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Charity & Children

The historic publication of Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina, first to tell the story for 135 years.



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November 2023

Issue 11

Volume 136



N A T I O N A L

Adoption

M O N T H

In the last 12 months, an amazing 41 families have adopted babies into their homes through Christian Adoption Services, a ministry of Baptist Children's Homes. Christian couples are boldly stepping forward responding to God's call in ever increasing numbers.

(Continued on page 6.)



Celebrating adoptions and families in November.

Center Stage: Spotlighting the Latest in News and Events



Kinston Greater Vision dedicated Oct. 10

Baptist Children's Homes staff members, community dignitaries, supporters, and nonprofit partners and friends gathered October 10 at Kennedy Home in Kinston for the ribbon-cutting ceremony and opening of the Kinston Greater Vision Outreach Center. Greater Vision in Kinston is an extension of the ministry first established on the campus of Mills Home in Thomasville.

"Greater Vision at Kennedy Home works with families in need, guiding them through the process of becoming self-sufficient," said Sara Becker, Manager of The Bob and Carolyn Tucker Greater Vision Outreach Ministry. "We look forward to assisting families in Kinston and the surrounding areas in their journey to a better life."

Greater Vision in Kinston also works to enhance the services of community non-profits by facilitating and distributing large

donations, creating partnerships to improve communication and ministry efficiency, and supporting broader community outreach efforts.

"Greater Vision will be a place where families in need can come and receive assistance, compassion and guidance," said Becker. "Our staff and volunteers will work to help fulfill the mission of Baptist Children's Homes—'sharing hope... changing lives.'"

Turkey in the Hole remains BCH tradition

The first Turkey in the Hole occurred nearly sixty years ago at Camp Woodland Springs just outside of Dallas, Texas, where Buford McKenzie (Chief Mac) began his career in therapeutic camping. Woodland Springs was the first camp of its kind and provided the model for Baptist Children's Homes' Cameron Boys Camp (CBC). Chief Mac was the first director at CBC until 1990 when Paul Daley

became director

In November of 1967, a Woodland Springs group was canoeing the Trinity River. Struggling to complete the trip and having to stay over Thanksgiving, Chief Mac surprised the group with a turkey and a box of aluminum foil. The group buried the twenty-two pound turkey in a deep bed of coals along the riverbank and covered it with sand—the precursor of many Turkey in the Holes.

Cameron Boys Camp has carried on the tradition since its first Thanksgiving in 1981. The night before the festivity, groups dig a large pit and lay a bonfire on top. Once lit, there's much singing and celebrating as everyone discusses how God has blessed them throughout the year. The next morning, when the pit is full of coals, the boys bury up to fifteen turkeys wrapped in five layers of tin foil. The turkeys cook about eight hours and come out golden brown and tender.

INVITATION TO CAMP EVENTS:

Cameron Boys Camp's Turkey in the Hole begins with the Bonfire on November 19th



at 7:00 p.m. Thanksgiving Meal with the campers is held the next day, November 20 at 4:30 p.m. Call 910-245-4034 to RSVP.

Camp Duncan for Girls is hosting Founders Day on Saturday, November 18. Meet the girls, tour campsites, and enjoy lunch. Registration is at 10:00 a.m. Lunch begins at noon. Call 336-474-1209 to RSVP.

Editor's Note: Center Stage is a new feature highlighting the latest news and events of BCH's ever-expanding ministries.

Mission:

sharing hope . . . changing lives

Vision:

To provide the highest quality of Christian services to children, adults and families in a caring culture of measurable excellence

Charity & Children—Established in 1887 as the official publication of Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina, Inc., 204 Idol St., PO Box 338, Thomasville, NC 27361-0338. Jim Edminson, editor (wjedminson@bchfamily.org); Blake Ragsdale, managing editor (jbragsdale@bchfamily.org); Marcia Housand, account clerk. **Charity & Children** (ISSN 0009-1723-09 USPS 100-460) is published 11 times a year for friends and supporters by Triangle Web Printing, Durham, NC and mailed by Excalibur, Winston-Salem, NC. Circulation: 62,000 seven times a year, 30,000 four times a year. Periodicals postage paid at Thomasville, NC, and at additional mailing offices. For free subscription or to be removed from the mailing list or make address correction or change, use the above address and write to Attn: Circulation Manager, send an email to address@bchfamily.org or call at 336-474-1209. Subscribe online at bchfamily.org/charityandchildren. POSTMASTER: Send change of address to **Charity & Children**, PO Box 338, Thomasville, NC 27361-0338.

Sisters escape abuse and neglect through adoption

By Jim Edminson, Editor

Courtney Conley's world is all about family—and her heart beats for children. As a public school teacher, she goes into the classroom daily bolstering children who deal with a broad array of challenges.

"I grew up here," the Franklin, North Carolina native says. "It is home. I fell in love with school in the second grade and becoming an elementary school teacher became my dream."

She remembers being inspired by her fifth grade teacher and she has never regretted her decision. "I believe teaching is what I am meant to do."

Being a teacher made her aware of the lives children live—lives filled with trauma and pain, experiences most people could never imagine.

It is from this place that Courtney chose to become a foster parent. She entered fostering with eyes wide open. "Seeing the needs pricked my heart, compelling me to step forward."

When Courtney decided to pursue fostering, she came to Baptist Children's Homes (BCH). Her lifetime involvement at Cullowhee Baptist Church made it an easy decision.

Through the "EVERY CHILD" Foster and Adoption Ministry, BCH trains and equips people to become licensed foster care families. BCH also partners with churches, recruiting families from within congregations and helping churches begin their own foster and adoption ministries.

Courtney called BCH and began to ask questions. "I learned quickly that they were committed to helping me—putting me on the right track."

BCH works to help people become licensed foster care families. Foster parents are committing to caring for and loving a child, or children, for a brief or extended period of time with the ultimate goal of the child returning to their biological families.

BCH's "EVERY CHILD" adoption ministry is designed to find permanent homes for children currently in the foster care system when reunification is not possible. The ultimate goal is to provide permanency for these children through adoption.

BCH seeks foster parents who are in it for the right reason. Fostering takes hard work and has its challenges—despite BCH's training and 24/7 support.

With BCH's help, Courtney became a licensed foster parent in 2018.

The first children she fostered were two sisters, three and four, and she admits she was "terrified—but at the same time excited and hopeful."

Two months later, their younger sister came



Courtney Conley never imagined her call to foster children would lead to an answered prayer. Two years after becoming a licensed foster parent, Blakely and Harlow (l-r) were placed in her home. The girls' parents relinquished their custody and Courtney realized a dream come true by becoming a mom to the sisters.

to live with them. Three children were almost overwhelming. Courtney's family pitched in to help and she took it day by day.

"God knows me well," she chuckles. "He knew what I could handle. I prayed through it. Others prayed for me. Looking back, I can truly say that nothing became too big."

The confidence Courtney has in BCH was also not misplaced. She knew a BCH case manager was just a phone call or a short drive away. "From the very first day the girls arrived, I knew I was not alone. They wanted me to succeed as much as I wanted to succeed. BCH does everything with God's mission in mind."

Eighteen months later, the sisters were reunified with their family. Courtney was content to be what they needed in that season of their lives and help them. "I was determined to give my best, believing and trusting it would be enough."

In August 2000, sisters Blakely, age four, and Harlow, age three, were to be temporary. Courtney agreed to help another BCH foster family by

being a respite care resource for the girls. The Welch family's adopted son Israel was facing a critical health issue and the demand on Lisa and John were great. (See the three-part series on the Welch family in the August, September, and October issues of C&C.) The Welch family believed in time the girls would return as their son's health improved. But instead of returning, Courtney was asked to become their foster family.

Before coming into foster care, the sisters were abused and neglected. The house where they lived had holes in the roof, walls, and floors. In the summer, they were suffocatingly hot and in the winter they were teeth-chattering cold. When it rained, they huddled under a table in the kitchen. There was no hot water and they often went to bed dirty, hungry, and afraid. But the girls were resourceful. They knew which churches handed out meals to the poor and homeless. They often visited church pantry boxes.

(Continued on page 11.)

Patricia is safe in the "I" of the storm

By **Brenda B. Gray**, Executive Vice President, Development & Communications

Jesus appears to the disciples in the boat in the midst of the storm. And as he comes to them walking across the water, he speaks these words: "Take heart; It is I. Do not be afraid."

Did you know it is estimated there are 117 variations of "do not be afraid" in the Bible? Throughout His word, He reminds us we are not alone. He reminds us to take heart, take courage, He is the living God. He is with us. God is the great "I" of the storm. Just as He was there for His disciples, Jesus has been here for Baptist Children's Homes in the midst of our stormy season. It has been a difficult season, but throughout, we have remained steadfast focused on the great "I" of the storm as He reminded us to take heart, to take courage, and rest in the fact He was with us.

I am filled with gratitude for God's presence in our lives. One of the ways He has walked with us is through you—our wonderful BCH family. We are so grateful for your faithful encouragement and support during this time and we celebrate all that God has done and is doing in the midst of the storm.

Storms are something we are quite familiar with in our ministry. Every child that walks through our doors have been through some kind of storm. I am so grateful for the opportunity to speak truth into their lives, reminding them of God's message in the midst of the storm—"Take Heart"

I recently returned from a speaking engagement and was settling in for what would become a "short" Sunday afternoon nap when the phone rang. "Hey, Ms. Brenda. I sure miss you." It was the sweet voice of Patricia.

She grew up at Broyhill Home in Clyde. Patricia's life had been full of storms. She and I chatted for a few minutes and then the conversation became serious. She asked me to pray for her. She shared that her MS was worse and that she was going to have heart surgery—and that Jim's (her husband) cancer was back.

When Patricia awoke from her last heart surgery, which there have been many, Ms. Linda (her former houseparent) was there holding her hand. For many of the children in care, we become family for life.

"Ms. Brenda, I do not know where I would be if it were not for Baptist Children's Homes," Patricia said. *"My parents gave me life, but BCH saved my life. I hope to come see you soon."*

We spent a time in prayer. She told me that she loved me and I assured her that I loved her and would also be praying for Jim. After I hung up the phone, I began to think about Patricia's life, the storms, but also the victory she has

experienced. She has truly learned what it means to "Take Heart" and trust God. I am so thankful for the many opportunities God gives us to care for the "Patricia's" of this world.

Like many of the children who walk through our doors, Patricia's childhood was a very scary time—full of fear. One day, her fears became reality when she heard dishes break and doors slam. Her mom and dad were in a vicious fight. Patricia walked into the room to see her mother holding a gun. Her father saw Patricia enter the room, grabbed her and put her in between him and the barrel of the pistol.

Her life seemed like a nightmare she could not wake up from. Before coming to live at BCH, she and her sisters had no stability. There were times when they had no lights, no running water, and Patricia slept on hard floors with only a pillowcase. She remembers a Christmas when her family was living on the streets in a shelter. A church provided them with Christmas gifts which her parents sold to buy drugs.

As a teenager, medical test revealed a dark spot on her brain. There was fear of cancer, but the doctors attributed the mark to a possible childhood injury. Today, Patricia suffers from multiple medical issues many of which are due to the severe abuse and neglect she experienced as a child.

Through the ministry of BCH, Patricia was introduced to God and His unconditional love. She accepted Christ as her personal Savior and was no longer in the storm alone. She was able to "Take Heart" in knowing God was with her.

Today, Patricia is an amazing young lady who loves the Lord with all her heart. She will not be stopped by the storms. Patricia loves to tell people "we serve an amazing God who has taken a girl the world said wouldn't make it and brought her to a place of faith, hope and love." Patricia believes that the difficult situations she has experienced in her life can be used by God to help others.

So many Patricia's walk through our doors. We are grateful to God for the many people that are a part of their lives—people who have wiped away tears of fear, people who have been listening ears, people who have been prayer warriors. You who have supported us in so many ways.

Storms will come and go in the lives of our



ministry and those we serve. We hold on to the promise we are not in the boat alone. "Take heart; It is I. Do not be afraid."

We are so blessed to have a \$300,000 year-end matching gift challenge. Consider gifts of cash, stocks, bonds, real estate, life insurance, a qualified charitable distribution from an IRA, a vehicle, or/and a gift from your donor advised fund. There are so many ways you can make a difference in the life of a child like Patricia.

National trends show that giving was down last year and projected to be down this year. National trends also show that needs are greater than ever. This presents a potential storm. These are challenging times. But we are reminded, we are not in the boat alone. Your gift is vital! Consider giving a little extra for those who wish they could give but cannot this year.

Thank you in advance for your gift to help calm the storm for a child or family in need.

I leave you with Patricia's powerful words, *"My parents gave me life, but Baptist Children's Homes saved my life."* Thank you, most of all, for introducing Patricia to Jesus, the one who truly Saves!

Emma's story tells why your gift is so important

Despite the Christmas decorations, five-year-old Emma felt sad. Only days before, she was rescued by authorities after her parents left her alone in a house for three days. She was found afraid, hungry, and dehydrated. Now safe in a cottage, she worried: "If mommy and daddy won't watch over me, why will the grown ups here take care of me?"

As Christmas approached, Emma and the other children heard their cottage parents talk about Jesus and how His birth is what makes Christmas special. A small statue of Jesus holding a child's hand captured Emma's attention. She thought about all she had learned, her eyes widened, and she whispered: "He watches over me."

You make it possible for children like Emma to be not only watched over by loving cottage parents, but by Jesus—our perfect Christmas gift. Give now and your gift will be matched dollar for dollar through our \$200,000 challenge gift until January 31, 2024. Thank you!

I want to share the **HOPE** of Christmas

- ☐ \$50 Christmas for one child ☐ \$100 Christmas for two siblings ☐ \$300 A cottage holiday outing
☐ \$600 Christmas for a cottage ☐ \$1,000 A large gift for a cottage ☐ \$_____ Any size gift

There are two ways you can make your gift:

- 1) By Check: Please use the enclosed envelope and mail this completed form with your check.
2) By Credit Card: Give online at www.bchfamily.org/givenow or call Faith Frazier at 336-474-1312.

Receive ministry updates and more. Email: _____
☐ Contact me with information on how to prepare a Christian Will. ☐ I have included Baptist Children's Homes in my estate plans.

Adoption assistance funds help reduce barriers

By Jim Edminson, Editor

(Continued from page 1.)

More than 2,000 babies have been placed with Christian families through Christian Adoption Services (CAS) since its beginning in 1979. Today, God continues to bless the ministry in big ways.

"We average about 30 domestic adoptions a year," says Kevin Qualls, Director of Development, CAS and Young Leader Relations for BCHNC/CAS. "These past 12 months blew the top off."

The 41 babies adopted this year signals more growth can be expected in the months ahead. New financial assistance awards are helping to reduce barriers couples face when responding to God's call to adopt. CAS has assisted couples through the Jim and Doris Woodward Adoption Assistance Fund since 2017.

The new Phillip Qualls Adoption Assistance Fund will begin making awards in

2024 for ministers who are adopting (See page 11).

In addition, the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina partners with cooperating churches, matching church funds at a 2:1 ratio to reimburse out-of-pocket expenses of adoptive families, up to a maximum of \$2,000 per adopted child.

Families who adopt through BCH or CAS are eligible for an additional reimbursement at a 1:1 ratio, up to \$1,000 per

adopted child. Ryan and Amber Blue from Pleasant Garden Baptist Church are the fund's first recipients.

Churches can apply for reimbursements on behalf of the adoptive families from their congregation and can apply online at ncbaptist.org/adoptiongrant. The fund was created after BSCNC and BCH NC partnered in 2021, creating the EVERY CHILD Foster and Adoption Ministry.

"These are great days," says Qualls. "Please pray as we work with interested families as they seek God's will through adoption."



Ryan and Amber Blue, members of Pleasant Garden Baptist Church, were the first couple to be awarded a NC Baptist Adoption Assistance Grant.



BAPTIST CHILDREN'S HOMES

bchfamily.org/gift-catalog



GIFT CATALOG

2023

**SHOP 30+
GIFT IDEAS**

GIVE THE GIFT OF
A BIBLE TO SOMEONE
WHO HAS NEVER
OWNED ONE

PAGE 4

CELEBRATE

**SHINE JESUS'
LIGHT WITH A GIFT
THAT REALLY
MATTERS THIS YEAR**

FEATURE STORY
READ MORE ON PAGE 3

*Shop our selection of gifts that impact the lives of children
and families across North Carolina, South Carolina, and Guatemala
through our many ministries that share hope...change lives.*



DIRECTIONS: Please look through the categories of items and make your choices—cost and quantity options are in red. There is an order form at the end of the catalog with instructions on how to make your gift.

CELEBRATE!



Sponsor a Birthday

Show love to someone on their birthday (something they may have never experienced before) by providing a gift & decorations for a child or adult in our care.

\$50/Person or \$600/Cottage

Group Celebration Trip

Sponsor a group celebration trip for a child in our cottage care or a camper in our Wilderness Camps. (example: the Ark Encounter, Creation Museum, Dollywood, Carowinds, etc.)

\$125/Person or \$1,500/Cottage

College Care Package

Send a care package to a college student who has aged out of the foster system to help them feel loved and celebrated during their college years.

\$50

Sponsor Christmas

Purchase a Christmas gift and help make Christmas magical for a child in our care. This child may be experiencing the real joy of Christmas for the first time.

\$50/Person or \$600/Cottage

Christmas Meal

Provide a special Christmas meal for a child or adult in our care.

\$25/Person or \$300/Cottage

CLOTHING

Winter Coat

Give the gift of warmth to a child in care or adult in our IDD ministry. You can show Jesus' love with this simple gift.

\$50 Quantity : [1] [5] [10]

Shoes

Send a child to school with a new pair of sneakers. Some children have never received a new pair of shoes, so this small act gives a child hope that someone cares.

\$75 Quantity : [1] [5] [10]



Clothing Wardrobe

When a child comes into our care, most come with little to no belongings. Provide a child or adult in our IDD ministry with the opportunity to select new clothing items when they arrive.

\$400

Pair of Boots

Every camper of Cameron Boys Camp and Camp Duncan needs a sturdy pair of boots for outdoor living. Your gift can provide a pair of boots for a camper or for our entire camp.

\$100 Quantity : [1] [5] [10]

BASIC NEEDS

Medical Needs

Help cover the cost of medical needs such as glasses, speech therapy, etc. for children and adults in our care.

\$50/Person or \$600/Cottage

Welcome Care Package

Provide a child with a Welcome Care Package that provides necessities such as toiletries & towels when they enter into care.

\$35



Bedding Basics

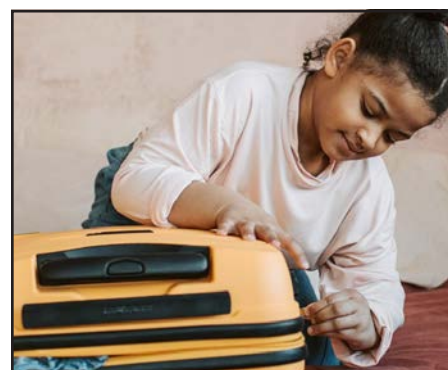
Provide new bedding for a child in our cottage home or adult in our IDD ministry.

\$100

Suitcase/Duffle Bag

Purchase a suitcase or duffle bag for a child in care to replace the trash bag they typically carry their belongings in.

\$50



Headphones

Provide a pair of school-required headphones for a child to use to learn and grow in the classroom.

\$25

School Supplies

Purchase school supplies and cover costs for fees and field trips for a child in our cottage homes, wilderness camps, foster care or our Guatemala orphanage.

\$50

HELP AGING ADULTS

Wheelchair Ramp

Pay for an aging adult to have a wheelchair ramp built at their home as part of our Rampin Up' program so they can maintain their independence and quality of life.

\$350

ACTIVITIES

Fishing Pole

Purchase a fishing pole for a child in care so they can experience the joy of learning a new skill and enjoying the outdoors.

\$25/Person or \$300/Cottage



Sports Scholarship

Provide the opportunity for a child to participate in youth community sports.

\$100/Person or \$1,200/Cottage

DID YOU KNOW? BCH impacted 167,619 lives in 2022 through the support of North Carolina Baptists. More than 80% of those who come into care are unreached. There have been 661 professions of faith in the past five years.

Art Scholarship

Provide the opportunity for a child in our Cottage Homes to take dance, art, or music classes.

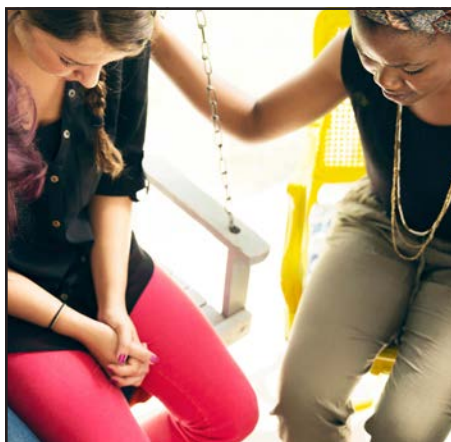
**\$100/Person or
\$1,200/Cottage**

MOMS' NEEDS

Birth Mom Retreat

Sponsor a birth mom to experience hope and healing at our annual birth mothers retreat.

\$500



Family Start-Up Package

Provide a woman & her children coming into our Family Care program with a "start up package" including necessary items to stock their kitchen/bath/bedroom (including pots & pans, utensils, towels, dishes, glasses, bedding, etc.).

\$300

Counseling Session

Provide one session of counseling for a mother in crisis who has placed her child for adoption or is currently parenting in difficult circumstances.

\$100 Quantity: [1] [5] [10]

Night of Safety

Provide one night of safety for a single mom and her children or for an expectant mom in a crisis situation through a hotel stay and warm meal.

\$150

BABIES' NEEDS

Car Seat/Booster Seat

Every child from 0-5 years in care across all of our ministries needs a car seat or booster seat. Provide a child a safe way to travel.

\$125



Diapers & Wipes

Purchase diapers and wipes for one month for a single mom in our Family Care program, a family in our Foster Care program or for a child in our Guatemala orphanage.

\$100

Baby Formula

Provide formula for a month for a baby in our Family Care or Foster Care ministry or for a baby brought to our orphanage in Guatemala.

\$200

WILDERNESS CAMPS



Campership

Give a child memories that will last a lifetime with an opportunity to experience summer camp!

\$250 Quantity: [1] [5] [10]



"Can I have lights on my Christmas tree?"

Tommy was hopeful, answering Ms. Betty when she asked what he wanted for Christmas. Betty and Will, who have cared for hundreds of children as cottage parents, suspected that past Christmases for Tommy and little brother Joey were anything but "merry."

Like so many other boys and girls who come into care, Tommy and Joey were removed from their family for their safety. The family home was deteriorating and unsafe. There was never food to fill their hungry bellies. There was no electricity. The boys lived in literal, as well as figurative, darkness until coming to live at Will and Betty's cottage.

As all the boys started decorating their cottage's enormous Christmas tree, Betty had a special surprise for Tommy and Joey—a small tree for the brothers' bedroom that they could decorate. Overjoyed, the boys strung as many lights as their tree could hold!

Life Jacket

With our campers living outdoors in the wilderness, they spend a lot of time learning about teamwork & appreciating creation through canoeing & rafting trips. Provide a life jacket for a camper at Camp Duncan or Cameron Boys Camp.

\$25/Camper or \$250 Camp

Canoe

Purchase an Old Town Penobscot 174 Canoe for our campers to use to learn teamwork and make memories on canoe trips.

\$1,500 Quantity: [1] [5] [10]

\$300,000 MATCHING GIFT CHALLENGE: Double your gift! Between now and January 31, 2024, gifts will be matched dollar for dollar. So, don't wait! You can double the impact on a child's life. Give now!

GLOBAL NEEDS

Chicken & Feed

Purchase a chicken & chicken feed for our Guatemala orphanage to provide a renewable food source for our children and caregivers.

\$50

Medical Emergency

Give a sick child a fighting chance by providing the funds necessary for emergency care including surgery and/or life-saving medicine.

\$220

Meals for a Week/Month

Help a Guatemalan child have nutritious food each week or for a month. You ensure they eat healthy.

\$50/Week or \$200/Month



Goat & Feed

Purchase a goat & feed to help with the ministry's spacious yard. Plus, children learn responsibility as they care for the animals' daily needs.

\$100

GREATEST NEEDS

Bible

You can help share God's Word with a child or individual who has never had his or her own Bible.

\$10

Where Needed Most

Not sure what to give? You can give an amount of your choosing to go towards where it is needed most.

\$ _____

HOW TO ORDER

ORDER WITH A CHECK:

- 1) Find your item(s) on the form below.
- 2) Write the quantity in the space provided beside each item(s) you are choosing.

- 3) Total your purchases and make your check payable to "Baptist Children's Homes" for the total amount.
- 4) Detach the order form. Place the form and check in the enclosed pre-paid postage envelope. Please fill out the information on the envelope. If using your own envelope, mail to: BCH, P.O. Box 338, Thomasville, NC 27361

MAKE YOUR GIFT ONLINE:

Go to bchfamily.org/gift-catalog or scan the QR code on the catalog cover to make your gift online.

MAKE YOUR GIFT BY PHONE:

Call 336-474-1312 to make a credit card gift by phone.

Thank you for the gift of hope this Christmas season!

2023 GIFT CATALOG ORDER FORM (Deatch form below and mail with check using the enclosed envelope.)

ITEM	AMOUNT	QUANTITY	YOUR GIFT	CODE	ITEM	AMOUNT	QUANTITY	YOUR GIFT	CODE
Birthday Sponsorship	\$50		\$	GC001	Sports Scholarship-Cottage	\$1,200		\$	GC024
Birthday Sponsorship-Cottage	\$600		\$	GC002	Art Scholarship	\$100		\$	GC025
Group Celebration Trip	\$125		\$	GC003	Art Scholarship-Cottage	\$1,200		\$	GC026
Group Celebration Trip-Cottage	\$1,500		\$	GC004	Wheelchair Ramp	\$350		\$	GC027
College Care Package	\$50		\$	GC005	Birth Mom Retreat	\$500		\$	GC028
Christmas Sponsorship	\$50		\$	GC006	Family Start-Up Package	\$300		\$	GC029
Christmas Sponsorship-Cottage	\$600		\$	GC007	Counseling Session	\$100		\$	GC030
Christmas Meal	\$25		\$	GC008	Night of Safety	\$150		\$	GC031
Christmas Meal-Cottage	\$300		\$	GC009	Car Seat/Booster Seat	\$125		\$	GC032
Winter Coat	\$50		\$	GC010	Diapers & Wipes	\$100		\$	GC033
Shoes	\$75		\$	GC011	Baby Formula	\$200		\$	GC034
Clothing Wardrobe	\$400		\$	GC012	Life Jacket-Camper	\$25		\$	GC035
Pair of Boots	\$100		\$	GC013	Life Jacket-Camp	\$250		\$	GC036
Medical Needs	\$50		\$	GC014	Canoe	\$1,500		\$	GC037
Medical Needs-Cottage	\$600		\$	GC015	Campership	\$250		\$	GC038
Welcome Care Package	\$35		\$	GC016	Chicken & Feed	\$50		\$	GC039
Bedding Basics	\$100		\$	GC017	Medical Emergency	\$220		\$	GC040
Suitcase/Duffle Bag	\$50		\$	GC018	Meals for a Week-Guatemala	\$50		\$	GC041
Headphones	\$25		\$	GC019	Meals for a Month-Guatemala	\$200		\$	GC042
School Supplies	\$50		\$	GC020	Goat & Feed	\$100		\$	GC043
Fishing Pole	\$25		\$	GC021	Bible	\$10		\$	GC044
Fishing Pole-Cottage	\$300		\$	GC022	WHERE NEEDED MOST			\$	GC045
Sports Scholarship	\$100		\$	GC023	TOTAL DONATION AMOUNT			\$	

New fund launches to help ministers with adoptions

By Jim Edminson, Editor

Kevin loved his father, Phillip Qualls. A preacher's kid, Kevin grew up admiring him, so much so, that surrendering to the call to be a pastor, like his dad, wasn't a stretch. Kevin went to a Christian college and attended the same seminary as his father. His dad pastored for 40 years. Kevin served twenty-two years as a pastor. As adults they enjoyed each other's company cheering on their beloved Tar Heels and New York Yankees together. They were friends and confidants as well as father and son. It was no surprise that when Kevin was asked to leave church ministry to lead Christian Adoption Services (CAS) in 2016, he called his dad for advice.

"I remember calling my dad and the first thing he did was remind me: 'Have you prayed about it?' He told me that I needed to seek the Lord. And I did. It put me on that familiar track of faithing through the decision and I never looked back."

When the call came that his dad had passed away last year at age 76, Kevin's heart broke. But as his family celebrated their patriarch's passing into Heaven, he and his sister Dana Rice felt a stirring in their hearts.

"Just like Dad would have prompted," Kevin says, "we began to pray about it."

After Kevin became the president of CAS, Phillip Qualls poured himself into his son's new ministry. He was keenly interested, becoming a donor and, of course, a prayer partner.

"Dad wanted to hear the stories," Kevin says. "His love for adoptions grew and his admiration

for birth moms grew. He celebrated when one would accept the Lord. The gospel and adoptions made sense to him—he became a champion for the ministry."

The siblings knew what they would do. Touched by the generosity of those who gave to CAS in Phillip's memory, nearly \$8,000, Kevin and Dana decided to use the money to help ministers adopt. A plan was put in motion, and combined with a financial commitment by First Baptist Church Indian Trail, The Phillip Qualls Adoption Assistance Fund was created to help ministers and their families with the cost of adoption. It became Kevin and Dana's desire to carry forward their dad's love for pastors and his love for adoption.

The fund became CAS's second adoption assistance fund. The first was created in 2017 with the establishment of The Jim and Doris Woodward Adoption Assistance Fund. The Woodwards founded CAS in 1979 and retired



Pictured: Kevin Qualls and his father, the late Rev. Phillip Qualls. Kevin and his sister Dana Rice helped establish The Phillip Qualls Adoption Assistance Fund to help ministers and their families with the cost of adoption.

in 2016. Unlike the Qualls' fund designated to help ministers, the Woodward fund assists any family. Both funds require applicants to be fully accepted and vested in the CAS adoption program. Applicants can be participating in either the domestic or international adoption programs.

The Phillip Qualls Adoption Assistance Fund applications are accepted quarterly and given based on need. Amounts are awarded ranging from \$1,000 to \$2,500. December 31 is the next deadline.

Churches and individuals who are

interested in giving to these funds are encouraged to come forward. As more and more families seek to grow their families through adoption, more financial assistance will be needed. To learn about the funds and how to apply, visit christianadopt.org/scholarships-grants.

"I believe Dad would be pleased," Kevin says. "His was a life well lived and this fund is part of that God-honoring legacy—one that can now bless ministers responding to God's urging to adopt."

Courtney Conley believes fostering was God's plan

(Continued from page 3.)

As Blakely and Harlow's foster parent, Courtney immediately plugged them into school resources. She focused on their academics and they started catching up in school. She began to believe God had placed them in her life for a reason.

The girls were unable to be reunited with their family. The parents relinquished their custody and a petition was filed to terminate parental rights. Adoption was now an option and Courtney could not imagine the girls being in any other place than with her. She decided to adopt the sisters.



"It can take a while—it's a process," Courtney remembers. "The girls were happy with me but struggled to understand being separated from their parents. It was a difficult transition."

The adoption came through near the end of May and Adoption Day was May 26. "I'm intent on giving my girls a

sliver of what I experienced as a little girl. I had great role models and I want to be a great role

model to them."

Now ages seven and six, the girls are excelling and thriving. "We live next to my parents in the house where my grandparents lived. I remember playing here when I was little. Now, it is home to me and the girls."

The girls not only have a loving mom, but fiancé David is the supportive father figure they never had. The church that nurtured Courtney as a child now nurtures Blakely and Harlow. And doting grandparents are only a short walk away where unconditional love is given out in big heapfuls.

Courtney is convinced that fostering was God's plan for her. For years, she prayed for a child and thought it might never happen. Now she knows that she only had to wait. "I tell the girls, 'I waited my whole life to become your mom.'"

Retired pastor shares God's love with heart and humor

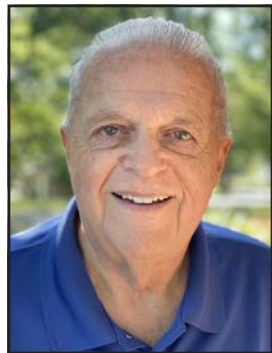
By Carol Layton, Director of Communications and Administration, NCBAM

When a retired Baptist pastor begins with, "I thought I was going to have to start wearing a dress to fit in," you know you're in for something special—and some laughs. Ronnie Beane was jokingly referring to his initial weeks as the first male Call Center Specialist in North Carolina Baptist Aging Ministry's (NCBAM) history. NCBAM's Call Center provides information and referral to aging adults 65+ and connects them with Baptist volunteers who meet needs to help them maintain independence. In the last two years, Ronnie has proven he could do the job—and do it well. "It's being focused and compassionate with each caller, that matters," Ronnie explains.

In addition to holding sacred space with callers, Ronnie's goal is to leave each person feeling better at the end of the call. "I love cutting up with people when the situation is right. I asked one lady what denomination she was and when she told me 'Episcopalian,' I asked her, 'Do you know why I'm not Episcopalian? Because I can't pronounce it!'" Ronnie said that when she cracked up, he knew her spirit was lifted.

Ronnie confesses that his light-hearted attitude has found him in hot water a few times. "My 7th grade teacher Miss Truelove made me spend a lot of time in the hall. And even though I was a rule-follower, standing in the hall was okay if I had made someone smile or laugh."

As part of the NCBAM team, Ronnie also takes his show on the road as an Elvis impersonator at senior adult retreats. In "Music Bingo" presentations, Ronnie entertains crowds in a flashy yellow blazer, dark aviator sunglasses, and a jet-black pompadour wig. The ladies swoon, he works the crowd, and everyone smiles. Cutting up doesn't bother



Ronnie Beane

Ronnie one little bit if it means someone's heart is made lighter.

In addition to making quick connections through humor, Ronnie has noticed that his pastoral experience gives him "a leg up" when calling on churches to help NCBAM clients. "It's invaluable because I have an idea what pastors are dealing with—and extend compassion to them, just like our clients." Ronnie admits, "When I tell people I'm a retired pastor, their positive responses almost make it feel like I'm cheating."

Ronnie's good humor and ministerial experi-



Retired pastor Ronnie Beane loves to lighten hearts with his keen sense of humor. When he is not assisting aging adults through the NCBAM Call Center, you may find him impersonating the king of rock 'n' roll at an NCBAM event. NCBAM team members Amy Burns and Shirley Carlson (l-r) **can't help falling in love** with their dedicated and fun-loving colleague.

ence aren't the only strengths he brings to NCBAM. He's also strategic and forward-thinking. Ronnie spearheaded an initiative to connect Call Center Specialists to volunteers through SMS texting. "When I first started, it amazed me how many 70- and 80-year-olds were out there building ramps—and asking if I would text instead of call them. We used our personal cell phones, but this caused delays if we weren't working that day."

Thanks to Ronnie's advocacy, the Call Center phone system was upgraded to handle text messages. Now all Call Center Specialists can view text communications via computers and respond quickly.

Ronnie played a strong role in NCBAM receiving \$275,000 in grant funding for ramps and home modifications in the Piedmont Triad. A Meals on Wheels provider Ronnie had been working with called to let him know about the opportunity that was expiring soon. "I hung up the phone and said, 'Listen y'all, we may have some grant money!'" The Call Center hustled, and are now able to meet many needs in four counties served by an American Rescue Plan Act grant.

Ronnie also plays a key role in NCBAM's durable medical equipment outreach in Thomasville. He keeps the equipment organized and has developed contacts with physical therapists

and other agencies who help get the equipment to those in need.

Ronnie retired from the pastorate in 2019, "but not from preaching," he's quick to add. "The Lord called me to preach in 1968 and I went to Fruitland in 1970. My first sermon when people came to the altar, I was hooked." Ronnie doesn't talk about his ministry very long without mentioning Sheila, his wife of 31 years. "She is my rock!" he states earnestly, and then clarifies with a smile, "along with Christ of course."

After retiring from pastoring 15 years at Hasty Baptist Church in Thomasville, Ronnie played golf with his buddies for a year before noticing the Call Center Specialist opening posted in the Liberty Baptist Association newsletter. "This job has made me feel good about myself and my ministry. I've done more to help people with their physical needs in the past two years than I have my whole life. Volunteers building ramps often leave Bibles and we hear stories about successful evangelism efforts. I'm grateful for my part in the love and care being shown to aging adults through volunteers and ramp-building teams all across the state."

Ronnie explains his delight in making people smile and his pastoral calling this way: "When you see God's love demonstrated, it's like light. It's hard not to go right to it."

Faithful makes difference in children's lives— Strong work ethic taught by MH caregivers

By **Lib Johnson** (336) 299-7412 libsjohnson@triad.rr.com

For several years in a row, **Sharon DeHart Stiles** has had the pleasure of eating Homecoming Sunday lunch with **David and Linda Wright**, a couple who comes to Mills Home (MH) Homecoming EVERY YEAR. It was a natural thing to sit and eat with them since they belong to her church in Gastonia. But it was only three years ago that she learned that David is a child of MH Alumna **Elizabeth "Lib" Rollins Wright** who reared her family in Gastonia. When David and his siblings were young, Lib brought her family to MH Homecoming every year and in other actions taught her son to appreciate what MH did for his mother as a child. Returning for Homecoming every year now as an adult who has grandchildren of his own, he makes that faithful pilgrimage in honor of his mother and her MH heritage. Several alumni have come to know David and Linda and look forward to seeing them every year.

A personal MH history from 2009 recently came to us again on Facebook. An interesting former MH resident wrote, "My name is **Jack Case**. I've told my family countless stories about my experiences at Mills Home. It was the foundation for my life and I have no regrets, only great memories of a bunch of knuckle headed and buzz cut kids (thanks to **Mr. Abernathy's** one chair barber shop) who were just like me. With no OSHA then, I'm surprised that any of us lived to adulthood. Huck Finn had nothing on us when it comes to adventure and fun. I worked on the campus farm and in the dairy and print shop. I was in the scout troop with **Mr. Bailey and Doc Baldwin**. I remember the corn harvest and **Mr. Sisk**, manager of the freezer locker; **Mr. Raper**, the dairy manager; **Ms. Raper**, the

librarian, (and their dog **Toby** who would chase you if you rode a bike past the library); **Mr. Campbell**, the farm manager; **Ms. Crouch**, my first house mother; and **Coach Corder and Micky Sparrow**, coaches in athletics. I remember also **Miss Sally McCracken**, **Hugh Starnes**, and **Mr. Savage** (who was over seven feet tall and dressed up as Frankenstein for Halloween); and I remember the haunted house in the gym locker room.

"I'd like to say hello after all these years to you who are also on Facebook: **Ray Fortenberry**, **Harry Walls**, and **Rick Smoot**, one of the older guys. I think Ray, Harry and I worked together in the dairy and lived in the Farm Cottage where we made fourteen dollars a month or something like that. Man, did breakfast taste good after those dairy shifts. Then we went to school! Where did all that energy go? Regards and a big thank you to the folks who set up a great Facebook page."

Through the years I have tried to make sure each member on the Alumni Council is introduced to the *Charity & Children (C&C)* readers at some time. Today, I am introducing **John Gordon Shields**. When I reconnected with John just a few years ago, he seemed to be a gentle giant sort of person but he tells me he has always been a feisty, tough hombre. That was his reputation back in the period of 1951-1961 at MH. Well, at least being feisty stood him in good stead when he tried out for the high school football, baseball, and basketball teams. He recalls four long hard years working on the farm developing a strong work ethic by working with **Mr. Raper**, **Mr. Richardson**, and **Mr. Sisk**. He did not see farm work as hard work and it never bothered him because he could see the value in what he was being taught. And then he had

a really special advantage working with **Mr. Sisk** because he took the time to teach him a lot about football as well. John also credits fellow residents **Bobby Almond** and **Dean Lunsford** with teaching him a lot about football. Like the other guys, he joined the RAs and scouts and enjoyed activities at the gym and valley. He especially loved **Ms. Leonard**, the dietitian at the Durham Cottage though he was fond of almost all the workers. After high school, John spent four years in the Marines, an experience that coupled with life at MH to make the most important years that gave him training and built his character. Near the end of his Marine career, he married and started a family that included a son and a daughter. Today, he has two grandchildren, and three great grandchildren he adores. Most of his work years, he was involved as a chemist and colorist in the textile industry. And with his textile cronies, he loved leisure time in golf.

Jerrie Canady Stewart posted to the Mills Home Orphanage Memories Facebook page in late September that her sister **Pat Canady Sieg** (1953-1960) passed away at her home with family surrounding her. She wrote, "Pat, like the rest of my siblings, was very grateful to have been reared by MH. She was always part of the busy campus life: she sang in the church choir, had duties around campus as a 'big girl' working with the younger children, and eagerly learned to play the violin and piano. At school, she was in the Glee Club and being a beautiful red head and popular, she was a candidate for the honor of Homecoming Queen. She had a great sense of humor and was always telling jokes and laughing. She loved music and loved to dance, even if she 'danced alone.' Not long after high school,

she settled in Stokesdale, NC with husband **Wiley Pegram** and reared three youngsters with the values she learned at Mills Home. Widowed for several years, she found new happiness in marrying **Vern Sieg**, a wonderful, patriotic Marine. Pat leaves two daughters, **Rhonda Turbyfill**, **Stella McNeil**, and a son, **David Pegram**. Condolences may be sent to her daughter Rhonda Turbyfill at 205 Trey Lane, Archdale, NC 28263. Her brothers and sisters at MH were **Alice Faye** (deceased), **Geraldine**, **Herman** and **Robert Canady**.

Thanks to **Linda Rochelle** (Mrs. Jimmy Rochelle) for the following obituary: "**Kent Douglas Lightfoot** went to be with the Lord on October 9th, 2020. He was born on August 12, 1947 in Guilford County to the late **Ralph Lightfoot** and **Margaret Beeson Lightfoot** of High Point, NC. Kent is survived by five siblings: **Richard Lightfoot** of High Point, NC, **Danny Lightfoot** of Hudson, Wisconsin, **Carma Lightfoot** of Chicago, Illinois, **Willa Centanni** of Washington, and **Janie Holbrook** of Beaufort, NC. Two siblings preceded Kent in his death: **Barbara Hunt** of High Point, NC, and **Tommy Lightfoot** of Tennessee."

Sadly, we also recently learned of the death of **Marie Jacobs Stover** and **Judy Hargus Reid**, class of 1968. We hope to have more information in the next issue.

Please contact me at libsjohnson@triad.rr.com or 336-299-7412 if you wish to add or correct an address for your C&C subscription. Contact **Sharon DeHart Stiles** to discuss use of the God's Acre Columbarium. 704-685-2443 or 1588 Elkhart Circle, Gastonia, NC, 28054.



Lib Johnson was a resident of Mills Home from 1946 to 1957. Johnson began writing the Mills Home alumni column in 1992.



Making News Every Day Around the State



Boys make pizza at their campsite

The boys at Cameron Boys Camp, one of two 24/7 residential wilderness ministries, can prepare meals with the resources in their "cook tent." They recently learned to make pizza.



Thrivent take children shoe shopping

The Thrivent Financial team including BCH friends, the Everhart family, took youth living at Mills Home shopping for shoes. Thrivent does this as a part of the Hope in Style event.



Dutch Cove Baptist collects backpacks

Pastor Jason Miller brought backpacks filled with school supplies collected by Dutch Cove Baptist. They were for children at Broyhill Home and BCH's other Western NC locations.



Resident celebrates his birthday

R.L., with his brother Ben by his side, celebrated his birthday. He requested chocolate cake. They live at Joy Cove Ministries for adults with intellectual/developmental disabilities.



Couple adopts their third child

Ben and Brittany have adopted their third child—their second through Christian Adoption Services. Eva has plenty of older siblings including the couple's twin biological girls.



GracePointe gives generously

NC Baptists continue to be a blessing to the ministry. BCH's Jody Yopp, center, received an \$11,350 offering check from Pastor Tony Medlin and friends at GracePointe Baptist.



Odum Home experiences the beach

The children and their cottage parents finished up summer vacation with a trip to McNeill Home -- BCH's beach cottage. It is the first time many of them have been to the ocean.



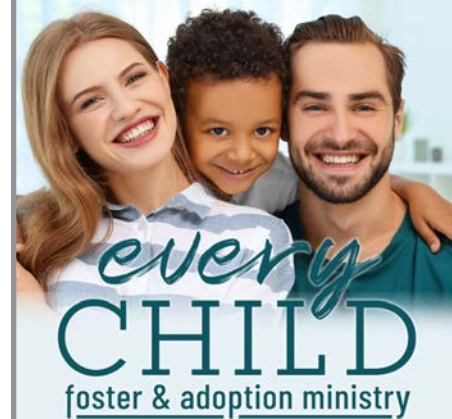
Church goes on mission at Broyhill

Volunteers from Bethany Baptist Church in Wendell came to Broyhill Home for a mission trip. They painted, pressure washed, installed LED lights, built shelving and fed the campus.



BCH shares at South Yadkin meeting

BCH set up at South Yadkin Baptist Association's annual meeting hosted at Peninsula Baptist. Staff were able to share how NC Baptists can partner with BCH's many ministries.



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#3641

Christmas Party set for December 2—Noon to 3:00

Alumna shares highlights of girls' weekend

By **JOHN THOMPSON**, 104 Village Court, Havelock, NC 28532 (252) 671-3515 jthompson117@ec.rr.com

Sadly, the Fall Beach Retreat was cancelled because of storm damage to the cottage. Also, please notice that I have a new address. I still reside in Havelock but will be living with my son **Scott** and his wife **Melisa**. You remain welcome to visit me anytime. Their home is located near the Cherry Branch ferry.

My other son, **Johnny**, will also be helping me with my new life. The doctor won't let me drive anymore and it has made a big difference in the way I live. The Lord really blessed **Becky** and me with two very nice boys and four grandchildren. Scott is a nurse and Johnny is a funeral director. Both of their wives are school principals in Craven County.

Patsy Hensley Lovejoy writes about a fun weekend she and some of my youngins recently had. Patsy was a staff child at Kennedy Home (KH) at the same time Becky and I were serving there in the seventies. She begins her letter: "I woke up excitedly for our 2nd annual girls' weekend. With the help of my daughter and her fiancé—since I am legally blind now—I met **Debbie Stallings Lassiter** and her husband **David** in Suffolk. Before meeting them I needed my morning fix of coffee, so a stop at WaWa was perfect! Debbie and I arrived at **Debbie and Gary Caulder's** house in LaGrange around 4:00 p.m. We had a mini reunion Thursday night with **Priscilla Woolard Craft**, **Judy Simmons White**, and **Ellen Brantley**—who is an adopted KH sister. When they arrived, Gary was the luckiest guy being surrounded by a 'bevy of beauties.' We talked and laughed until late at night. I was wide awake at 5:00 ready to roll Friday morning. We picked up **Ellen**, went to Chick-fil-A, Dollar General, Walmart,

Eagle Island, and finally made it to **Donna Weeks Duty and Dave Duty's** beautiful home at Bolivia. After eating a delicious meal at their house, we went to the Oak Island lighthouse—but it was locked. Debbie Caulder was very disappointed since this was her second time trying to climb this lighthouse. She has climbed all the lighthouses in the state except for Oak Island. Donna and I walked down to the ocean to wiggle our toes in the water. We walked around Southport until it was time to eat. Fishy-Fishy did not disappoint us with our seafood entrees. After a little shopping, we arrived back home and reminisced on their screened porch. We validated that laughter is the best medicine. So many KH stories retold and laughter shared.

"Dave and Donna prepared a delicious breakfast of fresh fruits, homemade banana bread, and they served some delicious croissants from Burney's Bakery on my recommendation. Pouring down rain Saturday morning did not stop us from driving to Myrtle Beach. We found a new favorite shopping store for DLS when we went to Hamrick's for an hour and a half. We went to the mall and everyone enjoyed what they wanted to eat at the food court. More shopping on the return trip to Bolivia. We rested for two hours while DSL visited a high school friend who lives in Oak Island. We later enjoyed a great meal at a Mexican restaurant. Sunday morning was bitter sweet. We had to return home but not before being fed like a queen once again. It was a fun trip of eating and shopping on our way back to the Caulder's in LaGrange."

Donna Weeks Duty writes: "KH Alumni who lived on campus during the early to mid 1970s may remember the church bulletin

called the 'Informer.' John Thompson wrote articles and kept us all informed of campus and church happenings. I recently found a copy in my **Aunt Mary's** old Bible. It is dated March 9, 1973. I mailed her the paper because there were a couple of small articles that concern me. This is one article: 'Our deacon of the week this time is none other than **Miss Donna Weeks**. **Donna** is a rising senior this year and is looking forward to working off campus this summer. She is real excited about the possibility of working in Raleigh. She is a resident of Pollock Cottage. She will be at Kennedy Home seven years this October. Before moving to Pollock she lived at Brokenhurst. She is also interested in becoming a secretary. She is a member of choir-grade 9-12 and the new Kennedy Home Choir (Madrigal Singers). She is very active in Sunday School. She is one of our Junior Deacons. Donna is very active in campus activities. She is presently working at our locker. She is our campus 'milk man!'

"In another article, John wrote: 'This past Monday night I was invited to go to First Baptist Church in Washington and tell about Baptist Children's Homes. **Donna Weeks and Mike Robbins** went with me. The people there just loved them to death. Donna told about life in the cottage. She really made it interesting and exciting. You can tell she is proud to be with **Mrs. Simmons**. Mike sang a song for the group. He really touched the hearts of the people there. Becky and the boys went along to be with us and to see our friends. She did say a word of 'hello.' Becky and I served the Lord at First Baptist on two different occasions.'"

A highlight for me at FBC Washington was working with

Rev. Rodney Beals while he was the pastor. Every Sunday in the bulletin, Pastor Beals included the "Pastor's Paragraph." This edition was from March 9, 1973.

"They tell me that curiosity killed the cat. But I guess I have my share of curiosity and want other people to have it too. We have said before that the word for this year was 'study.' Curiosity is a big help when you study. You learn much faster if you are curious about what you are studying. Now I say all of this because people have asked me some interesting questions lately. Some of the questions have made me stop and think. Some about the Bible have sent me to search in the Bible for an answer. But most of these questions came because someone wanted to know. They were curious. It seems to me that curiosity is something good and we should encourage it. But I still remember that 'curiosity killed the cat.' So I was curious and looked this statement up in the dictionary. The dictionary had an answer. It said a curious person could be a meddlesome person. We do not want to be meddlesome so we will put limits on our curiosity. We will search for answers but we will respect other people. Maybe we can make the word curiosity a good word. Then people will say 'curiosity is a teacher.'"

Working with Rev. Beals was a highlight of my life. The best time of the week was on Sunday morning to hear the church bells ringing and all the children coming out of the cottages, walking down the sidewalk to the beautiful sanctuary. Those were the days!

Always remember that I love ya. jt

John Thompson served at Kennedy Home from 1972-1977. Today, he enjoys an active retirement.



It's not a gift unless it is received

By **Jim Edminson**, Editor

I grew up in a home that celebrated Christmas well. Mom and Dad were all in and made every yuletide season memorable. Dad was in charge of the outside decorations. He set aside a Saturday, a week or two before Thanksgiving, to hang lights, outlining the roof of our home. This was before the soft white icicle lights or wispy LED lights that change into lots of colors, flashing on and off to Christmas music streaming from speakers mounted under the eaves of the house. Dad's lights were jumbo lights, colored red, blue, orange, white, and green. When turned on, they illuminated the house, the yard, and the neighbor's house and yard. They were seen as soon as you turned onto our street—almost a block away. They were the type of lights that drew enough power to double December's electric bill.

The weekend after Thanksgiving, Dad decorated the front door with shiny green foil paper like he was wrapping a gift. He used wide red ribbon and a large bow Mom made to finish the illusion of a package. It was the perfect holiday touch.

The final chore outside was the placement of the white plywood cutout nativity scene he constructed. And of course, it was spotlighted so that it seemed to glow.

As soon as the outside decorations were in place, the tree went up. Tree decorating was Mom's domain. The decorating traditions were a mingling of her childhood traditions with tree decorating ideas she incorporated from living in Germany when Dad served in the Air Force. Again the lights were colored bulbs—a smaller version of the outdoor lights. An antique Nuremberg tree topper angel made of gold, blue, and red foil she bought at the Christmas Market in Ramstein was carefully unpacked, taking special care as layers of tissue were peeled away. Mom

was particular about how the silver tinsel was placed on the tree branches. She would take three to four strands between two fingers and painstakingly place strand after strand so it seemed to cascade down the tree—more naturally she thought. It was magical, and when brightly wrapped packages went underneath, all were in awe.

Every year, Mom started buying presents in July. She loved Christmas and as her family grew, and the number of grandchildren grew, shopping early became necessary. She placed the gifts as they were bought in safe hiding places. The problem was that she sometimes forgot where she hid them.

Misplacing a gift never dampened Mom's enthusiasm. She shrugged it off and assured us the gift would be delivered—when she found it. Sometimes the gift arrived in a mailbox in time for Valentine's Day.

We all love receiving gifts. Maybe the gift is one you really wanted? Maybe it is a gift you put on a list—like a Christmas or birthday wish list? Sometimes we receive gifts we have not asked for or even expected. But what if you were given a gift and never opened it? What if it was never taken out of a box, plugged in, or hummed to as you listened to it? Is it really a gift then?

A gift must be received to be a real gift.

On a recent Sunday, our church marked the 250 anniversary of "Amazing Grace." In 1773, John Newton led believers in singing it the first time. The new music told of Newton's conversion, his self-proclaimed wretchedness, and of

the saving power of God's grace. The song struck a chord then and reached across the years stirring hearts in every generation.

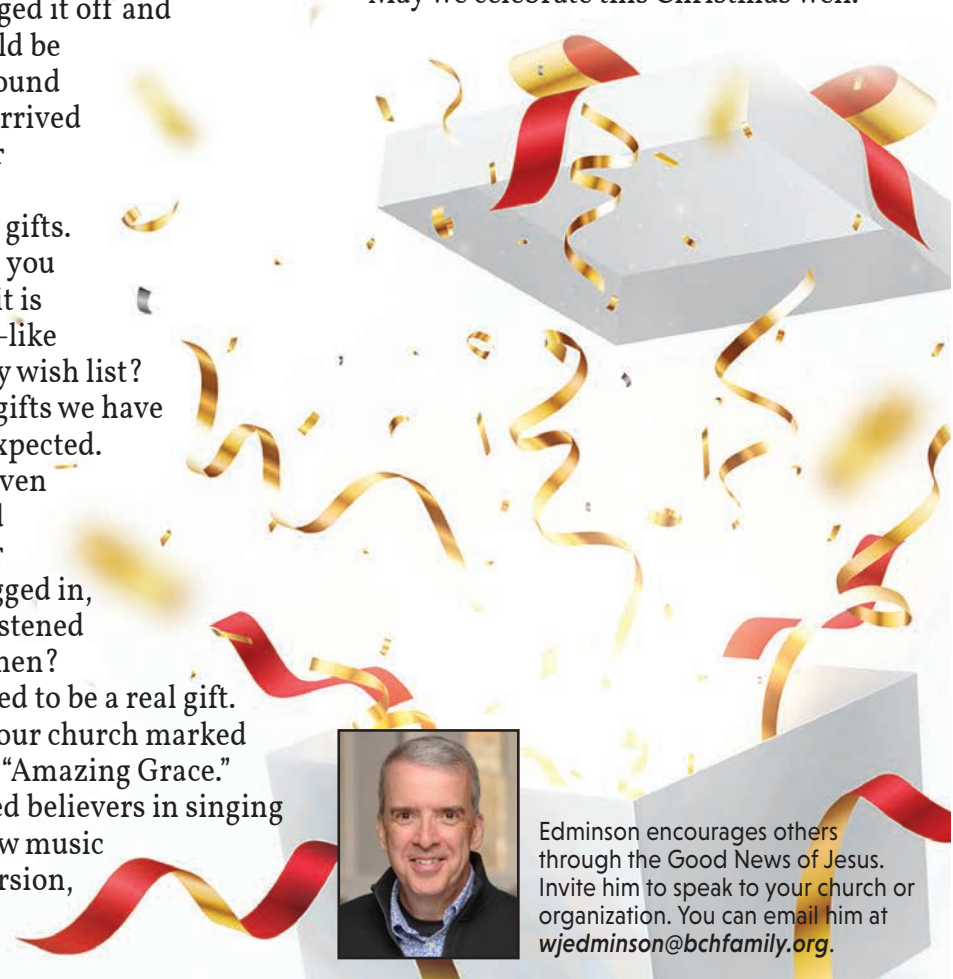
God's grace is undeserved favor. Grace cannot be earned; it is something freely given. But it must be received.

We read in John's gospel that God loved us so much that He gave us a wonderful gift. He gave the gift of Jesus! It is a gift freely given in hopes we receive it.

Through the years, the Christmas season unfolds as preparation goes into decorating homes and trees, wrapping gifts, and singing hymns. Each points the way to the celebration of the coming of Immanuel—God with us.

What a perfect gift presented by a loving God. Each of us, however, must make the gift real by receiving His amazing grace, opening our hearts and lives to the Spirit, and being Jesus to a hurting, lost world.

May we celebrate this Christmas well.



Edminson encourages others through the Good News of Jesus. Invite him to speak to your church or organization. You can email him at wjedminson@bchfamily.org.

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