A Vision for the Aging Church

By James M. Houston and Michael Parker
“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

— Isaiah 55:10-11

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Maximal Generosity

The Beeson Divinity School Fund

By Timothy George

I never met Dora Maclellan Brown, but her joyous generosity had a profound influence on my life. Born in 1879 in New Brunswick, Canada, “Aunt Dora,” as she was known, moved to Chattanooga, Tennessee, my hometown, in 1892. She was a deeply committed Christian woman, active in her community and church. She was also a teacher of God’s Word, and she knew how important it was for pastors to be well trained for the ministry. Aunt Dora died in 1974 at age 94. Several years before, she had established a charitable trust to be used to support seminary students preparing for the ministry.

As a student with a definite sense of God’s calling on my life, but with little financial resources of my own, I was chosen as the first scholar to receive support from this fund. Over the years, hundreds of other theological students have been the beneficiaries of Aunt Dora’s vision and generosity, including a number of our own Beeson Divinity School students. Ralph Waldo Beeson, like Aunt Dora, was selfless and unstinting in his generosity. He was not hesitant to make his wishes known. He was willing to support a school, he said, that would be serious about preparing “pastors who can preach.” He wanted a school that would be explicitly evangelical in its theological commitments, interdenominational in its outreach to the entire Body of Christ and committed to sharing the love of Christ throughout the world.

Since its founding in 1988, Beeson Divinity School has graduated nearly 1,000 students. Each of these has been blessed by Mr. Beeson and his visionary gift. These wonderful men and women of God are now serving the cause of Christ in every inhabited continent on earth. My greatest joy as the dean of the divinity school is connecting with our alums and seeing the remarkable work they are doing for Christ and his church. Without exception, they are filled with gratitude for the training they received at Beeson Divinity School. They are thankful for our faculty, for training in ministry, for the rich resources for study and research they found here, for community worship in Hodges Chapel, for the focus on prayer and spiritual life, for friendships made, and love received, and directions set. They are also grateful for the financial support they received from Beeson Divinity School, for the generosity from others that poured into their lives and enabled them to pursue God’s calling in the service of the church.

Now is the time for us to ensure that Mr. Beeson’s dream will become a reality for pastors, missionaries and ministers of tomorrow. As we think about the future, it is crucial that we cultivate a new generation of friends, donors and prayer partners, a cadre of encouragers who believe in the mission of this school and are willing to support it—personally, spiritually, and financially. My dream and my prayer is that Beeson Divinity School will be able to support with generous scholarship funding the rising generation of theological students God is sending our way. For this to happen, we need your support.

In connection with our 25th anniversary, we have established a new office of development for Beeson Divinity School directed by Carolyn Lankford. Carolyn is a wonderful Christian woman deeply committed to the Gospel and to the mission of our school. (You can read more about Carolyn on page 23.) With her help, we have established a new Beeson Divinity School Fund. We are asking for your prayers and your financial support as we look to the future with gratitude and great expectancy.

Perhaps you are thinking: Well, I am no Dora Maclellan Brown or Ralph Waldo Beeson. True enough, they were extraordinary individuals whom God blessed with great financial means. But when we consider the whole scope of God’s blessings on our lives, we must admit that, as someone put it, we are all “embarrassingly gifted.” We all have the capacity to be generous with what God has given to us. I like the way Eugene Peterson renders 2 Corinthians 9:11:

This most generous God . . . gives you something you can then give away, which grows into full-formed lives, robust in God, wealthy in every way, so that you can be generous in every way, producing with us great praise to God.

But when we consider the whole scope of God’s blessings on our lives, we must admit that...we are all “embarrassingly gifted.”
A Vision for the Aging Church

Facing Memory Loss with Hope in God’s Remembrance

By James M. Houston & Michael Parker
Photography by Mandy Busby

Contrary to popular opinion, most American families do not abandon family members with disabilities, diseases and conditions to paid professionals and paraprofessionals. Yet most health-care-service practitioners and some church leaders fail to acknowledge and affirm the central role families play in extending health care services, because most pastors and lay leaders lack the necessary skills to encourage and enable families to do their Herculean jobs more effectively. Pastors and lay leaders need to acknowledge and support family caregivers in their vital caring role as a first step toward dealing with the growing phenomenon of caregiving and facing the unique challenges of family members caring for individuals with disabling conditions.

Many people who live in community settings who belong to churches require assistance at some time because of chronic disease and disability, and dementia is clearly an example of a common, chronic, progressively disabling condition that affects the person and the family. The term dementia (or senility) indicates progressive, marked decline in intellectual or cognitive functions associated with damage to brain tissue; this may affect personality and behavior, and it may be of a reversible or an irreversible type. In the aging process, once there is loss of memory, the immediate popular judgment is, alas, this must be the onset of the dreaded brain disease, Alzheimer’s, which leaves the body still alive after the brain is dying or dead.

**An Embodied Patient or a Socialized Person?**

There is a tension between an unrelenting disease and human care, encapsulated well by the statement of Oliver Sacks, professor of neurology and psychiatry at Columbia University in New York, “In examining disease, we gain knowledge about anatomy and physiology and biology. In examining the person with disease, we gain wisdom about life.”

Yet new philosophers now use neuroscience to redefine philosophy as merely the function of embodied minds, the body being everything. Increasingly, even the larger culture struggles to come to grips with the common fallacy that “the mind” is only the brain. The brain is a remarkably flexible organ of the body, which, since the 1960s, has been studied and understood more completely by the science of neuropathology. Its circuitry is not static, but dynamic, slowly changing according to both organic and also environmental conditions, themselves in flux. The brain’s extraordinary ability to remember is like the recording archangel Gabriel, reputed in the Middle Ages to have written down every committed human deed for all time. But “the mind” and indeed “consciousness” are wider categories, socialized by many more external stimuli that shape the entire human narrative of what it means to be created as a unique person.

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Though the term caregiver is helpful, it represents a rather modern application of words that leaves out the word love.

Admonition to love the least of these helps give biblical purpose and meaning to the hard work of caring for someone who might not recognize or appreciate the care.

Women as well as men, Jesus even included lepers, perhaps the equivalent of social outcasts that the demented have now become in our modern culture. All categories of people were treated as persons in Christ. The church, as in days of old, must take a countercultural stand in the twenty-first century regarding the unborn child and the senile alike, to treat all as persons, not cultural artifacts, as wanted or unwanted, useful or useless, legacy or burden. We would argue that even if a demented person requires burdensome care, Christ is able to provide meaning for such care and the courage and capacity to set correct boundaries that protect the caregiver and recipient of care. But we must be grounded in certain scriptural principles. We are all persons, all created in the image of God, whatever our religious or ethnic origins.

Yet between the first century and now, little help was given to the helpless, the insane and the other vulnerable categories of humanity. Admonition to love the least of these helps give biblical purpose and meaning to the hard work of caring for someone who might not recognize or appreciate the care. With earlier diagnosis, the church may need to move into position to prepare those affected by the disease and those who choose to be lovingly present. Though the term caregiver is helpful, it represents a rather modern application of words that leaves out the word love.

Barbara Tuchman, who has studied carefully the upheavals of the fourteenth century, notes that Western society in the late Middle Ages made virtually no organized provision for the vulnerable members of society other than within a few religious communities. To be fair, church leaders and doctors have historically been confused about innovative medical practices until modern times. And yet the concept of personhood could have better informed even antiquated medical care. Only gradually from the seventeenth century onwards did institutionalized care begin to take place. But even in the beginning of the nineteenth century, the great innovator of medical care for those suffering from mental distress, Samuel Hahnemann, could still condemn the way doctors treated the “insane,” as worse than prison guards might treat criminals. Most of these mental institutions still remained depersonalizing until the past two or three decades.

Today, far better diagnostic skills are in place for dementia. In the past few decades, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, used to diagnose psychiatric or psychological disorders, has literally tripled in size and content. Most professionals admit that labeling a person is not equivalent to cure, but an accurate diagnosis constitutes a necessary step in the right direction. Even so, major cultural modifications are still needed. For example, how do we discuss memory loss with seniors? Many are confused about the terms dementia and Alzheimer’s disease. The latter is still associated with “no help, no cure and no hope.” It is a neurological condition of brain degeneration. But dementia, while suggestive of a lessening of cognitive abilities. Thus a senior will now enter into a pattern of life that could include emotional and mental disarray, where it is often difficult to distinguish between cause and effect. Does depression occur from brain disease or from social alienation? Does the speed of dementia indicate the collapse of social support, whereas neurological decline usually moves much more slowly? Rarely does a senior ever have the reflective powers or the advice from others to face up to such issues.

The care needs of dementia sufferers encompass three distinct dimensions. First, in dementia we can and should apply state of science findings from neuroscience and other specialties. Second, we must consider whether our whole culture may be showing signs of being a “dementing society” that contributes to widespread senior experiences of dementia. Third, we must face up to the magnitude of ethical tasks required of our caregivers. All three approaches are needed, suggesting that the growing challenge of dementia in an aging society can become a blessing in disguise by changing our cultural paradigm and fostering a more caring society.

Memory Reflects God’s Character

In a scientific culture like ours, is there any greater threat to a senior than being told through all sorts of innuendos, “You’re losing your mind!” For four primary reasons, the loss of memory is a new universal fear among our society as we age. First, cognition is of primary importance in our technological society. Second, personality changes clearly occur as a result of memory loss and its emotional consequences. Third, we have become a society in which people consciously value their self-made identity and exaggerate the value of the role their professional careers define them. Fourth, contemporary living is complex. (This becomes painfully apparent when we lose our wallet with all its plastic cards so vital to our day-to-day welfare. We have so many more things we say we cannot afford to forget!) Into this setting, a Christian
When therefore “God remembered Noah” and saved him from the flood (Gen 8:1), “remembered Abraham” in saving Lot from destruction (Gen 19:29), opened Rachel’s womb to bear a child in her barrenness (Gen 30:22) or heard the groaning of the afflicted Israelites in their bondage in Egypt (Ex 2:24), God had much more than a good memory. The term reflects God’s divine character in both redemption and judgment, his redemptive history of Israel. God’s remembrance expresses his attentiveness towards us personally, whether in grace or in judgment. Unlike human memory, which is corrupted and diverted to other loyalties, God’s active remembering is identical with his actions and his character of love. It is his creative and redemptive power. Our powers of memory may not be sustained, but he is “the same yesterday, today and forever.”

The prophets, then, strongly urge us “to remember the Lord thy God,” and indeed to “remember his statutes” (stipulations of their covenant life). Within the Hebrew context, states Brevard Childs, “an act of remembrance is not a simple inner reflection, but involves an action, an encounter with historical events.” The past will not disappear so that we operate only presently, as God too will not go away just for our rebellious desires. Such remembrance implies confession, contrition and conversion. Above all it calls our attention to the exclusive attention we should give of ourselves to God, since our uniqueness reflects upon the universal human need of God, with a relationship with him that is not contingent on our merit. Such remembrance then is the equivalence of “choosing life,” eternal life, not just life, forever and ever. Biblical memory is always associated with the heart, which is the most important anthropological term in the Old Testament. It functions to control all physical, mental, emotional and spiritual functions, so no English word is like it, making it difficult to translate. As my (Dr. Houston’s) friend and colleague Bruce Waltke has described, it is “the inner forum of the soul,” the center of one’s personal being in both its inner and outer realities. Such “remembrance within the heart” is therefore far deeper and richer than merely having a good memory. Christians in a state of advanced dementia, having lost mental memory, can remain secure in the Father’s everlasting arms. God’s memory of us qualifies us as human persons, even if we are in an advanced state of dementia. My niece with Down’s syndrome has a love for Jesus personally, being a part of the redemptive history of Israel. God’s remembrance expresses his attention towards us personally.

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On April 27, 2011, Daven Watkins waited out the tornado with his wife and children, huddled in the basement wearing bicycle helmets. Their home was relatively unscathed, but when they emerged after the storm, they found a devastated community. Nearly one out of every three homes in Pleasant Grove, Alabama, was destroyed.

The 62 tornadoes that tore through the state that day in 2011 claimed the lives of 247 people. The casualties of the storm were overwhelming. In Birmingham, police closed the roads around UAB and St. Vincent’s hospital to all traffic except the ambulances flooding in from communities throughout the state. Those of us who live near these hospitals could hear sirens late into the night.

Meeting Needs

Thousands of people became homeless in the course of a couple hours. Watkins, pastor of First Baptist Church of Pleasant Grove and graduate of Beeson Divinity School, watched his church spring into action. “In good Baptist fashion, we started feeding people,” Watkins said. Church members began to prepare all the food from the quickly defrosting church freezer. The church building became a shelter. “It was a beautiful thing to see God’s people rise up, without hesitation, without instruction.”

The Christian Service Mission in downtown Birmingham became a hub for donation collections and redistribution. Day after day, the mission’s warehouse filled and emptied, filled and emptied. Volunteers drove truckloads of first-aid supplies, food and diapers to small towns that had been nearly demolished.

Because the need for volunteer manpower was so large, Samford University offered two paid service days to all employees who assisted with disaster relief. More than 95 service days were taken by employees in the months that followed the tornadoes. Those who couldn’t help during the week volunteered on weekends. Hundreds of students, staff and faculty worked to tarp roofs, cut apart enormous tangles of debris with chainsaws, and feed and shelter those who had lost their homes.

Birmingham’s M-POWER Ministries opened satellite health clinics in Pratt City and Tuscaloosa to treat tornado victims. Many people who lost their homes also lost vital medications, so they came to the volunteer doctors and pharmacists at the M-POWER clinics for replacement prescriptions. Pastors and counselors volunteered to provide emotional support for patients.

Rebecca Hays, a student at Beeson Divinity School, served as a volunteer counselor. Hays survived the tornado that struck Union University in 2008. “Having something as massive as an EF-4 tornado break into your life changes you forever,” Hays said. “I had a unique way of relating to these tornado victims, but it was not exact. I do believe, however, that God sometimes uses our own crises to prepare us to minister to others.”

Ryan Hankins, a 2003 graduate of Beeson Divinity School, serves as executive director of M-POWER, which seeks to break the cycle of poverty. “It was humbling to see so many from across the state and region respond to our call to serve in Jesus’ name,” Hankins said. “Sadly, the work M-POWER did was not that different from what we do year-round—serve those who have next to nothing and nowhere to turn. Everyone who saw firsthand the damage done by these tornadoes will never forget it. I pray that the church will not forget that, though the immediacy of recovery has passed, crisis is an everyday reality for far too many of our neighbors.”

Asking Questions

In addition to immediate physical needs, the storms left gaping questions in need of pastoral answers. Young and old asked, “Why?” in unison. Watkins assured his congregation, “God does not have a vendetta against the people of Pleasant Grove. If this was a display of God’s wrath, not one of us would be left standing!”

Jason Odom, a Beeson Divinity School student from Pleasant Grove, said that people struggled with the “seemingly indiscriminate nature of the storm;” they wondered why some were spared and not others. Although First The Church and Disaster

Alabama Churches and Tornado Relief

By Betsy Childs

The damage done by these tornadoes will never forget it. I pray that the church will not forget that, though the...
Baptist Church of Pleasant Grove lost its steeple, First Assembly of God, right across the street, was flattened. The people of the hardest-hit communities who did not lose their houses, church or family members struggled with survivor guilt.

First Baptist Church of Pleasant Grove grieved deeply for Reba Jones, a beloved elderly church member killed by the storm. Watkins said that church found comfort in the words spoken by Jesus in John 14: “In my Father’s house are many mansions. . . . I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” In this passage, Watkins finds the answer to the question, “Where was Jesus that night?”

Watkins said that months after the storms, people wrestled with new questions. Those who lost all of their earthly possessions were faced with big decisions about where to rebuild and how to start over, and many are still asking, “What is God’s will for my life now?”

Watching Walls Come Down

Lyord Watson graduated from Beeson Divinity School in December of 2010. During his last semester of seminary, Watson had completed his ministry internship at Mission Birmingham. This nonprofit organization connects and mobilizes the Birmingham community—including churches, businesses and government agencies—to work together to address the needs of the city’s most vulnerable. After the storm hit, vulnerability took on new meaning, and the need for connectivity was greater than ever.

Watson returned to Mission Birmingham to supervise receiving and dispersing donations at a drop-off center temporarily opened in Birmingham’s Southside district. He and others at the ministry connected the Red Cross and FEMA to local organizations, and helped match volunteers with needs. In the face of staggering devastation, local churches pooled their resources like never before.

Watson said, “The storm forced groups of people to work together who otherwise would not work together. Before that, people would have their own groups and do their own things. The storm was so big and the need was so much that organizations had to work together.”

He told the story of one Southern Baptist minister who wanted to get his congregation involved in the cleanup efforts who asked a Presbyterian pastor for help. The Presbyterian pastor introduced the Southern Baptist pastor to an African American Holiness church that could give him access into the affected communities. “Race didn’t matter,” Watson said. “Theological differences didn’t matter. It was the body of Christ working together in order to help those who are in need.”

Since the storms, there have been more opportunities to work together. “Whether the differences will be lasting,” said Watson, “still remains to be seen.”

Daven Watkins also saw the relief effort bring down divisions. “Many walls came down. I don’t just mean physical walls. Racial walls came down. Socioeconomic walls came down. It did not matter what your neighbor looked like, if he or she was a person in need. It was a beautiful picture of people helping people in the name of Christ.”

Reflecting on the newfound unity he saw in the aftermath of the tornado, Watkins said, “I pray those walls don’t get rebuilt. Homes need to be rebuilt. Structures need to be refortified. I pray that those walls of racial and socioeconomic division are obliterated from now until Jesus returns.”

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new ways of viewing faith and never return to Christianity, at least in an orthodox form. In fact, a recent Barna poll reveals that 61% of today’s American college students do not participate or serve in a local church after they graduate. This makes the next generation one of the largest mission fields to date.

In the last decade, more and more Beeson Divinity School graduates have been led into this mission field. College and university ministry is one of the fastest-growing trends among alumni eager to impact the world for the Kingdom of God. Some serve directly on the college campus, while others are church staff members ministering to young adults. In each case, they are called upon to answer some of life’s toughest questions for a generation that is globally focused, mindful of social justice and anxious to discover its purpose in the world.

**Life On Campus**

Heidi Cheatham graduated from Beeson Divinity School in 2001 and immediately began serving as the Baptist campus minister at a community college in her home state of Mississippi. After two years, she moved to her alma mater, Mississippi College, where she serves as associate director of the Baptist Campus Ministry. “The beginning of my call to college ministry started when I was in college,” she said. “I interned with the college ministry at my church, and since then, God has continued to open doors that lead to college ministry.”

Cheatham’s passion is to mobilize college students for missions around the world. Along with other duties, she disciplists and trains students who choose to serve as summer missionaries or participate in international mission trips. In her time at Mississippi College, she has led teams to Indonesia, Thailand and China.

Cheatham has been encouraged to see a growing global and missional awareness among college students. “College students . . . have an increasing awareness of the needs around them,” she explained. “They realize that they need to be part of something much bigger than themselves.”

College students realize that they need to be part of something much bigger than themselves.

Their college ministry work leads to change in their own lives, as well as teach some OBU courses. “He finds his work incredibly rewarding because college students are at such a crucial stage in their faith development. College students make choices about their calling and career, their spouse, and they often evaluate their own faith for the first time,” Taylor said. That’s why he believes strongly in teaching sound theology while also connecting college students to churches while they are students, rather than allowing the campus ministry to be their “church.” This eases the inevitable struggle of watching students move on from their college ministry. “We find comfort in the hope that we have sent them out into churches where they are more faithful members because of what they have learned in college,” he said.

James Drake, a 2010 graduate, finds his work rewarding because of his personal experience. “My life was changed in college because someone reached out to me with the Gospel, and it changed everything. I want that for today’s college students,” he said.

Drake, who leads the Campus Crusade (CRU) ministry at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, has seen what began as a small Bible study become a city-wide movement. Hundreds of students on the multicultural campus of UAB meet weekly for worship, small groups and ministry opportunities throughout the city. In his five years with CRU, 10 student leaders have become full-time Campus Crusade ministers, often working with the least reached communities on campus. That’s what Drake finds so rewarding about college ministry. “Every week, I hear from a student whose life is being changed,” he said. “I sense a real awakening here in Birmingham among college students.”

When asked what advice he gives to others who work with college students, Drake recommends holding them accountable to grow in their faith. Drake is also an adjunct professor. “All of the biblical and theological studies classes I took at Beeson have been a great foundation for my ministry,” he said. “They gave me the tools to teach Bible studies as well as teach some OBU courses.”

Drake says the most rewarding aspect of his work is the lasting impact students make long after they graduate. “It is tragic that most Christians walk away from their faith during these four years, because the college years set a person’s life on a trajectory for the next 40 years,” he said. “My life was changed in college because someone reached out to me with the Gospel, and it changed everything. I want that for today’s college students.”

**Conclusion**

As college students begin to explore their faith, it’s important for them to have a strong foundation in the Gospel. By connecting college students to their faith development, college ministry is a vital part of the mission field. The impact college ministry has on students’ lives can be transformative, leading to a lifelong commitment to Christ’s work in the world.
accountable to the whole Gospel, when the world is telling them that truth is relative. “Unfortunately, most young Christians today do not have a biblical worldview, which sometimes leads to appalling lifestyle choices,” he said. “The best thing any Christian leader could do in helping the next generation of Christian leaders is to help them really understand the Gospel and what Christ had to say about ALL of life.”

A Succession of Leaders

One college ministry with unique Beeson ties is University Christian Fellowship in Birmingham. Originally founded in 1999 by Beeson alumnus Joel Brooks, UCF has flourished under the leadership of three Beeson graduates. Brooks, who began the ministry as a small Bible study in a home, saw God grow the ministry to several hundred students from campuses all over the city. Eventually, Mountain Brook Community Church partnered with UCF and built a state-of-the-art ministry facility on the church’s campus for round-the-clock college ministry. Today, 2011 Beeson Divinity School graduates Joel Busey and Suzanne Goddard serve as UCF director and assistant director, respectively.

Busey explains why that his Beeson education prepared him richly for ministry with college students. “Beeson teaches you how to really think deeply and grapple seriously with theological issues,” he said. “I believe that campus ministry requires a high-level of knowledge about biblical and theological issues.”

Busey also acknowledges how much he gained by working with other Beeson alumni. Although, he did not work directly with Joel Brooks, he recognizes the legacy he created. “Joel saw a need for an environment for college students, where God could be worshipped and the Word proclaimed,” he said. “I’ve heard stories of people who come up to Joel at conferences who are in ministry today and credit UCF as the beginning of their walk with Christ.” And, Busey also has glowing words about Andy Byers (M.Div., 2001), with whom he served for two years, “I think more than anything Andy forever redefined what pastoral ministry is for me. I saw the way he preached, taught, related, prayed for, pursued and confronted college students,” he said. “Andy taught me that a pastor is someone who cares, listens, thinks, struggles, writes, preaches and extends hospitality.”

College Ministry — A Family Affair

Many Beeson Divinity School alumni are called into ministry as a family. This is clearly the case for Brian and Renee (Lankford) Pitts, who met through student ministries at Samford University and married before they graduated from divinity school. While they knew they were both called to ministry, they assumed that they would work in different areas. But, when the Pittses came to Birmingham, they were drawn to social ministry, where Lord called on Brian to help when he needed to. “It didn’t feel like work,” Brian commented. “I loved working with students and with Renee.”

Brian Pitts teaches at Shiloh

The call to college ministry was born.

Both Brian’s and Renee’s parents worked together professionally, so they already had strong models for how to minister, work and parent together. Not long after leaving the BBA, Brian and Renee were each independently called to serve as part of the University Ministries staff at Samford. Renee came first, serving as a part-time missions coordinator. Brian came shortly after and serves as director of spiritual formation. Today, Renee continues to mobilize and educate students who are interested in local and international missions; she also directs a new Global Mission Scholarship program. One of Brian’s main areas of ministry is leading Shiloh, University Ministries’ weekly student worship service, which ministers to approximately 300 Samford students per week. He also oversees small groups and other campus-wide spiritual formation opportunities for faculty, staff and students.

The most unusual aspect to Brian and Renee’s ministry is that they not only share a common ministry, they also share an office. “I usually get two reactions when people find out that we work so closely together,” Brian said. “Some think it sounds great, but most ask how in the world we could ever do that.” But, the unusual work dynamic has allowed them to model a healthy, Christian relationship to their students. They conduct many premarital sessions with young couples, some of which admit that they had not seen a healthy marriage until they met Brian and Renee.

It is these types of experiences that have led the Pittses to discover that God intended all along for them to serve as a team. While taking a student mission team to Southeast Asia last summer, they experienced something very profound and symbolic to confirm this. As they were preparing to return home, members of the church with whom they had ministered asked to pray for the team. They prayed for each student individually, but when they came to Brian and Renee, they joined their hands and prayed for them together.

“An exciting place where new ideas gain influence and where I realized for the first time that the uniqueness that Renee and I bring to ministry is what we bring as a team,” Brian said. “We came into college ministry with so little experience that he has grown us into a ministry unit. Her strengths complement and aid my weaknesses, and my strengths do the same for her.”

While Brian and Renee serve on a private, Christian campus, another alumni couple ministers to students in a much different environment. Jeff and Anna (Moseley) Gissing have served with InterVarsity Fellowship with graduate students at Duke, UNC-Chapel Hill and, most recently, Wake Forest.

Jeff and Anna met at Beeson Divinity School, where they discovered common love for academics and the academic environment. “Jeff and I were attracted to campus ministry because we believe the university is an exciting place where new ideas gain influence and where...”

...I want to offer students the same opportunity to experience the transformative power of the Gospel that altered the trajectory of my life.”

Ministering in the Midst of a Storm

Renee Pitts serves communion to Samford students

“Years ago, I was sitting at a table with young people, and one student said, ‘I want to offer students the same opportunity to experience the transformative power of the Gospel that altered the trajectory of my life.’”
College Ministry within a church context starts in junior high and ends when they become leaders in their congregations.”

working with college students is their desire to share the Gospel holistically throughout the world as well as in their local community. Sadly, his students were given a profound way to touch their city, on April 27, 2011. Violent tornados ripped through Tuscaloosa, demolishing entire neighborhoods just blocks from Calvary Baptist’s campus. While some students were directly impacted, most sprung into action, assisting Brooks and the rest of the church staff with disaster relief. Calvary’s student space was quickly converted into a relief center where donations were collected and distributed, sometimes providing homes.

Brooks saw his students put actions to their convictions, as well as witness the practical beauty of their work. For Brian Oaks, an interest in college ministry started while serving overseas after college. As part of a one-year ministry experience, he served on college campuses and began to engage students of different cultures. Upon returning to the United States, his calling to college ministry grew stronger. Today, he is the college minister at Covenant Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Alabama. But Oaks, who received his M.Div. from Beeson Divinity School in 2009, considers college ministry to him is when he is able to see how that investment has taken shape in a student’s life many years after college.

Without exception, each of these graduates expressed the importance of the biblical knowledge they gained at Beeson Divinity School. Without it, they said, they would not be able to teach ever-inquisitive and increasingly provocative students the orthodox truths of the Bible. Theirs is a unique mission field, and theirs is a mission to continue to model Christ to many in need.

College Students at Church

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Gerald Bray edited Galatians, Ephesians, the first volume of the Reformation Commentary on Scripture to be released by IVP Academic. Bray also contributed the chapter “The Deity of Christ in Church History” to Crossway’s The Deity of Christ.

Timothy George’s book Reading Scripture with the Reformers was published by IVP Academic. His book The Great Tradition of Christian Thinking, coedited with David Dockery, will be released by Crossway in 2012.

Timothy George edited the book Evangelicals and the Nicene Faith from Baker Academic. Other contributors include Carl Beckwith, Gerald Bray, Mark DeVine, Mark Gignilliat, and Frank Thielman.

David Hogg contributed the chapter “Caroligian Conflict: Two Monks on the Mass” to The Lord’s Supper: Remembering and Proclaiming Christ until He Comes, published by Reformation Translation Fellowship.

David Hogg and Paul House each contributed a chapter to Great Is Thy Faithfulness? Reading Lamentations as Sacred Scripture, published by Pickwick Publications.


Kregel published The Post-Racial Church by Kenneth Mathews and Sydney Park.

Kurt Selles’s book A New Way of Belonging: Covenant Theology, China, and the Christian Reformed Church, 1920-1950 was published by Ernemann.

Douglas Webster’s book Table Grace: The Role of Hospitality in the Christian Life was published by Christian Focus.
Rob Willis was born in Long Island, New York to a Jewish family that he describes as “a-religious.” When he was still a newborn, his mother left him, his father, and his older brother. The family heard nothing from her for five years. His brother’s health was poor, and large medical bills forced their father to work back-to-back shifts in a hospital boiler room while Rob’s grandparents cared for him and his brother. Though his grandfather was opposed to religion, his grandmother read him stories from the Old Testament.

Rob’s life changed dramatically when his father remarried and took his sons to live in the U.S. Virgin Islands. St. John was a beautiful island where the alcohol flowed freely, and Rob and his brother were given liberty to roam where they pleased. Rob took up music and started playing in bars when he was only 11 years old. He recalls, “I watched bright and talented people destroy their lives with alcohol and drugs, all before I even started high school.”

Rob left the Virgin Islands to study music composition at Berklee College in Boston, Massachusetts. In Boston, he encountered committed Christians for the first time in his life. He describes himself as an argumentative person, and he enjoyed trying to upset the Christians who reached out to him. He attended their Bible study just to be a nuisance. Although he also spent time with Buddhists, Moosies and Hare Krishnas, only the Christians were offensive to him because of their exclusive claims.

When Rob needed a New Testament text for a choral assignment, one of his Christian friends happily loaned a Bible to him. Rob recalls, “I was determined that I would read this book so I could find the holes in the Christians’ argument. Much to my amazement, I opened the New Testament and read these words ‘These are the generations of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.’ I was amazed to find the names that my Grandmother had read me stories about were on the pages of a book that I had been told was not a book for Jewish people. I read on differently, my curiosity aroused. Three months later, after much reading and wrestling, I completely surrendered my life to God.”

Rob met his wife, Vikki, in Boston, and together they ministered for several years at St. Francis House for the Homeless. Eventually, Rob and Vikki returned to St. John to serve as church planters. The island’s transient population made church planting difficult, but Rob and Vikki led evangelistic Bible studies for itinerant restaurant workers. Then Hurricane Marilyn struck. The hurricane devastated the island, destroying 30 percent of homes and damaging many more. With no water or electricity, most of the population evacuated. Rob and Vikki, now expecting their first child, decided to move to Birmingham.

Rob enrolled at Beeson Divinity School in 1996 in order to finish the master of divinity he had started in Boston at Gordon-Conwell. Someone offered him the job of chapel sound coordinator, a role he expected would take a few hours a week. That job grew and grew until it turned into a full-time position as Media and Technology Manager.

When Rob Willis came to Beeson, he found stacks of tapes that had been recorded in the school’s first eight years. He organized these, and thousands of other events and courses he has since recorded, into a media archive. Creating the media archive was important to Rob because, during their year as church planters in St. John, he and Vikki had relied on tapes from their home church in Boston to provide spiritual nourishment. Now, the recordings and videos that he and his staff make are available to people all over the world through the Beeson Divinity School website and podcasts.

Rob has continued to serve in church ministry as the pastor of Brook Highland Community Church. This opportunity came about when the leadership of this aging congregation approached him in 2006 and asked him if he would consider merging the church that he had recently planted—which at the time was meeting in a barn—with theirs. This seemed like a timely request, especially since the weather that would soon be getting too cold for meeting in a barn! Rob has pastored this united congregation for six years.

Rob says that he loves his job at Beeson Divinity School because he loves problem solving. When he trains the students who work for him, one of his mantras is “The difficult we can do right away, the impossible will take a few minutes.” Another is that 85% of tech support is moral support. Anyone on staff can attest that Rob’s willing attitude rubs off on his tech support team. He treats media and technology as ministry, and God multiplies the fruits of his labors.
Community News

News and Updates

Reformation Spirituality Conference

In October 2011, Beeson Divinity School hosted a Reformation Spirituality Conference in conjunction with Refo500, a multi-year project celebrating the relevance of the Reformation as a movement of renewal and change. Divinity faculty Carl Beckwith, Gerald Bray, Graham Cole, Gisela Kreglinger, Timothy George and Piotr Malysz presented papers, along with special guests Dr. Herman Selderhuis, from the Theological University of Apeleuorn, Netherlands, and Karla Appeloo-Boersma, Project Manager of Refo500. A highlight of the conference was an evening of Reformation music, presented by an ensemble from the Samford School of the Arts. Conference attendees enjoyed celebrating all aspects of Reformation spirituality, including hymnody, prayer, Scripture-reading and baptism.

New Endowed Lecture Series on the Apostle Paul

On Sunday evening, September 23, 2012, Dr. Frank Thielman will present the first annual Milton G. Walker Church Lecture on the Apostle Paul. The Walker lecture series has been endowed by Mr. Ellis J. Parker lecture series has been endowed by Mr. Ellis J. Parker in memory of his uncle, Milton G. Walker. Mr. Walker devoted his life to teaching Sunday school classes on St. Paul. The series will be held in churches throughout western Alabama where he ministered. Haleyville First Baptist Church will host the first lecture, which is open to the public. For more information contact Carolyn Lankford at 205-726-4480 or clankfor@samford.edu.

Noll, Nystrom Receive Pollock Award

The 2011 John Pollock Award for Christian Biography was awarded to Mark A. Noll and Carolyn Nystrom for their book Clouds of Witnesses: Christian Voices from Asia and Africa (IVP Books). The book tells the life stories of 17 Christian leaders from Asia and Africa. It includes the biographies of Ugandan martyr Janani Luwum (whose bust is among the martyrs in Hodges Chapel), Indian mystic Sundar Singh and Ignatius Cardinal Kung of China, as well as many lesser-known but equally inspiring figures.

This is the first time that the Pollock Award has been given to a book chronicling the lives of more than one life. Clouds of Witnesses is based on sound, scholarly research in world Christianity, while at the same time it tells engaging stories that will likely move the reader to doxology. The award will be presented on April 3, when Noll will be speaking in the divinity school chapel.

House President of ETS

Professor Paul R. House serves as the 2012 President of the Evangelical Theological Society. ETS, which has over 4,000 members, is a professional, academic society for evangelical scholarship. House will give a presidential address at the 64th annual meeting of the society, which will be held November 14-16 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The theme of this meeting will be “Caring for Creation.”

Divinity School Welcomes New Faculty

Beeson Divinity School welcomed three new faculty members in 2011.

Dr. David Hogg is associate dean for academics and associate professor of history and doctrine. Hogg is a medievalist and comes to the divinity school from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina.

Dr. Piotr Malysz, originally from Poland, is assistant professor of history and doctrine. Malysz is an ordained Lutheran pastor who recently completed a doctorate at Harvard Divinity School.

Dr. Graham Cole joined the divinity school faculty as the Anglican Chair of Divinity. Cole is an Australian, and served as principle of Ridley College, University of Melbourne, as well as on the faculty of Moore Theological College and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School before his appointment at Beeson Divinity School.

Dr. Graham Cole is a theologian who has written extensively on the Holy Spirit.

Carolyn Lankford Joins Staff as Advancement Officer

The Beeson Divinity School community has been pleased to welcome Carolyn K. Lankford as its new advancement officer. Lankford previously served as a director of Christian education at the Cathedral Church of the Advent in Birmingham. She has been active in fundraising for Red Mountain Theatre Company and has served in several capacities on its board of directors.

Lankford is working to assemble a divinity school advisory board to expand the influence, reputation and resources of Beeson Divinity School. In addition to raising money for scholarships and special projects, she has also worked to establish a new BDS Fund, which will support the operating expenses of the divinity school.

Below, Lankford shares a bit about her background and why she is excited about her role at Beeson Divinity School.

I’ve been a member of the Church of the Advent in Birmingham for 24 years. I first learned about Beeson Divinity School 22 years ago when the dean of our church invited Dr. George to preach during our annual Lenten series. Since then, the Church of the Advent has benefited from the preaching and teaching of numerous Beeson faculty members. For quite some time I have known that Beeson was a gem in my very backyard.

I accepted this position for several reasons, and I must say it was a very prayerful process for me. I had profound respect for Beeson Divinity School; I knew a bit about its caliber of academics and its commitment to propagating evangelical, orthodox, reformed Christianity. The idea of being a part of a community that was clearly focused and serious about the business of furthering God’s Kingdom was very attractive to me. And, having spent the past five years as an executive board member with a growing non-profit organization, I had learned much about the work of development; most especially the revelation that when your “product” is one worthy of advancement, the job of raising funds is not just about asking for gifts, but also it is about introducing and connecting potential supporters to the good work in place and the good work yet to be done. In the case of Beeson Divinity School, I see doing just that as a privilege and a joy.

I am very excited about working at the divinity school. The faculty and staff here are people I respect very much, and I have many places to turn when I need guidance or reinforcement. I pray daily that God will continue to provide for Beeson, and I believe that He will.
Watkins and Richardson Named 2012 Distinguished Alumni

**Updates**

**Brandon Fredenburg** (M.Div. 1993) is assistant dean of the College of Biblical Studies and Behavioral Sciences at Lubbock Christian University in his hometown of Lubbock, Texas.

**Douglas Ngatunyi** (M.Div. 1996)

is working in a hospital in Kenya and preparing to launch a new ministry.

**Connie L. Hedges** (M.Div. 1997) has been serving as a chaplain at Logansport Juvenile Correctional Facility in Logansport, Ind., for 10 years. She also teaches Introduction to Philosophy and Philosophy of Religion for Ivy Tech Community College near Logansport.

**Dennis Aggrey** (M.Div. 1999) lives and works in Liberia as the mission director of the Christian Revival Church Association, a group of cooperating Christian Revival churches in rural Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea.

**Kyle Quarterson** (M.T.S. 1998) works as a church developer/plantner with the International Mission Board in southern Africa.


**Oleg Turlac** (M.Div. 1999, D.Min. 2006) moved to Toronto, Canada, in 2010 after serving for nearly 10 years as pastor and teacher in Moldova and the former USSR. He directs the Turlac Faith Ministries and serves as the editor of Christian Megapolis and Perspectives. He continues to minister to Christians in countries where they are persecuted for their faith.

**Steve Echols** (D.Min. 2000) book Catastrophic Crisis: Ministry Leadership in the Midst of Trial and Tragedy was published by B&H. Echols was installed as president of Tennessee Temple University in 2012.


**David Chambers** (D.Min. 2001) is in his tenth year as senior pastor of First Baptist Church Fairview in Cullman, Ala. He also serves as moderator for the East Cullman Baptist Association.
Josh Dear (M.Div. 2001) is assistant pastor at Lakeside Baptist Church in Muskegon, Mich.

Mark Flores (M.Div. 2001) has served as pastor at Mount Hermion Baptist Church in Bedford, Va., since 2005. He has been a chaplain in the United States Air Force Reserve since 2001 and was promoted to major in December of 2010.

Matt Hampton (M.Div. 2001) is pastor of McFarland United Methodist Church in Roseville, Ga. He earned a doctor of ministry degree from the University of the South in 2011.

Dean Smedley (M.Div. 2002) is assistant director for student center operations at Augusta State University in Augusta, Ga.

Melody Maxwell (M.Div. 2003) completed a doctor of philosophy in church history from the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague, Czech Republic.

Brian Peterson (M.T.S. 2003) joined the faculty of Lee University in Cleveland, Tenn., as assistant professor of Old Testament.


R. David Nelson

Jon Parks (M.Div. 2004) and his wife, Tania, were commissioned with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship to serve in Kosice, Slovakia. They will work alongside English teachers at an all-Roma private school.

Maurice Watson (D.Min. 2006) was one of the plenary speakers at the 2011 Beeson Pastors School. Watson is pastor of Beulahland Bible Church in Macon, Ga.

Rob Foley (M.T.S. 2006) joined the staff of Denver Seminary as the community life coordinator.

Derrick Hammond (M.Div. 2006) accepted the position of church business administrator at First Mount Zion Baptist Church in Dumfries, Va.

Keith Ray (M.Div. 2006) is senior pastor at Arbor Baptist Church in Pella City, Ala.

Jim Wallace (D.Min. 2006) works as a fellow and senior research associate at the Institute on Culture, Religion and World Affairs at Boston University. He is the coauthor of the “Emerging Evangelical Intelligentsia Project.”

Skip Alexander (D.Min. 2007) was appointed senior pastor of Northside Baptist Church in Indianapolis, Ind.

Brad Barnett (M.T.S. 2007) serves as director of Servant Life (an initiative of Student Life) in Birmingham.

Christian George (M.Div. 2007) is assistant professor of religion at Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee, Okla. He earned a doctorate from St. Mary’s College at the University of St. Andrews.

Rebecca George (M.T.S. 2007) was named residence director of Taylor Residence Center and West University Apartments at Oklahoma Baptist University.

Jennifer Rash (M.T.S. 2007) was named executive editor of The Alabama Baptist.

Graham Hill (M.Div. 2008) was promoted to senior director of event management with Student Life.

Jared Smith (M.Div. 2008) serves at Redstone Church in Birmingham, Ala., as the service programming director.

Brian “Spike” Burt (M.Div. 2009) works at the Jimmie Hale Mission in Birmingham, teaching basic math, English and reading skills. He also serves as a chaplain.

Jon Gilliland (M.Div. 2009) serves as youth minister at Antioch East Baptist Church in Greenville, Ala.

Jacob Simmons (M.Div. 2009) left his position as alumni relations officer at Beeson Divinity School to work with the North American Mission Board and Send Chicago in Chicago, Ill. He will also be a church planter in residence at Armitage Baptist Church in Logan Square.

Jon Gilliland (M.Div. 2010) is associate pastor of Fullness Christian Fellowship in Birmingham.

Whit Goodwin (M.Div. 2010) is director of student life at Houston Baptist University in Houston, Texas.

Mike Motta (M.Div. 2010) serves as minister of youth and children at First Baptist Church Shawmut in Valley, Ala.

Daniel Williams (M.Div. 2010) began doctoral work in American history at Auburn University in 2011. He was ordained at Free Will Baptist Church of Eastman, Ga.

Andrew Bolger (M.Div. 2011) is campus minister at the College of the Ozarks in Lookout, Mo.

Tony Scona (M.Div. 2011) serves as groups director at Browns Bridge Community Church in Cumming, Ga.

Doctor of Ministry Studies at Beeson Divinity School

Beeson faculty want to help you grow in spiritual maturity and to see you excel in a ministry that is biblically rooted, theologically sound, and culturally relevant. Our Doctor of Ministry Program allows you to gain the most from on-campus seminars (two weeks every January and July for two and a half years) while continuing to serve in your place of ministry full-time.

The program is open to those who have already earned a Master of Divinity degree and who have a minimum of three years’ experience in a pastorate or other professional ministry.

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When Moses Lartey told me he wanted to do his cross-cultural assignment at my church, Iglesia Bautista Jesús el Buen Pastor, I had some doubts. The doubts did not have to do with Moses himself—he had been one of my students and I knew him to be diligent, spiritually mature and respected. The concerns had to do with the setting. You see, the church I attend is an exclusively Spanish-speaking congregation in Birmingham. The congregation is made up of Hispanics from Central America and Mexico; they are poor, only about half possess minimal reading and writing skills, and most speak very little English. What did they have in common with an African-American student from Beeson Divinity School? Would the cultural differences just be too great? And what about the language? How could this significant barrier be overcome?

We decided to give it a shot anyway, settling on preaching as his primary activity. I would perform the translation of the sermons (an activity that, I would discover, required significant energy given Moses’ vigorous preaching style!).

And so we began on a Wednesday evening. The rumor had spread among the members that we would have a Beeson student ministering for the next few weeks, and thus there was a high attendance on that first Wednesday. I should mention that, generally speaking, folks from Central America tend to be reserved and soft-spoken. The contrast between their quiet demeanor as they listened and Moses’ beautifully passionate and animated delivery was tremendous. Their eyes grew big as Moses preached while walking through the congregation and even as he sat down in one of the pews and continued preaching for a few minutes from there. They loved it. As the weeks went by, the initial delight in Moses’ different preaching style turned into deep affection between minister and congregation that went far beyond delivery style. I could sense that a special bond was forming.

Moses’ ministry at our church eventually came to a close. On his final evening with us, the ladies of the church produced a variety of delicious Hispanic dishes, and we all sat down and shared a meal. It was time for the church to express thanksgiving to God for Moses. What did they appreciate? A number of things were said, but two remained with me. They appreciated that this dear brother could empathize with their status as sojourners in a foreign land. For Moses had been born in Liberia, Africa, and, like them, had been a stranger in this land. He encouraged them to remain faithful to the Lord despite often being mischaracterized by politicians and despite having to live in the margins of society.

The other area of appreciation was Moses’ faithfulness to Scripture. They said, “This brother preached the Bible.” For them, their common belief in the Bible and the Gospel provided unity and love.

I was deeply satisfied as I reflected on how, in a city that has been so broken by racial differences, in a little corner of Lorna Road in Hoover, Alabama, God, through his church, was providing a beautiful picture of what the Gospel can accomplish.

Osvaldo Padilla teaches Greek and New Testament at Beeson Divinity School.

△ Moses Lartey

For more information or to make a reservation, please visit us online at www.beesondivinity.com.
I’m graduating with a deep love for God, an intense passion for the Gospel, a hunger for the Word, a love for the church and a desire to be a part of God’s mission in our world.

— Joel Busby, M.Div 2011

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