

## First Assembly youth place at Fine Arts



Submitted photo  
Members of the Fine Arts teams at First Assembly of God in Butler are: (Back, left to right) Bubba Grantham, Jessie Boykin, Dillon Anderson, Benjamin McBride, Tyler Fulcher; (Middle) Dakota Lolley, Jeannie Marie Cunningham, Amanda Tyson, Tyler Walker, Terry Kirkham, Courtney Cox, Beth Grantham; (Front, standing) Amber Dixon, Courtney Walker, Bree Bonner, Sheldon Gourgues, Annie Kelley, Timothy Watson; (Seated) Ann Marie Hendley, Brittanie Day, Shelby Fulcher. Not pictured - Joshua Manley.

**BUTLER --** On Saturday, Feb. 17, students from Butler First Assembly of God attended the Zone Level of Fine Arts at Knollwood A/G in Mobile, with several students coming away with awards and opportunities to advance to state level competition.

Fine Arts is a program offered by the National Assembly of God office through churches nationwide. It offers students in grades 6-12 an opportunity to use and develop their ministry gifts and talents in many categories (group and individual) at different levels of entry. Students begin at Zone Level then advance to State then to Nationals by achieving a Superior with Invitation rating from one level to the next. At the national level students can advance from one round to the next. The top three entries in each category have an opportunity to receive a scholarship for Assembly of God colleges and many others.

Entries from First Assembly who placed in the top 3 for their category to receive an Invitation to State competition were as follows: Keyboard Solo, 2nd place Courtney Cox; 3rd place Joshua Manley; Worship Team, "Flames of Fire", 2nd place (Brittanie Day, Shelby Fulcher, Tyler Fulcher, Ann Marie Hendley, Joshua Manley, Benjamin McBride, Courtney Walker, and Timothy Watson); and Youth Choir, 2nd place (Dillon Anderson, Bree Bonner, Jessie Boykin, Courtney Cox, Jeannie Marie Cunningham, Brittanie Day, Amber Dixon,

Shelby Fulcher, Tyler Fulcher, Beth Grantham, Bubba Grantham, Ann Marie Hendley, Annie Kelley, Terry Kirkham, Dakota Lolley, Joshua Manley, Benjamin McBride, Courtney Walker, Tyler Walker, and Timothy Watson).

The entries receiving Superior with Invitation to State rating were as follows: Large Human Video Group, "Code Red" (Jessie Boykin, Courtney Cox, Brittanie Day, Shelby Fulcher, Tyler Fulcher, Terry Kirkham, Ann Marie Hendley, Joshua Manley, Amanda Tyson, and Courtney Walker); Small Human Video Groups, "S.T.A.T." (Sheldon Gourgues, Annie Kelley, Tyler Walker, and Timothy Watson), "The Three Stooges" (Brittanie Day, Shelby Fulcher, and Courtney Walker); Human Video Solo, Shelby Fulcher; Female Vocal Solo, Brittanie Day and Shelby Fulcher; and Short Sermon, Shelby Fulcher and Tyler Fulcher. Entries receiving a Superior Rating were as follows Small Human Video Group, "But God" (Bree Bonner, Amber Dixon, Bubba Grantham and Joshua Manley); and Songwriting Solo, Shelby Fulcher. Every student that entered advanced to the next level in at least one category.

The State Fine Arts event will be held on April 20-21, at Kingwood Assembly of God in Alabaster, near Birmingham. Along with the entries listed here, there will also be eight more at the State level, making it a total of 20 entries to compete at state level.

## Ladies retreat planned at Calvary BC

**BUTLER --** The Ladies Ministry of Calvary Baptist Church in Butler is hosting its First Annual Ladies Retreat on Saturday, April 27th at the church located at 113 Pickens Avenue.

Registration will begin at 9:30 a.m. and sessions will begin at 10 a.m. Cost for the event is \$10

per person which includes lunch and supplies.

Robin Noland, from Eastern Shore Baptist Church and an author for LifeWay Christian Resources in Nashville, TN, will be speaking.

Lunch will be served at 11:30 followed by an afternoon session with hands-on activities. The

day should end around 2 p.m. A nursery will be provided with advance registrations of names and ages. Children up to six years of age will be accepted. If you sign up and find that you do not need nursery services, please contact us before the event so that we can be adequately prepared.

For further information or questions contact Stephanie Bonner by email at [bonner2696@yahoo.com](mailto:bonner2696@yahoo.com) or by phone at 877-640-2873; or Diane Barlow by email at [dlb06us@yahoo.com](mailto:dlb06us@yahoo.com). When sending emails, please put LADIES RETREAT in the subject line.

## Once homeless in South Korea ...

# Local man feels call to Philippines

By Dee Ann Campbell  
The Choctaw Sun

**BUTLER --** "The Lord called me to this ministry in 1987," says Michael McIlwain of Butler. "But I've been running from it for almost 20 years. Now it's time."

It's been his passion for 2 decades. Since before he first landed in the Philippines, Michael McIlwain has felt drawn there — to live, to work, and to minister.

It is a calling that, he says, began in the late 80's. But, because of his own mistakes and wrong choices, it is a calling that he feels he has not been ready to fill, until now.

"In 1987, I went to a revival meeting and felt the call of God on my life, but I did not listen," says McIlwain. "My relationship with God was never the same after that. I went my own way."

McIlwain received what he terms 'a wake-up call' in 1989, when circumstances in his life prompted him to dig deeper into his faith. For a time, he served God through a bus ministry, through working with children, and through a growing walk with Christ.

But once again, he says, he moved away from God.

"I fell away again," he explains. "I was a child of God, but for too long I lived my own life."

In 2004, another wake up call came. This time, McIlwain says it came from the Philippines. After corresponding with some people in that country, he decided to visit the area. But he didn't just want to visit — he wanted to stay.

"I decided I wanted to go over there, to apply for Philippine citizenship, maybe get married and settle down there," he



Submitted photo  
Michael McIlwain, back center, is pictured with the Filipino family whom he stayed with during his visit. Pictured in center is Charina, his fiancée.

recalls. "But that was my own idea, not God's."

On his first trip to Philippines, McIlwain says that God began to intervene in his plans — plans that of his own making, not God's. It was an intervention that would result in a heart problem and weeks of homelessness in a country where he was unfamiliar and unable to communicate.

"On that trip to the Philippines, I had a problem with my heart," he says. "We were flying to Seoul, South Korea, first, then to Manila. But on the flight to Seoul, I had what I felt was a heart attack. I can't explain it, but something in me said that if I got back on that flight to Manila, I would die."

Instead of continuing

his trip to the Philippines, McIlwain found himself stranded in South Korea. His luggage, however, had gone on to Manila without him.

"All I had was my carry-on with a pair of pants, 2 shirts, underclothes, socks, and my Bible, along with some papers," he remembers.

What he had thought was enough money to pay his way in the Philippines was not nearly enough in the more expensive area of Seoul, and within a few days, McIlwain found himself running out of cash with no way out.

"I was almost out of options," he says, "and no money."

Opting to take a boat into Japan, McIlwain slept in a park with the homeless in Kitakushu that first night. The next

day, he found out about a campground located on top of a mountain. He decided to go.

"It took me 2 hours to reach that sight," he says. "I stayed on the mountain for 10 days."

While on the top of the mountain, McIlwain says he got what he believed was a calling from God — a calling that again included going to the Philippines.

McIlwain left the mountain and returned to South Korea. Using what little money he had left — as well as some cash sent to him from back home — he bought a plane ticket to fly back to the United States. With a ten-day wait until his flight, he lived on the streets of South Korea, often relying on the benevolence of local Christians to help him

survive.

"That experience in South Korea showed me that all this stuff we have doesn't mean much," he says. "It also made me realize that I couldn't do things my own way."

McIlwain later made his trip to the Philippines, where he found a great need for missions in that area. He also found a young woman, fell in love, and asked her to eventually become his wife.

But, McIlwain says, the time was not yet right for him to stay in the Philippines long-term. He returned to the United States to prepare for what he considers his life work in missions to that country.

McIlwain says that his work in the Philippines is just beginning, that God is calling him back there. This time, he says, he will do it God's way.

"The first time I went, it was for all the wrong reasons," he admits. "He sent me back home."

But the next time, he says, it will be for the right reasons.

"At one time, when I was stuck in South Korea, I thought I'd never get back home," he admits. "Then when I got back here, I thought I'd never leave again. But I feel like God wants me to go back there."

McIlwain says that his plans are to go back to the Philippines as a missionary, but to become self-supporting once he is there.

"I want to be self-supporting," he explains. "I want to get set up on the mission field and get a business started, too, so that I can support myself over there."

McIlwain says that his potential business would involve selling produce and other prod-

ucts that are in demand in the area.

"I know produce sells," he says. "I would also like to get involved in repairing cell phones — that is getting to be a bigger market over there."

For now, McIlwain is still working to get financing to make the trip back to the Philippines, to set up his business, and to start his mission work.

"I need help to get set up," he says. "It takes a little money to pay the fees and to get started. I want my business to end up supporting me and my family."

Although he says he has tried for several years to find a church who is able to sponsor him, he has not had much success with the larger denominational mission groups. But, he says, he is still making plans.

"I would love to go to speak at churches about my ministry there," he offers. "Even if they don't want to support me, I would like to tell them about the Philippines, and I'd like for them to pray for me, this ministry, and the people over there. Prayer always works, and the Philippine people need it so much."

"The need is there," he adds. "They are searching. They are so open and receptive to the gospel. It's the right time for me to go."

And if no one chooses to support him, he says he'll likely go anyway.

"I've been homeless before," he says. "I've slept on a park bench in South Korea for weeks. I don't worry about that because I believe there is a hedge around me. God will provide."

(ED. NOTE: McIlwain can be contacted by writing to P.O. Box 288, Millry, AL 36558)