



DEBBIE MATHERS

Texas drama team excels at Leadership Training for Christ

A drama team from the Creekside church in Midlothian, Texas, reacts to winning a gold medal at the North Texas Leadership Training for Christ convention. Pictured are Heather Howton, Madison Simpson, Dylan McCasland, Chasiti Mayo, Daisy Mapes. Not pictured is Nick Cooper.

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Mississippi churches host 65th National Lectureship



LYNN McMILLON

Chris Turner of Durham, N.C., leads singing at the National Lectureship.

BY JOY McMILLON | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

JACKSON, Miss. — *Troubles will soon be o'er, happy forever more. When we meet on that shore, free from all care.*

The voices of more than 800 worshipers filled the large conference room of the Jackson Marriott. Chris Turner from Durham, N.C., led his fellow church members in a heart-

felt chorus of the old, familiar hymn as the 65th National Lectureship of the Churches of Christ began.

An estimated 1,000 church elders, deacons, ministers and members of predominantly black congregations attended the recent four-day event, sponsored by the New Capitol Street church in Jackson.

See **LECTURESHIP**, Page 14

BENEVOLENCE IN A RECESSION Churches help needy, try to screen out greedy

BY BOBBY ROSS JR. | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

The man's emotional appeal touched the hearts of the elders at the Sunny Hills church in Fullerton, Calif.

A young father of three told of losing his job and seeing his family — including a newborn — evicted from their apartment.

The church gave him \$700 for temporary housing and car repairs, and the family attended a couple of worship assemblies, elder John Free said.



Free

But then the man began approaching a widow in the congregation for money. The elders became more concerned when they learned of the man's run-ins with a mechanic and a minister at a different church.

"We have come to the conclusion that we need to be ... more thorough and organized in doing background checks," Free said.

Amid the worst economic downturn since the Great

Depression, many churches across the nation report increasing cases of strangers seeking help with food, rent and utility payments.

At some congregations, requests for benevolence are up 25 percent or more, a survey by *The Christian Chronicle* found.

"We are also seeing a comparable increase in the number of members needing assistance," said Patrick Odum, minister of the Northwest church in Chicago.

Benevolence ministry leaders say they are eager to feed, clothe and house "the least of these" — as Jesus described the less fortunate in Matthew 25.

But determining who is truly needy and not simply greedy can be a challenge.

"While you don't want to see anyone suffer, especially children, you don't want to waste the Lord's money either," said

See **BENEVOLENCE**, Page 16



Odum

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