

Baptist Briefs

January 18, 2008

Posted: 1/18/08

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Church compensation survey under way. The 2008 compensation survey for Southern Baptist churches, a joint effort of Baptist state conventions, LifeWay Christian Resources and GuideStone Financial Resources, is online at www.LifeWay.com/compensationsurvey. All ministers and employees of Southern Baptist churches are encouraged to participate. Answers to the online survey are kept confidential and are not reported individually. The survey takes, on average, less than 10 minutes to complete. In addition to salary and benefit information, participants in the survey will need to have available their church's average weekly worship or Bible study attendance, resident membership and annual budget. LifeWay and GuideStone are pooling resources to conduct the online survey, compile the data and make available an online reporting tool for users to access results. Southern Baptist church ministers and employees may complete the survey through April 15. For staff at churches without Internet access, a paper copy of the survey may be obtained by contacting GuideStone Financial Resources at (888) 98-GUIDE (984-8433).

CBF to lease building from Mercer. The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship has signed a 10-year lease with Mercer University for offices previously occupied by the Georgia Baptist Convention. The state convention recently moved to new office building in Atlanta's northern suburbs. CBF will rent the offices—which are part of Mercer's Atlanta campus—in an agreement

that solidifies the existing partnership between the two groups. CBF has occupied offices elsewhere on the campus since 1997, occupying space on the second floor of Mercer's McAfee School of Theology building. With the new lease, the Fellowship will move into a 19,000-square-foot space on the first floor of a facility that houses administrative offices and conference facilities. The building also is the new home of the Baptist History and Heritage Society, which moved into the facility last year. The American Baptist Historical Society is scheduled to occupy space in the building as well.

Cartoon

January 18, 2008

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2nd Opinion: Looking for

something reliable

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2nd Opinion: Looking for something reliable

By Bruce Lampert

The tradition of Groundhog Day came to the United States from Northern Europe. Legend has it the groundhog awakens from his winter sleep on the second day of February. He sticks his head out of his den and looks around. If the sun is shining, he can see his shadow. The shadow frightens him, so he scampers back into his hole—six more weeks of winter! But if it's cloudy that day, then the groundhog can't see his shadow, and he will stay outside his hole. This means spring is on its way.

Obviously, there's nothing scientific about Groundhog Day, but there was at least some scientific observation involved in its origin. Somewhere in the misty past, somebody figured out the relationship between the weather on the second day of February and the weather patterns of the following several weeks. Then they associated that relationship with a familiar woodland creature, and they passed the information along. Soon it became part of folk wisdom.

We shouldn't be too hard on folk wisdom. There's actually some real wisdom in it—like the Farmer's Almanac, which still enjoys a wide circulation. For some reason, people who plant their gardens by the signs in the moon seem to make better gardens than those who just plant when

they get a chance.

Stop complaining, and life becomes more enjoyable

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Stop complaining, and life becomes more enjoyable

By Shona Crabtree

Religion News Service

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (RNS)—Last year, Will Bowen gave a sermon challenging listeners not to complain for 21 consecutive days. He handed out purple bracelets as a reminder.

One year later, 4.6 million people in more than 80 countries have taken up the challenge. Bowen's recent book, *A Complaint Free World: How to Stop Complaining and Start Enjoying the Life You Always Wanted*, extols the spiritual virtues of a complaint-free life.

Will Bowen

Death penalty opponents find new allies among evangelicals

January 18, 2008

Posted: 1/18/08

Death penalty opponents find new allies among evangelicals

By G. Jeffrey MacDonald

Religion News Service

CARRBORO, N.C. (RNS)—Stephen Dear has spent the past 10 years waging an uphill battle to abolish the death penalty in the American South—with virtually no help from the region’s powerful evangelical ministers.

But unlike in years past, Dear has new confidence that within six months, he can round up 100 conservative clergy in North Carolina alone to sign an open letter denouncing the current system of capital punishment.

DOWN HOME: Comic's nonmarriage not funny

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DOWN HOME: Comic's nonmarriage not funny

Did you see where comedian Eddie Murphy's New Year's Day wedding on the South Pacific island of Bora Bora to movie producer Tracey Edmonds was "only symbolic"?

I wonder if Edmonds' daddy is scouring all the wedding photos, looking to see if he can find evidence that Murphy had his fingers crossed behind his back. Maybe Murphy walked his new bride back down the aisle, looked over his shoulder, lit up the room with his zillion-watt grin, and shouted, "Just kidding!"

Now, I'll be the first to admit Murphy is a talented comedian and a very, very funny guy. I still crack up remembering some of his "Mr. Robinson's Neighborhood" and "Buckwheat" skits on *Saturday Night Live*. His *Beverly Hills Cop* franchise had its moments of jocularly. And his sidekick Donkey stole every episode of *Shrek*.

But this just ain't funny.

EDITORIAL: Countries, conventions need free press

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EDITORIAL: Countries, conventions need free press

A friend forwarded an e-mail citing the “memoirs” of Vo Nguyen Giap, a general in North Vietnam during its war with the United States. The e-mail quotes Giap as saying: “Your media was definitely helping us. They were causing more disruption in America than we could in the battlefields.” It then makes a contemporary application: “The exact same slippery slope, sponsored by the U.S. media, is currently well under way. It exposes the enormous power of a biased media to cut out the heart and will of the American public. ... Do not fear the enemy, for they can take only your life. Fear the media far more, for they will destroy your honor.”



The quote is bogus (debunked by websites snopes.com and about.com), but the e-mail illustrates a common perception—a free press is dangerous for freedom. Such thinking is broad-based—in society and among Baptists. How ironic that free people don't seem to value one of the freedoms guaranteed in the First Amendment. Some considerations:

Even if you were to believe in this quote, a communist general isn't exactly the most reliable commentator. We fought a war with his kind precisely because they deny freedom. And what do communists and other despots do upon seizing power? They take over the media, so that they control exactly what the people hear and read, what they believe they know, and, eventually, what they think. This is the polar opposite of democracy.

Still, some Americans reflexively complain about the media. They say they want Supreme Court justices to interpret law based exclusively upon what the Founding Fathers wrote in the Constitution. But these same people seem to think the Founding Fathers were out of their minds when they included freedom of speech and freedom of the press in the First Amendment. The Fathers knew what they were doing. And people today can't have it both ways.

**ENGAGE: The most effective
evangelism tool? The one
Christians will use**

January 18, 2008

Posted: 1/18/08

During a breakout session at the Engage evangelism conference, Texas Baptists talk about how to share the gospel in a postmodern context.

ENGAGE: **The most effective evangelism tool?** *The one Christians will use*

By John Hall

Texas Baptist Communications

ROCKWALL—The most effective evangelism tool for any Christian is the one he or she actually uses, speakers told participants at the Engage evangelism conference, sponsored by the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

James Lankford, student ministry and evangelism specialist with the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, said Christians have made evangelism seem complicated, creating an environment where laypeople don't feel

qualified to share their faith.



Jon Randles, evangelism director for the Baptist General Convention of Texas, told the Engage conference that Christians must be intentional about living evangelistic lives by seeking to build relationships with non-Christians and praying for people around them.

Faith Digest

January 18, 2008

Posted: 1/18/08

Faith Digest

Evolution and religion compatible, scientists insist. A top panel of scientists has published a new book asserting that belief in the theory of

evolution and religious faith “can be fully compatible,” and creationism has no place in science classes. The 88-page *Science, Evolution, and Creationism*, produced by the National Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Medicine, is an updated version of two previous books supporting evolution scholarship. The 2008 version is different, according to the 15-person committee that designed it, because it is aimed at clergy and school board members and discusses the role of faith in human knowledge. “Science and religion address separate aspects of human experience,” the book says.

‘In God We Trust’ will move from edge to surface of coins. By popular demand, the national motto “In God We Trust” will move from the edge of new dollar coins honoring U.S. presidents to the front or back of the currency. A provision in the \$555 billion domestic spending bill for 2008 calls for the change to take place “as soon as is practicable.” The U.S. Mint began producing presidential one-dollar coins in 2007. The words “In God We Trust” were placed along the edge of the coins, as instructed by Congress. But critics complained about the placement and thought the words belonged on the front or back of the coins instead. The dies already have been produced for the 2008 coins, so those will still have the motto along the edge. But the motto will be moved on 2009 coins.

Redeemed Klansman reunites with long-ago victim

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Redeemed Klansman reunites with long-ago victim

By Roy Hoffman

Religion News Service

MOBILE, Ala. (RNS)—Stan Chassin, a 59-year-old investment counselor, had been nervous all day. He had heard a bully from his youth was coming back to town.

Tommy Tarrants had terrorized Chassin in high school by cursing him for being Jewish, grabbing him by the throat and threatening to kill him.

Trial date set for suit by dismissed female prof

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Trial date set for suit by dismissed female prof

By Hannah Elliott

Associated Baptist Press

UPLAND, Ind. (ABP)—Sheri Klouda sparked denominational—and national—debate when she cried foul last year over her [dismissal from teaching](#) at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, allegedly because of her gender.

Ten months later and anticipating a year of legal proceedings, media interviews and medical procedures for her ailing husband, the professor says she hopes to come out of it with “resolution and closure—having a final decision made on the matter and a righteous and just decision being rendered.”

Texas Baptist Forum

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Texas Baptist Forum

Happy-clappy or ‘Amen’?

What a marvelous letter from Richard Berry concerning banning “applause-

attracting” parts of the worship service ([Jan. 7](#)).

- [Jump to online-only letters below](#)

Letters are welcomed. Send them to marvknox@baptiststandard.com; 250 words maximum.



"I'm an optimist—by choice. It's because of Christ in me, the hope of glory, that I can chose to be an optimist rather than a cynic, which is much easier. It is because of that hope that I still run, that I still love, that I still play."

Berry Simpson

Sunday school teacher, petroleum engineer, writer, runner and member of the Midland city council (<http://berry.voxtropolis.com>)

"The success I've had has given me a platform to try to let people know what's really important in life. If you're not feeding the poor, not looking out for the troubled kid on the block, not giving yourself away, you've totally missed it."

Michael W. Smith

Contemporary Christian singer
(Associated Press/RNS)

"There is a self-righteousness, a glibness in their writing. They are too sure of themselves. They've backed themselves into a fundamentalist mode."

Bill Hamilton

A leader of the "death of God" theological movement of the 1960s, describing recent books by militant atheists (RNS)

It will never happen, because our folks are so entrenched in the “entertain me” philosophy they will never be able to admit the truth that we gather to worship God, not to please and entertain ourselves.

For years, I have been dismayed by the “Christian artists,” the happy-clappy services and the hand-clapping, finger-snapping presentations that draw attention to themselves rather than to an omnipotent God. I recently saw a clip on TV where a young boy did a “cannonball” into the baptistry to the surprise of the preacher. Everyone thought it was hilarious.