Equipping the Saints
As we complete the 2010-11 academic year at Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, we can certainly give thanks and praise to the Lord for an awesome year. Seeing the passion for ministry among our graduates is encouraging and a testimony to the Great Lord Jesus we serve.

With the coming of summer, the seminary remains active and busy as we prepare for the Mid-America Fellowship Luncheon at the Southern Baptist Convention. If you are in Phoenix, please stop by the Mid-America Seminary booth in the exhibit area and get a ticket to come to the fellowship. We have the greatest alumni in the world and the SBC is the perfect time to reconnect.

Stay tuned for our special fall Founders’ Days at our New York campus. Founders’ Days in Memphis is on our usual schedule but in New York we will be meeting the 3rd through the 5th of October. In addition to the Northeast Founder’s Days, we will have our fall Board of Trustees’ meeting at our Northeast Campus. On October 5th, Dr. Tim Christian and I will be leading a one-day Great Awakening Tour to sites in the area of our Northeast Campus. All in all, it will be a great time. If you would like to know more about the special Northeast Founders’ Days and the Great Awakening Tour, just let us know and we will send you more information. Also, you will find information on our MABTS website.
God bless you as you continue to live for Jesus day by day. Thank you for being a part of the Mid-America family. Finally, continue to pray for our Southern Baptist Convention and its work. Through our Cooperative Program, we can literally reach around the world with the love of Jesus. Let's go!

Michael Spradlin

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http://www.facebook.com/midamericabaptist
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Vol. 39 No. 4                      SUMMER 2011

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**Practical Missions Report**

*August 2010 - May 11, 2011*

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Everyone needs a pastor. Oftentimes, we need one more than we care to admit. In 1987, as a young married guy with a young family, we were new arrivals to a military posting at Fort Riley, Kansas. We were new to the Fort Riley area and knew nothing about the surrounding communities or the Midwest. For us, this was the time before cell phones and home computers so we let our fingers do the walking through the Yellow Pages as we looked for a church.

The weeks passed by as we visited a few churches. As the weeks continued to pass, we found ourselves not visiting any churches at all, and we began to drift. In our church searching and shopping ventures, there was one church we continually passed by but had never visited. We visited that church the next Sunday, and then the next. God led us to join and plant our lives there until our time at Fort Riley came to a close.

It was a great church—one with a flourishing and growing membership. It was led by a great pastor—one I still keep in contact with today. During our time there, we labored for the Lord, but—the church and the pastor did far more for us than we did for them. The love and labor of the church generally, and the pastor specifically, filled a void in our lives that we desperately needed filling; a void that only a pastor and church can fill.

God gives us pastors and Bible teachers for a purpose: To perfect us; to make us better—more like the Christ who bought us. That is one of the most challenging job descriptions I know, but God calls men to that
number one, it was obvious to me (and known by others) who the “pastor” was (we’re all aware of places where one man may have the title, but someone else may own the influence).

This was a welcomed realization to me having previously served churches that were community influenced or committee run. I was basking in the “blessing” of being THE PASTOR. However, for me, what began as a blessing was quickly becoming a burden. I began to realize that I was spelling lead incorrectly. I spelled it c-o-n-t-r-o-l or h-a-n-d-s-o-n or even m-i-c-r-o-m-a-n-a-g-e. I soon learned that if I wanted to know

In 1999, God led me to begin planting the Agape Baptist Church in Scottsboro, Alabama. I am privileged and excited to still be their pastor. Really, from day
everything, do everything, lead everything, or attend everything… a lot of Baptist people would let me! And the result: I would restrict my people, limit my church, and slowly but surely kill myself.

I guess you could say I was crippling our growth and development. It finally dawned on me that my job was not to do the work of hundreds of people but to equip hundreds to do the work. In fact, the word Paul uses in Ephesians 4:12 “perfecting or equipping” is said to mean, “To set a bone.” It is a medical term for correcting a fracture. The inference to me is clear: Why are so many Christians and so many churches hobbling about and finding that they are incapable to run the race in such a way as to win? They are crippled.

Pastor friends, know your role and understand your limitations. Your church, like mine, is not a hotel. It is a hospital and the Great Physician has brought you on board as chief surgeon… start setting some bones. Is your ministry limping about? Perfect it. Is your discipleship or evangelism crippled? Equip the saints. Are your families diving or your finances dwindling? It’s high time we prepare those God has given us for the work God has for us.

Today, I am thrilled to tell you that there are a lot of things that go on in the name of Agape that I don’t have anything to do with. Once we began to correct some “breaks” we learned that equipped and empowered people are great assets to the church growth and the pastor’s health.

In this copy of The Messenger you will hear from several alumni pastors who are equipping the believers they shepherd to do the work of ministry God has given them. Let their examples be a challenge to you.

Expound? Yes! Evangelize? Certainly! Exhort or encourage? Why sure! But make sure you also equip the saints to do the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:12). This will truly build up the body of Christ.

Dr. Roger D. Mardis
National Alumni President
Timothy K. Christian is completing his tenth year as Dean of Students and Professor of Systematic and Practical Theology at our Schenectady, NY, campus. Tim joined the faculty after twenty-five years of full-time pastoral ministry. He pastored Southern Baptist churches in Tennessee, Arkansas, Indiana, Georgia, Florida, and New Hampshire. He also pastored a European Baptist Convention church in Naples, Italy. Since joining the faculty, he has preached in churches and Bible conferences in all of the northeastern states, has preached in four Pastors Conferences in India and one in Bangladesh, and has been interim pastor of seven different churches in upstate NY. He is now the bivocational pastor of Cornerstone Community Church (SBC), in Malta, NY.

Tim and his wife Judy have been married for thirty-five years. They have two adult children, Trina and Marcus, and love being grandparents to four of the world’s greatest kids.

Tim honors his parents’ spiritual heritage: “I started attending a Baptist church nine months before
I was born,” he said. “I received Jesus Christ when I was a preschooler. It happened in a children’s class at church, but John and Virginia Christian introduced me to Jesus in our home. Jesus was real in them. They made it easy for me to trust Him.”

“When I was twelve, I professed my faith in Jesus publicly. Our church had no baptistry. Baptism days were big deals. After Sunday school, the congregation drove three miles, parked our cars and pickups on a dirt road, walked another quarter mile down a rocky, washed out road to Steven’s Mill Pond. It was the local swimming hole as well as our baptistry. With the congregation sitting on a rocky hillside in lawn chairs and on blankets, we sang hymns, daddy preached, and then he baptized the candidates. I was baptized with several others who were saved at a revival meeting in the summer of 1966.”

“God called me to preach when I was a high school junior. The Wadley Baptist Church licensed me. Daddy did not try to call me, but he encouraged me to seek and follow God’s will. He taught me to trust Jesus, believe every word of the Bible, love the church, and share my faith with others. And of course, growing up in Alabama, he taught me to root for the Crimson Tide.”

Christian said, “Daddy was a pastor for fifty-two years, and a high school teacher for more than thirty of those years. When he died in January 2011, I received multiple calls and emails from friends telling me that he had introduced them to Jesus. What better heritage could one have?”

Christian earned a Bachelor of Arts at Tennessee Temple College in Chattanooga, the Master of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry at Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, and the Doctor of Theology in Systematic Theology at the University of South Africa, Pretoria. He has written six books, multiple articles, and has a budding ghostwriting ministry.

“It is a privilege to teach and pastor in the northeast,” Christian says. “Whether they realize it or not, people are hungry for truth. God empowers the faithful exposition of His Word. People trust Christ, believers grow in grace, and churches are transformed. It doesn’t happen overnight, but that’s OK. We’re growing people, not mushrooms. God is faithful; He is working.”

Our northeast faculty is united in its mission of training pastors and church planters to lead God’s people to fulfill the Great Commission until Jesus comes. Dr. Christian is happy to participate in the process.
Some time ago I came across an anonymous adage that has stuck with me across the years: “He is a great man who can do the work of ten men; he is a greater man who can get ten men to work.” For pastors, many of whom tend to be workaholics, this is a vital reminder. As admirable as it is for you to be an absolute work horse, it is more important (not to mention biblical) that you equip others to join in the Lord’s work.

Many a pastor gives himself with abandon to the multitude of tasks associated with shepherding his flock. Hospital visitation, evangelistic contacts, sermon preparation, staff meetings, committee meetings, and more all vie for his time and attention. Even after an exhausting day, it is often the case that there are many good things that still lurk on his “to do” list.

Day after day, week after week, he relentlessly tackles these duties. His congregation respects his work ethic and loves him for it. If he is not on guard, he, too, can begin to take a certain amount of satisfaction in it. He is the spiritual leader and caregiver to whom all turn in their times of need.

There are several problems with this approach that lie just beneath the surface. First, there is the obvious temptation to pride. We can become the indispensible one around whom all else orbits. We feed off of the congregation’s dependence on us. We reinforce this mindset by making herculean efforts to comply with everyone’s expectations, regardless of how unreasonable they may be.

A second problem is that we fail to do what is one of our primary tasks as a pastor—that of equipping the saints for the work of the ministry! Ephesians 4:11-12 makes this clear that this is our call:

“So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the
evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.”

Failing to equip and engage others in service can result in us actually capping and hindering growth (both spiritual as well as numerical) as we become a sort of spiritual bottleneck. Often an overworked minister and an unequipped laity walk hand-in-hand.

Add to these pitfalls the serious problems of personal burnout and the neglect of the pastor’s own family. Someone has rightly said, “Anyone who burns the candle at both ends is not nearly as bright as he thinks he is!” The failure to include proper margins in our lives is a recipe for disaster.

The Apostle Paul not only wrote Ephesians 4:11-12, he lived out its truths in his own ministry. An example is his relationship with the church at Ephesus. As you may remember, he spent some three years laboring in that field. It was one of the longest of his tenures in a particular locale. As he prepped them for his departure, he met with the elders of the church there. With confidence he entrusted the ministry into their hands. He could do this because he had spent intense time and effort equipping these new leaders for the work of the ministry. He said, “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).

The ministry at Ephesus did not collapse with the departure of Paul. He had not built the ministry around himself. He had equipped the saints for the work of ministry. Many were ready to provide spiritual leadership when the moment came. It is worth asking if the ministries that we lead would fare similarly if God called us to another field of service.

Perhaps you have viewed yourself as one who, in effect, “does the work of ten men.” As strange as it sounds, I’m not convinced that would be a compliment to your ministry! To be sure, I am not lobbying for laziness. By all means work hard. But let your work be that of a player-coach. Do the work of an evangelist. Care for the sick and dying. But do so in the company of others that you are equipping to take on that ministry. Multiply yourself in others.

Rather than doing the work of ten, why not set yourself to, “get ten men to work.” That is a huge part of God’s call on every pastor’s life. You will be healthier, the ministry will prosper, and God will be glorified in greater measure.
A fresh challenge to plant new churches is beating in the hearts of hundreds of faith communities around the globe. As our church considers how we can fulfill our vision of planting twenty new churches over the next ten years, one question I consistently consider is “Who will pastor the new churches?” The answer to that question has caused a dramatic shift in my personal involvement with our church’s discipleship and equipping ministries. The Apostle Paul’s words to Pastor Timothy have reminded me of one element in God’s job description for me as a pastor. Second Timothy 2:22 says.

“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.”

One piece of my work as a shepherd is to intentionally recognize around me those whom God is calling to be pastors and to help prepare them for a future role in ministry leadership. I need to be involved in seeing on the outside the calling others are hearing on the inside. This recognition requires an intentional focus. This focus means that the pastors to the future church’s we will plant may already be on site. They may be in our nurseries, in our youth groups, and in our college and adult ministries.
Nurseries are where I learned the most about equipping the next generation of pastors—not church nurseries, but plant nurseries. My dad was a career nursery man, growing and selling container plants and turf grass. That was the career he had in mind for me as well. Early on, I realized this was not his business but this was our family business. His plan was to take his sons, train them, equip them, provide formal education for them, and then place them in a new and additional location.

You already know by now that ultimately, God had a different end in mind. During my last year of college, I wrote my dad to tell him I would not be back to the family business. He calls it his “Dear Jerry” letter. However, those years of “discipleship” have not been wasted. When I think about new churches we will plant and who will pastor them, my thoughts are not too far removed from my dad’s thoughts of new locations and who would lead them.

My dad’s plan of equipping the sons works rather well in equipping the saints. The process of intentionally participating with a person in recognizing and confirming their call to vocational ministry has led our church family, and specifically our church staff, into a role of also helping in their preparation for ministry. The process of equipping people for vocational ministry is now happening over and again among us. However, this reproduction of pastors and vocational ministers has not always been the case during my pastorate.

In Henri Nouwen’s book on Christian leadership, In the Name of Jesus, he wrote, “One of the most painful realities for many Christian leaders is that fewer and fewer young people feel attracted to follow in their footsteps.” I felt that pain a few years back.

Our church is located ten minutes from the heart of the University of Georgia’s campus. I kept seeing student after student come through making life decisions but rarely would I hear them say they felt God’s call to pastor. I took this prayer to the Lord and He answered quickly through His Word in Matthew’s Gospel, “Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” I did and He has.

Soon after that prayer I prayed again these very words, “God, I’m asking you for a guy that I can pour into that would serve you in ministry.” That very next Sunday, a guy walks up to me after the worship service and introduced himself. He said he would like an appointment with me. I knew before the handshake was over God had answered my prayer.

Over the next few months I gave intentional time to this young
man. We met weekly at 6:30 a.m. for an hour, reading books together, talking ministry, and discussing life’s future. Soon those weekly meetings turned into ministry opportunities. I asked him to speak to our teenagers, to go on mission trips, and eventually to lead our youth ministry for the summer. I gave him opportunities to preach to our church family and talked to him about seminary training.

In the process of watching this young man grow, affirmation seemed to play a major role in his development. Words spoken out loud that basically meant “atta-boy” opened the doors for counsel, advice, and confidence building in his service for the Lord. He eventually made his way to seminary. I visited him while he studied there in order to once again affirm him and let him know our church family knew where he was and believed in him. Today this young man is married, the father of two, and is serving the back end of the 2+2 seminary program in Rome, Italy. And get this—helping plant churches.

The pattern of prayer, time, opportunities, and affirmation is being repeated even as I write. When the previous guy left for seminary, the prayer was voiced again, “God, I’m asking you for a guy I can pour into that will serve you in ministry.” Within two weeks a man introduced me to a freshman at UGA saying, this guy is looking for someone to spend some time with him to help him get ready to be a pastor.

For the past 18 months I have met most Wednesdays over lunch with this future pastor. Opportunities have been given to him where he can watch and work, and lead and learn. Soon he will visit seminars and all along the way God gives me chances to speak words of affirmation, putting steel in him for a life of ministry.

Most recently, God has used this process of prayer, time, opportunities, and affirmation to directly impact our pastoral staff. In filling our Children’s Pastor position our church family hired from within for the first time. The excitement in our church over one of our own joining the pastoral staff has strengthened my commitment to this equipping process.

What I am describing is not a new process in ministry. Randy Ferguson, of the North American Mission Board, once told me that as a teenager, when he shared his call to ministry with his home church, he never returned to a regular Sunday school class. His pastoral staff intentionally took him and others under their wing and began to equip them weekly, preparing them for the ministry. My own experience is similar to Randy’s.

During my college days, a conversation about ministry with my
pastor, Al Jackson, led to weekly Thursday morning meetings, mission trips, an internship, opportunities to preach and three years at Mid-America. And by the way, a very affirming visit from Al while I was at Mid-America probably helped me finish.

Who will pastor those churches you intend to plant? Is there a son in the ministry that might return home? I encourage you to pray an intentional prayer, “God, give me a guy I can pour into…”
Graduation 2011
Practical Prayer

We pastors are always evaluating the needs of the people whom God has entrusted into our care. We look at them as a group, called a church, and size up what we perceive to be significant weaknesses and strengths. Once we think we have sufficiently observed and discerned this, we develop ministry plans to augment strengths and shore up weakness. We rightly consider the church’s commitments to fervent evangelism, missions giving and participation, effective discipleship, and dynamic worship. So, we run to the how to books, the latest research on church growth, the next new ministry model, the greatest new program since the last greatest new program, or the website of the flavor-of-the-day, cutting edge church and see what might help infuse our church with a needed fix.

Truthfully, we pastors care deeply about the health of the church and we sincerely want to be effective leaders who equip the people to fulfill their mission. And we probably have done a fair job of diagnosing the church’s needs. That is usually the easier part. However, with the best of intentions, in our pursuit to help our congregations to move forward, we hastily run right by the methodology that will be most helpful. And it’s not because we don’t know about it. And it’s not because it’s complicated. But the uncomfortable, yet actual reason we overlook it is because we really don’t think it to be sufficient.

In ministry we often talk about the proverbial toolbox. This is the collection of programs, assessments, methods, and strategies that we believe will help us accomplish effective ministry. Now, there is absolutely nothing wrong with having a well-equipped ministry toolbox. Actually, it’s probably a good idea. However, we need to
ask ourselves if we have in the top tray of this toolbox the practical commitment to prayer. This probably sounds obvious, but therein lays the problem. Any pastor will without exception affirm the invaluable quality of prayer for the church. Yet, even while we give the “amen,” we sadly continue not to elevate prayer to a place of prominence in our personal lives or in the church.

There is honestly no need to recount all the biblical material related to prayer. We know that God’s Word tells us to pray consistently, earnestly, and humbly while believing. We know that the Bible tells us we do not have because we do not ask. We know that we are to be authentic within the church and confess our faults and pray for one another. We know that we should approach God in prayer with bold assurance because He has told us He hears. We know all of this, yet prayerlessness keeps the church powerless and mired in mediocrity.

Every church has individual prayer warriors, but the church as a whole finds very little time or encouragement to be devoted to prayer regularly together. Many Baptist churches still have the traditional mid-week “prayer meeting.” However, the label is most often a misnomer. Over time, our prayer meetings have devolved into a short time of sharing about the sick or families who have experienced death. Then after a sincere prayer for these folks, we proceed with a sermon or Bible study. There is nothing fundamentally wrong with this. But let’s get real and not call it “prayer meeting.”

At the beginning of 2010, I made a decision to make that year’s emphasis prayer. We used the theme, “A house of prayer” and we were intentional about keeping the issue of prayer before the people. I preached messages about prayer. We offered a discipleship class on prayer from the Growing Disciples Series, Pray in Faith. But the most significant change was to our Wednesday evening prayer meeting. In the Sunday morning vision sermon in January 2010, I announced that prayer meeting would be refocused. Instead of continuing with ten minutes of prayer requests and brief prayer followed by thirty minutes of biblical exposition, we would reverse the format. I would love to report that the people embraced the idea and Wednesday evening attendance doubled. Actually, the attendance immediately fell off by half and has remained there since. But the half that stayed began to be transformed.

Prayer meeting was no longer a nice Bible study in which they sat and listened and learned. Nothing wrong with that, of course,
except that it’s not prayer meeting! Now, they were participants along with their pastor in praying. And praying for the sick was not the only matter for which we prayed. Over time, it became only one of many other vital issues of which we needed to be in earnest and consistent prayer. I led them to understand the importance of praying for the lost, for spiritual awakening in our church, for the ministries of our church, for laborers for the ministry, for our immediate community and country at large, and for God’s provision in all matters. Prayer meetings became highlighted (not every week) by testimonies of answered prayers. Various people in addition to the pastor would pray aloud during our time and often we would pray in small groups, in which virtually every person present prayed. People who had been in church for years were for the first time intentionally and regularly praying with others, not just listening to the pastor or a deacon pray. And we have seen God work. We have seen God save souls and provide for our needs. But it didn’t happen overnight.

When a pastor and a minority of people in a church begin truly to trust in the power of prayer, then a wonderful change begins to occur. First, we are forced to become more patient as we wait for God to move in answer to our prayers. And as we wait on the Lord, our faith is bolstered as we claim the promise of his provision long before we even know what it will exactly look like. Despair and
anxiety can be replaced by a quiet peace because we know that God will provide. And as we pray and wait and pray some more, we see more clearly when God moves and answers prayers. I’ve heard more than once from someone, “well, I’m not surprised, we’ve been praying about that!” But those moments of recognition are always preceded by a season of prayer that prepares our hearts to perceive God’s providential hand at work.

A second advantage to committing ourselves to prayer and exercising patience is that it keeps us from running ahead of God foolishly into really bad decisions and leads us to the right ones. I cringe when I hear someone assert, “Just do something!” That is often the battle cry of the fool who rushes into a decision that ends up causing conflict, waste and frustration. A commitment to prayer will give you assurance that God will make it clear when it’s time to act. He will bring about the right circumstances and pull together the right resources and people so that your decision will be spiritual and sensible. It has been said that it’s better to work smarter, not harder. Praying harder is working smarter. The problem we seem too often to have is that we don’t consider praying as doing. There’s praying about something. And then there is doing something. We have to renew our minds to understand that praying together is doing. And it is the first doing that ought to be done before anything else is done!

Prayer is not merely a good idea that the Bible points us toward; it is the most practical tool for your ministry tool box. As a pastor, I know that I have to be committed to a consistent prayer life. I must pray for myself, my wife, my children, and my church family. I must pray for wisdom and clarity in decision making. I must pray for the lost and for the spiritual needs of the flock. My two greatest responsibilities are to proclaim the Word of God faithfully and to pray relentlessly. One of the most important tasks I have as pastor is to lead the church to be a praying people. If pastors do not make prayer a priority, then it most likely will not be. And practically speaking, an effective prayer tool for the church impacts everything. You pray for the lost, for the backslidden, for the needy, for the youth ministry, for the Sunday school, for the budget needs, for special events, and so forth. It’s the most amazing, supernatural tool that’s guaranteed by God to work. Value it, plan for it, use it and know it is sufficient!
Faculty Preaching Schedule

Dr. Jeff Brawner  
Pastor, Island Community Church, Harbor Town, Memphis, TN

Dr. Van McClain  
Interim Pastor, Trinity Baptist Church, Niskayuna, NY

Dr. Stan May  
Pastor, Immanual Baptist Church, Olive Branch, MS

Dr. Jere Phillips  
Transitional Pastor, Oakhurst Baptist Church, Clarksdale, MS

Dr. David Shackelford  
Interim Pastor, First Baptist Church, Lakeland, TN

Dr. Steve Wilkes  
Interim Pastor, Second Baptist Church, West Helena, AR

Upcoming Events

Fellowship Luncheon at the Southern Baptist Convention  
June 14

Founders’ Days  
August 15 - 17

Adrian Rogers Center for Biblical Preaching Conference  
September 26 -28

Donors’ Banquet  
October 20
Gospel evangelism is the alphabet of the Christian spirit. What the alphabet is to literature, the soul-winning spirit is to Christianity—whether that soul-winning spirit be the individual’s plea with an individual or the evangelistic appeal from the pulpit to a great throng of people. Shakespeare, with all his wide range of thought, does not go beyond the alphabet. Trying to build a spiritual church with spiritual power without the soul-winning spirit and with revival effort is like trying to write “Macbeth” without the alphabet. The Alpha and Omega of Christianity is soul-winning.

’Tis pity ‘tis true that a sit-down strike has been staged by many when it comes to evangelistic teaching and preaching and personal soul-winning in our churches. Great buildings, programs, budgets, and choirs without the definite, earnest evangelistic spirit to win souls, is like trying to ripen a harvest with moonlight.

The churches are in the world to lead many to Christ. This they must do or be false in Christ.

In our evangelism today we must have many pulpits. The housetop was a pulpit to Jesus. The fisherman’s boat was a pulpit to Jesus. So was the shadow of a sycamore tree. So the dining table. The well curb! The sick room! The hillside! The roadway! The by-path! The doorstep! The mountainside! The market place! All these places were pulpits to Jesus. All such places were to Him pulpits where He preached to one, more than to many.

The woman at the well—to her Jesus preached with the well-curb as a pulpit and the noon-day sky as a roof! Zacchaeus—to him Jesus preached with the ground as a pulpit.

Let us not forget that “he that winneth souls is wise.”
This semester has been a busy one for us here in New York. Please allow me to take a moment and share with you some of what has taken place here on the Northeast Campus.

**Graduation**

On Friday evening, May 13, 2011, we will celebrate the graduation of seven of our students. Six of these men will receive their Master’s degrees; and we have one young man who will earn his Associate’s degree. Our commencement speaker this year will be Terry Robertson. Terry is the Executive Director of the Baptist Convention of New York. Pray for our graduates as they look to follow the Lord into the specific area of ministry that He would have them fulfill.

As we come to the end of this semester, let me also update you on the progress of our New York City classes. The classes at both sites have gone extremely well. We ended up with forty-five students in our Spanish speaking class in Queens and twenty-five in our French speaking class in Brooklyn. We have heard enthusiastic reports from students at both sites. In fact, as word continues to spread and interest grows, we are already
looking at starting classes at two other sites around New York City in the fall! Pray for us as we seek to follow the leading of the Lord in this direction. We have an amazing opportunity to help meet the needs of theological training here in the northeast. Because of this, we desire to be the campus God desires us to be!

**Special Events**

This spring has been particularly busy for us. We have had the opportunity to host several events on our campus. For example, we had our second annual Pastors’ Conference in April. Our guest was Dr. Danny Sinquefield, Pastor of Faith Baptist Church in Bartlett, Tennessee. Dr. Sinquefield came and shared with about twenty-five local pastors on how to have a church that has kingdom impact. It was a tremendous day of fellowship and learning. We also had our spring preview day. Seven prospects visited our campus on this day. Of those seven, one has already applied and intends to begin taking classes in the fall! We are grateful for the news of new students. Please pray that God would send us more students over the summer as we head into the fall. Towards the end of April, our President, Dr. Michael Spradlin, came and spent a couple of days with us. He preached twice sharing with us his exegesis of Zechariah chapters 11-12. Our students enjoyed the opportunity to have Dr. Mike on campus.

**Founders’ Days**

Speaking of the fall, let me put a “bug in your ear” about Founders’ Days on our campus. This year,
our Founders’ Days in the north-east will be different for a couple of reasons. First, we are planning a fall Founders’ Days for the first time. The dates for our Founders’ Days are October 3-5. Second, the Trustees of Mid-America will be having their fall meeting on our campus. I am elated that they can come and be here.

Due to the nature of this year’s Founders’ Days, we will be altering our schedule slightly from the normal agenda. Our Monday evening will be basically the same: Dr. Gray will tell the story and we will hear from a couple of guests.

On Tuesday, the Trustees will meet so we will not have our usual services in the morning. Guests will have the opportunity to see the sites in this area. Tuesday evening, however, we will have our normal schedule. Then, on Wednesday, we will have no services at all. We will be taking a “Great Awaken-

ing” tour. All those interested will have the opportunity to visit some of the most historical landmarks in the northeast and revisit some of the sites that have shaped our spiritual heritage. If you can, plan to come and be a part of the twenty-third Founders’ Days on the Northeast Campus.

Conclusion
Thanks for allowing me to take a moment and share with you some of what is happening here. If you read my “news” segments regularly, you know in the past I have spoken about the fact that God is working in the northeast. He is at work on our campus. He is at work in our churches. He is at work in our region. Pray for us when you think about us. And, as always, come and see.
While distance education courses cannot fully replace the face-to-face instruction of a regular classroom at the main campus, online classes and extension courses provide help for ministers who are unable to move to the Memphis area. Who are the students who take distance education courses? Meet a few of our students:

Corey Reeves and Jason Fisher work full time as executives in a computer software company that handles financial management systems.

James Terrance lives in West Monroe, Louisiana, and has begun his seminary studies with our online classes.

Timothy LaPlante, who lives in St. Louis, began his studies with MABTS online and will take extension classes in the new St. Louis extension in August.

Doug Hibbard is pastor of the First Baptist Church in Almyra, Arkansas. He is a returning student who is trying to come back and complete his work through MABTS.

Yoon Hwang lives in San Antonio, TX, and works for the Naval Medical Research Institute. With a strong background in biology and life science, he would like to understand God more deeply.

Jeremiah Henderson serves as the worship coordinator at River of Life Church in Guilderland, NY. He has had the privilege of serving our country part-time for the past six years in the Air National Guard as a Chaplain’s Assistant. He works full-time as a phlebotomist for the American Red Cross.

Perhaps you know someone who would like to pursue ministerial training with MABTS but cannot move to the main campus. Distance education offers an effective option. Please share with
prospective students the possibilities offered by this ministry at Mid-America and have them contact me at jphillips@mabts.edu

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## Distance Education Course Schedules 2011-2012

### Fall Semester Online

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greek 1 (MDIV)</td>
<td>Dr. Matt Akers</td>
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<tr>
<td>OT Elective Ezra-Nehemiah (MDIV/ADIV)</td>
<td>Dr. Matt Akers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systematic Theology 1 (MDIV)</td>
<td>Dr. Garry Graves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Bible Doctrines (ADIV)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Financial Management (ADIV)</td>
<td>Dr. Jere Phillips</td>
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### Oxford Extension Monday Classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Old Testament Survey 1 (MDIV/ADIV)</td>
<td>Dr. David Skinner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biblical Preaching 1 (MDIV/ADIV)</td>
<td>Dr. Eric Hankins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Growth (MDIV/ADIV)</td>
<td>Dr. Robert Allen</td>
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### St. Louis Extension Monday Classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Old Testament Survey 1 (MDIV/ADIV)</td>
<td>Dr. Curtis McClain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Formation (MDIV/ADIV)</td>
<td>Rev. Jim Breeden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of Christianity (MDIV/ADIV)</td>
<td>Dr. Mark Carpenter</td>
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### Saturday Classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall: Evangelism (MDIV/ADIV)</td>
<td>Dr. Jere Phillips and Rev. Chris Coury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring: Church Growth (MDIV/ADIV)</td>
<td>Dr. Steve Wilkes and Rev. Chris Coury</td>
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### Spring Semester Online

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greek 2 (MDIV)</td>
<td>Dr. Matt Akers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of the Baptists (MDIV/ADIV)</td>
<td>Dr. Jeff Brawner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systematic Theology 2 (MDIV)</td>
<td>Dr. Garry Graves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to Computing (ADIV)</td>
<td>Mr. Ray Meadows</td>
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### Old Testament Survey 2 (MDIV/ADIV)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Old Testament Survey 2 (MDIV/ADIV)</td>
<td>Dr. David Skinner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biblical Preaching 2 (MDIV/ADIV)</td>
<td>Dr. Eric Hankins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministerial Counseling (MDIV/ADIV)</td>
<td>Dr. Jere Phillips</td>
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### History of Christianity (MDIV/ADIV)

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<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apologetics (MDIV/ADIV)</td>
<td>Dr. Mark Carpenter</td>
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Alumni News

1978
Larry Pridmore (MDIV) is hosting an annual Bible Conference on May 31 through June 1 at Southside Baptist Church in Mansfield, LA.

1982
Dillard Lykins (MDIV) is retired from full-time vocational ministry, but is very active in his local church in witnessing and discipleship in Three Way, TN.

1993
John Michael Dobson (MDIV) serves as a National Missionary with NAMB and as Associate Director of North American Missions and Church Planting at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

1994
Doyal Long (ADIV 1988 & MDIV, 1994) has retired from serving in pastoral ministries from Bellevue Baptist Church in Cordova, TN, on March 31, 2011.

2002
Reagan Reeves (MDIV) serves as Associate Director of Missions of FIRM Baptist Area in Cameron, TX.

2006
Brad Jones (ADIV) has accepted the call to pastor Looxahoma Baptist Church in Senatobia, MS. He was serving at Heartland Community Church in South Glens Falls, NY.

2007
Andy Price (ADIV) is planting a church in Wynne, AR, called Harvest Gate Church.

2010
Joseph Bresnahan (PhD) is serving on faculty at Criswell College in Dallas, TX, as a professor of Theology.

News from the May 2011 Graduates:

Shun Abram (MDIV) serves as pastor of Birmingham Community Church in Memphis, TN.

Mike Baker (PhD and MDIV, 2008) is pastoring Crosswind Baptist Church in Union City, TN.

Daniel DeWitt (ADIV) is serving as an assistant in the recreation ministry at Leawood East Baptist Church in Cordova, TN.

Allen Fletchall (MDIV) serves as Sunday school teacher at Kirby Woods Baptist Church in Memphis, TN.

David Foust (MMISS) serves as youth pastor of Colonial Baptist Church in Memphis, TN.

Jason Garrison (PhD) is serving as education associate minister at Faith Baptist Church in Bartlett, TN.

Russell Gourley (MCE) serves as Sunday School teacher at First Baptist Church in Eads, TN.

Allyson Hauss (MACE) is serving with her husband, Greg at Bellevue Baptist Church on the Arlington campus.
Kenneth Lewis (MDIV) is serving as associate pastor of Binghampton Community Church in Memphis, TN.

Kathy Rainwater (MMISS) has served as a missions intern at Germantown Baptist Church in Germantown, TN, for the past three years, and currently teaches an English as a Secondary Language class that has seen numerous people come to know Christ.

Jonathan Mays (MMISS) is serving as a missions intern at Germantown Baptist Church in Germantown, TN.

Toby Stone (ADIV) serves in maintenance at First Baptist Church in Fisherville, TN. He and his wife, Mary, serve as mentors at Youth Villages in Bartlett, TN.

The Mid-America family would like to offer our deepest sympathy to:

Carolyn Bays Suttles (MRE) in the passing of her husband, Jackie Suttles, on April 18, 2011, from a long illness.

Please call the alumni office at 901.751.3037, send us an email at alumnioffice@mabts.edu, or complete the alumni update form on our website at www.mabts.edu regarding updates, praises, prayer requests, or family news.
“Rangers lead the way General.” “How do you know that?” He asked. I replied, “I used to be a ranger.” That was the beginning of a long conversation I had with Major General Doug Carver, the outgoing US Army Chief of Chaplains, at the 2008 Southern Baptist Convention in Indianapolis, IN. Our conversation that day resulted in my reentering the US Army as a North American Mission Board appointed military chaplain by November that same year.

In 2008, I was the pastor of Memorial Baptist Church in New Castle, IN, my second church after graduating from MABTS in 1998. I was also a permanent adjunct professor in Religious Studies at Indiana University East in Richmond, IN, but I had grown restless and had been praying for direction and clarity for my ministry. As Patti and I drove home from the Southern Baptist Convention that night, we talked about the idea of going back into the Army in the Chaplaincy. I served eight years on active duty in the 80s and 90s, as an infantryman in the 75th Ranger Regiment and as a Drill Instructor but left the Army to pursue God’s call to fulltime Christian service after being converted to faith in 1990. I missed the Army nearly every day after leaving active duty in February 1992, but never really thought about the Chaplaincy until that conversation with MG Carver. Patti and I prayed for a week about the Lord’s will in this new direction of ministry for our family, and we quickly came to the conclusion that this was indeed God’s will for us.

The transition from pastor/professor to Army Chaplain was seamless. The only request that I had for the US Army chaplain recruiter was to try and get me back into an airborne unit, and much to my surprise my first assignment was with 3rd Battalion, 4th Psychological Operations Group at Fort
Bragg, NC. It is still hard for me to believe that in December 2008 I was the pastor of a church and four months later I had graduated from my Chaplain Basic Course at Fort Jackson, SC, and was an Army Chaplain in a special operations unit at Fort Bragg, NC. I was forty-three and jumping out of airplanes again! Words cannot adequately explain the sheer excitement I was experiencing in my new ministry. I loved being back in uniform, jumping out of planes, conducting physical training runs before daylight, and working around hundreds of twenty-year-olds. I quickly came to see that the previous years of ministerial experience and thorough education had all been to prepare me for this season in my life. MABTS so engrained in me the confidence and boldness to share the gospel with anyone, anywhere that I found myself talking to everyone from Privates to Colonels about personal faith and commitment to Jesus Christ. The word began to spread fast that the new chaplain was passionate about his calling and work.

The first person I saw come to saving faith in Christ was one of my company commanders. A Major walked into my office one day, shut the door, and said, “Charlie, can you tell me how to become a Christian?” Wow, can it
get any better than that! Needless to say, I had the opportunity to share the gospel clearly with this young commander and see him profess personal faith in Christ a few weeks later. This was just the beginning of evangelism with the commanders God had placed in my path. While deployed in 2009, I had the opportunity to have long, detailed, conversations about Christ with my battalion and group commanders and have since seen both of their lives and faiths enriched.

In June 2010, the Army reassigned me to the 6th Ranger Training Battalion on Eglin Air Force Base, the Florida phase of US Army Ranger School. I had not been here since I went to Ranger School in 1985, and there were no chaplains in Ranger School back then, so I was not sure what to expect. What I have found here is that this is a great place to be a chaplain. We live on a small compound called Camp James E. Rudder. I minister to 2,000 American Warriors per year that come through Ranger School, and I have 250 Ranger Instructors and their families as my permanent “flock.” Because we are in the middle nowhere, rather than taking my family off camp and plugging into a local church, like we did at Fort Bragg, we regularly hold chapel services here for the camp families. We meet in an outdoor chapel and have baptism services in a pond, snakes and all! In many ways, being the chaplain here is very much like being a pastor of a small church, and the whole family has actively engaged in the ministry. Patti and I started a children's Sunday school that meets in the Army dining facility, and she and my children teach children’s church to our camp preschoolers during the worship services. Oh yeah, and I get to jump out of just about anything that can fly multiple times a month too. Patti and I have often said that if we would have known that military ministry would have been this fulfilling we would have done it right out of seminary, but we also know that part of what has made it such a fulfilling experience is the experience we gained putting what we learned at MABTS to good use in the local Bride of Christ for nearly seventeen years prior to this calling. If you are wrestling with a call to military ministry, I enthusiastically recommend it and welcome you to contact me for more information. Rangers Lead the Way, but Jesus is the ONLY Way!

Dr. Charlie Shields
Battalion Chaplain • 6th Ranger Training Battalion
Camp James E Rudder, • Eglin Air Force Base, FL • Charles.shields@eglin.af.mil
Financial bondage, and all the frustrations and worries that go with it, occurs because we insist upon controlling our own hearts and rebelling against the principles and laws that God has revealed in His Word. We resort to all kinds of manipulation, schemes, and plots to achieve our goals instead of God’s goal. Even our tithe becomes a scheme or plot...we give to get.

God’s goal is that we be conformed to the image of His Son Jesus. As we stubbornly refuse to seek God’s ways, we deify the things we seek, whether it is money, things, success, fame, or power. When we do this, we give the obsession we seek illegitimate power over us.

It becomes an idol. Psalms 115 describes idols of silver and gold that, have mouths, but cannot hear, noses, but cannot smell; they have hands, but cannot feel...those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.

What then must a Christian do to be free? Scripture teaches that, where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Cor. 3:17). Freedom to a Christian then is not freedom to do what we want to do; rather, it is freedom to do what we ought to do.
We must understand that we are subject to the consequences of our choices. Therefore, it is good if we chose God and His way, for God in His Scriptures has shown us the way to freedom. The Scriptures contain many promises of the power of His Word to free us and release us from bondage, but He has prerequisites: Action on our part is required.

The Christian who is seeking freedom and God’s best must be willing to submit to His will and His direction. We must realize that God’s will is not always compatible with our wishes. Many Christians say they are willing to accept God’s direction, but their actions deny it. We have a tremendous capacity to use reason to justify what our conscience rationalizes.

I believe to be a cheerful giver we have to tear down the idols in our life, submit ourselves to God and accept His direction. God will provide contentment and freedom, and with it all, the blessings of the Lord (Proverbs 10:22).
Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary is a school whose primary purpose is to provide graduate theological training for effective service in church-related and missions vocations through its main campus and designated branch campuses. Other levels of training are also offered.