By Gerald Harris
Editor

FORT WORTH — You will never meet a more remarkable man than Orville Rogers. Today he is 99 years old, a competing athlete, and a world record holder in track and field championships.

He is the oldest man to run a 10-minute mile. He has climbed Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania at an altitude of over 19,000 feet. He has run 26-mile marathons. He holds sixteen age-group world records for individual and relay running events. In fact, he has just written his autobiography, entitled The Running Man.

Dr. Kenneth Cooper, of the famous Cooper Clinic in Dallas, TX, stated, “Orville Rogers is truly one of the most deeply committed, disciplined, and talented individuals I have ever had the privilege of working with in my 60 years of practicing medicine. I only hope that one day when I ‘grow up,’ I will be able to enjoy the highest quality of life which he has been able to enjoy.”

He has plans to participate in national track events in his age range when he reaches his 100th birthday in November. But primarily, he is a devout Christian who has found a multitude of ways to serve the Lord.

Reach high, ignore consequences

Rogers stated, “In the summer of 1927, Charles Lindbergh flew the Spirit of St. Louis in a circle above our little schoolhouse in Oklahoma. That brush with greatness inspired me at an early age to reach for the heights and ignore the consequences.”

After graduating from high school, Orville went to the University of Oklahoma where he met Esther Beth Shannon. He recalled, “Beth was dating somebody else, but I was a very patient man. I set my sights on her and never gave up. My approach was slow, but it was effective. It took some time, but eventually I convinced her to come over to my side.

After graduating from the University of Oklahoma Orville, convinced he should do some kind of work for God, decided to go to Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Ft. Worth, TX (He is a member of the Board of Visitors today.).

In the air

Rogers became a skillful pilot and instructor during World War II. He carried out secret missions during the Cold War. During the Korean War, Rogers was recalled from reserve status to active duty. It was during that war he got to fly the B-36, the largest airplane in the world. The B-36 had ten engines and was designed to carry a maximum bomb load of 84,000 pounds, or one atom bomb.

He later became a pilot for Braniff Airlines and served until the company’s retirement policy at age 60 mandated the end of his commercial piloting.

He commented, “I had asked God to tell me what to do next, and He set His answer in motion with head-swimming speed.

“I firmly believe God not only wants the very best for us, but also wants us to ask it of Him. For the next 17 years, I flew airplanes in the service of my Lord, facing great challenges as well as moments of unspeakable joy. I only had to ask and it was given.”

The good guy

Rogers recently told a group in Fort Worth that during his professional life he earned $1,550,000. But wise investments in the stock market and the oil and gas business has allowed him and his wife, Beth, to give away $34 million. He explained, “I believe the only way we could have accumulated so much wealth was by giving it away. God knew we would give back as much as we possibly could, and He helped us grow and grow in abundance. God was, and continues to be, involved in every aspect of my life, including my finances.”

Orville Rogers’s story is about the good guy finishing first, and he will tell you in no uncertain terms that all the good in his life – and there has been much – comes directly from God.”
Youth Sunday: Churches’ opportunity, responsibility to engage with students

By Scott Barkley
Web Content Editor

Ricky Smith shares the adamant perspective with most, if not all, of his peers working with students. As studies continue to point to a secularization of America, so do church leaders continue to stress the importance of reaching younger generations.

And, where research may cause some to worry, Smith sees the possibility of The Next Great Awakening.

“Look through history,” says Smith, state missionary for Student Ministry Groups and Faith Development of the Georgia Baptist Mission Board. “There are critical hinge points. Take those and consider where our world is today. Right now, we’re positioned for another hinge point, which have historically begun with students. I think we’re on the edge of it and am really excited about our U2019 initiative.”

Recently, Georgia Baptist leaders revealed U2019 as a concerted effort encouraging churches throughout the state to reach teenagers. Still in its strategy phase, the plan seeks to look at a church’s position in its community and utilize Mission Board resources toward ministry to youth.

One method through which churches can empower students is holding a Youth Sunday. Typically practiced among smaller churches, it’s a chance for youth to take the lead in a worship service. Conversely, it gives adults a chance to listen and watch.

“There’s a perception this is an outdated practice, but I think the motives behind holding a Youth Sunday still ring true,” said Smith.

8 best practices for planning a Youth Sunday

There is no set observation for a Youth Sunday. However, many tend to fall in late winter or early spring, sometimes in conjunction with a discipleship-focused weekend. Whenever it’s held, Smith lists eight considerations for a church to make theirs successful.

Plan six weeks in advance. “Put it on the calendar and prepare.”

Identify the roles to fill in. “These may be different based on a church’s philosophy of ministry, such as wanting the pastor to preach instead of a student. The size of the church and number of students available will account.”

Give students input and ownership. “Accept their creativity. It’s important for them to not just be told what to do. There may be a song they want to include not normally sung. Likewise, they may want to sing a song the church knows, but sing it in a different way.” That said …

Give them acceptable boundaries. “This may concern the timing of the service, theology of what’s being taught, or the music chosen. Give them boundaries, but leave them space to work within them.”

The week before have them shadow the adult whose job they’ll have. “There’s a mentoring component to this, but it could also trigger a mentoring relationship.”

Require anyone going onstage to outline their thoughts. “Have them plan out what they’re going to say. Give feedback.”

Expect quality, and coach them to do their best. “We have a lackadaisical culture, but these kids have potential. They know that in other contexts, such as being part of a sports team, they’re expected to give their best effort. Why should that be any different in church?”

Gather them in prayer before the service. “It reminds them this isn’t a performance. It’s not about them. It’s a holy moment and we need them to see they’re positioned under God’s authority.”

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Other benefits

Churches with few or even no youth can still make an impact, says Smith.

“Churches need to make it a priority to not just invest in students, but their community,” he maintains. “Getting into that community means outreach.”

It’s equally crucial to develop ways to keep students bridged to the church.

“Students run the risk of only seeing part of church life,” says Smith. “You don’t want a church within a church, which can happen when a student ministry becomes separated.”

In other words, support the student ministry, but not to where it becomes its own place. Make it obvious students are an active part of the church’s overall ministry. Even with today’s challenges in student ministry, stresses Smith, those very challenges can easily become opportunities.

“Every church needs to be aware of the importance of what’s happening in their students’ lives,” he says. “Our society is soaked with secularism, spiritualism, postmodernism, you name it. This is a cultural moment for spiritual formation within our students.

“The church needs to wake up and engage with that moment.”

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Religious Liberty assaulted again under Governor Deal’s watch

It has happened again. The Georgia state government has attempted to censor, silence, and repress a Christian for sharing the Gospel.

Chike Uzuegbunam, a student at Georgia Gwinnett College, was repeatedly prohibited from discussing his Christian faith on campus, even after he had obtained permission to do so in one of the school’s free-speech zones.

Even after following the proper procedures and reserving space in a free-speech zone, Uzuegbunam was again told to desist, because his speech had apparently “generated complaints” and constituted “disorderly conduct.”

Last year Georgia Governor Nathan Deal vetoed a religious liberty bill, because he didn’t think the bill was necessary even though there were at least 14 cases of individuals and faith-based groups having their religious liberty being violated.

Once again this year Governor Deal expressed his unequivocal opposition to a revived religious liberty bill. He said, “I didn’t want there to be any confusion about where I stand on the RFRA bill: I have no desire or appetite to entertain that legislation.”

Add Uzuegbunam to the list along with Walsh, Cochran, and others

I have wondered why the governor would be so unyielding in his stand against religious liberty legislation. Perhaps the answer can be found in one or more of the speculations below.

First, unlike Chike Uzuegbunam, perhaps the governor has not attempted to share his faith, explain the consequences of rejecting the Savior and tried to draw the net – at least on the Georgia Gwinnett College Campus. Sharing one’s faith outside the walls of a church can be risky business in today’s culture.

Second, perhaps the governor has not sat down and talked to Chike Uzuegbunam, Ruth Malhotra, Kelvin Cochran, Eric Walsh or others in Georgia whose religious freedom has been scorned, stifled, and suppressed.

Third, it may be that the governor has listened to big businesses and heard their threats to curb economic growth; and he has listened to sports’ franchises and heard their forewarning about losing major sport-ing events and favored their appeals over the pleas of the faith-based communities.

Fourth, perhaps the governor has been influenced by his church and its theological position. Last year Dr. Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, said in a March 29 podcast that along with economic and political pressures, the governor’s veto “is fueled by a theological agenda as well.”

Governor attends a CBF church in Gainesville

The governor is a member of First Baptist Church in Gainesville, a congregation identified with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Bill Coates, pastor of the Gainesville church, expressed his views after the 2015 Supreme Court decision to legalize same-sex marriage in all 50 states.

Coates stated: “As with most things in life, we have to balance. In this case, we must balance our esteem for the dignity of every person, gay or straight, with the harmony of the congregation we are part of. It is not easy, but it is possible. Jesus teaches us to love God and love our neighbor, just as Moses taught. We cannot love our neighbor and treat him or her as a second-class citizen at the same time.”

“I say this: I do not always know what the truth is, but I can always tell what love is. I believe love is the greatest of all, and to do the loving thing will always be the right thing. Most congregations will eventually find their way there.”

So, the governor’s veto may well have been based on his theological position.

Fifth, there were so many voices demanding the governor’s attention that he forgot about the promise he made to advocate for religious liberty legislature to a roomful of pastors at the governor’s mansion in September of 2014.

At any rate, while the governor has slammed the door on any kind of religious liberty legislation, the cases of First Amendment rights being violated continue to pile up. I long for a governor who will become a champion for religious liberty, and whose word is his bond.