

# FELLOWSHIP NEWS

COOPERATIVE BAPTIST FELLOWSHIP OF SOUTH CAROLINA APRIL 2004



Tony Hopkins, pastor of First Baptist Church in Greenwood, met nine-year-old Zaura Mecic at the Ruth School in Bucharest, Romania, as part of a SC/CBF missions trip in January. Zaura, 9, a Romany Gypsy, is in the first grade along with her brother Duran. Her father is a street sweeper and her stepmother is unemployed.

## Greenwood 'missionary' helps Gypsy child break cycle of poverty

Zaura Mecic is getting an education she never expected because of a woman she never met. Hazel Boyd is doing missions in a way she never envisioned because of a need among a people she has never known.

Four years ago, Hazel, 81, a member of First Baptist Church in Greenwood since 1964, read in this newsletter about the opportunity to sponsor the education of a child through Project Ruth, a school for Gypsy children. She signed up and soon was connected with Zaura. She kept photos of 'her child' on her refrigerator and got updates from Romania.

But the gift that she was giving became real in January when Hazel's pastor, Tony Hopkins, met Zaura face-to-face at the Ruth School, and learned of the opportunities that were now hers because of Hazel.

"I loved seeing the photo of her with Tony," Hazel said. "I had no idea when he left whether he would be able to connect with her. I was delighted that he met her."

Between Tony's glowing report of his visit to the Ruth School and Hazel's ongoing involvement, Project Ruth has gained 18 new sponsors in Greenwood. "I was able to come back and confirm that

the money that goes to sponsor these children is not fluff money. It's going to pay for books and toothbrushes and food for these children," Tony said.

By Romanian law, a person must complete the eighth grade in order to work, and traditionally, Gypsy children are not allowed in the public schools. "What I stressed to the congregation is how the Ruth School is absolutely transforming the lives of these children in a way that even they cannot appreciate," Tony said. "Generations of Gypsies have been locked into illegal or lousy jobs because of the law requiring an eighth grade education. This is the first generation to have a chance at a bright future. The folks in this congregation saw that and responded."

"I had no particular interest in the Gypsies," Hazel said. "It was just that the school appealed to me. I have an interest in any kind of worthwhile mission work. I'm a social worker. I believe in doing social worker kinds of things. That's evangelism too."

From northwest Georgia, Hazel came to Greenwood in 1964 by way of Southwestern Seminary (early in her life, she had planned to be a missionary), Charleston and UNC at Chapel Hill. She worked for 20 years with a community health center that serves a seven-county area. After she retired in 1984, she became a volunteer social worker at the local women's prison. Until this past winter, she taught a women's Sunday School class at FBC. She also has been active in the church's missions programs, has been a deacon for nine years, and served on the search committee that called Hopkins.

"Hazel is a matriarch in this church," Tony said. "She is one of these people who embodies the character of Jesus. She is the most wonderful, loving person you'd ever want to meet. She was on the search committee that brought me here, and that tells you who the congregation trusts to go out and find staff."

**Want to know more?** We hope to get enough sponsors — individuals, classes, or other groups — to support the 30 incoming first graders at the Ruth School at a cost of \$25 a month each. Ellen Sechrest at Boulevard Baptist Church in Anderson is the USA contact. She may be reached at [esechrest@boulevardbaptist.com](mailto:esechrest@boulevardbaptist.com), or 864.225.8693. The Ruth School website is at <http://www.projectruth.ro>.

# Craig Ellison joins Tidal Creek staff



**T**idal Creek Fellowship, a new church start sponsored by SC/CBF, has expanded its staff. Former missionary Craig Ellison began work as the church's student minister in February.

Craig was ordained in 1982 in Arlington, Texas, while attending Southwestern Seminary. He received his masters degree in religious education in 1983 and was called as youth pastor in Richmond, Virginia.

In 1986, the Ellisons began serving as missionaries in Uganda, East Africa, through the International Mission Board. After a short furlough, they went back to Tanzania to work with youth and train pastors.

Later, in 1996, Craig worked as minister of youth and music at Pine Grove Baptist in Walterboro for 3½ years, then at a mission church in Summerville.

Craig lives in Walterboro with his wife, Nina, and two of their four children. Craig's love for flying continues a heritage shared by his grandfather and father who were both pilots. Other areas of interest include music, singing and water sports.

David Holland is pastor of Tidal Creek Fellowship on Ladys Island near Beaufort. The church was begun in 2002 and now has more than 350 members.

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## Women pastors: It may be the best decision you can make

**C**BF churches have preached a better game than we have practiced with regard to women in ministry, especially female pastors. We agree with the principle of women in ministry in theory and in theology. We send them off to seminary to be educated, and even ordain them. But when it comes time to call a pastor for our own congregation, we say, "No thanks."

Our practice is both wrong and foolish.

It is wrong because Jesus was absolutely clear that our walk should be consistent with our talk. Our actions should match our beliefs. The word "hypocrite" comes to mind. There are already too many places where there is a disconnect between what we say in church and how we actually live. This sin does not need to be added to that list.

Qualified women are graduating from seminary who would be delighted to start their pastorate at a small church, just as their male counterparts do. Other women have impressive resumes as experienced "Associate Pastors" and are ready to pastor a larger church. If they were male, they would have that opportunity. What business would not value a person who has performed successfully and long and is now prepared for a larger role?

In an article in the *Christian Century*, a denominational executive was quoted as saying, "If I send out a profile of a pastor who is mediocre along with a picture of him with his family, and he is 35 years old, has a cute wife and two beautiful children, I guarantee he will be interviewed if not called." That is my experience exactly. The same profile of a woman will be ignored.

The common excuse by members of a pastor search committee is something like this: "I am for it, but I don't think the church will accept it." I like Terry Brooks' response. Terry, who handles the reference and referral opportunities in our office, reminds these search committees that they are the church! The church has elected them to bring back the best candidate. If they fail to do that, they have failed the church of Jesus Christ which they were elected to represent.

That brings us to the foolishness of selecting a second-tier option when there is a better candidate. I remember the first time, decades ago, when I assisted a woman minister in a Methodist wedding. She was magnificent. She was caring, thoughtful, sensitive, clear-headed, and compassionate. I reflected on her gifts and how she represented so many of the very positive attributes we typically associate with women. Those characteristics sound to me just like the kind of person I would want as my pastor. I remember thinking, only half jokingly, that if

word of this female alternative to male ministers gets out in the churches, no man will ever be called again to be a pastor.

To their great credit, Methodist churches have paved the way. Some congregations kicked and screamed as they were assigned their first female pastor, until the members discovered that she turned out to be the best pastor who had ministered in their community for at least two generations.

Is there a down side to this? Yes. Women will make mistakes and fail. I have noticed that happens with men, too.

If your church needs a pastor, consider a woman. It may be the best decision your congregation ever makes.



**By Marion Aldridge**  
Coordinator of SC/CBF

# Seeing the gifts we get every day

In our Imani (Faith) Circle time in our Young Leaders program, almost everyday you can hear a variation of the following prayers: "God, I hope you are having a good day," "God, thank you for giving me a good day at school," "God, I hope I have a nice afternoon at the Young Leader's Program," and we never fail to hear "Please bless Ms. Charmaine, Ms. Quanna, Rev. Bill and Rev. Evelyn."

At first, I thought God could have given me a little more to work with if I was going to be inspired by these children. I didn't see any particular depth or insight in these prayers.

Then, I took some Sabbath days, and what I was missing in these prayers hit me hard. I felt the heavy burden of stress falling away from me. I had gotten so used to the stress of living with the worry of the busy future and the guilt of

the undone past that I had forgotten what it was like to live in the present. I had forgotten what it was like to talk to someone without worrying about time. I had forgotten what it was like to spend time with Bill outside of work, outside of time awareness itself. I had forgotten what it was like to be bored, to reach that place empty of all the "to do's", that place where one can really be reflective. I had been

on reactive mode for so long.

When I returned to the Imani Circle with our Young Leaders, I finally grasped the gift that they give me everyday. They are not worrying about the PACT tests in April. They are not kicking themselves for what they did last week. They are not feeling guilty over that extra dessert or for skipping exercise. They are

just thankful and grateful for the day they are in.

I confess that it took me a lot of procrastinating to write this article. It was easier for me to go, go, go and skip lunch so I could get more done than to sit down and reflect on my life. Yet in writing, I

## METANOIA

By Evelyn Oliviera  
SC/CBF Urban Minister  
Charleston, SC



am once again connected to the present, to the importance of living in the "now" and not in the list of things to do. I am reminded of the gift that is each new day. I am reminded of WHY I do all I do.

*God, thank you for giving me a good time to stop today. I hope you are having a good day. Please bless all your children with peace and presence.*

## Couch signs for SC/CBF in Belgium

Jack Couch, pastor of Clearview Baptist Church in Anderson and a member of the Missions Committee of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of South Carolina, went to Belgium to represent SC/CBF at the signing March 13 of a partnership agreement with the Union of Baptists in Belgium. The signing officially began a relationship whereby we will help and learn from each other.

## On the radio

SC/CBF Coordinator Marion Aldridge will be the guest on Sunday Morning With David White on WISW 1320AM in Columbia from 8-11 a.m. April 25.

## Staff help needed

Trinity Baptist Church in Seneca is seeking a minister of education. Contact the church for details, 864.882.9396.

## General Assembly April 23-24 in Anderson

The Assembly begins at 1:15 p.m. on Friday, April 23, at Boulevard Baptist Church in Anderson and concludes around lunchtime on Saturday. Daniel Vestal, at right, the coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, will be the featured preacher in both worship services.



Ronnie Adams, pictured at left, an urban minister in the Hell's Kitchen area of New York City, will speak at the Missions Banquet about his work through Rauschenbush Ministries. Singer Sarah Reese will perform.

The signing of a partnership agreement with the Union of Baptists in Belgium will highlight this year's assembly. Register online at [www.cbfofsc.org](http://www.cbfofsc.org). The only charge, \$15, is for the Missions Banquet, and advance reservations are required.



## Milburn Price to address the SC Baptist Historical Society

The South Carolina Baptist Historical Society will hold its spring luncheon on Friday, April 23, at Boulevard Baptist Church in Anderson.

The meeting will begin at 11:45 a.m. Milburn Price, Dean of the School of Performing Arts at Samford University, will speak on "Hymn Singing Practices among South Carolina Baptists." Price will lead the audience in singing several hymns to illustrate the historical development of the types of hymns used in Baptist churches.

Advance reservations are necessary for the meal. Contact Glen Clayton at the SC Baptist Historical Collection at Furman University by phone at 864.294.2194 or by email at [glen.clayton@furman.edu](mailto:glen.clayton@furman.edu).

The meeting will conclude in time to attend the opening session of the SC/CBF General Assembly at 1:15 p.m.

## Breakout Sessions

on developing conflict and conversation skills for congregations, church freedom, funding for theological education, the physical health of the congregation, the Celtic version of evangelism, opportunities to volunteer in the SC Department of Justice, juvenile arbitration, Hispanic ministry, volunteer work in Lebanon, and Bible study.



RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

## April 2004

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## GENERAL ASSEMBLY APRIL 23-24 in ANDERSON

# Randy Wright volunteers to teach Gypsy pastors after Being 'pushed' to Bucharest

Randy Wright was so impressed with what he learned in Bucharest about the training of Gypsy pastors that he has volunteered to teach there for a week in November.

The Gypsy Smith School is held several times a year as part of the Ruth Project, designed to educate Romany Gypsies. Gypsy pastors come for a week of study led by (usually) an American pastor and CBF field personnel. Ralph Stocks, CBF missionary among Gypsies in Hungary, coordinates the school.

Randy was one of seven South Carolina CBFers who visited CBF mission points in Belgium, Romania and France in January.

"When we met with the field personnel at the Ruth School, and Ralph Stocks mentioned a need for teachers at the Gypsy Smith School, I thought, 'I could do that,'" Wright said.

After returning home, Randy talked

with Tom Leland, pastor of University Baptist Church in Charlottesville, VA, who happened to be one of the instructors while Randy was there. "I began seriously considering volunteering for such an opportunity and e-mailed Ralph about possibilities," he said.

"'Striking while the iron is hot' is not a bad saying, so when Ralph emailed me the next day and invited participation, I talked with my wife Diana and 'struck,' Randy said. "God knows about hot irons and striking, I suppose."

About 25 Gypsy pastors will be offered six hours of instruction per day for five days. Randy will teach three hours a day on spiritual disciplines. Earl Martin, retired missionary and teacher at Carson-Newman College, will teach the other three hours on missions.

"Having recently completed a two-year spiritual directors formation program, I'm really interested in Christian



Randy Wright plans to use his vacation time to take the week off from his duties as pastor of Fernwood Baptist Church in Spartanburg to teach Gypsy pastors in Romania.

spirituality," Randy said.

"I want to thank Marion Aldridge who encouraged me to go on our trip in January. I really didn't want to go, but pushy Marion kept pushing. I'm glad he did, because now I have this privilege before me."

If anyone has frequent flyer miles she or he is willing to donate for Randy's airfare, please contact him at randy\_wright@charter.net or call him at 864.582.7467.