



**SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL  
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES**  
Historical Commission, SBC  
Nashville, Tennessee  
**- - BAPTIST PRESS**  
News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

OCT 04 1996

**NATIONAL OFFICE**  
SBC Executive Committee  
901 Commerce #750  
Nashville, Tennessee 37203  
(615) 244-2355  
Herb Hollinger, Vice President  
Art Toalston, Editor  
Fax (615) 782-8736  
CompuServe ID # 70420,17

October 3, 1996

96-174

ARKANSAS--Fasting can be life-changing, say Baptists who have done it.  
WASHINGTON--High court to tackle assisted-suicide issue.  
TENNESSEE--Skills inventory under way at SBC agencies merging into NAMB.  
VIRGINIA--Volunteers in China recount lifestyle evangelism success.  
FLORIDA--Disney execs defend company's decisions.  
DALLAS--Annuity Board: No '97 hike in medical coverage rates.  
OREGON--SBCNet computer network helps 2 new believers grow in Christ.  
CALIFORNIA--Controversy over homeless aid yields help for congregation.  
NEW ORLEANS--Missionary great-grandmother reasons, 'Why sit at home?' photo.  
NORTH CAROLINA--Volunteers travel 700 miles to spruce up seminary housing.

**Fasting can be life-changing,  
say Baptists who have done it**

**By Tammi Ledbetter**

**Baptist Press  
10/3/96**

SPRINGDALE, Ark. (BP)--For most Southern Baptists, it will be a new experience: setting aside special days for prayer and fasting.

Southern Baptists were challenged at their annual meeting last June to a week-long spiritual awakening emphasis, Oct. 27 through Nov. 3, which has since been embraced by many other Christian groups across America.

Arkansas pastor Ronnie Floyd, delivering this year's convention sermon on "The Midnight Crisis Before the Coming Millennium," included a call for a day of fasting among Southern Baptists.

Floyd, chairman of the SBC Executive Committee and president of the Pastors' Conference, related how God spoke to him in the midst of his second 40-day fast to appeal to Southern Baptist preachers to use the morning of Sunday, Oct. 27 to call members to fast and pray for spiritual revival the following Wednesday, Oct. 30. During the evening of the same Sunday, churches are asked to hold assemblies to repent of sin and seek God's mercy. And on the following Sunday, Nov. 3, preachers are asked to focus both services on spiritual revival "in our personal lives, our churches and in our nation," as Floyd urged, "calling for God's people to do whatever it takes to see revival in our day."

Spiritual formation professor Don Whitney calls fasting "the most feared and misunderstood of all the spiritual disciplines." In his book, "Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life," the Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary professor says many Christians have a fear of what fasting might cause them to become. "We fear it will make us hollow-eyed fanatics or odd for God."

The voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes receives more attention in the Bible than even the subject of baptism. Still, many Southern Baptists who have successfully fasted say they heard little about it from the pulpit.

Layman Duane Wilson of Rogers, Ark., has a varied denominational background, having attended Church of Christ, Lutheran, Presbyterian and several Baptist churches. He doesn't remember hearing about fasting until he became a member of First Baptist Church, Springdale, Ark., where Floyd is pastor.

"When you read the Bible, fasting is in there so many times. I grew up knowing right from wrong, but I didn't know the Bible in depth as well as I should."

After hearing Floyd preach on fasting, Wilson read a book by Campus Crusade for Christ founder Bill Bright called "The Coming Revival in America." He followed the first of seven steps Bright believes will determine whether a fast will be successful -- setting a specific objective. Wilson was able to list 17 areas of concern about which he intended to pray while fasting.

--more--

But for the next four to five months, Wilson did what most Christians considering a fast do -- put it off indefinitely. Bright's second admonition for the Christian is to "prepare yourself spiritually." Through that time of anticipating a fast, Wilson dealt with God's desire for total surrender.

"I went in and totally surrendered everything," said Wilson, a vice president for general merchandise with the corporate headquarters of Wal-Mart. He called his family together to explain his intention to fast for an extended period of time and said he was ready to do whatever God asked. "I told them we may have to sell our house, move somewhere else, whatever God asks, and they agreed to that."

Having totally surrendered his future to God, Wilson found himself open to God's instruction through prayer and fasting. Floyd writes in his booklet, "God's Gateway to Supernatural Power," that individuals who are fasting should identify, confess and repent of all revealed sin before and during the fast.

Bright also urges Christians to "ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the kind of fast God wants you to undertake." Biblical evidence of fasting reveals various durations of as little as one meal to as long as 40 days.

The extent to which a Christian fasts may range from an absolute water-only discipline to supplementing the period of abstinence with fruit and/or vegetable juices. While the Bible also records instances of supernatural fasts in the lives of Moses, Jesus and, most likely, Elijah, such miraculous provision is not viewed by Bright or Whitney as normative.

Some fasts are intentionally conducted privately, though Scripture also describes regular and occasional fasts on specific and special occasions, respectively.

Christians often find benefit in fasting concurrently with other believers. Baptist Student Union director Carol Lee Mohler of Muncie, Ind., found it easier to develop the discipline of fasting by being accountable to another Christian. While serving as a summer missionary, she and a friend fasted together on Wednesdays.

"I can see that was a crutch for both of us. We had each other, and as we prayed together it really went well," she recounted. "When I went back to school it was harder because I didn't have anyone to hold me accountable."

Oddly enough, it was the example of a converted New Age believer who got her back on track, Mohler said. "As I was discipling her as a new Christian, she was teaching me about fasting" by offering practical aspects which the young woman had learned in her non-Christian days. "I realized if I could have a 19-year old teach me a spiritual discipline, I could get it into my system. I didn't have to have anybody with me. I could do it by myself as well."

Like many others who share testimonies of fasting, Mohler said God has to do the prompting. "When God prompted me, it was successful. The need for food was less and the desire for God was greater," she said, adding, "I've seen so many answers to prayer."

Whether it's a brief fast or a 40-day commitment, Georgia pastor Kie Bowman believes in letting God do the convicting. His experience with fasting dates back to the first day of his walk with Christ. Over the years he has conducted short fasts of a few days each, but he did not feel led to undertake a 40-day fast until he heard Floyd describe it over a year ago.

Bowman heard Floyd say, "your hunger for God will determine the length of your fast." At that moment Bowman said he heard God speak to him about a lengthy fast.

"This changed my life," he said enthusiastically of a 40-day fast he completed in July. "I walked with God like never before. He gave me a vision for the rest of my life," explained the pastor of First Baptist Church, Canton, adding, "I will never go back to being like I was before."

Bowman said he is convinced, "If God calls you, you need to do it," referring to a 40-day fast. Both the example of Jesus in fasting and the call for Christians to deny self provide instruction for Christians to fast on at least a short-term basis, he said.

The thought of going hungry is enough to prevent most Christians from fasting, Bowman acknowledged. "We don't have the need to pray, 'Lord, give us this day our daily bread.' We know we're going to eat."

He further noted a lack of emphasis on fasting has caused most to see it as a "fringe" idea. "It wasn't a Sunday morning-type sermon in my church or around the country. There's a lack of teaching and preaching on the subject."

Homemaker Heidi Morgan of La Tour, Mo., said she believes "it's just assumed we will (fast)" in Scripture.

"We gloss over those assumptions. All of us need to look more at God's call in Scripture instead of relying upon what a church is doing in our era as defined by our culture."

As a mother of four children, 1 to 12 years of age, fasting must be an intentional discipline, she said. She joins with fellow church members of the congregation her husband, Pat, pastors to fast every Friday of the month before a week of special services at the church for revival.

"I prepare a double amount of food the night before" so that her children eat the day she and her husband fast. "The kids get their own cereals and sandwiches during the day," she said. "I don't want to even smell food when I'm fasting."

During the evening, the members of Rose Hill Baptist Church in La Tour come together for cottage prayer meetings after which they jointly break their fast. "Having that prayer meeting at the end of a day of fasting has been helpful," Morgan said.

She said she has noticed increased spiritual warfare in proportion to an increased commitment level. "But I'm reminded that Jesus went a lot longer without food."

Like many others, Morgan once viewed fasting as "kind of weird." Now her focus is not so much on going without food as "denying my flesh to concentrate more on the spiritual."

In his recommendations for times of fasting, Bright also encourages Christians to limit the level of activity planned during a fast. When Ball State University senior Mark Ferguson anticipates a fast, he said he considers the load he's carrying at school.

"It's hard," he admitted. "But I sought the Lord for his strength." When he contemplated the responsibility he would have for leading a youth group in ministry at the Summer Olympics, Ferguson planned out a 40-day fast that would end just prior to their trip. He credited the spiritual encouragement he experienced during that fast with equipping him for challenging encounters in inner-city Atlanta.

Bowman agreed a Christian should plan a fast carefully before beginning. "Don't just do it on the spur of the moment. You need to spiritually and mentally prepare by asking what are the practical implications of going without food. Most people have trouble going from breakfast to lunch."

By examining his own calendar, Bowman found the best span of time that would inconvenience his family the least. "Is Christmas coming up? Do I want to be fasting during Thanksgiving, kids' birthdays, things like that?"

Bowman continued, "It's one thing to inconvenience the flesh. It's another to inconvenience the family." Once he's made it over the hurdle of the first few days of hunger, Bowman drinks juice while his family eats regular meals.

He urged Christians planning a fast to "take it one day at a time," knowing the second or third day is the most difficult. "If you tell yourself, 'I've got only 37 more days to go,' you'll cave. Don't worry about tomorrow. Just decide this day belongs to the Lord."

Care also should be given to coming off a long fast slowly. Bright's book offers detailed instruction on nutrition during and after a spiritual fast as well as a caution to consider any medications currently being taken. Bright, Floyd and Whitney all advise consulting a physician to be sure there are no serious health risks to the individual.

"Setting aside ample time to be alone with the Lord" is a final encouragement from Bright and others. "You need to spend more time than usual in prayer and Bible study," Bowman said. "Otherwise, your fast is nothing more than a diet -- a severe diet."

In a recent letter to Southern Baptist ministers, Baptist Sunday School Board President James T. Draper Dr. urged them to lead their congregations in meeting the challenge Floyd issued for specific activities and messages on the last Sunday of October and the first Sunday of November this year. Noting the challenge of a new millennium is great, Draper concluded, "Our resources are so inadequate, but our God is all-powerful."

The mass mailing by the BSSB included an audio tape of the convention sermon by Floyd and a booklet he authored, "God's Gateway to Supernatural Power." The resource, which is available from the BSSB, includes Floyd's testimony along with practical guidelines for prayer and fasting. Call 1-800-233-1123 to order resources by Floyd, Bright and others.

"Unless and until we completely surrender to God's plan, we are destined to drift in a sea of disappointment, disillusionment and depression," Floyd writes. "We are in constant need of supernatural power. Our only hope is in the life and love of our Lord Jesus Christ. God's gateway to supernatural power is prayer and fasting."

**High court to tackle  
assisted-suicide issue****By Tom Strode**

WASHINGTON (BP)--The U.S. Supreme Court has joined the national dispute over physician-assisted suicide, granting reviews to two cases which could have as great an impact on end-of-life issues as two 1973 cases did on early life issues.

The court will hear arguments over appeals court decisions which struck down Washington and New York state laws prohibiting doctors from prescribing drugs for patients to use in committing suicide, it was announced Oct. 1. Oral arguments in the cases will be heard in tandem but not before January.

In March, the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in California overturned the Washington law, saying there is a "constitutionally protected liberty interest in determining the time and manner of one's own death." In April, a three-judge panel of the Second Circuit Court struck down New York's law prohibiting physician assistance in a suicide, ruling there is no difference between the prescribing of drugs for a suicide than the withdrawal of artificial life support.

While the Second Circuit based its opinion on equal protection rights in the Constitution and rejected the Ninth Circuit's ruling there is a due-process right to commit suicide, the "consequences of the two decisions are in practice the same," said pro-life lawyer James Bopp. "Assisted suicide would be protected as a constitutional right for anyone with a serious medical condition," said Bopp, president of the National Legal Center for the Medically Dependent and Disabled, in a prepared statement.

Washington and New York are joined by 33 other states which have laws banning assisted suicide. The Michigan Supreme Court has ruled against assisted suicide.

"I think we need to be careful about jumping to conclusions about what the Supreme Court might do in this case," said Will Dodson, the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission's legal counsel and director of government relations. "It is difficult for me to believe that the Supreme Court of the United States, even as liberal as it has become, would find a right to die in the Constitution. I hope that the reason that they have accepted these two cases is because these lower-court rulings offend even their sense of how broadly the Constitution can be misinterpreted.

"If the Supreme Court were to uphold these lower-court rulings, I think that it would precipitate a reaction against the court, which, frankly, I think is needed whichever way these cases go."

The situation is not unlike the abortion debate in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Though there was a variety of state statutes on abortion, the Supreme Court issued decisions in 1973 which made abortion for many reasons throughout pregnancy the national law, invalidating many state anti-abortion acts.

In the Roe v. Wade opinion, the court ruled there is a constitutional right to abortion which may be restricted only in the last six months of pregnancy except when the mother's life or health is threatened. In a companion case, Doe v. Bolton, the justices defined health as "all factors -- physical, emotional, psychological, familial and the woman's age -- relevant to the well-being of the patient." The effect of such a liberal interpretation of health was to legalize abortion for any reason until the end of the ninth month.

The assisted-suicide crusade of Jack Kevorkian and the experience of The Netherlands also are a part of the debate over the issue in this country.

Kevorkian has become a household name in recent years for promoting the practice while assisting in more than 40 suicides.

Opponents of the practice have pointed to The Netherlands as an example of what may happen when physician-assisted suicide is legalized. According to statistics from 1990, about 50 percent of deaths caused by physicians in that European country are done without the patient's permission.

The Ninth Circuit case is Washington v. Glucksberg. The Second Circuit case is Vacco v. Quill.

## Skills inventory under way at SBC agencies merging into NAMB

By Herb Hollinger

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Employees of the Home Mission Board, Radio and Television Commission and Brotherhood Commission have been asked to complete a skills inventory to "help assure all employees get the maximum consideration for North American Mission Board positions."

According to a twice-monthly bulletin produced by the NAMB transition communications team, the inventory form was scheduled to be completed by employees Sept. 25. The inventory information will be compiled electronically for an Implementation Task Force personnel subcommittee and will be accessible by categories such as skills and education, according to David Hankins, chairman of the NAMB transition communications team and vice president for convention policy for the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee.

Hankins said the inventory information will be completed by mid-October.

The three agencies will combine to form the North American Mission Board in June 1997 as part of the restructuring of the denomination mandated by the "Covenant for a New Century" approved by the SBC in 1995. The Implementation Task Force was established to assist the agencies affected in the restructuring, which reduces the number of SBC agencies from 19 to 12. The transition team, meanwhile, is a representative group from the HMB, RTVC and Brotherhood to assist in the transition of the three agencies to NAMB.

To assist displaced employees from the HMB, RTVC and Brotherhood in finding employment, Hankins said he will contact SBC agencies and state conventions to learn of available positions. Efforts will be made to set up a process where displaced employees can be considered for these positions. Hankins said it has not been finally decided how many employees of the three agencies will be affected. The three agencies combined have approximately 500 employees.

In other NAMB transition news: at a retreat Sept. 10-12, the Implementation Task Force agreed, with input from the transition team, to recommend a primary organization for NAMB. The groups agreed the purpose of NAMB should be "to give leadership to Southern Baptists in reaching North America for Christ."

Participants at the retreat adopted five conclusions:

- 1) NAMB, in response to the SBC assignment, should be aggressive and proactive in its approaches to fulfilling its mission. It should lead rather than follow.
- 2) There should be an urgency about its work that helps to overcome inertia, break out of old restraints and cast a big vision. No dream should be considered impossible.
- 3) Partnerships with churches and other Baptist bodies will be enhanced as they see the value of NAMB ministry and volunteer to participate, and NAMB should actively invite but not attempt to coerce participation. Nor should it feel restrained by others' lack of willingness or cooperation.
- 4) NAMB should be focused on what it can do better than others. It should concentrate on evangelizing North America through reaching the unsaved, starting churches and communicating the message of Southern Baptists.
- 5) The structure and organization of NAMB should flow from mission and strategy.

The transition group also announced NAMB information will be available on the Internet even before the agency is officially operational. Its home page address on the World Wide Web will be NAMB.Net. The "Net" designation usually is given to Internet providers, so NAMB will be able to set up an Internet connection service for other agencies for \$100.

The Sept. 19 NAMB transition news bulletin said the Implementation Task Force will send a letter soon to all current retirees of the HMB, RTVC and Brotherhood assuring them their retirement benefits will continue unchanged with the transition to NAMB.

The bi-monthly bulletin is a product of the NAMB communications team, set up to communicate with employees of the three agencies. The team is chaired by Hankins and includes Wally Buckner, HMB; James Warren, Brotherhood; Martin Coleman, RTVC; Linda Lawson, Baptist Sunday School Board communications office director; and Sarah Maddox, member of the Implementation Task Force.

After input from the agency representatives, the bulletin is sent electronically by Lawson under Hankins' direction to the three agencies for distribution.

"We agreed that information related to the transition process must be communicated first to employees," Hankins said. "We don't want employees learning something about their future in a newspaper article."

In addition, the team will publish a periodic newsletter to key audiences: trustees; SBC, state and associational leaders; key customers and others.

## Volunteers in China recount lifestyle evangelism success

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Fifty-four Southern Baptists who traveled to China this past summer came back reporting that lifestyle evangelism works.

The volunteers worked through the Amity Foundation, a social service agency of the China Christian Council, to train junior high and high school teachers how to teach English.

"In some places, many rocks have to be removed before seeds can be planted," said Faye Pearson, Foreign Mission Board area director for East Asia. "Others come to water the seeds, and still others will bring the harvest."

Volunteer workers came as teachers, not evangelists, but answered questions as they were asked, she said. Twenty-one teachers reported positive response to an interest in the gospel. Two-thirds of the group reported a chance to share a Christian testimony.

More than 100 Chinese teachers asked for Bibles, which are being supplied through the Amity Foundation. Amity sponsors the program, which it began six years ago.

Southern Baptist volunteers worked four weeks in 10 teachers colleges scattered throughout four Chinese provinces.

"Middle school and high school teachers are better equipped to teach their students the English language as a result of this program," said Pearson. "They were touched by volunteers that simply came to love, care and build bridges of friendship.

"The volunteers left confident that God would bring the harvest."

For information about this and other similar English teaching opportunities in 1997, contact the Foreign Mission Board's Volunteers in Missions Department at 1-800-888-VOLS.

--30--

## Disney execs defend company's decisions

By Dwayne Hastings

Baptist Press  
10/3/96

ORLANDO, Fla. (BP)--The Walt Disney Company's top two executives were guests on CNN's Larry King show Sept. 30: Disney Chairman Michael Eisner and President Michael Ovitz in an Orlando studio before a backdrop featuring Mickey Mouse as the sorcerer in the Disney classic "Fantasia."

Between discussing the 25th anniversary celebration of the company's central Florida theme park with Eisner and Ovitz, and detailing the entertainment giant's future plans, King quizzed the pair on Disney's recent skirmishes with conservative Christian groups.

Saying many considered the Disney Company "progressive," King mistakenly said the uproar had been prompted by the company's decision "to give health benefits to all your employees."

Disney head Eisner told King it had not been "a tough decision."

"Every single company in the entertainment industry does it. We believe it is appropriate and nondiscriminatory. We have a nondiscrimination policy at our company," Eisner said, noting the policy places Disney "among the most prestigious companies in America."

"Providing health care benefits to all employees and not discriminating against anybody may seem risky," Eisner said, apparently referring to the criticism prompted by the company's policy of providing medical benefits to the partners of same-sex employees.

Yet in arguing for the correctness of the decision, Eisner added, "But to me if you do the right thing, you really probably in the end avoid the risk."

In yet another display of the talk show host's confusion of the issues surrounding Disney's corporate decisions, King fingered the Christian Coalition as Disney's gadfly, asking, "What do you make of some of the Christian Coalition efforts against Disney -- the boycott and the like -- first, have they been effective?"

Messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention in New Orleans last June endorsed a resolution calling on Southern Baptists to monitor Disney's "anti-Christian and antifamily" behavior. The Assembly of God denomination has voiced support for a boycott of the company, echoing a call made last year by the American Family Association based in Tupelo, Miss.

--more--

Ovitz told King he couldn't comment about the effectiveness of any economic action against the company but that Disney's critics were entitled to their beliefs.

"They surely have every right to feel the way they want to," Ovitz said, while noting within the entertainment industry Disney's track record stands for itself.

"We produce more quality family entertainment than any company in the history of the world," Ovitz claimed. "We have a mandate and a constitutional charter from our founder to do that and we will continue."

Seeming to slightly tip his hat to those who have found some Disney products offensive, Ovitz continued, "Occasionally when things occur that are done or not done with or without the knowledge of the company or we get involved in certain situations and you compare it on an overall basis to what we have done through the history of the company or the remainder of what we do -- it is a minuscule amount of issues."

Responding to King's query about rumors the lead character in "Ellen," an ABC Network sitcom produced by Disney's Touchstone Television, may announce she is homosexual, Eisner said he had no idea of the show's story line this fall.

"It is one of our better shows on ABC," Eisner explained, failing to note opening week ratings had the Wednesday comedy last in its time slot. "I don't know whether she is or isn't; she is working on her material.

"No matter what she does, it won't happen unless the scripts are excellent or the story line and the individual episodes lead in a meaningful and humorous direction," Eisner explained, adding, "I don't think it's that serious of a public policy issue."

"This is an ABC issue; this is not an issue we will legislate," Ovitz said. And agreeing with Eisner, he continued, "It's an issue of what's funny and what works."

The SBC resolution encourages Southern Baptists "to give serious and prayerful reconsideration" to whether to attend Disney theme parks and purchase Disney products -- and to boycott Disney if it continues "this antiChristian and antifamily trend."

The resolution cited five examples of Disney "corporate decisions, which have included but are not limited to:" 1) granting insurance benefits to partners of homosexual employees; 2) hosting homosexual "theme nights" at its parks; 3) a subsidiary's hiring of a convicted child molester to direct the movie, "Powder;" 4) a subsidiary's publication of a book aimed at homosexual teenagers; and 5) a subsidiary's production of the movie "Priest," which "disparages Christian values and depicts Christian leaders as morally defective."

The SBC resolution asked the Christian Life Commission "to monitor Disney's progress in returning to its previous philosophy of producing enriching family entertainment."

Criticism of Disney practices also was voiced last fall by messengers to the Florida Baptist Convention.

--30--

#### **Annuity Board: No '97 hike in medical coverage rates**

**Baptist Press  
10/3/96**

DALLAS (BP)--There will be no Jan. 1, 1997, rate increase for the Personal Security Program (PSP) Comprehensive Medical Plan offered by the Annuity Board of the Southern Baptist Convention to individual participants employed by Southern Baptist churches and associations.

Paul W. Powell, president of the Annuity Board, said, "We are very pleased to pass on our good experience to the participants in our plans. The last increase, Jan. 1, 1996, has been sufficient to cover claims and give us security for the entire year of 1997."

Joel H. Mathis, senior vice president for insurance services, noted monthly rates for the Personal Security Program medical plan have been increased only one time since July 1992. "We normally do an analysis every six months and set the rates for January through June and July through December," Mathis said. "However, this year, it is exciting to hold the line on rates for all of 1997 and thus free up money in the churches and for individuals for other needs and ministries."

Mathis noted the Personal Security Program is an age-rated and individually underwritten plan, and the plan's rates are geographically balanced. This means persons who move from one ZIP code to another, add a dependent or move across an age bracket could see their rates change.

--30--

**SBCNet computer network helps  
2 new believers grow in Christ**

**By Keni Walker**

PORTLAND, Ore. (BP)--When Bill Phillips became one of the first pastors to sign up for SBCNet, he never dreamed it would lead to providing direction to new Christians over the computer network.

In recent months, the pastor of Mill Park Baptist Church, Portland, Ore., has established two high-tech relationships with converts who accepted Christ via the Southern Baptist forum on CompuServe. He also offers encouragement to those seeking information about the Bible and other spiritual subjects.

"That's the value of SBCNet," said Phillips, a member of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee. "We're touching people's hearts. I've learned if the church of the 21st century doesn't recognize the capability of using the computer and electronic messaging, we will miss the boat. We need to ask where we can tie in."

Since "meeting" them over CompuServe, the pastor has maintained regular contacts with Jim, who lives in the southwestern United States, and Kathy, a resident of a European nation. (In order to protect their privacy, the names of these individuals have been changed.)

Earlier this year, both posted messages in SBCNet's "Minister's Corner" telling of their decisions accepting Christ as their Savior.

"I have spoken to some of you over the past month or so concerning God and Jesus and how to let them into my life," Jim wrote. "As some of you know, this hasn't been an easy choice to make, based on my upbringing and (past) involvement with Scientology."

He went on to credit several SBCNet members for their guidance in helping him draw closer to Christ. One told him about a church in his area and let members know that Jim was interested in meeting them.

Those representatives answered many of his questions and explained spiritual matters in a way that he could understand.

"It is with great pleasure that I tell you all that this coming Sunday, I will be attending Bible study and worship at a local Baptist church," said Jim. "Thank you for all your help and prayers on my behalf."

After congratulating him on his decision, Phillips later learned the man had been baptized and is attending a Southern Baptist church.

Phillips and Kathy talked over SBCNet the same day she asked Jesus into her heart. He has continued to offer insights via computer, including telling her how to order a copy of a "Survival Kit for New Christians" (a popular guide for new Christians) from a Baptist bookstore in the States.

Kathy later e-mailed the pastor a copy of her testimony in which she told of being devastated when her best friend died last March.

A few weeks later, she was visiting another CompuServe forum. When a Christian friend, Jon, asked via computer how she was doing, she explained why she was having a bad day. He said he understood and began praying for her over the network.

"It was like a catalyst," Kathy said. "I started to cry like never before. Long deep sobs that were almost wailing and through my tears I began to add bits to the prayer. Jon just kept right on going and the prayer got longer and longer.

"Then another friend ... came in and paged me. Leo and I had often debated theology in the past and he told me later he had known for awhile I was searching and that I was almost ready to accept Jesus. He started praying too ... .

"The last thing I remember was Leo saying, 'Lord, I hold Kathy up to you' ... then I felt an unnatural calm come over me. It was really sudden, as though someone took away my grief. I felt so safe and I knew I didn't have to cope any more ... . I felt fantastic but the crying went on and on as though it was coming from someone else."

Afterward, she logged onto SBCNet and asked for a pastor's help. Phillips answered that call; she was pleased he was so excited about her decision. The next day he asked in prayer over the computer that she would relax in God's presence as if she were embraced in his heavenly lap.

Suddenly, she understood God's love, Kathy said. "I knew I would never have to cope on my own again and that Jesus really had come into my heart."

--more--

Phillips has offered guidance in other CompuServe forums, talking with nonbelievers in the Christian Interactive Network. Once he visited the CB Forum and suggested a woman experiencing problems try reading her Bible.

"I gave her several verses in Proverbs and she said, 'Thank you.' She felt it was nice that someone shared with her that there is hope out there."

SBCNet also has offered a boost during his struggles, Phillips said. Many correspondents prayed for his nephew, Ewell, when he needed open heart surgery at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn.

One night during a SBCNet chat with Betty Lynn Cadle, WMU director for the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention, she asked where Ewell was hospitalized.

Hearing that he was in her city, she went to another phone and called Phillips' brother at the clinic. Telling his brother of the computer chat, she asked if there were anything she could do for him.

"That's the kind of people who are on there," Phillips said of SBCNet. "When I started, I didn't fathom the possibilities. I didn't know these things existed."

--30--

### Controversy over homeless aid yields help for congregation

By Karen L. Willoughby

Baptist Press  
10/3/96

BUENA PARK, Calif. (BP)--When city officials squared off to fight the blight of homelessness as seen hovering around First Southern Baptist Church in Buena Park, Calif., pastor Wiley Drake knew they were in a losing battle.

"God's going to win this one," Drake said in a recent telephone interview. "They told me in June, 'If you keep doing what you're doing, we're going to come down and find a way to shut it down.' But what we're doing here is nothing more than following a biblical command to help the less fortunate. And now they've thrown out a compromise."

When Drake moved from the Ark-La-Tex area of Texas in 1987 to lead the Los Angeles-area church, which averages about 75 people in Sunday morning worship, the congregation was ministering to perhaps 10 families a week with food and clothing. Now about 500 families a month come to the church for assistance that totals 25,000 pounds of food a month.

First Southern for the last two years has been the site of the Orange County Baptist Association's Christian social ministries program, "Here's Hope." "I think it is meeting a great need in our association," said Doyle Braden, director of missions for the association. "The results that we're getting indicate this is a ministry that is working."

"It's just grown, multiplied little by little," Drake said. "For a long time it was 98 percent local needy. We were preparing maybe 10 homeless bags a week -- granola bars, fruit cocktail, vienna sausages, stuff you can eat on the run. Now we put out 400 of them a week."

Homeless people began spending the night at the church in sleeping bags or cars. Ministry to them had become such a permanent part of First Southern's work that in May, the men's ministry at Rose Drive Baptist Church in Orange County built a showerhouse on First Southern's spacious two-acre lot.

Fifteen months before First Southern's ministry to the homeless was determined by the city to be a nuisance, the city awarded the church a certificate of appreciation for taking in people made homeless after major flooding.

First Southern provides a multitude of services for the homeless in addition to private, safe showers:

- outdoor rest rooms open 24 hours a day;
- an outside community refrigerator -- locked now for safety but all adults have the combination;
- an on-site outside pay telephone and typewriter, computer and fax;
- a church member volunteering her expertise as a paralegal to help on-site in the filling out of forms;
- a member of another area Southern Baptist church volunteering her expertise as a cosmetologist on-site for men and women;
- an on-site employment services office helping prepare resumes, providing job leads -- movie extras, seasonal workers in a tomato factory, construction laborers etc.--- and calling prospective employers;
- a spiritual counseling office. So far in the 1995-96 church year, 31 people have been baptized;

--more--

- medical care available at low cost with doctors on-site three days a week and assistance in arranging low- or no-cost dental and optometry care;
- crisis pregnancy counseling and care available at no cost from initial test through birth;
- meals served: volunteers prepare Wednesday evening and Saturday noon meals; the rest of the time, the church kitchen is open for an hour per meal, except during Sunday services; if not cleaned by those who use it, the homeless are told the kitchen won't be opened for the next meal;
- bus passes, along with minor auto repair done by homeless mechanics;
- financial counseling;
- a home church. The homeless are welcomed at all services, Bible studies and fellowship times; a Bible study particularly for the homeless takes place three days a week at the church, led by formerly homeless Charles Huggins.

"I am calling this a conversion-transition center," Drake said. "We do our best to convert them to Christianity and we make no apologies for that. If they do not want to convert to a relationship with Jesus Christ, we don't force them, but we do insist they convert from drugs, alcohol and unemployment to being clean, sober and employed. We encourage them to be involved in a local church, ours preferably.

"We do not allow them to stay on the property more than a couple of days unless they're actively seeking employment and trying to get themselves off the street," the pastor continued. "The first thing we require is identification. The second, contact with their family. One woman last week didn't know her mother had died two years ago."

When the Buena Park city manager and chief of police called Drake to city hall in May, they said there had been "several" complaints about homeless people hanging around the church. Chief among the complaints, Drake said, was the fear expressed by senior citizens over people hovering just off the church property and smoking.

Drake said he sought to rectify the problem the same day by providing a 20-by-20-foot section on the property where the homeless can smoke. No church members have complained.

The city's real problem with the church's ministry, Drake contended, is that they don't want homeless in their city, which is on an entertainment corridor. First Southern is just up the street from Knotts Berry Farm, and eight miles from Disneyland. Buena Park is about 40 miles southeast of downtown Los Angeles.

"They said, 'We don't want those kind of people in Buena Park,'" Drake said, referring to the May meeting. In June the city sent inspectors from the code, fire, safety and health departments to First Southern. Each violation was immediately corrected, Drake said -- a lock put on the refrigerator, covers attached to garbage dumpsters.

"They made it real clear that the real problem wasn't the codes but that we were allowing people to camp on church property," Drake said. "They said if we did not cease and desist they would bring criminal charges against me."

The resulting media frenzy brought three attorneys to offer their services without charge.

"On Sept. 3 the city said they said they wanted a meeting. We made it very clear to them that we would correct any violations but we would not make people leave the property," Drake said. "They said that wasn't good enough because of the camping law, and offered a compromise: 'If you will proceed with plans to design and apply for conditional use permits to build a building on your property to house all the ministries and all the campers, we will hold off filing criminal charges.'"

The first requirement -- duly noted by area media -- was that an architect and structural engineer be on board within two weeks. Within two days, more than 90 people had called the church to volunteer their services. Drake chose two Southern Baptists: Charlie Floyd of Floyd Construction and architect Ernest Clarke.

The plans were to be submitted to the city by Oct. 7 and, if approved, a public hearing will be set for Nov. 13. Drake said he expects final approval to be given by January.

Preliminary plans call for a 5,000-square-foot, one-story structure built in off-white stucco with gable roof, to match the rest of the church plant. It will be situated on the southwest corner of the church property; the church is on the northeast corner. This will allow for a maximum retention of grassland, on which the church youth play volleyball and soccer.

The building itself will include a large main room in which cots can be set up, a commercial-size kitchen, six consulting rooms, two shower/rest rooms, plus a storefront for groceries and storage.

"God will get the glory for this," Drake said. "We're doing his work. He'll protect us and be with us. He promises us that."

**Missionary great-grandmother  
reasons, 'Why sit at home?'**

**By Debbie Moore.**

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--The day after Margaret Burks graduated from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary this past May with a master of divinity degree -- with honors, at age 81 -- she was packing up to go to Panama to build a church, for the eighth time.

She has been on 24 missionary expeditions in her life -- that is, her life since age 70 -- but as of Sept. 30 she reached a new milestone.

Burks, who turned 82 on Aug. 28, became the oldest active missionary of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board when she left on the last day of September for a two-year appointment. She will serve in Arusha, Tanzania, as business manager and teacher at the International Baptist Theological Seminary. While studying the native language of Swahili, she will give instruction in English in bookkeeping, typing, the Johannine epistles and the synoptic gospels.

A retired certified public accountant and head auditor for the Internal Revenue Service at the Atlanta office, Burks has been an "unofficial" foreign missionary since December 1985 when she made her first mission trip, a building project at a Woman's Missionary Union camp in Liberia. She returned nine more times in the course of seven years, becoming an expert at mortar mixing, brick building and cement smoothing. She helped construct eight church facilities and laid concrete for several basketball courts.

Besides Panama and Liberia, Burks also has been on working mission trips to Peru (twice) and once each to Ecuador, China and Singapore. This past summer she went on her first archeological expedition in Israel with the annual NOBTS trip led by professor Dennis Cole, during which she and others helped excavate, among other things, the 4,000-year-old remains of a child buried in its home for protection against roaming animals.

"There's always something to learn, something to do," she said. "Why sit at home when I'm healthy?"

Brought up in a wealthy home in Georgia, she cared for her parents for many years and eventually graduated with a 4.0 average from what is now Georgia State University. She promised her very proper mother three things:

"I'll never use anything but sterling silver eating utensils. I'll never eat off of a paper plate. And I'll never marry someone like my boss."

Burks has since broken all three rules -- "and then some," she said, even eating with her fingers the traditional African meals -- and she "didn't suffer a bit."

At age 42, Burks not only married someone like her supervisor, widower Jesse Burks, she actually married him, immediately becoming both a mother and grandmother. "It was the strangest thing; he just looked different to me all of a sudden one day. I knew it was the right thing to do," she said, a simple statement that has since helped her make up her mind about a myriad of other situations with which she has been confronted over the years.

So when Jesse died in 1985 after 28 happy years of marriage, Burks didn't sit around long wondering, "Now what?" At age 70 she began planning for her first flight in an airplane, a family vacation to London. Later that same year she had another country stamped into her passport as she made her first mission trip to Liberia.

Then in 1990 she heard and answered positively when God called her to do something more: to prepare, intensely, for ministry.

"I'll never forget it," she said. "I was sitting in the Sunday evening service," at First Baptist Church of Flowery Branch, Ga., the town to which she and Jesse had moved in retirement. "The Lord laid it on my heart that he wanted me to go to seminary. The impression was so strong that I walked down the aisle at the end of the service and asked my pastor if he would recommend me to go," part of the application requirements for enrolling in an SBC seminary.

That fall she became a student -- at age 75 -- in the master of divinity degree program at the NOBTS North Georgia extension center campus, then located in Marietta at Roswell Street Baptist Church. Burks saw the transition as the campus moved to a permanent location in Decatur when members of Columbia Drive Baptist Church gave their property and facilities to New Orleans Seminary in 1994.

"My seminary days were exciting days. I just loved it," she said. "The Bible came alive to me. I would have gone to seminary just to experience that. I especially enjoyed learning so much about the Old Testament.

"But I got tired of hearing people ask, 'Why are you in seminary?' Why shouldn't I be in seminary? I wanted to know how to do what God wanted me to do and I wanted to do it right."

--more--

Halfway into her seminary training and by then a veteran of global missions, Burks decided to move to the NOBTS main campus in 1994 to accelerate the completion date of her degree program. She moved into the women's dormitory, Carey Hall, and became "one of the girls," said several of her classmates of a woman who was by then a great-grandmother.

"Margaret Burks seems capable of doing whatever needs to be done," said William Neal, editor of the Christian Index, the Georgia Baptist newspaper, in an editorial salute to Burks in May upon the completion of her master's degree.

There'll be no turning back now for Burks. After 29 hours of travel to her new home in Tanzania, she said she intends to stay "as long as my health holds up.

"If you know God wants you to do something, just do it," she said. "Just do it."

--30--

(BP) photo available upon request from NOBTS office of public relations, 1-800-662-8701, ext. 3292, or e-mail 70420,62 on CompuServe. Burks' address in Africa is International Baptist Theological Seminary, P.O. Box 832, Arusha, Tanzania, East Africa.

### Volunteers travel 700 miles to spruce up seminary housing

By Lee Weeks

Baptist Press  
10/3/96

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--Members of the Joy Sunday school class at First Baptist Church, Lakeland, Fla., take their name seriously. Mostly retirees, they love to have a good time. But for many, their joy comes from more than just fun and games. Instead, it's giving of themselves they find most fulfilling.

That was the case for eight of the class members who boarded their church van Sept. 22 for a 700-mile trip to Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., to help spruce up seminary housing with fresh coats of paint.

Carl Freeman, a member of Southeastern's board of visitors, and his wife, JoAnn, and six others in their Sunday school class worked three and half days Sept. 23-26 painting six two-story buildings that house seminary students and their families.

Freeman, an ordained minister who owns a paint contracting business in Lakeland, Fla., said God impressed upon his heart two years ago while helping refurbish some of the seminary's buildings that he should return for another project.

"It's just a burden the Lord gave me to try to do whatever we can to help the seminary out," Freeman said.

Freeman presented the idea to his Sunday school class who eagerly supported the project by contributing nearly \$1,000 to pay for the 130-plus gallons of paint. Others in First Baptist contributed several hundred dollars as well.

JoAnn Freeman said the newly painted apartment buildings should not only improve the campus aesthetically but also enhance student morale.

"It's a face-lift and it lifts the spirits a little bit," Freeman said as she carefully painted the trim around the front door of an apartment. "We get the blessings, really."

Veanna Cook, whose husband, Skip, is a student at Southeastern, decided she would help paint while her husband attended classes.

"Painting is a lot of work," said Cook, of Dade City, Fla., while adjusting her cap.

Besides painting, the volunteers were busy scaling up and down ladders and taking doors off hinges and putting them back on after the new coats of paint dried.

But you weren't hearing any complaining from Cook or any of the other volunteers.

"This has been a blessing," said Ann Fleming, a volunteer from the Joy class of the Florida church. "We get up early in the morning and we stay up late at night. I'd do it again next week if the opportunity came. These students around here, they are so appreciative. It's so nice to come and see the way it was and now we'll go home and see it all fresh. It's worth every minute of it."

Students living in the McDowell Street apartments called the new look refreshing. The once-weathered grey facade is now a shiny cream and the fire-orange doors are a placid green.

--more--

C.B. Scott, a master of divinity student from Virginia, said he was impressed with the volunteers' workmanship.

"A lot of times when you get a volunteer group to go and do something like this it's not really a good job, but these folks have done a good job. I like the green doors better. This green gives us more of a modern look," Scott said.

On Thursday, Sept. 26, the volunteers were greeted with a resounding applause from the student body after being recognized in chapel for their contributions by Southeastern Seminary President Paige Patterson.

"Carl Freeman and his coterie of peripatetic painters have once again embarked on a merciful mission of providing for the seminary," Patterson said. "We will forever be the debtors of a truly gracious group of men and women."

During the week, the volunteers dined in the seminary's cafeteria and relaxed after 10-hour workdays while staying at Southeastern's Manor House for seminary guests.

Gene Turchan moved to Lakeland from Ohio two months ago. He said helping the seminary out was the least he could do to help the many God-called men and women who have made great sacrifices by "stepping out on faith and doing without things to make things happen" for the cause of Christ.

Volunteer Bob Bryant said he felt privileged to have the opportunity to help an institution like Southeastern with a mission to prepare men and women for full-time Christian ministry.

"I'm certainly glad the Lord has helped me to be willing and able to come up and help out, and I encourage someone else to do the same," Bryant said.

Freeman said he would like to return soon to Southeastern to assist in another project. The next time, Freeman said, he hopes more churches from his local association will join First Baptist, Lakeland.

HOUSE MAIL

**(BP)**

**BAPTIST PRESS**  
901 Commerce #750  
Nashville, TN 37234

**F  
I  
R  
S  
T  
  
C  
L  
A  
S  
S**

**Southern Baptist Library  
and Archives**