



## It's About Partnerships: *Pass the Grapes!*

Rev. Shovie Ducre (with microphone below) of Starlight Missionary Baptist Church, Slidell addresses CBF Arkansas assembled in Little Rock. He is thanking them for their stellar assistance in disaster response. All four pictured here were drawn together by the presence of Christ at a time of tragedy. Second from the left is CBF-LA Coordinator John Daugherty. At far left is Arkansas Coordinator Ray Higgins and at right is Arkansas Disaster Response Coordinator Charles Ray.

CBF-AR is but one of scores of groups -- Baptists, non-Baptists, non-profits, and businesses who have joined hands to serve those in need. Individuals -- pastors, lay people and volunteers as far away as British Columbia -- by the hundreds now, have given time, energy and resources. They are part of the tapestry of partners, of co-laborers in the Vineyard.

We honor, we applaud this holy network in the issue before you. Dependent on God, interdependent on each other, it is a larger, perhaps more peculiar extended family than you might expect. Included are Gypsies in tent

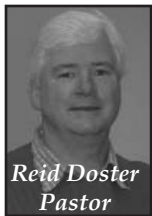
meetings, a nun in Lake Providence, homeless in Lacombe, seekers in Madisonville, a Pastor at the end of a journey, even a bureaucrat or two. We also pull into this circle those with troubled faith or no faith at all (at least not yet) praying God will grace them through us. And within this web are cousins in the faith, some 2nd, even 3rd removed. Yet we have learned, denominations are merely human inventions. Our distinctives have their place, but pale in significance to our common relation to the Keeper of the Vineyard.

Soon this strain of God's children will have a party, a reunion. It's the big national family to-do in Atlanta starting June 21, a kind of calling home of partners. Ya'll come. (See back cover) You'll be smiling like these guys. So why are these guys smiling? Grape pickers privilege. You don't gather grapes without eating a few yourself. The King's grapes are the sweetest. Blessed by being a blessing. There is joy in the Vineyard. -- Editor, Kyle Kelley



# Up From Adversity: Bridgewater Church Growing

by Carla Wynn



Reid Doster  
Pastor

Amid disaster response efforts to rebuild homes and lives after Hurricane Katrina, a **new church start** has been born in western St. Tammany Parish. Bridgewater Church, which launched Feb. 12 with a worship service at Madisonville Maritime Museum, is already averaging more than 40 in worship.

While this church start was planned before Katrina, the storm undoubtedly shaped the church's ministry.

"Even eight months after Katrina, people are still not back to normal," said the church's pastor, Reid Doster. "People are grieving over tangible and intangible losses. Bridgewater is meeting a need for the familiar—something that feels rooted in timeless truth, and a need for closeness with safe people."

[bridgewaterchurch.info](http://bridgewaterchurch.info)

Doster, who also leads CBF-LA's Katrina relief efforts, has previously served in four other Baptist churches and most recently as pastoral care director at a local Presbyterian church. There, his pastoral gifts were renewed. "It got harder and harder for me to sit through a sermon because I wanted to be preaching," he said. "The Lord seemed to be nudging me and saying, 'Well, what are you waiting on?'"

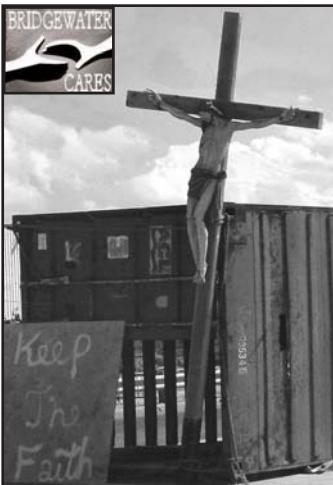
When CBF-LA began looking for a place to start a church, St. Tammany Parish was the fastest growing area of the state. Growth potential still thrives with 27 housing developments being constructed in the church's focal area. But with the strength – the highest per

capita income and number of college graduates – also comes weakness – highest suicide rates, rampant divorce and substance abuse,

Doster said. Two of the church's small groups offer support for members dealing with grief or divorce. "Many people here have tried everything and are coming to the conclusion that the only thing that can help them now is a savior. We want to introduce them to Jesus, get out of the way and let them get acquainted," Doster said.

CBF church starts are vital to the Fellowship's growth, but Doster has been slowly introducing the Fellowship to attendees, many of whom are not familiar with the movement. "Once they experience our reverence for biblical authority, balanced by respect for honest questioning, and see our commitment to justice and mercy in the world, they will understand who we are," he said.

Some attendees heard about the Fellowship because CBF volunteers helped clean and repair the damage Katrina caused. Volunteers helped Lonnie and Tina Livaudais, who even though their home and business flooded still donated 50 hymnals to the church. Pam Howell, the church's music minister, and her husband, Mike, also suffered significant damage to their home and business. Because of the experiences of the congregation, "Bridge-water will probably always have disaster response in its DNA," said John Daugherty, CBF-LA coordinator. "It will certainly be a part of the make up of their congregation."



## VOLUNTEERS WITH FURY

by Steven H. Meriwether  
St. Charles Church, New Orleans

They jumped into their work head-first. It was about three o'clock Monday afternoon. A group of thirty had endured a twenty-two-hour bus ride from Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Weeks prior to their coming the leader had specified that in spite of arriving late in the day, they wanted to go straight to work.

This bothered me. How in the Sam Hill was I going to line up a project for such a large group for such a small window of time? I called Max and Lori Sanders. They welcomed the offer of help in gutting their home. Having started the task an hour or so earlier, we three were elated to see the big church bus pull up to 3709 Rosetta Drive. Changing clothes on the bus, the group went at the project with fury. There was no dallying. The job was all but complete before sunset.

The rest of the week was no different. Daily, this group harnessed themselves, like oxen to a heavy cart, to the task at hand. Two houses were slated for sheetrock. They strained and pulled. There was little in the houses built on 16-inch centers. Adapting to the challenge before them, sheets of drywall were hung faster than the supply wagon could furnish them. By Saturday morning one house was complete, and a second all done but for a bathroom. Passersby stopped to gawk. The electrician called to compliment them. The

group left their mark.

Each morning presented some new twist to be straightened. The stress of chasing supplies down and securing assistance from overworked suppliers was unpleasant. And the record April heat left one feeling like a wrung-out dish rag. But I eagerly met the group each morning. I want to be with people like that. I want to be with people who submerge themselves in the task at hand. There were few generals and many followers. The goal of returning two of God's displaced children to their homes furnished a common rhythm. For a good part of each day we lived and worked on the same page.

I have missed these coworkers. Now that they are submerged into their normal lives, I wonder if they have forgotten me/us. I doubt it. Work like this leaves the worker with a measure of satisfaction. I think satisfaction comes from contact with the materials and lives of this world, from the mutual dependence of creatures upon one another, from fellow feeling, to borrow the words of Wendell Berry. Satisfaction rises out of the flow of time, the work that causes us to move in common rhythm.

The poet writes, "The pitcher cries for water to carry and a person for work that is real." To be of use is our mission daily. And when we manage to be of use the satisfaction lingers long past the stiff back or blistered hand. May God bless the men and women who pour into our city each week to work. May God keep them safe and give them rest. May God bless us all as we seek work that is real.



## Twister Yields Twisted Irony

Reid Doster recently reported: *This afternoon, after Bridgewater's worship service, it was my less than happy task to visit with Samuel Ducre, of Lacombe, and inform him that one of the two trucks carrying the two sections of their new home (given by Trinity Baptist Church, British Columbia) was hit by a tornado yesterday in Kansas. That particular half of their house now sits in a ditch in Kansas, in various pieces. An insurance claim has been filed. The surviving half of the totally furnished house ... [was later] delivered to the site... You might remember that Samuel and Loretta Ducre have buried two children in recent years. They live with their two grand daughters in a small FEMA camper, after their mobile home was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. I think everyone would agree this family has had more than its share of heartache, but the amazing thing is their positive attitude, fueled by a sincere faith. Samuel took the news as I expected he would, with chin up and even a smile. He and I believe good will come out of this turn of events. Please pray for them and for God's leadership as we figure out what to do next... One thing is for sure, CBF-LA will NOT give up on this project and will see it through to the end.*



Samuel Ducre Family

Be part of the blessing: VOLUNTEER! Contact Reid Doster at: 985-222-6900 or reid\_doster@hotmail.com

**Editor's Note:** Dr. Larry Taylor, Pastor of Emmanuel-Alexandria since February 1985, retired this month. His was the longest pastorate in the 118 year history of Emmanuel. We mark the occasion with Dr. Taylor's moving reflection on Ezekiel and God's redemptive work through people in exile.

*Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherubim on which it rested to the threshold of the house....Then the glory of the Lord went forth from the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubim. And the cherubim lifted up their wings and mounted up from the earth in my sight as they went forth, with the wheels beside them; and they stood at the door of the east gate of the house of the Lord; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them.... Then the cherubim lifted up their wings; with the wheels beside them; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them. And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city. And the Spirit lifted me up and brought me in the vision by the Spirit of God into Chaldea, to the exiles. Then the vision that I had seen went up from me. And I told the exiles all the things that the Lord had showed me.*

-- Ezekiel 9:3a; 10:18-19; 11:22-25



like a thorn into their souls. They were people still in shock as the long desert miles slowly passed behind them.

Upon arriving in Babylon the Hebrew captives saw one of the greatest cities of the ancient world. Jerusalem must have seemed like a small country town by comparison. Here were the spectacular hanging gardens of Babylon, the Ishtar Gate with its lapis-lazuli dragons, the ziggurat towering over the city, and the temple of the god, Marduk. It must have left their heads swimming, these Hebrews, wealthy and gifted in their own land, the cream of the crop, upper classes from Judah. But now in chains amid the splendors of Babylon they experienced the culture shock of a magnificent city dedicated to an alien god, and dwarfing anything Jerusalem ever had in comparison.

The Hebrew captives were taken to the east of the city and settled in ghetto housing along the River Chebar, a canal for irrigation. Here, in the weeks and months that followed the full despair and depression of their situation settled on them like a thick, wet garment.

And why wouldn't they have been depressed? Their whole world was shattered, dismembered by a cruel war machine. They

**God specializes in exiles. Hope is born from the rubble of despair. Resurrection is God's favorite surprise.**

themselves were captives in a hostile land. Their once-proud city of Jerusalem lay in ruins, a distant memory now, a city of rock and debris.

The Jews' national theology was ill-prepared for this disaster. These Jewish captives had been taught that their temple, the city of Jerusalem itself, and the Hebrew nation were inviolable. It had been an indisputable dogma in their minds. They had believed that God would never forsake Jerusalem. Now, with their holy city in ruins, and the temple razed to the ground by Nebuchadnezzar's battering rams, the Hebrews' God had been dislocated. God's house had been destroyed, and these people had no concept of a God without a holy place to dwell. It must have seemed to be the end of the world.

To make matters worse, they were tormented by their captors, who demanded that they sing the songs of Zion they use to sing en route to the temple to worship. All the pain and humiliation of the Jews' captivity is expressed in the 137th Psalm: "By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion...For there our captors required of us songs...,saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?"

This story from scripture turns on that question. It's a poignant question for exiles in all ages, a timely one now for many of us. "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?"

The Hebrews had worshiped a territorial God. True, they had heard from long experience that God was God of all the nations. Nonetheless, he was primarily Israel's God. God resided in Jerusalem, and they showed little willingness to share their God with anyone else. But now God had proven he couldn't even protect his holy city. Indeed, it must have seemed to them that their God had failed.

I remember visiting once in a home where death had taken a child from a couple who had loved and served God all their lives. I've never seen such grief as they told me through their tears, "We're disappointed with God. We feel let down. God has failed us."

All of this was bad enough for the Jewish prisoners. But there was something else that made their lives almost intolerable. In the years that followed their deportation to Babylon there developed a lively correspondence between themselves and their countrymen back in Jerusalem. The two groups were aware of what was going on in the other place. The Jews back home in Jerusalem taunted their countrymen in Babylon by pointing out that God had spared them the indignity of captivity. They still dwelt in the city of David where God resided. They looked with scorn upon the exiles in far off Babylon.

All the years of class hatred and resentment built up against these upper classes now in captivity was expressed. God at last had taken his revenge on these self imagined favorites. It was a final piece of bitterness for the captives. They felt cut off, utterly bereft of the presence of God.

Now here in this situation we see all the ingredients for the death of hope, for the surrender of faith and worship, for the despair that attends the loss of everything dear in life. Unless God somehow intervenes, the Hebrews' faith in Yahweh, God of Israel, could disappear forever. At this moment in the history of Israel, faith hangs by a thread among the exiles by the River Chebar.

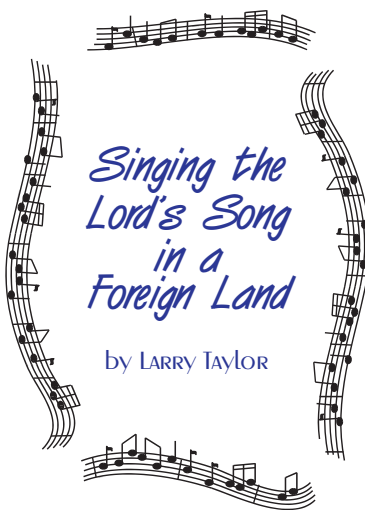
This story is framed by the human reality of exile. Deep in our souls we know what it is to be in the far

country. Sometimes we feel like a motherless child.

But God specializes in exiles. Hope is born from the rubble of despair. Resurrection is God's favorite surprise. Often, it is signaled by the appearance of a new voice.

And what a voice it was! For five years this young priest sat among the captives in Babylon, struggling their struggles, sharing their heartbreak, trying to come to grips with loss. All the while God was preparing him to receive visions like no one else had ever seen, to hear words from God no other prophet had heard, literally to raise the hearts of his fellow exiles, and to rescue their ancient faith from early death. This young priest's name was Ezekiel, and to this very day his name raises strange images in our minds.

It's not hard to understand why. Ezekiel was no normal man. "Weird," "bizarre," and "far out" are some of the kinder descriptions of Ezekiel. His behavior was so strange that modern psychological methods have been used to analyze him. One diagnosis is epilepsy. Karl Jaspers, the philosopher,



Sister Karen Flaherty says poverty is like a weight that pulls a person down. It climbs on a person's back, and it takes a lot to shake – especially when that person is continually told they are poor. It's a label, and it comes in bold and subtle ways – from outsiders who treat people differently to governmental assistance programs and aid organizations that over time make people dependent on charity.

**Planting Hope in Lake Providence**  
by Carla Wynn

The community of Lake Providence knows about being labeled poor. A 1994 article in Time magazine identified the community as the poorest in the country, according to 1990 census data. Being labeled poor is bad enough, but imagine the shame that comes from being labeled the poorest of America's poor.

The label weighs, no doubt. But, there are people in the community fighting back, refusing to accept what statistics then suggested. And it's already looking up. Part of the solution, they're finding, is that hope and change can come from within the community.

"I believe we are each other's greatest asset," said Joseph Jackson, police jury president. "We just need to recognize that ... we need to come together and work together."

Raised in Lake Providence, Jackson returned to the area after college to run his family's business and try to make a difference in the community. Pat Roberson, who also serves on the police jury, returned to Lake Providence after college. "I feel that this is my obligation and duty to help my own parish," she said. "This is home. There's no place like home."

Stemming from her undergraduate degree in health education, Roberson led an effort to create a walking trail behind the community's hospital. The grant-funded project

has created a safe exercise area and a common attraction for the community's black and white populations, who largely don't interact, residents said. Conversations between

Roberson and Lynn Hawkins, former CBF-LA coordinator, led to Together for Hope's involvement in landscaping the track.

Lake Providence is the parish seat of East Carroll Parish, one of 20 counties CBF focuses on through its rural poverty initiative, Together for Hope (TFH). Because the Fellowship has no personnel in the parish, it relies on partnering with existing community organizations such as Flaherty's ministry.

Since 2003, Flaherty has lived in the community, working in a variety of ways. She goes to a local elementary school daily to listen to children read. She also spearheads a Christmas project that CBF-LA partnered with last year. At the invitation of East Carroll Schools, CBF-LA also distributed 200 backpacks filled with school supplies to local schools.

Mary Hall and Nealie Sasser, both lifelong Lake Providence residents, are raising their respective families in Lake Providence, and there's no place they'd rather live. "I love Lake Providence, and I don't stay away long," Hall said. "I came in '67 and fell in love with it." "I've moved away a couple of times but always came back," Sasser said. "We have a lot of good people here, and you don't meet a

stranger." Lake Providence still has its challenges. Ninety percent of children in East Carroll schools are eligible for free or reduced lunch, said Alice Jean Nichols, child welfare supervisor for East Carroll Schools. More jobs, more businesses, better housing and health care, and an increasing population are all needed, Roberson said. "Our problems are not that much different than anyone else's," Jackson said. "We're just small and rural."



Sister Karen Flaherty talks with John Daugherty outside St. Patrick Catholic Church, in Lake Providence.

Photo-Carla Wynn

And community pride might be the greatest indicator that something positive is happening in Lake Providence, Flaherty said. The parish raised more than \$47,000 – the second highest amount in Louisiana – in last year's Relay for Life event. They also had nearly 190 volunteers in last year's *Make a Difference Day*. "I think Lake Providence is on the verge of something good," Flaherty said. "It's a great time to be in Lake Providence."

TFH efforts in Lake Providence will continue with relationship building, the key

ingredient for successful community development. Started in 2001, TFH is a 20-year initiative of the CBF to come alongside and learn from the relationships formed in rural communities in 20 counties across the nation in a long-term effort to address domestic poverty. For more information, see [ruralpoverty.net](http://www.ruralpoverty.net).

East Carroll  
**TOGETHER FOR HOPE**  
Louisiana  
To take seriously 2,000 verses of Scripture telling us of God's special concern for the poor and marginalized  
cbf rural poverty initiative

Relationships matter. Crucial to life, crucial to ministry, relationships are the heartbeat of Together for Hope (TFH), the CBF's rural poverty initiative in 20 counties across the nation. "Building relationships is always the most important aspect of our work," said John Daugherty. "We're here to form relationships that we hope will last a long time."

**Spreading Hope in Tensas**  
by Carla Wynn

Relationships take time, and 20 years is CBF-LA's commitment to Tensas Parish. Relationships are gradually building with some of the parish's estimated 6,000 residents. Tensas is an agricultural community, with vast farmlands separating the parish's small towns – St. Joseph, Waterproof and Newellton. There are two other main industries in Tensas – the public school system and the local prisons. "In Tensas Parish there are more inmates in detention centers than children in the school system," said Bill Hoffman, CBF-LA's former missions coordinator who is still involved in the prison ministry.

A five-person ecumenical group provides consistent presence in the prisons, holding worship services that have struck a spiritual chord with the men who attend. "We've been fortunate enough to see firsthand transformation of lives," Hoffman said. "It's readily apparent to all those involved that the spirit of God is at work. It's totally the Lord."

CBF partner churches have gotten involved, too, last year providing more than 1,000 bags of personal

items for inmates and several hundred Bibles in varying languages, Hoffman said. But restorative justice – the aim of Hoffman's work – reaches beyond the prisoner to his or her family, prison employees and even crime victims. CBF partner churches have helped in this approach by providing 650 Christmas gifts to prisoners' families last year. "Our ministry approach has been a holistic approach, recognizing we not only affect a prisoner but his or her family and those on staff," Daugherty said. "It ends up being a systemic impact in the whole community." And community transformation and development is the ultimate hope of TFH.

As with every other community, Tensas communities like Newellton have both needs and gifts. Lifetime Newellton resident Tawanna Banks said Newellton needs jobs, transportation to jobs and better housing. Under traditional needs-based models of ministry, churches and individuals would mobilize to ensure those needs were met. But TFH's strategy of local asset-based community development focuses on the community's gifts, acknowledging a community's existing and potential resources, skills and goals. It's not needs-based; it's assets-based.

One of the community's biggest assets is that, "Newellton is a close-knit community. People really care about each other," said Mary Johnson, principal of Newellton's ele-

mentary school. "They take pride in things – that's what holds this community together." Those supportive and caring relationships are a community asset that the Fellowship hopes to join. The area is quiet, with little crime, and safe enough for children to play outside without parents worrying, Banks said. In fact, Newellton is the only place Banks' 85-year-old grandmother wants to live. "She's been here all her life. She can sit down with the door open ... and she won't be scared. She likes her doctors. She likes her church," Banks said.

Johnson sees the school as a community asset as well. "The kids are proud of their school," she said. Because of the school's central role in the community, CBF-LA will continue to work with the school on short-term projects as invited by the school. For three years, CBF partner churches have provided 200 backpacks full of school supplies for students at Newellton High School, which serves children pre-kindergarten through grade 12. But these projects are just the start. Short-term projects are only a means, not the ends of community development. The development comes through relationships as community members journey to achieve their own dreams for their community. TFH just helps, when invited. Banks would like to see more activities for local children, including her own and her two nephews. Johnson would like to see school children succeed, and if they stay in Newellton, "to try to help the community grow and build. I think that's what it's going to take to make this community thrive," she said.



Tawanna Banks' nephew Treveon is one of the Tensas students who received a backpack.

Photo-Carla Wynn

**The Problem of Our Day: Complex, Spiritual, Moral...**

by Daniel Vestal



**POVERTY IS A MORAL PROBLEM**

Within all of us there is an intuitive and instinctive sense that the growing disparity between rich and poor is wrong. It's just not right, and we know it. Our moral conscience can be seared or silenced, but it can also be heeded to guide our decisions and behavior. When taxation takes money from the poor and gives it to the rich, that's a moral issue. When trade policies protect the rich and hurt the poor, that's a moral issue. When corporations make excessive profits at the expense of the poor, that's a moral issue. When budgets give preference to the rich and ignore the poor, that's a moral issue. The prophets of Israel were stinging in their rebuke of those in power when they failed to seek justice. And they were equally stinging in their rebuke of religious leaders who condoned such behavior. A moral test of society is how it treats the poor and powerless.

**POVERTY IS A HUMAN PROBLEM**

I personally believe we are living in a time of great opportunity. There is an emerging convergence between people of different faith traditions to address the problems of global poverty. We may have significant differences between us and great divides on many issues, but when it comes to the misery and suffering of so many, we feel united. The human family is increasingly being seen as just that, the human family.

This unity was the overwhelming impression I had when leaving the meeting with Secretary Rice. It was amazing how much unanimity there was among the religious leaders who gathered: Jewish, Christian, Muslims, all united in address-

ing social justice. I left feeling a certain hope among us – a hope for transformation within our various communities that would give impetus for a transformation in governments, in culture, in the world.

What was encouraging and inspiring to me in this meeting, as in other similar meetings, was the genuine collegiality and community in such an ecumenical and interfaith setting. It was not a strained or artificial environment, but one with a genuine care matched by a mutual respect for one another in a common concern.

**POVERTY IS A GLOBAL, NATIONAL, LOCAL, PERSONAL PROBLEM**

This means it must be addressed at all levels and by all of us. This means it will require both prayer and work, compassionate service and political will, engagement with poor people and advocacy for poor people, private action and public action, substantive change and symbolic change. It will require efforts by the church and state, "for-profit" organizations and "not-for-profit organizations." It will require partnership between business, government, institutions and churches. It will require leadership and intentionality.

Let me conclude this reflection by recounting a very personal experience. In the past several months I have become friends with a man in Atlanta (Henry) who lives on a disability check in a one room apartment. We share a meal and fellowship regularly. At the very moment I was walking into the state department building to see Secretary Rice, my cell phone rang. I took it out of my pocket and quickly turned it off. After the meeting I listened to my voice mail to discover that the call was from Henry. For me this phone call was more than serendipitous. It was providential. It was a reminder that the problem of poverty is so vast as to require the energy and resources of the U.S. government. And at the same time, it is so personal as to require my attention and concern for one poor person.

Built as a place of reconciliation, the new walking track at the hospital invites crossing of barriers and building community. With beautiful Lake Providence in the background, around 50 local folks including Girl Scouts, high school students and athletes, members of the East Carroll Police Jury and Hospital Board gathered there on April 8. They were joined by about as many friends from outside the area to landscape and beautify this trail of hope.

CBF-LA had representation from Temple-Ruston with Kenny and Shirley Crump, Lynn Hawkins and 21 members of the International Bible Study at Temple (19 Chinese and two Nepalese.) Luke Purdy represented Emmanuel-Alexandria along with a College and Young Adult Sunday School class from that church.

Together for Hope prepared and served 160 hotdogs with trimmings and drinks to the group. Several who were unable to attend gave gifts to provide plants and supplies purchased through local vendors. "We accomplished all that was planned for the day," reported John Daugherty. With at least four ethnic groups pulling together for a common task, the dream of bridge building by the track has already begun.



Photos-Phyllis Daugherty

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## SONG, from page 3

thought Ezekiel suffered from schizophrenia. John Bright, the historian of the Old Testament, said, "No stranger figure can be found in the prophets than Ezekiel." Why, at one time the rabbis were even unwilling to permit the first chapter of Ezekiel to be read in synagogues.

In personality Ezekiel was turbulent, stern, somber, and fantastic. He was an intellectual of the first class, and one of the finest theologians among the prophets. He was a sensitive poet of unusual skills, and that fact alone makes him almost incomprehensible to our own flat, prosaic age. Our age favors factual prose over poetry. Our times produce leaders with no poetry in them, then gives them power to lead institutions. I heard about one such man who was surprised to learn he'd been speaking prose all his life. John Bright is no doubt correct when he says, "Ezekiel was no normal man."

But the times didn't call for a normal man. The times called for a mind vast in its spectrum, a faith elastic and supple to new possibilities. The occasion demanded a visionary, a person of imagination and language, a soul so sensitive that a poet's spirit and a poet's tongue were essential. It was time for a non-conformist who was intimate with the traditions of his people, but who saw with clarity a future that subverts the tradition and then resurrects it from its own ashes. It was time for such a mind, such a soul, such a voice. It was time for Ezekiel.



**It is precisely when we're deprived of old ASSURANCES THAT WE'RE OPEN TO NEW EXPERIENCES ...AT OUR LOWEST ...GOD HIMSELF IS THERE WITH US AS SANCTUARY.**

And so he writes, *"In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the river Chebar, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God."*

Ezekiel saw a storm come out of the north. He saw fire flashing around four living creatures, and he saw a wheel upon the earth beside the living creatures, as it were a wheel within a wheel, turning at will, going in whatever direction it chose. He saw the glory of God, and fell on his face as God spoke to him. In the Old Testament the glory of God refers to the very presence of God. The glory of God is a synonym for God himself.

In his vision Ezekiel saw a mobile God, a God on the move. The wheel symbolized a traveling God, who went wherever he chose. We live every day with symbols and we're never bothered by them until we meet one in the Bible. Then we become literalists. Ezekiel challenges literalism.

Ezekiel saw the glory of God rise from the holy of holies and move to the threshold of the temple. That's revolutionary already, God leaving the holy of holies. Then he saw the glory of God move from the threshold of the temple to the east gate of the house of the Lord, where he paused. Next he saw the glory of God, symbolized in the wheels, move across the Kidron Valley to the Mount of Olives. God is on the move. God is vacating the temple itself. And finally, Ezekiel saw the glory of God move all the way to Babylon and settle among the exiles by the river Chebar. It is a powerful, symbolic picture of the withdrawal and relocation of God.

This was radical stuff in Ezekiel's day, because the Jews located God in Jerusalem. For God to move out of the holy city was revolutionary.

The withdrawal of God from the places we've always found him in the past can be a debilitating thing for people of faith. Millions of people today have lost God because the little brown church in the vale has disappeared among the steel and glass of the concrete, secular city. These people have not re-dreamed their God in a new place, and find themselves without the sense of the presence of God, exiles in a secular Babylon where other gods are honored. The departure of God, the sense of the absence of God, paralyzes us in our exile of spirit. A peripatetic God, a God on the go, appears to be a moving target. But Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggemann says, "God has no commitment to any of our structured worlds."

The God Ezekiel saw could not be contained in some oriental village named Jerusalem, nor could he be sealed in a fallen temple or a lost past. Ezekiel's God was a mobile God who would not be confined to a narrow strip of land in Palestine.

Ezekiel helped his people dream a bigger God to meet their national crisis. He dispelled forever the notion of a national God. In a moving vision he saw the presence of God move from the destroyed temple in Jerusalem, all the way to Babylon, to be with his crushed and hurting people. God is going into exile with his people.

Charles H. Spurgeon, the great London preacher, said, "As surely as God's children are in the fiery furnace, God is in there with them."

Exiles are especially precious to God, people who are out of the mainstream, those who wander in strange territory, exiles from the traditional and the conventional. The Book of Hebrews speaks of those who haven't received *"the promise of faith, but who have seen it and greeted it from afar, having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth."* There are a lot of exiles today from Baptist fundamentalism, and our church has dared to pay some attention to them.

We now know that there was a lively correspondence between the Jews left in Jerusalem and the captives taken away to Babylon. Each group knew what was going on in the other group. The group back home draped themselves in self-righteousness and self-confidence to say absolutely that they were still in God's good graces since they'd been spared the captivity.

So we have this situation where the Jews still in their homeland have no doubts, while those in exile have no assurance. Sound familiar?

It is precisely when we're deprived of old assurances that we're open to new experiences. It's to those with no assurance that Ezekiel brings the comforting

message that the presence of God is with the exiles. God is with the homeless, God is with the strangers in the land, the displaced, and the unsettled.

There is a sense in which the prophecy of Ezekiel is a tale of two cities, Jerusalem and Babylon. It's a story of two communities, one feeling that it has a lock on the will of God, and the other in despair, and wondering just where God is.

The word of the Lord came to Ezekiel saying, "Though I removed them far off, and though I scattered them among the countries, yet I have been a sanctuary to them." In the prophets there is never a vision of God without an audition. That is, word always accompanies sight. "Show and tell" is the ancient teaching device of God. God's word to his people is that God himself is their home and refuge.

The psalmist says "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place." The poet Wordsworth spoke of "God, who is our home." When we feel despair, when we are at our lowest, when we weep by the river Chebar with other exiles, God himself is there with us as sanctuary.

Ezekiel brings this message: God's people would be renewed by the minority in exile, not by those who stayed home and clutched their territorial God. Ezekiel's mission was to search out security, absolutism, and certainty, and then to undermine them. He brought an alternative message to a marginal people who lived as exiles.

This is the Gospel according to Ezekiel: Are you in exile to despair? God is with you. Are you in exile to defeat? God is by your side. Are you in exile to depression? God is closer than hands or feet. Because God goes into whatever exile his people go.

This is the Bible's message over and over again. To Moses at the Burning Bush, to Jacob at Bethel, to Elijah in a cave on Mt. Horeb, to Daniel in a den of lions, to the Hebrew captives by the River Chebar: God is with us in our own exile.

And ultimately it's the message of Jesus Christ, whose name, after all, is Emmanuel: God is with us!

All the prophets looked to the future, and finally saw hope because God will triumph. At the end of his prophecy Ezekiel looked into the distant future and saw there a new city that God would build for his people. In the last verse of his prophecy Ezekiel says, "And the name of that city shall be, 'The Lord is there'."

God no longer dwells in the old city. Let them have it. God has a bias in favor of exiles. There is gospel in that. There are many of us right now who feel like exiles, but faith can be at its very best on the edge of exile.



Barry Moser

Ezekiel

# Sinti Tent Meeting: Food, Stories, Faith

Since most of you have not had the pleasure of attending a Sinti tent meeting, I thought I might describe one to you. The center piece appears to be a circus tent, set up in a commanding position on a grassy field. This grassy field usually lies on the edge of a mid-sized city. Behind and around the tent, travel trailers cluster in friendly family groups. At a discreet distance, facilities have been set up (a set of rest-rooms in a trailer for the larger tent meetings; a port-a-potty for the smaller ones). Somewhere near the tent, a generator noisily creates electricity. Children and well-waxed cars mingle on the grounds. Even if it rains, a festive air pervades the place.

Inside the tent, a platform has been set up along one wide side faced by irregular rows of plastic lawn chairs. Meetings held every evening (well attended) and every morning (by the very faithful) use a Gypsy orchestra to draw the crowd. Violins, guitars, with sometimes a bass and sometimes a keyboard, strike up a swing beat. Impromptu jam sessions often take place before and after (though usually not during) meetings. Space is given in the song service for improvised solos by the very best. The singing itself is usually led by a group of long-haired women with incredibly intense voices. Some, I think, could sing opera if properly trained. Most sing Gospel or swing in

Romanes (their own language), Dutch, German, and sometimes even English or French. I have never met an adult Sinti who could make themselves understood in less than three languages.

During the musical beginning, adults gather. Children come and go. Young men, dressed in their best but affecting nonchalance,

cluster around the openings to the tent. Will they go in? Maybe. In the meantime, all the young women, dressed in their best, must pass through the young men to sit down or to take their place among the singers. And while the young women may be covered from waist to ankle as Sinti etiquette demands, the long skirts cover without actually hiding any attractive features.

After about a half hour of music and prayer, or perhaps ten minutes into the sermon, women with younger children tend to slip out. Shoes are always left outside the trailer door. I have seen women carefully wash the children's feet before bed. The sermon is broadcast into the night clear enough for most in the surroundings to hear, even those who have opted to stay sitting comfortably in lawn chairs around their trailer, or the trailer of a friend.

Often the most significant parts of the tent meetings happen in these groups that will gather before and long after the services. Most trailers have an awning or even attached tent with a mini-kitchen (hot plate on table along with wash basin and dishes), picnic table, and plenty of chairs. People chat with friends and family members from other towns, cities, even countries. Food is shared. Stories are shared. Faith is shared. A people whose culture is based on community and interaction pass on the Good News in the same way.



**RomanyMission**  
romani-bible.org gypsyministries.com



CBF-LA has adopted the mission to the Romany people (gypsies). We receive regular updates and prayer requests from Louisiana native CBF missionary Keith Holmes and his wife and missionary partner Mary van Rheenen. Based in the Netherlands, their work includes translation of Scripture and other Christian media, support for Pastors and Evangelists, and micro-economic development for impoverished families.

**JUST IN! Keith will be in the US from Nov 22-Dec 17 with Armin Peter, Wycliffe Bible translator, and Rudi Walter, Sinti evangelist/head of Roma & Sinti Christian Training Center. They are available to speak to any gathering during that time.**

### PRAY FOR:

- \*Impact of this season's tent meetings;
- \*Children's programs for tent meetings;
- \*Distribution of media materials during this season's tent meetings.

\*Pentecost children's program and workers

### PRAISE GOD FOR:

- \*Completion of David & Saul video, should be ready to distribute soon;
- \*Good CBF team meeting & the addition of two Global Service Corps members to the Romany Team;
- \*Good trip to Moldova & good leadership in the Bethlehem Baptist Church there.
- \*The Offering for Global Missions that makes this work possible.



## Partners in Prayer Calendar

Some missionary names omitted due to sensitive nature of work.

### MAY

- 21 \_\_\_\_\_, unevangelized people group
- 21 Ron Winstead, Emeritus
- 25 Rick Burnette, Palaung people, Thailand
- 26 \_\_\_\_\_, unevangel. people group, Asia
- 28 Laurel Morrow, 1992, daughter, Frank & Karen, Germany
- 31 Ann Skipper, Affiliate, Tennessee

### JUNE

- 2 Emily Morrow, 1990, daughter, Frank & Karen, Germany
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_, unevangelized people groups, SE Asia
- 7 Diann Whisnand, urban work, Los Angeles
- 8 Janice Newell, work with Albanian/Balkan peoples, Greece
- 9 Michelle Cayard, representative to China
- 10 Kim Wyatt, internationals, Toronto, Can.
- 14 \_\_\_\_\_, unevangel. people group, Mid East
- 15 \_\_\_\_\_, 1985, daught., unevang. group, SE Asia
- 16 \_\_\_\_\_, 1988, daught., unevang. group, SE Asia
- 17 Margie Thibodeaux, urban work, Georgia
- 19 Ana D'Amico, UN Public Policy/Partnerships, Vol. Liaison, Cary, NC
- 20 Lonnie Turner, HIV/AIDS/public policy coordinator, sub-Saharan Africa
- 21 \_\_\_\_\_, 2000, daught, unevang. group, Asia
- 21 \_\_\_\_\_, Affiliate, Middle East
- 22 Brenda Lisenby, representative to China
- 22 \_\_\_\_\_, scripture translation, Asia
- 22 Darrell Smith, work with Albanian/Balkan peoples, Macedonia
- 23 Sarah Ballew, Affiliate, Macau, China
- 23 Helen McNeely, Emeritus
- 23 Martha Shaw, work with Albanian/Balkan peoples, Macedonia
- 23 \_\_\_\_\_, 1998, son, scripture transl., Asia
- 24 Hannah Myrick, 1989, daughter, Lori & Tim Myrick, Jordan
- 25 Brian McAtee, CBF Research Consultant, Boston, MA
- 26 \_\_\_\_\_, unevang. people group, N Africa
- 26 Tim Myrick, Bedouin people, Jordan

### JULY

- 3 Nathanael Ballew, 1994, son, Lary & Sarah, China
- 3 Jesse Burnette, 1990, son, Ellen & Rick, Thailand
- 4 Alex Smith, 1990, son, Darrell & Kathy, Macedonia
- 5 Jeanette Lochner, Affiliate, China
- 5 Bob Potts, Emeritus
- 6 Shelah Acker, urban work, West Africa
- 6 Sam Harrell, urban work, Nairobi, Kenya
- 6 Becky Shenton, Global Service Corps, Freemont, CA
- 8 Doug Shenton, Global Serv. Corps, CA
- 10 Tiffne Whitley, internat., San Francisco,
- 11 Allie McNary, 1995, daughter, Dianne & Shane, Slovakia
- 12 Elizabeth Houser, 1990, daughter, Ana Marie & Scott, Southern Africa
- 12 \_\_\_\_\_, unevangel. group, M East/N. Africa
- 12 Mark Podgaisky, 1999, son, Gennady & Mina Podgaisky, Ukraine
- 14 John Deal, Emeritus
- 14 Erik Smith, 1985, son Becky & Jim, Germany



A Smaller Tent Meeting



*"Being the Presence of Christ for a World in Need"*

National Assembly



June 21-24

Bo Prosser  
LA Meeting Speaker

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See yourself in Atlanta!

*The Big Family gathers – for worship, sharing, laughter, challenge.*

- Diverse offerings sampled below:**
- \*Al Staggs - Dietrich Bonhoeffer & Clarence Jordan
  - \*Michael Hawn - Worship From Around the World
  - \*Eddie Hammet - Missional Deacon Ministry
  - \*Companions in Christ Small Group Training
  - \*Joy Yee and Alicia Walker lead corporate worship
  - \*Jay Hogewood- Confessing Sin: When Speech Acts
  - \*Trevor Hudson - A Call to Justice and Mercy
  - \*Bill Hull - Marks of a Missional Church
  - \*Dale Riddle - Missional Churches and Evangelism
  - \*George Mason & David Hinson - Mentoring
  - \*G. Bullard - Every Church Needs a Little Conflict
  - \*HIV Summit: Christians responding to AIDS
  - \*Greg & Priscilla Hunt-Marriage Ministry Jump Start
  - \*Salvador in Concert – Christian Music with Concern for Justice
  - \*African American Network Gospel Festival
  - \*Denton Lotz - Baptist World Alliance
  - \*John Ivins - Communicating the Gospel to Youth
  - \*Molly Marshall - A Theology for Ministry
  - \*Caleb's Café online service for Adult/Youth Discipleship Groups
  - \*Dianna & David Garland - Crazy Families of the Bible
  - \*Frank Tupper- Doing Theology with Country Music
  - \*Les Robinson - Drawing the Short Straw: Serving on a Search Committee
  - \*Bill Leonard - Baptist Dissent
  - \*Theologians Under Hitler – Baptist Center for Ethics
  - \*Lloyd Allen - Experiencing Guided Prayer and Meditation
  - \*David Brown & Nomie Derani - Being the Presence of Christ in the Muslim World
  - \*Lynn Miller - Money Talks: What Do You Want Yours to Say
  - \*Jeanie Miley - Mining for Gold: Lessons from Job

**CBF-LA 'BRIEFS'**



**Expanding Partnership with Romany Mission:** John Daugherty plans an October trip to Holland to strategize with missionaries Keith Holmes and Mary van Rheenen ways to partner more directly in their Gypsy ministries. Pastors and mission leaders are invited. Call John at 318-229-3738.




**Welcome to: Starlight Missionary Baptist Church, Slidell,** which recently took the step of formally affiliating with CBF-LA. Pastor, Rev. Shovie Ducre and his wife are pictured to the left.

**A CBF Film Crew visited Louisiana** in April to see the work of **Together in Hope Rural Poverty Initiative.** Video footage will be featured at the National Assembly in Atlanta.




**Disaster/Mission Mobile Called into Service.** CBF-LA is now the proud title holder of a (previously owned and lovingly cared for) RV. Ready for emergency ministry opportunities or for scheduled mission activities, it enhances our ability to go to the need. Is that a groundswell we hear calling for a blessing of the RV?

**PASSPORT Summer Youth Camp,** July 17-22, LSU-Baton Rouge. Contact: passportcamps.org, 800-769-0210



*A Rose To Dr. Larry Taylor*



CBF-LA would like to express our congratulations and best wishes to you and Linda upon your retirement and being named Pastor Emeritus of Emmanuel-Alexandria. Baptists of Louisiana will miss your leadership, your courage, and your commitment to the traditional and historical principles of what it means to be Baptist. Moreover, CBF-LA wants to express to you our appreciation for your presence, support, leadership and commitment to this wonderful movement. We pledge our continued prayers for you as you forge ahead into a new phase of life. You will always be considered a valuable partner in the work and ministry of this Fellowship.

Excerpts from letter by John Daugherty on behalf of CBF-LA

CBF-LA Receipts	Mar/Apr	Fiscal Year 3/01/06-2/28/07
Undesignated	\$18,786.78	\$18,786.78
Together in Hope	\$5,055.34	\$5,055.34
Stagg-Tolbert Forum	\$196.29	\$196.29
New Church Start	\$6,026.66	\$6,026.66
Disaster Relief	\$10.00	\$10.00
Misc. Designated Funds	--	--
Credits	\$775.00	\$775.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$30,850.07</b>	<b>\$30,850.07</b>

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