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March 1, 1996

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WASHINGTON--Christian Life Commission trustee meeting, March 4-6.

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**Missionary killed
in Peru plane crash**

**Baptist Press
3/1/96**

AREQUIPA, Peru (BP)--A Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board missionary was among those killed after a Peruvian jet apparently caught fire in the air and crashed five miles from its planned landing Feb. 29.

The missionary, Lynn Davidson, 42, was last identified in Lima, Peru, boarding a Faucett Airlines flight home from a church growth strategy meeting there. Several hours after the crash, a newscast listed her as a passenger. All 117 passengers and six crew were killed.

Davidson and her husband, Dennis, from Santa Fe and Albuquerque, N.M., respectively, were appointed missionaries to Peru in 1987. They have three children, Charis, 11, Cassia, 8, and Rannon, 4. They have lived in Arequipa since 1992, where he has been assigned as a church starter.

News reports March 1 quoted Faucett Airlines as listing 40 international passengers on the flight, but none as Americans. Foreign Mission Board officials speculated that because of Davidson's address in Peru, the airline would have assumed she was Peruvian.

It was the second disaster in February suffered by the organization of 63 Foreign Mission Board missionaries in Peru. The first was Feb. 1, when missionary Wade Watts and his family were seriously injured in a mountainous car wreck. Watts and his son, Marcus, have been in a coma since.

Flight 251 was to complete its 465-mile trip to Arequipa in southern Peru at 8:20 p.m., said missionary Dan McLaughlin. The crew had received authorization for final approach and landing at 8:15, and then all contact was lost, he said.

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News reports quoted a Lima airport official as saying another commercial flight had spotted the plane flying "completely in flames." Shortly afterward, people nearby reported hearing an explosion as the plane crashed into a remote Andean mountain canyon.

Davidson's husband, Dennis, was able to see the crash site in the early hours of March 1. He reported seeing little left of the plane except ashes, Foreign Mission Board officials said. Rescue workers were not expecting to remove any bodies until late that day.

Lynn Davidson had just begun to represent southern Peru on a team of missionaries studying church growth strategy. The short meeting she had attended in Lima was to begin to prepare for working with a team of strategists from outside Peru who are to help analyze mission work there.

The former Lynn Vanderford, Davidson grew up in Santa Fe. She received the bachelor of arts degree from the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley and the master of arts degree from the University of Colorado at Denver. She was a Southern Baptist Home Mission Board summer missionary in Salida, Colo., in 1976.

She was a speech pathologist in Baltimore at the time of her appointment.

Besides her husband and children, she is survived by her parents, Max and Marie Vanderford of Brighton, Colo.; a sister, Cathy Gilpin of Alamosa, Colo.; and two brothers, Gerry Vanderford and Keith Vanderford, both of San Jose, Calif.

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**New generation changes
face of foreign missions**

By Mark Kelly

**Baptist Press
3/1/96**

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--A new generation of Southern Baptist foreign missionaries is taking the field -- and the faces are changing as much as the places of service.

Among new appointees of the Foreign Mission Board, singles and ethnics are more numerous. More have worked in overseas ministry before. And the steady stream of new missionaries flowing toward traditional "harvest fields" is being joined by a growing group headed where the need for a witness is critical.

These people are redefining what it means to be a missionary.

They're at home in a world shrunk dramatically by passenger jets and television news. Many are hearing God call them to places where life is hard and the name of Jesus unknown. Most are planning to join hands with other Christian groups to make the greatest possible impact with limited resources.

"They feel drawn to the cutting edge," said Lloyd Atkinson, director of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's personnel selection department. "They want to go places where there are no other missionaries and life is hard. They want to go where the need is the greatest -- even into dangerous, uncharted waters."

One of the most significant changes is the number of workers coming forward to serve in areas where the need for gospel witness is urgent, Atkinson said. Of 246 long-term workers appointed by the Foreign Mission Board in 1995, 50 went to countries closed to traditional missionary activity and 43 went to countries where the collapse of communism has opened a window of opportunity.

"This is a significant, encouraging trend," said Atkinson, who has closely watched personnel trends during his 17 years as a missionary and administrator. "God is calling people to these new opportunities, and we can look at their lives and see how God has prepared them.

"That says to me that God knew a long time ago these doors would open, and he began preparing them to serve."

Three broad trends reveal important aspects of the changing face of Foreign Mission Board missions:

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-- "been there, done that." A growing number of new missionaries already know by experience what overseas life will be like. In 1975, only 10 of 183 new career missionaries previously had lived overseas, either as missionary journeymen or as children of missionaries. But in 1995, the 246 long-term appointees noted 93 instances of overseas service in ministry channels expanded to include the board's short-term International Service Corps program and volunteer projects.

-- different faces. Ethnics, especially Asians, are becoming more highly visible among the force of 4,100 missionaries at work in 130 countries. Ten years ago, five ethnics were appointed; the Foreign Mission Board hired its first ethnic consultant, Jerry DeOliveira, only seven years ago. In 1995, 12 ethnics were appointed, 10 of them Asians, in part reflecting the rapid growth of ethnic congregations in the Southern Baptist Convention.

-- going it alone. Recent missionary appointments show a sharp increase in the number of singles. Since 1985, single missionaries comprised a steady 5 percent to 6 percent of new missionaries. In 1994, however, the percentage jumped to 10 percent, and in 1995, it was 9 percent. Of 683 openings for new missionaries in 1996, 325 positions could be filled by a single man, 249 by a single woman.

The Foreign Mission Board's eight consultants work full time with more than 3,000 people seeking to discern God's will for their lives, Atkinson said.

"Many people think they have to know for sure God is calling them to foreign missions and where he wants them to serve before they contact us," Atkinson said. "But a contact with the Foreign Mission Board is simply saying a person wants to know what God wants.

"We deal with every one individually because God's calling is an individual matter. Our commitment is to walk alongside as God deals with them, and to help them ask the right questions."

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Rankin on the millennium:
'Prophecy being fulfilled'

By Mark A. Wyatt

Baptist Press
3/1/96

HIGHLAND, Calif. (BP)--"God may be calling us out today to be the last generation of missionaries," the president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board said during a luncheon address Feb. 28.

Citing "an awesome sense of destiny" in missions service as the 20th century draws to an end, Jerry Rankin also reported on record missionary appointments and overseas baptisms during a dialogue session with California Southern Baptists.

Hundreds of ministers and laypersons attended the luncheon at Immanuel Baptist Church, Highland, Calif., at the conclusion of the 1996 California Southern Baptist Convention evangelism conference. Rankin was the final speaker at the three-day gathering.

"As we find ourselves less than 1,500 days away from the year 2000, we are sensing God is allowing us to do something," Rankin declared, noting Southern Baptists are responding in record numbers -- with 546 missionaries appointed by the FMB during 1995 and 3,200 candidates currently in different stages of the appointment process.

"God is planning to do something out there in the future, beyond what we could ever anticipate," Rankin said. "God's purpose will be fulfilled whether we're involved or not," he continued. "The question is, Will we be obedient?"

Rankin said he is aware of increasing speculation concerning the religious implications of the approaching millennium. Some published reports have linked the event with the expected return of Jesus Christ.

"Though I believe in the personal, glorified return of our Lord Jesus Christ, I've never been caught up in eschatology," Rankin said. Besides, "I don't think God is so impressed with the numbers on a Roman calendar."

Rankin quoted Jesus' statement in Matthew 24:14 which states: "... this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come."

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"My heart beats with excitement as I realize that prophecy is being fulfilled," Rankin said. He said Southern Baptists are collaborating with other "Great Commission Christians" to evangelize.

And he reminded that all Christians -- not just appointed missionaries -- must continue sharing the gospel with all people until Christ returns. "The Great Commission was given to every believer and every church," he said.

The veteran missions leader said Southern Baptist missionaries now serve in places no one ever thought possible. He told of recently meeting a woman who wept upon hearing Rankin report that Southern Baptists were serving in Albania. The woman later told Rankin her church had been praying for seven years for missionaries to be allowed in the communist nation.

"After she told me that she started crying again and I cried, too," Rankin said.

In another example, Rankin said less than three years after Southern Baptist missionaries helped start the first church ever organized in Mongolia, that nation now has at least 10 churches and 5,000 believers.

Overall, the number of FMB-assisted church starts increased more than 20 percent in 1995, including 367 new churches started among groups inaccessible to traditional mission work, Rankin said.

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**MBTS' Whitehead on 'Oprah,'
defends religious liberty**

By James A. Smith Sr.

Baptist Press
3/1/96

CHICAGO (BP)--The Oprah Winfrey show served as a battleground for a recent clash over an upcoming trial on school prayer.

Religious liberty attorney Michael K. Whitehead faced off against People for the American Way attorney Elliott Minberg in a Feb. 28 taping of the program. The program is scheduled to air March 19.

Whitehead, who also is vice president for business affairs at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Minberg are representing opposing sides in the case which involves student-initiated, student-led prayers or Bible readings over the school intercom in a Mississippi public school district. The trial before U.S. District Judge Neal Biggers begins March 4 in Oxford, Miss.

"This is a classic case in which strict separationists are pushing 'the separation of church and state' too far," Whitehead said on the program.

Whitehead is trial counsel for the public school district in Pontotoc, Miss., which has been sued by People for the American Way and the American Civil Liberties Union. Another guest was Lisa Herdahl, the resident parent who contacted the ACLU about bringing the lawsuit. PAW and the ACLU claim the school district's accommodation of student religious activity constitutes governmental endorsement of religion, which violates the First Amendment's establishment clause.

"Oprah Winfrey opened the program with the theme, 'People who have been made outcasts in their community,'" Whitehead recounted.

"Video clips showed the Pontotoc school children and other citizens rallying in support of religious liberty and praying around the flag pole. But the voice-over commentary referred to the harassment and death threats which Mrs. Herdahl has alleged, and implied that she was frightened for her life, thinking every trip to the grocery store might be her last."

Winfrey suggested the community was engaged in a campaign of harassment against Herdahl and her son, Kevin, who was also a guest on the show.

"It is outrageous to imply that my clients were promoting a climate of threatening to kill Mrs. Herdahl or hurt her children," Whitehead said on the program. "Kooks are responsible for their own kooky behavior, not my client. My client condemns and deplores name-calling and meanness, by children or adults, wherever it occurs."

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Whitehead noted the harassment charges were questionable enough that People for the American Way dropped the claims from the lawsuit.

During the program, Whitehead noted PAW and ACLU were seeking to stop elementary students from saying grace for their food, as a group, while still in their classroom.

"Because the teacher is in the room, they say it is still instructional time, and hence the teacher would be endorsing the prayer," Whitehead said.

"They say the students can only pray in the cafeteria, while the food is in front of them. The technical legal phrase for this argument is 'magnus balognus,' which means, 'a lot of baloney.' Praying in the cafeteria is not constitutionally different from praying in the classroom. The crucial feature is that students are choosing to pray at a break time."

Whitehead said if the actions of the school district are ultimately held to be unconstitutional, "this case becomes a classic example of why we need a constitutional amendment to protect private religious expression from discrimination."

In addition to Whitehead, Mincberg and the Herdahls, other guests on the program were Pat Mounce, a Pontotoc mother and head of a parents organization supporting school prayer and Doug Jones, pastor of the Victory Baptist Church in Pontotoc, and a leader in the citizen's group supporting the school district.

Whitehead began representing the Pontotoc, Miss., school district when he was general counsel for the Christian Life Commission, the public policy and religious liberty agency of the Southern Baptist Convention. The Pontotoc school board asked him to continue representation after Whitehead joined the staff of Midwestern in Kansas City, Mo., in January.

In one of the eight segments on the show, Winfrey presented a videotape featuring Jimmy Allen, past president of the Southern Baptist Convention, recounting the tragedy of his family's struggle with AIDS. Allen spoke from a pulpit in the video clip, expressing the hope that the AIDS crisis would provide one of the greatest occasions for Christians to really be "Christian" to one another -- demonstrating love and compassion instead of fear or hatred.

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Whitehead: 'Oprah' audience
had pre-show manipulation

By James A. Smith Sr.

Baptist Press
3/1/96

CHICAGO (BP)--Have you ever wondered how people on TV talk shows like "Oprah," "Rikki Lake" and "Sally Jesse Raphael" can get so emotionally agitated?

After participating on the Oprah Winfrey show, religious liberty attorney Michael K. Whitehead has an answer to that question.

The episode, taped Feb. 28 in Chicago, was an "eye-opening experience" for Whitehead, vice president for business affairs at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Mo.

"Oprah had a toxic teleprompter," Whitehead said in an interview after the taping. "The rhetoric she was given to read to set up this piece was hysterical hype, implying that the school officials or community leaders were engaged in harassment, or condoning it if not causing it."

Whitehead participated in the program in his capacity as trial counsel for a public school district in Pontotoc, Miss., which has been sued by the American Civil Liberties Union and People for the American Way for alleged violations of the First Amendment.

Although the theme of the show was "the evils of heated community debate about prayer," Whitehead noted the irony in the methods used by Oprah's producers to "stir up the crowd."

"A stage manager asked questions of the audience before Oprah appeared and the taping began, to try to discover which members of the audience had strong opinions on the issue," Whitehead said.

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Because most members of the audience initially seemed supportive of voluntary, student-led prayer, Whitehead said the producer appeared to be disappointed. "When he found a few contrary voices, he tried to get the critics of prayer to argue heatedly with the proponents of prayer," Whitehead recounted. "He even moved some vociferous folks to different seats in the studio, so they could be on camera more easily.

"Having generated some passionate and heated exchanges out of the crowd, he proceeded to start the show -- about how awful it is that the people in Pontotoc have generated strong passionate convictions in support of school prayer," Whitehead said. "It was awful for Pontotoc citizens to hold rallies and cheer for religious liberty, but it was fine for the Oprah show to rally the few available troops to boo the citizens of Pontotoc."

In spite of the tactics to generate verbal conflict against his clients' position, Whitehead said he believes the program went fairly well and his clients were able to present their point of view.

"We'll have to wait and see what winds up on the editing room floor," Whitehead concluded.

The program is scheduled to air March 19.

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Multicultural church pastors:
Diversity can be enriching

By Linda Lawson

Baptist Press
3/1/96

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Twenty-one years as pastor of a multicultural Southern Baptist church in inner-city Chicago has made Charles Lyons "very opinionated on the issue of homogeneity."

"I think the mixed congregation better reflects the biblical concept of the New Testament church. It is the way God can most dramatically be glorified in an urban setting," said Lyons, pastor of Armitage Baptist Church. His church membership includes about 35 nationalities -- approximately 30 percent Anglo, 30 percent black (African American and African), 30 percent Hispanic and 10 percent of other racial and cultural groups.

Lyons and two other pastors of multicultural congregations visited the Baptist Sunday School Board recently with a group of pastors from the Chicago Metro Baptist Association. Tom Maluga has been pastor of Uptown Baptist Church about five months after 10 years at Vickery Baptist Church, a multicultural church in Dallas. Ariel Ruiz has been co-pastor of First Baptist Church, West Chicago, for two months.

Maluga, whose church membership includes African Americans, Caribbeans, Africans, Asians, Hispanics and Europeans, said growing a multicultural congregation requires "intentionality to build unity among people who are different" from one another.

When a language barrier exists, Maluga said he believes establishing separate congregations for various groups is justified. In addition to the main service in English, Uptown church presently includes congregations where worship is conducted in Russian, Cambodian, Vietnamese and Spanish.

Ruiz' church of Anglo, Hispanic and Asian members presently holds one worship service in Spanish and English. However, they are conducting home studies by language groups.

The members of the West Chicago church focus on three things: love, understanding and fellowship, Ruiz said. "If we don't have love, we won't have understanding or fellowship."

Lyons acknowledged that pastoral leadership in a multicultural setting presents unique challenges, beginning with preaching to people of diverse backgrounds.

"The things one group might laugh at might offend another," he said.

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Worship traditions also differ among members. "We address this by using contemporary praise music which crosses a lot of bridges," Lyons said. Black gospel, Spanish choruses and Asian-Indian choruses also have been introduced.

"We try to touch varied cultural bases and let them know we're sensitive to their presence and appreciate their culture," he said.

Emphasizing challenges are not weaknesses, Lyons said the multicultural dimension of Armitage "strengthens virtually everything" the church does.

"Virtually all who walk in our door the first time see people like themselves," he noted. "And our membership strengthens our credibility in the community. We reflect the city."

Maluga added the variety of cultures in a church enriches the membership even though achieving unity may mean no one gets to experience church "exactly the way they like it."

"We learn to view things from other perspectives. When that unity is really happening, it's so exciting. You know it's not just a human thing," he added.

Maluga said he believes a church of one culture group can effectively reach others.

"If you want them, include them and respect them, they will come," he said. "People are looking for friends and craving acceptance. It's a tremendous opportunity."

Lyons, who felt called to preach at age 10, as a teenager became convinced God wanted him to minister in the inner city.

"I'm as excited about what I'm doing 21 years down the road as when I started," he said. "We've identified barriers and sought to remove them."

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East Dallas center reaches
inner city, trains workers

By Ken Camp

Baptist Press
3/1/96

DALLAS (BP)--Street people stream into a three-story building in east Dallas. A few homeless men live there. Others drop by asking for food. Youth gang members hang out there. And the building's owners couldn't be happier.

"The needs are so great, and fields are so ready for harvest," John Shelton said.

Shelton directs the Inner-city Outreach Ministries Resource and Training Center, a ministry of Dallas Baptist Association. He also is pastor of the Church on the Lot, an open-air mission of Cliff Temple Baptist Church, Dallas, that draws homeless people, prostitutes, drug dealers and their customers to a vacant lot for worship each week.

The center helps to meet the day-to-day needs of Shelton's "church members." And it offers hands-on experience for members of other churches who want to learn how to do community ministries.

"We want to involve people in reaching the inner-city here for Christ," Shelton said. "And we want to train Christians to go into their own communities."

Each floor of the center represents a distinct aspect of ministry -- discipleship, community services and youth outreach. Each has its own coordinator: an African American man who used to live beneath an overpass, an Anglo woman from suburban north Dallas and a Hispanic former gang leader.

Dallas association owns the facility and provides ongoing financial support, along with several churches in the association and in neighboring Tarrant Baptist Association. Texas Baptists around the state also support the center's ministries through their gifts to the Mary Hill Davis Offering for State Missions.

Seven formerly homeless men call the third floor of the center "home." Among them is its on-site coordinator, Lawrence O'Neal.

"It started for me when me and my wife busted up," O'Neal said. "A lot of people were hanging out then under I-45, so I decided to hang with them."

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While he was living beneath the overpass, O'Neal became acquainted with Shelton and the Church on the Lot.

"I've been knowing John for about two years," O'Neal said. "He's my pastor and my best friend."

The two friends work closely in leading discipleship classes for the center's residents and clients. Men who completed the first MasterLife discipleship training course in prison take the second half at the center. Other classes include studies of specific books from the Bible and courses on topics such as "character."

"They are training for ministry," Shelton said. "Last year, we recorded 364 professions of faith. But this year, we're running 50 percent ahead of that pace. It's all because we have all these other people involved in sharing Christ."

Many of the new Christians are introduced to the Lord by Pat Gatchel, a member of First Baptist Church, Carrollton. As director of community services, she coordinates the food pantry, clothes closet ministry, job placement and other programs on the second floor of the three-story center.

"I got involved after my pastor, Wayne Allen, preached a sermon challenging us to get out of our comfort zones," Gatchel said. "I had been hearing John Shelton's name, so I got in touch with him. I worked with John on the streets for at least a year and a half, and I've been here at the center since October."

Gatchel screens applicants for aid, but no one is turned away.

"We're not here to determine who gets food. Anybody who comes in here asking for food gets it," Shelton said. "We're here to determine what the needs are, to share Christ with them and to pray with them."

The program is explicitly and unapologetically evangelistic.

"The day we are looked at as nothing but a social service is the day we close our doors," he said.

In addition to serving needy people in the area, the center also takes its food and clothing distribution ministry to remote locations. Workers served 800 families in January, and Shelton expects that number to exceed 2,000 per month in the near future.

The center's first floor still is being renovated, but already it is packed with 50 to 60 young people each Friday and Saturday evening. Pointing to the mini-blinds on the windows, Shelton noted, "We're ministering to rival gangs. We need the blinds so nobody passing by could get a clear shot at anybody in here."

Several years ago, Carlos Martinez was a founding leader of the Northeastside Gang in Dallas. Today, he works as a commercial artist and spends about 15 hours a week as coordinator of youth gang outreach for the center.

"I started with the gangs when I was 12 years old, and it lasted until I was about 20," Martinez said. "I skipped school. I did drugs. All I knew was gangs."

His life changed when he began taking classes at the Art Institute in Dallas. There a fellow student introduced him to Javier Valdez, who was then youth minister at Pleasant Grove Primera Iglesia Bautista.

Valdez showed Martinez the kind of acceptance he previously had found only in the gangs. About three years ago, Valdez led the former ganglord to Jesus in the backseat of his car.

"Now I want to help these kids out who are in the gangs," Martinez said. "I've hurt so many people. I want to give something back to the community and serve the Lord."

Since Thanksgiving, 21 youth -- including 16 gang members -- have accepted Jesus as Savior as a result of the youth outreach center.

"We want gang kids to hang out here," Shelton said. "We want them to loiter."

As Shelton thinks of plans for the future -- a day camp for inner-city children in south Dallas, a hot breakfast program at the center, more extensive aftercare ministries for recently released prisoners -- he takes satisfaction in seeing his efforts multiplied.

"When we first opened the center, for awhile it seemed like I was spending all my time in administration when I wanted to be out on the street," Shelton said.

"But now the directors for each floor carry on the ministries whether I'm around or not. And they're training others to share Christ in the inner city. This is a lot bigger than me."

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Musicians affirm common ground
despite differing worship styles By Charles Willis

Baptist Press
3/1/96

LARGO, Fla. (BP)--Despite the differences in worship styles and musical preferences of the congregations they serve, two Southern Baptist music ministers say they support each other's ministry and find common ground in the greater goal they share.

Randy Elrod of First Baptist Indian Rocks, Largo, Fla., and Jim Ferguson of First Baptist Church, St. Petersburg, work as ministers of music only miles apart in the Suncoast Baptist Association. But the differences in the worship styles they use might lead some to conclude there is more distance between them than mere geography.

The variety of their approaches, however, has not driven a wedge between the two men nor has it separated them from other music ministry colleagues in their association and state, they said.

Ferguson, whose church has a tradition of classical music "with some southern gospel and a few spirituals," said he has noticed over the years that "uniquely, music ministers have always found common ground. In our association, we never had difficulty working together, finding music that appealed to us collectively.

"Regardless of the theological questions about which we might have different convictions, the worship times we have planned together have always been extremely positive experiences. Quite frankly, I'm proud of that. I'm glad the Lord has allowed us to find common ground through worship and music."

And although First Baptist in St. Petersburg has undergone a metamorphosis toward more contemporary anthems, the worship style and music is unlike that of First Indian Rocks where Elrod plans "very contemporary" services without hymnals, but with a praise team and live rhythm band.

Ferguson, who uses a hymnal and continues to include some traditional anthems in worship, serves a congregation that prefers a style some musicians would describe as "blended" -- including both traditional and contemporary elements.

Elrod, in contrast, plans "seeker-friendly" services that may include movie clips, drama or other creative arts to provide a themed service.

In contrast to the St. Petersburg church where Ferguson said members "like things done in order," First Indian Rocks members "have no idea what order things will be in" from week to week, Elrod said.

These differences, while admittedly important to the people who are being led in worship, are not insurmountable barriers to fellowship in ministry, Ferguson and Elrod agreed.

The Suncoast association has abandoned the concept of choral festivals, Ferguson said, in favor of a Praisefest.

"Each church can come and participate because it is a worship experience, not an event to determine which choir ranks at what level. We've gotten rid of choral experts to come and listen to our choirs because that doesn't go with our philosophy. That gives us common ground at the foot of the cross."

"And as an association we've done a senior adult musical premiere," Elrod added. "Everybody has senior adults. We did a Genevox Music premiere at Ridgecrest. Musical excellence is common ground.

"I ask my musicians to be excellent, to be rehearsed and prepared," he continued. "Whether Jim is doing a classical number or I am doing jazz, both need to be excellent."

Elrod noted the concept of respect for varied approaches to reaching people has "swept Florida."

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The state Baptist convention's music director, Bob Burroughs, formed a task force soon after assuming his position, "as diverse a group as I have ever seen," Elrod said. "He has made an obvious effort to understand and cultivate different ideas. At a leadership conference in Ocala, widely differing musical styles were demonstrated.

"If that is not common ground," Elrod declared, "I don't know what is. I didn't see anyone looking down their noses at anyone else."

At First Baptist in St. Petersburg, Ferguson said, "We are required to define our music program by results in reaching people with the word of Christ."

And at First Indian Rocks, Elrod agreed, "we are admonished regularly to keep the main thing, the main thing. Everything I do musically must enhance that. Everything ... enhances the Word of God, because the Word is what changes people."

While not all musicians respect all music or worship styles as appropriate tools to reach people for the Lord, Ferguson and Elrod may represent many musicians who look beyond personal tastes to the greater purpose of their tasks.

"God has invested his spirit in our church as he has in many others," Ferguson said. "We serve a gigantic God that none of us can know in his entirety, and so we can appreciate each other. I hope that is reflective of what our (Southern Baptist) Convention can be."

Common Ground is an emphasis of the Baptist Sunday School Board's music department. A series of Common Ground worship gatherings, which focus on diversity in worship styles and musical tastes as well as the common elements of faith and worship within the SBC, began in 1995 in Riverside, Calif. Upcoming Common Ground worship gatherings are scheduled for April 15-17 in Jackson, Miss; Sept. 29-Oct. 1 in Atlanta; and April 17-19, 1997, in Harrisburg, Pa.

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(BP) photo (vertical, color) posted in the SBCNet News Room.

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