

Musical couple begins new phase of ministry in Australia

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Musical couple begins new phase of ministry in Australia

By Jonathan Petty

Wayland Baptist University

PLAINVIEW—After three years in Australia performing Christian concerts, Clint and Jennifer Staj are spending the holidays state-side this year before starting work in January as youth ministers at an Australian Baptist church.

Three years ago, the Stajes—along with band members and fellow Wayland Baptist University alumni Greg and Sara Howle and Salem Posey—moved to Australia where they performed Christian concerts under the name Zuigia. About a year ago, the group members decided to go their separate ways.



Clint and Jennifer Staj, with 9-month-old Makarios, continue their mission work in Australia. After the first of the year, they will begin work as youth ministers at Cooma Baptist Church.

Baptist bell-ringer tolls for Episcopal weddings, funerals

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Irene Raymond is a Baptist but has been ringing the bell at All Saints Episcopal Church in Mobile, Ala., for weddings and funerals more than 35 years. (RNS photo/Mike Kittrell/*Press-Register* of Mobile, Ala.)

Baptist bell-ringer tolls for Episcopal weddings, funerals

By Roy Hoffman

Religion News Service

OBILE, Ala. (RNS)—Solemn and intent, Irene Raymond stands in the vestibule of All Saints Episcopal Church and clutches the rope that leads through a hole in the ceiling to a 1,500-pound bell.

Slowly, methodically, she puts the whole weight of her body into the first pull—gong. Then, as the bell swings the other way high above, she pulls down again, harder. Gong!

Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

[Higher Ground: A Call for Christian Civility](#) by Russell Dilday (Smyth & Helwys)

Conflict is inevitable in any relationship. Unfortunately, most Christians are ill prepared to handle conflict in a Christ-like manner.

Russell Dilday provides an insightful option to how conflict can be addressed. He uses his personal experience in the Southern Baptist Convention controversy of the 1980s to call Christians to higher ground during times of conflict.

Off the Bookshelf
What's everyone reading anyway?

What are you reading that other Texas Baptists would find helpful? Send suggestions and reviews to books@baptiststandard.com.

The conflict and methods of conflict that occurred in the convention easily could have names changed and possible tactics changed, but the results and motives would remain the same as the conflicts that occur within local congregations. This book is a somber reminder that by taking the name of

Christ as our own, we are called to a different standard.

Baptist Briefs

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Baptist Briefs

Florida Baptists adopt alcohol abstinence policy. Messengers to the Florida Baptist State Convention annual meeting overwhelmingly approved a bylaw revision requiring all trustee nominees to sign a pledge that they will abstain from drinking alcoholic beverages and using any other recreational drugs. The bylaw revision on alcohol abstention—proposed by the Florida State Board of Missions—passed with few dissenting votes. The abstinence provision resulted from a pledge announced by Executive Director John Sullivan at the Florida convention’s 2006 annual meeting. Reacting to a prolonged debate at the 2006 Southern Baptist Convention over the use of beverage alcohol, Sullivan said he was “embarrassed” by the protracted discussion and wanted to clarify Florida Baptists’ position on the issue. Messengers to the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention annual meeting passed a similar measure binding on its staff and elected officials.

Kentucky Baptists hear ‘troubling’ report on spiritual maturity. Messengers to the Kentucky Baptist Convention’s annual meeting heard a

sobering report on the theological views of average Kentucky Baptists. Scott McConnell, associate director of LifeWay Christian Resources' research department, presented findings from a study on the level of spiritual maturity and discipleship among Kentucky Baptists. Describing some of the findings as "troubling," McConnell said only 49 percent of respondents disagreed with the "heretical statement" that "Christians must continually work toward their salvation or risk losing it" and only 45 percent disagreed with the statement that "if a person is sincerely seeking God, he or she can obtain eternal life through religions other than Christianity."

South Texas church helps hunters feel at home

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First Baptist
Church in
Cotulla
declared the
first Sunday
of whitetail
deer season
this year
“Camo
Sunday” and
promoted it
that way.
Members
were
encouraged
to attend
church
wearing
camouflaged
clothing,
and about
two-thirds
did—enough
to make any
hunter in his
or her gear
feel
welcome.

South Texas church helps hunters feel at home

COTULLA—Hunting means big business in South Texas, worth tens of thousands of dollars each year to ranchers and the overall local economy. First Baptist Church of Cotulla decided to capitalize on the annual influx of visiting hunters—not for the benefit of their church, but for God’s kingdom.

Pastor Steve Parker recognized what happens every hunting season. The town fills with visitors from all over the world. The county continues to lengthen its airport runway to accommodate ever-larger corporate jets.

After observing this for a couple of years, Parker and other church leaders asked what they could do to minister to local residents who work on the ranches 24 hours a day, seven days a week, as well as to visiting hunters who might be interested in attending an informal worship service.

The church developed strategies to meet both needs. It declared the first Sunday of whitetail deer season this year “Camo Sunday” and advertised it on a sign in front of the church, located on the main thoroughfare through town. Members were encouraged to attend church wearing camouflaged clothing, and about two-thirds did—enough to make any hunter in his or her gear feel welcome.

Cartoon

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Conservative Christians show growing acceptance of divorce

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Conservative Christians show growing acceptance of divorce

By Adelle M. Banks

Religion News Service

WASHINGTON (RNS)—When Pentecostal power couple Randy and Paula White recently announced they were headed to divorce court, the most remarkable part of the reaction was that there wasn't much reaction at all among their supporters.

For increasing numbers of clergy, a divorce no longer generates the kind of career-killing hue and cry of decades ago, in part because plenty of people in the pews have experienced divorce themselves.

DOWN HOME: Children of Zacapa: God bless them all

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DOWN HOME: Children of Zacapa: God bless them all

Pichi grabbed my attention. Alex fired my imagination. Manuel warmed and broke my heart.

They live in an orphanage in Zacapa, Guatemala. I met them when a group from my church, First Baptist in Lewisville, spent most of a week there. We'll send three mission teams per year for at least three years to Zacapa, working in cooperation with Buckner International.

Pichi came up to me as we entered the compound. She didn't say a word, but she spoke with the biggest, brownest 4-year-old eyes I've ever seen. She smiled; I got weak in the knees.

Later, Pichi nestled into my lap as we listened to a Bible story delivered in English and translated into Spanish. She didn't squirm, but leaned into my chest and traced the outline of my fingers with her own. If the laws of two countries didn't prohibit it, I'm sure I could've been convinced to buy an airline ticket and bring her home to Texas.

EDITORIAL: A view from both sides of the pulpit

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EDITORIAL: A view from both sides of the pulpit

Preaching is a lot like playing shortstop.

When I was a young man, Hall of Famer Ozzie Smith mesmerized me with the way he played shortstop for the St. Louis Cardinals. With Ozzie, grace defied gravity. He turned baseball into ballet, equal parts beauty and power. Most amazingly, he made it all look so simple and easy. I wanted to be like Ozzie; I wanted to play shortstop.

Then, just once, the manager of our church-league softball team moved me from right field to short. I was thrilled. Then humiliated. When I tried to field grounders, somebody in the stands wondered why I wore cinder blocks instead of cleats. And when I tried to throw a runner out at first, the second baseman ducked. It was a long night.



Like playing shortstop, preaching is a lot harder than it looks. In this issue, we're examining this divine craft. Preaching, not shortstop. I spend most Sundays in a pew, listening to someone else preach a sermon. So, I resonate with Baptist laypeople the world over. But my job sometimes affords me the opportunity to stand behind a pulpit and seek to deliver a message from God. So, I empathize with preachers. From that vantage point, I'd like to offer a few words to both groups.

Engage conferences designed to inspire, equip for evangelism

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Engage conferences designed

to inspire, equip for evangelism

By John Hall

Texas Baptist Communications

DALLAS—[Engage](#) and [Radical Engage](#)—conferences designed to inspire and equip Texas Baptists to evangelize the state—are scheduled Jan. 13-15 at LakePointe Church in Rockwall and feature speakers from around the nation.

The events continue a long tradition of bringing Texas Baptists together to focus on what God has called them to do—share the gospel, said Jon Randles, director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas Evangelism Team.

Faith Digest

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Faith Digest

Christian groups commit to cooperation. More than 240 Christian leaders said they left an international summit in Kenya committed to building closer ties among the world's Christian denominations. The Global Christian Forum, meeting near Nairobi, brought together Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, and Pentecostal and charismatic Christian leaders. It

also assembled groups that had sometimes been at odds, including the World Council of Churches and the more conservative World Evangelical Alliance.

Oral Roberts University president resigns. The embattled president of Oral Roberts University resigned amid intense scrutiny over allegations of financial, political and other wrongdoing at the charismatic Christian university in Tulsa, Okla. Richard Roberts, son of the university's namesake founder, submitted a resignation letter to ORU's board of regents Nov. 23. The resignation came just days before the board was scheduled to hear the results of an outside investigation of allegations against him and his wife, Lindsay. Roberts, chairman and CEO of Oral Roberts Ministries, had placed himself on an indefinite leave of absence Oct. 17 as university president. But he had said he expected to return to the post in "God's timing." He was the second president in the 42-year history of the 4,000-student university, succeeding his father, Oral Roberts, in 1993. The allegations that sparked the turmoil over Richard Roberts' presidency were raised in a lawsuit filed Oct. 2 by three former ORU professors who claim efforts to act as whistleblowers cost them their jobs. The lawsuit in Tulsa County District Court alleges illegal political activity and lavish, unchecked spending by Richard Roberts and his family.

Ghana minister to Texans: ‘We need help’

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Ghana minister to Texans: ‘We need help’

By George Henson

Staff Writer

DALLAS—Yaw Ofori traveled from Ghana to Texas to communicate a very simple message: “We need your help.”

Christians in Ghana need people to provide training to help them plant new churches, said Ofori, director of missions for the Ghana Baptist Convention. Of the 75 people groups who live in Ghana, 15 are unreached with the gospel, he said.

Yaw Ofori
