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**Nov. yields big increase
in SBC Cooperative Program**

**Baptist Press
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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Southern Baptist Convention Cooperative Program gifts for the month of November totaled \$3.2 million more than the same month in 1995, according to Morris H. Chapman, president and chief executive of the SBC Executive Committee.

Gifts for November 1996 reached \$13,934,056 compared to November 1995 of \$10,743,955, an increase of \$3,190,100 or 29.69 percent.

For the first two months of the SBC's 1996-97 fiscal year, CP gifts have totaled \$26,249,173 compared to the same period in the last fiscal year of \$21,681,338, an increase of \$4,567,834 or 21.07 percent.

"We owe all glory to God for the great things he is doing among Southern Baptists," Chapman said. "Last month's phenomenal increase in CP giving is explicable only in terms of God's grace and the obedience of God's people. State conventions have helped greatly by effectively informing the churches of the enormous need for cooperative world missions."

For the fiscal year's Program Allocation Budget, the required monthly total of \$12,087,791 was surpassed by \$1,846,264 or a 15.27 percent increase. For the first two months of the budget period, the budget goal of \$24,175,583 was surpassed by \$2,073,590, for an 8.58 percent increase.

Designated gifts were down \$71,996 for the month compared to a year ago: \$2,434,287 in November 1996 to \$2,506,283 in November 1995, a 2.87 percent decrease. For the two months of the fiscal year, designated gifts totaled \$4,150,180 compared to the same period a year ago of \$4,832,858, down 14.13 percent or \$682,677.

The SBC Cooperative Program total includes receipts from individuals, churches, state conventions and fellowships for distribution according to the 1996-97 Cooperative Program Allocation Budget.

The Cooperative Program is Southern Baptists' method of supporting missions and ministry efforts of state and regional conventions and the Southern Baptist Convention. Designated contributions include the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions, the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for home missions, world hunger and other special gifts.

State and regional conventions retain a percentage of Cooperative Program contributions they receive from the churches to support work in their areas and send the remaining funds to the SBC Executive Committee for national and international ministries. The percentage of distribution is at the discretion of each state or regional convention.

**Churches key to nurturing,
supporting missionaries****By Teresa Dickens**

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Southern Baptists nurture the missionary calling and sustain those who respond, as their churches teach about, pray for and give to missions, according to denominational missions leaders.

The chief executives of the Foreign Mission Board, Brotherhood Commission and Woman's Missionary Union -- the entities which coordinate the promotion of the SBC's Season of Foreign Missions -- highlighted the importance of these activities in reflecting on the 1996 theme, "Missionaries: From Churches with Love."

The 1996 Season of Foreign Missions includes the Foreign Mission Study, Nov. 17-20; Week of Prayer for Foreign Missions, Dec. 1-8; Foreign Missions Day in Sunday school, Dec. 8; and the collection of the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, which has a goal of \$100 million.

The missions leaders said the theme not only emphasizes the love churches express for missionaries, but also the motivation behind sending more than 4,200 missionaries around the world.

FMB President Jerry Rankin said the churches' giving "reflects their love for the missionaries and what the missionaries are doing on behalf of the churches."

The theme also "plugs into the idea of our love for a lost world and our desire to bring them to Jesus Christ through the witness and work of our missionaries," Rankin said.

And, he noted, it "helps to emphasize that the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering does provide support for the missionaries. The perception has been that the offering is for capital needs, for churches and for properties. But when Lottie Moon challenged the churches and WMU to collect the offering, it was to support more missionaries to come to China. It has always provided a large portion of our overseas budget which is basically missionary support."

Brotherhood Commission President James Williams said the theme reminded him of Southern Baptists' responsibility and commitment to send out the best they have to offer.

"Southern Baptist missionaries represent the finest from among our congregations," he declared. "The New Testament mandate for us to be missionaries demands that we send nothing less than our best, and the commitment to send the best demonstrates our love for lost people around the globe."

Williams recalled the story of an Indian woman who had two sons, one healthy and one crippled. When the woman told a Christian missionary she planned to sacrifice one of her sons to her god, the missionary pleaded with her not to sacrifice the child. Later, the missionary saw the woman with the crippled child and assumed that she had convinced her not to sacrifice the child. In quizzing the mother, the missionary learned that the woman had sacrificed her healthy son. When asked why, the mother replied, "Why should I give anything less than my best to my god?"

"Likewise," Williams concluded, "Southern Baptists must offer their best with love."

"Missionaries represent the heartbeat of Southern Baptists," he said. "We have a passion for missions fueled by our interpretation of Scripture's missions mandate and our commitment to evangelism. Missionaries are an extension of the local church, sent by the local church and supported by the local church through the Cooperative Program and the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering."

WMU Executive Director Dellanna O'Brien emphasized prayer in her observations about the theme.

"It brings to mind the picture of churches being the rope holders -- of reaching out and spanning the gap of separation of missionaries from their homeland through love and support during the time they are overseas. Love implies a personal relationship and we certainly foster that when we pray for them and learn about their work."

"Love is not always the term we use," O'Brien acknowledged, "yet it certainly is the kind of expression that God would have us to experience because it was his love that sent them out from among us all across the world in the first place."

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Dickens is communications specialist for WMU, SBC.

**'Putting a face' on missions
increases offering by 35%**

By Mark Kelly

ASHEVILLE, N.C. (BP)--A burst of new enthusiasm for foreign missions propelled an Asheville, N.C., congregation far past its goal for the 1995 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering.

Merrimon Avenue Baptist Church beat its \$35,000 target by more than \$12,000 -- by "putting a face" on foreign missions.

The face was that of Suzanne Barden, a 38-year-old agricultural missionary in Ethiopia. Barden, a Virginia native, was an active member of the Asheville church when the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board appointed her to Ethiopia in 1993.

"A lot of people in churches today weren't brought up in children's missions groups and Woman's Missionary Union, so they don't always understand how Southern Baptist missions works," said Frances Underwood, longtime WMU director at Merrimon Avenue. "But when you talk to them about someone they know and put a specific need in front of them, they get excited."

The church was firmly established in a missions giving tradition, said deacon chairman Jesse Messer. "Billy Cline, our pastor for 30 years, always made missions a priority," Messer said. "We knew that when we gave to missions, we had a part in what the Lord was doing all around the world."

But the 2,700-member church had not really challenged itself in missions giving for several years, said Mike Smith, a church member and local businessman who has served as a Foreign Mission Board trustee since 1989.

After meeting dollar goals in the low 30-thousands for several years and "only gaining a little bit each time, I felt we were just giving a token amount," Smith said. "Overseas missions trips and serving as a Foreign Mission Board trustee really opened my eyes to the needs in the world. I knew we could do more as a church."

When last year's Week of Prayer for foreign missions began, Smith approached pastor Bill Bigham, who had come to the church just a few months earlier, and asked for a few minutes on Sunday to challenge the congregation toward a higher goal.

"I had called the Foreign Mission Board and found out it took \$46,170 to support Suzanne Barden's ministry in Ethiopia for a year," Smith said. "I just got up and told the congregation that she's our missionary, that we sent her out and we ought to take care of her needs."

Knowing a specific missionary, however, is not a prerequisite for putting a face on missions. Churches can receive a missionary family's newsletter and pray for their needs; invite missionaries to speak while on furlough; or even name a missions group or Sunday school class after a missionary, committing to pray for his or her ministry. A range of ideas are offered in "Adopting a Missionary," available from FMB customer services at 1-800-866-3621.

"We had a Christmas tree at the front of the sanctuary and we were lighting a strand of lights for each \$100 we received, but things had been kind of sluggish at first," recalled Merrimon Avenue's pastor Bigham. "Within a week after Mike made his challenge, though, we had exceeded the goal by almost \$10,000." When the offering was totaled, the church had given \$47,359, beating their original goal by 35 percent.

Although the offering promotion wasn't elaborate, Bigham believes the congregation's love for "their missionary" opened a new era of missions involvement.

"Bringing Suzanne into the picture captured the people's imagination," he said. "It created a spark in the congregation."

The genius of Southern Baptist cooperative missions is that churches can accomplish more together than separately, said Foreign Mission Board President Jerry Rankin. But developing personal relationships with a particular missionary benefits everyone, he said.

"This is one of the most important times in the history of missions. God is opening doors all over the world," Rankin said. "We praise God that he is calling new missionaries to walk through those doors and that their churches are standing right beside them."

When churches "adopt" a missionary and make a commitment to keep in close touch, missionaries are assured they have brothers and sisters at home who are behind them all the way, and churches are stimulated to greater heights of missionary service, he said.

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Rallying around Suzanne Barden not only energized Merrimon Avenue church to give more to the foreign missions offering, it also galvanized the congregation in other ways. Positions on a volunteer team headed for Ethiopia filled quickly. Church members began praying for the needs Barden shared in her monthly newsletter. Individuals committed to mail regular letters of encouragement to Ethiopia. People gave to buy supplies for Barden's ministry, including two mules to help her reach mountain villages too remote for her four-wheel-drive truck.

"I like the idea of being a partner with a missionary on the field," said Frances Underwood. "There are things every church can do to help. Even a small church can help dig a well or sponsor a nutrition class for new mothers.

"If we name things people can do, it helps them get excited," she added. "When we put a face with the dollar bill, that makes it personal."

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Ledbetter nudges seminarians to consider journalistic call

By James A. Smith Sr

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--The call to Christian journalism is as valid as a preacher's call, and more seminarians should be willing to consider such nontraditional ministry roles, a veteran Southern Baptist journalist asserted at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Tammi Ledbetter, freelance writer and former managing editor of the Indiana Baptist, also said Christian journalism must be distinctively Christian in its manner of covering news, rather than accepting secular standards which often use reporting to advance the journalist's own ideological agenda.

"Don't limit God by deciding you can only serve as a pastor," Ledbetter said during a Nov. 26 chapel service at the Kansas City, Mo., seminary. "Open yourself up to the possibility that he may call you to some truly odd jobs."

Ledbetter told the seminarians that while the pastorate is an important place of service, "there are many, many more diverse places of service and God has given some of you the gifts to fill those roles."

Ledbetter was careful to note as she began her chapel speech that she was not going to preach, making light of recent local media coverage which once again has focused attention on the debate about women pastors and the opposition of Midwestern's president, Mark Coppenger, to such roles for women.

Having participated in mission trips during her days as a youth, Ledbetter said, "God used those experiences to speak to me about full-time Christian service."

Without strong Bible teaching from the pastor of her youth, Paige Patterson, Ledbetter noted she may have misinterpreted her ministry call as one to preach. Patterson is now president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.

"Had I been raised in a different church under different teaching, I wonder if I would have succumbed to thinking the only way God could use me to share the gospel would be for me to preach," Ledbetter said. "And from there I could have rationalized that what was a very definite call to share his truth must naturally lead to a preaching ministry. And without exposure to biblical truth about God's order for the family being represented in the local church, I might have been led down a different path."

While she had served in journalistic roles for a number of Christian organizations, Ledbetter said the most surprising call came when she and her husband, Gary, were offered the opportunity to jointly edit the state Baptist paper.

As managing editor for the Indiana Baptist, Tammi was able to use her journalistic skills in producing the biweekly publication. Meanwhile, Gary, whose previous ministry was in student work, discovered unknown skills in his editorial writing.

Gary handled student ministries for the State Convention of Baptist in Indiana, as well as serving as executive editor of the state convention's newspaper. He is currently vice president for student affairs at Midwestern.

"I believe God used his years of service as an editorial writer to challenge our thinking as Southern Baptists and stir many to action," Ledbetter said.

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Noting journalism has acquired a "bad name" in recent decades, Ledbetter asserted Christian reporting, including Southern Baptist state papers, often suffers because of its pursuit of "advocacy journalism," like its secular counterparts.

"It is not my job to interpret the news or make the news, but rather, to relate the news. There are other places within a publication for analysis and editorializing," Ledbetter said. "Some of what passes for news coverage today is application of the writer's presuppositions, and consequently the report given bears little resemblance to actual events and statements."

Poor journalism also results from "sheer laziness," Ledbetter said.

Illustrating the point, Ledbetter told of a trip, along with other Southern Baptist state paper editors, to the Women's Missionary Union headquarters in Birmingham, Ala., to become familiar with the organization and meet its new executive director.

As she and several other new editors were carefully taking notes during the visit, Ledbetter said two tenured editors were "amused" at such activity, recalling that one said to the other, "Remember when we used to work that hard?"

"They had a good laugh, but their publications suffered from the way they approached their ministry and responsibility to Baptist readers," Ledbetter said. "They began the trip having already decided what their readers needed to know."

Instead of such laziness, Ledbetter said reporting "takes intense concentration to accurately record a speaker's words. Whether by using a pencil, a laptop (computer) or a tape recorder, the journalist must not depend upon his memory, or the process of writing is reduced to hearsay."

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ANALYSIS

**Jesus celebrated Hanukkah;
holiday calls for a decision**

By John Worley

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DALLAS (BP)--Every year a holiday appears on the calendar in December by the name of Hanukkah. This year it is Dec. 6. For Jewish people, it begins an eight-day celebration. For the non-Jewish world, it passes almost without notice. However, for all those who love God and his Word, this is a time that should not go unnoticed. Hanukkah is the Hebrew word for "dedication," and the history behind the holiday recounts the dedication of the Jewish people to worshipping the one true God.

The origin of Hanukkah occurred during a time when there was a great effort to make the Greek culture the culture of all the world. As Alexander the Great conquered the world in amazing fashion, he also spread the Greek culture. The spreading of the Greek culture, or "Hellenism," meant the spreading of both the Greek language as well as the worship of Greek gods.

After Alexander's death his empire was divided among his four generals and their descendants. Israel eventually came under the control of the Seleucids and their ruler Antiochus IV.

Antiochus IV enforced the Greek culture on all his subjects, including Israel, in an effort to strengthen his kingdom. The Jewish people were divided over the issue of Hellenism. The Hellenistic Jews believed that they should accept Hellenism. However, the Hassidim ("pious ones") believed that this culture was incompatible with a life of obedience to God's Word. Antiochus naturally favored the Jewish Hellenists and gave them the position of leadership. Eventually, the temple was desecrated and turned into a pagan shrine, and the worship of Israel's God and the obeying of his commands was forbidden.

With this, the Hassidim could no longer stand to submit to the rule of the pagan Seleucids. In Modiin, a town near Jerusalem, a priest by the name of Mattathias slew a Jew who was sacrificing to a pagan god and so began what came to be known as "the Maccabean Revolt." Against all odds Judah Maccabee, Mattathias' son, led the Hassidim in overthrowing the Seleucid forces and recapturing the temple from them.

On the 25th of the Jewish month of Kislev, 165 B.C.E., the Jews rededicated their temple to the service of the one true God, the God of Israel. They dedicated the temple with a great celebration lasting eight days and declared that all succeeding generations should do likewise to commemorate the great event.

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To this day, Hanukkah is celebrated by the Jewish people worldwide. The holiday often recalls a tradition about the candelabra of the temple. The candelabra (menorah) was lit with only enough oil to burn for one day and yet it burned for eight days until more oil could be obtained. Another tradition of Hanukkah is the lighting of the Hanukkah menorah ("Hanukkiah"). This candelabra holds nine candles; one is the "shammas" or "servant" which is used to light the other eight. For eight nights the candles are lit, beginning with one the first night, two the second and so on. As the candles are lit, Hebrew blessings are recited which recall the hand of God in delivering his people. Other common traditions are the giving of gifts to children and spinning the dreidel, a game played with a top.

In the New Covenant (New Testament) book of John, we learn that Jesus celebrated the Jewish feasts, and in John 10:22-39 we find him celebrating Hanukkah. It should be of special interest to know that in Israel he was and still is known by his Hebrew name, Yeshua, which means "salvation" (Matt. 1:21).

In John 10, we find that just as there was division during the days of the Maccabees over Hellenism, there were different Jewish views about Yeshua. On this occasion there were some Jewish people asking Yeshua if he were the Messiah.

His response was: "My sheep hear my voice and I know them, and they follow me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish and no one shall snatch them out of my hand."

In the days of the Maccabees, Jewish people had to make a stand for the truth. In the same way Yeshua was saying that some had already made a stand for the truth of his identity as Messiah. Their faith in him resulted in receiving eternal life. The Hebrew prophet Isaiah had revealed that the Messiah would die to make atonement for sin and be raised from the dead. By his death, Yeshua fulfilled this prophecy and made the final atonement for sin. His resurrection guarantees eternal life for all who receive him as Messiah.

Today the Jewish people are still divided over the identity of Yeshua. Some have dedicated themselves to discovering the truth about Yeshua and have found that he truly is the Messiah. Through faith in Yeshua, these Messianic Jews have received atonement for their sins and the promise of eternal life. Yeshua still offers eternal life to all who will trust him as their atonement. In the eight days of Hanukkah, may the Jewish and Gentile communities dedicate themselves to discovering the truth about Yeshua so that they might find eternal life in him.

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Worley is a Southern Baptist representative in Israel and former co-pastor of Adat Shalom Messianic Congregation in Dallas, which is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Messianic Fellowship, with offices at 392 Maplewood Ave., Columbus, OH 43213. This article is reprinted from the fellowship's newsletter, The Messianic Window.

ANALYSIS

'Holiday' movies add drama
to each month of the year

By Phil Boatwright

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THOUSAND OAKS, Calif. (BP)--The "holiday season" is upon us, but actually, "holidays" of various kinds come our way year-round.

So, beginning with December, here are a few video suggestions for family and friends, to coincide with the special events of each month:

The synopsis and content of each recommendation is included, so you can decide if a particular film is suitable for your viewing. It's very difficult to find a film with which someone cannot find a complaint, but these entries will not bombard your senses with negative images or language. Most will make you laugh, tug at your heart and, upon occasion, lift your spirit.

DECEMBER, Christmas: "The Gathering" (1977), Ed Asner, Maureen Stapleton. This Emmy-winning TV movie focuses on a dying man's efforts to reunite his family. It reinforces the importance of family and presents positive Christian images including a believable prayer, the Scripture reading of Jesus' birth and a child's christening. Pass on the sequel. For kids: "A Charlie Brown Christmas" still leads the pack. A perfect animated tale by Charles Schultz, with the Peanuts gang searching for the true meaning of Christmas. Great dialogue, charismatic voice performances and an award-winning jazzy score by Vince Guaraldi. And how often do you hear cartoon heroes quoting Luke's gospel, proclaiming the Christ child as the messiah?!

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Also: "Miracle on 34th Street" (1994), Richard Attenborough, Mara Wilson. PG (one expletive; Santa is provoked by the villain, but he later repents). The manager of a New York department store hires Kris Kringle to be the store Santa. Soon the old fellow has to convince the woman and her precocious daughter he is truly Father Christmas. A delight and a rarity, as it is one of the few worthwhile remakes. Full of laughter, poignancy and charm, it is noteworthy for containing both visual and verbal Christian metaphors and pointing out that Santa is a symbol. Although Edmund Gwenn and Natalie Wood have nothing to worry about, this newest Miracle is destined to become a classic. The scene where a little deaf girl sits on Santa's knee is worth the rental price.

JANUARY, New Year's Day: "Rocket Gibraltar" (1988), Burt Lancaster and a very young Macaulay Culkin highlight this heartwarming story of a family reunion to celebrate the patriarch's 77th birthday. This is probably the most controversial of these monthly suggestions, as it receives its PG rating for a few obscenities and one daughter who is very libidinous, although we do not see any sexual situations. But beware, it does discuss sex. I merely bring this to your attention because the subject matter was handled tastefully, and it is a very effective tale of children connecting with their grandfather.

FEBRUARY, Black Awareness Month: "The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman" (1974) presents black life in the South through the eyes of a 110-year-old former slave. One of the best TV movies ever, with an outstanding performance from Cicely Tyson. Caution: some brutality, but a heartwarming and insightful ending. A lesser-known work: "Harlem Diary," which aired on the Discovery channel last February. A poignant look at nine young African Americans dealing with life in New York's Harlem. Although it contains about 20 expletives, there is no misuse of God's name and you won't be assaulted by the images, but rather exhilarated with a compassion and newfound understanding at its message. This is a gritty, emotional probe into Harlem's community without hostility or obscenity. A strong manifesto of hope and possibility is threaded throughout the vignettes that should be inspiring to any race. My highest recommendation in this time when the media has done much to divide the races.

MARCH, St. Patrick's Day: "The Quiet Man" (1952), winner of two Oscars for director John Ford and for the film's cinematography. Starring John Wayne and Maureen O'Hara, this is a gentle, warm, romantic comedy full of blarney about an American who comes back to his roots in an Ireland we all wish existed. If you're not a Duke Wayne fan, see it anyway! It's this critic's all-time favorite film.

APRIL, Easter: "Jesus of Nazareth" (1977), arguably the best of the life of Christ films. Franco Zeffirelli's epic production features many memorable performances by an all-star cast, including Laurence Olivier, Ann Bancroft and Ernest Borgnine. Both acclaimed for its thorough biblical and historical research and as a very moving and spiritual experience. Its length (371 minutes) will take a couple of evenings to digest, but I highly recommend the effort.

MAY, Mother's Day: "I Remember Mama" (1948). If your gang is not hung up over old movies, you're in for a treat. A well-told heart-tugger about a Norwegian immigrant family living in San Francisco. Irene Dunne, Barbara Bel Geddes, Cedrick Hardwicke, Edgar Bergen head an impressive cast. Gets 4 stars.

JUNE, Father's Day: "Father of the Bride" (1993). I can't believe I'm saying this, but I actually prefer this remake to the 1950 version. Although Steve Martin is no Spencer Tracy, newcomer Kimberly Williams outshines Elizabeth Taylor in this warm comedy about a father whose little girl is leaving the nest. Rated PG for one mild expletive, and a homosexual character is represented, but there are no sexual situations.

JULY, Independence Day: "1776" (1972). Very stirring musical of the events leading up to the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Rated PG for a few mild expletives and some bawdiness in one song.

AUGUST, summer movie alternatives: Many summer blockbusters contain inappropriate material. Try this epic -- "It's A Mad, Mad, Mad World" (1963). The funniest movie ever made with Sid Caesar, Buddy Hackett, Mickey Rooney, Jonathan Winters, Milton Berle, Jerry Lewis, etc, etc. A madcap chase for buried treasure. Rated G.

SEPTEMBER, Labor Day: "The Next Voice You Hear" (1950). A hardworking stiff dealing with a nasty boss, a pregnant wife, mortgage payments, and oh yeah, God talks to him on the radio each night. Stars James Whitmore and Nancy Davis (Reagan). Sometimes corny, but powerful ending.

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OCTOBER, Halloween: Horror movies, like coaster rides, have always caught the interest of the American public. These spook flicks have degenerated the past few years into nothing more than slasher fests. If you examine terror films of the past such as Frankenstein and Dracula, you'll find that once upon a time this genre actually had a good vs. evil theme. For example, in the 1931 version of Dracula, the Prince of Darkness had to turn away in fear at the sign of the cross. In the more recent remake, he simply stares at the crucifix until it bursts into flames, changing the power and meaning of the character. If you want a suspense that won't upset your stomach, try renting the 1942 classic, "The Cat People," with Simone Simon and Kent Smith. Don't make a mistake and rent the '82 version. The original is a morality play, while the remake is merely a vulgar catastrophe. The original features a scene where our hero holds up a cross and tells the menacing foe to "leave us alone in the name of God." Slowly, the possessed leopard retreats. If you feel strange renting a horror flick for your friends, try instead the comedy/suspense, "Charade" (1963) with Cary Grant and Audrey Hepburn or "To Catch A Thief" (1955), also with Cary Grant and another beauty, Grace Kelly.

NOVEMBER, Thanksgiving: "Squanto, A Warrior's Tale" (1994), a true story of an Indian kidnapped by colonists and taken back to England. Although the first part is a bit heavy-handed with all the white guys looting and mistreating the locals, the film begins to liven up when our hero is befriended by a "tribe" of monks and learns about forgiveness and loving your enemies. When he returns to his homeland, these lessons are well tested. Rated PG for some mild violence, but the producers have kept it at a minimum, preferring to place attention on character rather than violent action. For the kids: "Squanto and The First Thanksgiving," with Graham Greene narrating this same story, set to music by Paul McCandless and paintings by Michael Donato. This is a true find for the entire family.

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Boatwright, a Baptist from Thousand Oaks, Calif., is editor of the monthly newsletter, The Movie Reporter, and author of "How to Choose a Good Video Every Time."

**Spike Lee movie gives opening
to Louis Farrakhan's followers**

By Karen L. Willoughby

**Baptist Press
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TIBURON, Calif. (BP)--A new Spike Lee movie dramatizes the hunger of black men for companionship, according to Jerry Buckner, a nationally recognized expert on the Nation of Islam led by Louis Farrakhan.

Farrakhan's Nation of Islam already has more than 30,000 adherents; another 200,000 belong to splinter groups; and many more people in Christian churches support the aims of the black militant organization that, Buckner said, masquerades as a religion.

"If God could change the apostle Paul, then he can change Louis Farrakhan," said Buckner, pastor of Tiburon Christian Fellowship, a predominantly African American congregation in Tiburon, Calif. "Only the Lord through the power of the Holy Spirit can bring people to Jesus Christ, and if you have patience and love, he can use that."

African American film maker Spike Lee's "Get on the Bus" was released nationally in mid-October to coincide with the first anniversary of Farrakhan's 1995 Million Man March on Washington.

In the movie, a bus leaves from First AME Church in Los Angeles with 16 men on their way to the Million Man March, blessed by a prayer to the "creator" voiced by the oldest rider.

"The movie doesn't really make a connection between Farrakhan and Christianity," Buckner said. "There seems to be some sense of subtlety behind it, kind of making it seem to point to God, but in actuality pointing perhaps to Allah -- since Allah was who was emphasized at the march."

Bottom line, "Get on the Bus" is about friendship, and it's at this point that Southern Baptists can reach out to members of the Nation of Islam, Buckner said.

"As you meet them on the street corners, see them in various places around, you can effectively witness and share the gospel with them," Buckner said. "One of the most effective ways I've found of witnessing both to the Nation of Islam and traditional Muslims is the theme of righteousness versus unrighteousness."

Buckner, who has addressed Southern Baptist groups in California, Louisiana and Virginia in recent months, often role-plays a conceivable conversation between a Christian and a Muslim:

Christian: Isn't God perfectly righteous?

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Muslim: Of course.

Christian: Is it true God tolerates no unrighteousness whatsoever?

Muslim: Yes.

Christian: Isn't God perfectly just?

Muslim: Yes.

Christian: Doesn't God's perfect justice mean he will punish all unrighteousness?

Muslim: Certainly.

"You see, they will dialogue with you on this topic," Buckner said.

Christian: Are you perfectly righteous?

Muslim: No. Nobody is.

"You see, you open the door to talk about the righteousness of Jesus Christ," Buckner said. "That's where I'm going with this."

Christian: Since God tolerates no unrighteousness, then God cannot tolerate you.

Muslim: Yes, but I'm striving for righteousness.

Christian: But that doesn't change the fact that God doesn't tolerate you because of your unrighteousness. It doesn't change the fact that, because God is just, you must be punished for your unrighteousness up to now.

"A Muslim has no real solution for this," Buckner said. "This is effective whether witnessing to a member of the Nation of Islam or a traditional Muslim. The best answer they can offer when you dialogue on this level is that God forgives by simply saying, 'I forgive,' but Muslims still lack assurance of forgiveness. So they take the offensive."

Muslim: If I can't approach God, then you can't either.

Christian: Oh yes I can, and do.

Muslim: How?

Christian: I come to God on the basis of the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ.

"I then share that God's forgiveness comes through justification in Christ alone and that I can have assurance of it -- not just insurance," Buckner said. "A Muslim cannot deny the perfect righteousness of Christ because the Qur'an (Koran) states it clearly in Sura 3:40-41 and 19:9."

Muslims believe Jesus was a righteous prophet who could not lie, Buckner said. He suggested bringing up the fact that Jesus said in John 14:6 that he is the way, the truth and the life, and that no person comes to God except through him.

"If Jesus could not lie, which is what they believe, then when he said the only way to get to the Father was through him, then that must be true," Buckner said. "Then ask them why, then, they would want to go to Allah. Generally when this is pointed out to them it really throws them for a loop. It really has convicting power."

Buckner also role-plays a relationship approach of witnessing to a member of the Nation of Islam or to a traditional Muslim.

Christian: How would you describe your relationship to God?

Muslim: I am a servant of God, responsible to submit to his will.

"They're into submitting," Buckner said. "They're more into submitting to the will of Allah to the point of good works, rather than submitting to God of the Bible and his finished work as sons of God."

Christian: Would you also describe yourself as a slave of God?

Muslim: Yes. This is what the Qur'an teaches.

Christian: This is interesting, because I am a son of God. I am not a slave.

"If a Muslim knows his doctrine well, this statement might be repulsive to him," Buckner said. "To prevent this response, I explain that my sonship is based on adoption. Then I introduce Hebrews 3:1-6, which compares Moses the servant of God to Christ the Son of God, and I explain that Christian sonship is greater than Islamic servanthood because the son -- not the servant -- is the one honored in the father's house."

Buckner gave several practical suggestions for those who sense God's calling to witness to Muslims:

-- Use much patience.

-- Be yourself; don't try to be someone else.

-- Develop a genuine friendship first.

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-- Try to understand Islamic doctrine from the perspective of Islam, recognizing the corruption of the Christian teachings they have heard.

-- Be a good listener. "Don't evaluate a Muslim only on the basis of his doctrine," Buckner said. "Examine the situation that led him to Islam and the goals he is trying to achieve through it."

Often Muslims will use biblical language. Affirm them in this; feed into it and talk more about it, Buckner said.

"When dealing with a Muslim's doctrine, do not use the occasion to show off how much you know about your faith," Buckner said. "Instead, show him how much you know about Jesus.

"A lot of times we talk too much," Buckner continued. "If we would just let people talk and process how they are feeling, we could go a long way with them.

"Draw out a person in the genuine spirit of wanting to be informed. Give him a chance to express himself and make sure he knows you understand what he is saying. And don't get all uptight; just keep your poise and confidence."

-- Communicate the validity of historic faith and what that means to you.

-- Avoid displaying a King James Bible. According to the wayward claims of some Islamic teachers, King James of England himself translated this version and corrupted it, Buckner explained.

-- Do not use a Bible that has been underlined or marked in any way. To Muslims this indicates disrespect for the Word of God.

-- Avoid all biblical pictures; this speaks to Islamics of idolatry.

-- Don't use the word "trinity" because to Muslims this connotes the worship of three gods. Instead, talk about the oneness of God.

-- "Show patience and love," Buckner said. "Make sure when you are dealing with them on the issue of righteousness that you demonstrate with the only way they are going to become righteous -- through the Lord Jesus Christ.

"In their minds, they have conditioned themselves to think they can be righteous by good works, like Jehovah's Witnesses," Buckner said. "Scripture tells us our righteousness is like filthy rags. Hammer that fact in. Help a member of the Nation of Islam to see that they are unrighteous as well.

"They have been brainwashed to think that whites are responsible for crime," Buckner said. "Ask them, who's responsible for black-on-black crime? Who's responsible for going into Rosa Parks' home and robbing her, beating her almost to death? Who's responsible for killing Michael Jordan's father? Help them to see there is trouble in the world and not just whites are responsible. All have sinned.

"Get them to the point of personal sin, and help them to see that only our righteous God through Christ can make them righteous," Buckner said. "And let them know that Jesus sets you free, man, from being out there all those hours with the Final Call (Nation of Islam-produced newspaper), and with those bean pies, trying to sell them and all the money going to Farrakhan.

"Let them know the only hope is Jesus Christ," Buckner said. "There is no hope for them beyond the grave without Jesus. Hammer that fact in. We have hope beyond the grave. Just mix the gospel with love and patience and God will bless you for it."

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Pastor initiates witness to NYC's Pakistani Muslims

**Baptist Press
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NEW YORK (BP)--Most Christians know that reaching Muslims for Christ can be risky business.

For example, it is forbidden to witness for Christ in Pakistan, an official Islamic state. So what is a Christian to do? Just ask Aslam Masih, a native of Pakistan and pastor of the Indo-Pak Baptist Church of Passaic, N.J.

"Sharing Christ may be illegal in my country, but it is not against the law here. I believe that God is bringing many Muslims to the United States so we can reach them here."

With that commitment, Masih began to pray. "When God put it in my heart to reach Pakistani Muslims with the Word of God, I spoke with several Muslim outreach organizations. I felt that maybe God wants us to take the initiative," Masih recounted.

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And he did. Masih organized an outreach to Pakistanis on the Pakistani Independence Day celebration Aug. 18 in Brooklyn, N.Y. Working with First Spanish Baptist Church of Manhattan and First Spanish Baptist Church of Passaic, Masih hosted a Southern Baptist Home Mission Board interfaith witness training seminar on Islam, led by HMB staff member Bill Gordon.

Then Masih ordered 1,000 copies of a booklet, "Why I Became a Christian," written by a former Pakistani Muslim. Masih placed the booklet inside special envelopes with the phrase "Happy Independence Day!" printed in both English and Urdu on the front. He stamped the address of the church on the booklet and opened a post office box for anyone who wanted more information.

Finally, Masih gathered 18 people from Southern Baptist churches, along with several people from the Times Square Church and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship of Manhattan, and they set out for the Pakistani celebration.

After parking their vehicles, the 18 people prayed on the sidewalk and each set out with a bag of booklets to give away. Walking in teams of two among the thousands of people playing volleyball, listening to traditional Pakistani music, eating food and enjoying the company of friends and family, they wished them a happy independence day and offered them a booklet. Up and down the streets they went, and within one hour, 950 copies of the booklet were distributed.

Back at the van, the team marveled at the interest many showed in the booklet and how God guided them. Eric, a member of the Indo-Pak church, reported, "I could tell by how they were dressed who were committed Muslims. I gave the booklet to them first!"

Nora, from the Manhattan First Spanish church, said, "I gave out all of my booklets so soon I realized I needed more! Sometimes we judge Muslims to be closed to the gospel, but only one person refused the booklet. I saw people reading them in the middle of the street."

The experience of one team member reminded the others of the cost of sharing Christ. Ivan, a member of Maranatha Baptist Church, recounted, "While we were handing out the booklets, a Pakistani security guard stopped us and tried to take away our booklets. He threatened us if we continued. But I said, 'It's a free country!'"

"Not here it isn't," the guard replied.

Ivan did not want an altercation, so he invited the guard to talk with a New York City police captain, one of many at the celebration. Ivan asked the captain if handing out booklets is allowed and the captain reminded the security guard, "Yes, this is New York!"

George Russ, associate evangelism director of the Baptist Convention of New York who helped put together the training seminar and secure the funding for the booklets, said of Masih's initiative, "This is a clear example of what can happen when someone hears from God and then casts a vision before his people!"

"All across the city, there are celebrations like this one where we can be present to share our faith in Christ," Russ said. "This has been a team effort of churches, association, convention and Home Mission Board."

Russ exhorted team members and other interested Baptists: "Now let us covenant to pray as these people read the booklet and respond."

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