

Too many Christians fail to recognize opportunities

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Too many Christians fail to recognize opportunities

By Ken Camp

Managing Editor

BROWNWOOD—Christians miss divine appointments because too many churches fail to challenge members to recognize international contacts as missions opportunities, said Mary Carpenter, director of [cross-cultural studies](#) at [Howard Payne University](#).

“Christians are traveling and doing business globally, but too often we, as churches, are not training them to think globally,” she said.

Stop inflammatory rhetoric about gays, theologian urges

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Stop inflammatory rhetoric about gays, theologian urges

By **Hannah Elliott**

Associated Baptist Press

WASHINGTON (ABP)—An evangelical theologian told her colleagues recently they must “cease and desist” publishing materials with “inflammatory language” about homosexuals.

Linda Belleville made the comments in an address to fellow members of the [Evangelical Theological Society](#) during the group’s annual conference in Washington.

Star Wars Force followers claim more Jedi than Jews in Great Britain

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Star Wars Force followers claim

more Jedi than Jews in Great Britain

By Al Webb

Religion News Service

LONDON (RNS)—A pair of London science fiction enthusiasts are petitioning the United Nations to formally recognize the Jedi Knights of *Star Wars* fame as a legitimate religion.

Umada and Yun-yun—known in real life as John Wilkinson and Charlotte Law—base their case on the results of [Britain's 2001 census](#) in which some 395,000 followers of the *Star Wars* cult recorded their faith as “Jedi.”

Laredo church prays for release of kidnapped members

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Laredo church prays for release of kidnapped members

By George Henson

Staff Writer

LAREDO—At press time, members of United Baptist Church in Laredo continued to pray for the safe return of the congregation's treasurer and his son, along with another man.

Librado Pina Jr., United's treasurer and a Laredo businessman, [was kidnapped](#) along with his son, Librado Pina III, two hunters and a cook from a ranch owned by Pina in Mexico near the border. The ranch is leased for deer hunting.

MySpace lets youth ministers peek into teenagers' lives

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MySpace lets youth ministers peek into teenagers' lives

By Chansin Bird

Religion News Service

FAYETTEVILLE, Ark. (RNS)—Youth minister Lara Blackwood starts her day the same way most of the young people at her church do. She signs on at [MySpace.com](#).

"Any time they post a new blog, I get a message in my e-mail and cell

phone that such and such has posted a new blog,” said Blackwood, youth minister at First Christian Church of Fayetteville, Ark., and a regional youth minister for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Arkansas, Mississippi and Louisiana.

On the Move

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On the Move

- **Harvey Abke** to First Church in Fresno as pastor.
 - **Steve Akin** to First Church in Athens as minister of missions, where he was minister of music and missions.
 - **John Barnard** to First Church in Brenham as student minister.
 - **David Beirne** to Travis Church in Corpus Christi as pastor from Fox Avenue Church in Lewisville.
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Fisherman finds letters sent to God

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Fisherman finds letters sent to God

By Wayne Parry

Religion News Service

NEWARK, N.J. (RNS)—A fisherman who found a bag of 300 letters to God floating in the ocean off Atlantic City will give most of them to the daughter of the dead minister for whom they were intended.

Bill Lacovara, an insurance adjuster, said he plans to give the letters to Vanessa Cooper, the daughter of Grady Cooper, a former associate pastor of the Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Jersey City who died nearly two years ago.

Studies shed light on religion's role in American

life

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Studies shed light on religion's role in American life

By David Briggs

Religion News Service

PORTLAND, Ore. (RNS)—Who's speaking in tongues? Do chastity pledges work? What do religious consumers buy?

Exploring a world immersed in faith and mystery, religious research scholars provide hard sociological data to give some practical answers about the role of religion in American life.

Poverty trumps hot-button issues with most voters

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Poverty trumps hot-button issues with most voters

By Hannah Elliott

Associated Baptist Press

WASHINGTON (ABP)—“Kitchen-table” issues like poverty and greed were more important to voters in this year’s midterm elections than issues usually trumpeted by religious groups, recent surveys revealed.

Commissioned by [Faith in Public Life](#) and [Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good](#), the survey reported that faith groups who told voters to consider kitchen-table issues when voting had a 20 point higher national favorability rating than religious groups that told people to vote for candidates according to views on abortion and same-sex marriage.

“More than twice as many voters named poverty, greed and economic crisis as the biggest moral problems in the United States than abortion. When voters hear from groups that are emphasizing these issues, they like what they hear.”

Program gives poor families reason to give thanks

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Two HOPE
program
participants
present
Shontoya
Watt (center)
with a
surprise
turkey
delivery just
before
Thanksgiving.
Sarah
Eubank,
HOPE
program
supervisor,
looks on in
the
background.

Program gives poor families reason to give thanks

By **Miranda Bradley**

Children at Heart Ministries

ROUND ROCK—Shontoya Watt works hard to provide for her family, but living in a low-income housing complex, she hasn't always found it easy to give thanks.

This Thanksgiving was different, due largely to [Texas Baptist Children's Home's](#) HOPE program.

TOGETHER: From Thanksgiving on to Christmas

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TOGETHER: From Thanksgiving on to Christmas

This season always comes as a special gift to me. Caught up between Thanksgiving and Christmas, my spirit begins to soar a bit more, like a bird riding the updrafts of sun-warmed air rising from overheated fields of

freshly plowed earth or miles of urban asphalt.

Some of the exhilaration is purely family and memories. I have been blessed with family trips, warm welcomes and slowed-down schedules that hover around me like benedictions.



Executive Director
BGCT Executive
Board

One snowy day, we piled into our Volkswagen Beetle to hurry from my folks' home to Rosemary's folks' home so we could spend part of Christmas day with both families. Racing across Oklahoma's rolling hills, suddenly the front hood sprung loose and flew back against the windshield.

Three children were riding in the tiny backseat and "cubby space." They squealed in amazement and then concern. "Daddy, don't let the presents fall out!"

Wade to release Valley probe to law-enforcement officials

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Wade to release Valley probe to law-enforcement officials

By John Hall

Texas Baptist Communications

MCALLEN—Baptist General Convention of Texas Executive Director Charles Wade will give law-enforcement officials complete copies of a BGCT-commissioned investigative report and all relevant exhibits regarding alleged misuse of convention church-starting funds in the Rio Grande Valley.

BGCT leaders are attempting to schedule a meeting with law-enforcement officials in an effort to gauge their interest in the documents.

• [See complete list of Valley funds scandal articles](#)