

## Mud Creek Association church holds river baptism



Photo courtesy of Allen Scott

Pine Ridge Baptist Church, Bessemer, recently held a river baptism in Warrior River. Several people from 4 years old to a woman in her 50s have been attending the church for a while and recently made professions of faith. Here Allen Scott (left), associate pastor and worship leader, baptizes Elizabeth Hide. Mason Mardis (right), a member of the church since he was 5 years old, assists. A fellowship lunch followed the special service.



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# Catholics cease to evangelize Jews; Southern Baptists urge more sharing

By Carrie Brown McWhorter  
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In a move some hail as a step forward, the Vatican has said Catholics should witness to their faith but not undertake organized efforts to convert Jews.

In its most explicit commentary on evangelization regarding Jews, the document released Dec. 10 by the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations With the Jews said Catholics should take a different approach to Judaism than to other religions.

"In concrete terms this means that the Catholic Church neither conducts nor supports any specific institutional mission work directed toward Jews," the document reads.

The Vatican commission produced the new text to mark the 50th anniversary of a groundbreaking document on Catholic-Jewish relations, "Nostra Aetate," in which the Church formally rejected the notion that Jews were responsible for Jesus' death.

While Baptists do not always agree on issues related to Israel, efforts to evangelize the Jews must continue, according to Jim Sibley, a former professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. Sibley argued this position in a presentation at the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism's 10th International Conference in August. Convening in Jerusalem, the conference included some 200 Jewish evangelists from six continents. He said Jewish evangelism must continue because Scripture presents the gospel as "especially for Jewish people."

"My thesis is a simple one," wrote Sibley, a professor of biblical studies at Israel College of the Bible in Netanya, Israel. "It is that Scripture teaches that the Jewish people should not only be a continuing priority in evangelism and missions, but that this priority is intrinsic to the gospel itself. ... Ultimately this is the case because it is rooted in the promise of the fathers, as recorded first in Genesis 12:3b: 'In you all the families of the earth will be blessed.'"

### 'To everyone who believes'

Paul's statement in Romans 1:16 that the gospel is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" doesn't mean simply that the Jews heard the gospel first, Sibley argued. Rather, it means the gospel was intended first and foremost for Jewish people.

In recent years Southern Baptists have increased their efforts to reach people from every ethnic group including Jews, according to the president of the Southern Baptist Messianic Fellowship (SBMF).

Southern Baptists are "the most evangelical of just about everybody," SBMF President Ric Worshill said, adding that Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Executive Committee President Frank S. Page especially encouraged outreach among ethnic groups when he established a Multi-Ethnic

Advisory Council that completed its work in 2014.

Thanks in part to the advisory council's work, Worshill said, "slowly and surely, our ethnic groups" — like SBMF — "are being supported by local Southern Baptist churches." But the work isn't finished, and Worshill urged Southern Baptists to practice Jewish evangelism.

"All people need to hear the gospel," Worshill said. "We need to plant seeds in abundance."

The official SBC position on Jewish evangelism has remained unchanged since messengers to the 1996 annual meeting approved a resolution that included a commitment to pray "for the salvation of the Jewish people" and to "direct our energies and resources toward the pro-

clamation of the gospel to [them]."

Mike Ebert, North American Mission Board (NAMB) spokesperson, said evangelism and church planting efforts always keep the broader community in mind.

"When we start churches with our partners we intentionally build in cultural sensitivity. If a church is being planted in an area that has a high percentage of Jewish

Americans in the population, that sensitivity will be hard-wired into the plant and the planter," Ebert said.

Matt Queen, associate professor of evangelism at Southwestern Seminary, said he is "convinced" that a "consensus affirming the importance for Jews to be evangelized exists among Southern Baptists" despite disagreement on some theological matters related to the Jewish people.

Queen said, "In addition to offering himself to be accursed by Christ if only his ethnically Jewish brothers would be saved (Rom. 9:2-3), Paul desired and prayed for their salvation (Rom. 10:1). How can Southern Baptists be anything but passionate about Jewish evangelism?"

Steven Kaplan, president of Jewish Outreach International and specialist on Jewish evangelism for NAMB, said he is disappointed with the Vatican decision because the Scripture is clear that evangelism is for everyone.

"Jesus is the only means of salvation. If the gospel is not shared with the Jewish people, there is no other salvation for them. As a Jewish believer in Jesus, I am most thankful my Gentile co-workers shared Jesus with me."

Jack Morgan, congregational leader at Tree of Life, a messianic synagogue in Mobile, believes many Orthodox Jews are earnestly seeking the Lord even though they do not yet recognize Him as Messiah.

"They are open to the good news, but how we proclaim it to them is important."

Forming friendships with Jews is a first step, Morgan said.

"As Paul said in his text, we have to become 'all things to all people' so that some might be saved" (1 Cor. 9:22). (BP, RNS)

