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Charity & Children

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

@bchfamily

January/February 2025

Issue 1

Volume 138

SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE DAY IS JANUARY 19



Connecting

As we tally the latest numbers, we celebrate the 84 domestic and international children who were compassionately connected with adoptive families in 2024. Finding the right home, where Christ's love is shared, is vital for every child Baptist Children's Homes serves.

Mission Engagement is at the heart of volunteering

By Kristyn Butts, BCH Director of Volunteer Engagement

Who doesn't love a child? "Baptist Children's Homes (BCH) has had a special place in our hearts for over 40 years. We're so grateful to partner to give hope and love to the children they care for," Piedmont Baptist Association (PBA) Mission Strategist Michael Barrett said at the recent 130th Annual Meeting.

The theme for the night was "Mission Engagement." Clay Leonard, BCH's Piedmont Region director of development shared, "In Genesis 22, Abraham looked up and saw the ram caught in the thicket as he was in the midst of an unthinkable sacrifice. He named the place 'The LORD Will Provide' (Jehovah Jireh) and he worshipped the Lord for His provision. ...The gifts they (PBA) have given and the meaningful time of intercessory prayer for us caused me to look up and worship our Jehovah Jireh. I heard a missionary say one time, 'If it's God's will, it's God's bill.' Once again, He provides for what He decides, and I am thankful."

Through the collaboration and generosity of the PBA and their partnering churches, the group gave:

- 82 Gas Cards for Foster Families
- 70 Camp Sponsorships
- 89 Birthday Bags with Gift Cards and Party Supplies
- 10 Blessing Boxes for Family Care Moms
- 15 Blessing Boxes for Sex-Trafficking Victims

In addition to the gifts, a meaningful time was intentionally set aside to pray specifically over each group of gifts and the children, moms, and families who would receive them.

BCH Associate Vice President of Child and Family Services Christopher Allabaugh said: "The annual meeting of the Piedmont Association was something truly wonderful to behold. The worship was uplifting and the fellowship engaging. What was even more impressive was watching



Above, Teresa Barrett, from the Piedmont Baptist Association, helps deliver the donations collected during the PBA Annual Meeting—including birthday bags for children in foster care. Below, Scotts Hill Baptist Church members welcome children from Baptist Children's Homes to Mountain Camp.

a group of churches be so dedicated to being on mission together. BCH is truly blessed by this partnership, and more importantly, those we serve benefit from the love displayed by this incredible collection of churches."

With the help of the PBA, 70 children in BCH's care will experience this summer the wonder and power of Mountain Camp produced by Scotts Hill Baptist Church in Wilmington.

"Mountain Camp is an unforgettable example of how Christ uses teens to share the gospel to BCH's youth," BCH's Vice President of Children

and Family Services Linda Morgan said.

In attendance for the PBA's annual meeting were the campers from Camp Duncan for Girls. Harleigh, one of the campers, said, "Mountain camp is Awesome! Fun! Radical! Fantastic! Mountain Camp is special because of the intentionality of the camp all the way around. The people, games, small group leaders, and the focus on the need for a relationship with Christ."

At the close of the PBA meeting, the girls from Camp Duncan gathered around a pretend campfire and sang: "Thank you Church. Thank you, Thank you Church. Thank you Church!"

Thank you PBA churches for being the hands and feet of Jesus and for finding your spot to serve sacrificially. Let us help you "Find Your Spot!" Visit www.bchfamily.org/volunteer for current volunteer opportunities or submit a volunteer inquiry.

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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Starting with the end in mind

Steven Covey's well-known principle, "Begin with the end in mind," from *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, aligns deeply with a biblical truth found in Ecclesiastes 7:8—"Better is the end of a thing than its beginning, and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit."

Although Covey popularized the phrase, the idea originally stems from the wisdom of the Holy Spirit through Solomon. As I begin this season with Baptist Children's Homes (BCH), I want to align my heart with this concept: to be shaped by the end vision—the hope we find in Christ—and live in light of it.

One of my favorite passages that illustrates this mindset is 2 Corinthians 5:16-21:

"From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation..."

This passage is full of life-changing truth. The concluding verse—"For our sake, He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God"—is one that every follower

of Christ should commit to memory. It reveals the core message of our faith: because of Christ's life, death, and resurrection, God has made us righteous in Him. This truth is astounding.

Ultimately, the end we hope for is the completion of our sanctification, the day when we will stand fully glorified in God's presence. Until that day, however, our mission is to pursue reconciliation—not just between individuals but between God and people, especially within the BCH community and among those we serve.



David Melber, CEO

Reconciliation is one of the most beautiful experiences we can have. When broken relationships are restored, the sense of relief and joy is incomparable. One of the Bible's most memorable stories of reconciliation is the parable of the Prodigal Son. After wandering far from his family, the son returns, humbled and ready to be restored. His father, filled with joy, does not dwell on the past rebellion. The only thing that matters is the reunion—the son is home again. This picture of reconciliation resonates deeply with me. It's not the victory of battles or the accomplishment of goals that moves me most, but the restoration of relationships.

We were created as relational beings—first, to be in relationship with God, and second, to live in

harmony with one another. When we are separated from the Lord, life becomes hollow and without meaning. In the beginning, everything was good and right between God and humanity, but sin shattered that perfect relationship. However, God, in His mercy, provided Christ to restore all things. As 2 Corinthians 5:17-18 reminds us, we are made new through Christ, and God has reconciled us to Himself. Even more astonishing is the fact that He entrusts us with the ministry of reconciliation.

As I step into this exciting new role at BCH, my prayer is to faithfully serve with the end in mind. I am committed to celebrating and championing BCH's mission: sharing hope and changing lives. At the heart of this mission is reconciliation—a restoration that is only possible through the finished work of Christ on the cross.

Together, as God's people, may we live in the reality that we have been made right with God. Let us approach every relationship as His ambassadors, carrying the privilege of representing King Jesus. Through our work, we proclaim the Gospel, share hope, and witness the transformation of lives.

May we never forget that our ultimate end is being in the presence of our Savior, fully reconciled and complete. Until that day, let us labor faithfully in the ministry of reconciliation, trusting that the hope of Christ will change lives—one relationship at a time.

Note: David begins as Baptist Children's Homes CEO (Chief Executive Officer) on January 1, 2025.

Every gift you give offers wonderful possibilities

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

Sunday, December 1 was a great day! Three youth and one adult were baptized during worship at Mills Home Baptist Church. I wish you could have been here to see the joy on their faces and to witness God working in their lives. Each of the youth have been through so much trauma. During the prayer time, a number of the children in care made their way to the altar to pray. Our staff surrounded them, prayed with them, and cried with them as they asked God to help them with the hurt they are facing. To see the healing taking place is such an amazing blessing. The children are experiencing grace and love in this place in the most real way. They have so much ahead of them, so many possibilities. Thank you for helping to make these moments and these possibilities real.

As I write to you, I can imagine there is a faithful servant of God, sitting at a desk somewhere praying, “Lord, bless this gift—use it to help a child.” The prayer is uttered before the gift is sealed in an envelope. Imagine the possibilities this gift will provide.

Imagine the possibilities your gift provides...

A child who has lived in an environment of drugs and unsafe conditions finds a place of hope and refuge.

A child who was hungry and cold is fed physically and spiritually finding warmth in the love of caring cottage parents.

A young lady is married, becomes a mother and breaks the cycle of abuse in her family.

A young man, who was angry and bitter because of an abusive father, becomes a father and shares the love he never felt with his two sons. He teaches them of a Heavenly Father that will always be there for them.

A man with developmental needs discovers a home where he can be as independent as possible, share happiness and grow to his maximum potential.

A child who is failing in school receives encouragement and extra help. She makes the honor roll.

A teenage girl, who felt like a failure, graduates from college and works as a social worker, giving back the care that has been given to her.

A child finds hope and healing as she asks Jesus into her heart.

One of the joys of my job (and there are many) is sharing with churches and individuals the BCH story and how God is using their gifts to our ministry to build His kingdom. After one of my speaking engagements, I was standing at the front of the church as people shared with me their love for BCH. The members of this small church have big hearts for our children. A husband and wife shared their heart for our ministry: “Baptist Children’s Home is always on our hearts,” the wife shared. “We want you to know Baptist Children’s Homes is in our will.

We want to continue to care for the children.”

There are many ways to give to BCH. One way is to give a Legacy Gift. I hope you have already included BCH as a part of your Legacy Giving. January is Make your Will month. It is a great time to review your plans and imagine the possibilities your Legacy Gift will make. Legacy Gifts represent the long-term assurance that BCH will always be able to imagine the possibilities of building the Kingdom through this ministry.

I am filled with gratitude for generous hearts for children and others in need. I am filled with gratitude for YOU!

This issue of *C&C* is a testimony of Sanctity of Human Life in action. It is a testimony of imagined possibilities and fulfilled possibilities. As you read this issue join us in celebrating Sanctity of Human Life month throughout January and beyond. The phrase sanctity of life refers to the idea that human life is sacred, holy, and precious. Every child that walks through our doors—whether a baby left in a gutter in Guatemala to die, a baby born addicted to drugs, four siblings hungry and cold, a teenager that is angry and hurting due to the loss of a parent—every child is given the opportunity to know that they matter. Their lives are indeed sacred, holy, and precious.

Thank you for joining us in this quest to honor God by following His mandate as stated in James 1:27, “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”

Another year draws to a close and a new year emerges filled with so many wonderful possibilities—many opportunities to be a part of celebrating life by changing precious lives. I call this “putting feet” to our prayers. With each new opportunity also comes challenges—challenges that stretch us and grow us—which is a good thing. I pray we never allow ourselves to become complacent and unwelcoming to the challenges/opportunities to care

for the “least of these.”

Our ministry has grown substantially to meet the growing needs across our state, and we face one of our most challenging years financially. We face this challenge with faith and with confidence that God will provide. Every gift you give offers life, new beginnings, second chances, hope, and love. Every gift you give offers so many wonderful possibilities. Thank you for helping us meet these critical, lifesaving, urgent needs. With God all things are possible!

For more information on how you can help give a child new life, call me at **336-689-4442**. Remember, every gift you give between now and January 31st will be doubled through the \$300,000 gift challenge.

Please note that we combine the January/February issues of *Charity & Children* and you will not receive an issue in February. In February, I would once again like to challenge you as you celebrate the month of love to celebrate by sharing love with others by doing one act of kindness each of the 29 days of the month. I can’t wait to hear

about the creative ways you offered hope to others. Email me at bbgray@bch-family.org.



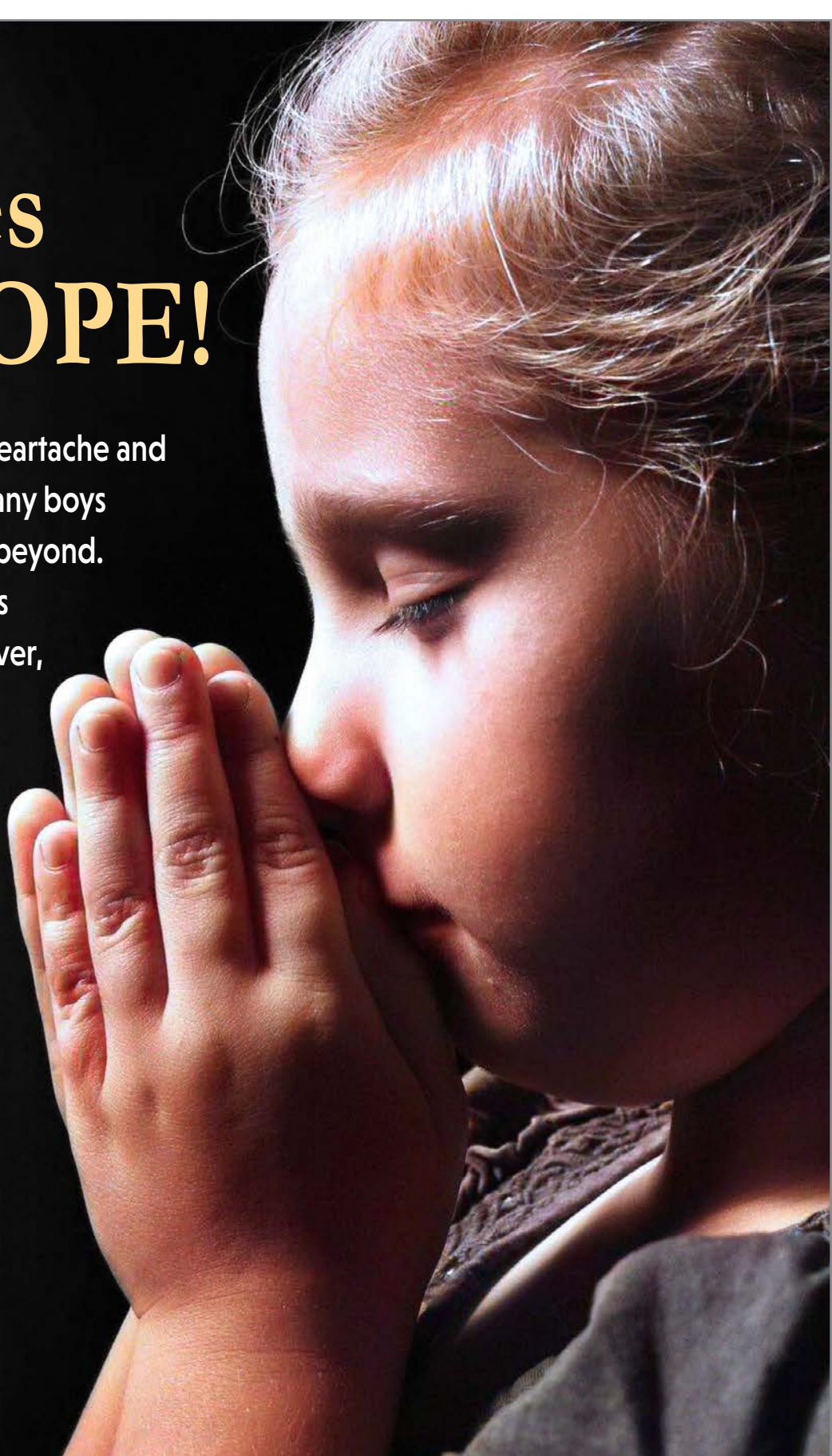
Your gift shines the light of HOPE!

Children are in desperate need of HOPE. Heartache and pain have become the norm for far too many boys and girls throughout our NC mission field and beyond. Abuse and neglect run rampant as the darkness closes in, threatening to consume them. However, God promises that the light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot win.

At Baptist Children's Homes, through your year-end gift, hundreds of boys and girls coming to us in the next year will discover a place where heartache and pain are replaced with joy and love. You make it possible for the light of Jesus to be shone into their lives.

Please give.

DOUBLE your gift through the \$300,000 matching gift challenge until January 31. Your gift is vital to not only helping children now but for those who will need us in 2025.



I want to help, please double my gift!

\$50 \$100 \$250 \$500 \$ _____ 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.

Ten year journey leads Rick Norman to new ministry

By Jim Edminson, Editor

Rick Norman was raised in a Christian home, loved by parents he admired. He made his profession of faith in Jesus when he was 10 years old at Hilliard Baptist Church in High Point. Godly family life became his life's aspiration. As a teen, he began working for the same grocery store chain where his father worked. It was here he met his future wife, Melissa, at the checkout counter. They attended Green Street Baptist Church together, fell in love, and after Rick graduated from college with a business degree, the couple married and began their family. It was then that he felt a stirring in his heart. It was a calling.

"Being a pastor was not what I was supposed to be doing," Rick recalls. "I always shrugged it off when I was asked, 'You sure you're not supposed to be in ministry?'"

A serious illness slowed life down. He knew he needed to act: "I realized I'm not guaranteed another day."

He registered in seminary and soon earned a masters degree in Theological Studies. Stony Point Baptist Church called him to be their associate pastor in 2011.

Rick, Melissa and their two daughters, Michaela and Autumn, made Stony Point home. Their son Danny was born a year later and the family of five thrived.

The ministry at church was going well, but Melissa and I wanted to do more," Rick says. "We wanted a personal way to minister in the community. In 2014, our hearts turned to foster and adoption."

Alan came into their home when he was two years old. His older sister, eight-year-old Floricela, came next and the Normans adopted them together.

Rick was now senior pastor. Their family had grown to seven. They thought it was the perfect number. But God had other plans.

"We had five children in our home—there are restrictions—that's the limit," Rick says, "or that's what we thought."

Reign was a premie born with medical issues. It was an emergency placement and a waiver was submitted. Rick and Melissa brought her home from the hospital at three months. Things moved quickly. Two and a half years later, she was adopted, becoming child six. "Reign is the child we didn't know we needed," Rick says.

"Foster children do not choose their lives," Rick says. "They deserve love, a family, and a home—not a worldly love but the love of God.



Above, the Norman family, left to right: Michaela, Floricela, Autumn, Danny, Alan, Rick, Reign, and Melissa. Rick and Melissa Norman began the journey in fostering and adoption ten years ago with hearts for hurting children. Below, the couple added to their family, left to right, daughters Floricela and Reign and son Alan through adoption. The Norman family continue to foster children in their home.

The Normans began the journey in fostering and adoption ten years ago. Unaware they were traveling a path to a new ministry. Rick was named Baptist Children's Homes' new Foster and Adoption Church Liaison on October 1.

After 13 years at Stony Point Baptist Church, Rick resigned his pastorate. The church rallied around Rick and the family. Their love and support has been vital to the children and family's transition.

With 10,000+ children in the North Carolina foster care system, and more being removed from homes daily, Rick now works to recruit and equip couples from North Carolina Baptist churches across the state to provide homes through fostering and adoption.

"Foster children do not choose their lives," Rick says. "They deserve love, a family, and a home—not a worldly love but the love of God.

Our role is to wrap our arms around foster children, showing them the love of Jesus."

But one does not have to be a foster parent to be involved in a foster child's life. Members of churches can offer support and walk with foster families.

"We see churches as the hub for ministry," Rick says, "and prayer is paramount. Meals,

supplies, and clothes are needed. Children often come with little—sometimes with only the clothes on their backs. We need to have a heart for this ministry and allow God to use us to do what He desires."

Rick's goal is to encourage and facilitate all kinds of foster care ministries across North Carolina. Individuals interested in becoming foster

parents and churches who want to learn how to minister to foster children are encouraged to contact him at 828-450-9136 or rnorman@bch-family.org. Learn more at www.every-child.org.



Rick Norman

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Making a difference: *The Assessor and the Hugger*

By **Carol Layton**, Director of Communications & Administration for NCBAM

Missions are the Carlsons's passion. "There's no doubt we are called to do this. I'm a Call Center Specialist for North Carolina Baptist Aging Ministry (NCBAM) and my husband is a Pastor, but at our core, we're both missionaries." Shirley Carlson is referring to her and her husband's recent work providing Disaster Relief services with Baptists on Mission after Hurricane Helene.

Shirley and Roger have been married 59 years, but didn't begin their lives together as missionaries. "I was in high school when we married," remembers Shirley. "Roger was in the military and then later, he worked as a weighmaster at a trucking company. Throughout our early years, we always had a sense that we wanted something different."

The Carlsons's journey to "different" began in 1983 when they moved from Goldsboro to the mountains of North Carolina so that Roger could attend Mars Hill College. "We moved my mama and our children there and it became our new home," Shirley recalls with a nostalgic smile.

The Carlsons lived at the edge of the Blue Ridge Mountains for 17 years. Roger began pastoring and Shirley worked as a nurse at Asheville Children's Medical Center. Their involvement with Disaster Relief began in 2005 with Hurricane Katrina. "We had just become missionaries and finished a church plant in Weaverville. I adjusted my schedule at the Medical Center so that I could be off for four days. Then, we drove all night to Gulfport, Mississippi and started working the next morning."

Roger is a trained Disaster Relief Assessor with Baptists on Mission. Shirley explains his role: "An assessor is often the first Disaster Relief volunteer on site. Roger submits a report of the issues to a Disaster Relief Site Coordinator who then sends the appropriate team to meet the need."

Shirley's role is different. "I'm a hugger," she



Since Hurricane Helene, Shirley and Roger Carlson have made four trips to Marion to serve with Baptists on Mission's Disaster Relief teams. The Carlsons joined hundreds of volunteers based at Pleasant Garden Baptist Church in Marion. More than 8,000 meals were served to families and volunteers while they were there.

laughs, and then adds with a look of satisfaction, "I've seen my role make a difference many times. As you can imagine, people's worlds have been turned upside down, sometimes literally. I can often feel their spirits lighten when we hug. I just want my words and hugs to encourage them to realize they're not alone. We always offer to leave a Bible with them and to pray. We let them know that another team will be there in a day or so."

When Shirley is not volunteering with Baptists on Mission in places like Gulfport, Mississippi; New York City; Bayboro, New Bern, Lumberton or Marion, North Carolina: she is working at the

NCBAM Call Center—a unique resource that provides "help for the journey" for North Carolina's aging. The Call Center refers callers to community resources and connects individuals 65+ with volunteers and resources that increase their safety and independence at home. Shirley jokes, "This is the only missionary work I've ever gotten paid for."

Shirley's numerous connections with North Carolina's Baptists on Mission and their volunteers make her job easier – which is finding resources and volunteers to serve clients of NCBAM's Call Center. "Ninety percent of the volunteers I regularly work with at NCBAM are also involved with Baptists on Mission. When a Caller needs a wheelchair ramp, a grab bar, or a porch repair, I can often find a Baptist on Mission volunteer to meet their need. There's nothing I like better than to involve a local church in helping to meet a need in their community."

Shirley is pleased that Baptists on Mission volunteers also value the NCBAM Call Center. "Many times, a Baptist on Mission volunteer will know of a need for a wheelchair ramp in their community, but rather than building it, they will encourage the person to start the process with NCBAM. They know we do things right—such as getting signed permission from homeowners before modifications are made, and exploring if there may be other needs in the home."

The Carlsons have found the "something different" they yearned for when first beginning their lives together. Sleeping on air mattresses in church fellowship halls with hundreds of other volunteers, wading through muck to be the first sign of hope after a natural disaster, and sharing God's love—along with plenty of warm hugs. As Shirley puts it, "There's no better way to live than to serve God and see him make a difference in people's lives!"



For the more than **10,000** boys and girls placed in the NC foster care system,
the church is the answer.

Through the EVERY CHILD Partnership with NC Baptists, Baptist Children's Homes (BCH) staff will come alongside your church to:

- Organize an info meeting for your church to learn more.
- Train and license couples in your congregation to be a foster family.
- Assign a BCH case manager to be an ongoing advocate for the families.
- Help your church establish a ministry to support foster care families.



Contact Rick Norman at 828.450.9136 or rnorman@bchfamily.org | Learn more at every-child.org



Olivia meets birth mom Noelle and her family for the first time at their home in Clemmons on August 11, 2024. Pictured, left to right, are Noelle's husband Ryan, her son Nick (Olivia's brother), Noelle, Olivia, Olivia's mom Robin, dad Sam, and Olivia's youngest brother Thomas.

Olivia meets birth mom after lifetime of knowing her

By Jim Edminson, Editor

The Christmas tree in Olivia's bedroom is adorned with ornaments. Each year since her birth, a new ornament was added. The ornament this year was not received by mail like all the previous years. This year's ornament was hand delivered to Olivia by her birth mom Noelle.

Noelle was a sixteen-year-old junior in high school when she learned she was pregnant. She was afraid and kept it a secret until she could not hide it anymore. Confiding in her parents was the first step that led to contacting Christian Adoption Services (CAS). CAS staff comforted Noelle's family, offering care and understanding. After choosing adoption, Noelle made an adoption plan for her unborn child and chose Robin and Sam Bowling to be her baby's parents. They all agreed to a semi-open adoption, choosing to maintain some privacy. In this arrangement, updates, letters and special gifts can be shared but are mediated through CAS.

Noelle's baby was born on November 26, 2003 and named Olivia. From day one, Robin was intent to make Olivia's adoption story and Noelle a part of her little girl's life.

"I know it may sound funny, but I always knew I was adopted," Olivia says. "Mom even had a picture of Noelle in my nursery as a baby."

Robin and Noelle agreed early in Olivia's life that meeting her birth mom in person would be Olivia's decision. In the meantime, Noelle was kept up on many of the things happening in Olivia's life. Noelle began sending gifts and cards for major events in Olivia's life—school and athletic achieve-

ments, birthdays, and Christmases. She sent Olivia's first Christmas tree ornament weeks after her birth.

"I always hoped, and it was always a prayer, that I could meet Olivia in person," Noelle confesses.

"But I always wanted what was best for Olivia, and if we never met, it would be okay. Reunite or not, adoption was the best decision for both of us."

Olivia is now a junior at North Carolina State University in Raleigh. She lives only minutes away from campus and is studying animal science in hopes of becoming a doctor of veterinarian medicine.

Almost a year ago, she began thinking about meeting Noelle. She and Robin discussed the possibility and Olivia decided to wait until summer: "I believe it was God impressing me to move forward and meet Noelle. I knew I was ready."

Tears began to run down Noelle's cheeks before Olivia stepped out of her dad's truck. She had traveled to Noelle's home in Clemmons with her mom and dad and youngest brother Thomas. It

was August 11. In a few months, she would turn 21.

"I never thought 'would I like her or love her?'" Olivia says. "Of course, I love her. She has loved me since I was born and now we love each other in person. It all worked out the way it was supposed to. It was God's perfect timing."

Olivia says she was more nervous than she thought she would be. But the two embraced and the words began to flow, mixed with more tears and laughter. The duo have visited together more than ten times since that first reunion. Olivia has spent time with her new brother, Noelle's son Nick. Both are thrilled to celebrate November birthdays—but ten years apart. Noelle's family, husband Ryan, her son Nick, and her parents



Noelle and Olivia stand with a Christmas tree filled with ornaments that Noelle has given Olivia every Christmas since her birth.

Linda and George, gathered with all of Olivia's family at Robin and Sam's home in Rocky Mount the Saturday after Thanksgiving.

"It is all more than I imagined," Olivia says. "Mom and Dad always told me adoption was God's plan for my life. Noelle and her family are an added bonus. It has always been in God's hands."

It's only a matter of time when Olivia and Robin will be scheduling a lunch date with Noelle. There is still so much to catch up on.

Robin and Noelle create bond for the love of Olivia

By Jim Edminson, Editor

It can be hard to explain. Sometimes it's just a feeling. For Robin and Sam, it began when they were dating in high school. They remember talking about wanting to help a child one day—a child who needed a family. Of course, they had no idea that one day their heart to help a child would lead them to a sixteen-year-old girl who would want them to adopt her baby.

Being sweethearts in high school turned into marriage and the beginning of a family of their own. Sam and Robin Bowling had three sons—Matthew, Timothy, and Thomas—who kept them busy and were the lights of their lives. But Robin couldn't help but wonder what it would be like to raise a daughter.

Sitting together and watching their sons play baseball, Robin and friend Sheryl Naylor were sharing small talk. Robin had been watching a group of little girls playing off to the side. She mused, "I would love to have a little girl."

Sheryl, who worked for Christian Adoption Services (CAS), instinctively said, "You can. What about adoption?"

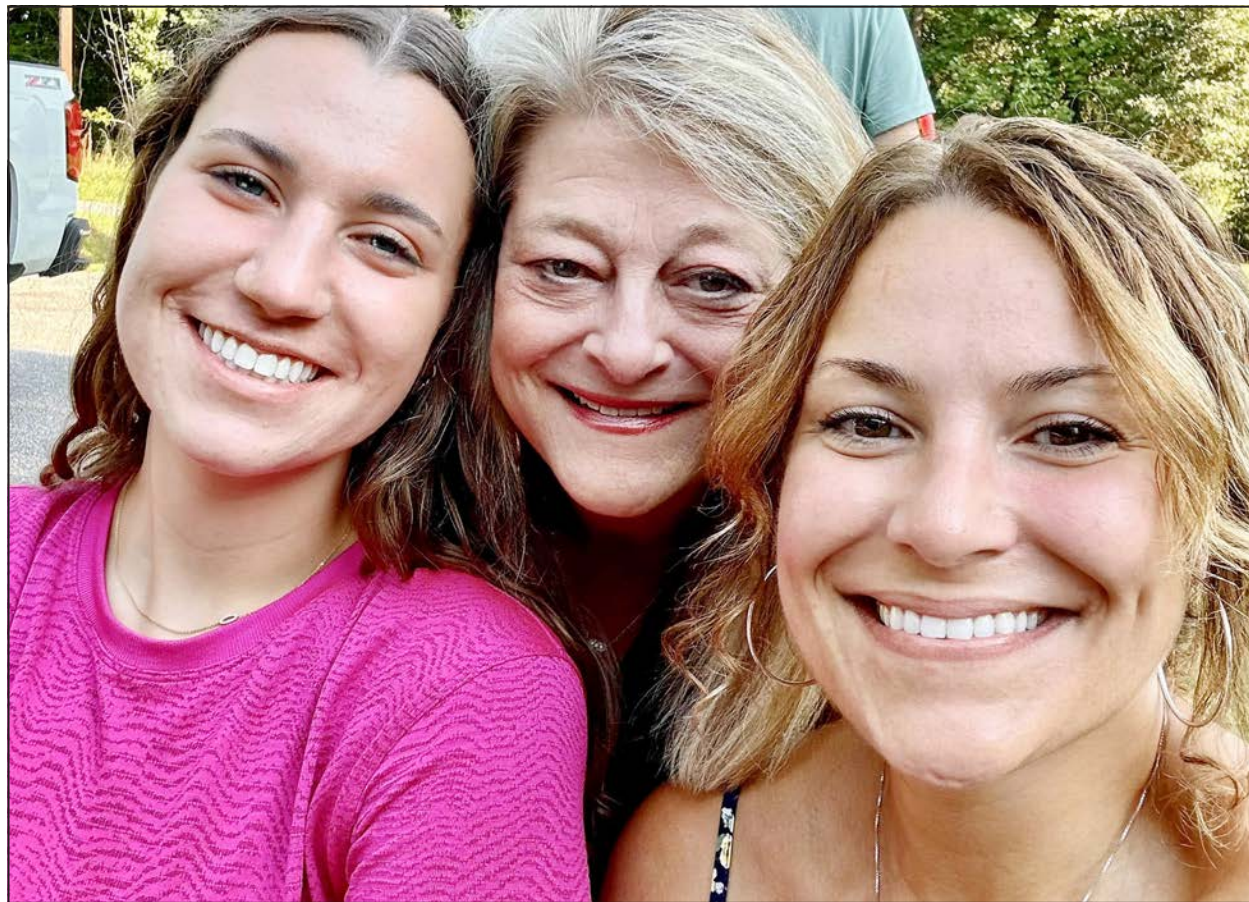
"It was a path that Sam and I felt we had been on since when we dated," Robin confesses. "We decided we would adopt a baby—a little girl who needed a family."

Noelle thought her life was over. The junior in high school tried to keep her pregnancy a secret. But it was a secret that could not be kept from her parents. Unsure what to do, Noelle's mother sought help and learned about CAS. Caring CAS staff members outlined Noelle's options. Through their counsel, she made an adoption plan for her unborn child.

"Knowing that God was at the center of my decision was comforting," Noelle remembers. "My focus became what was best for my baby."

There are three types of adoptions: open, semi-open, and closed adoptions. In all three, only CAS approved waiting adoptive

families are eligible. Open and semi-open adoptions afford the opportunity for the birth mom to choose the adoptive family. But in a semi-open adoption, identifying information such as address and phone numbers may not be shared. In this arrangement, CAS serves as the mediator for any contact. The adoptive family in an open or semi-



Twenty-one-year-old Olivia, left, met her birth mom Noelle, right, for the first time on August 11, 2024 at Noelle's home in Clemmons. Noelle and Olivia's mother Robin, center, knew Olivia needed to learn her story directly from Noelle. Below, sixteen-year-old Noelle and the Bowlings greet newborn Olivia on November 26, 2003.

open adoption sends regular updates and pictures to the birth family and the birth mom can also send letters and special gifts—but is not obligated. In a closed adoption, a birth mom decides to not have contact with the adoptive family. The baby is placed with an approved waiting adoptive family CAS chooses. However, if at any time the birth mom decides to receive updates, she can.

Noelle entered into a semi-open adoption with the Bowlings. She had her baby girl the Wednesday before Thanksgiving 2003, and Robin and Sam brought Olivia home that Friday.

"We love Noelle," Robin says. "Sam and

I knew the adoption was God's leading. We had peace from the beginning and we weren't afraid to show Noelle our love."

Robin wanted Olivia to know about her adoption and her "tummy mommy." She believed it was important she knew about her two families—and that both families loved her. Too often, adopted

children have questions and no answers. They may feel unloved or abandoned. Robin and Noelle joined together to keep that from happening to Olivia. Robin kept lines of communication between her and Noelle open. Bound together with a common purpose, Olivia never felt the stigma other adopted children know and she thrived.

Robin knew Olivia needed to know her story directly from Noelle. Both hoped one day Olivia would decide to meet her birth mom. That day came on August 11, 2024. And the day after Thanksgiving, both families gathered at the Bowlings home, November 30, in Rocky Mount.

It was a dream come true for Noelle: "Our families together is like a big hug from God. Robin and Sam have been loving parents to Olivia. To be reunited is amazing. I would not change any of the decisions I made for Olivia."

Choosing adoption was the right choice for Noelle. Seeing Sam and Robin give Olivia a wonderful family life was what she had hoped for her baby girl. Knowing the Bowlings love her and wanted the best for her has been life changing.

To learn more about CAS's adoption services, visit www.christianadopt.org. CAS also has a no-cost, "confidential intermediary" service to assist CAS adoptees and birth families reunite when a child turns 18. For more information, call 704-847-0038.



Stephanie chooses life and adoption for Judson

By Jim Edminson, Editor

Walking into the clinic, Stephanie feels uneasy, finding it difficult to catch her breath. She has come for an abortion and takes a seat, waiting for her appointment. The clock on the wall ticks off the seconds and with every minute her heart beats faster. Five minutes pass. She stands up, but instead of walking back with the nurse, she turns and walks out the front door just as her dad is walking in to stop her.

“God spoke to us at the same time,” Stephanie says. “I knew this had to be bigger than me and what I wanted. I now know it was all in God’s plan.”

Life had become too hard. Stephanie already had three children, two she was raising herself as a single mom. The little family lived in a two bedroom apartment with eight other people. She had slid into a life of drug use. With this pregnancy, abortion seemed to be the only solution.

“But I couldn’t,” she says. “I stopped the drugs and decided to take care of the baby.”

And yet, Stephanie worried. She struggled to parent the two children she was raising. How could she provide for three? She was eight months along before making a decision about adoption. Her mom searched online and discovered Christian Adoption Services (CAS). She spent two hours on the phone that first call. “The call changed my life, my child’s life, and a loving family’s life.”

She met a week later to look through books of prospective, fully-vetted, CAS adoptive families in hopes of choosing parents for her child. She thumbed through each profile until she came to Nataleigh and Zack Carscaddon’s book.

“When I saw them, I felt this peace,” Stephanie remembers. “I knew this was the family and that



Nataleigh holds one-day-old Judson as she and Zack prepare to take him home from the hospital. Stephanie, left, chose the Carscaddons as Judson’s adoptive family. Below, three-year-old Judson is all smiles at a Christmas gathering with birth mom Stephanie.

I was making the right decision for my child.”

Zack and Nataleigh chose a different path to parenthood. After seven and half years into their marriage, they determined that adoption was the way to grow their family. The couple contacted CAS.

“There was an instant, strong connection the first time we met Stephanie,” Nataleigh says. “Zack and I were convinced this was to be.”

Judson was born October 15, 2020. Thirty minutes after his birth, the Carscaddons met their new son.

“Stephanie chose life for our son,” Nataleigh says. “We will always be

thankful for her. It is such a selfless love to birth a child and then release the child to an adoptive family. It takes great faith and courage. Few people have any idea what that is like.”

Stephanie praises God for her new path. Gone are the days she feared she would not wake up from a drug overdose. She is four years clean and sober. She has just been promoted to supervisor at her job and she and her husband Dylan are looking for a more permanent home for their family.

“Motherhood is about being selfless—and just being humble,” Stephanie says. “And definitely you gotta be strong. You gotta learn how to be strong for your children and do what’s best for them.”

Stephanie decided on an open adoption. She and Carscaddons share information openly and stay in touch through regular texts, phone calls, and face-to-face visits.

“We honor Stephanie,” Nataleigh says. “We believe the Lord handpicked Judson to be a part of our family. We are extremely grateful to her.”

Stephanie has no regrets. She credits CAS for the positive birth mom experience. “You lay your life out and there is no judgment—only love for you and your child. God is at the center of what they do. I love them so much.”

Are you pregnant and need help? Call 800-453-1011 or text 704-619-3531. A CAS representative will answer your call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Scan the QR code and view a video of Stephanie as she shares her adoption journey with CAS.



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17 birth moms made decisions for Christ

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SERVICES



Ministry pledges help to South African orphans

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

Baptist Children’s Homes (BCH) is expanding its international outreach through a new partnership that will impact the orphan crisis in South Africa

BCH is working with Kerus Global Education (Kerus), a Christian nonprofit that addresses the vulnerability of South African orphans through partnerships with faith-based organizations and professionals who can support, educate and equip those directly caring for these children.

“God continues to open doors, in His timing, so that BCH can help meet the needs of children in other parts of our world,” said Keith Henry, BCH Chief Operating Officer. “When we first heard about Kerus and its mission, we knew we needed to explore how BCH could be a part of their efforts. That has resulted in an official partnership that we pray not only helps to impact the physical needs of the orphans but also ensures they hear the good news of the Gospel.”

In late August, a small BCH team flew to the Kerus Care Center in Soshanguve, a township outside of Pretoria which is South Africa’s administrative capital. During the visit, the team spent time with the children, caregivers and Kerus staff engaging in activities, worship and bible study. It was an opportunity for them to see the work firsthand that is being carried out by the staff while also building relationships with the children and their grandmothers affectionately known as “grannies.”



The grannies are the primary caregivers for the children because their parents – who represent an entire South African generation – were victims of the AIDS crisis as well as rampant human trafficking. Their deaths left a genera-



Baptist Children’s Homes (BCH) is dedicated to helping South African orphans through a partnership with Kerus Global Education. Above, Regina Keener, a former BCH staff member, and Kristyn Butts, BCH Director of Volunteer Engagement, meet the orphans during a trip to Soshanguve. Below left, Jennie Cerullo, Kerus Co-founder/Executive Director with the children. Below, Kristyn Butts shares smiles with boys and girls.

tional gap that the grannies, with the help of Kerus and its partner organizations, is filling.

“Kerus has always prioritized collaborations with those who share our vision for helping the vulnerable and spreading the hope of Jesus,” Marcia Ball and Jennie Cerullo, Kerus Executive Directors/Co-Founders, said in a statement. “Collaborating with a group that shares our mission of supporting vulnerable children in the U.S. is invaluable. Our children, grannies, and staff will greatly benefit from their expertise.”

Both organizations have mutual expertise that they will be sharing with one another as a part of the partnership. In February 2025, a team from BCH will travel to the Kerus Care Center to conduct CARE training, a trauma-informed training that will equip the staff and caregivers to best care for boys and girls who are dealing

with the effects of trauma. Kerus staff will have an opportunity in the future to lead BCH staff in its Courage to Care training which focuses on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse of children.

In addition to its newly-formed relationship in South Africa, BCH has international outreach in Guatemala and the Philippines. BCH operates ministry locations in more than three-dozen communities across North Carolina, South Carolina and its international partnerships.

“We’re excited for what the Lord is going to do through our partnership with Kerus and how He continues to lead BCH into more opportunities that will meet the myriad of needs both domestically and globally,” said Brenda Gray, BCH Executive Vice President of Development and Communications. “We know



He will be glorified in all that will be accomplished.”

Legacy Giving: Making a lasting impact

By Jody Yopp, BCH Senior Director of Development and Planned Giving

Leaving a legacy is about more than just the assets we accumulate in our lifetime; it's about the impact we have on future generations. Legacy giving allows individuals to make a lasting contribution to causes they care deeply about, ensuring their values and passions endure beyond their lifetime. For those with a heart for supporting vulnerable children and families, leaving a legacy gift to Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina (BCH) is a powerful way to create positive change for years to come.

Why Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina? BCH has been serving children and families in need for over 139 years, providing loving homes, education, and support to those facing difficult circumstances. With a mission to "share hope and change lives," BCH offers a wide range of services, including residential care, foster care, adoption, family support, homes for special needs adults, ministry to senior adults, and more. Our commitment to meeting the holistic needs of children and families sets us apart as a trusted and respected organization in North Carolina and beyond.



Jody Yopp

Making a Legacy Gift: There are several ways individuals can leave a legacy gift to BCH, each offering unique benefits and opportunities for impact:

1. Bequests: One of the simplest ways to leave a legacy is through a bequest in your will or trust. By including BCH as a beneficiary, you can designate a specific amount, percentage, or asset to support their mission.

2. Life Insurance: Naming BCH as a beneficiary of a percentage of your life insurance policy is another effective way to make a significant impact. This allows you to make a substantial

gift with minimal upfront cost, as premiums are often tax-deductible.

3. Retirement Accounts: Designating BCH as a beneficiary of your IRA, 401(k), or other retirement accounts can provide tax benefits while supporting our work. By naming BCH as a beneficiary, you can ensure that unused retirement funds are put to meaningful use.

4. Charitable Remainder Trusts: For those looking to maximize their impact while receiving income during their lifetime, a charitable remainder trust can be a valuable tool. This allows you to donate assets to BCH while retaining income for yourself or your loved ones.

5. Real Estate and Securities: Gifts of appreciated assets, such as real estate or stocks, can provide significant support to BCH while offering tax advantages for the donor.

Impact and Legacy:

By leaving a legacy gift to BCH, individuals can make a profound difference in the lives of vulnerable children and families for generations to come. Whether providing a stable home, educational opportunities, or essential support services, legacy gifts ensure that BCH can continue their vital work long into the future.

Furthermore, legacy giving allows individuals to leave behind a meaningful legacy that reflects their values and beliefs. By supporting BCH, donors can leave a legacy of compassion, hope, and transformation, embodying their commitment to making the world a better place.

Leaving a legacy gift to Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina is a powerful way to create lasting change and make a meaningful impact on the lives of vulnerable children and families. Whether through a bequest, life insur-



ance policy, retirement account designation, or other planned giving vehicle, legacy gifts ensure that BCH can continue their important work for years to come. By choosing to leave a legacy with BCH, individuals can make a difference that lasts far beyond their lifetime, leaving behind a legacy of love, compassion, and hope. For more information on Planned Giving, please contact our Senior Director of Development and Planned Giving, Jody Yopp at [jyopp@bchfamily.org](mailto: jyopp@bchfamily.org), or call and leave a message at 1-704-314-5291.



I would like more information about planned giving.

Please contact me with information on how to prepare a Christian Will.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ PHONE _____ EMAIL _____

Two volunteers are needed for Alumni Council — Alum recounts places traveled to around the world

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

The Mills Home Alumni Council held its fall meeting on October 20. Probably the main business of the first post-homecoming meeting was to evaluate the various activities of the weekend, discuss the greatest and weakest parts, and start searching for ways to make improvements for 2025. That being said, it would be helpful if anybody would write to our president, **Jackie Elliott Walker**, and mention some part of Homecoming that was particularly enjoyable for you. Or feel free to suggest something that would make Homecoming more interesting. Jackie's contact information follows: 1044 Jackie's Lane, Garner, NC, 27529; phone-910-606-6027; jhoneybear108@gmail.com.

Jackie and the entire Council have a deep desire to give you the best Homecoming possible. We really want everyone back on campus in August for a great reunion.

I was just reminded by the minutes of our last meeting, that the Alumni Council needs to call on our members for two volunteers to be added to the Council. The responsibility of these two would be to attend the meetings coming up in Jan, April, and June, listen to discussions in the meetings, offer ideas on any concerns, and help plan for next year's Homecoming. If you are interested, please contact Jackie. (Find her address above.)

I called **Sally Beck Ferguson**, the originator of our first alumni webpage. She lives in Ormond Beach, Florida and it is hard for her to attend homecomings. She reads about it on Facebook and enjoys the photos, but she asserts that "pictures don't replace orphan hugs." She continued, "With one call to my friend **Janice Greene**, we agreed, that God willing, we shall go next year, 2025. We're both looking forward to it and we'll

keep each other motivated. So Lib, please tell everyone we're looking forward to seeing their beautiful faces at this next Homecoming, and we want lots of orphan hugs. Love Sally."

In chatting with **Gilbert Lipscomb** in early November, I learned how interesting his life has been. After 12 years at MH, Gilbert graduated in 1964. From there, he went to Gardner-Webb and then finished a BA degree in history in 1968 from Campbell Baptist College. Soon after, he earned an MA from Virginia State in Educational Media. His work career covered several years teaching history, being an educational media specialist, and teaching graphic communications. His side hustle while teaching and after retiring was photography. His wife **Janice** was a media specialist. Their progeny includes one offspring and two grandchildren. Friends can contact Gilbert at imagesbygil@icloud.com.

Gil, as he calls himself today, says his MH days were filled with activities around church organizations, the usual duties for boys, and of course, the other gems of a boy's life—baseball, basketball, and sports in general. In speaking of the MH workers of his day, he seemed to respect them all, but he had fond memories of three: **Estelle Crouch** who never forgot a face or name; **Bill Sisk** who was always respected; and **Coach Corder** for all the reasons everyone loves a coach. And he mentioned the fun of renewing old acquaintances at Homecoming.

As with most alumni, Gil says "There were so many memorable experiences at MH, but one that stands out was the unauthorized use of a Big M Tractor to pull an unnamed worker's son's car from a ditch, getting the Big M stuck in the same ditch and having to borrow Big M 2 to rescue said car and Big M 1. Those involved still believe that Bill Sisk and **Van**

Richardson knew but said nothing because they were proud of us for doing what they would have done as a kid. Since retiring in 2000, my wife and I have had many wonderful experiences traveling to every state in our beautiful country and to over 20 different countries around the world. Our favorite overseas trip was a Viking River Cruise from Moscow to St. Petersburg. My personal favorite was a two-month trip to Australia with **Larry Phillips** and his wife. This coming spring, we will be making what we think will be our final trip over the big pond to Morocco and Ireland. However, we will continue our traveling because there is still too much in this country that we have not seen."

We were saddened to learn that **Helen Helms Johns** passed away on Friday, November 1, at her home. Helen was part of the popular Helms family who entered MH in 1965. She left MH before her class graduated, so she graduated from Glen Burnie High School near Baltimore, MD. After finishing high school, she worked at Warwick Manor for over 10 years. She married not long after graduating and began a progeny which included many grandchildren. She adored them all and loved to spend time with them. She also enjoyed gardening. She is survived by her husband, **Travis Johns**; a daughter, **Laura Radcliffe**; a son, **Scott Johns**; five grandchildren; a sister, **Jane Brown (Danny)**; brothers, **Robert Helms** of Texas and **Jerry Helms** of South Carolina. Helen is preceded in death by siblings **Van Helms**, **Jeanie H. Cooper**, and **Martha H. McCartney**. Friends and family held a Celebration of Life for her on November 12, 2024.

I was sad also to learn from my good friend **Christine Langley Shelton** that her brother **Bruce** died on November 4. The two of them entered MH in 1942 and he gradu-

ated in 1952. Christine mentioned that Bruce had often said that he was glad he had lived at MH—and he was especially thankful he had such great vocational training in the print shop. After graduation, he entered the U.S. Navy and proudly served his country for four years. He and Evelyn, his wife of 66 years, were living in Wilson, NC at the time of his death. She survives him but sadly she suffers from Alzheimer's disease. He is survived also by two sons, two grandsons, one granddaughter, two great grandsons, and sister Christine. Condolences may be sent to Christine at 104 Valley Dr., Goldsboro, NC, 27530.

I was so sorry to learn that **Leona Grindstaff Price** passed away peacefully at her home on October 13. She was 106 years old. I will share comments from her daughter in the next column along with those about **John Paul (Dusty) Jenkins**.

We still remind you that we need additions and corrections for the Mills Home Alumni Address Directory. Please send that information to Flora Hicks Patton by one of these methods: florapatton@ctc.net, 704-791-7866, or 6428 Sisk Carter Rd. Rockwell, NC, 28138. The directory will go to the printer around June 15, 2025. If you let her know, Flora will gladly give those corrections to the **Charity & Children** circulation staff.

Folks wishing to learn about having your ashes placed in the Columbarium at God's Acre can get the information from **Sharon DeHart Stiles**. She knows all the details and can inform you well. Contact her at sharondstiles51@yahoo.com, 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



Foster family creates memories
The Biggerstaffs at River Hill Refuge gave a special ornament to each foster and biological child for tree decorating.



Church fills boxes of Christmas goodies
Brookwood Baptist members collected boxes of Christmas goodies for Kennedy Home's children and foster families.



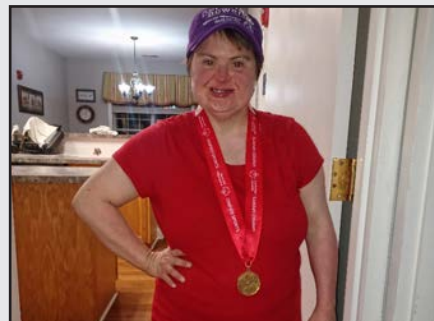
Bikers make toy run to Kennedy Home
The 32nd annual Biker Toy Run kicked off Christmas at Kennedy Home -- one of the largest toy runs in Eastern NC.



HOMEbase congratulates graduates
Students aided by BCH's college ministry celebrated graduation. HOMEbase helps students with little family support.



Woodmen Life carries on tradition
Woodmen life have celebrated Christmas with Odum Home children and staff for more than 50 years.



Victoria strikes Special Olympics gold
Victoria, who lives at Lindsay Home, brought home the gold medal in tennis for the Special Olympics.



Campers celebrate Thanksgiving
The girls at Camp Duncan hosted guests and staff for "Turkey in the Hole" digging up turkeys uniquely cooked underground.



Youth volunteers help Greater Vision
High Point Christian Academy and Vietnamese Baptist youth organized donations at Greater Vision to help families.



Cedar Grove youth bless Odum Home
Youth at Cedar Grove Baptist raised \$4,000 for Odum Home collecting pennies and change in year and a half.

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Alumni Christmas Party was a great time for all — Recipes needed for new alumni cookbook

By **John Thompson**, 102 Maritime Court, Havelock, NC 28532 (252) 671-3515 jbthompson43@gmail.com

Our thanks goes out to Alumni President **Larry Gilliam** and his lovely wife **Brenda** for booking King's Restaurant in Kinston for our 2024 annual Christmas party on December 7. King's Restaurant has a special place in the heart of many Kennedy Home (KH) alumni. King's has for many years provided a place for KH teens to work. When a KH youngin reaches the 12th grade, they could have a job off campus and King's has always helped.

The Christmas buffet was delicious as usual with many vegetables, meats, and desserts for all to enjoy. We always have a great time just being together. We shared gifts, stories of the past, and a lot of good old fellowship together. I always like the singing part of our party. We sing a lot of secular and sacred Christmas songs.

It's not too early to mark your calendars for 2025 Homecoming slated on June 7 and 8. We hope to have a huge crowd come together for a weekend of Christian fellowship and remembering. Make your motel plans for that weekend. The next date for your calendars in 2025 is the annual Fall Alumni Beach Retreat on October 3, 4, and 5. Stay at the beach cottage and have a lot of good old time hanging out together. **Debbie and Gary Caulder** are looking for a great time of food and fellowship. Put these two dates on your calendar for 2025.

Debbie Daniels, Larry Gilliam, and several others are putting together a Kennedy Home Alumni Cookbook for all to enjoy. This will be a money-making project for alumni to use on special projects at KH. I will give you more information on this as the cookbook progresses. We are asking that all alumni write out your favorite recipes (I'm sending my spaghetti recipe) and mail them to Debbie at 936 Sunset Drive, Havelock, North Carolina, 28532.

When my family was working at KH from 1972-1977, all the boys and girls would have their certain job to do in their cottage in addition to their own room they kept clean. They were brought up to know that families work together to make their home a success. From preschool to age 13, the children would receive an allowance. I remember that **Mrs. Lanie Cribb** at CCB cottage would give her cottage youngins their allowance and remind them to put some of it to the side to give at church on Sunday mornings. After you became a teenager, you could have a job on campus to make extra money for you to use as you saw fit. I had four children cleaning the church every week. They always did a great job of keeping God's house in good shape and looking clean and nice. Other children had jobs on the farm, at the dairy, at the gym, and the office.

Then when the KH youngin got into the 12th grade, they could work off campus. This was preparing them to go out into the world after graduation. All of these jobs prepared the children for the time when they would have their own lives and families.

"What's in a candy cane?"

I found this information the other day and thought you might want to share it with someone. Think about a red and white candy cane. Turn it upside down and you have the letter "J" for Jesus. Look at the shape. With the crook at the top—a Shepherd's staff. Now, look at the colors: red represents the blood Jesus shed for us. And the white: Jesus washed our sins away and made us white as snow. The stripes remind us: by His stripes we are healed. And the sweetness of the candy—His love "grows sweeter" every day!

Remember, December is the last month to enter the "Kennedy Home for Children Coastal Fishing Tournament." The tournament goes from August 23, 2024 to January 25,

2025. It is sponsored by Parkview Baptist Church of Morehead City. All fishermen are encourage to enter this contest to raise money for KH. The categories are Redfish, Speckled Trout, Sheepshead, Pompano, Spanish mackerel, King Mackerel, and Bluefish. Please contact **Mr. Sean Bowen** at 252-269-8783 or spbowen@hotmail.com or contact **Albert McElmon** at 252-242-9359. The entry fee is \$40. (You might think about doing this kind of project through your church next summer.)

Again, we welcome **Mr. David Melber** as Baptist Children's Homes' new chief executive officer. We look forward to hearing from him and meeting him in the coming future.

Time for a little KH history: In the agricultural east of North Carolina, KH came into being, located outside of Kinston. You are welcome to come by and visit. Kennedy Home was a "gift of love." It was the plantation home of the Kennedy family, whose main residence, known as Cedar Dell, stands as it was when it was built in 1832. It was the residence of **William Lafayette and Emily Kennedy**. They continued to live on campus for many years after the children started moving there. They saw and met scores of children. The story is told that Mr. Kennedy would sit on his front porch and greet the children. Mrs. Kennedy gave to build the first cottage by selling a her jewelry. Today, Kennedy Home is as much about the people as the land. The people—children from disrupted families coming together on the rich farm land. It is three miles from the main gate to the Neuse River. The therapy of a wholesome rural life continues to build character and the thrill of watching growing things. Back on the farm in the woods their is a place called "Sketter Hut." The houseparents can take their children-in-care back there to spend time. In my day, children

would go home for the weekend and I always worried about the ones who weren't able to go home or to the home of a visiting family. I enjoyed taking them with my boys to camp at the "Sketter Hut." We would have a blast. I will always remember that.

Mr. Vance Russ used to camp back there in the woods with boys for the early wilderness program. At KH, the children continue to find loving care, Christian guidance, and needed understanding. They receive the best in creative approaches to meeting the needs of today's troubled youth.

You can help. You can become a clothing sponsor or provide parties. Your on-going support through your time or money are greatly appreciated. Your gifts of Christian love are welcome.

When my family left KH we became a visiting home for several children. They would come to our home on the weekend once a month in New Bern. I'll never forget the day my wife **Becky** came into the family room and found a little boy swinging from the chandelier and having the best time.

If you would like to bring a group from your church or just your family for a tour, call the main office and make arrangements.

I will always remember the time I served the Lord working at Kennedy Home. Becky worked in the office and played the organ at church while I had five choirs and 62 piano students. I also enjoyed "filling in" any place on campus that they needed me. I loved taking groups on tour and telling them about the great history. I really appreciate all my KH youngins. Plan to visit me, write me notes, and feel free to call me on my phone anytime. I will always love you. — jt



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

The New Year brings opportunities to begin again

By Jim Edminson, Editor

There are days before the new year begins, and we are on a journey to visit Kyle, Susan, Stuart, Roger, and Maggie. We take far too few trips to Texas, and our excitement is running ahead of us. The flight is on time, and in just minutes we will be in the air and heading southwest. My fear of flying above the clouds is masked only by the anticipation of those hugs and smiles from our children and grands.

Kathy's favorite part of flying is the race down the runway seconds before lift-off. She claims the window seat and smiles broadly as she watches the landscape speed by, and she squeezes my hand at the feel of sinking into the seat as the plane lifts from the ground and takes to the sky. My favorite part is watching her joy. Beyond that, my attention is on a safe landing at Dallas Love Field and our reunion.

I'm not an enthusiastic flyer to say the least, and I need some distractions between the start and end of the journey.

One of our travel traditions is reading aloud to each other. Years ago, our family go-to books included JRR Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy and the phenomenal stand-alone novel *The Hobbit*. To this day, quotables from these tales remain in the lexicon of the Edminson clan. Some seem particularly apt these days as we proceed from one year to the next: "Where there's life there's hope" and even "It's a dangerous business...going out your door. You step onto the road, and if you don't keep your feet, there's no knowing where you might be swept off to."

On recent trips, Kathy reads from a series of mysteries set in the fictional salt marshes of Norfolk. Author Elly Griffith writes about transitional spaces, the places between the sea and the sky that merge into the endless dark gray days of winter. In her books, these spaces are magical in their range of possibilities; they are also, at times, frightening in their unfamiliarities.

This is somewhat how I feel living between past

and future as the New Year looms. So much opportunity and wonder! And yet so much is hidden.

Franciscan friar and ecumenical teacher Richard Rohr writes about these liminal places "where we are betwixt and between the familiar and the completely unknown...a good space where genuine newness can begin." From his New Mexico desert home, he sees the world's ambiguity with different eyes than the ones I peer through in North Carolina's piedmont. Despite the differences, the wonder persists. The future is unknown, and I choose faith as I step into the coming days.

The apostle Paul puts it much better: "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14).

Here, the word "forgetting" means "dismissing from the mind or paying no attention to," to stop dwelling on something, to dismiss distraction from the mind, to focus on the important parts.

My home pastor Al Gaspard reminded the

church that we can trust an unknown future to our well-known Lord and Savior. Back then, we had Watch Night services

in the hours between the year passing and the one beginning. As a

community of believers, we sang and prayed as the clock moved from known to unknown. We gladly proceeded into a new year because we knew that Jesus already inhabited that place.

These memories swirl in my mind as the plane flies on. I see beloved faces of family now gone on, I hear again the countdown of minutes before midnight, I feel the thrill of all the possibilities the new year seems to promise. My heart embraces the opportunity to begin again.

The prophet Isaiah proclaimed hope in his days as he recorded words of our Creator God: "Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert" (43:19).

Journeys, both small and large, await each of us as the new year begins. Will the days ahead bring promises fulfilled? Will we struggle with untold circumstances? Will we add to or subtract from our circle of family and friends? And will we walk boldly into the unknown trusting the omnipotent God of the Cosmos?

Happy New Year, friends. May you follow closely where our Lord leads.



Your MATCHING GIFT is vital now and in 2025.

Why your gift right now is absolutely essential:

We cannot serve the needs of vulnerable, neglected boys and girls right now or in the coming year if we do not receive donations today. Giving slows down at the first of the year which is why your gift matters.

Why the matching gift so important:

Any gift you make is **DOUBLE** the impact in children's lives—all gifts are matched dollar for dollar. We must meet the \$300,000 matching gift goal if we are going meet needs and share the Gospel with those we serve now and in 2025.

Change a child's life today! Scan the QR or go to bchfamily.org/givenow. You can also mail a check to: BCH / PO Box 338 / Thomasville, NC 27361 or use the enclosed envelope.

