



## MISSION ALABAMA February, 2010

### EVANGELIZING ACROSS ALABAMA

By Sammie Jo Barstow



More than two million people in Alabama are unchurched or unreached by the gospel message. How can that be possible in a state smack in the middle of what we call the “Bible Belt”? The task of reaching lost people for Christ is bigger today than ever before.

Frank Page, former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, threw out the challenge for a national evangelism initiative at the 2008 convention in Indianapolis. The North American Mission Board (NAMB) responded by launching “God’s Plan for Sharing” (GPS), a 10-year focus on intentional evangelism with a varying emphasis every two years.

According to Sammy Gilbreath, Director of Evangelism at the Alabama State Board of Missions, the national emphasis for 2010 is *Across North America*. “In Alabama, we’ll call it *Across Alabama*, and during the next few weeks churches throughout our state will participate in four ways: praying, equipping, sowing, and harvesting,” said Gilbreath. This is a wonderful example of partnership and cooperation between the North American Mission Board, State Conventions, Associations and local churches, all made possible by gifts given through the Cooperative Program.

The goal of *Across Alabama* is to reach every home in the state with a gospel distribution, as well as an invitation to attend Easter Sunday service with a local congregation. The response of churches joining the initiative has been overwhelming, according to Gilbreath. “I thought perhaps we could reach 250,000 homes in this first effort,” he said. But by the end of January, churches had ordered enough materials to supply gospel distribution bags to more than 1,050,000 homes.

On March 20<sup>th</sup>, participating churches will prayerwalk area neighborhoods. “Every person can get involved,” said Gilbreath. “If some people cannot walk through neighborhoods, they can drive through and pray. I’ve jokingly said that they could get a teenager to drive a car full of senior adults and we would involve all ages!”

One week later, on March 27<sup>th</sup>, volunteers will again walk through neighborhoods, leaving a plastic bag door hanger containing materials supplied by the Alabama State Board of Missions including a gospel flyer entitled “Find it Here.” Churches may also include a brochure about their church, as well as an invitation to worship with their congregation on Easter Sunday, April 4<sup>th</sup>. The cost of materials is amazingly small. For only \$60, a church can purchase enough materials for distribution to 1,000 residences. “Rural churches, small churches, those with a bi-vocational pastor – any church can afford to participate,” said Gilbreath.

The possibility of reaching a majority of households in Madison Association is fueling a high level of excitement in pastors and laypeople alike, according to Ron Lynch, Church Ministries Director. “In our association, we have 22 zip codes which include approximately 135,000 households, and our goal is to reach at least 80,000 of those residences during the *Across Alabama* emphasis,” he said. Fifty churches in Madison Association have already committed to participate in *Across Alabama*.

Pastors are being asked to preach an evangelistic message on Easter Sunday. “We are expecting and praying for the largest harvest we’ve ever seen,” said Gilbreath. “Wouldn’t it be wonderful if revival broke out all over this land on Easter Sunday because we’ve been praying and distributing the gospel message? It could be the revival that turns this country back to God.”

Dr. Rick Lance, Executive Director of the Alabama State Board of Missions agrees. “*Across Alabama* is an effort to touch the lives of as many Alabamians as possible with the caring message of Christ. Some of our best witnesses are ladies who have been engaged in missions through Woman’s Missionary Union, so I encourage leaders of WMU to participate in this important outreach effort.”

The fourth prong of the evangelism emphasis is follow-up. After Easter Sunday, churches are asked to visit, email, or write notes to those who visited. Gilbreath expects churches will use the *Across Alabama* emphasis as a pattern for future evangelistic efforts, also. “We’re telling churches this should not be the only time they prayerwalk. Perhaps they will want to do this again before a revival or before Vacation Bible School,” he said.

What if your church has not committed to be part of *Across Alabama*? Is it too late? “Absolutely not!” said Gilbreath. He encourages pastors or missions directors to contact his office by calling the 1-800-264-1225 and asking for the evangelism office. “We have plenty of materials and anyone in my office can answer questions and take orders.”

Pray specifically for *Across Alabama* as follows:

- For more churches to commit to *Across Alabama*.
- For leaders as they organize volunteers for prayerwalking and gospel distribution and for volunteers to be willing to participate.
- For pastors as they prepare to preach a strong evangelistic message.
- For a huge harvest of souls on Easter Sunday.
- For follow-up efforts of those who go into homes of people who visited churches on Easter Sunday to be able to share their faith and lead people to Christ.

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