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Charity & Children

The historic publication of Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina—first to tell the story since 1887.

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November 2024

Issue 9

Volume 137



A word from Trustee Rev. David Powell, Chair CEO Search Comm.

With the call of David Melber as CEO, there is no doubt you have been praying! To shepherd a ministry so close to Jesus' heart, I believe God sent a person who embodies Philippians 2:3-4 (CSB): "...in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others." The moment my fellow trustees and I surrounded David Melber and his wife, Tera, in prayer, BCH's CEO search ended as it had begun—with prayer. Let us stay united in prayer, trusting God to do great things as Rev. David Melber leads BCH. (See page 7.)



Starlite Home's first foster family arrives

The girls are awake. Dog barking announces their descent down the steps. The Stinsons' day begins as the sun rises over the newly constructed Starlite Home. Six years ago, then-newlyweds Caitlin and Justin had no idea God would lead them to adopt sisters 14-year-old Alicia and 13-year-old Elena or they would welcome the beginning of a new year of married life fostering hurting children at River Hill Refuge. (Continued on page 11.)

A month of prayer

We need your prayers every day in November. Use this year's **four-week prayer guide** on **page six** and pray everyday for a different need. The guide gives you insight into the lives of those we care for 24/7. Also, download the digital guide at bchfamily.org/prayer.



"Top Ten" ways to unite and humbly serve in love

By Kristyn Butts, BCH Director of Volunteer Engagement

We are reminded in Galatians 5:13 that we are to serve one another humbly in love. Since September, we have been blessed with more than 800 volunteers who completed 3,300 hours of service. During the closing service at the Mills Home "Friends of Children" event, I was overwhelmed as we all gathered and sang "How Great thou Art." The church was filled with children in foster care, single moms in crisis, staff, and volunteers. We each brought our own experiences, heartaches, and joys. Together, we worship our Heavenly Father who is beyond great. It was a beautiful picture of the body of Christ united in love for our Savior and one another.

While many, many projects were completed this fall, there is still much work to be done. Development Director Clay Leonard shared that when a volunteer serves with us at Baptist Children's Homes (BCH), they are using the hands that God has given them by taking one hand and holding on to Christ and extending the other hand to help. Our logo with the two hands is a beautiful reminder of humbly serving in love.

Here are the "Top Ten" ways that you can be the hands and feet of Jesus to the children, adults, and families in BCH's care.

1. Our homes for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities need help with landscaping, power washing, and other small projects.

2. The wilderness camps have some special projects that they need help with including building some barns.

3. Oak Ranch is preparing a space for staff, family, and church enrichment. Help is needed moving furniture and cleaning the future enrichment space.

4. As the foster care ministry continues to



grow, so do the needs. CARE House foster care office in Lenoir has landscaping, power washing, and some general maintenance that is needed.

5. Mills Home has many opportunities for volunteers to help with painting and power washing.

6. Since Hurricane Helene, there are multiple trees down across BCH locations in the mountains and piedmont. Help removing trees, grinding stumps, and cleaning up the debris is needed.

7. Fancy Finds and Greater Vision in Thomasville and Kinston have ongoing opportunities for sorting, cleaning, and stocking donations.

8. Kennedy Home has an old ropes course that needs removed and some skilled labor is needed with plumbing, carpentry, and electrical work.

9. Odum Home would love to have their gym painted, gutters cleaned, and sidewalks power washed.

10. Pray for those we serve. The holidays can be particularly hard for children and adults separated from their families. For vulnerable families working through crisis, the holidays bring additional stress. Your prayers are priceless.

Let us help you Find Your Spot! Visit www.bchfamily.org/volunteer for current volunteer opportunities including those listed above or submit a volunteer inquiry. When you use your gifts, talents, and time, you are demonstrating the love of Christ. We are so humbled to serve with you.



The large group from Mt. Lebanon Baptist Church in Asheboro attended the "Friends of Children" event at Mills Home in Thomasville. Groups and individuals totaling more than 800 volunteers completed 3,300 hours of service since September. The events held at BCH facilities across the state show the impact of North Carolina Baptists and how volunteers are essential in caring for hurting children and families.

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

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Children, residents, and staff safe after historic storm

Before the devastating winds of Hurricane Helene had completely calmed, and after raging floods left thick layers of mud, news came that all Baptist Children's Homes' residents and staff in the mountains of Western North Carolina were safe. Within hours, phones began to ring. North Carolina Baptists' minds and hearts turned to helping and preparations began. Tree and debris removal was the first order of business. Churches were on site helping within days.

Residents from three homes for intellectually/developmentally disabled adults were evacuated due to power and water outages. The Alverta Bolick Home residents from Asheville sheltered at Broyhill Home in Clyde. (The western campus sustained only minor damage.) The residents from BCH's two Joy Cove homes north of Boone were safely evacuated to Mills Home in Thomasville. They returned to their Zionville homes after it was assessed safe and the power was restored. It will be much longer before our Asheville Home residents will be able to return due to municipal water and sewage issues.

Homebase ministry at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee served as a hub, providing support for displaced students. Several of our staff in the west and their families did sustain major damage to their homes. Please remember them in prayer as they face the weeks and months ahead.

Immediately, NCBAM Call Center staff began contacting Baptist churches and Associations in the west to let them know that NCBAM was ready to serve aging adults impacted by the storm. Call Center Specialists are still actively reaching out to clients to check on them and encourage them. Staff are also reaching out to western area volunteers to partner with NCBAM as a possible resource for needy clients. The Call Center has also received many calls from aging adults in affected areas. These callers are typically referred to specific Baptists on Mission's Disaster Relief posts where set up to serve in particular areas.

NCBAM Call Center Specialist Shirley Carlson, along with her husband Roger, have traveled to Marion twice as volunteers with Baptists on Mission Disaster Relief teams. Roger volunteers as a trained Disaster Relief "assessor" and Shirley is there to encourage and pray with



While Hurricane Helene devastated much of the west, Baptist Children's Homes' (BCH) locations were largely untouched with the exception of minor damage and several fallen trees. Above, residents from BCH's two homes for intellectually/developmentally disabled adults in Zionville evacuated to Mills Home in Thomasville due to outages. Below, NCBAM's Shirley Carlson and husband Roger helped through Baptists on Mission Disaster Relief.



Roger and Shirley Carlson

people on some of the toughest days of their lives. The Carlsons have also served in Alaska and in Louisiana in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Hearts are grateful for Baptists On Mission and God's people mobilizing to offer help and share hope in the midst of this crisis.

Greater Vision Outreach in Thomasville, with community and BCH staff support,

is holding an ongoing drive to collect cleaning supplies and hygiene items. Also, coats are being collected as winter approaches. The outreach delivered four pallets of hand antibacterial wipes to help in the aftermath. For more information on how to participate, call 336-474-1214.



Commit your life to bless others in Jesus' name!

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

I love watching God work among his people to bring about unity and hope for the most vulnerable among us. That has been so evident during our most recent days of devastation across North Carolina and beyond. During this time, we have heard countless stories that have broken our hearts and filled us with sadness. But also during this time, we have heard and seen so many acts of love and kindness. We have heard many stories of miracles and hope in the midst of the disaster around us.

Thank you for your many acts of kindness. We are so grateful for your help and witness during this time.

Every day I am reminded of God's provision of rescue and hope, to see how He uses each of you on mission together to make a difference during and after the storm. This is true for those we serve each and every day that are in the midst of their personal storms. It is also true after those storms pass. We do not stop caring in the aftermath. And we are able to be there because you are there with us, praying and supporting this ministry.

Even before the hurricane had passed, you were calling and preparing to help. We have had volunteers on our campuses helping with tree removal—only one tree to fall on a building and fence. A group from Elizabeth Baptist Church was there within days to remove the debris.

Many of you have reached out to pray and support our ministries throughout the west. Our facilities in the west sustained minimal damage. We evacuated three of our IDD homes. The two from Zionville was relocated to Mills Home and our home in Asheville was relocated to Broyhill Home in Clyde. Our Zionville IDD family have been able to return. It seems it will be much longer before our Asheville Home residents will be able to return due to public water issues.

Homebase ministry at Western Carolina is serving as a hub, providing basics for displaced students. Several of our staff in the west and their families did sustain major damage. Please keep them in your prayers in the weeks and months ahead.

November marks several milestones for me. November 11 is my birthday. It is also the birthday of Baptist Children's Homes. I feel so special sharing my birthday with BCH. November also marks my 25th anniversary of service with BCH. During these 25 years, I have watched God

use you to pierce the darkness. I have watched as God used you to light the pathway to safety, hope, and healing for thousands of children and families who He has sent us. Thanks to you we have been able to swing the doors open wide with arms of love ready to embrace each hurting child and family. I am so very grateful for every prayer and every call I have received on behalf of the "least of these." I am so very grateful and humbled for the amazing opportunity to serve.

I am beyond excited for what the future hold for BCH. This weekend, I had the opportunity to spend some time with David and Tera Melber. David is our newly elected CEO. (Take time to get to know David Melber by reading the insert in this issue of C&C.) I look with anticipation for the many opportunities God will open to introduce the Melbers to you and for you to have the opportunity to see and experience their passion and calling to this ministry. It is evident God has been preparing them for this moment in time. I also look forward to David and Tera having the opportunity to see and experience your passion and calling to this ministry. God has blessed us with so many wonderful ministry partners. Thank you for walking this journey with us.

I am committed to helping the Melbers as they transition and David leads in caring for the "least of these."

I thank you in advance for continuing to make this extraordinary journey with us. I often find it hard to put into words how much I treasure you, how much I love you for being there in the midst of the many storms. Even when things get hard, or maybe even more when things get hard, you never stop praying and giving.

In just a few weeks, churches all across North Carolina will begin gathering their BCH annual offering. Your gifts of love are more important than ever.

How can you help? PRAY! Please share this issue of *Charity & Children* with your church, Sunday school class, and family and friends. Encourage them to live out the power of the good news of the Gospel of Matthew by supporting this vital ministry.

In scripture, Matthew 25:35-40 reads: ***"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."***

"Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?"

"The King will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

Join us in prayer each week throughout November using the prayer guide on page six. The prayer requests were submitted by staff and they covet your prayers as they care for those God has placed in our lives.

Another great way to help is to use the Christmas Gift Catalog (online and in our October and December issues of *Charity & Children*) and find ways of bringing joy, hope, and love this Thanksgiving and Christmas. Remember to "Find your Spot" to learn how you can volunteer.

Note: We are very grateful that once again we have a \$300,000 challenge gift. Every individual gift given between October and January 31, 2025 will be matched dollar for dollar up to \$300,000. ***Thank you so very much for your much needed and prayerful support.***



Healing Jessie's scars

Jessie's parents were abusive—immersed in a world of drugs. The house where she lived was a meth lab. One day it caught fire and Jessie's arms were badly burned, leaving them scarred.

You may be thinking this is an unusual way to begin, but it's essential to start with the scars children bring with them. The scars are emotional—and sometimes physical. Jessie came into care with both.

The scars Jessie and our children bear speak so many lies to them: that they are unloved, that they are unimportant and worthless, and that there is no such thing as hope. Christmas is the perfect time for us to show them that nothing is further from the truth.

At Christmas, Jessie's wish list includes a stuffed animal and a toy. But she also asks for pretty, long sleeve shirts. She still feels the need to cover the scars, but she is on the road to regaining hope as she is valued and deeply loved.

Your Christmas sponsorship is matched dollar-for-dollar as you make healing possible for children like Jessie. With love, care, and generosity, you ensure hundreds of boys and girls celebrate the Christmas season filled with parties, festive decorating, gifts under the tree, and the knowledge that a Heavenly Father loves them unconditionally.

Please give. And 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.

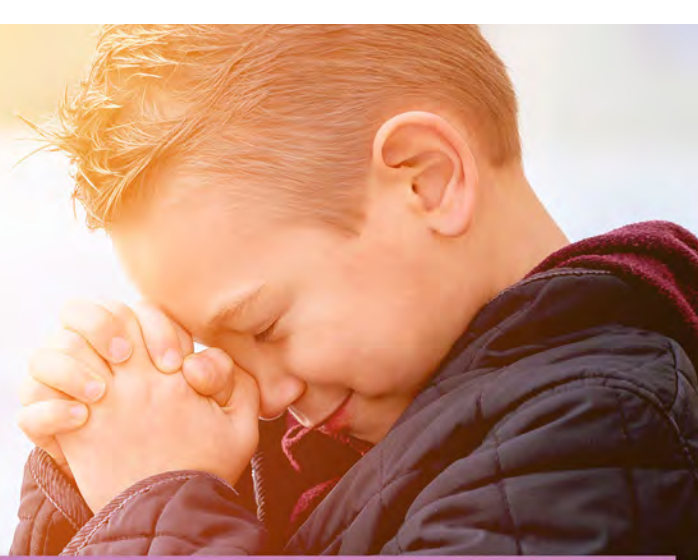


Receive ministry updates and more. Email: _____

- Contact me with information on how to prepare a Christian Will.
- I have included Baptist Children's Homes in my estate plans.

A month of prayer

We know prayer changes things, and Baptist Children's Homes (BCH) needs your prayers every day. By using this four-week prayer guide, your church, Sunday School class, small group or youth group can pray everyday for a different need. The guide gives you insight into the heartache and struggles of those we care for 24/7. Download the digital guide at bchfamily.org/prayer.



SUNDAY Pray for our cottage parents and foster parents who give so much, providing care for children who have been abused and neglected. Pray God will continue to call Christian couples to serve as cottage parents and foster parents and that they will respond to His calling.

MONDAY Pray for two of our youth who live at Mills Home. They have both begun college this year. One is studying culinary arts and dreams of becoming a chef. Pray for all the children as they attend school. Many are attending brand new schools and are working hard to find their place.

TUESDAY Pray for a young girl who is battling cancer. Pray for her doctors. Pray for the incredible foster family who is caring for her sacrificially. Pray for all of our foster parents who care for children who are facing a myriad of needs: physical, emotional, mental, and health.

WEDNESDAY Pray our children will experience peaceful dreams. Pray that God will take away the intrusive thoughts and memories of hurtful pasts that haunt them. Pray that the children will rest well and wake to experience all the joy that every child deserves.

THURSDAY Pray for the safety our campers and their chiefs/mentors at Cameron Boys Camp and Camp Duncan for Girls. Pray that good memories will be created around their campsites, on educational trips, and as they tackle their day-to-day experiences as they seek healing from hurts in their lives.

FRIDAY Pray for the families who are waiting to adopt a child. Pray for the families who have adopted a child and need guidance. Pray for the three babies we took into care from the hospital who were born addicted to drugs and need loving homes.

SATURDAY Pray for the young ladies who are no longer at Camp Duncan for Girls. Pray that they will remember the lessons they learned and that they stay close to the Lord. Pray that they partner with their parents and find positive Christians and Christian peer groups who will support them.

SUNDAY Pray for BCH foster parents who want to adopt. Pray that the adoption process through the Department of Social Services and the court systems will be more intentional in securing permanency quickly for the foster children in BCH's care so they can be connected with their "forever families."

MONDAY Pray for the sisters who had to be removed from their home. The house was a local drug house, endangering the girls. Pray for the eight-year-old boy who carries significant trauma from the horrific physical abuse he received from his family.

TUESDAY Pray for birth moms who choose adoption for their children through BCH's Christian Adoption Services. They often return to their communities with little to no resources or support. Pray God leads them to BCH's Emmanuel Home for a safe home while building the community they need.

WEDNESDAY Pray for the oldest teenager at Good Shepherd Children's Home as she completes her last year of school before going to university. Pray as she seeks God will for direction in deciding her course of studies and future career plans.

THURSDAY Pray for boys living at Cameron Boys Camp who are dealing with the loss of their biological parents, whether it is because of drug issues, death, the loss of their parental rights, or those that have just chosen to not be a part of their son's life. Pray they experience healing and God's love through Camp.

FRIDAY Pray for the staff and volunteers who serve our families and are the hands and feet of Jesus at Greater Vision in Thomasville. Pray for the churches and donors who support this outreach, enabling Greater Vision to provide for the needs of families struggling to achieve self-sufficiency.

SATURDAY Pray for a 70-year-old widower in Madison County is in need of home modifications to accommodate his wheelchair. Pray for the 65-year-old amputee who needs a wheelchair ramp constructed at his home in Greensboro. Pray NCBAM can find volunteers to help bridge these needs.

SUNDAY Pray for our wilderness campers to grow with the Lord. Pray they learn that past habits and choices are not as fulfilling as God's plans and desires for their lives. Pray for "God encounters" while they face the challenges of living in His creation 24/7 at camp and on wilderness trips.

MONDAY Pray for the child at Truett Home who has experienced a tremendous loss and needs assurance that God loves her. Pray for the boy at Drake Cottage who is struggling to accept not living at home because his family's situation is unsafe.

TUESDAY Pray that the Lord will provide more foster husband and wives who have a heart for older children. There is a great need for placements for older elementary-age children and teens. Pray for families to open the lives and homes up to fostering sibling placements.

WEDNESDAY Pray for the young women who serve the children and teens at Good Shepherd Children's Home, Mae Home, and Westmoreland Home in Guatemala. Pray that God will give them the strength and energy to provide the daily care and love the children in these homes need and deserve.

THURSDAY Pray additional partner agencies will join Greater Vision in Kinston. Partners are vital for strengthening community outreach efforts to struggling families. Pray for the staff and volunteers as the busy holiday season begins. Pray for "divine encounters" where Jesus can be shared and lives changed.

FRIDAY Pray for one resident who lives at the Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities home in Marshville. The holiday season is hard for him with few family members visiting. Pray for another resident in the men's home in Winston. His uncle, who he was very close to, passed away suddenly.

SATURDAY Pray for the boy who came to know Christ as his Savior at Cameron Boys Camp. Pray that his walk with Christ grows and strengthens. Pray that the camper will be a light to his family, opening their lives to the saving power of Jesus.

SUNDAY Pray for the child who recently lost her mother to a drug overdose and for the sibling group who came to live at Broyhill Home in Clyde due to their parents being sent to jail for selling and distributing drugs. Pray for the cottage parents and staff serving these children at this difficult time.

MONDAY Pray for the students at Western Carolina University who rely on BCH's HOMEBASE College Ministry for stability and to assist them because they have no family members to help. Pray the students will have the support and resources they need to succeed and be able to graduate.

TUESDAY Pray for our new chief in training at Cameron Boys Camp. Pray that his heart, mind, and soul begin to be prepared as he serves the boys. Pray for more chiefs/mentors to come so more boys can be served. Pray for the chiefs who are at Camp now, serving and ministering to the boys in the woods 24/7.

WEDNESDAY Pray for the children of Good Shepherd Children's Homes in Guatemala. Many of the children have special medical challenges that need treatment. Pray the staff can connect with the best medical treatment for them and that God will provide the resources needed to provide that treatment.

THURSDAY Pray for a special needs adult at Mercer Home who has been struggling with his health – falling and problems with his gate. Many tests are being done. He was prescribed a walker to assist him. Pray he will continue to be active. The falls have made him nervous and hesitant about activities.

FRIDAY Pray for a 75-year-old man in Raleigh recovering from hip surgery who is in need of a wheelchair ramp and a 97-year-old lady living alone in Charlotte. Pray for a 75-year-old who is confined to a wheelchair and is immobile on the left side. She needs grab bars installed in her bathroom and shower.

SATURDAY Pray foster parents will have wisdom, patience, and adequate resources to navigate many challenging behaviors and needs due to trauma their foster children have previously experienced. Children come into their care from many hurtful and often terrifying circumstances.

“At the end of it all, this is not about me or my name. It is about Jesus working through His people to accomplish what only He can accomplish.”

David Melber

CEO-ELECT | BAPTIST CHILDREN'S HOMES of NC



Trustees name Melber as ninth ministry leader

By Blake Ragsdale, Vice President of Communications/C&C Managing Editor

David Melber, a 25-year leader who has dedicated himself to non-profit ministry within Southern Baptist life, has been named as the next Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina (BCH). Melber, currently the Chief Operating Officer/Chief Financial Officer for the Georgia Baptist Mission Board (GBMB) and an ordained minister, accepted the position after a vote by the BCH board of trustees the evening of Friday, October 11, 2024.

“Coming into this role at Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina is both sobering and uniquely humbling,” says Melber. “God has been preparing me for this opportunity since a visit in 2003 to an orphanage in Moldova where He opened my eyes to the plight of those in great need—particularly children—who have no voice.

This is an opportunity to serve, to share the incredible needs, to build relationships and see the body of Christ mobilized so that lives are changed for all eternity.”

In the past nine years, Melber has served in executive positions with the GBMB, the North American Mission Board (NAMB) and Send Relief, a collaboration between NAMB and the International Mission Board (IMB) to respond to global crises and help the vulnerable.



Melber greets BCH's Linda Taylor at The Mill.

ministry,” says Paul Chitwood, President of IMB. “He is a passionate, highly intelligent, intentional leader with strong skills and a unique combination of experiences.

David is a high achiever who leads organizations to success.”

At GBMB in Suwanee, GA from 2020 to the present, Melber has continued growing his experience in managing the resources of a large-scale nonprofit. As COO/CFO, he oversees all of the organization's operations including its financial services which is responsible for more than \$300 million in total assets and operates on a \$50 million budget.

During his tenure from 2015 to 2019 as Sr. Vice President of NAMB in Alpharetta, GA, Melber was responsible for developing what would become known as Send Relief. This involved developing partnerships with 42 state Baptist conventions as well as other national and global partnerships. All of these efforts led to him being named President for Send Relief which has provided disaster and relief support to 2.56 million people across 85 countries and opened up 1,680 new regions for the sharing of the Gospel. Send Relief is currently providing aid to the states, including Western NC, impacted by Hurricane Helene.

(Continued on the next page.)

David and Tera Melber embrace their passion for children at BCH

By Blake Ragsdale, Managing Editor/Vice President of Communications

Baptist Children's Homes Trustees selected David Melber as the ministry's ninth executive leader on October 11.

"David Melber is a visionary leader—professional and highly relational—who knows how to cast a vision and mobilize others to get it done," says Kevin Ezell, President of NAMB, who worked with Melber at Send Relief. "He has spent many years in nonprofit ministry and knows how to navigate that lane very well."



David and Tera Melber

The process of identifying the new CEO began in late 2023 by the BCH Transition and Search Committee chaired by David Powell, Senior Pastor of Lovedale Baptist Church in Sylva and member of the BCH board. Powell has sought prayer in every aspect of the nationwide search process in order to ensure that the search was foremost led by God.

"As we arrive at this moment, we give all thanks and glory to God, whose perfect timing has brought us here," says Powell. "I am grateful to the committee for their service and remarkable commitment to pursuing God's will. Most of all, I am excited for the future of BCH because of who the Lord led us to recommend. I am confident that David Melber will be the person to seize the opportunities that God sets before us with the help of dedicated staff and ministry partners. His executive skills and extensive experience make him the ideal leader to shepherd BCH into the future. What truly sets him apart,

however, is how he consistently reflects his genuine love for the Lord in both his professional and personal life."

A Leadership Search Prayer Guide, released by the committee earlier this year, asked for BCH's stakeholders to pray for "a Christ-centered, servant leader who is called to serve the vulnerable population in NC and beyond" and that "there only be unity in where God is leading."

"I can say with certainty that the Lord answered these prayers and many others," Powell continues. "His sovereignty and provision have been evident."

Ronnie Holman, Chair of the BCH board of trustees and member of Baton Baptist Church in Hudson, agrees. "Through God's faithfulness and the prayers of those who love this ministry, the Lord has brought David Melber and BCH together. On behalf of the board, we are grateful



The Melber Family, L to R: Isaac (in the arm sling), Alex – biological son, Alex's wife Kristin holding son Brooks, Jonas – adopted from Ethiopia, Sarah – daughter in law married to Jonathan, Jonathan – biological son, Tera Melber - David's wife, David Melber, Maritess – adopted from Philippines holding hand of son Miqueas, Kelly – biological daughter – married to Graham, Holt – son of Alex and Kristin, Ivey – daughter of Alex and Kristen.

that David has accepted this calling, and we are looking, with expectation, at what God is going to do through his leadership."

Melber will remain with GBMB until the end of the year. The trustees have granted him the interim

title of CEO-elect until his official start date of January 2, 2025. Melber will be present for the Annual Meeting of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina (BSCNC) held at the Koury Convention Center in Greensboro.

"It's a great day to be a NC Baptist, and a new era of ministry for the Baptist Children's Homes," says Todd Unzicker, Executive Director-Treasurer of the BSCNC. "God has uniquely prepared David Melber with leadership experience and a heart for ministry to the most vulnerable. The future is bright for our movement of churches on mission together."

During the Annual Meeting, Melber will be introduced to messengers from the stage during Session 2 on Tuesday, November 5 at 10:20 a.m. BCH will be hosting two "Meet and

Greet" events at its display booth in the Imperial Ballroom to give attendees the opportunity to greet Melber. The first will be from 7:30 a.m. to 8:15 a.m. and the second from noon to 1:30 p.m.

"We look forward to our NC Baptist friends not only meeting David the person but seeing the heart behind the man," says Brenda Gray, BCH Executive Vice President of Development & Communications. Alongside BCH COO Keith Henry, Gray has served as Co-interim president for the organization. "I am passionate about raising support for the BCH ministry because I am passionate for every child and every person we serve to experience the unconditional love of Christ. I can say, with confidence and excitement, that this is also

David's heart."

Henry agreed, "It's been a tremendous privilege serving with Brenda to oversee the ministry while God guided the committee's search. I echo her sentiments about David and his strength of character. Physically and spiritually, the children, families and individuals we serve will greatly benefit from David's leadership."

Melber is a native of Paducah, KY. After surrendering to a call to ministry, he attended The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY where he received his Master of Divinity. Melber has been married to his wife, Tera, for 33 years. The couple, who are now empty-nesters, have three biological children and three adopted children.

"Tera and I have always prayed that God would open up a role with an organization like BCH," Melber says. "Looking back at the journey with Send Relief, Georgia Baptist Mission Board, and the adoption of our three international children, it's amazing to see how the Lord has worked through all of our circumstances to bring us to this point. I cannot think of anything greater to give my life to."

The couple plan to move to Thomasville, NC as Melber's office will be located at the Mills Home campus, BCH's inaugural location that also serves

as the nonprofit's administrative headquarters. Melber and his wife desire to live on campus so they can best get to know the staff, the children and individuals who BCH serves, and the 139-year-old ministry itself.

"One of the biggest priorities for me is demonstrating – especially over time – my love of the Lord and love for my neighbor," Melber says. "My neighbor includes the staff, who are our most valuable resource, but also includes the broader BCH family of NC Baptists, supporters and ministry partners. At the end of it all, this is not about me or my name. It is about Jesus working through His people to accomplish what only He can accomplish."

Look for more information in the coming days at bchfamily.org and BCH's news publication, *Charity & Children*.

Meet the new CEO: Annual Meeting of the Baptist State Convention

We are excited for NC Baptists, attending the Annual Meeting of the Baptist State Convention of NC at the Koury Convention Center in Greensboro, to have the opportunity to meet Rev. David Melber, Baptist Children's Homes' new CEO.

Meet & Greets with David Melber

TUESDAY, NOV. 5TH | BAPTIST CHILDREN'S HOMES DISPLAY BOOTH, IMPERIAL BALLROOM

Morning Event: 7:30 am to 8:15 am
Join us at the booth for an informal time of coffee and pastries with David.

Noon Event: Noon to 1:30 pm
David will be at the booth as we serve scoops of sherbet with NCBAM, our ministry for aging adults that is celebrating its 15th anniversary.

From the stage: Session 2 at 10:20 am
David will be introduced during the morning session at Annual Meeting on Tuesday.



Jennifer Lomax with Greater Vision Outreach in Thomasville meets Melber as his wife Tera greets Greater Vision's Jayla Simmons during a tour of the ministry's warehouse.



Learn more about David. Scan the QR code or visit bchfamily.org/ceo



Additional Testimonials

“ I know very few, if any, leaders who hold together such professional acumen and tenacity side-by-side with a heart that’s so deeply devoted to God and the things He cares about. He’s a great visionary, strategist, and communicator, but what makes all that so compelling is that David lives the vision before he asks others to join him in it. He’s the real deal, plain and simple—as a husband, father, friend, disciple, and Christian leader.”

Jedd Medefind
PRESIDENT, CHRISTIAN ALLIANCE FOR ORPHANS (CAFO)

“ David is trustworthy and cares that the Lord’s resources are handled with utmost accountability. They are present on Sundays, attentive, and eager to follow God’s Word. They have opened their home for the last several years to lead a Bible study for high school friends of their youngest son, Isaac. Multiple of those friends yielded their lives to Christ and were baptized in our church. I would hire both David and Tera Melber today on our staff if that were a possibility.”

Landon Dowden
THE MELBERS’ PASTOR—SENIOR PASTOR, HEBRON BAPTIST CHURCH IN DACULA, GA

“ David Melber is an outstanding individual and leader! He and Tara not only advocate for caring for the vulnerable, they live it out every day through their actions and in their personal lives. We have worked alongside them for God’s Kingdom and have seen their passion for children and for Jesus.”

Jerry T. Haag
PRESIDENT/CEO, FLORIDA BAPTIST CHILDREN’S HOMES | ONE MORE CHILD

“ David is one of the sharpest leaders I know. He’s the type of man you call when you need wisdom in difficult times or help when you get stuck. He’s a problem solver and a champion of others. His practical leadership skills make him incredibly effective in every role he has been placed in. Most importantly, David loves Jesus and the advancement of God’s kingdom. This is reflected in godly family he has raised and the impactful roles he has held. I could not be more thrilled to have David serving North Carolina Baptists in this new capacity.”

Ronnie Parrott
LEAD PASTOR, CHRIST COMMUNITY CHURCH, HUNTERSVILLE, NC

Stinsons follow calling to care for foster children

By Jim Edminson, Editor

Caitlin knew Justin was the “one” when he insisted they pray together. “We had just started dating, and I shared with Justin about a challenge I was facing and asked him to pray for me. I was not expecting him to say, ‘Let’s pray right now.’”

Justin was raised in church. His parents are Christians, and he was saved at age five. He credits his father for helping shape his faith. “Dad drove a Charlotte city bus and shared Jesus with the people he met. He inspires me to live my faith boldly.”

Caitlin gave her heart to Jesus when she was sixteen. She connected with a church, sang in the praise band, and thrived until she went away for college. An abusive relationship led her to despair. “I remember that I felt I had nothing and nobody cared. But I prayed knowing the Lord was near and that He still loved me.”

Caitlin ended the relationship, returned to church, and found everything she needed was waiting for her. She grew in faith and saw God do amazing things in her life. “It was a time when I truly experienced His grace and mercy.”

Caitlin’s mom and her siblings were all adopted. She saw firsthand its importance. “I always have had a heart for adoption and fostering sat on my heart. It was something I had to do.”

Caitlin was 27 when she and Justin met. She was tired of dating for the sake of dating; she wanted more. When the couple became serious about their relationship, Caitlin needed Justin to know her heart about fostering and adoption.

“I had not thought about it before,” he says. “I knew I wanted children and was open to it. I remember thinking, ‘Why not?’”

The couple were engaged at six months and married 18 months later. After trying to have a baby, they learned the disappointing news that they were unable to have children.

“It was hard, but the Lord had already prepared our hearts,” Caitlin says, remembering the foster and adopt conversation of their dating days.

In the summer of 2022, Caitlin felt God speaking to her, telling her she was called to be a mom. “We had come to the place after four years of our marriage that Justin and I would not have kids. But I wanted to have a family and Justin agreed.”

A friend was fostering and she recommended



Caitlin and Justin Stinson and their two daughters, left to right Elena and Alicia, have been selected as the first foster care family to live in Starlite Home at River Hill Refuge near Shelby. RHR consists of three BCH-owned homes dedicated to the care of foster children. The Stinsons have dedicated their lives to caring for displaced children.

Baptist Children’s Homes (BCH). A phone call started the process and in a few months the couple was fully licensed. They thought younger children would be best, and boys preferable. “I knew boys,” Justin says, “I knew nothing about girls.”

In March 2023, the couple welcomed two sisters and their younger brother into their home. The children had been in foster care for a year and a half in multiple homes. They had

suffered great hardship. The trauma had been severe, and it was determined the eight-year-old brother needed special therapeutic care. The Stinsons focused on creating a home for the sisters.

The girls needed help in school. They had changed schools several times in just months and they were unsure, often

feeling like misfits. Alicia, an honor student, experienced her scores falling. With loving care, those things soon improved.

“They began to thrive,” Caitlin says. “You could see it in their faces. There was joy instead

of hurt and confusion. They were sponges. They opened their hearts and learned to trust God.”

In July of this year, the couple completed the sisters’ adoption paperwork. The process was finalized on September 10. The family agreed they wanted to continue fostering. “Alicia’s eyes lit up when we discussed fostering again,” Caitlin remembers. “She was excited and wanted to help other kids like Elena and her.”

Caitlin and Justin knew they would need more living space to continue fostering. A flyer landed in their hands about BCH’s new ministry at River Hill Refuge.

River Hill Refuge near Shelby consists of three BCH-owned homes dedicated to the care of foster children: Westmoreland Family Home, Starlite Home, and Tucker Home. Starlite Home was made possible by a lead gift by Marsha and Tom Huskey of Whittier and is the second home to open. The Westmoreland Family Home’s foster family, the Biggerstaffs, were in place before the April 27th dedication this year.

“It is an answer to our prayers,” Caitlin says. “Fostering children at Starlite Home gives us the opportunity to continue to do what God has called us to do.”

To learn more about BCH’s foster care and adoption program, visit bchfamily.org/programs.



Church strengthens its outreach to senior adults

By **Anita Davie**, Far West Regional Director, NCBAM

Within the steep hills, deep valleys, and hollows, and along the branches and streams in western North Carolina, there is a light shining—God’s Light! A light shining through Christ followers and through His church.

I believe that God’s children have within them the strongest light in the universe, if only they will let it shine. It is our purpose. Jesus calls us to: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).



Anita Davie

There is a desire in each of us for our lives to matter—to have meaning or purpose. Having a sense of purpose has been shown to be critical to our well-being: physically, emotional-

ly and spiritually.

As Christians, we know the truth. Nothing on earth can fully satisfy our longing for meaning; that is nothing but Jesus Christ. There is an emptiness within us, a longing for something more, something greater. God made us this way. Paul writes, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

A few months ago, Pastor Cannon of Pine Branch Baptist Church in Spruce Pine and his wife Windy invited North Carolina Baptist Aging Ministry (NCBAM) to partner with their church to strengthen the church’s senior adult ministry at their church and in the community. They were intentional and committed. I love the title they chose for their ministry, “Shining the Light.”

Their ministry focuses on three outreaches: a DME closet (durable medical equipment such as wheelchairs and walkers), a senior day celebration, and smoke alarm installations.

DME loan closets are much needed in almost every community. NCBAM provided assistance in the startup of their loan closet by helping to develop the written procedures for operation and by providing startup DME.

Recently, Pine Branch hosted a Senior Adult Conference. It was a day of worship, fellowship, food, and much needed information. NCBAM shared the One Hope outreach—a spiritual response to social isolation and loneliness. The managing attorney for the High Country office of Legal Aid of NC spoke about end-of-life documents to have in place for a peace of mind.

NCBAM will soon provide smoke alarms and installation training to Pine Branch to serve seniors in their community. NCBAM is excited about this partnership with Pine Branch.

NCBAM would love to partner with your church’s senior adult ministry. We have 14 outreaches to share with your church. They include:

- The NCBAM Statewide Call Center which provides connections to churches and community resources.
- Wise Up enrichment workshop which feature more than 40 classes addressing issues relevant to aging adults.
- Priority # 1 Prevention programs which address

safety concerns such as fire and fall prevention and home safety.

- Intergenerational Camps
- Caregiver Resources, including workshops, and our new Caregiver Guidebook which provides practical and spiritual guidance for self-care.

NCBAM is a ministry of Baptist Children’s Homes of North Carolina and was designed to work in partnership with NC Baptists. The ministry serves aging adults (65+) and their families by providing spiritual encouragement along with practical assistance that enables older adults to maintain their independence and quality of life in their own homes. Contact the NCBAM Call Center at 877.506.2226, Monday through Friday, 9am–5pm.



Alum Ray Yow dedicates life to serving the Lord — Rev. James Lambert and wife Betty Jo remembered

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

Ray Yow entered Mills Home (MH) in 1957 with siblings **Keith, Kay and Sherry**, now deceased. He graduated in 1964. In his life around campus, Ray was noted as a serious student, especially of the Bible. When Ray learned he would be able to take a Bible class at Thomasville High School, he was thrilled and he came to be highly appreciative of his teacher **Ms. Ingram**. He was always noted to be kind and respectful and thereby became highly respected himself. **Pete Knight**, a former housemate of Ray's, mentioned that all the MH kids looked up to Ray for his quiet, kind lifestyle. He was also looked up to for the way he performed his campus duties.

After graduating from MH, Ray attended New Brunswick Institute in Brunswick, Canada. After he graduated from there as a pastor in 1969, he went to Columbia, South Carolina but was called back to Eastport Maine where he met his wife **Carol**. They made their home there for around 10 years. They presently live in Whiteville, North Carolina and have been there since 1981. Married since 1971, he and Carol have two daughters, two granddaughters, and one grandson.

Meaningful events in Ray's life include having the opportunity to spend six weeks at a boys' home in the Virgin Islands, spend a two week trip to Brazil where his group worked on a church building and he worked with the pastor, and taking a trip to Israel that included his seeing Golgotha and other things related to Jesus. From his strong interest in Bible studies in his teenage years, he seemed destined for the Christian ministry. And having served in multiple pastorates, he seems gratified he was able to serve God that way. Presently, he is a member of Lemons Crossroads Baptist Church in Whiteville.

We were saddened to learn that

Catherine "Kathy" Blackwell, wife of **Dr. Michael C. Blackwell**, passed away peacefully on September 18. In addition to her parents, she was preceded in death by her sister, **Rachel Denham**.

Kathy married Dr. Michael C. Blackwell, Sr. on August 12, 1967, and they spent the next 57 years together. She was a loving and supportive wife to Michael, a very nurturing mother to their children, and a wonderful grandmother to the grandchildren.

She graduated from Brevard with an AA degree in Liberal Arts. In her later years, she graduated from High Point College with a BA in Psychology. Left to cherish Kathy's memory are many family members that include her beloved husband; daughter **Julie Blackwell**; son **Michael Blackwell, Jr.**; grandchildren **Gabriella Curtis** and **Sam Curtis**; and brother **Stephen Kanipe**. A Celebration of Life Service will be held at a later date.

We learned recently also of the December 7, 2023 death of **Genene Hamby Harrold**. She passed away at her home in High Point. Along with her husband **Wade**, she was a member of Rich Fork Baptist Church, where she was active in the Ladies' Auxiliary. From her youth, she pursued lifelong learning and obtained her RN degree in 1981 through Davidson County Community College. That degree led her to work with Guilford County Mental Health. Later she was a much beloved MH houseparent. She always enjoyed saying she had cared for over one hundred children and had forged many lifetime relationships with the several. Genene was a loving wife and mother, devoted grandmother, and strong model of a life of Christian service. She is survived by her husband **Wade Harrold**; sons, **Gregory (Karen)**, **Eric (Wendy Hill)**, and **Tommy (Susie)**; brothers, **Jim (Mary)** and **Gary (Sylvia)** sister-in-law,

Lydia Hamby; ten grandchildren; and eight great-grandchildren. She was preceded in death by her brother, **Dennis Hamby**. Her funeral and burial services were held at Rich Fork Baptist Church on Dec. 12, 2023.

Most MH alumni tend to be very appreciative of their MH church life and especially their pastor and his family. Such a case is that of **Rev. James M. Lambert** and his wife **Betty Jo Frazier Lambert**, who served Mills Home Baptist Church (MHBC) from 1966-1973. They were much loved so we know alumni will be saddened to hear that Betty Jo passed away on September 12, her husband James having been deceased several years. They had a long marriage of 66 years together. **Stephen Matthew and James Blake Lambert**, their two sons, survive Betty Jo as do two grandchildren and three great grandchildren.

Betty Jo served alongside her husband in five different NC churches. During his service at MHBC, Betty Jo served as a teacher in the Child Development Center on campus and some of the time was a teacher's aide at Colonial Drive Elementary School in Thomasville. At all the places Rev. Lambert served, Betty Jo was very active in church activities, classes, and the choir—usually not out front, but as part of the congregation. A celebration of her life was held on September 21 at King First Baptist Church. She was buried at Crestview Memorial Park in Rural Hall.

We were sorry to hear from **Obie Harris** that his brother **Donnie Richard Harris** died September 23. He was living in Mars Hill at the time of his death. Born in Guilford County, **Donnie, Obie, and Robin** came into the care of BCH in the early 70s and Donnie remained so until 1979. Early under BCH care, Donnie lived a year at the BCH Wilderness Camp in Wallburg. It was a lifestyle he adored and he remained a sort of outdoors-

man all his life. He loved and appreciated his life at MH also. Like all the other kids, he was involved in church activities and social activities at the gym, pool, and valley. **Clifton Lambrecht** says he was an "action oriented person" and did many things well and often in a very creative manner. After leaving MH, he finished high school in Guilford County. After high school, he served his country as a staff sergeant in the National Guard for 27 years and during that time he fulfilled his duty in four combat tours in Afghanistan and Iraq. With his being known as a "get things done" kind of person, we are not surprised that he was a highly decorated soldier. During Desert Storm, he suffered a serious car accident which had a permanent effect on his life. Once out of military service, Donnie served the Department of Corrections for 30 years in Marion and Craggy.

Donnie is survived by his wife, Susan Cheek Harris; sister **Robin Sheehan (Thomas)**; brother **Obie Harris, Jr. (Tracey)**; stepdaughter **Stephanie Rice (Darvom)**; and granddaughter **Camila**. A memorial service will be held at a later date. Condolences may sent to Obie Harris at 7926 Eversfield Rd., Stokedale, NC, 27357.

Please remember that we will print a new address directory around June 15th, 2025, so please send any new addresses or corrections of addresses to **Flora Hicks Patton** at florapatton@ctc.net or call her at 704-791-7866. She is also happy to take any corrections for your **Charity & Children** subscription. Please contact **Sharon DeHart Stiles** for information regarding "burial" at 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



Celebrating former resident's life
Brian, a former Alverta Bolick Home resident for special needs adults, passed away due to illness. He was a joy to all.



Newborn adopted by Christian couple
Andy and Shanda, a Christian Adoption Services couple, adopted a baby girl whose mother chose adoption.



Friends of Children impact Camp
Churches at Cameron Boys Camp helped at Friends of Children missions day. Sign up at bchfamily.org/volunteer



Church collects diapers for Western NC
Utah Baptist in Union County delivered a truckload of diapers to Broyhill Home in Western NC.



Western Carolina students give back
Students helped HOMEBASE College Ministry through Western Carolina's Community Engagement program.



Group makes blankets for BCH annually
The "Slip Stitch Sisterhood" from Hillcrest Baptist in Raleigh crafted dozens of blankets to bring children comfort.



HOMEBASE equips college students
HOMEBASE set up at an event for the first week of classes at Western Carolina University to help any student with supplies.



Churches fill food locker with pasta
First Baptist Thomasville and Lakeview Baptist in Linwood teamed up to collect pasta and spaghetti for BCH.



Volunteers of all ages help Oak Ranch
Church groups tackled projects at BCH's Oak Ranch in Broadway for its Friends of Children Saturday missions day.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

JOIN US FOR FALL EVENTS/MISSION DAYS

NOVEMBER

3-10: Annual Offering Week of Prayer for Baptist Children's Homes | bchoffering.org

4-5: Annual Meeting of Baptist State Convention (NC Baptists) in Greensboro
ncbaptist.org/annual-meeting

- Visit the Baptist Children's Homes booth area to connect with our many ministries.
- Meet new BCH CEO David Melber on Tuesday at 7:30am to 8:15am and Noon to 1:30pm.

09: Thanksgiving Dinner at Cameron Boys Camp in Cameron

23: Thanksgiving Dinner/Founders Day at Camp Duncan in Aberdeen

For more details and registration information, visit the Events Calendar at bchfamily.com/events

How can we help you? Contact 1.800.476.3669 or bchfamily.org/referral >>>

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Annual October Beach Retreat was a success!

Alumni gather and remember the "Good Old Days"

By JOHN THOMPSON, 102 Maritime Court, Havelock, NC 28532 (252) 671-3515 jbthompson43@gmail.com

McNeil Beach Cottage is a wonderful place. It was provided to Baptist Children's Homes by some wonderful friends from in Morehead City. The property goes all the way from the sound over to the Atlantic Ocean on the other side. A lot of good friends and staff work to keep the cottage in "top notch" shape.

It sleeps 60 people, there is a great kitchen with anything you need, and there are washing machines and dryers for folks to use. The cottage has two large living rooms and a large front porch. There are special rooms for the cottage parents and lots and lots of bunk beds for children and residents. A special downstairs room is set up for the lifeguard to use in the summer time.

The Kennedy Home (KH) alumni just had their fall beach retreat the first weekend of October. We have been doing this for years and will be scheduling next year's retreat soon. Our next alumni gathering will be the annual Christmas luncheon in December. Homecoming is slated for June 7-8, 2025.

One of the alumni attending this year's beach retreat was **Mary F. Parker**. She always brings crafts for everyone to do. This year we made ear rings. I made some for my daughter-in-law. We also painted pictures inspired by the beach. She truly is amazing. She writes: "I really enjoyed our beach trip this year again. It is always a good time. I love seeing everybody and I got to meet new people this time. We need to give good 'thanks' to **Debbie Caulder, Gary Caulder, and John Thompson** for all the good food. It seemed like they were in the kitchen all the time. Everyone pitched in to clean up, set the table, make coffee, etc. Everyone worked together

to make the weekend a great success. I love all my Kennedy Home brothers and sisters—from when I was there (1982-1989) and those from other times. Love you all!"

Patsy Hensley (1954-1974, her parents worked at KH) attended the retreat. Her father, **Haldane Hensley**, was the farm manager part of the time. You could always find him working in the "pig parlor." Patsy's cousin, **Amy Stout**, brought her from Virginia. Keep praying for Patsy. She is legally blind but can see a little. They both enjoyed the food and fellowship. And Amy finally got to meet all the people she's heard about throughout the years. Patsy is looking forward to all the future reunions. Amy really took good care of Patsy—what a loving cousin.

Alice Sisk Russum (1962-1972) writes: "I came to Kennedy Home in November of 1962. I was the last of the Sisk family to come. My sisters **Dona and Gail** and my brother **Buddy** were already living there. My dad left my Mom with us four children and she could not care for us. The first building I was admitted to was Biggs Cottage. My housemother was **Mrs. Casper** and our dietitian was **Mrs. Justice**. I enjoyed being with all the girls in the building. There were 18 in all. Mrs. Justice taught us a few things in the kitchen. I learned to make my first pot of coffee and chocolate toast under her direction. I lived in the Brokenhurst after I was old enough to move up. I then went to the Bryant Cottage after it was built and all of my siblings moved in there with me. It felt more like a home to me. I shared a room with my sister Gail. Our houseparents were **Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong**. Then they left, **Mr. and Mrs. L. Russell Simmons** were our houseparents. They were my favorite houseparents. Mr. Sim-

mons was a gentle giant and had such a sweet nature. He worked in the maintenance department on campus. His daughter, **Judy Simmons White**, is still my best friend to this day. We never lost contact with each other after all these years."

Judy was able to come to our beach retreat to visit and eat with us. When I served at KH, I sold her daddy my daddy's old car and she really enjoyed it.

Several remarks made at the retreat while we were just sitting around:

Patsy recalled that an F-4 jet from Seymore Johnson crashed at the "hog parlor." She also remembered how the fire department coming to burn Spillman Cottage for training. The boys cleaned all the bricks from the cottage to be used again. She remembers when the new gym was being built, the children would play hide and seek. Patsy and her sister **Peggy** were class mascots at the LaGrange school.

Debbie Stallings shared that some of the best times at KH was had at the garden. She remembered **Mike Potter and Grayson Gentry** and the hard work—but lots of fun. There was lots of corn to shuck by the order.

Memories of **Mr. Harper**, the housedad at the Ferebee Cottage, came flooding back. He would check the cottage after clean up time, bouncing a quarter on the made beds to see if it would bounce. If it didn't, the beds would be made again. **Rusty Wortham** remembered going into the Air Force with his long, blond hair and having it cut first thing. The barber went right down the middle of his head and then turned the chair around so he could see what was coming.

George Wilson was on the same flight with him going to

basic training. Rusty spent all his money getting to the base and had to borrow a dollar to pay for his hair cut. No one present on the retreat knew you had to pay for your military hair cut.

Heidi Gentry said the following blessing while at the beach cottage: "Come on Jesus and be our guest and let this food to us be blest. Amen!"

I remember that when I accepted the "call" to work at KH. Kennedy Home Baptist Church was having repairs so we met in the gym. On the very first Sunday I was singing a solo and my son **Scott**, who was in diapers, got away from who was holding him and walked up front. I just kept singing and bent over and picked him up just like it was planned. **Mr. Rodney Beals**, the pastor at that time, told me the next day in the office that I made my place when he kept singing and loving my son all at the same time.

More shared memories will be included in my next column. Don't think I forgot you.

Thanks to those who come by to visit me. I really love sitting with you and loving on you. I don't drive any more—I keep going to sleep at the wheel and that won't work. I don't want anyone else to get hurt. Being 81 feels no different than being 80 but I do have to make changes. But God is so good. Mt family takes care of me and I'm so proud of them.

Please write me good articles to use in my **Charity & Children** column. Send your stories right away about Christmas and growing up at KH. Love to all my youngins. Give me a call some-



time at 252-671-3515. — jt

John Thompson served at Kennedy Home from 1972-1977. At age 81, he continues to serve the Lord.

Heart swells in gratitude at each sound of a tractor

By Jim Edminson, Editor

The old John Deere motor turns—thump, thump, thump—and fires. The bump and chug repeats faster and faster, announcing Uncle Grant’s tractor is ready for the fall trek into the woods to gather the winter’s firewood.

Eddie and I have become Saturday farm hands, tagging along with Uncle Grant and his sons Richard and Greg. Not because we are useful—boys ages seven and 12 can only do so much—but to keep our minds and hands busy.

Dad has been deployed for more than a year now. He calls when he can, and as thrilling as it is to hear his voice, our hearts break when the dial tone signals the call is over. I think: “This war is taking too long.” Uncle Grant understands. He served in World War II. He knows the heartache of being away from his family. He determines to do all he can to ease the sting for me and my brother.

We rise early, dress in jeans, grab our fleeced-lined jackets, and dash across the blacktopped Louisiana Highway 488. Uncle Grant’s farmhouse stands on property that has been in the family for generations. The smoke from the fireplace promises a warm welcome. The smells of breakfast greet us as we burst through the back door: homemade biscuits fresh from the oven, thick bacon crisp in the black cast-iron skillet, and eggs laid that morning, fried, slide onto plates. We gobble Aunt Dale’s breakfast, served at the hand-hewn wood table. Four growing boys leave little evidence

of the hard work that went into preparing it. But the content looks on our faces seems payment enough for her labors.

Fall is my favorite season, the season of harvest and thanksgiving. It is a time to remember the benefits of family and to give thanks for God’s faithfulness. David entreats us in Psalm 103, “... forget not all His benefits.” After uniting the twelve tribes of Israel and reigning as their king, David looks back, reminding readers to count their blessings. He urges the reader not to forget all of God’s deeds. David recounts His forgiveness, healing, redemption, and mercy. He proclaims God’s love and grace. He testifies that he wants for nothing—God satisfies the desires of his heart.

After that big breakfast, we climb onto the trailer built by Uncle Grant and his brothers when they were young. It sways left to right along the trail that marks the way to the trees cut in the summer. Summer cutting to autumn gathering, the seasons mark the passing time. I know as days come and go, Dad’s return home comes closer.

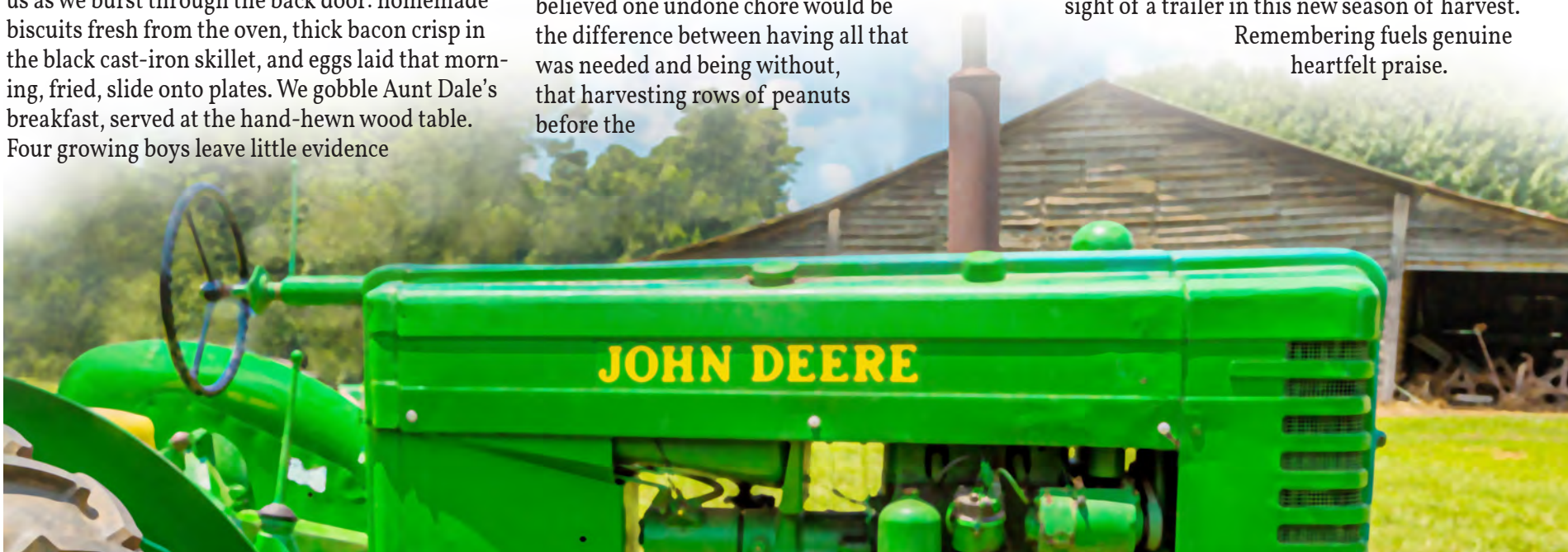
I remember those far off days with thanksgiving. Uncle Grant made us feel necessary, as if the farm work would suffer if we did not help. We believed one undone chore would be the difference between having all that was needed and being without, that harvesting rows of peanuts before the

first frost guaranteed a bounty, enough to make an abundance of the peanut brittle I loved, or helping to mend fences made Uncle Grant’s cows happier, making their milk plentiful and sweeter. Uncle Grant’s love and care made Saturday mornings a time to look forward to instead of dread. His thoughtful care provided a pleasant distraction from the reality of Dad’s absence. We felt needed. Only later did we realize the great need in our lives Uncle Grant filled in that season.

Remembering is not just about the past. Remembering equips us for the future. We can be confident that what God has done in days past, He will do again. He is faithful, and will be faithful, no matter what challenges and hardships befall us. As David reminds us, no matter how great the challenge, God is the One who brings victory, equipping us for the task, renewing us—likening us to eagles who soar.

Dad’s eventual return made our family whole again. Days on the farm came to an end, but my memories of Uncle Grant during that time remain a cherished part of a good childhood. Miles and years away from Louisiana Highway 488, my heart swells in gratitude at each sound of a tractor and sight of a trailer in this new season of harvest.

Remembering fuels genuine heartfelt praise.



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