirley, approached us about this ministry and expressed the great need in our community. We had a past of addiction ourselves and the inner city of Philadelphia was a perfect place for us to minister. This type of ministry is what we had in mind, so we decided to seek The Lord more intently. The close of 2016 brought us to a decision, and we decided it was most certainly God's will to stay and minister in Marion, North Carolina. We went to Rockford, Illinois and learned what this ministry entailed and decided this was it. So, we set a startup date on May 26th, 2017, and we have been growing and have had the pleasure of seeing lives made free and transformed through the gospel of Jesus Christ! Here are a couple of our attendees who have experienced this very thing, and these are their testimonies.

"My name is David Orostica. I grew up in a Catholic family in the Republic of Colombia in Central America. By the time I was 6, I was out of church and started running the streets. At the age of 8, I was introduced to drug dealing and started to traffic drugs myself. I didn't start doing drugs until I was 9, and for 22 years from that time, I lived a life of hustling, gang activity, and violence. In that time, I fatally harmed and even took others' lives and had many attempts at my own life. It became such a problem that my family had to move to Florida in hopes to get me away from my lifestyle, but it only continued. Addiction took many loved ones and close friends in these years and God was completely absent from my life until I made the decision recently to seek Him, ask for His forgiveness, and turned my will and life over to Him. Since that moment, I have had 6 months of victory over drugs and am highly active in the community, church, and other organizations. I am still striving to better myself and fulfill the purpose that God has planned for my life and blessed me with."



David Orostica

"My name is Ruthie Tepal. I was raised in church my whole life and my mother taught me about The Lord. Unfortunately, at the age of 14, I began making wrong decisions and started using drugs. From then on, I was in and out of jail, mental institutions, and even served two sentences in prison. In those dark years, I sometimes prayed, and every once in a while, darkened the doors of a church, but I felt there was no way out of this lifestyle and all hope was lost. On March 1st, 2017, I finally started an attempt at a sober life, but it wasn't until June 2nd, when I went to Reformers Unanimous at New Manna Baptist Church, that my life changed. I learned what having a true relationship with Jesus Christ really was and that's when I became truly free. I want to thank God for saving me, for this program, and for my church that started it, and lastly, I want to thank my mother for planting the seed of God's Word in my life. I have now had victory over addiction for 9 months and have a true relationship with my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."



Ruthie Tepal

It is our passion to be a guidance and help to anyone who struggles with any addiction, and we believe with all of our hearts that "once an addict, always an addict" does not have to be the standard. They can have complete and true freedom, only through Jesus Christ. Proverbs 13:12 says "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick, but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life". We defer hope when we believe our addiction is an incurable illness that we must battle the rest of our life. The Bible tells us in John 8:36 that "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye SHALL be free INDEED." We welcome you to our program at New Manna Baptist Church located at 245 East Court Street, Marion, NC. Our meals start at 6:30 PM and our program starts at 7 PM until 9 PM every Friday night. You may contact Justin Norris at (828)544-9883, or Kayla Norris at (828)381-1689 at any time. We look forward to serving you and your loved ones!

Justin Norris is the Director of RU of McDowell County.



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*Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them:
because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the
world. 1 John 4:4*

The Book

By Lana Ellis
Tennessee



The fragrant aroma of the fresh cut Fraser fir from North Carolina permeates the air. The tree in all its glory stands as the centerpiece of the festivities. Beneath are carefully wrapped gifts tied in red and green ribbons adorned with matching bows. After what seems forever Christmas morning has finally arrived. The excitement grows not only for the children but other family members as they gather. Then one by one the gifts are distributed and the revealing of the contents begins.

Unable to wait any longer the children make haste ripping and tossing paper from one end of the room to the other. Shrills of screams echo off the walls as they become recipients of the latest toys, games and gadgets they've seen advertised on TV since Halloween. Granny also wastes no time as she rips off the paper and pulls out her annual gift from Grandpa, a long flannel night gown; however, this year it's green plaid instead of the usual red.

Not to be out done her gift to Grandpa is matching flannel pajamas. Uncle Zeke proudly displays the sweater hand knitted by his sister, Aunt Jodie. Uncle Zeke doesn't have one arm longer than the other but his dear sister evidently thinks so!

All eyes turn toward Sis holding a small box in her hand. She carefully removes the tiny bow and slowly opens the box. Please don't let it be a grocery store gift card. Diamond earrings! He really came through this year! Hope he remembers how much he loves her when the bill comes next month. Brother grins ear to ear as he shows off his new battery powered drill. No shirts and ties for this Tool Man. Speaking of ties spiffy Dad is delighted with his yellow bowtie and matching dress shirt. It doesn't take a lot to make Mom happy. She often says that having the family together is her best gift but this year there was an extra-large box under the tree for her. The family thought it was about time she had her very own "Lazy Girl" recliner!!! Attached was a tag that said, "Put your feet up Mom and let us take care of you today!"

As usual it was another fun-filled time with gifts for everyone including the annual hilarious gag gift for an unsuspecting recipient. Still talking and laughing the hungry group headed toward the kitchen for the much anticipated home cooked breakfast. I stayed behind to pick up the wrapping paper and fancy bows that had been torn asunder and scattered to and fro. With an overstuffed trash bag in hand while turning to leave the room to join the others something caught my eye. From the now exposed bare floor beneath the tree I retrieved an unopened gift. It was wrapped in what appeared to be ancient parchment paper and tied simply with brown twine. With trembling hands I untied the string and gently peeled away the fragile paper. Inside was a book and with the book was a note, "To You, from Martin."

"The Book" (to be continued)

Lana Ellis resides in Kingsport TN, next door to grandchildren. Church is West Colonial Hills Baptist Church.



Crossword Solution

E	A	S	T		P	A	R	E		B	A	C	K	S
B	L	U	E		E	V	E	N		A	S	H	I	P
B	A	R	S		L	E	F	T		T	H	I	N	E
	S	E	T		E	N	R	I	C	H		N	E	W
O			E	G	G		E	R	R	E	D	No.225		
R	H	O	D	A		A	S	E	A		R	E	A	D
P	E	R		M	A	S	H			V	O	Y	A	G
H	A	D		E	T	A		W	E	T		T	O	P
A	V	E	R	S	E		S	A	S	H		E	A	T
N	E	R	O		N	E	T	S		E	A	R	T	H
			M	I	T	R	E		A	R	T			S
L	A	P		T	H	O	R	N	S		R	O	B	
A	R	O	M	A		D	I	E	S		O	M	E	N
C	A	M	E	L		E	L	S	E		T	R	E	E
E	M	P	T	Y		S	E	T	S		H	I	N	T

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Sudoku Solution

4	5	7	1	3	6	9	8	2
2	1	8	4	7	9	3	5	6
3	9	6	2	8	5	4	1	7
1	3	9	5	2	8	7	6	4
6	2	4	7	1	3	5	9	8
8	7	5	9	6	4	1	2	3
5	4	3	6	9	2	8	7	1
9	6	1	8	4	7	2	3	5
7	8	2	3	5	1	6	4	9

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Shopping in county or out of county

Clint's Chronicles on the Funny Farm

The Rest of the Story Farmer Doug

I know that any of you that have worked in cornfield beans will understand how they can irritate your skin, that is what happened to Clint in this story and he was really shook up when he came in with the red welks on his neck. His comment was always, "Strong Like Bull" but he really was a pussy cat around many of the farm activities. Many cases it really was the fear of the unknown in his world and very understandable.

In the second story, my cousin, Betsy Herrell, was always bringing me tea, cookies, watermelon or other goodies when I was working around her house. Clint was not familiar with how the ladies took care of us men when we were outside working. Betsy's comment to me had been, "what is the matter with Clint, I tried to bring him watermelon out in the field and he would not even stop"! I explained to her that he just did not understand how it worked out on the farm. Clint learned that lesson really quick!!

Clint's Chronicles on the Funny Farm

Dear friends,

I am always amazed by the notoriety arising from my adventures at Harrell Hill Farms. Wherever I roam folks point, gawk and question my veracity, wondering aloud if Farmer Clint's mishaps are factual. Seeking a quiet meal at Western Sizzlin' I hear, "Hey, I know you! Did you really plow someone's yard?" ... How embarrassing! At a local church the lady says, "Be careful of those 'killer groundhogs'! ... My manhood is ridiculed. On Facebook a friend suggests, "Harrell Hillians beware...it is springtime and Farmer Clint soon will be mounting the John Deere!" ...I'd like to see him crawl out of the river only to be assaulted by snakes on all sides! ... I can't even escape at Wal-Mart, "Seen any coyotes, oops I mean yorkies, lately?" ... When will it end?

As I reminisce about my agricultural prowess over the last year I am amazed that one man could survive so many near-misses with death on the farm. There are nights I awaken, terrified of "what might have been" yet thankful for God's protective covering.

This month I want to share two short stories, more evidence of how easily things can go awry!

Hazmat Suit...

It was a sweltering summer day as Doug dispatched me to spray insecticide on rows of beans and tomato plants. While I don't recall the exact name of the chemical, I believe it was first cousin to Agent Orange. Despite temperatures in the 90's, my buddy insisted that I wear a ridiculous crepe suit, gloves and hat. Always compliant, I slithered my then fat self into the hunter's green material, donned my farmer's gloves and set out to eradicate the veggie cannibals.

I had the presence of mind to stand down-wind of the fine chemical mist so as not to drink too many of the tiny droplets. And spray I did...up and down...all around...bugs gasping for their last precious breath as I bobbed and weaved among the rows. Dodging pig weed, swarms of hornets and all manner of creepy crawly things I maneuvered throughout the vast garden. Mission accomplished.

Returning home that evening the skin on my neck was burning, tingling, and feeling as though a gazillion bees were feasting on my blood. As I looked in the mirror I noted what appeared to be a vast blister, better said leprosy! Alas, my life flashed before my eyes as I envisioned the end...surely the dastardly chemical mixture was expediting my trip to heaven. I scurried to the farmhouse kitchen, hoping only to bid farewell to Doug and Barbara.

Running headlong into my mountain-man friend, my eyes telegraphing terror and distress, he asked, "Pollard, what's wrong with you?" I explain how I followed his instruction, "Doug, I wore the suit and gloves even though the heat was nearly exhausting. I even thought to stand upwind of the spray. But, as you see, my skin is being eaten from the outside in."

That crooked smile and mischievous look, the one he always displays just before saying "Pollard, I don't know what I'm gonna do with you," that one...and he asked, "Uh, did you get tangled up in the beans?" Thinking back, I recounted how a couple times the corn row beans had wrapped their stringy vines around my neck, once nearly taking me to my knees. "You are allergic to the bean vine, lots of folks are," Doug said. "Take a shower, dry it off and you'll be okay in a couple days." Snickering, having a bit too much fun in my opinion, my friend offered me a piece of cake. And I devoured it, thankful that God spared me death from the nuclear material.

Waving Watermelon...

I had been plowing, hoeing, raking and otherwise eating dust all day long. An extended dry spell plagued our mountain farm as Doug lovingly and painstakingly taught me the process of harvesting hay. I recently learned to lift and transport the round bales (a story for another day) and was returning to the barn with a fresh load.



As you know from previous musings, I love driving the tractor @. Tooling along down Harrell Hill Road I "was one" with the land...content in my role as farm hand extraordinaire...privileged to captain the Kiota along our rural roads.

I'm telling ya, this was a hot day and I'd had no water in a few hours (Doug doesn't give me breaks @). As I rounded the bend I saw a lovely lady standing at the intersection of Harrell Hill Road and Byrd Road. Drawing near I recognized Betsy, Doug's cousin and my friend. Her arm was extended as though flying a kite, but I quickly noticed that instead she was waving a piece of watermelon.

As I passed by, I could nearly taste the succulent, dripping, cool red melon. And I wondered aloud, "Why is Betsy standing there waving a slice of watermelon? Such unusual customs in these mountains." Nevertheless, I smiled, tipped my Farmer Clint hat as a gentlemanly gesture, and went to deposit the hay. All the while wishing I could figure out a way to finagle that watermelon from Betsy.

A week or so later Doug remarked, "You owe Betsy an apology." I searched the cobwebs of my mind to comprehend what I possibly could have done to offend this wonderful woman. "What did I do now?" I whined. Once again, his eyes two mischievous marbles, my friend explained, "Betsy tried to flag you down for some watermelon last week and you just drove by and waved."

Immediately I went on the attack, defensive to the extreme I proclaimed, "Now look, I don't know the rules of etiquette here. What was I supposed to do? You know I like Betsy, and you know I like watermelon. What you don't know is that I WANTED Betsy's watermelon! But how was I to know she wanted to share with me? It just didn't seem right to stop and say, 'Hi Betsy, may I please have your watermelon!' Or what if I had leaped from the tractor and said, 'Gimme that watermelon Betsy!'" Bursting into laughter my friends Doug and Barbara nearly died at the hilarity of that vision.

That was an important day, though, in my education at Harrell Hill Farms. What I learned is that on the farm virtually every gesture has meaning, and every movement has purpose beyond what is apparent.

A few days later I apologized to Betsy for my faux pas. "That's okay," she said. "There's always another day and another watermelon." So, if you're new here and don't know what to do, remember...never fly by a lovely lady waving watermelon in your direction @!

Farmer Clint



Merry Christmas

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"Holiday Grief"

By Jacob Willis
Yancey County

The Holidays are depicted as happy times of family and friends gathering around the table to celebrate life and faith. This depiction is true for some people, as they are healthy, close to relatives, and gainfully employed. Holidays can be a different story for some people, however. Many people spend the holidays alone. This time is particularly difficult for elderly people who live alone. Many of them rely on public transportation, meals on wheels, senior centers, and neighbors for food and support. Their lives are made better by these services. During the holidays many of these services aren't available. Many of our local seniors are left without meals, or any way to get out of the house. Many seniors in nursing facilities miss their homes the most during the holidays. The memories we all celebrate can haunt them. Many seniors sadly are abandoned by their families, or they outlive their families. Thanksgiving and Christmas are holidays that many elderly people spend alone and hungry. What can we do during this time, and all year, to honor those who have given so much to us?

First of all we can open our eyes and hearts to see a need. Many times, during the holidays we can focus on our families, food, and presents. Getting all of this together can be overwhelming. During this time, it is really important to remember the "Reason for the Season". Jesus came to serve the marginalized people of this world. This season is about giving, loving, and sacrifice. I think it is important to remind our children that people who are less fortunate are our responsibility. We have a responsibility to care for those who cared for us. We have a calling to minister to those who are hungry, imprisoned, sick, and homeless. We are called to do this not only at Christmas and Thanksgiving, but all year long. If you choose to volunteer serving food to the homeless, prisoners, or shut-ins, it will open your eyes to the great need in our world. Delivering gifts to the nursing home and spending time with them enhances our lives beyond measure. In giving we receive. People need someone to love them. They need someone to care about them regardless of what they have done or been.

Secondly, we can identify people in our own community that have needs. We can visit them, identify their need, and make them our adopted family. We need to make our churches aware of the needs of others and challenge them to reach out and help. If we look in our communities; it may surprise us with what we see. Taking action speaks louder than words. Preach the gospel everywhere and when necessary use words.

Finally, we need to develop meaningful relationships with elderly people. As we get older our priorities in life change. When you are young, climbing up the ladder of success seems to be very important. When you are older relationships are the most important aspect of life. Working with Hospice is not only about a patient's physical needs, but emotional, socio-economic, and spiritual needs. We provide comfort and family to our patients regardless of circumstance or ability to pay. Our clients become a part of the Hospice family. Many of them have no other family present in their lives. Many times, after being placed on hospice our patient's lives improve. Seniors need companionship and community. They have much to share when it comes to life experience and love. If you choose to make them a part of your life, you will certainly receive more than you give.

Our challenge during the Holidays is not to buy our kids all they want, or cook the best meal, nor is it to have the best decorated house, it is to be Jesus to marginalized people. If we can make people's lives better, we are sharing the Spirit of the Christ Child.

Jacob Willis is an ordained pastor and Bereavement Coordinator for Yancey County Hospice. You may contact him at jacobw@hospiceofyancey.org.



The wise men, themselves, were astrologers and studied the stars and planets and knew, according to Jewish rabbis, of the triangle and that it had appeared before the birth of Moses. Perhaps they interpreted it as a sign of a great event in the land of the Jewish people. This may have been the star of Bethlehem. Pisces became the special constellation of the Hebrew people.

Still, many people prefer to believe that the strange star did appear, and that it was simply a miracle and throughout the world today, the Christian holiday has usually begun with the appearance of the first star of Christmas Eve.

The Festival of the Star is held in Poland. Right after the Christmas Eve meal, the village priest, acts as the "Star Man" and tests the children's knowledge of religion. In Alaska, boys and girls carry a star shaped figure from house to house and sing carols in hopes of receiving treats. In Hungary a star-shaped pattern is carved in a half of an apple and is suppose to bring good luck.

In general, the Christmas star symbolizes high hopes and high ideals - hope for good fortune, hope for reaching above oneself. For all human beings, regardless of religion, stars have special meaning for all share the heavens, no matter what barriers keep them apart on earth.

Candles

There are many different reasons why candles are associated with Christmas, although no one knows when they first became connected!

They were used during ancient winter solstice celebrations a way of remembering that spring would soon come.

One of the earliest records of candles being used at Christmas is from the middle ages, where a large candle was used to represent the star of Bethlehem. Jesus is sometimes called 'the Light of the World' by Christians. This might have started the custom of the Advent Crown and Advent Candles.

Candles were also originally used to decorate Christmas Trees, until safer electric lights were invented!



Traditions of Christmas Bells

Bells, especially Church Bells, have traditionally been associated with Christmas for a long time. In the Anglican and Catholic churches, the church day starts at sunset, so any service after that is the first service of the day. So a service on Christmas Eve after sunset is traditionally the first service of Christmas day! In churches that have a Bell or Bells, They are often rung to signal the start of this service.

In some churches in the UK, it is traditional that the largest bell in the church is rung four times in the hour before midnight and then at midnight all the bells are rung in celebration.

In the Catholic Church, Christmas and Easter are the only times that Mass is allowed to be held at Midnight. It's traditional that at both midnight Masses, the church and altar bells too in many cases are rung while the Priest says the "Gloria" (Gloria in excelsis Deo).

Having a Mass at Midnight at Christmas dates back to the early church, when it was believed that Jesus was born at midnight, although there has never been any proof of this! A lot of Churches have midnight services on Christmas Eve, although not every church will have a mass or communion as part of the service. In many Catholic countries such as France, Spain and Italy, the midnight mass service is very important and everyone tries to go to a service.

In Victorian times, it was very fashionable to go carol singing with small handbells to play the tune of the carol. Sometimes there would only be the bells and no singing! Handbell ringing is still popular today.



Christmas Candy Canes

The Christmas Candy Cane originated in Germany about 250 years ago. They started as straight white sugar sticks.

A story says that a choirmaster, in 1670, was worried about the children sitting quietly all through the long Christmas nativity service. So he gave them something to eat to keep them quiet! As he wanted to remind them of Christmas, he made them into a 'J' shape like a shepherd's crook, to remind them of the shepherds that visited the baby Jesus at the first Christmas. However, the earliest records of 'candy canes' comes from over 200 years later, so the story, although rather nice, probably isn't true!

Sometime around 1900 the red stripes were added and they were flavored with peppermint or wintergreen.



Respiratory Therapist Joins Hospice and Palliative Care of the Blue Ridge

Hospice of the Blue Ridge is happy to welcome Elizabeth Hollifield to our hospice team. She is a life-long resident of Mitchell County who knows and loves the communities we serve.

Elizabeth earned her Bachelor of Science degree from ETSU and is a registered respiratory therapist who has served our community for over thirteen years. Her experience has equipped her with the important skills necessary to serve patients who are coping with COPD, CHF, lung cancer and other respiratory



issues.

Recently we launched a program entitled "Breathe Easy" to provide more extensive care and education to these patients. Elizabeth will be instrumental in leading our efforts to constantly improve respiratory care for all of our patients. Her knowledge and expertise is extremely valuable as Hospice of the Blue Ridge continues to grow our range of services.

The "Breathe Easy" program is another way that we strive to fulfill our promise to provide the highest quality of care possible. We know Elizabeth's role will contribute to our success and we look forward to working with her to benefit those in our care.



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Joy in Tribulation

By Billy Graham

In the late fall of 1966, approximately 36,000 square miles of land in northern Italy were engulfed as the rain-swollen Po and Arno rivers ran wild. Nearly a million tons of mud and muck were dumped in Florence alone. One hundred thousand persons were left homeless. Priceless treasures of the Renaissance were damaged or ruined.

Nowhere does the Bible teach that Christians are to be exempt from the tribulations and natural disasters that come upon the world. It does teach that the Christian can face tribulation, crisis, calamity and personal suffering with a supernatural power that is not available to the person outside of Christ.

"Nowhere does the Bible teach that Christians are to be exempt from the tribulations and natural disasters that come upon the world."

Thousands of Christians have learned the secret of contentment and joy in trial. Some of the happiest Christians I have met have drunk the full cup of trial and misfortune. Some have been life-long sufferers. They have had every reason to sigh and complain, being denied so many privileges and pleasures that they see others enjoy, yet they have found greater cause for gratitude and joy than many who are prosperous, vigorous and strong.

They have learned to give thanks "always for all things ... to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 5:20).

Christians can rejoice in tribulation because they have eternity's values in view. When the pressures are on, they look beyond their present predicament to the glories of Heaven. The thought of the future life with its prerogatives and joys helps to make the trials of the present seem light and transient.

The early Christians were able to experience joy in their hearts in the midst of trials, troubles and depression. They counted suffering for Christ not as a burden or misfortune but as a great honor, as evidence that Christ counted them worthy to witness for Him through suffering. They never forgot what Christ Himself had gone through for their salvation, and to suffer for His name's sake was regarded as a gift rather than a burden.

He Made No False Promises

Jesus Christ spoke frankly to His disciples concerning the future. He hid nothing from them. No one could ever accuse Him of deception. No one could accuse Him of securing allegiance by making false promises.

In unmistakable language He told them that discipleship meant a life of self-denial and the bearing of a cross. He asked them to count the cost carefully, lest they should turn back when they met with suffering and privation.

"In unmistakable language He told them that discipleship meant a life of self-denial and the bearing of a cross."

Jesus told His followers that the world would hate them. They would be "as sheep in the midst of wolves" (Matthew 10:16). They would be arrested, scourged and brought before governors and kings. Even their loved ones would persecute them. As the world hated and persecuted Him, so it would treat His servants. He warned further, "They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service" (John 16:2).

Many of Christ's followers were disappointed in Him, for in spite of His warnings they expected Him to subdue their enemies and to set up a world political kingdom. When they came face to face with reality, they "went back and walked with Him no more" (John 6:66). But the true disciples of Jesus all suffered for their faith.

Tacitus, a Roman historian, writing of the early Christian martyrs, said, "Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle." How true were the words of Paul to the early Christians. "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

Bathed in the Blaze

We are told that the martyrs went rejoicing to their deaths, as if they were going to a marriage feast. They bathed their hands in the blaze kindled for them, and they shouted with gladness. One early historian, witnessing their heroism, wrote, "When the day of victory dawned, the Christians marched in procession from the prison to the arena as if they were marching to Heaven, with joyous countenances agitated by gladness rather than fear."

"Thus, they could regard present difficulties as of little consequence and could endure them with patience and cheerfulness."

We are not surprised that the early Christians rejoiced in suffering, since they looked at it in the light of eternity. The nearer death, the nearer a life of eternal fellowship with Christ. When Ignatius was about to die for his faith in A.D. 110, he cried out, "Nearer the sword, then nearer to God. In company with wild beasts, in company with God."

The Christians of the early church believed that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18). Thus, they could regard present difficulties as of little consequence and could endure them with patience and cheerfulness.

In all ages Christians have found it possible to maintain the spirit of joy in the hour of trial. In circumstances that would have felled most people, they have so completely risen above them that they actually have used the circumstances to serve and glorify Christ. Paul could write from prison at Rome, "I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel" (Philippians 1:12).

Count it as a Blessing

In our day millions of Christians are suffering in many parts of the world.



Christians have been killed and their churches plundered.

The Bible teaches that every believer who is faithful to Christ must be prepared to suffer at the hands of those who are enemies of the Gospel. "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution," said Paul (2 Timothy 3:12).

However, Christ told His disciples that they were not to count it a stroke of affliction when they were reviled and persecuted. Rather, they were to count it as a favor and a blessing. They were to "rejoice and be exceedingly glad" (Matthew 5:12). Just as Jesus had overcome the world, so they through His grace and strength would overcome the world. Thus, they were to be of good cheer.

"I have found in my travels that those who keep Heaven in view remain serene and cheerful in the darkest day. If the glories of Heaven were more real to us, if we lived less for material things and more for things eternal and spiritual, we would be less easily disturbed by this present life."

They were to be "more than conquerors" (Romans 8:37). They were to glory in tribulations (Romans 5:3). When beaten and threatened with worse treatment if they continued to preach Christ, Peter and John departed, "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And ... they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (Acts 5:41-42).

As we read the book of Acts, we soon realize that suffering and death intensified the joy of the early Christians. The Apostle Paul could write, "I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation" (2 Corinthians 7:4).

In all his sufferings and sorrows, he experienced a deep, abiding joy. He writes of being "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" (2 Corinthians 6:10). With sincerity he declared that for Christ's sake he was content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities (See 2 Corinthians 12:10).

I have found in my travels that those who keep Heaven in view remain serene and cheerful in the darkest day. If the glories of Heaven were more real to us, if we lived less for material things and more for things eternal and spiritual, we would be less easily disturbed by this present life.

In these days of darkness and upheaval and uncertainty, the trustful and forward-looking Christian remains optimistic and joyful, knowing that Christ must reign, and "if we endure, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Timothy 2:12).

Put Your Trust in Him Today

For all throughout the world who are suffering, our Lord has these words from the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:11-12).

"In the midst of it all, there is the promise of victory."

Speaking of our salvation, the Apostle Peter said: "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:6-8).

Perhaps in your particular circumstances you are undergoing psychological suffering, which is just as real as physical suffering. It may be a suffering that you cannot express even to your dearest friend—an inward suffering, a heartrending, heartbreaking suffering.

In the midst of it all, there is the promise of victory. Christ has overcome the world, and you by faith can overcome the world through our Lord Jesus Christ (See 1 John 5:5).

Put your trust in Him today. Repent of your sins. Receive Him as your Savior and let His serenity, His joy, His peace, be yours in the midst of the hard realities of the life that you have to live wherever you are. ©1966 BGEA

Scripture quotations are taken from The Holy Bible, New King James Version. You can know the joy of the Lord.



Crossnore School

Revival

By Jim Hart
Avery County

Last summer, a number popped up on my phone that I recognized. It was a fellow pastor I hadn't heard from in at least a year. A pastor who far exceeds me in Methodist hierarchy, and I caught myself saying out loud, "wonder what she wants with me?" This pastor who happens to have a bunch of letters after her name and a degree from Yale on her wall wanted to know if I would come out to her church and talk about the mission of Crossnore School and Children's Home as it relates to the Gospel. It will be a great gathering she said. And then, she slyly slid a word in to our conversation that strikes fear into my heart - revival. You see, I grew up an Eastern NC Baptist Church. We didn't live very far from highway 301 which was the main route from Delaware to Florida. Every spring and fall, traveling preachers would come through town, set up their tents and advertise a good old fashion tent revival.

I went to a few of those revivals. I can still hear the words and see the actions of those preachers burned into my memory - lots of hard preaching and jumping around. I will never forget the red faces and white dried lips of those pastors as they laid the law down on we sinners who showed up on that steamy Saturday night. So, when I was asked if I would come preach a revival, my automatic thought was no. I can't do that. I don't have that kind of charisma about me. It is not one of the gifts God gave me. Then she said there would be food, and I was instantly in. You see, I love a good church potluck. Nothing like putting your life at the mercy of a casserole that has been simmering in the backseat of someone's car on a warm spring day. Undaunted by any amount of gastro intestinal distress, I agreed to her request.

Friends, I loath the word revival. I am tired of all the words we church folks, both pastors and congregations use about growth - revival, renewal, refresh - the list goes on. We get together and talk about ways to make our churches grow; how to get new folks in church; how to grow membership. The words fly about, and the ideas start flowing. Let's start a contemporary service with a band. Or maybe, we can build a really nice playground. A playground will attract people with kids. How about if we get some hip App. student with skinny jeans and Chacos to be our youth pastor? That will work. Or, I have a great idea, let's have a revival. We can advertise it. It will be for several days, and we can get different pastors to come speak. It will be great!

Friends, we need to stop offering folks casseroles and electric guitars. We need to stop offering them great playgrounds and hip young folks in skinny jeans. We need to revive, refresh, renew with Jesus. We need to offer folks Jesus. And not



just so they will come to our church, not so they will put in the offering plate, not so we can count them as a member and turn it in on our end of the year reports, but because as Christians, as followers of Christ, it is what we are called to do. By walking along beside others and by sharing the Good News, we are being the community of faith, we are in communion with one another and that is what the church is called to do and to be. The church is not called to lock ourselves away inside our stained-glass ghettos, only worrying about our personal prosperity and by that, I mean, our own personal salvation. We are called to offer people Jesus.

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus went into homes and synagogues, teaching and healing. And people came to him, the sick and the demon possessed. Those who couldn't come on their own were brought to the feet of Jesus by others. They were offered Jesus.

While in Capernaum, a paralytic was brought on a mat to the feet of Jesus. They didn't turn away because of the crowd. They were not deterred. They offered their friend Jesus by digging through the hard-baked roof, making a hole to lower their paralyzed friend down to Jesus. We cannot give up on offering folks Jesus, even when it's hard...even impossible.

On December 11, 1911 that is exactly what Dr. Mary Martin Sloop did. A woman who had already been turned down for medical school because of her gender, a woman who grew up in a time when women were mostly only educated on how to be a great wife and mother, dug through the roof of inequality, poverty and disease by offering the people surrounding a small community in Western NC, medical care and education. And, she did it by first offering them Jesus.

Dr. Sloop and her husband Doctor, as she referred to him, spent their first Sunday in Crossnore attending Sunday School in what she referred to as the most interesting building in town. It was an interesting building across from the general store and post office. No one knew exactly how old it was. Sloop wrote that it looked like it was made from wood from the Ark. It was nothing more than a poorly made shed. But, it was the schoolhouse, church, and magistrate's courtroom for the whole region. It was a dark and gloomy building. The inside was stained from smoke from a poorly fitting pipe. As Dr. Sloop sat and listened to the very serious but sickly Sunday School teacher, some folks noticed her Bible was different from theirs. They were amazed at the amount of information within the margins of her Oxford Teaching Bible, and they wanted one.

On that cold Sunday, Sloop told everyone that she would give them a Bible just like hers if they memorized 200 verses of scripture. Within a short time, a young boy showed up and accepted the challenge. He insisted on standing while reciting his verses. He said he had never sat down to learn them, so he stood and recited all 200. It was the entire genealogy in Genesis.

From these humble beginnings in nothing more than a shed and a determined woman offering people Jesus 200 verses of scripture at a time, The Crossnore School began. Today, Crossnore School and Children's Home is a residential group foster home for more than 135 kids ranging from 14 months old to 20 years old. More than 300 kids in western NC are touched by our outpatient, Day Treatment and educational services. What Dr. Sloop started in the early 1900s continues today. We may not memorize 200 verses of scripture at a time, but we offer hope and healing by tearing the roof off the cycle of abuse and neglect so prevalent in the lives of our children. Today, we offer our children Jesus in a Christian sanctuary of hope and healing and friends, that is a revival.

Jim is the Director of Christian Education and Campus Pastor at Crossnore School and Children's Home. He lives in Crossnore with his wife, Caroline and their five out of control children.



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Bridge42 Church

I Don't Want to Talk About It: Part Two

By Jason Koon
Burke County

This is the second part of a series about things that we as Christians often hesitate to speak about, but about which the bible is very clear.

Politics

On some level, we love to talk about politics, maybe a little bit too much, and perhaps that is the problem. Pontius Pilate, when Jesus was standing before him, asked about the location of Jesus' kingdom, to which Jesus famously replied, "My Kingdom is not of this world." The Disciples, for their part, didn't really get it either. We all remember Peter, in Matthew's Gospel, confessing His faith that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, but we forget that after that Jesus went into a speech about how the Messiah would have to suffer and die at the hands of "sinful men." Everyone who heard this would have known that he was speaking about the Jewish-Roman power monopoly that dominated the landscape during this time, the very power monopoly Peter believed Jesus had come to overthrow. This didn't fit with his conception of the Messiah (or anyone else's at that time). The Messiah was supposed to be a strong warrior King, a King that would overthrow Roman rule and establish Israelite national sovereignty once and for all, but Jesus had other plans. Just like he told Pilate, "my kingdom is not of this world." We know now that Jesus didn't come to release God's people from the bondage of the Roman Empire, his mission was to liberate us from a far more sinister enemy, that of sin and death. We know now that He didn't have time to mess around with temporary warlords like the Romans. This has not changed.

I worry about modern-day Christianity in many ways. I worry that our biblical literacy is lacking and that we are losing touch with the ancient roots of our faith. And I worry that we are becoming more like Peter, you know the guy to whom Jesus said, "get behind me Satan?" In the days after the presidential election last year Facebook became a bizarre place. I saw articles warning that Trump would bring a permanent end to democracy in America and I saw hymns of praise extolling God for engineering the rise of His anointed to the presidency, and everything else in between.

Now, the Psalms are filled with hymns of Praise to God for the King, and the Prophetic books are often extremely harsh on unscrupulous men who wield power without wisdom. I'm not saying these are not legitimate expressions. I'm not saying Christians should stay out of politics altogether. I'm not saying we shouldn't do all we can to make this world a better place while we're here. I'm just saying that "My Kingdom is not of this world." The election of a Republican does not add to the inheritance we have in Christ or threaten our once firm hope in the coming Kingdom. Our hope is in Jesus and in His Kingdom, a kingdom that cannot be shaken, a kingdom that is coming regardless of who is elected and what laws are passed. Until then, we, like Jesus, may have to suffer at the hands of sinful men and women. This world may become an increasingly dark and dangerous place for us, or it may not, I don't know. But I do know that Jesus also said, "take heart, for I have overcome the world." We are to overcome as He has overcome. We fight this battle not with swords or arrows, or well-crafted political campaigns; we fight this battle with the good news of the love of Jesus and the Wisdom of God.

Jason Koon is Pastor of Bridge42 Church in Morganton, NC.

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Matthew 2:1-12



Morganton Seventh-Day Adventist Church

The Gift of Peace

By Rick and Cindy Mercer
Burke County

It seems more and more that our nation and our hearts are at unrest and peace seems to be nowhere in sight. The news is a constant reminder of another heart ache due to the latest disaster or tragedy.

Sometimes, just the storms in our own lives give us another stark reminder that the enemy is trying desperately to steal our joy and our peace.

Lorenzo Dow went through a period of soul-searching. He wanted a relationship with God. He wanted to be filled with the Spirit. And finally, God inspired him, "Believe the blessing now." That is, "Believe that you've received it."

That proved a breakthrough for Lorenzo. He said, "A gentle running peace filled my soul."

Before, Lorenzo had bounced often between ecstasy and melancholy. He was often discouraged. But now Lorenzo began to experience what he called a "simple, sweet, running peace from day to day, so that prosperity or adversity didn't produce the ups and downs as formerly; but my soul is more like the ocean, while the bottom is still calm."

Lorenzo Dow was filled with the Spirit. And he was filled with the quality of peace. He became a powerful man of God.

Peace is not an attribute we strive for. It is not a state of mind we achieve through some meditative state.

Peace is a gift God offers. We receive it by faith. When we open our hearts to the Spirit, the Spirit brings peace. Isn't that a comforting thought?

Scripture calls the Holy Spirit our Comforter. The New Testament word is paraclete. It means "one who stands alongside." He is the one who holds us up and supports us, encourages us, steadies us, and gives us peace.

Peace is a state of calm assurance when everything else around us is seemingly out of control. It is the result of trust, of knowing that someone much greater than we are is in control. Peace is the opposite of worry.

Worry projects the worst possible scenario on the screen of our minds. Peace trusts that God will work to accomplish His good in every situation. The apostle Paul declares, "He [Jesus] Himself is our peace" (Eph. 2:14). Jesus is the "Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6). Receiving Him, we receive peace. And when we are at peace with God...being miserable is not an option.

The old hymn states it well: "Peace! Peace! wonderful peace, coming down from the Father above; sweep over my spirit forever, I pray, in fathomless billows of love."

So during this Christmas Season...open your heart to receive heaven's Dove of Peace. Accept His gift of peace. It is yours for the asking. You will receive the very best gift ever...the gift of peace!



Rick Mercer is the pastor of the Morganton Seventh-day Adventist Church at 2187 Jamestown Road, Morganton. They can be reached at 870-820-3549 or cjmercer@tds.net. Check out www.morgantonsda.org. Their passion is to share the love of Jesus with all who will listen.

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Blue Ridge Hospice & Palliative Care

By Brent Price
Mitchell County

As we begin to prepare for another Christmas why don't we pause for a moment? We have been invited on a journey. The invitation for some persons is loud and clear, direct and unmistakable. For others the invitation is a slight tug on the heart, a whisper or perhaps a longing for something we can't find words to express. Even though we may travel with others, the experience is always uniquely our own.

As foolish as it may sound to some people, set your eyes on a star and follow it to the place where a child is waiting. Don't get distracted by deception and shortcuts. Embrace those who travel with you and help those who grow weary along the way.

There is no roadmap, no soothing voice of a GPS, only Spirit. The Spirit is writing the map on your heart. Follow it.

Don't allow deep discounts or coupon codes to hinder you. Whatever you think you might gain is an illusion. No matter how much you may thank God, this endless accumulation will come to nothing. Batteries die, things break and there's always the newest model that makes your toy obsolete. Don't get stuck in this madness.

Prepare and take that first step. Pray, search, listen. Turn off your cell phone. The journey might be long, especially if someone is counting on you to help them along the way. Focus on seeing and hearing with your heart. Pray some more. You don't have to take much with you--- the slightest glimmer of faith and hope, a willing heart, perhaps a need you can't put into words. Remember, God has promised to provide bread for your journey and light for your path.

Before long, there you are, standing in the presence of perfect love. Slowly you realize that you packed more than you thought. The hands of a child reach toward you to accept your burden and your pain, your worry and your doubt. A hope that is more than wishful thinking begins to burn inside and you realize that your life is the best gift you can offer.

The trip was worth it, every step and stumble. However, the arriving is just another beginning. Keep your bags packed.

Reverend Brent Price is a chaplain at Hospice & Palliative Care of the Blue Ridge.



Amazing Love

By Rev. Bruce Cannon
Mitchell County

Isaiah 9:2, 6 "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."

It's so hard to believe that Thanksgiving Day has already passed, and Christmas is just around the corner.

Time seems to be flying so fast! Many of us are having to not just do two things at once, but are having to multi-task to stay on pace. We are in such a fast-paced state that we do not have time to stop, think about the time of year it is, enjoy the holidays or even enjoy family...many of whom make a special effort to be together during these times of the year.

My hope and prayer is that we can slow down the next several weeks and take time to really contemplate what this Season is all about. As you know, at Christmas we celebrate the greatest gift ever! "...and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21)

The Scriptures state: "The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: (Psalm 37:23). We need the Lord to order (direct) our steps always; but especially at this time of the year. We do not need to let the Christmas Season go by without really spending time praising and thanking God for "his unspeakable gift." Our prayer for you is that you are able to know His amazing love this Christmas. That the message the angels spoke at His birth is true in your life and family: "peace on earth".

We pray your family is able to be together, that everyone is as well as possible and that you can spend quality time loving on each other over the next few weeks. From my home and heart to yours, Merry Christmas!

Rev. Bruce Cannon currently serves as the Senior Pastor of Bear Creek Baptist Church in Bakersville. Formerly he served as Director of Missions for the Bladen Baptist Association and has served on the General Board of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina.



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What's Your Attitude Toward Christmas

By Pastor Steve Williams
Mitchell County



What's your attitude toward Christmas? I hate to say it, but we live in a time where we have developed the wrong attitude about Christmas. The world has tried to steal Christmas just like the Grinch did in the Book Dr. Seuss wrote many years ago. Many of you know the story of what happens in the town of Who-ville. The Grinch hated seeing and hearing all the people celebrating Christmas - so he tries to figure out a way to stop Christmas from coming to Who-ville. He decides that if he steals all the presents, decorations and special Christmas food then he will stop Christmas from coming. He spends the whole night before Christmas sneaking around and stealing everything Christmassy from all the houses in Who-ville. When Christmas morning comes the Grinch is shocked that his plan didn't work - Christmas still comes to Who-ville. The people are still happy, and they gather hand in hand to sing Christmas songs. He learns that Christmas is more than just presents and decorations. TODAY THE WORLD TRIES TO STEAL THE REAL CHRISTMAS AWAY FROM US BETTER THAN THE GRINCH TRIED TO STEAL IT FROM WHO-VILLE.

The Grinch tried to steal Christmas by taking away some of the things related to Christmas - but that only helped the people of Who-ville to focus on what was left - which was actually more important. The world steals Christmas better than the Grinch because it doesn't take things away. It just replaces what is most important about Christmas with things that draw our focus away from the real meaning of Christmas. Everyone who lived down in Who-ville liked Christmas a lot... But the Grinch, who lived just north of Who-ville did not! "The Grinch hated Christmas, the whole Christmas season, and no one quite knew the reason, it could be perhaps his shoes were too tight. It could be, his head wasn't screwed on just right... But, I think the most likely reason of all, was that his heart was two sizes too small!"

We can never have the right Christmas with the Wrong Attitude. To have the right attitude at Christmas is to know what Christmas is really about. It's not about light and gifts you find on and under a tree. It not about Black Friday, sales, and deals of a life time or trying to find the right gift to make someone happy. It's about a Savior who came to this world over 2000 years ago who came and gave his life that you and I might have eternal life. It's about a relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who desires to live in you, and show you His Love, His Presents, and His Power each and every day of our lives. It's also about experiencing the greatest love that a person can ever imagine. It is an unconditional love. There is nothing you can do to stop His love for you, and there is nothing you can do to make Him love you anymore. See, to me, the real meaning of Christmas is God's Love He offers to us freely, to all who will believe in Him. Folks, toys come and go, things get old and tear up, the things we hold dear to us, soon leave us, but God's Love is forever. The Right Attitude for Christmas is to have the attitude of Love toward our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.



Don't get caught having the wrong attitude this Christmas.

Words of Wisdom:

- Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference. Winston Churchill
- People may hear your words, but they feel your attitude. John C. Maxwell
- Weakness of attitude becomes weakness of character. Albert Einstein
- Happiness doesn't depend on any external conditions, it is governed by our mental attitude. Dale Carnegie
- The greatest discovery of my generation is that a human being can alter his life by altering his attitudes. William James
- The only disability in life is a bad attitude. Scott Hamilton

Attitude Is Everything

There once was a woman who woke up one morning, looked in the mirror, and noticed she had only three hairs on her head. Well, she said, "I think I'll braid my hair today?" So, she did, and she had a wonderful day.

The next day she woke up, looked in the mirror and saw that she had only two hairs on her head.

"H-M-M," she said, "I think I'll part my hair down the middle today?" So, she did, and she had a grand day.

The next day she woke up, looked in the mirror and noticed that she had only one hair on her head.

"Well," she said, "today I'm going to wear my hair in a ponytail." So, she did, and she had a fun, fun day.

The next day she woke up, looked in the mirror and noticed that there wasn't a single hair on her head.

"YEA!" she exclaimed, "I don't have to fix my hair today!" Attitude is everything. N/A

Steve Williams is the Pastor of Berry Chapel Baptist Church in Spruce Pine.

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Mine Creek Baptist Church

Blessed by a Good Man
By Preacher Chris Rathbone
Mitchell County

There is not a family or individual who has not been down the hard road of losing a loved one to death. At some time in our lives we will have to go through this kind of heartbreak. No family is immune to this fact. Not even mine.

Several years ago, our family got the news that no one wants to hear. My father-in-law, Jr. Hoilman, was diagnosed with cancer. There is really no way one can prepare themselves for this kind of news. I believe that no matter how it happens, we are never prepared to give up the ones we love. Our family went through all the emotions and ups and downs just like everyone else. For me it is one thing as a pastor to try to help another family, but it's another thing for my own family to go through it. When you're the pastor, who is your pastor? Guess I hadn't thought of that till it happened.

We had a wonderful group of people who rallied around us. Our church families meant so much to us during this time. They prayed, visited, prepared food, called, etc. They will never know how much it helped. It's wonderful to know that when you need someone, there are those who will be there even without asking. I really don't understand how people make it through such times without the support and love of family, friends, church families, and most importantly, the love and hope of Christ. During these difficult times is when our Lord draws so close. We often may feel as if we can't make it through, but His grace is always there at just the right time.

We often hear of the horror stories of how bad a person's relationship is with their in-laws. Fact of the matter is, I believe the relationship will be what we make of it. If in-laws want to have a great relationship they can. If either side wants to be difficult, they will be. If they want to be a blessing they will. I believe it's a matter of what we choose to be. I can honestly say that I had one of the best relationships with my father-in-law. You may think that is impossible, but I experienced it.

Our friendship started some 28 years ago. I started dating this pretty little girl at the head of White Oak outside of Bakersville. The road stayed hot as I traveled up it as often as Jr. and Linda would tolerate me. The first time I met my future in-laws as a teenage boy, I was nervous to say the least. On my first visit I spilt almost an entire glass of sweet tea on the sofa. Talk about blowing a first impression! They extended a little grace and Jr. rubbed it in a little, but they accepted me for me, warts and all!

From day one, Jr. treated me like a man. He showed respect and never spoke down to me. Without even realizing it, he was helping me grow into a man. I'm sure that there were times that he asked himself, "What is wrong with that boy?" By respecting me, he earned my respect for him. Respecting one another was a key in our relationship as in-laws. I respected him and the relationship he had with my wife as her father and he respected me and my relationship as her husband. Mutual respect goes a long way in building strong friendships.

When my boys were born he tried to be the best Papaw he could be. You grandparents are very different when it comes to grandchildren! All together Jr. had five grandsons. You read it right, five grandsons. He gave them toy guns, knives to whittle with, and always made birthdays and Christmas extra special. There is no doubt that the boys knew they were loved by Papaw.

We realize that our family will never be the same. We do rejoice however that we have a hope in Christ that even death cannot take away. God allowed our family to make many wonderful and precious memories that will be in our hearts always. Our family, just like others, will continue to press on with the hope that we will see Jr. (a.k.a. Papaw) again one day. We will cherish the time God gave us. I will always cherish the friendship that me and Jr. had. I will miss him. I was truly blessed by a good man.

Preacher Chris Rathbone serves as Pastor at Mine Creek Baptist Church.





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Brian Center

30 Years Loved

By Heather Bonaminio
Mitchell County

November 16, 2017 marks the 30-year anniversary for Sherri Buchanan at the Brian Center in Spruce Pine. What an achievement. Sherri began her employment at the Brian Center on the day the doors of the long-term care facility opened, and before the first resident was admitted. Many have come and gone since that day. Residents who have since passed on to their heavenly life with Jesus and those who have been rehabilitated and returned to their homes. Co-workers who have moved on to other opportunities, passed on or retired. Sherri is the "face" you see first and the voice you hear when you call. Sherri has touched many lives here as well as in the community and her church. Sherri has "let her light shine" for all to see. She has sat with family as their loved ones took their last earthly breath. She has comforted those grieving and rejoiced with those who have returned home.

Sherri is very active in her church and choir. She has been a Bible drill leader since 1991(25 years). Quite an accomplishment since Sherri will often remind you "she is only 29 years old." I am no math teacher, but I am pretty sure that does not add up. (LOL) Through it all, one thing stays the same—Sherri is well loved by all. When Sherri says she will pray for you, you can count on it! Sherri loves to sing for her Lord and often sings special music at Bear Creek Baptist Church where she has been a member for almost 35 years. Over the years, she has led many children, some of which are now grown with kids of their own participating in Bible drill. I personally have had the privilege of working with her in Bible drill and my kids like many others call her their "other Mom". One of Sherri's favorite verses (she has many) is Psalm 56:3 "What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee". Sherri often has relayed to her drillers that when she was a kid, she was afraid of the dark and would repeat this verse whenever she had to go somewhere dark. This is something that will always stick in my mind as well as the children she has served. Because of Sherri it is also one of my favorite verses. I always think of Sherri when I see or hear it.

Sherri lives in Bakersville with her husband of 35 years, Allen. Please join me in Congratulating Sherri for this huge accomplishment. We wish her 30 more years with us at the Brian Center. (She will still be 29)!

Heather Bonaminio works at the Brian Center and attends Bear Creek Baptist Church. She and husband, Jim, have 2 daughters, Katie and Elizabeth.



Grace Community Church

Will You Choose to Hear the Bells?

By Jerry Lewis
McDowell County

Last night after an amazing First Wednesday worship service, Greg and Jackie Stewart sent this to me from their devotional (Glimpses of God's Grace, Donahue): Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was no stranger to the sufferings of war. During the Civil War near the Christmas of 1863, he found out that his son had been injured in battle. How could he bear being so far away from his son on Christmas Day when he desperately wanted to be at his side to help and comfort him?

In spite of his despair, Christmas bells penetrated his sorrow and made him aware of God's gracious love—a love that could be with him and his son at the same time. As he listened to the chimes, he penned the words to "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day."



*I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day
Their old familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet the words repeat
Of peace on earth, good will to men.
I thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along the unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good will to men.
And in despair I bowed my head:
"There is no peace on earth," I said,
"For hate is strong and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to men."
Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is not dead, nor doth he sleep;
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,
With peace on earth, good will to men."
Till, ringing singing, on its way,
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime, a chant sublime,
Of peace on earth, good will to men!*

No matter how many wars are fought, no matter how many battles are lost or won, God is near, helping, comforting and guiding those who trust Him. There is no limit to His powerful healing and grace. There is no measure to His love. Perhaps the greatest lesson to be learned during such troubled times is that Jesus truly is our Lord of Lords, our Prince of Peace.

So, I have a new tradition (started it about 5 years ago actually). Every Christmas I google this YouTube video. Yesterday, in the middle of a hectic day, I stopped to listen to the bells. Since 2010, almost 49 million others have done the same! Maybe it will bring peace in the midst of your chaos.



Jerry Lewis is Senior Pastor at Grace Community Church in Marion.

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Making Disciples

By Brent Ramsey
Mitchell County

When thinking about the vision of FORGE ministries, we take our cue from Jesus when he says, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men"—Matthew 4:19

Our vision is that our college students and young adults (ages 18-27) in Avery, Mitchell and Yancey County would be growing as mature disciples of Christ by becoming radical followers of Jesus. And, in turn, they are making disciples who make disciples... who make disciples... who make disciples... and that this would ultimately lead to our young adults bringing Jesus to the nations.

FORGE was founded in Mars Hill, North Carolina in 2013 with the vision to lead students to become fully devoted followers of Christ. FORGE is catering to young adults each and every week, forming relationships, equipping them with the Gospel and sending them out in the world. Although our focus is college students and young adults, FORGE has no direct affiliation with any school, church, or denomination. Our hope is to have a relationship where we can work with local colleges, churches and organizations to better help ignite our future leaders with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Starting January 9th, FORGE will host a weekly worship gathering each Tuesday Night during the Spring and Fall semesters. Opportunities for community and discipleship are provided through LIFE Groups (gatherings of 10-14 young adults) throughout the year, and are primarily student led. Additionally, FORGE offers numerous retreats, social events, and missions projects/trips for students to get connected to.

Weekly gatherings will be held at The Grove Church in down town Spruce Pine (next to DT's Java).

For more information please feel free to give me a call at 828-467-1016 We hope you are as excited, as we are!

Brent Ramsey is Youth Leader at Grassy Creek Baptist Church. He has studied at Gardner-Webb university and ETSU. He also is a Counselor at Mayland Community College



By Doris Thompson
Mitchell County

*The trees are trimmed with a star on top,
The candles in the windows are aglow.
All the goodies are baked and ready,
And every child wishes for snow!*

*The halls are decked with holly...
The light posts are trimmed with bows.
The mailbox has donned a new cover.
The warm fire sparkles and glows!*

*There's "last minute" shopping and wrapping.
The streets are crowded each day.
All the shoppers are excited and calling,
"Merry Christmas," as they go on their way!*

*The presents are stacked 'neath the tree.
A wreath is placed on the door.
Everything seems to be ready,
But wait...is there not one thing more?*

*Is there room for Christ in our holidays?
Do we celebrate His birth Christmas Day?
Or do we say, "There's no room in our Inn,"
As we rush on our merry way?*

*If we'll take time for the sad and lonely,
And reach out and do our small part...
Then we'll truly put Christ in our Christmas,
And make room for Him in our heart!*

Doris is retired and serves as our resident angel of Spruce Pine.



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Training Our Children

By Dr. Tom Walker
McDowell County

The Bible says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). What an encouraging promise is found in this verse. The words "train up" (chanak) is also translated "dedicate" in Deuteronomy 20:5. Those are the only two ways the Hebrew word is translated in the Old Testament.

The word in Deuteronomy 20:5 is used in the context of dedicating a house. Verses 1-9 in Deuteronomy deals with instructions having to do with military service. Deuteronomy 20 makes it clear that "the officers were responsible for making sure the army was composed of qualified men. However, the most qualified were not necessarily those most gifted for battle. They were rather the men most committed to the Lord and free from any distractions that might dampen their spirits for battle. Therefore, for humanitarian reasons as well as for the morale of the army anyone who had built a new house and not begun to "use" (this sense of the Hebrew word *chanak* is preferable to dedicated) it was granted an exemption" (Bible Knowledge Commentary). The house that is dedicated is one that is inhabited and is indwelt by its owner.

The word "train" in our English language means to educate, to teach, to form by instruction or practice or to bring up. There are too many parents who are not taking time to train their children. Some parents are content that the television or video games are occupying the time of their kids. If Hollywood with its violence and low morality trains our children, then our homes and our society is in deep trouble. If all our kids have to train them are video games or the internet their lives will be deficient and defective.

Training takes time. Parents today use the busyness of life as an excuse for not taking ample time with the children. The mother or dad who will not devote time to train or dedicate their children will have sons and daughters who will be lacking in what they ought to be.

There are three things we need to grasp from Proverbs 22:6. Notice a command, a course and a comfort.

A Command
"train up a child"

It is a definite command. This responsibility cannot be passed on to someone else. Multitudes of moms and dads expect the church to train up a child. Although the church should have a part in doing so, it does not exempt the parents of a child from doing their part to instruct. There are always great benefits that come to those who obey the Lord, no matter how time consuming it might be.

It is a demanding command. To do what our text says to do will take a sacrifice of time by the parents. Life is busy and there are a lot of things we want to do and



need to do, but this important responsibility cannot be overlooked.

It is a demonstrated command. Deuteronomy 6:6-9 tells us what God told the Hebrews to do in training their children: "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates." What did the Hebrews do? They taught their children diligently in private instruction. They also talked of the Scriptures during the activities of the day, when they went to bed, and when they aroused in the morning. That would be a good practice to incorporate into our daily family life.

It is a doable command. It is not something that is out of our reach or impossible for us to accomplish. God would never command us to do anything that He would not give us grace to perform. With His commands are His enabling. Isaiah 41:10, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."

This training involves not only verbal instruction but also setting the right example before the children in both action and attitude. Children not only watch how you act but also how you react. What if your children emulate outside the home what you are in the home? If they did would you be satisfied with what you would see in them?

Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:12: "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity."

Those words should be true in the home as well as in daily life outside the home.

A Course

Note the words "in the way he should go." There is a way that leads to death and another that leads to life. The word "way" speaks of a course or direction of life.

Children deserve not to be misled about life and what makes it up. They need direction from the parents who have already walked the way the young person is walking. Parents have so much wisdom to impart to their children if they will only take time to convey it to the children.

The course a child should take is a good course. There are so many things in life that are detrimental to the lives of our children. Due to the wayward direction of our society it is of the utmost importance that we show them the good way.

The course a child should take is a godly course. The Bible says in 1 Timothy 6:6, "But godliness with contentment is great gain." Our children must see and possess godliness in an extremely ungodly society. It is so important the children be taught to live as Jesus set the example for us to live.

The course a child should take is a grace course. Life really begins when one realizes he cannot save himself. As a result, one looks to the grace of God as the avenue to be saved. The right way is given in Eph 2:8-9 which says, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." One of the happiest days in the life of a parent is when his or her child realizes he is a lost sinner, that he cannot save himself, and he trusts the grace of God to provide salvation.

I believe that course should involve daily devotions with the children each day. Satan will unceasingly try to hinder that time you set aside but we should not allow him to hinder us in time that should be spent with our family.

A Comfort

There are some very comforting words found in the latter part of this verse. It says, "When he is old he will not depart from it." Are those words a promise that if a child is trained right he will always live as he should? A child has a free will. Even though he was raised as he should have been, due to his old nature, he may make wrong choices in the future. The child may not always live the way he was trained to live.

I believe it is a promise that the child will never be able to get away from what he has been taught. It will be a part of him until the day he dies; he will never be able to fully dismiss from his mind the good way that godly parents taught him.

What should that promise do for us who embrace it? It should remind us that taking time to train a child is not a waste of time. It always pays to train and dedicate him to the Lord by educating and teaching. It is time well spent.

It should remind us of the importance of truth. The Lord has said in Isaiah 55:11, "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." There is power in the Word of God that cannot be found anywhere else. It is the truth that sets people free (John 8:32).

It should remind us that our children's future may partly be determined by the quantity and quality of training they receive from parents.

Let's obey what the Bible says and look to reap the benefits from obedience in the future.

Tom Walker is President of Foothills Baptist Bible College and Pastor of Zion Hill Baptist Church in Marion, NC.



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Enjoying Everyday Life

Hearing the Holy Spirit

By Joyce Meyer

As born-again believers in Jesus Christ, we serve a triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In Genesis 1:26 (AMP) God says, “Let Us (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) make man in Our image....” This verse reveals God as the Trinity, and we need to worship and have relationship with each Person of the Godhead.

It seems more common to hear people talk about God and Jesus, but the Holy Spirit does not get enough of our attention. It’s important to understand that He is a person who has a personality, a will, knowledge, a mind, and He thinks and knows things. For example, 1 Corinthians 2:11 (AMP) tells us that “no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.”

In John 16:7 we learn some of the facets of His personality and how we need Him to work in our lives. In this verse Jesus says, “...If I do not go away, the Helper (Comforter, Advocate, Intercessor – Counselor, Strengtheners, Standby) will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him (the Holy Spirit) to you [to be in close fellowship with you]” (AMP).

This scripture teaches that He is our...

- Counselor—always go to God first for counsel and let Him speak to you His way, through the people or things He chooses.
- Advocate—He pleads our case when we’re in trouble.
- Intercessor—He prays for us and through us when we don’t know how to pray on our own.
- Standby—He stands by us, ready to act on our behalf when we need something.
- Strengtheners—He gives us God’s grace to do whatever we need to do in every situation.

He’s all these things and so much more! God is literally everything we need, and as we fellowship with the Holy Spirit, we can have “the mind of Christ [to be guided by His thoughts and purposes]” (1 Corinthians 2:16 AMP).

Learn the Sound of His Voice

The Holy Spirit is the only One who fully knows the mind of God, so when we pray for God to give us wisdom or the knowledge we need, it’s important for us to realize the Spirit is in us (1 Corinthians 2:12; 6:19). And He communicates to us what He hears God say. John 16:13 (AMP) explains that He is “the Spirit of Truth” and He guides us into the Truth. “For He will not speak on His own initiative, but He will speak whatever He hears [from the Father....]”

One way we learn how to hear the Holy Spirit is by understanding that He has emotions and He can be grieved. Ephesians 4:30 (AMP) says, “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God....”

Because He lives in us, when He feels grieved, we will feel it too.

Ephesians 4:29-31 (AMP) lists some behaviors that cause Him to be grieved: unwholesome (foul, profane, worthless, vulgar) speech, bitterness, wrath, anger, and clamor (perpetual animosity, resentment, strife, faultfinding), slander, every kind of malice (all spitefulness, verbal abuse, malevolence).

When we choose to think and speak in ways that go against His nature, we will feel conviction, and the best thing we can do is confess our sin and repent immediately.

James 3:8 teaches that no one can “tame the human tongue” and sometimes we make mistakes and say wrong things. But we can learn from our mistakes; we can pray and ask God to help us only say things that are right and pleasing to Him. I know it’s easy to be insensitive and say the wrong things sometimes. The other day I was wearing a blouse that didn’t fit me right, and I said to someone, “This thing is way too big for me but it would probably fit you.” Afterward, I couldn’t believe I had said it!

We need to pray for God to help us hear His voice, giving us wisdom and direction in the thoughts we choose to think about and the words we speak. As our Counselor, He wants to guide us in everything we do, and we can learn how to hear His voice.

Listen for the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to your heart. You can hear it as you wait quietly in His presence, while you’re studying His Word, in the midst of your circumstances, and even through nature. God is talking to you!



Joyce Meyer is a New York Times bestselling author and founder of Joyce Meyer Ministries, Inc. She has authored more than 100 books, including *Battlefield of the Mind* and *Overload: How to Unplug, Unwind and Unleash Yourself from the Pressure of Stress* (Hachette). She hosts the *Enjoying Everyday Life* radio and TV programs, which air on hundreds of stations worldwide. For more information, visit www.joycemeyer.org.

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Valdese Annual Christmas Parade:

December 2 at 10am

P&W Railroad Museum Open House at the Old Rock School

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December 2 at 7:30pm • Tickets \$18 Presale • \$20 at the Door

Old Rock School Auditorium. Tickets available for purchase at townofvaldese.com or by calling 828-879-2129.

Celebrate Christmas in Valdese: December 8 from 6-8pm

Enjoy Shop Hop in downtown sponsored by the Merchants Association with refreshments & PRIZES! Christmas Caroling by the Valdese Elementary School & Christmas Tree Lighting with SANTA!

Mingle with Kris Kringle: Saturday December 16. The Valdese

Fire Department presents “Mingle with Kris Kringle” at the Old Rock School Waldensian Room. This event has 3 time slots available. The event will include a meet-n-greet with Kris Kringle, a full breakfast prepared by the Valdese Firefighters and served by Elves.

Entry fee: \$2. Registration available at townofvaldese.com.

Waldensian Presbyterian Church Live Nativity Scene:

December 17 & 18 on the Church Front Lawn at 6pm & 7pm

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Merry CHRISTMAS

Avery County

Avery County Chamber

December 1 Christmas Parade, Downtown Newland
December 2 A Small-Town Christmas & Parade of Lights, Banner Elk
December 8 Tree Lighting Ceremonies Town Square Newland
December 9-10 Sugar Mountain Sugarfest Sugar Mountain Resort
December 22 Yule Log Bonfire and Hayride Beech Mountain
December 31 New Year's Eve Celebration, Beech Mountain and Sugar Mountain Resort

Burke County

Burke County Chamber

SunTrust Bank is helping gather presents for the Veteran's of Foreign Wars Children's Christmas Party! Please help make these Children's Christmas Bright! Donate a New unwrapped toy or stocking stuffer. Children's ages range from 0 to 12 years old. Party is December 16, 2017 Thank you for your Support.

Catawba River Baptist Association - Nearly 275 years after it was first performed, Messiah has become a holiday season staple. Experience the joy of the season by singing along (or just listening!) to the much beloved music of Handel's Messiah. Singers are encouraged to bring a copy of the score if they have one (a limited number will be available at the door). The experience is unique, and the chorus is you!

During the fall of 2016 Reuter Pipe Organ Company refurbished and significantly upgraded the First Baptist Church organ, restoring it to its original splendor – and more. The organ features three manuals, with 49 ranks of pipes, and its recent renovation has enhanced the instrument tremendously.

Organist Mrs. Rebecca Myrick-Poteat will accompany the soloists and assembled choir in this Messiah sing-along. A highly accomplished musician, Mrs. Myrick-Poteat holds degrees from Appalachian State University, Lenoir-Rhyne University, and the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music.

Event will be held at First Baptist Church – 502 West Union Street on December 19, 2017 at 7:30 pm. Adult tickets: \$7.00 Youth Tickets: \$5.00 Tickets available at the Comma Box Office or online @ <http://www.commaonline.org>

Morganton Seventh-day Adventist-Burke County - The Silver Creek Adventist School would like to invite everyone to their Christmas Program, Saturday, December 16th., at 11:00 a.m. 2187 Jamestown Road, Morganton, N.C.

The Morganton Seventh-day Adventist Church will be having their Christmas Cantata on Saturday, December 23rd., at 11:00 a.m. Everyone is invited to attend! Morganton SDA is located at 2187 Jamestown Road, Morganton, N.C.

Communion & Agape Love Meal will take place on Saturday, December 30th., at 5:00 p.m., at the Morganton Seventh-day

Adventist Church, 2187 Jamestown Road, Morganton, N.C. - Don & Donna Mohl will be performing their unique blend of Folk Mountain Gospel in concert at the Morganton Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2187 Jamestown Road, Morganton, N.C. Wednesday, December 6th., at 7:00 p.m.

Christmas Health Social - December 17th., at 5:30 p.m. Please bring a plant based dish and copies of the recipe to share if you would like!

Also, optional, if you would like to participate in a fun gift exchange game, please bring a wrapped gift that costs \$10.00 or under.

For directions and more information, please contact Cindy at 870-510-8048.

Journey Through Bethlehem - December 7th. through December 10th., from 6:00 p.m., to 8:00 p.m., at the Morganton Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2187 Jamestown Road, Morganton, N.C. Journey through the market place, hear wonderful Christmas hymns, see live farm animals and experience the true reason for the season, our Savior Jesus Christ! Each journey lasts approximately 30 minutes. A golf cart will be available for those with disabilities. This event is completely FREE for all who wish to attend!

Waldensian Trail of Faith - 401 Church Street NW, Valdese, North Carolina 28690-1256. We have all of our lights on now through December the 24th every night from 6pm to 9pm. We serve hot chocolate and hot apple cider in the visitor center for 1\$ per cup. we ask 1\$ donation per vehicle to help off-set the electric bill for the months of Nov. and Dec. We also have a gift shop that is open. The lights will be on Dec. 24, but the visitor center will be closed. Dec. 25, we will be closed no lights and no visitor center open.

McDowell County

Grace Community Church - New Prayer Line Launches in Marion, North Carolina - James 5:16 says "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." A. J. Gordon said, "You can do more than pray after you have prayed, but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed." Churches in McDowell County believe God's Word and agree with A. J. Gordon. That's why they have launched 659-PRAY, a prayer line where people can call anytime, leave a message and know that churches in McDowell County will be praying for them. Here's how it works. The prayer line (659-PRAY) is housed at Freedom Life Ministries (freedomlifeministries.org). Each day prayer requests will be sent to 25 partnering churches in McDowell County who will immediately send those requests to prayer warriors in their churches who will pray for them. The effect

is knowing that your prayer request is covered daily by hundreds of people across McDowell County. 659-PRAY will begin on September 1. Between now and then, please ask your pastor if your church is involved. If not, encourage your leaders to reach out and get on board. For more information, please call Robin at (828) 724-9599. – Contact: Chris Allison Cell Phone: 828-559-7312 E-Mail: chris@rocketsleddesign.com.

Ecuador Mission Trip- We will be taking a group to Ecuador in June of 2018 to help with construction, medical assessments and support for women and children. The cost is \$1500 (more info to come). If you are interested email robin@graceforall.org

Greenlee Baptist Church - Saturday, December 2, 7:00 at Greenlee Baptist Church December 3, 3:00 Greenlee Baptist Church's address is: 5967 US Highway 70 Old Fort, NC 28762 This year's theme is "Glory to God in the Highest". There will be a couple of selections by the men of the chorus and another one will be by the ladies of the chorus and children of the community. We will have solos by Ashleigh Phillips, Jonathan Tipper, Ron Springs, Patrick Ellis and Jamie Burnette. Duets will be by Jamie Burnette and Jonathan Tipper, Savannah Allison and Jamie Burnette, and a trio by Kim Hensley, Savannah Allison and Jamie Burnette.

Carolyn Early and David Hensley will be directing, and Howard Smith is the pianist.

There is no admission, but donations are appreciated.

The public is cordially invited to attend. The chorus hopes that the concerts will be a blessing to you and help you remember the real meaning of Christmas.

Mitchell County

All Saints of America Orthodox - On Saturdays beginning in June, All Saints of America Orthodox Mission will be having Divine Liturgy at the meeting hall located at Trinity Episcopal Church, 15 Hemlock Ave, Spruce Pine, NC 28777. The Liturgy will be served weekly on Saturdays at 11:00 AM. Fr. Steven Webb, the priest appointed to serve the new mission, will be officiating. While All Saints of America Orthodox Mission is a part of the Russian Orthodox Church, all services are performed in the English language. Afterwards, all are invited to a picnic at 1064 Deer Park Lake Rd. Spruce Pine, NC.

Bear Creek Baptist Church-Ledger - Celebrate Recovery

This is a Christ and Biblical Based Program, giving hope and help for men, women and families suffering from addiction. Any questions contact Josh Wise @ 385-0061

There will be a meeting every Thursday night with someone there to talk to men, women, and their families

Drug Task Force –The educational session to be led by Dr. Fagan on December 5th at Bear Creek Baptist will not only include information about the STOP Act and Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) but also address NARCAN and the opioid epidemic.

In addition to this session in Mitchell County, there will also be a session in Yancey County later that afternoon on December 5th for those who cannot at noon. Both of these sessions are meant for any audience - not just medical professionals.

If you plan to attend Dr. Fagan's discussion at Bear Creek in Mitchell County, please RSVP to one of the folks listed in the attached flyer. If you are interested in attending the Yancey County presentation, please RSVP directly to me - the number interested will dictate which space we use. Once we have an idea for interest in Yancey County, I will send out details on the time that afternoon of December 5th and the location.

Berry Chapel Baptist Church - CHRISTmas Concert-Sunday, December 17, 2017 6:00 p.m. Refreshments following. No charge. Come & enjoy an evening of CHRISTmas worship with Dawn Hughes and Monica Henley-Kritz. Piano duets, flute/piano duets, and singing. In the busyness of the season, take time to sit still and worship THE KING OF KINGS and THE LORD OF LORDS!

Burleson Heating and Plumbing Join us for our 2nd annual Christmas Shop located at the showroom at Burleson's Plumbing and Heating Showroom on December 4 from 4:00- 8:00 p.m. Drop by and shop for Christmas gifts (or for yourself!) while enjoying Hot Chocolate or coffee! There will be unique, local, and handmade gifts!

Calvary Chapel Asheville - Spruce Pine-Calvary Chapel Church in Asheville is sponsoring a home fellowship and Bible Study in Spruce Pine. The fellowship is held on Thursday evenings at 7:00pm at 79 Sean Dr. (Estatoe area—off Brushy Creek Rd). Call John Jackson 760-793-3799 for information and directions. And bring your Bible.

Spruce Pine Citizens and Businesses—Due to the outpouring of complaints of speeding on Oak Ave., We will start a zero tolerance for any speeding inside the city limits in Spruce Pine, NC. Effective Wed. Nov 1 we will start enforcing the speed limits and the citation will be issued by the state. Everyone make your travels to Spruce Pine a Safe and Slow trip!!

Support group for caregivers of those with memory loss to hold meetings the first friday of each month from 1-3pm - Care & Share, a newly-formed support group for caregivers of loved ones who have memory loss, will hold monthly meetings at the offices of Hospice & Palliative Care of the Blue Ridge, 236 Hospital Dr. in Spruce Pine, from 1:00 P.M. to 3:00 P.M. High Country Caregiver

Bits 'n Pieces

Foundation welcomes and encourages all caregivers to attend.

Families dealing with a loved one with memory loss can quickly become exhausted, traumatized, and isolated, and this new group intends to provide support, friendship, education, information and referrals for caregivers. Monthly meetings held on the first Friday of each month will offer refreshments and fellowship. There will be opportunities for caregivers to tell their stories, learn useful tips, trade information, and give and gain support to others in the same situation.

For further information about the group and the meeting please contact Suzanne Russell at (714) 614-5867 or Janet Ouzts at jnutozts@yahoo.com.

Mitchell County Baptist Association - Week of Prayer for International Missions and International Mission Study-- Dec. 3-10, 2017

Mitchell County Chamber - Parkway Playhouse

* Get The Hook Improv Comedy Troupe, our teen group will share their talents with you on Dec 1 & 2 at Parkway Playhouse at 7:00. Tickets are just \$5 each and will be available at the door.

* Our Christmas Show will be performed by the Parkway Players on Dec 15 and 16 at 6pm and Dec 17 at 3pm at Parkway Playhouse. Tickets are just \$5 each and will be available at the door.

Info on the Mainstage at Parkway Playhouse in 2018! Coming soon!!

Spruce Pine Farmer's Market - We will be moving indoors at the Pizza Place! We will have food for any mood!!! Winter squash, tomatoes, cabbage, potatoes, cucumbers, bell peppers, kale, mustard, chard, microgreens, collards, eggs, pork, beef, cookies, ciabatta, scones, brownies, cheese strip. You can also find essential oils to heal and help with what ails you! Come out and see us, Wednesdays 2-5 in the parking lot under the blue tents.

Tipton Hill Community Foundation (Tipton Hill) - Country Breakfast, the first Saturday each month, 7:30 - 10:30 am, at the old Methodist Church, across from Jerry's Store. Come join us for homemade sausage, scrambled eggs, gravy, jellies, juice and coffee. Eat in or take-out, all funds support the Tipton Hill Community Foundation.

Women's Prayer Breakfast: If you would like to join a group of women who are dedicated to praying, learning about God's will, and fellowshiping, come join us for breakfast at DT's in Spruce Pine. We will be ending by 10:00am. Open to all-for more information call Barbara Harrell at 828-467-3644 or email at barab@brcnews.com. December is on the 8th.

Yancey County

Higgins Memorial United Methodist Church

Special Services

Thursday, November 30 * 5:00 pm * Pre-Advent Family Event

Sunday, December 3 * 11 am * Hanging of the Greens

Sunday, December 3 * 24-Hour Prayer Vigil (Look for the sign-up sheet, coming soon!)

Friday, December 8 * 6:30 pm * Higgins Family Christmas Play & Festival

Sunday, December 10 * 3:00 pm * Praise Team Christmas Concert

Sunday, December 17 * 4:00 pm * Christmas Music and Love Feast (potluck)

Sunday, December 24 * 5:30 pm * Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

We look forward to worshiping with you!

Yancey County Meals on Wheels (Burnsville) - Volunteers needed to deliver meals to Yancey County shut-ins, any weekday, 10:30 am - noon. If you would like to volunteer, please call the Yancey County Senior Center at 828-682-6011.

Mayland Community College

No classes have been listed for December! For more info Contact Allen Cook

Merry Christmas!

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Christmas Season

By Edward Couser
Yancey County

Is not God's grace amazing! When we consider our world's history, God's grace has been evident. He has consistently rescued from sin those who have committed their lives to Him. His grace is not only His desire to save everyone, but also His power manifested in loving conviction for all and actual deliverance for those who believe. The greatest revelation of God's grace was in the coming of His son Jesus. Because of Jesus, we have clear and undeniable testimony of God's love for sinners. Jesus died on the cross for you and me. "We ourselves owe everything to God's free grace. Grace in the covenant ordained our adoption. Grace in the savior effected our redemption, our regeneration, and our exaltation to heir ship with Christ." Christ Object Lessons, P. 250.

The birth of Jesus, is commemorated by the Christmas season. The birth of Jesus, is the key to the plan of salvation. The birth of Jesus gives final meaning to the suffering servant prophecies in the Old Testament. There are at least six reasons for the incarnation, the act of Jesus in taking upon Himself humanity:

- 1. To reveal the invisible God (John 1:18; 2 Cor. 4:6).
- 2. To fulfill the covenant (Isa. 11:1, 10; Jer. 23: 5,6; Acts 2: 29-31; Eph. 1: 3,4).
- 3. To become a sacrifice and substitute for our sins (1 John 3:5; Heb. 10: 4,5; 1 Cor 15: 1-4).
- 4. To furnish us with a high priest (Heb. 2:17; 3:1; 5:1-10).
- 5. To show believers how to live (1John 2:6; 1 Peter 2:21).
- 6. To become head of a new creation (Rev. 21:5).

For me, the Gospel of John makes a significant statement about Jesus and His work. He writes in John 1:12: "But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons/daughters of God, even to them that believe on His name." This is the new creation process that Paul talks about. (See Ephesians 1 and 2 Corinthians 5: 17.) It is begun by the new birth and carried out through the intercessory work of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary and the activity of the Holy Spirit in our personal lives and in the life of the church in general.

During this Christmas season, may we not overlook the true message of this holiday. The message is not only about the birth of Jesus; it is also a message about the need for each person to consider again why Jesus came to earth. The message of His birth speaks to us of God's mercy and grace in providing a substitute for us. It shows us God's willingness to go to any length to provide for our salvation. The message of Christmas asks for our response. Let me end with a question: "How can we more closely reflect the meaning of Christmas in our own lives?"

Ed Couser is the pastor for the Burnsville and Erwin Hills Seventh-day Adventist Churches. Previously he served churches in Ontario (Canada), New York, Kentucky and North Carolina. He also is a retired Chaplain, Lieutenant Colonel, having spent 29 years in the US Air Force. Pastor Couser, and his wife of 25 years, Carol have four adult children: Melissa, Kaylee, Meagn and Drew. He enjoys sharing the love of Jesus and encouraging others to prepare for His soon return.



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Members Earn National Degree
6 American Degrees for 2017

By Gwen Clark
Avery County

EJ Byrd, Jacob Keener, Charli Nelson, Ben Clark, Chris Clark and Alex Clark have earned the highest award an individual can earn from the National FFA-The American FFA Degree.

The six began their membership in the Avery County FFA as freshman at Avery High in the Fall of 2012 and Graduated high school in 2016. They enrolled in Agricultural Education classes and paid their FFA dues. Through the following 4 years of high school, this group of young people continued to be FFA members, serve as Chapter Officers, participate in Leadership Conferences, participate in many Career Development Events (competition teams), and earn the Greenhand, Chapter, and State FFA Degrees. All these experiences helped to lead to the coveted American FFA Degree and Gold Key that is earned and awarded to less than 1% of all National FFA members.

Each FFA member is required to keep a Supervised Agriculture Experience (SAE) and to keep computerized records of work experience, hours worked, and all monies earned or spent on the SAE project. From raising Fraser Fir Christmas trees, Welding, Mechanics, Landscaping, Environmental studies, and community service work, these six FFA members earned their American FFA Degree.

2017 American FFA Degrees recipients from Avery County FFA are as follows: Elijah Waker (EJ) Byrd, son of Tony and Selena Byrd of Ingalls, Jacob Keener, son of Lisa Vance of Altamont, Charli Marie Nelson, daughter of Janet P. Nelson and the late Tim Nelson of Pineola, Ben, Chris, and Alex Clark are the sons of Reed and Buffy P. Clark of Newland

The 90th National FFA Convention was held in Indianapolis, Indiana on October 24-28, 2017. The American FFA Degree Ceremony was held on Saturday, October 28, 2017 at the Lucas Oil Stadium. There was a record number of attendees with 67,006.

Sponsors of the American FFA Degree are the agricultural companies Case IH, Elanco, and Syngenta. There were 4,071 American Degrees earned and awarded at the Convention. The state of North Carolina had 61 FFA members to earn the American FFA Degree with 6 of those being Avery County FFA members.

The newest six American Degree recipients join 20 other American FFA Degrees from the Avery County FFA bringing the total to 26 for the Avery County FFA Chapter. The American FFA Degree award has been earned by the following Avery County FFA members:

- 2011- Jared Clark and Olivia (Watson) Haigler
- 2012- Lakean (Stamey) Byrd
- 2013- Katie Stamey
- 2014- Michelle (Cuthbertson) South, Dustin Clark, Shayna Vance, Carson Rose Clark, Codie (Hicks) Berry, and Dakota Guy
- 2015- Abigail Griffith
- 2016- Graham Avery, Sawyer Avery, Paige Johnson, Mckenzie Ledford, Jodi Poore, John Clark, Austin Daniels, Jeremiah Vance, and Katie Masters
- 2017- EJ Byrd, Jacob Keener, Charli Marie Nelson, Ben Clark, Chris Clark, and Alex Clark

Congratulations to the American FFA Degrees for 2017.
The FFA Mission: The FFA makes a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education.
The Agricultural Education Mission: Agricultural Education prepares students for successful careers and a lifetime of informed choices in global agriculture, food, fiber and natural resources systems.



Jacob Keener, EJ Byrd, Charli Nelson, Ben Clark, Chris Clark
Mrs. Gwen Clark is a retired Agricultural Education Teacher/FFA Advisor at Avery County High School. She is a graduate of NC State University (BS) and NC A & T State University (MA). She is a National Board Certified Teacher and has been teaching for 29 years. She and her husband, Dee Clark, have been married for 26 years and attend Crossnore Baptist Church.

And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. Matthew 2:11

Evergreen Church

"God With Us"

By Rev John McCoury
Roan Mountain, Tennessee

As we start thinking about this Christmas let us review the Christmas Story in Mat 1:21-25 *And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.* Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, *Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.* Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS. In this passage we see a special Child (18-25). The birth of Jesus was different from every other birth: He was conceived by the Spirit in Mary's womb and born with a sinless nature. He is "God with us," and He is also God like us because He took our nature and entered into human life and experience. What a wonderful Savior! We also see The virgin birth of Jesus Christ is vital to the truth of the gospel (Isa. 7:14). Since Jesus Christ is God, He existed before Mary; therefore, He could not have been conceived as other babies. He was not only born, but He "came into the world" (John 18:37). He is both God and man, the sinless Lamb of God (1 Pet. 1:19). Matthew opens and closes his book with "God with us" (1:23; 28:20). In Psalm 145 v. 18 *The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth* Pas 145 v. 18) Isn't that a great promise? It's one you can put to work today. Let's look at it more closely. First, God is near to those who are stumbling. *"The LORD upholds all who fall, and raises up all who are bowed down"* (v. 14). You may have stumbled and fallen. Perhaps you just didn't do what you should have. Maybe you stumbled in your job, and you are embarrassed and worried about it. Perhaps you have stumbled into sin. Second, God is near to those who carry burdens. Those who are bowed down with the weight of care can find rest if they will call upon Him. Third, God is near to those who are hungry. *"The eyes of all look expectantly to You, and You give them their food in due season"* (v. 15). Verse 16 shows how simple it is for God to answer prayer: *"You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing."* All God has to do is open His hand to meet our needs today. The problem is, we often don't open our hearts and cry out to Him. Fourth, God is near to those who call upon Him. We have this great promise: *"He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them"* (v. 19). Finally, God is near to those who love Him. *"The LORD preserves all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy"* (v. 20). Follow the advice of James: *"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you"* (James 4:8). God is not far from you. He's waiting for you to take that first step, to cry out to Him and say, "Lord, I want to draw close to You. Here I am." Have you stumbled? Are you carrying a burden, or are you needy? He promises to be near to all those who call upon Him. This Christmas, may we feel and see that "God with us" and "THE LORD IS NEAR TO ALL WHO CALL UPON HIM". Merry Christmas to all



John McCoury is pastor of Evergreen church in Roan Mountain, Tennessee and also chaplain at Roan Highlands Nursing Center.



Habitat For Humanity

Goes Green

By Steve Bruton
Mitchell County



Mitchell-Yancey Habitat for Humanity is very excited about our current home build project in Ledger, right down the road from Mitchell High School. Two weeks ago, volunteers from Bear Creek Baptist Church, First Presbyterian Church of Burnsville, Higgins United Methodist, Western Carolina Realty, and our Wednesday Core Team came together to build the outside walls. But instead of constructing with traditional stick framing, we opted to be the first builders in Mitchell or Yancey County to utilize Eco-Panel "green" technology.

Eco-Panels LLC out of Mocksville, N.C. worked up our original Ledger Habitat home design plans and a month later arrived on site with forty-one 8' x 4' 120 pound specially processed Eco-Panels. Once all the panels were staged, our experienced and inexperienced volunteers jumped right in to erect the walls. Exactly one hour and forty-five minutes later, the last panel was locked into place. As one of our volunteers stated, "This has to be some kind of record!"

What also makes this so amazing is that our Habitat construction volunteers will not need to spend time and energy to insulate, frame out the windows and doors, cut out the conduit outlets, or wrap the outside walls with Tyvek. And because of the four and a half inch super-dense polyurethane foam sandwiched between OSB, the walls are several times stronger than stick framing with a wind rating of 200 mph, and up to five times more energy efficient. The end result will be a healthier, stronger, and safer home with lower cost power bills for the recipient family. We couldn't be more excited!

During this outside wall build, Eco-Panel company owner and president, Charles Leahy, was on-hand to educate several folks who came from Kansas, Tennessee, South Carolina, and from all across North Carolina, to marvel at the construction first hand. Leahy also addressed about two dozen students at the job site from Mitchell High School's drafting and cabinet making classes. One of the highlights of Leahy's message to the students was when he demonstrated the polyurethane foam's ability to withstand fire from a 3600 degree blow torch flame. The Mitchell High construction courses are taught by Terry Lewis and Mitchell Warren who recognized an opportunity to teach their students about new and improved "green" construction technology.

Our Habitat affiliate would like to send a special Shout Out and Thank You to Spruce Pine Subway for providing our Habitat work crew with their tasty sub sandwiches!

If you would like to help volunteer on our Ledger home on Wednesdays, Thursdays or Saturdays from 9am to 1pm, and we really do need and appreciate your help, please contact Steve Bruton, Mitchell-Yancey Habitat Volunteer Coordinator, stevehabitatvc1@yahoo.com, or 407-864-0699.



Mitchell High School students and teachers learn about Eco-Panel "green" construction technology.



Jack Sietlaff, Terry Burse, Colton Burse, Lonnie Speight, Jose Vargas, and Woody Ryan (foreground) help erect Habitat outside walls in record time.

Steve Bruton is the Mitchell-Yancey Habitat For Humanity Volunteer Coordinator



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YOUR GOVERNMENT PAGES

US House of Representatives NC District 11



Congressman
Mark Meadows
202-225-6401
www.meadows.house.gov

Tax Reform Passes the House

Some major news from Congress this week: the House passed a historic tax reform package, H.R. 1, the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, which I supported.

It's a delivery that is long overdue. Moms, dads, small business owners, and working families across the country sent us to Congress to create a simpler and fairer tax code that grows our economy, works for American families rather than D.C. special interests, and returns power from bureaucrats in Washington back to the people of Main Street. Today is a monumental step toward fulfilling those promises.

Make no mistake, though: we must not allow ourselves to view this vote as a job completed. This is not a time for extended celebration or victory laps. The task of reforming our tax code will not be finished until BOTH chambers, the House and the Senate, come together and send a proposal to President Donald Trump's desk. It's on ALL of us to keep working and make that happen.

While the bill isn't perfect, and there are some changes that need to be made, the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act is an excellent first step toward keeping our promise. Now the process moves to the Senate side, where they're already working overtime on their own bill. Once the Senate passes their version of a tax reform bill, our two chambers will likely go to conference for a final measure. I'm very confident this will be finished and placed on the President's desk within the next few weeks.

However, the bottom line is this: the American people have had it with political statements or symbolic victories—they want results, and the results won't be delivered until President Trump signs the bill into law. Congress must run through the tape and finish what we promised.

No more excuses. Let's get the job done.

NC Senate District 47



Sen. Ralph Hise
Ralph.Hise@ncleg.net
919-733-3460

In September, I joined the National Pro-Life Women's Caucus, a project of the Susan B. Anthony List, as a signatory of a letter sent to President Trump, requesting a reversal of an Obama administration policy of forcing states to reimburse abortion providers. Medicaid is the largest taxpayer funding stream for Planned Parenthood, the nation's largest abortion provider. Specifically, we requested that the Trump administration direct the Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to allow states to direct who can be providers under Medicaid. The Governor of South Carolina has asked for this flexibility, and the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals approved Arkansas' decision not to fund abortion providers in their Medicaid program. I believe all states should have the flexibility to set standards that serve the best interests of their respective Medicaid programs and the health and safety of the women the programs serve. The Trump administration is currently reviewing the request. I am hopeful that the administration will rescind the Obama policy and issue a new interpretation that allows states flexibility in deciding which Medicaid providers they will reimburse.

In November, I signed, along with over 100 legislators, including about 70 members of the NC General Assembly and the Lieutenant Governor, an amicus brief that was filed before the U.S. Supreme Court. The brief supports Rowan County's petition for overturn of the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals ruling that the county commissioners could not open their meetings with prayer. The freedom to hear the prayers of other legislators, as well as a legislator's freedom to express his or her own prayers before a legislative body has a long historical precedent and is a bedrock of our nation's traditions. The 4th Circuit Court's ruling against the Rowan commissioners is wrong, and I, as a signatory to the brief, ask that the U.S. Supreme Court grant Rowan County's petition and reverse the 4th Circuit Court's decision.

I wish you all a Merry Christmas, as we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ!

As always, please share your thoughts with me on issues related to state government by emailing me at ralph.hise@ncleg.net or calling me at 919-733-3460.

NC House District 86



Rep. Hugh Blackwell
919-733-5805

Hugh.Blackwell@ncleg.net

Confronting Opioid Abuse

A growing recognition of the deaths and anguish caused by opioid abuse is causing many to ask what the legislature may be doing to curb what amounts to an opioid addiction epidemic in North Carolina. Opioid addiction is one of the greatest health care challenges we face. Each day, four North Carolinians die from opioid overdoses. One out of every 100 births have a newborn addicted because the mother is opioid-addicted. In turn, that can lead to lengthy intensive care stays for the infant and longer term mental disabilities. Many who initially get addicted on pain meds prescribed by physicians, then progress to cheaper heroin and fentanyl that are even more potent.

Back in March four of my colleagues in the House took the lead in introducing The Strengthen Opioid Misuse Prevention Act, or "STOP Act" for short. I was a sponsor of this bill along with others. Through the Stop Act, we are attacking opioid abuse on several fronts: by limiting the number of opioid pills prescribed at one time by a provider, by requiring prescribers to query the Controlled Substance Reporting System to see if a patient is getting additional opioids from more than one provider and by allocating \$20 Million for the treatment of substance abuse and addiction for those already suffering from opioid addiction.

The STOP Act became law on June 29th of this year. The bill is a first significant step. However, I am confident we will continue to monitor its effectiveness and supplement our efforts across North Carolina to determine what additional actions may be needed. Throughout our efforts, we also remain clearly mindful of the need to also effectively treat and meet the needs of our citizens who have very real need for pain relief so that they can get the proper quantities of proper meds in a way that provides real relief without addiction.

The House and Senate both took huge steps forward in a years-long effort to reform our nation's tax code this week. The House passed their version of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act on Thursday, and just last night, the Senate Finance Committee passed our bill. This is a historic opportunity for North Carolina and the country as a whole, and I'm very pleased to see our progress to this point.

Under this legislation, it is estimated nearly 26,000 new jobs will be created in North Carolina alone, and the average middle-income family will see their tax bill

reduced by \$2,400 per year. I mentioned last week the doubling of the child tax credit and the standard deduction. You should also know I was very proud to have two amendments included in the Senate Finance Committee's final package. These provisions include improvements to the ABLE Act by allowing rollovers from 529 college savings plans and allowing disabled individuals who work to save a portion of their income in an ABLE account without risking the loss of benefits. I also fought to preserve the mortgage interest deduction, as well as the child and dependent care credit and dependent care FSAs. These are crucial provisions to one of the most important pieces of legislation I've worked on in my time in Congress.

Long story short, Americans need a break from the crushing burden our tax system puts on them. While our economy has continued to stagnate over the last fifteen years, your paychecks have not increased as fast as they should, and too many jobs have left our communities to set up shop abroad. This bill is a great chance for our state and our country. I look forward to continuing our work to put money back into the pockets of Americans.



Senator Burr Speaks at Senate Finance Committee on Tax Cuts and Jobs Act

YOUR GOVERNMENT PAGES

North Carolina prepared for recession

The message below is reprinted from the Office of House Speaker Tim Moore.

North Carolina is one of sixteen states well-prepared for a financial recession according to an economic "stress test" study released this month by researchers at Moody's Analytics.

North Carolina has a record \$1.5 billion savings reserve and has significantly improved its tax structure under a Republican-led state legislature.

"The people of North Carolina can have confidence our state is well-prepared for emergencies thanks to a better budget process and smarter savings by Republican leaders in Raleigh," said House Speaker Tim Moore.

"I'm proud the North Carolina House has served families and businesses responsibly with careful planning of our state's financial security."

Moody's Analytics provides financial insights on capital markets and credit risk management for investors, strategic planners and policymakers, and "pioneered the concept of stress-testing the public sector."

The "stress test" study applies potential economic recession scenarios, ranging from moderate to severe, to analyze each state's fiscal readiness for an inevitable downturn.

The analysis considers the ratio of each state's savings reserves to its spending commitments and measures the predicted impact of a recession on tax revenues. State budget flexibility and planning are also factored into the comparisons. The Moody's Analytics study groups states into three categories of preparedness: sixteen states that "have the funds they need," nineteen states that "have most of the funds they need," and fifteen states that "have significantly less funds than they need."

North Carolina ranked in the top-third of the Moody's Analytics study as one of sixteen states that "have the funds they need."

Praise for Savings Reserve Requirement

In April of 2017, Moody's Investor Service praised North Carolina's House Bill 7 Savings Reserve Requirement as a "credit positive" commitment. In years past, according to Moody's, "North Carolina's reserves have been below average."

The October "stress test" study by Moody's Analytics also notes "policymakers should be diligently implementing statutory reserve guidelines," as North Carolina did with House Bill 7 in 2017.

NC House District 118



Rep. Michele D. Presnell
Michele.Presnell@ncleg.net
919-733-5732

NC Senate District 46

And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory; glory as of the only son from the father, full of grace and truth. — John 1:14



Sen. Warren Daniel
Warren.Daniel@ncleg.net
919-715-7823

Dear Friends,

On the eve of this Holiday season, I would like to wish all of you a Merry Christmas. Let us take time this month to reflect on the many blessings God has bestowed upon us. I hope you are able to take a few days away from your busy schedule this season to relax and enjoy time with friends and family. In this update you will find some information about the steps we are taking to maintain reverence in legislative practice. God Bless you, and thank you for your support.

You may have heard about the recent federal Fourth Circuit Court decision striking down the Rowan County Commissioners' practice of opening their public board meetings with prayers led by the members themselves. On November 15, I, along with 70 fellow members of the General Assembly, filed an amicus brief supporting Rowan County's petition to the U.S. Supreme Court asking them to take up the case. Here is some background about the case, describing what happened in the lower courts and what's at stake for elected officials in the Fourth Circuit and across the country.

Summary of the Rowan County Case

Legislative prayer is as old as the First Amendment. Indeed, it's even older. Three days before Congress approved the First Amendment, it enacted a statute authorizing the Senate and House to pay the chaplains who opened each legislative session with prayer. *Marsh v. Chambers*, 463 U.S. 783, 787-88 (1983). That practice, the U.S. Supreme Court explained in *Marsh*, "has continued without interruption ever since that early session of Congress." *Id.* at 788. The same has been true in nearly every State and thousands of local legislative bodies—with those governments opening sessions with prayer led variously by chaplains, legislators, laypeople, or some combination of those groups. To this day, even the federal courts (and our state courts) open each session with "God save the United States and this Honorable Court"—a short prayer, but a prayer nonetheless. In light of that "unambiguous and unbroken history of more than 200 years," the *Marsh* Court concluded, "there can be no doubt that the practice of opening legislative sessions with prayer has become part of the fabric of our society." *Id.* at 792.

But that hasn't stopped challenges to the historical practice. Just three years ago, two residents of Greece, New York challenged that town's practice of opening public board meetings with prayer. The town invited local ministers of any faith to offer prayers of their choosing and did not prescreen or preselect any particular prayer, and yet the challengers claimed that the prayers violated the Establishment Clause because they were "sectarian." Following its decision in *Marsh*, the Supreme Court in *Town of Greece v. Galloway*, 134 S. Ct. 1811 (2014) rejected the citizens' argument, explaining that "[t]o hold that invocations must be nonsectarian would force the legislatures that sponsor prayers and the courts that are asked to decide these cases to act as supervisors and censors of religious speech." *Id.* at 1822. The Court likewise rejected the challengers' argument that the town violated the Establishment Clause by inviting predominantly Christian ministers to lead the prayer. The town welcomed prayers by any minister or layman of any faith, the Court explained, but it turned out that nearly all the congregations in town were Christian. "So long as the town maintains a policy of nondiscrimination," the Court went on, "the Constitution does not require it to search beyond its borders for non-Christian prayer givers in an effort to achieve religious balancing." *Id.* at 1824.

In a separate opinion in *Town of Greece*, Justice Kennedy, writing for himself and two other Justices, explained that the "principal audience" for legislative prayer is not "the public but lawmakers themselves." *Town of Greece*, 134 S. Ct. at 1825. To be sure, "many members of the public find these prayers meaningful and wish to join them," "[b]ut their purpose is largely to accommodate the spiritual needs of lawmakers and connect them to a tradition dating to the time of the Framers." *Id.* at 1826. Justice Kennedy also emphasized that legislative prayer allows many legislators to "reflect the values that they hold as private citizens. The prayer is an opportunity for them to show who and what they are without denying the right to dissent by those who disagree." *Id.*

With the *Town of Greece* decision in 2014, I and many others thought that the issue was settled: The First Amendment permits legislative prayer—a practice that has gone on since before the Founding.

That brings us to Rowan County. Rowan County's Board of Commissioners, like countless other legislative bodies, opens its public meetings with prayer. There is no preset or preselected prayer; each County Commissioner, on a rotating basis, can offer a prayer of their choosing—regardless of their religion or faith. The County's practice is no different from how numerous other legislative bodies have started their sessions since our country's earliest days (and even before). Indeed, the NC House and NC Senate's practice of inviting its own members to volunteer to pray is very similar to Rowan County's.

And yet earlier this year, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit held, by a 10-5 vote, that Rowan County's practice violates the Establishment Clause because the County commissioners themselves (not a paid chaplain or layperson or other volunteer) offer sectarian prayers. The Fourth Circuit majority acknowledged *Town of Greece* and *Marsh* but held that those cases were different because they involved chaplain-led (as opposed to legislator-led) prayer. See *Lund v. Rowan County*, 863 F.3d 268, 276-78 (4th Cir. 2017) (en banc). Rowan County has filed a certiorari petition asking the Supreme Court to review and reverse the Fourth Circuit's decision.

Meanwhile, in a case involving Jackson County, Michigan's nearly identical practice of legislator-led prayer, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit recently rejected the Fourth Circuit's decision and held that the county's practice is "consistent with the Supreme Court's legislative prayer decisions, *Marsh* and *Town of Greece*." *Bornmuhr v. Cty. of Jackson*, 870 F.3d 494, 498 (6th Cir. 2017) (en banc). The Sixth Circuit explained that "legislator-led prayer is a long-standing tradition" in the United States—citing example after example. *Id.* at 509-11.

So what is the upshot of all this? Legislators in the Sixth Circuit (Tennessee, Kentucky, Ohio, and Michigan) can pray at the beginning of a legislative session without fear that their prayer might violate the Constitution while legislators in the Fourth Circuit (North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, West Virginia) cannot. Rowan County has asked the Supreme Court to resolve that split by re-affirming that legislative prayer (even when led by a legislator) does not violate the Constitution.

Unfortunately, the Fourth Circuit's decision casts a shadow of uncertainty over the prayer practices of thousands of legislative bodies across the region. And it does so in the face of the Supreme Court's clear teaching that those practices are part of the "fabric of our society." I agree with Justice Kennedy that an opening prayer allows legislators to "reflect the values that they hold as private citizens" and "to show who and what they are without denying the right to dissent by those who disagree." If anything, Rowan County's custom of allowing its board members to pray fosters an environment where the prayer is more meaningful to the prayer-giver. The Fourth Circuit was wrong to suggest that legislators must reflect their private values only by borrowing a chaplain's or volunteer's words and voice. That is why 70 members of the NC General Assembly filed an amicus brief in support of Rowan County. Let's hope that the U.S. Supreme Court will take up this case, and reverse this misguided court opinion.

Rural Life

By Chelsea Thayer
Mitchell and Yancey County

I've reheated my coffee four times today and haven't had a sip. Though messy buns may be the hairstyle du jour among Hollywood's in-crowd, mine is out of necessity and is not in any way, shape, or form, fashionable. I'm not exactly sure which day this week I showered but I swear I took one at some point. If this sounds familiar or describes you then we are a part of the same club – MOMS of little children. As a mom of four kiddos, myself, I depend on a steady supply of coffee and Jesus to get through the day.

On this day, I set out with the goal of writing an op-ed on rural healthcare but sitting down at my computer I have come to the conclusion that I can't. I just can't. I can't write about the state of healthcare in our region when more businesses are closing. I can't write about the state of healthcare in these beloved mountains when more families are moving away. I can't write about the state of healthcare while my friends are deliberating where they should give birth and whether a drive down the mountain is too risky in the winter-time. These are real people and my words about these very real and grim situations don't do them justice. I can't write about the state of healthcare because it is intertwined with so much more. It is not just healthcare at stake here. It is quality of life. I chose to plant my family in Mitchell County for many reasons, the least of which being that my roots are here. Truly, it was longing for a small town and the quality of life that comes with it that made me long for the mountains. And that quality of life is in serious jeopardy.

Small town living is not for everyone. But I am quite certain every person can agree that it is in small towns that we find so much of what we love about our country. "Mom and Pop" stores, the local pizza shop, small town Christmas parades, and the Friday night ballgames at the high school. All those places and people that give quality to our lives. But today I find myself bemoaning the fact that yet another business I love is closing its doors. Businesses closing, families leaving, vital services (like healthcare) slipping away. How? Why? Like many of you, I find myself groping for answers and coming up with few things I know for certain. Like, dang, I'm going to be missing some good cheesy bread come January. Or the knowledge that families I have come to know and admire have been forced to leave since the closure of Labor and Delivery at our local hospital. It was brought to my attention recently that with the new year, Blue Ridge Regional Hospital may no longer have doctors on staff at night. Sure, there will be physicians in the emergency room but not in the hospital itself. Which may not matter to you until you, or someone you love, is staying overnight. Then it will matter a great deal. Another service lost. Another card dealt against our small town. Like watching dominos, I shudder to think what will fall next.

This is where you come in. This is why SEARCH began. SEARCH, Sustaining Essential and Rural Community Healthcare, began in response to the closure of Labor and Delivery at BRRH but has expanded to so much more. SEARCH is comprised of local citizens, clergy members, and healthcare professionals that care about the quality of life here in the mountains. SEARCH knows that every decision made by those at Mission affects more than just those people that receive the services eliminated. Every decision that overlooks the people of this area in favor of fattening wallets trickles down to each of us. No one is excluded. Jobs are lost. Families leave. Small businesses lose necessary patrons. Another business closes its doors. How can we combat this? The first step is to get involved. Attend a SEARCH meeting. Talk to your neighbors. Relay your concerns to your pastor, your county commissioner, or your physician. You deserve to be heard. You deserve a purpose-filled life and access to quality, accessible, and affordable healthcare. The next SEARCH meeting will be held December 5th at 7pm at the First Baptist Church of Bumsville. I hope to be there, messy bun and all, doing what I can to improve the quality of life for my family and the lives of all that call the mountains home. Now please excuse me while I reheat my coffee.

Chelsea Wilson Thayer is a native and resident of Bakersville, NC. She is motivated by her husband, Bryan, and four children to live a life of purpose and service to those that call rural Appalachia home.



Tipton Hill Community Foundation

By Linda Lamp
Mitchell County

Regional Honor to Tipton Hill Community Foundation ASHEVILLE, NC The WNC Honors Awards is built on a 68-year-old tradition of recognizing rural community development clubs for their innovative ideas and grass-roots solutions. These centers and clubs are the backbone running through our beloved mountains. The culmination of this year's program occurred at a luncheon held on Saturday with 240 community leaders from 15 counties and the Eastern Band of Cherokee.

Communities of Promise receive a cash award of \$1,000 and are chosen because of the initiatives implemented by the community that show promise and can be replicated around the region. Tipton Hill Community Foundation from Mitchell County received this high accolade for raising over \$24,000 for facility improvements and continuing efforts on a community museum. The museum to be housed in the facility will preserve the history of the community through historical documents, artifacts and memorabilia. The foundation was also recognized for their work on collaborating with the Center for Rural Health to open a tele-medicine clinic to serve local residents by providing remote diagnosis and treatment through telecommunications technology.

"We should all be grateful for the dedication rural communities put into making the mountains a place we can all be proud to call home," shared Linda Lamp, Executive Director. "For over 68 years, the WNC Honors program has served as an inspiration for continuing and replicating community success."

Generous sponsorships from Harrah's Cherokee Casino Resort, Harrah's Valley River Casino & Hotel, Biltmore Farms, Inc., Duke Energy, Mission Health, The McClure Fund, First Citizens Bank, Buncombe County Farm Bureau, Carolina Farm Credit and Wells Fargo brought in a record amount of \$40,500 to award to the 65 community centers and clubs in the region.

Community centers and clubs across the mountain region voluntarily participate in the annual cash awards program by submitting an application to WNC Communities, a non-profit dedicated to strategies to improve rural community life. The 65 communities involved this year represent over 13,500 volunteers with an impressive 173,000 hours in outreach programs dedicated to education, health, conservation and events highlighting the mountain's great art, craft, and music traditions, as well as collaborative efforts with government, churches, community colleges, nonprofits and small businesses. In addition, the collective fundraising efforts of these communities brought in over \$865,000 for everything from neighbor helping neighbor to food pantries, community gardens, school supplies, senior meal sites, military honorariums, preserving mountain heritage and funds dedicated to the upgrades and maintenance of these rural beacons known as community centers.

Linda Lamp has worked in the nonprofit industry for over two decades and is currently the Executive Director of WNC Communities.



Scott, Arvena, Kit & Anne receiving the award on behalf of the community foundation.

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Sled Hill

By Timothy W. Tron
Burke County

"The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."—John 10:10

As a child, I never understood why standing on top of Sled Hill and overlooking the trees, rooftops, and steeples in the tiny town of New Harmony made me feel as if I were somewhere else; somewhere in another place and time. Life would eventually lead me on a journey, led by the Master's hand, to mountain tops beyond my wildest dreams, back to a beginning that no one knew. In those places, the grandeur of God's majesty would take my breath away as He would open my mind to the Truth. It was as if back then, He was preparing me for the future, but it was beyond my comprehension, as it so often is. But before those magnificent peaks and that walk of faith came a humble beginning. Yet, even now in my mind's eye, I can still see that view on a sunny day as clouds whisked overhead, throwing shadows that raced across the lush green pastures below that were sewn into a patchwork of squares that bordered the edge of town on the farm we knew as home. It was here on this hill, which to us was a mountain in those days, that the event of a lifetime would occur on a snowy day; quite unlike that bright sunny day, yet so full of wonder and awe that it would take a multitude of memories to contain it all.

Christmas was just around the corner, so everyone was anxious for our first snowfall of the season. The weather on that winter morn was gray and dull with clouds hanging so low it felt like you could reach up and touch them. The forecast was for a few inches of snow, but by noon, there was already a blanket of white so deep it covered everything around that old farmhouse there on the edge of town that sat just below Sled Hill. As the snowflakes fell like giant goose-down feathers, more and more family began to gather until the house couldn't contain us all and at the suggestion of grandma, we lit out for Sled Hill with anything we could find that might act as a sled, including one real working sled. At that point, it was just us kids, out on an exploratory expedition. Looking back, grandma's suggestion for us to go explore the sledding conditions were a perfect way to quiet the house and make more room for the adult family who had come to visit. For us kids, it was the perfect excuse to play in the snow. Either way, it would become soon become the stuff of legends.

I don't know which of us tried to go down first, but by the time we reached halfway up the famous hill, the snow was so deep you couldn't slide down easily without first making a trough. The initial attempts all met with crashes. It wasn't until someone made a run nearly to the bottom of the hill that our luck began to change. It wasn't long before the runs were stretching out into unbelievable lengths. Soon it was apparent that a report back to home base was necessary; this was going to be the sledding event of the century; Christmas had come early! We went up and down that hill so many times that afternoon that we eventually became wore out and had to return back to the house for warmth and recuperation. If you knew us kids, you knew that for us to have to stop doing something that much fun was a clear indication of our exhaustion. As we retold of the excitement while sipping hot chocolate and eating grandma's hot fresh homemade cookies, some of the adults had to go check it out for themselves. A few of us escorted them back to the hill, which was a good hike that went past the tractor barn, up the long lane that passed the garden at Ms. Wolfe's house, past the backside of the Labyrinth, past the bullpens and eventually to the pasture gate at the far end. All along the lane were huge Catalpa trees that would provide an unending supply of fishing bait in the summertime from the worms that would fall off their leaves but now stood barren and dark as ominous figures that loomed overhead which stood as bulwarks against the snowstorm; one side becoming



white as they too became part of the ever-increasing snow-scape. Once you reached the pasture gate, you had a good quarter mile to reach the base of the hill, that now stood silent and foreboding as the snow-covered sled run loomed white disappearing into the snowfall from above, becoming one in their obscurity of eyesight.

The report from our adult led expedition told of some of the best sledding conditions that they had ever seen in their lifetime. Our eyes nearly popped out of our heads at this exclamation. The wheels were soon put into motion for preparations for a night sled, something we children had never heard of nor thought of before. Grown men began to brainstorm, and the idea of putting torches along the sled run was thrown out. "And why not," came a reply which soon put some of the creative minds in the family to work to build the home-made torches that soon lined the sled path before darkness had set in putting off a warming glow to the gleaming white ice that had begun to form on the trail to the top of the hill. I don't know what we ate, nor when we ate, all I can recall to this day was sledding and sliding down the hill that loomed like a monolithic icicle in the night sky. The hill became so slick that the only way to get back to the top was to find footsteps on the side of the run that had been made before; otherwise, you'd find yourself sledding without a sled. By the end of the night, only the brave or fool hearty would slide from the top of the hill, so fast and slick was the ice. Those who did try found themselves becoming human torpedoes flying down the hill as their sleds raced ahead.

While we kids were climbing up and down the hill, a giant bonfire began to grow, where we would find ourselves warming our frozen extremities and finding hot dogs or other fire baked goodies to satisfy our hunger that had grown without our knowledge. As the faces of family and friends gathered around the blaze, we realized that when grandpa and grandma were also there gathered around that giant fire, this was the event of a lifetime. Grandpa would rarely venture out this time of night especially when he had the 3:00 AM milking coming, but this was no ordinary day or night. We continued on that night until arms and legs would no longer move and slowly we all left the snowfall and ice-covered hill behind. As the embers of the fire began to glow in the darkness, the last snowflakes fell into its warmth with a hiss. A tiny puff of smoke escaped and drifted above into the night sky, like our memories that drifted off with our sleep as soon as our heads hit the pillows that night.

In the event of a lifetime, a memory was made that affected so many its recollection brings forth memories from so many that if we were all gathered together, you might mistake our ages as children once again and hear the crunch of snow underfoot as our minds race down that hill once more.

There have been many Christmas seasons that have come and gone since that day. Many of those adults have gone on home to be with the Lord while others have grown and moved away. The old farmhouse was torn down and the farm drastically altered to adapt to changing times. The old milk barn is still there, but now it is the offices and warehouse for a flower farm. While one can stand at the road that once went by the house and look back to where the old front porch used to sit, it is only then, in the mind's eye can we see from whence we came. Time is the thief that comes to steal and destroy, but we cannot allow it all to slip away. Life is about living, our past and our mutual experiences and sometimes, those all combine into the unforgettable.

A life lived abundantly.

So, it was and always shall be with our "Sled Hill." Somewhere in your life, you too have had or will have a "Sled Hill." When you do, or if you have, embrace those memories or that time with all you can, for it sometimes only comes around once in a lifetime.

Again, live life abundantly, and strive to make the most of every opportunity. Thanks be to God.

Timothy W. Tron is the Executive Director of the Waldensian Trail of Faith. He lives in Valdese with his family. He is the author of, "Bruecke to Heaven," and an active blogger, artist and musician. Timothy also has a BSEE from UF, is an Eagle Scout. He is now teaching in Watauga County.



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Selling Your Home During The Winter

By Dave Ramsey



Thinking of selling your home sometime next year? Why wait? Existing home sales have increased from November to December an average of 4.5 percent in the past three winters. That means even though there are less homes on the market, buyers are out there buying at a steady, if not increased, pace. That's great news for you winter sellers!

If you've got a home on the market right now, you might feel like the Grinch stole your Christmas. Everyone knows winter is the season of giving, and spring is the season of selling. Plus, working home showings into a busy holiday schedule is like trying to shove a 20-foot tree into your living room.

But selling your home during the holidays doesn't have to spell disaster. You may be surprised that there are advantages to selling your home in the winter. Here are some of our favorites.

The internet has no seasons

Traditional home buying and selling seasons have evolved as a result of instant internet access to property listings. While spring is still the hottest home-buying season, serious home buyers are always on the lookout, checking out the latest listings on their tablet before bed or while waiting for their kid's football game to end.

Today's buyers do the bulk of their home searches online, and that's especially true when the weather outside is not so cheerful. This means your online listing and photos are especially important. Make sure you use high-quality photos that show off your home's selling points. Photos of the exterior in all seasons can help, as can including a video tour and night shots of the exterior with all the lights on.

Make sure you work with an experienced real estate agent to get your listing up-to-snuff for online house hunters. An expert agent can help you know how to show off your home's best features.

Competition dries up

Come spring, sellers will flood the market and your home will be just another fish in a great big pond. But right now, you've practically got the market to yourself.

Since 2014, existing home inventory has fallen an average of 15 percent from November to December. That's 15 percent less competition on the market if you list your home during the winter. Buyers have fewer homes to choose from, which means you could sell your house faster.

Buyers mean business

Most folks want to curl up under a blanket next to a warm fire on a cold winter day. If a buyer is trudging around in freezing weather to look at your home, they must be serious. That's because many winter buyers are working against a deadline, whether it's an expiring lease, relocation, or a contract on their current home.

Getting tax breaks before year's end

Winter home buyers may also be motivated to capture the tax benefits of buying a home before year-end.

Home buyers can write off some of the expenses of their home purchase on their taxes. There are usually multiple tax benefits of owning a home they can take advantage of, too. Typically, a homeowner can count on the following being tax-deductible:

- Mortgage interest
- Private mortgage insurance (PMI) premiums
- Real estate taxes

These tax benefits could make a potential home buyer want to get a house bought and closed before the new year. And if you're selling your home and buying another, you could ring in the new year with more tax breaks, too.

Remember that selling or buying a house can complicate your tax situation, which is why it's always a great idea to lean on a tax expert's knowledge. They can make sure you get every deduction and credit you've earned.

Time off

You may think people are less likely to see your home during their hectic holiday schedules. That can be true, but keep in mind most people have more time off around the holidays. That means more time for browsing their favorite home apps, dreaming about their future decor, and even scheduling home showings.

Three tips to set the buying mood

Nothing says welcome home quite like walking out of the cold into a nice, warm house that's dressed up for the holidays. Admit it: Your home looks great this time of year!

It's easier to make a house feel like home in the wintertime. Here are a few tips to help you set the buying mood.

- Keep it simple. Decorations should accent — not overpower

— a room. Less is more. You don't want your Christmas tree to take up half the living room.

- Crank up the cozy. Light a fire in the hearth, play soft holiday music in the background, and prepare fresh-baked goods or mulled cider for guests.

- Shine a light outside. Winter days get dark early. Brighten your home's exterior with outdoor spotlights. A few holiday lights are okay. Just save the Clark Griswold light show for next year.

Remember, the nicer your home presents itself the more likely it is to sell — and for more money. With all these advantages on your side, hopefully selling your home in the winter won't feel so daunting!

Merry Christmas!

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Crossword

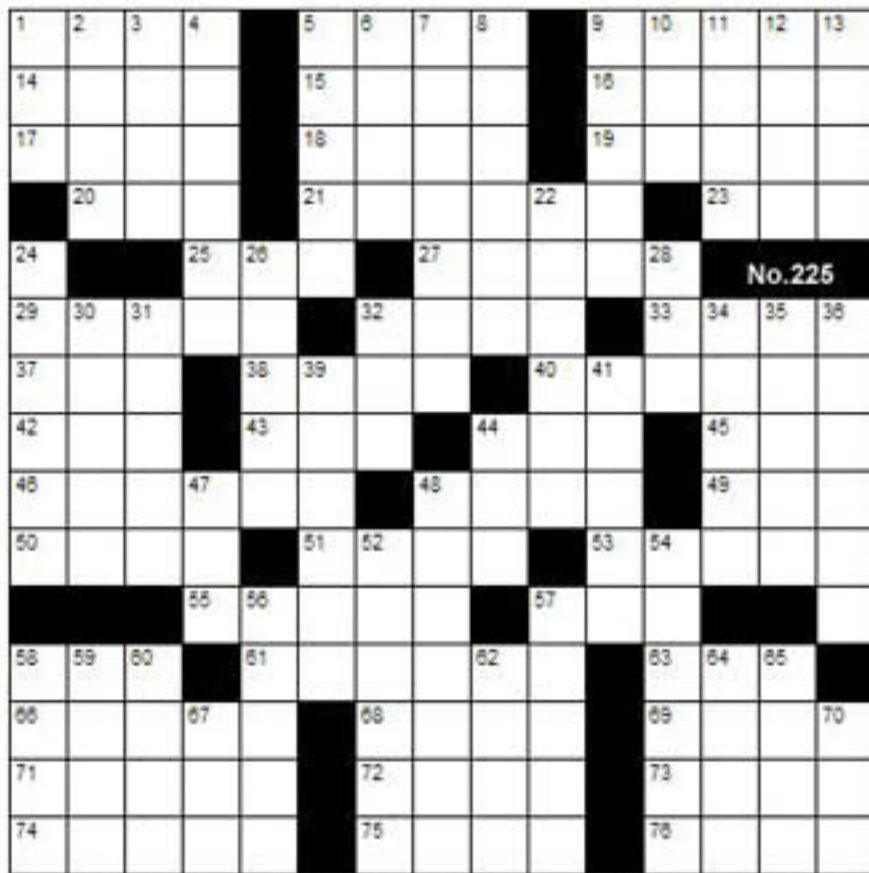
ACROSS

1 they shall come from the _____ and from the west (Luke 13:29)
 5 she shall shave her head, and _____ her nails (Deut 21:12) (KJV)
 9 I will make all your enemies turn their _____ and run (Ex 23:27)
 14 they shall take gold, and _____ and purple (Exodus 28:5)
 15 the LORD commanded the blessing, _____ life for evermore (Ps 133:3)
 16 to Joppa, where he found _____ bound for that port (1,4) (John 1:3)
 17 putting its doors and bolts and _____ in place (Neh 3:15)
 18 do not let your _____ hand know what your right hand is doing (Matt 6:3)
 19 Father, keep through _____ own name those whom thou hast (John 17:11) KJV
 20 the LORD appointed a _____ time, saying, To morrow (Exodus 9:5)
 21 and your toil _____ another man's house (Prov 5:10)
 23 Now there arose up a _____ king over Egypt (Exodus 1:8)
 25 is there any taste in the white of an _____? (Job 6:6)
 27 Surely I have acted like a fool and have _____ greatly (1 Sam 26:21)
 29 Peter knocked and a servant girl named _____ came (Acts 12:13)
 32 there was what looked like _____ of glass (1,3) (Rev 4:6)
 33 They _____ from the Book of the Law of God (Neh 8:8)
 37 one beka _____ person, that is, half a shekel (Ex 38:26)
 38 donkeys that work the soil will eat fodder and _____ (Isa 30:24)
 40 Men, I can see that our _____ is going to be disastrous (Acts 27:10)
 42 Joshua, who _____ seen all the great works of the LORD (Judg 2:7)
 43 seventh letter of Greek alphabet
 44 They are _____ with the showers of the mountains (Job 24:8)
 45 the curtain of the temple was torn in two from _____ to bottom (Matt 27:51)
 46 from them that pass by securely as men _____ from war (Mic 2:8) KJV
 48 a robe, a woven tunic, a turban and a _____ (Ex 28:4)
 49 gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and _____; this is my body" (Matt 26:26)
 50 Roman emperor (54-68 A.D.)
 51 fishermen's equipment (Luke 5:4)
 53 In the beginning God created the heaven and the _____ (Gen 1:1)
 55 thou shalt make the _____ of fine linen (Exod 28:39) (KJV)
 57 experienced in the _____ of engraving (2 Chron 2:7)
 58 a man scoop fire into his _____ without his clothes being burned? (Prov 6:27)

61 Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of _____ (John 19:5)
 63 Shechem set men on the hill-tops to ambush and _____ everyone (Judg 9:25)
 66 As an _____ pleasing to the LORD (Num 29:2)
 68 But man _____ and is laid low; he breathes his last (Job 14:10)
 69 to seek an _____: He will cast lots with arrows (Ezek 21:21)
 71 For it is easier for a _____ to go through a needle's eye (Luke 18:25)
 72 Salvation is found in no one _____, for there is no other name (Acts 4:12)
 73 every man under his vine and under his fig _____ (1 King 4:25)
 74 I looked at the earth, and it was formless and _____ (Jer 4:23)
 75 silver in two bags, with two _____ of clothing (2 Kings 5:23)
 76 there must not be even a _____ of sexual immorality (Eph 5:3)

DOWN

1 as their lives _____ away in their mothers' arms. (Lam 2:12)
 2 _____ for that day is great (Jer 30:7)
 3 the testimony of the LORD is _____, making wise the simple (Ps 19:7)
 4 Some Pharisees came and _____ him by asking (Mark 10:2)
 5 Two sons were born to Eber: One was named _____ (Gen 10:25)
 6 Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth _____ (Josh 7:2)
 7 I will _____ the weary and satisfy the faint (Jer 31:25)
 8 The _____ law is summed up in a single command: "Love your _____" (Gal 5:14)
 9 Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to _____ (Ex 2:5)
 10 raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the _____ heap (Ps 113:7)
 11 lower part of the face (Lev 13:29)
 12 the increase of thy _____, and the flocks of thy sheep (Deut 7:13) (KJV)
 13 and make him _____ out what he has swallowed (Jer 51:44)
 22 The sluggard _____ and gets nothing (Prov 13:4)
 24 Do not take advantage of a widow or an _____ (Ex 22:22)
 26 Everyone who competes in the _____ goes into strict training (1 Cor 9:25)
 28 children of Israel went on _____ land in the midst of the sea. (Exod 15:19)
 30 your tithes, and _____ offerings of your hand (Deut 12:6)
 31 upon his kingdom, to _____ it, and to establish it (Isa 9:7)
 32 your children together, _____ hen gathers her chicks (2,1) (Luke 13:34)
 34 He replied, "Out of the _____,



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something to eat; out of the strong (Judg 14:14)
 35 Bring me a heifer, _____ and a ram (1,4) (Gen 15:9)
 36 out of the _____ I cry to you, O LORD (Ps 130:1)
 39 present _____ of that tithe as the LORD's (1,5) (Num 18:26)
 41 there is none _____ God but one (1 Cor 8:4)
 44 it _____ needful for me to write unto you (Jude 1:3)
 47 abbr. for the 6th book of the N.T.
 48 had a wife who was _____ and remained childless. (Judg 13:2)
 52 as a mountain _____ and crumbles (Job 14:18)
 54 The Gadites built up Dibon, Aroer, _____ Shopan (Num 32:34-35)
 56 found an Alexandrian ship sail-

ing for _____ and put us on (Acts 27:6)
 57 ten bulls, twenty she _____, and ten foals (Gen 32:15) (KJV)
 58 they tied unto it a _____ of blue (Ex 39:31) KJV
 59 Also a bullock and _____ for peace offerings (1,3) (Lev 9:4)
 60 All your _____ has been brought down to the grave (Isa 14:11)
 62 There shall the great owl make her _____ (Isaiah 34:15)
 64 Ahab son of _____ became king of Israel (1 Kings 16:29)
 65 I have _____ a Nazarite unto God from my mother's womb (Judges 16:17)
 67 she heard that Jesus was coming, went and _____ him (John 11:20)
 70 Andrew his brother casting a _____ into the sea (Mark 1:16)

Solution on page 14



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- Friday, Dec. 15th - Farmers Daughter TN
- Tuesday, Dec. 19th - Khol's and Wal-Mart - Asheville
- Thursday, Dec. 21st - Bristol TN. - Speedway in Lights (vans leave the senior center at 4:15pm) **\$2.00 per person**

Bats

By Christy Lowman
Burke County

By now, you have probably figured out that I love animals. I enjoy researching and learning fascinating facts about the creatures God has created! But today, I'm going to talk about a mammal I don't like. Bats. I don't like bats. Why you ask? Because they like to fly too close to my head! I cannot tell you the number of times that a bat touched my cheek or swooped within inches of my head! That's why I do not like bats, but that is not fair to them. God made bats, so they deserve to be recognized. Besides, there are a lot of fascinating facts about bats, so many that I won't be able to tell you all of them in this article.

There are over 1240 species of bats. These species are divided into 2 groups: megabats and microbats. Megabats are very large bats that only eat fruit. The largest is the rare Giant Golden-crowned flying fox bat, whose wingspan can reach up to 6 feet across. Megabats have really good eyesight and chose to depend on this sense instead of their superpower that God gave them. Microbats on the other hand, have poor eyesight and rely a great deal on their God-given superpower. Most microbats eat insects, and some eat small animals. Vampire bats are also included in the microbat group, they are the only mammals whose diet is solely blood. The smallest microbat is the bumble bee bat, who weighs less than a penny and is the size of a thumbnail.

Bats come out at night and are the only mammals that can fly. The Mexican free-tailed bats can fly up to 250 miles a night, as fast as 60 mph, and up to 10,000 ft. high. At night, brown bats can eat up to 1200 mosquitos an hour and can live up to 30 years. Bracken Bat Cave, Texas is home to 20 million Mexican Free-tailed bats that eat 200 tons of insects every night. More bats live in this cave than people live in Mumbai, India, one of the highest populated cities in the world. When this family of bats leave the cave, it looks like a storm passing through on the radar. I would not want to be outside when this occurs!

I want to talk more about bats' superpower, called echolocation. Echolocation is the ability to make sounds and noises that reflect back to you in the form of echoes. The echoes that bounce back to them help them maneuver at night and find food. Echolocation shows the exact location of their prey. This God-given gift is so sensitive that bats can sense objects as thin as a single human hair. This superpower also alerts bats of moths that are poisonous so they don't eat them. I like to think of the echolocation as a gigantic force field for the bats. It's this invisible shield from God, that bats bounce sounds off of to protect and keep them safe from objects and to help them locate and distinguish between poisonous and safe food to eat. To me this is amazing! Even though I don't care much for bats, they are really cool!

Did you know that God also gave you an invisible shield? He sure did! It is part of the armor of God, called the "shield of faith." This shield will protect you from whatever the enemy sends your way. The devil wants to seek and destroy us because we are made in the image of God, but by believing that God is your shield, you will be protected. All you have to do is have faith that the shield is real and that God is protecting you! Ask God to give you your very own shield and to protect you from anything that might come your way and He will! God will put a forcefield around you to keep you safe. He will create a safe haven for you. He will wrap his arms around you like an eagle's wings and shield you from any storm you may encounter! Our God is mighty, and awesome, and He is all we need! Don't forget to praise and thank Him each and every time He protects you. That makes God super happy!

In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Eph. 6:16 NIV
Our soul waits for the LORD; He is our help and our shield. Psalms 33:20 NASB
Dear Lord, we thank You and praise You so much for Your shield that protects us from the things we see and the things we don't see. I pray that You will help develop the faith of each child so they will rely solely on You in all parts of their life. For You are mighty, and awesome and are worthy of all of our praise! AMEN.

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Christy Lowman is a Christian author and illustrator that lives in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains with her husband and two children. She enjoys writing and illustrating books for all ages. Some of her short stories are published with Guideposts and HCL. Christy gives all the glory to God in everything she does. A portion of every book sold from the Small Bible Character Series will be donated to battle human trafficking. If you enjoy her books, 'like' her author page on Facebook and let her know! You can buy her books at https://www.amazon.com/s/ref=dp_byline_sr_book_1?ie=UTF8&field-author=Christy+Lowman&search-alias=books&text=Christy+Lowman&sort=relevancerank You can reach her at <https://www.facebook.com/authorChristyLowman/> or christysoaps@yahoo.com.

Christy Lowman is a Christian author and illustrator that lives in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains with her husband and two children. She enjoys writing and illustrating books for all ages. Some of her short stories are published with Guideposts and HCL. Christy gives all the glory to God in everything she does. A portion of every book sold from the Small Bible Character Series will be donated to battle human trafficking. If you enjoy her books, 'like' her author page on Facebook and let her know! You can buy her books at https://www.amazon.com/s/ref=dp_byline_sr_book_1?ie=UTF8&field-author=Christy+Lowman&search-alias=books&text=Christy+Lowman&sort=relevancerank You can reach her at <https://www.facebook.com/authorChristyLowman/> or christysoaps@yahoo.com.



Health Club in Tanzania

By Doug Sudduth
Mitchell County

The Rotary Club of Spruce Pine welcomed Paula and Denny Lofstrom to their regular meeting on November 16. Introduced by their longtime friend and Rotarian, Dr. Arch Woodard, the couple spoke of their work beginning in 2002, when they went to Tanzania to bring health care to underserved people. As a physician and a nurse, Denny and Paula have worked not only in the United States, but in Guatemala and Antarctica before answering the call to go to Tanzania. With the late Mary Ellen Kintundu, they founded International Health Partners, U.S. & TZ, with the mission of planning, financing and building health care facilities in Tanzania. The St. John's University School of Nursing at Dodoma opened and has now more than 900 students, about 500 enrolled in the BSN program, 250 in the diploma nursing program, and 150 students in the laboratory technician's program under the umbrella of the nursing school. St. John's is now setting up the standards for continuing education opportunities for nurses in the entire country.

International Health Partners TZ joined with JEMA (For the Children of Tanzania) to form IHP-JEMA-TZ and is building The Children's Hospital at Zinga. Since breaking ground for the hospital in June 2013, IHP-US-JEMA-TZ has made progress developing the infrastructure to support the proposed 32 units of the hospital, as well as housing for the staff and for the many medical and construction volunteers who have come to help during the past four years. The Outpatient Department was the first unit of the hospital to open in 2016, thus providing care for both pediatric and adult patients. The Children's Hospital is already making a difference in the lives of children and families as we learned through the numerous photographs that Paula shared in the presentation. She noted that Rotary clubs in Illinois and Missouri have donated equipment for the X-ray building and water purification units. Donors pay the salaries of the 40+ employees who can now feed and educate their families. Donors also pay for building materials, the sub-contractors and for the upkeep of the facilities. Paula explained that providing medical care is both challenging and rewarding. With dedicated volunteers and generous donors Paula and Denny are optimistic about the future of the Children's Hospital at Zinga. Spruce Pine Rotarians appreciate Dr. Woodard making us aware of the International Health Partners organization and for inviting this dedicated and inspirational couple to share the story of their work with us.

Doug Sudduth is the Public Relations Officer for the Spruce Pine Rotary Club.



Rotarian Arch Woodard presenting a locally handmade Rotary mug to Paula and Denny Lofstrom

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Count on God for Christmas Surprises

Ken and Jan Merop
Avery County



What was your best Christmas surprise? Did a loved one show up at your front door and surprise you? Did you open a gift that you never expected to receive? Did you get to take a trip you had always dreamed about?

Christmas is about surprises, isn't it?

Rarely do we go around telling our loved ones what we are going to give them unless it is necessary for them to know so we don't duplicate or misunderstand. But those are usually exceptions to the rule.

I've described before how my engagement ring from Ken came wrapped in a large box, then smaller until I lifted out a shoe box containing a wooden shoe handcrafted by a friend. Thrilled with my surprise, I never expected the smaller box with my engagement ring to fall out of the shoe into my hand. My surprise and delight overflowed into tears of happiness.

Pleasing those we love and care about is an overflow of the great heart of our God in whose image we are created. He delights in surprising us.

In Psalm 37: 3 & 4, NKJV, it says, "Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart."

After the angel's first surprising visit, Mary lived out her pregnancy and her trip to Bethlehem with Joseph. I imagine she longed to get settled at a welcoming inn. But, surprise. No room at the inn except a nearby stable. But, once Jesus was born and placed in a manger bed; she must have marveled at what God had wrought within her and the good man he had given her to help raise this Son of the Highest.

And even if she may have begun to wonder anew about it all, in moments she saw them coming. Surprise visitors ~ shepherds with a look of awe and wonder on their faces who had encountered angels ~ as she and Joseph had also in Gabriel's visits to them.

As the shepherds spread the word and people marveled at all they heard, Scripture says in Luke 2:19, "But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart."

Mary allowed God to hold and reveal his surprises at the right time.

How might God surprise each one of us this Christmas? We can count on Him as we keep our hearts open and ready to cherish within us that which he reveals. Selah

BEAR ALL THINGS

*Love came down on Christmas morn
So that all who believe can be reborn.
Freely share that love so graciously given
Easing burdens for others with an eye toward heaven.*

*"Love...bears all things."
1 Corinthians 13: 7*

*"Bear one another's burdens..."
Galations 6: 2*



Ken and Jan reside in Land Harbour in Avery County, where they have moved in retirement because they love our mountains. They have written for us in years past.



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Serving God in Your Bodily Illness

By Shawn Thomas
Burke County

"But you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time ...". (Galatians 4:13)

So, the Apostle Paul had a "bodily illness" which was hindering him as he sought to serve the Lord. But as we see in Galatians 4, he didn't let that stop him from serving.

In fact, verse 13 says it was "because" of the bodily illness that Paul was able to preach the gospel to the Galatians. What these exact circumstances were, we do not know — nor the exact nature of Paul's illness; though both :13 and :14 describe it as a bodily (literally "fleshly") condition, and in :15 he mentions that the Galatians "would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me," perhaps giving a hint as to the nature of his physical problem. But those are the only clues we have; perhaps because the specific nature of Paul's difficulty was not as important as the fact that 1) the Galatians accepted him despite it, and 2) that Paul allowed the Lord to use him in it.

There are numerous lessons for God's people here, among them that the "health and wealth prosperity gospel" is false. The new Testament does NOT indicate that God will heal us of every physical malady if we merely believe. The Apostle Paul himself had a physical condition which God did not immediately heal. We also read in II Timothy 4:20 where Paul said *"Trophimus I left sick in Miletus."* So much for a supposed guarantee that God will heal every physical infirmity here in this world. That teaching is not supported by the scriptures.

Another lesson, for the ill persons themselves, is that we should not wait for perfect health to serve God. Quite honestly, that day may not come, and your opportunity to bless and be blessed by your potential service will have passed. Do not wait for the "perfect" circumstances, but serve God as He gives you strength NOW. And give you strength He can — often way beyond what you may imagine. Remember what the Lord told Paul when he asked Him for physical healing: *"My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness."* God can give us great strength, even when we are physically weak, if we will present ourselves to Him as vessels for service. This should not be taken to mean that there are not circumstances which limit our ability to serve. This writer has personally spent time sidelined from active ministry by incapacitating illness. There are times when we simply cannot serve.

But we should also recognize that sometimes we think our limitations — physical or otherwise — automatically exclude us from being used by God. And we should remember that often, as in the case of Paul here, God has plans to use us IN SPITE of them, so that He may be the more glorified. Share this:

Shawn Thomas is Senior Pastor at Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church in Morganton. His messages and devotionals are available at www.shawnethomas.com



Mountain View Prison

A Bed In A Bath Room

By Don Stafford
Mitchell County

My name is Rev. Don Stafford, and I have been the community funded Chaplain at Mountain View Prison for the past 12 years. I believe this is one of the greatest ministries that Christians can be involved with. In Matthew 25:36-40 the Bible says, *"I was in prison and you visited me... Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."* Through this ministry I have seen so many men give their life to Jesus Christ. It is such a blessing to see these men grow in the knowledge of the Bible. Many inmates ask to be baptized, and I was privileged to baptize 40 of them last year (2016/17).

I am employed by The Blue Ridge Prison Ministry Board. Each board member is a member of one of our local churches. Local churches support this ministry by giving a regular monthly financial gift. Rev Steve Williams is the treasurer for this ministry. If your church would like to give to this ministry please send your gift to the Mitchell Baptist Association, marked for the prison ministry. I believe God will bless you for it. Please remember that missions begin at home.

At almost any given time there are 908 inmates at Mountain View Correctional. Two inmates live in an approximately 8x12 room with only a commode, sink and 2 small bunk beds. Everything an inmate owns must fit in his locker which serves as a closet, file cabinet, medicine cabinet, food pantry and safe. Can you imagine living in this environment? Sometimes tempers flare because one inmate may try to bully the other. This can turn into a fight, and one or both end up in (the hole) segregation, where you spend 23 hours a day with only 1 hour out for a shower and exercise.

Each day begins at 5:45am when the cell doors open and ends at 11:30pm. The inmates spend their days either working a job, going to school, reading, watching TV, playing games, exercising, talking on the phone or going outside on the yard. Through Mayland Community College the inmates are offered GED/HSE, Commercial Cleaning, Masonry Tile, Masonry Block, Carpentry and Life Skills as well as Geriatrics programs.

I hope this article has been a blessing to you and encourages you to pray for all incarcerated men and women everywhere. I look forward to sharing more with you in future articles about this fulfilling ministry.

Don Stafford is the pastor of Ledger Baptist Church. He is employed by Blue Ridge Prison Ministry Board and serves as a chaplain.



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Toe River Arts

Toe River Arts Fall Group Show Winners Announced

By Kate Groff, Mktg/Prog Manager
Mitchell-Yancey County

The Toe River Arts Council ended its month-long regional exhibition on Saturday, November 4 at their Spruce Pine Gallery, located at 269 Oak Avenue. This display featured over 80 diverse works submitted by local Mitchell-Yancey county artists and those from Asheville, Mt. Airy, Cary and into Tennessee. Awards totaling \$1,000 were determined by "People's Choice" votes cast by hundreds of visitors during the four-weeks.

This year's winners are represented by two-dimensional work. First place went to Tina Brunetti for her oil ink on metal, "Guardian of the Memory." Second place was awarded to Crystal Hurt for her watercolor, "The Birds and the Bees," and Anne Harkness took third place with "Immersed in Novel Ideas." Rhea Ormond and Kat Turczyn tied for fourth place with "Emergence" and "Eos," works in earth pigments and oils respectively.

This was the first time in recent history that Toe River Arts hosted a regional People's Choice exhibit. Denise Cook, Executive Director, said, "This exhibit reflected the diversity in theme, medium, size, and structure and illuminated the gallery with expressive color and creativity. I would like to thank all the artists who participated and our visitors who selected these great award recipients."

Toe River Arts is a non-profit organization established in 1976 to connect the arts and the community. It is supported by other organizations, individuals, and businesses that understand the benefit of arts to a thriving region. The gallery is open Tuesday-Saturday, 10:30 am to 5 pm. For more information, please visit the website, www.toeriverarts.org or call 828-682-7215.



Tina Brunetti

Kate Groff is the Programs Coordinator for the Toe River Arts Council.



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Granite Falls Medical Care Center

To Receive \$50,000 Grant

Dr. Edward Bujold
Granite Falls, North Carolina



Dr. Edward Bujold of Granite Falls Family Medical Care Center was recently awarded with a \$50,000 grant from the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI). The funding will provide technical assistance and allow Bujold to develop a community research team to work in conjunction with academic research centers and perform community based, patient centered research.

"This grant gives us the opportunity to bring the academic research community to our own community" said Dr. Bujold. "We will be able to involve patients in our research endeavors, hopefully looking into issues patients may find relevant to their own health and the health of our community."

Dr. Bujold is available for appointments at his practice location in Granite Falls. For more information, call (828) 396-3168 or visit him online at bujoldmd.com.

Dr. Edward Bujold Recognized for Diabetic Care

Granite Falls, North Carolina - Dr. Edward Bujold from Granite Falls Family Medical Care Center has received three-year recognition from the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA) Diabetes Recognition Program from August 15, 2017 to August 15, 2020.

NCQA's Diabetes Recognition Program recognizes clinicians who have met standards demonstrating delivery of high-quality care to patients with diabetes. The NCQA Diabetes Recognition Program is a voluntary effort to identify clinicians who provide diabetes care consistent with the comprehensive diabetes care measures within the Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set (HEDIS®). Clinicians who achieve DRP Recognition show their peers, patients and others in the Diabetes community that they are part of an elite group that is publicly recognized for its skill in providing the highest-level diabetes care.

"For a person with diabetes, the right clinician can make the difference between living with diabetes as opposed to suffering from diabetes," said Margaret E. O'Kane, President, National Committee for Quality Assurance. "By earning recognition, Edward Bujold, MD has demonstrated that he provides effective, evidence-based care to his patients with diabetes."

Dr. Bujold is available for appointments at his practice location in Granite Falls. For more information, call (828) 396-3168 or visit him online at bujoldmd.com.

Edward Bujold, MD Named "One of America's Best Family Doctors" by the Consumer Research Council of America. Dr. Bujold has been providing personalized, leading edge family medicine for more than 25 years. Dr. Bujold is Board Certified by the American Board of Family Medicine (ABFM) and is an American Academy of Family Practice (AAFP) Fellow. A member of the American Academy of Family Practice National Research Network, Dr. Bujold has published several research papers in his field. He is also an active member of the American Academy of Family Practice and the North Carolina Academy of Family Practice.

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Walnut Grove Church

Oh, Little Town of Bethlehem

By Pastor Kurt Bomar
Avery County



Micah 5:2 tells us that the little city just 5 miles outside of Jerusalem would be the birthplace of the Messiah.

When the Wise Men spent upwards of a year traveling to arrive in Jerusalem and sought directions to this place, the scribes identified it as the birthplace. Did you ever stop and wonder why the religious leaders didn't go themselves? To them it was only 5 miles away. They knew the Scriptures but that wasn't enough. It isn't enough today.

My first point is this. We can easily be like them. We know the Word. We know what we should be doing, but we stop there. We know the greatest commandment...but are we loving our neighbor as ourselves?

But anyway, the Wise Men got there and found Jesus. Because of that event the city is a top destination spot for Christians around the world and has been for 2,000 years. What is the little town of Bethlehem like? Unfortunately, it's not like the words of the song.

Tourists flock to see this quaint little town but did you know that Bethlehem has made the top five lists of "the most disappointing cities in the world". They go there expecting to see something special but are disillusioned because it's just another Middle Eastern town. They go into the church of the Nativity, assuming it will be awesome. But as they walk in, they see the church itself divided into three sections (Catholic, Eastern, and Russian Orthodox) because these three groups have been fighting for centuries over who should control the site. And there are objects hanging from the ceiling that look like Christmas tree ornaments in a garage sale. The scene is complete with hawkers trying to sell you cheap souvenirs. With church groups fighting and dusty relics hanging, no wonder Bethlehem appears to be disappointing.

Buy wait, it's perfect! He was born in a stable. I've been in them. They stink. There are cow patties everywhere which means there are flies everywhere. But it had to be so.

This brings me to my second point. Jesus came to a real word as a real man to help real people. And Bethlehem mirrors reality today. This dirty little town is one of the best-known places in the world for one reason... Jesus was there!

And so too, with you and me, Jesus comes into little people like us--people who are somewhat dusty and smelly and not at all that impressive--and he makes us great, not because of who we are, but because of whose we are. We are His.

The disciples were a good picture of this. They started out as a rag tag group of n're-do-wells and in one short generation they changed the whole world. The interesting thing about their ministry is that the religious leaders were astounded at them and noted that though they were unschooled, they had been with Jesus.

Jesus has a plan for all of us. We may look like Bethlehem. We may be ignorant like the disciples, but if we will spend time with Jesus there is no limit to what he can do through us.

Do you want to have an impact on the world? Then don't just know the Word, spend some time with Jesus. It's all about him.

Merry Christmas

Kurt Bomar is pastor of Walnut Grove Church.



West Burnsville Baptist Church

Christmas Pageant

By Wanda Harding
Yancey County

Begin your Christmas season with your eyes on the reason for the season! "Jesus, King of Kings," the 17th Annual West Burnsville Baptist Church Christmas Pageant will be presented this year beginning Thursday, November 30 at 7 PM. Performances continue Saturday at 7 PM and Sunday, December 3 at 3 PM and 7 PM. The pageant includes favorite Christmas carols and the story of Jesus presented in drama and music. Don't miss this opportunity to be reminded of what happened when Jesus came to earth as a man! Reservations for groups of six or more may be made by calling the church office at 828-682-3990. Admission is free!



West Burnsville Baptist Church is located one mile west of the Burnsville town square just off US 19E on West Burnsville Church Road.

Sudoku

Solution on page 14

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7			3	5				

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Telemedicine Program Expands To Include All Schools

By Cheryl Shuffler
Burke County

The Health-e-Schools telemedicine program in Burke County Public Schools has expanded to include all school campuses, allowing a school nurse on site and a nurse practitioner off site to examine students with medical needs. The program started with six schools in 2015 and is offered through Health-e-Schools, which is part of the Center for Rural Health Innovation. Recent grants totaling \$22,000 allowed for the expansion with the purchase of small, mobile devices. The grants came from Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation, the Community Foundation of Burke and the Burke Women's Fund.

Burke County Public Schools Superintendent Larry Putnam said, "Healthy students are successful students. We are grateful to the Center for Rural Health Innovation and Blue Cross Blue Shield, the Community Foundation of Burke and the Burke Women's Fund for the opportunity to equip all of our schools with telemedicine devices. It has been a very successful program in six of our schools thus far, and we look forward to continued success as all of our students, as well as staff, can now benefit from it. Students can get a diagnosis, a referral, if needed, a prescription, if needed, and, in most cases, stay in school and go back to being actively engaged in learning. No one has to wait for an appointment or miss school and work."

Parents will soon receive an enrollment form for basic health and insurance information on their child. When a child falls ill at school, instead of mom and dad having to get off work and take the student to a doctor's office, the school will contact the parent and give them the option of having the school nurse and a nurse practitioner examine the child via a secured video feed.

The examination takes place in the school nurse's office and a nurse practitioner off site leads the examination. The two work together to examine the child and record basics such as height, weight and temperature. Tiny cameras on scopes allow the nurse practitioner to see over video feed what the school nurse can see in person, such as infected ears or red throats.

The nurse and nurse practitioner have the capabilities of testing for strep and the flu. Other common ailments they see include sinus infections, respiratory issues, head lice and rashes.

While students with contagious illnesses are sent home, 85 percent of the students the school nurse and nurse practitioner see are not contagious and can stay in school. The program sends records to the student's primary care physician to provide a continuum of care and keep parents in the loop.

Allison Bell, program director for Burke County Health-e-Schools, said, the 10 new devices purchased with the grant money come from TytoCare and include a camera, stethoscope, otoscope, tongue depressor and headphones.

Burke County Public Schools has 13 school nurses, six stationary telemedicine sites and new 10 mobile devices to offer telemedicine in every school.

Cheryl Shuffler is the Public Relations Officer for the Burke County Public School System.



Community Support

By David Burleson
Burke County

As the Christmas holiday season approaches, I want to thank everyone in our community for assisting us in making the Burke United Christian Ministries a caring and inviting place for our clients. It is an honor for our entire staff to work with a community that understands the mission of our ministry is to be the hands and feet of Jesus as we help and support our clients and to give them a hand up from the obstacles they face. In my opinion, the most powerful statement about the success of any ministry is what we do for our clients every day and how we encourage them to be the best person they can be.

Remember, people watch what we do much more than they listen to what we say. Our actions speak volumes and it is incumbent upon us to model and display the character of Christ in the world in which we live. If we want to make our world a better place, we must start with one person at a time.

Christmas is such a special time for so many of us, and BUCM is no exception. Because of the generosity of our supporters, we were able to provide Senior Santa bags to over 200 of our precious senior saints. It is a true blessing to provide these wonderful seniors a little extra for their Christmas.

Because of the work of many of our elves, especially Terri and Lorie, Cringle's Christmas Corner has opened in the BUCM Saved for You Clothing Store filled with beautiful, handmade crafts. If your home needs a little extra Christmas magic, be sure to come visit us until Saturday, December 23.

Also for Christmas, BUCM will provide two special events for our children. On Thursday, December 14, BUCM will be hosting an evening with Santa in our soup kitchen from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. We will also have a Polar Express night on Thursday, December 21 from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. There will be a pancake bar, hot chocolate, popcorn and a showing of the Polar Express.

We want to thank the following groups for doing food drives for Burke United Christian Ministries:

1. Liberty Middle School
2. Liberty Bells
3. Freedom Anchor Club (Power Puff Game)
4. Megan Welty's Freedom High School Class
5. Mull Elementary
6. Hillcrest Elementary School
7. Morganton Day School
8. Outward Bound
9. Food Fight (Summit Community Church, Mt. Home Baptist Church, Faith Community Church, and Morganton First Presbyterian)
10. Glory Land Baptist Church
11. Boy Scout Food Drive
12. Continental Teves
13. Morganton Children's Dental Center
14. Blue Ridge Healthcare System
15. Lowe's Nursey

It would be a true blessing to our clients for you to provide new or gently used clothes and shoes, non-perishable food or other necessities to BUCM for distribution over the holidays. We would also encourage you to consider a monetary donation to support the ministries of the Burke United Christian Ministries. From a one-time gift to legacy giving, anything is appreciated.


I wish for each of you a very blessed Christmas season and my prayer is that you will have an opportunity to spend time with friends and family. Thank you again for what you mean to our ministry. All you do for others is appreciated.


David Burleson is Director of Burke United Christian Ministries



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Healing Opportunities and Purpose for Everyone
Helping Children and Families Every Step of the
Way.

By Wendy Ward
Mitchell County



Mitchell County HOPE for families is a group of community members with the common vision of empowering adults and families by wrapping community service and resource arms around those who are in need. We want to build the capacity of the families we serve to navigate difficult circumstances and access services that will help them become healthy. The HOPE for families group is made up of representatives from different agencies and services providers in Mitchell County including: Children's Developmental Services (CDSA), Mitchell County DSS, Appalachian Counseling and Psychological Services (ACAPS), Focus Behavioral Health, Mitchell County Health Department, Mitchell County Schools, Head Start, Mitchell GAL, Family Support Network, Bear Creek Baptist Church Youth Pastor, Blue Ridge Partnership for Children, TRACES and Mitchell/Yancey Healthy Families. Our HOPE flowchart contains additional information regarding each of these agencies. HOPE for families has only been in existence for less than a year, and many positive ripples are resulting from this community alliance to help children and families in Mitchell County. HOPE has developed a family friendly flow chart of services available within Mitchell County. The services are listed in linear fashion from birth to adulthood. This flowchart is being distributed and utilized within agencies and programs to help the public realize what services are readily available to help in times of need. HOPE for families has also had monthly guest speakers including Mayland Community Small Business, Parkway Fire Department, MAHEC, Tri-County Pregnancy Center, and Yancey County Alliance for Young Children. These guest speaker sessions serve to refresh members on available services and promote Interagency resource utilization. We work as a team to ensure that we are utilizing county resources and to identify gaps in services, so that we can work toward bridging these gaps as a team. Our HOPE Mission statement;

"Empower families with community supports to strengthen the family unit" To support our Mission statement, we have developed belief bullets to encompass our complete vision, please see below.

- Agency and Community Collaboration
- Empower Parents
- Provide Parenting improvement opportunities for Parents/caregivers.
- Provide life skill training opportunities for adolescents (and adults)
- Assist in building a Functional Literacy Foundation for children.
- Strengthening struggling families with Family Systems approach.
- Providing meaningful treatment opportunities for those struggling with substance abuse.
- Program Development to fill gaps in available services.

We are successfully working on these belief bullets and building our vision each time we meet. HOPE is now working on a presentation/event by Dr. Fagan of MAHEC regarding Opioid misuse and prevention. This is a key component in helping our children and families to become healthy and free from addiction and the effects of addiction.

Along with this event at Bear Creek Baptist Church, HOPE will be attaching a resource/information session in which resource material from all involved agencies will be available to members of the public. We are also working on a literacy project that would greatly benefit the children of Mitchell County. We are currently working on providing the state with information regarding presenting literacy needs in Mitchell County, so that we will get the support and funding that we need to launch this literacy project. We are already looking forward to 2018 in which our literacy project will get off of the ground. We are also scheduling a guest speaker in January who will present to the group regarding the process of establishing a successful mentor program. We have a strong group with years of experience in Human services. There are many aspects that serve to make our HOPE group unique, one of them being that our vision includes involving professionals, community members, recovering adults and family, and the faith based community to reach out to struggling children and families as well as help to bring additional services to our community. We have seen the need, the struggle, the heartache, and hardship that many children and families are experiencing, and we are responding with HOPE.

If you are interested in becoming involved with the Mitchell County HOPE for Families resource team, please contact Lisa Pittman or Wendy Ward at 682-4772. Also, if you have a service that you would like to offer to the community, we will schedule your presentation with our HOPE for Families group. Or, if you would like to attend our HOPE group to learn about resources available in the community, we will be happy to have your attendance. Our HOPE for Families resource team meets once per month. We provide updates regarding services that each agency offers, as well as guest speakers regarding new or additional services that we can utilize in the community.

Wendy works at Children's Developmental Services Agency. She studied at Gardner-Webb and is a founding member of the HOPE Movement.



Tammy Burleson DSS, Ashley Phillips DSS, Lisa Pittman CDSA, Dan Barron GAL, Billy Pendley DSS
Left across front row: Wendy Ward CDSA, Idania Garcia TRACES, Tiffany English FOCUS. Missing from the photo are: Alexandra Stevenson CC4C, Dale Buchanan Bear Creek Baptist, Katherine Savage BRPC, Cassie York TRACES, Terri Hefner-Scott MCS, Jeremy Pearsall ACAPS, Ron Pallick ACAPS, Autumn Snyder HFA, Teresa Goss CDSA, Teresa Emory FSN. Thanks to Tammy Lynn Hopson for our photo session at Mitchell County DSS.

SILENT NIGHT

A Christmas Poem (a true story)
By Joyce (Joy) Harwood Baldwin



An old man toiled with rugged hands
To dig a ditch that day
Unaware his heart would change
As he began to pray.

The children singing "Silent Night"
Their sweet sound filled the air
When it reached the old man's ears
He listened with all care.

The words and music spoke to him
That Jesus was a child
The Spirit gently touched his heart
"Holy infant so tender and mild"

The old man tired and weary
Began to weep with joy
"Thank you Father for this child
Your precious baby boy.

Until today I could not see
Nor did I understand
The boundless love You had for me
Ere since the world began.

God's love unveiled through song
This night has set me free
My heart rejoices now to know
You gave your son for me"



Joy is a resident of Madison County, where she now lives with her husband, Danny Joe Baldwin. She is currently a member of Mt Zion Baptist church in Marshall, NC. As a previous member, she calls Forks of Ivy Missionary Baptist Church in Weaverville, "home away from home". She is currently singing with the Gospel Group "Jonah's Voice" out of Mars Hill, NC. Her latest song "Homecoming" will soon be heard by many.

A Caring Partner at Home

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America's Epidemic: How Opioid Addicts Find Help in the Church
From: Decision Magazine

By Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra

Jim Quigley had been sober for four years and was one semester away from graduating from Bible college when his stopped car was rear-ended by someone going 50 mph. He ended up with two artificial discs in his spine and a prescription for opiate painkillers.

"I was allowed to have eight pills a day if I took them like the label instructed," he said. "But in my mind, if I took all eight at one time, but no more, I wasn't really abusing them."

A month after surgery, his prescription ran out, and he quit using. But he fell back into alcohol and drug abuse and, three years later, came back to prescription opiates.

"My last year down in Florida, I was in the hospital three different times for pneumonia related to my substance abuse," Quigley said. "I was an IV drug user. I had used dirty needles and had cellulitis [skin] infections. I almost lost my hand. I was in three crisis stabilization units for suicide attempts. One time I took so much medication that I was in a coma for four days."

Quigley's cousin found him a long-term rehab place in North Carolina. His first night at Freedom Farm Ministries, a local pastor told the room, "A lot of you guys have had at one time a relationship with the Lord. You think, I've gotten so far away from God, I don't know how I could ever get back to Him. I need to tell you—God hasn't gone anywhere. You just need to repent."

"I said the first honest prayer I've said in years," Quigley said. He would go on to graduate from the program, then work his way up to executive director. Today, Quigley works with about 100 addicts a year.

"Ultimately, I can't change anybody," Quigley said. "I just continue to present the truth to them and see God grab hold of their lives."

Freedom Farm is just one way that Christians are tackling the opioid crisis, which killed 33,000 Americans in 2015 and almost 2,500 Canadians in 2016. In 2010, Americans—who make up less than 5 percent of the world's population—consumed 80 percent of the world's opioids and 99 percent of its hydrocodones (semi-synthetic opiates like Vicodin or Lortab). Canadians are the second highest opioid users after Americans.

This summer, President Donald Trump declared the opioid crisis a national emergency, in response to a commission report that said the country was "enduring a death toll equal to Sept. 11th every three weeks." Thanks to opioids, overdosing on drugs is now the most common cause of death for people younger than 50.

Opiate Origins

Opiates—which include heroin, codeine and morphine—are drugs made from the opium poppy. When ingested, the chemicals attach to receptors in the brain, blocking any signals of pain and replacing them with euphoria.

Opioid Stats in the U.S.

- 12.5 million people misused prescription opioids.
- 2.1 million people misused prescription opioids for the first time.
- 2 million people had prescription opioid use disorder.
- 828,000 people used heroin.
- 135,000 people used heroin for the first time.
- 33,091 people died from overdosing on opioids.

Sources: 2015 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (SAMHSA), and MMWR, 2016; 65 (50-51); 1445-1452 (CDC).

Using opiates to replace pain with pleasure has been around as long as the poppy—ancient Sumerians called it the "joy plant." It's been causing trouble almost as long, including two major wars between England and China, the morphine addiction of injured Civil War soldiers, and the invention of a German dilution that was supposed to be less addictive but turned out to be heroin.

Today's epidemic was fueled by the development and aggressive marketing of OxyContin in the late 1990s. Opiate manufacturers such as Purdue Pharma, which manufactures OxyContin, assured doctors that modern opiate pills weren't addictive and could be safely used for long periods of time. And from 1999 to 2015, pain prescriptions quadrupled.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, most of those prescriptions have been filled in towns and small cities inhabited largely by poor white residents, many of whom are unemployed or uninsured.

"Rural Appalachia has less opportunity for economic or social mobility," explained Covenant College psychology professor Kevin Eames. Coal mining "is a dangerous, tedious, and labor-intensive job. Poverty tends to produce family dysfunction, which is passed down from generation to generation. A combination of hopelessness, emotional wounds and physical pain make substance abuse highly likely."

"Last summer, we had 26 overdoses in four hours in Huntington, [West Virginia]," said Chris Priestley, who pastors a church about three hours away. "They ran out of ambulances."

One family member of North Carolina pastor Donnie Griggs became addicted through prescribed medication for pain; another began with marijuana and gradually amped up.

It guts him. "We are drowning in this," he said. "Everywhere I go, small towns are being eaten up with this stuff."

Whether through churches or Christian recovery centers, many addicts have found freedom from addiction through Jesus Christ.

The Church's Response

Not every church can whip up a recovery center, especially those small churches in rural areas where opioid abuse is most rampant.



"We have to recognize what we can and cannot do," Priestley said. He aims for preventative care by providing Gospel-centered preaching, Biblical counseling and solid pastoral care. His Crossroads Church partners with other organizations and the medical community.

"We want to connect people to care that is comprehensive, while also being present and welcoming them to a new Gospel community, so they can hope and heal alongside those who love Jesus," he said. "We've truly seen transformation in those scenarios."

Tips on Overcoming Addictions

Communities like the one Priestley is offering are a tremendously effective support for an addict's recovery, Eames said. Churches can also play a key role in relieving the underlying stressors—financial, relational, spiritual, physical—that may send a person to opiates in the first place.

Griggs calls out opiates from the pulpit, saying: "When we talk about our town's brokenness, we put a name on it. We talk about the pill addiction."

That seems to encourage people to ask for help, he said, though the shame is deep and extra complex for those whose addictions grew out of legitimate doctor's prescriptions.

"My doctor said I needed this"—I hear that so much," Griggs said. "For a soccer mom to go to the hospital and say, 'I'm addicted to OxyContin or heroin'—there's a stigma in our town. ... People really feel trapped."

Opioid addiction is both simply sin and also very messy. Its claws are especially long and sharp, and they often sink in through the innocence of a doctor's prescription.

"I've seen a lot of good people who love Jesus get hooked on this stuff," Griggs said. In addition, "a lot of people are taking their hopelessness to this instead of the cross. This has been prescribed as a way to deal with pain and sadness, because I don't think the church has done a great job of explaining how the Gospel encounters us in suffering and mourning. The church has almost made it sound like if you aren't smiling all the time, something is wrong with your Christianity." But the church also has the right answer. Along with providing presence and support, it can point addicts to the only solution for sin.

"Addicts are not immune from the hope of the Gospel," Priestley said. "That's pretty important to remember, to stay grounded instead of getting overwhelmed. I'm called to preach the Gospel—that's not irrelevant to my city's crisis. That actually applies. ... We have every reason—because of the cross and the resurrection—to have hope for the future." ©2017 Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra

Abridged from an article that originally appeared on The Gospel Coalition website. The full version is available at thegospelcoalition.org.

What Your Church Can Do

- Facilitate a workshop or dedicate a teaching time that focuses on the opioid crisis, led by someone from a substance abuse organization.
- Join existing substance abuse coalitions, or help to start one.
- Affirm the fact that treatment works, but treatment and aftercare are better sustained when a person comes to faith in Christ and is supported by a faith community.
- Incorporate substance abuse issues into prayer, Bible studies and sermons.
- Encourage members of your congregation to question doctors when pain medications are prescribed. Could these drugs lead to dependence?
- Educate your congregation on the risks of keeping unused pain medication, and be sure your community has a collection center for unused drugs.

Source: James E. Copple, SAI

Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra is senior writer for The Gospel Coalition and a contributing editor at Christianity Today.

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