

This page is devoted to happenings around Cobb in the religious community — upcoming and recent events, fundraisers, ministry news, seminars, honors and awards, and more. Send news and photos (jpegs) to lifestyle@mdjonline.com.

RELIGION | BRIEFS

Greater Community Church announces Easter services

Staff reports

Greater Community Church of God in Christ invites the community to attend one of the scheduled Easter services this Sunday. Sunrise service starts at 6 a.m. That will be followed by the Youth Easter Program at 9:30 a.m., and Resurrection Service begins at 11 a.m. Please come early for best seating.

Greater Community Church is at 406 Roswell Street in Marietta. For more information, visit www.greatercommunitycogic.org

THE LIFE Church to have \$.99 Cents Gas Giveaway in Marietta today

Staff reports

MARIETTA — THE LIFE Church of Marietta and Fort Valley, Georgia will be hosting a \$0.99 gas giveaway at noon today, in association with Texaco on 1655 Powder Springs Road in Marietta, the same street as one of the church's locations. The offer will be for a limited time, until the gas supplies run out.

The difference in price will be donated by THE LIFE Church, Bishop Sherman Wesley Scott, who helped mastermind the "fill up" initiative.

"On Easter Saturday, the tomb of Jesus was found empty. Here in Cobb County on Saturday, families can enjoy a tank of gas for much less in celebration of Easter Sunday," Bishop Scott said. "Ever since my wife and Pastor Sharon Scott and I were welcomed here in 2007, we have focused our energies on many holistic approaches to the development of people in the locality. This is one novel idea we wish to share with the broader community over Easter, a time of renewal and reflection."

With its headquarters on 1839 Powder Springs Road in Marietta, THE LIFE Church has its second location at 460 Wye St., Fort Valley. Bishop Sherman Wesley Scott has affirmed that his mission is to "change lives, strengthen families and impact communities across Cobb County and beyond."

THE LIFE Church has been serving the communities of Marietta and Fort Valley since 2007. Visit www.getlife.tv/ for more information.

COLUMNIST | BILLY GRAHAM

Place doubts aside, see Jesus for what He is and has done

Q: I grew up in a church-going family, but I'm having some real struggles with doubt. I'm in medical school studying to be a doctor, and I just can't bring myself to believe that Jesus came back from the dead. Things like that just don't happen. — **Z.J.**

A: What you say about death is correct; death is our final enemy, and once a person dies, they never return from the grave. Job put it this way: "If someone dies, will they live again?" (Job 14:14). The writer of Ecclesiastes noted, "Death is the destiny of everyone" (Ecclesiastes 7:2).

And yet the New Testament tells us that on that first Easter morning the stone entrance to Jesus' tomb had been rolled away, the tomb was empty — and Jesus appeared repeatedly to His disciples. Paul tells us that after His resurrection Jesus appeared to over 500 people at one time, most of whom were still living when Paul wrote and could bear witness to what they had seen (see 1 Corinthians 15:3-8). Luke was a medical doctor who knew the finality of death as well as you — and yet in both his Gospel and in Acts he strongly affirmed Jesus' resurrection.

How was it possible for Jesus to be raised from the dead? It could only have happened if God did it — and that's pre-



Billy Graham

cisely what took place! And because He rose from the dead, you and I can have hope — hope today, and hope for life beyond the grave. Death has been defeated!

Lay your doubts at the foot of the cross, and ask God to help you see Jesus as He really is. And on this Easter weekend may you be like Thomas, whose doubts vanished once he saw the risen Christ. Jesus' response is for you: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

Q: I've always been puzzled by Pilate, the Roman governor who gave the order for Jesus to be executed. Didn't he say several times that he thought Jesus was innocent and shouldn't be put to death? Why then did he allow it? — **Mrs. L.R.W.**

A: You're right; Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor who handed Jesus over to his soldiers to be crucified, repeatedly said that he didn't think Jesus was guilty of any crime. After examining Jesus he declared, "I find no basis for a charge against this man" (Luke 23:4).

And yet Pilate eventually gave in to the pressure of those who wanted Jesus

killed. Why? The only logical answer is that Pilate was a morally weak person, and instead of standing for the truth, he was only concerned about himself and his future. One of the false charges against Jesus was that He wanted to lead an armed revolt against Caesar and set Himself up as king. When Pilate tried to set Jesus free, Jesus' opponents "kept shouting, 'If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar'" (John 19:12). Fearful of his position, Pilate caved in and ordered Jesus' death.

Pilate will forever stand as a warning against giving in to the pressure of the crowd and turning our backs on Jesus. And that can happen far more easily than most of us realize. Jesus warned,

"Wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it" (Matthew 7:13).

Whose way are you following -- the way of the crowds and of Pilate, or the way of Christ? Don't end up on the wrong road, but by faith commit your life to Jesus Christ today. He alone could say, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6).

Send your queries to "My Answer," c/o Billy Graham, Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, 1 Billy Graham Parkway, Charlotte, N.C., 28201; call 1-877-2-GRAHAM, or visit the Web site for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association: www.billygraham.org.

RELIGION | ANALYSIS

Saint Leo University poll shows new book by Pope Francis may enhance popularity

Staff reports

A new national poll by the Saint Leo University Polling Institute shows the popularity of Pope Francis continues to increase and one in five Americans are aware of his new book. Saint Leo University has an education center in Marietta.

Nationally, 68.4 percent of the 1,015 adult respondents view him favorably and among Catholics, 88.1 percent. Also, about one in five Americans are aware of his new book, the first published since he became pontiff. His new work, "The Name of God is Mercy," may be contributing to his approval rating. The book was published in January.

"The fact that among Catholics nationally, the pope's current favorable opinion is higher now (88.1 percent) than it was in December 2015 (84.5 percent in Saint Leo's December poll) could very well be due to the release of his new book," said Dr. Marc Pugliese, Saint Leo assistant professor of theology and religion.

Some people say they are reading the book in groups at their churches or book clubs. "I'm not surprised that so many people have said they are or will be reading the pope's book, and that there are so many who will be reading the book in groups," Pugliese said. "Pope Francis seems to connect with people — and not just Catholics — in ways that other recent popes might not have. When I was in Philadelphia for the pope's visit there, I passed a Presbyterian church that had a sign saying it is a 'Pope Francis Church' and that they were studying the pope's environmental encyclical."

Pugliese read the book and found it inspirational, and of potential interest to a broad range of Americans. It "contains themes that would resonate with both conservatives and liberals," he said.

For more information, visit www.saintleo.edu.

RELIGION | FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, MARIETTA

The Rev. Dr. Joan Gray named Interim Pastor

Staff reports

The Rev. Dr. Joan Gray has been called to serve as Interim Lead Minister at First Presbyterian Church, Marietta. "I love being pastor here at First Presbyterian. This is a lively, committed group of people who are serious about their faith and God's mission in the world," Dr. Gray said. "We are going on an adventure with God into the future and we invite anyone who wants to have that experience to go along with us."

It is a tradition in the Presbyterian Church PCUSA that, when a minister leaves a church, an interim is hired until a search committee completes its work and a new minister is called.

A moderator of the 217th General Assembly of the PCUSA, Dr. Gray brings a depth of experience to the interim lead pastor position. She has served as a Senior and interim pastor in many Georgia churches as well as Adjunct Faculty and as Interim Dean of Students at Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, Ga. Dr. Gray has served in leadership positions in the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta and on General Assembly commissions. She has written definitive

books on church leadership and polity.

"We are so blessed here at First Presbyterian Church Marietta to have an Interim Pastor of the caliber of Joan Gray," said Clerk of the Session Rob MacPherson. "Having had the chance to meet with her individually on several occasions, I am convinced that God has sent us a wonderful person to lead us for the next year or so. Watching her conduct meetings with parents of youth and sitting with her during Council meetings, it is quite evident that she brings great wisdom and knowledge."

Pastor, spiritual church leader, author, Dr. Gray is able to relate and connect with members of the church at all levels and all ages as well as relating to the community. Ordained a minister in 1978, she has dedicated her life to God and his church. Married to ordained elder and attorney William A Gray, she lives in Atlanta.

Dr. Gray joins the pastoral staff at First Presbyterian Marietta that includes Rev. Denise Beltzer, Associate Pastor for Congregational Care and Life; Dr. Jeffery Meeks, Director of Music and Fine Arts; and Jeff Cain, Associate of Congregational Care and Life.

First Presbyterian Church, 189 Church St., Marietta, celebrates Sunday with traditional services at 8:30 and 11:15 a.m., and contemporary service at 11 a.m. Visit www.fpcmarietta.org for more information.

VERSE OF THE DAY

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

(John 20:29)