

vision

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary
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BAPTISM

**BURIED WITH CHRIST
RAISED TO WALK IN NEWNESS OF LIFE**

A Great Commission Resurgence, New Orleans Style

BY DR. CHUCK KELLEY

There is a great deal of conversation across the SBC these days about the Great Commission, the clear directive from Jesus to His disciples in Matthew 28:18-20 to make disciples of all nations. That Southern Baptists need a fresh passion for calling people to Christ and making disciples is beyond dispute. Much of the discussion seems to be about where to start to set such a movement in motion. Do you start by rearranging structures and processes, or do you start by helping churches recover, refresh, or enlarge their Great Commission priorities and ministries? Even now, I can hear the voice of Dr. Landrum P. Leavell II, my predecessor, in my ear: "Discussions about what the SBC ought to do are above our pay grade."

At NOBTS our habit has always been to keep working away on our ministry assignment while the Convention sorts its way through complicated decisions and issues. Happily, the Great Commission lies at the heart of what the SBC expects New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary to do, and so we are able to go to work every day adding our efforts to a Great Commission Resurgence while SBC messengers discuss the issues. For those who are curious, what follows is a description of the Great Commission Resurgence, New Orleans style!



Kelley

An Honest Assessment

The typical Southern Baptist church of every size and type is in Great Commission trouble. About 25 percent of our churches are reporting zero baptisms annually. Our total number of baptisms is in decline. Our average number of baptisms per church is in decline. Our average of baptisms per Southern Baptist church member is in decline. The percentage of our youth being baptized is in decline, and many of those we do baptize are not headed into college or the employment pool with a vibrant, active faith. For all practical purposes we are burying more Baptists than we are baptizing. To put it in language a Bubba like me can understand: If the chicken dies, it does not matter how you cook the eggs. We must help our churches learn to grow again in order to sustain and enlarge our efforts to bring Christ to the world.

As a school that exists to prepare the next generation of SBC leaders, this reality must inform our approach to theological education – and it has. Our mission is to equip leaders to fulfill the Great Commission and the Great Commandments through the local church and its ministries. We yearn for our students to grow healthy churches that will reach people for Christ, baptize and disciple those who respond, and do ministry in the name of Jesus to the ends of the earth. With these circumstances facing our churches, we emphasize three areas in particular to engage our students in a Great Commission Resurgence.

Revival

The Holy Spirit of God must stir afresh in our hearts and congregations if we are going to penetrate the lostness of our communities, our nation and our world. He has done so before, and He can do it again. The United States was shaped significantly by the First Great Awakening in the 18th century. The Second Great Awakening rooted the church in the frontier as the population expanded, and it profoundly affected the culture of the South to this day. The Awakening of 1858 was one of the greatest prayer movements in the history of the church, and the Welsh revival of the early 20th century spread divine fire to the ends of the earth. More recently, in the early seventies, the Jesus Movement touched every area of American life and culture and was the time when Southern Baptists experienced more youth conversions than at any other point in our history. When God sends a revival, churches and Christians catch fire, and that fire sends the gospel flooding out of the church and into the world on a scale beyond our expectations.

God still moves. I was on a college campus during the days of the Jesus Movement. I saw God stir that campus in ways I thought impossible. We have faculty members who came to Christ in that time and are still serving the Lord with deep passion and effectiveness. It was a time that marked my soul forever, and it happened during a period of terrific unrest, turmoil, and social upheaval. Yet God moved.

The Holy Spirit of God must stir afresh in our hearts and our congregations if we are going to penetrate the lostness of our communities, our nation, and our world. He has done so before, and He can do it again.

At NOBTS we are talking more and more about revival. We talk about how the church prepared for it and responded to it. We encourage our students and faculty to pray for it. We seek a stirring of God on our campus, and we pray that when spiritual fire falls here, it will spread to the churches our seminary family serves. We know only God can send that spiritual fire, but we are stacking the wood!

Discipleship

The most significant death in this era of the SBC was the death of a discipleship training process among our churches. Recently, when I was asked to do an assessment of the state of evangelism in the SBC, I was not surprised to learn that many of our churches are in Great Commission trouble. What I had not noticed before was the decline of a systematic process of discipleship that preceded those evangelism troubles.

I am not referring to the loss of any particular program. What we are missing is an emphasis on nurturing believers in their faith that in former days was as aggressive as our emphasis on evangelism. The aggressive evangelism got most of the spotlight, but a multi-layered approach to discipleship and training in the spiritual life received a great deal of time in the typical Baptist church. What I found is that as the emphasis on spiritual growth began to fade, it was followed by a declining evangelistic harvest. An important part of what we are doing to prepare our students for a Great Commission Resurgence is to emphasize the role of discipleship in our curriculum and campus life.

This year we have made reading every page of the Bible an emphasis in every class we teach. All of our Master of Divinity students spend a year in a spiritual formation class, meeting each week in a small group with a professor to practice the spiritual disciplines and to consider how to teach those disciplines to others. Our faculty begins each teaching day with a time of devotion and prayer before we go out to teach our classes. By modeling and by teaching, we seek to emphasize the significance of leading churches to implement a discipleship process to nurture the faith and spiritual passion of believers. As Southern Baptists become more faithful disciples, we will become more productive witnesses.

Ministry Evangelism

All of my adult life I have been a passionate advocate of personal evangelism and pulpit evangelism. I remain so today. It is becoming clearer and clearer, however, that the 21st century will require churches to add another layer to their evangelism strategy if they are to penetrate the lostness of their surrounding communities. Ministry evangelism, meeting the needs of people as you tell them about Jesus, is changing the game for a growing number of churches. It does so by providing a connecting point full of good will with people in the community who are living outside the influence of a church.

We have seen the impact of ministry evangelism blossom in New Orleans. The response of Southern Baptists to Hurricane Katrina transformed the image of Baptists in the

We teach our students that ministry evangelism is a complement to personal evangelism and pulpit evangelism, not a replacement. We look for ways to engage them in the recovery of the city that is still ongoing.

city. It created a greater openness to our witness than I ever imagined I would see. When the Gospel was made tangible for people to see and touch, it turned witnessing into more of a conversation than a monologue.

We teach our students that ministry evangelism is a complement to personal evangelism and pulpit evangelism, not a replacement. We look for ways to engage them in the recovery of the city that is still ongoing. We partner with a drug and alcohol abuse program in our neighborhood to illustrate the power of partnerships in addressing the needs of people. When tragedy strikes elsewhere we look for ways to be involved in helping. Even with their limited budgets, our students, staff, and faculty gave thousands of dollars to partner with Florida Baptists to get rice to Haitian families after the devastating earthquake earlier this year. We want our students to learn that helping others outside the body of Christ is a way to introduce them to Jesus so that they may come inside the body of Christ.

These are just some of the ways that New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary is preparing the next generation of leaders for a Great Commission Resurgence. When you pray for us, when you give to us, you become a part of this Great Commission preparation process. Every dollar you give to the Annual Fund or any other part of the seminary's ministry is a dollar students do not have to pay. This is one of the emerging challenges Southern Baptists are facing. We must keep theological education affordable so that any man or woman called of God to serve as a minister or missionary will have an opportunity to be prepared to serve our Lord with excellence. Thank you for being our partners in this great enterprise. Please do what you can to help us. To God be the glory!

Charles S. Kelley, Jr.

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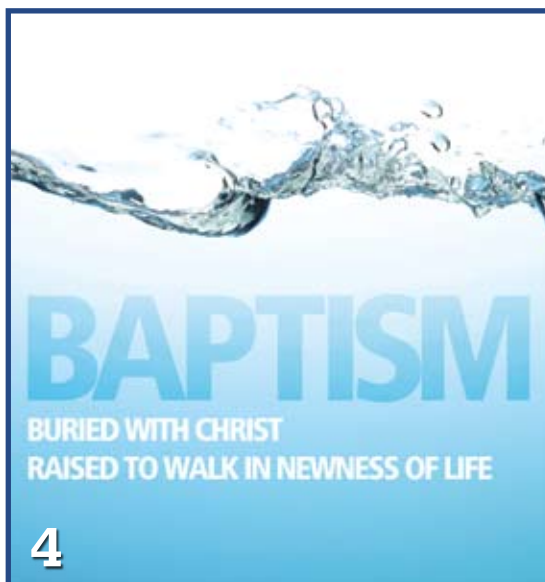


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BAPTISM

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East Bayou: Reaching people and making baptism special

By Gary D. Myers

Tucked away in two small rooms behind the sanctuary at East Bayou Baptist Church in Lafayette, La., hundreds of handwritten names cover the walls. Each name represents a person who came to faith in Jesus Christ and followed Him in believer's baptism.

Just before baptism at East Bayou, the staff encourages new believers to sign their names on one of the changing room walls. Some leave notes expressing joy about their salvation. Others make sure to sign their names near other family members who have been baptized at East Bayou.

According to Pastor Mike Walker (M.Div. '77), the "Changed Lives" walls represent East Bayou's intentional commitment to evangelism and believer's baptism.

East Bayou seeks its growth through conversions – especially adult conversions. Out of the 165 additions to the church in 2010, only 29 have come through transfer of letter. Eighty-two percent of those entering the membership have come through conversion. And the majority of those have been adults.

"Our growth, 82 percent of it, is through conversion," Walker said.

East Bayou is very intentional about baptism. The church prioritizes baptism. The ordinance is never simply tacked on to the service. It is always given a prominent place. Walker is also very intentional about sharing the meaning of baptism.

"We're baptized for one reason and one reason only and that's obedience," Walker said. "Jesus said we should be baptized and He gave us the example. Baptism does not wash away your sins. Baptism does not make you a believer. Baptism does not complete the act of salvation. Baptism is only for a public profession of your faith and obedience."

Twice a year Walker devotes an entire Sunday morning service to the two church ordinances – baptism and the Lord's Supper. He opens the service by teaching about baptism, followed by the baptism of new believers.

After the new believers are baptized, Walker gives an altar call for those who want to accept Christ and for those who have accepted Christ, but have not been baptized. Counselors are ready to meet with those who respond.

Walker then leads the church in the Lord's Supper, teaching about the meaning as the elements are taken. To close the service, Walker baptizes some who responded during the altar call.

The first time Walker tried this approach in 2009, 38 people received believer's baptism. Seventeen more were baptized the next Sunday.

As East Bayou focuses on evangelism, believer's baptism and discipleship, lives are being changed. And the changing room walls, covered with names, serve as a powerful, ongoing witness of changed lives.

Pastor Mike Walker points out names on the changing room wall at East Bayou Baptist Church in Lafayette, La./By Gary D. Myers



Baptism celebrates new life in Christ

By Dr. Steve Lemke

The word “baptism” is obviously tied directly to our denominational identity as Baptists. It is, after all, because of Baptists’ distinctive practice of baptizing new believers (rather than sprinkling infants) that separated us from other Reformation denominations. It was this practice that gave us the name “Anabaptists” (baptize again) or, more simply, Baptists.

The command to baptize new believers is, of course, a part of our Lord’s Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20). We baptize not so that people can become saved, but so that people who have been saved may identify with Christ by this public act of baptism. Baptism as the first act of obedience to God for new believers was a part of the proclamation of the early church (Acts 2:38, 2:41, 8:12-13, 8:36, 9:18, 10:47-48, 16:15, 16:33, 18:8, 19:5, 22:16).

As a pastor, I occasionally encountered young people who wanted to become Christians but were shy and reluctant to stand in front of so many people in making a public profession of faith and in being baptized. I sometimes asked such persons what they were going to do when they got married. They usually described how they wanted to be married at the church in front of all their friends and family. I shared with them that this is very similar to what they would be doing in baptism. Just as they would commit their lives to each other in front of these many witnesses

Believer’s baptism is still central to our identity as Baptists. All three editions of the Baptist Faith and Message follow the New Hampshire Confession in describing the church as consisting of “baptized believers.” Baptism is thus the entry point to church membership.

to be married, so becoming a Christian requires a public profession as well. Jesus said, “Whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 10:32-22, NKJV). Baptism is like a wedding ceremony in that we commit our lives publicly to Jesus Christ. Indeed, the Bible speaks of the church as the “bride of Christ.”

Baptism is the most obvious way that we make a public stand to profess our faith and commitment to Jesus Christ.

Believer’s baptism is still central to our identity as Baptists. All three editions of the Baptist Faith and Message follow the New Hampshire Confession in describing the church as consisting of “baptized believers.” Baptism is thus the entry point to church membership. The notion of sprinkling infants to wash away their original sin has been repugnant to Baptists throughout our history. The New Testament is utterly bereft of any reference to infant baptism. This is not a peripheral issue for Baptists. Baptists have literally given their lives for this belief.

Like all distinctive Baptist beliefs, believer’s baptism is not merely a tradition, but arises out of a careful reading of God’s Word. The Greek word *baptizo* literally means “to immerse in water.” This meaning was intentionally soft pedaled in many Bible translations. Since many early translations of the Bible into English were done by persons from denominations that practice sprinkling, rather than translate the word *baptize* as “immerse,” they transliterated it into a new anglicized version of the word, “baptize.” (Let me give another

example about the difference between transliteration and translation. Most people know that one of the Greek words for love is *agape*. Transliterated, it is “agape.” Translated, it is “love”). The same is true for *baptizo*. Transliterated, it is “baptize.” Translated, it is “immerse in water.” Frankly, the translators transliterated *baptizo* because they knew what it meant – to dunk or immerse in water. If they had translated it as “dunk under water” it would have invalidated their own practices of baptism.

However, the main scriptural reason for affirming that baptism should be by immersion is what baptism signifies. According to Rom. 6:1-11, the proper symbol of baptism is not washing away sin, but of death, burial, and resurrection. Like the Lord’s Supper, Christian baptism has reference to three tenses – past, present, and future.

Baptism looks back to the *past* as a memorial and reminder of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection. As Paul affirms, “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death” (Rom. 6:3-4).

Regarding the *present*, baptism symbolizes the death to the old self and the resurrection to the new life in Christ. This is the central message of Romans 6 – that as Christians we crucify the old self, turn from our life of sin, and experience the newness of life that comes only through Christ. Note how Paul begins this discussion:

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:1-4, NKJV).

Paul refers several times to this symbol of our old sinful nature being “crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Rom. 6:6). Instead, we can live “in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). We should therefore reckon ourselves, Paul says, “to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:11). Through Christ we can stop being slaves of sin, and become servants of God (Rom. 6:12-20).

Baptism also looks forward to the *future* as it anticipates the resurrection at the end of time, for “if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection” (Rom. 6:5). The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), but righteousness is the gift of God which allows us to enjoy eternal life.

Jesus said that the angels throw a party in heaven rejoicing when any sinner comes to repentance (Luke 15:7, 10). We should enter into God’s joy when any sinner repents, trusts Christ, and is baptized. Every baptism is a celebration of new life in Christ!



Dr. Steve Lemke is Provost and Professor of Philosophy and Ethics at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He is the co-editor of *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five Point Calvinism. Reflections from the John 3:16 Conference*. Read more about the book on page 18.

Baptistries in Tunisia illustrate early church views on baptism

By Gary D. Myers



Baptistry at Domus Caritatis/By Gary D. Myers



ABOVE: Baptistry at Bulla Regia
By Gary D. Myers

TOP Right: Baptistry at Bardo
Museum in Carthage, Tunisia
By Rex Butler



Dr. Rex Butler in a baptistry in Sbeitla, Tunisia

Following the teachings of the New Testament, Baptists insist that immersion of believers was the earliest mode of baptism. Baptists contend that immersion was practiced by the early church for centuries. Archaeological sites in Algeria and Tunisia lend credence to the long-held belief.

Groups from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary have visited North Africa numerous times since 2003. Among the many church ruins that dot Algeria and Tunisia are numerous examples of baptistries designed for immersion. Many baptistries in North Africa are designed in the shape of the cross, connecting baptism with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.

“North Africa was one of the most important centers for Christianity in the ancient world,” said NOBTS President Chuck Kelley, after a 2004 trip to North Africa. “It was fascinating to see church after church, built in the first 500 years of our faith, featuring baptistries to baptize believers by immersion.”

The architecture found at these church sites illustrates some of the earliest Christian beliefs about baptism. The ruins also preserve an archaeological record of the theological shifts related to baptism.

“Immersion was practiced in the church for centuries,” said Dr. Rex Butler, Associate Professor of Church History and Patristics at NOBTS. “We see that through archaeology. Excavations reveal baptismal pools being evident through the fourth and fifth centuries.”

According to Butler, the early church viewed baptism as the entrance to the church. In North Africa, this often led to the construction of baptistries outside of the main church building. The ruins of the Domus Caritatis Basilica in Carthage, Tunisia, offer a prime example of this practice.

At Domus Caritatis, baptism candidates entered the baptistry structure from an entrance outside the church, Butler said. The column-lined walls of the structure form a large round room with a baptismal pool in the center.

According to Butler, a convert would descend a staircase on the side farthest away from the church to reach the pool. After baptism the persons would ascend a different staircase which led to the church. Both the baptismal structure and the practice of immersion emphasized, in symbolic ways, the turn from sin to God. It also symbolized that person’s joining with the church – the community of believers.

As the church began to shift toward a sacramental view of baptism, church architecture changed as well. These shifts are evident in the ruins in Sbeitla, Tunisia.

“In Sbeitla, archaeologists excavated a church and found a baptismal font, of course this would have been used to sprinkle infants,” Butler said. “But when they kept digging further they found it was resting on a slab. When they removed the slab, they discovered a baptismal pool underneath.”

“That shows that originally they immersed their baptismal candidates, but then later on, when sprinkling came into vogue, they wanted their baptisms to take place in the same place so they put a slab over it and this baptismal font,” Butler continued.

Gradually, the churches in North Africa and throughout the world stopped practicing believer’s baptism. Infant baptism became the norm. Only after the Protestant Reformation did Christian groups rediscover the practice of believer’s baptism by immersion.

Baptismal practice: History and perspective

By Gary D. Myers

Dr. Rex Butler, Associate Professor of Church History and Patristics, and Dr. Lloyd Harsch, Associate Professor of Church History, often lecture on baptism in their church history classes at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. They teach both the positive expressions of baptism in history and the many missteps the church has taken over the years.

In their classes, students gain important insight into the purpose and meaning for baptism and many other issues in church history. By teaching history and the biblical meaning of baptism, these professors help their students avoid the errors of the past.

Mode, Meaning and Practice in the Early Church

“Baptism in the early church was much more elaborate than baptism today,” said Dr. Rex Butler. “Baptism in the early centuries was full of symbolism and it took some time to prepare the candidates for baptism.”

One of the key differences between today and the early church is the idea of *catechesis* – the period of training before baptism. Church leaders took this preparation time very seriously, because new believers not only needed training in biblical doctrine but also faced a real threat of persecution, Butler said. At times the catechesis took up to three years to complete.

“In the early centuries it was a major commitment of one’s life to be baptized into the Christian church,” Butler said. “Baptism was not a step taken lightly by the church.”

Easter or Pentecost. The night before the ceremony, the candidate would fast and confess sins as church members kept vigil, Butler said.

The New Testament clearly presents baptism as a symbolic act of obedience, Butler said. Baptism was given to those who had already acknowledged Christ as Savior.

“The *Didache* talks about immersion,” Butler said. “The preference for baptism was to be immersed in running water. The preference was outside in a river, in flowing water. If that was not possible, they would gather up water in a baptistry. There was actually a third option: if a body of water was not available, the *Didache* did allow for pouring.”

“Very early, the preference was for triple immersion. The baptismal candidate would be baptized in the name of the Father, and in name of the Son, and in the name of the Holy Spirit,” he said.

While in the water, the candidates gave public witness to their belief in the Trinity by answering questions in a baptismal creed that was similar to the Apostles Creed.

“The administrator would ask, ‘Do you believe in God the Father,’ the candidate would say, ‘Yes’ and would be immersed. ‘Do you believe in Jesus Christ His Son,’ and would be baptized again and then ‘Do you believe in the Holy Spirit,’” Butler said. “Three times the person would be baptized accompanied by a question from a baptismal creed.”

Afterward, the newly baptized believers joined the congregation for the Eucharist (Lord’s Supper), Butler said. Only baptized believers could partake in communion.

“The New Testament, we believe, teaches baptism as a sign of a person’s union with Christ’s death, burial and resurrection,” Butler

“THE NEW TESTAMENT, WE BELIEVE, TEACHES BAPTISM AS A SIGN OF A PERSON’S UNION WITH CHRIST’S DEATH, BURIAL AND RESURRECTION.” – DR. REX BUTLER

While the threat of persecution has diminished, committing one’s life to Christ and following Him in baptism is not something to be taken lightly. Believers still need instruction, Butler said.

“An area where I think the church needs to learn from the early church is *catechesis*,” Butler said. “Either before or after baptism – or before and after – we need to spend some time discipling people who are being baptized.”

Butler does not recommend a long delay. However, he would like to see more intentional efforts to train and disciple new believers. He believes this time of training will help candidates understand that baptism is an act of obedience and is not required for salvation.

Butler noted that the *Didache*, one of the oldest Christian documents outside of the New Testament, gave no definition of who was authorized to administer baptism. Tertullian said that anyone who was authorized by the bishop could baptize. The insistence on clergy-administered baptisms was a later development, Butler said.

Butler likes seeing a more open approach to the administration of baptism in the church today. He enjoys seeing fathers baptize their children or Sunday school teachers baptize their class members.

“I think we need to broaden the identity of the person who can baptize,” Butler said.

According to Butler, specific holy days were set apart for baptism in the early church. Baptisms often took place during a morning service on

said. “It is for believers, and it is conducted by immersion.”

The shift toward a sacramental view of baptism developed very early in church history, Butler said. In the sacramental view, baptism is seen as part of salvation rather than a symbol. Ultimately, it was this sacramental view that led to infant baptism.

As early as A.D. 110 Ignatius of Antioch wrote the water of baptism was sanctified, Butler said. Later, Tertullian wrote that salvation was bare without baptism.

Tertullian first mentioned infant baptism around A.D. 200. However, Tertullian’s treatise was critical of the practice, Butler said.

Origen, writing from Alexandria in A.D. 215, claimed that the practice of infant baptism went back to the Apostles. By A.D. 250, Cyprian reported that infant baptism was widely practiced, Butler said. However, even in the late fourth century, Church Fathers such as brothers Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa were not baptized as infants, even though they came from a Christian family.

“It was not until Augustine that infant baptism became universal, because of his teaching on original sin – that infants are born with Adam’s guilt and therefore need baptism in order to have that sin absolved,” Butler said.

For centuries, this sacramental view was the accepted view of the church. Many years after Augustine, Baptists and some other Christians returned to the biblical pattern of baptizing believers by immersion.



Photo by Boyd Guy

Baptism among Baptists

“Baptism is done for a variety of reasons,” said Dr. Lloyd Harsch. “It is done in obedience to Christ. Jesus says we are to be baptized so we are. We do so as a public testimony to faith – ‘I have accepted Jesus Christ and I am declaring that publicly.’”

“The practice of baptism among Baptists has been varied,” he continued “It has been as restrictive as only properly ordained ministers having the actual ability to do baptism, to as broad as anyone designated by the congregation having the ability.”

According to Harsch, *The Baptist Faith and Message* does not touch on the issue of who is authorized to administer baptism. Most often pastors administer the ordinance. In many Baptist churches today, the person who was most influential in leading a person to Christ is given a role in the baptism. Often they perform the baptism. Harsch agrees with this practice, as long as it is done under the authority of the local church.

“Baptism is an ordinance of the church, meaning to be properly done it has to be done under the authority of the congregation,” said Harsch. “It is something that needs to be an expression of faith within the context of the congregation.”

Throughout most of their history, Baptists practiced baptism outside in creeks, rivers, lakes and ponds. For this reason, Baptists commonly held baptismal services during the warmer spring and summer months. Sometimes holes were cut in icy streams or lakes to facilitate baptisms. Harsch said Baptist churches often baptized new believers around Easter.

“We’ve often done it around Easter, Easter being a time that ties in very well with baptism because it ties in with death and resurrection,” Harsch said. “It’s a declaration of our faith. It’s symbolic of our death to our old way of life and of our resurrection to walk in newness of life.”

While Baptists vary on who does the baptism and where baptisms take place, they do not waiver on who can be baptized and the proper mode of baptism. Baptists firmly hold that baptism is only for believers and by immersion.

Lately, Harsch has seen a disturbing trend among Baptists. Many churches are baptizing very young children. And while he is against

setting an age limit, Harsch believes diligence is needed as churches seek to make sure baptismal candidates are true believers.

“Baptism is for believers,” Harsch said. “How can you profess what you don’t have, and how can an infant profess what it is incapable of comprehending? Historically, we were very reluctant to baptize young children.”

Baptists also believe that immersion of believers is the only means of baptism that preserves the proper symbolism of the act, Harsch said.

“It’s symbolic of Christ’s death and resurrection,” Harsch said. “One reason we do immersion is that the symbolic picture is very clear,” he continued.

“Immersion is also the mode that we believe to be biblical because of the word *baptizo*,” he continued. “So not only do you have the clear picture of what our faith is all about – Christ’s death and resurrection – you have a word that suggests immersion as the mode. So we’ve got linguistic support, and we’ve got pictorial symbolic support.”

Areas for improvement

Butler and Harsch see several areas where today’s churches can improve or enhance the practice of baptism in the local church. Both believe that more could be done to call attention to the symbolic meaning embedded in the practice of immersion.

Both think teaching time with baptismal candidates, before and after immersion, can help avoid problems down the road. This is especially true when baptizing children.

“We need to be much more intentional and proactive for what we do in instructing people on baptism,” Harsch said.

In many churches the personal, vocal witness aspect of baptism has been lost. Both Butler and Harsch think that hearing personal testimonies from baptismal candidates enriches the baptism event.

“We need to know their testimony,” Harsch said. “We have rushed these people through the waters of baptism without allowing them the privilege of actually figuring out their faith. In that way, they can publicly declare a reasoned faith to a waiting world.”

Going to the hard places: Alumnus traces his missionary road

By Paul F. South



In 2002, Alan Henderson's first missionary journey got off to a rocky start. He was in the back country of Burkina Faso as part of a short-term mission trip to the West African nation sponsored by Union University. "We went out into the bush and tried to share with this local little village," Alan said. "It was just a disaster. As we shared the gospel, people just got up and left. They were just leaving in droves. It kind of rocked my world. I was confused about 'How can people dedicate their lives to this?'"

But on the plane ride home, somewhere in the air between Burkina Faso and Paris, Henderson heard the call of God to the mission field.

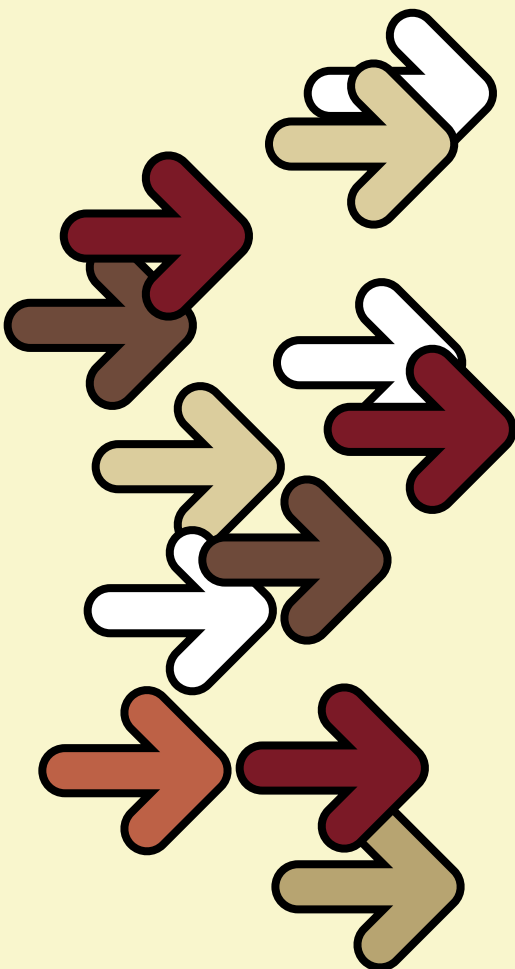
"I didn't know where or how or who or how long," he said. "But I knew that if I didn't say yes, I'd never say yes."

Alan Henderson and his wife Lindsey (not their real names) now serve North Africa-Middle East people groups as Team Strategy Leaders, seeking to plant Southern Baptist churches in an area spreading from Morocco to Iraq to Yemen, the heart of the Muslim world.

On the missionary road, following in the footsteps of William Carey, Lottie Moon, Jim Elliot and countless servants of God, the Hendersons learned not to be content to sit in the pew, but to put feet on Christ's Great Commission call. Now, only three-tenths of 01 percent of Southern Baptists go to the mission field.

"I came to find out how few Southern Baptists actually go," he said. "There's a huge need... if we can get our people over there just to taste it and smell it. They can't taste it and smell it through pictures. Once we get that far, (they get) to see the lostness and their impact on it."

"If we had 1 percent of Southern Baptists going out as IMB missionaries, we'd have over 100,000 missionaries," he said. "That's a pretty bug chunk."



God solidified the Hendersons' call during a Thursday night service at Union. As Alan Henderson searched the dark-eyed faces on the screen, God spoke again.

"He said 'This is where I want you to go; and this is where I want you to serve,'" he said. "The images were of people from North Africa and the Middle East. I didn't say anything to Lindsey at the time."

The couple had been called to the mission field, but at different times. In their prayers, they sought God's direction, and had started paperwork to join the International Mission Board's Journeyman initiative. After that Thursday meeting, Alan shared with Lindsey what God had said.

"I said, 'I think God really shared with me where we need to go together and serve,'" Alan told Lindsey.

Lindsey said, "Yeah, I know: The Muslim people of the Middle East."

Their call came, even as the wounds of Sept. 11, 2001, were still fresh. But Alan's greatest fear was not going into the crackling, sparking cauldron of anti-Western sentiment.

"When I heard the Lord say that, I said, 'Lord, if you're calling me to go to the Middle East and you're calling me to go to the Muslim people, I'll go,'" he said. "But how am I going to tell Lindsey's mom?"

With that burden on his heart, Alan and his future wife shared their concerns with their pastor at a small country church near Jackson, Tenn., and the Union campus.

"He told us, 'Look, you're much safer being wherever God wants you to be than you are being disobedient to Him.' We knew that if we did what He asked, He'd be faithful."

The couple tore up their Journeyman applications, and Alan enrolled at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and received his Master of Divinity with specialization in International Church Planting. He graduated in 2008 through the two-plus-three program, which allows degree candidates to complete 60 hours of coursework in the classroom, the remainder on the mission field.

Lindsey also earned her Master of Divinity with specialization in International Church Planting. She was the first woman at NOBTS to complete the degree after having children on the mission field.

Throughout their journey, Alan said, God has continually shaped the couple, through natural disasters, and other dramatic means. While at Union, they endured a tornado. In New Orleans in 2005, Hurricane Katrina hit with full fury. The Hendersons sensed the Lord was preparing them for a different challenge.

"About a year ago, we were kicked out of our country of service and forced to leave," Alan said. "We didn't realize at the time what was involved with all the loss – loss of ministry and all that stuff. He was continually preparing us. We don't know what crisis is right around the corner. But He is continually growing us and shaping us."

Now, as Team Strategy Leaders, the Hendersons are trying to reach a city with four distinct people groups for Christ.

"We have to map out the city and look at pockets of population. We have to map out where they are living. Then we have to understand there may be a different strategy for each different people group," said Alan, a native of Knoxville, Tenn. "Most of those people groups have different economic standards, so they have a different way of getting involved in their lives."

"What we're praying for is a community that's ready to receive the gospel," Alan said.

What initial advice does he offer others considering a call to the mission field?

"The first piece of advice or encouragement I give is for them to remain open," he said. "A lot of people think there's this Damascus Road experience and for some people there is. But it's not for everybody, and some people are just willing to go."

That willingness requires rare dedication, Alan said. He told the story of a missionary who was asked by his commissioning agency (a non-SBC agency) to say that he was specifically called to serve a certain people group.

"He didn't understand the language and finally he said, 'Look the Bible says "Go." I'm going. That's all.' That kind of dedication is not real common."

There is a great need for men to serve in missions, Alan said. Single women outnumber single men in the mission field 6 to 1. And in the Middle East, female mission workers suffer sexual harassment and belittlement in male-dominated cultures, where women are seen as second-class citizens, if citizens at all.

"Girls see the lostness. They're compassionate and they go out of the compassion of their hearts. Men are not so compassionate sometimes, and they're unwilling to go to the hard places. So I encourage men to go to those hard places because it's easier for them. They don't deal with the baggage," Alan said.

Alan and Lindsey Henderson were willing to go to the hard places years ago. Times have changed since that disastrous day in the African bush. Confirmation that the Hendersons were on the right road came through what was supposed to be a language lesson with a Muslim background believer grounded in his Christian faith.

On a white board, Alan Henderson began to show his teacher how he could reach his neighbors for Christ. They, in turn, could reach their apartment building, and from that building they could begin to reach the city with the Gospel. The language lesson became instruction in basic church planting.

"I sat back for a second and just looked at him. He kind of took it all in. Then, the man said 'We can do this. We can really do this,'" Alan said. "It was at that moment that I realized this is why I'm here. This was confirming everything. It was a good day, a good day."