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96-3

- TENNESSEE--Renewed spiritual interest evident on college campuses.
- TENNESSEE--SBC student ministry program reports several gains in '95.
- TENNESSEE--Laymen 'turn the tables,' pray for their pastors; logo.
- TENNESSEE--Fasting may be overlooked, misunderstood, but still ...
- TENNESSEE--Revival and fasting: one man's journey.
- ATLANTA--First Baptist, Atlanta, to vote on 'Ike' Reighard as associate.
- ALASKA--Former Alaska state exec dies in Arkansas Nov. 30.

Renewed spiritual interest
evident on college campuses

By Chip Alford

Baptist Press
1/4/96

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Is God making a comeback on campus?

After decades of rebellion, apathy and often outright hostility toward religion, reports from media and ministers in the field seem to indicate a renewed interest in spiritual matters at American colleges and universities. Consider the following evidence from 1995:

-- A worship service at a Brownwood, Texas, church included testimony, confession and repentance from a Howard Payne University student which sparked a spiritual renewal that touched churches and college and seminary campuses in several parts of the country, including Illinois, Kentucky, Massachusetts and Minnesota.

-- The number of students reached by Southern Baptist student ministry programs totaled 236,344, up from 188,323 in 1994. Among state conventions reporting record years with student work was Utah-Idaho, a newer convention area, which doubled the number of students reached in one year.

-- According to the Boston Globe, religious activism is on the rise at three Boston-area universities. Examples cited included a doubling of students involved in religious activities over eight years at one school, a standing-room-only Catholic mass at another and a doubling of membership in a gospel choir at the third.

-- An article in a recent issue of Leadership Journal quoted a graduate student in social work who said while religion used to be a "taboo" subject, now it is mentioned "in almost every class. Professors say, 'You have to know your client's spirituality.'"

Why the new focus on spirituality among today's students?

Fear about global upheaval, a desire for stability in a rapidly changing and complex world, declining economic opportunities and wounds from growing up in broken homes are just a few of the reasons cited by media and ministers.

"Today's students are looking for something that can be counted on. They want something secure and stable," said John Moore, student ministry director for the Louisiana Baptist Convention. "They are more hungry for Bible study and discipleship than ever before. They'd rather hear someone teach the Word than read a devotional. They are looking for teachers, not preachers."

Betsy Draper, Baptist student ministries director at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, said she has noticed renewed spiritual interest on her campus.

"Many students here are praying for revival on campus; that's part of the reason behind what's happening across America," she explained.

Draper said she also believes colleges are beginning to realize they have to provide for their students' spiritual needs. MIT, for example, last year opened a religious activities center to accommodate a growing religious community. Draper's office is located amidst offices for Jewish, Catholic, Lutheran and Episcopal student ministers.

"Our growth has been hidden somewhat in that there are so many evangelical student groups popping up to meet everyone's interest," Draper said, also pointing out non-Christian groups such as Muslims are active on campus.

"I think the interaction with other religious groups is a good thing. It makes students really think about what they believe," she said.

Bill Henry, director of the Baptist Sunday School Board's national student ministry, said he believes another key to renewed spiritual emphasis on campus is more direct church involvement in reaching students.

"I've been getting an overwhelming response from churches who are interested in college students," he said. "I've formed prayer partnerships with several of them. People are starting to realize campuses are the greatest mission field in the world."

Carl Kremer, a 23-year-old senior at Temple University in Philadelphia, said he has noticed more openness among his peers to spiritual issues.

"People are realizing materialism isn't where it's at," he said. "There's so much hopelessness out there. They're looking for whatever works."

Sometimes "whatever works" means focusing more on friendships and relationships than God, said Kremer, a Southern Baptist.

"My generation ends up clinging to each other, and that's just going to bring more shallowness. Agape love is what we're looking for."

Many students are missing that God-centered love in a bombardment of mixed spiritual messages from the media, cults and misinformed Christians, said Joni Hannigan, Baptist Student Union director at Indiana University-Bloomington.

While she agrees there is more talk about religion on campus, she said she fears many students don't understand "what is true spiritual interest and what is a smorgasbord of ideas that appeal to them. I see a very confused and a very a la carte kind of interest in spiritual matters.

"And there is much more openness on campus to non-traditional expressions of faith than traditional ones," she said, adding Islam, the Baha'i faith, New Age groups and Eastern mysticism are "very attractive" to many IU students.

"Faith on campus is eclectic, for sure," said Neil Walker, state student director for the California Southern Baptist Convention. He said many students become interested in New Age cults "because it allows you to have a spiritual experience without making any character changes or moral shifts in your life. They never address the issue of lordship."

Hannigan said many students she encounters have "very little regard" for absolute truth.

"It's abhorrent to them because it infringes on others' right to believe like they want to. I think many students are confused."

Moore agreed: "Today's students are very accepting of everything. The only thing they are intolerant of is intolerance."

Kremer admitted the tension between being respectful of other viewpoints and standing up for your beliefs can be difficult.

"It's a cautious line to walk. Sometimes you end up offending people if you're a Christian. That just makes developing friendships (with non-Christians) more important."

Hannigan said it is more important than ever for student directors "to be sharp in apologetics."

"We have to know what we believe and make sure our young people are armed with that knowledge before they set foot on campus."

In dealing with questions from students about other faiths, she relies heavily on information and tracts from the Home Mission Board's interfaith witness department.

Walker agreed a firm grasp of apologetics is important in reaching today's students, "but what is really going to make a difference is Christian students building relationships with non-Christian students and living out their faith. We need to let people see 'up close and personal' what being a Christian is all about," he said.

While stressing the moral absolutes of the Christian faith is vital, Hannigan said it also is important for student ministers to convey the gospel's healing message of love and forgiveness.

"With the deterioration of the family in our country, so many of these students come from broken homes," she said. "There is a great void in their lives. This is a pain-filled generation."

Even so, Moore said today's students "are brilliant kids. We can't afford to coddle them. We can't afford not to challenge them."

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SBC student ministry program
reports several gains in '95

By Chip Alford

Baptist Press
1/4/96

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--The Southern Baptist student ministry program reported several gains in 1995, including an increase in campuses with student ministry programs and the number of students reached; gifts to missions and hunger relief; and the number of churches, Sunday schools and missions students helped start.

Decreases were reported in the number of student conversions and participation of minorities and international students.

According to the 1995 Student Ministry Information Report, compiled by the Baptist Sunday School Board's national student ministry (NSM), 236,344 students participated in Southern Baptist student ministry programs in 1995, up from 188,323 the previous year. SBC student work was reported on 1,029 campuses, up from 1,013 in 1994.

The report stated students participating in SBC programs gave \$3,158,519 to missions in 1995, up from \$2,782,732 the previous year. Student gifts to hunger relief also increased, from \$74,025 in '94 to \$98,767 in '95. In addition, students helped start 346 churches, missions or Sunday schools in '95, up from 153 the previous year.

The report showed the following decreases:

- student conversions: from 7,528 in '94 to 5,963 in '95;
- minority student involvement: African Americans, from 11,603 in '94 to 8,979 in '95; other ethnic groups, from 7,534 in '94 to 4,872 in '95;
- international student involvement, from 10,193 in '94 to 9,388 in '95.

National Student Ministry Director Bill Henry said he was both pleased and challenged by the report.

"It shows Southern Baptist student ministry is alive and growing, but there are still some areas where we have work to do," he said, adding he specifically was concerned about drops in minority, ethnic and international student participation.

"I've already met with a group of state student ministry directors to discuss ways to impact this," he said. "We may need to come up with some new ministry models, and we're prepared to do that. This is a priority for us."

At a conference last summer, members of an interagency task force coordinated by national student ministry called for a "new movement" of international student ministry. At the same meeting, NSM released an administrative manual designed to help both Baptist Student Unions (BSUs) and churches in reaching and involving internationals. "Ministering to International Students" is available free of charge by writing to NSM in care of the Baptist Sunday School Board.

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In other areas, the Student Ministry Information Report showed the number of students involved in witness training decreased slightly from 13,497 in '94 to 13,275 in '95, but the number of campuses reporting evangelistic outreach projects increased from 512 to 549. And the number of students involved in Bible study groups decreased from 39,619 to 34,172, while the number of students involved in discipleship training increased from 16,578 to 16,694.

Procedural changes for reporting statistics in some categories made figures no longer comparable to previous years. One example is the total number of students involved in missions, which totaled 23,491 in '95.

And a new category -- students involved in student ministry programs -- was added to report the number of students who are regular participants in student ministry activities and events. The total in that category was 104,326.

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Laymen 'turn the tables,'
pray for their pastors

By Steve Barber

Baptist Press
1/4/96

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--Ever since the first Baptist Men's Day in 1933, Southern Baptist laymen have been recognized for their contributions in magnifying the ministries of their churches.

On Jan. 8, 1996, Baptist men will "turn the tables" and begin a 40-day season of prayer for their pastors based on the Brotherhood Commission's latest guided prayer booklet, "Pray for Your Pastor."

"This Baptist Men's Day emphasis underlines a longtime core belief of the Brotherhood Commission that pastors are the most important people in Brotherhood work," said James D. Williams, Brotherhood Commission president. "That's because missions education must have the support of pastors if Southern Baptists are going to maintain their commitment to world evangelization."

There's another reason for this year's emphasis: Pastors just need to be lifted up.

"American churches need strong, visionary pastoral leadership, and it's time for us to support them," said Jim Burton, director of Men's Ministries at the Brotherhood Commission. "We know that being the pastor is a very difficult and sometimes lonely job. They face high levels of stress and burnout. A pastor needs the spiritual intercession of his congregation, and they need to be ready to intercede for him."

The booklet is similar in size and format to "Pray for the President," introduced by the Brotherhood Commission in 1993 and since selling more than 350,000 copies.

Pray for Your Pastor, authored by Edwin E. Scott, pastor of Goodwood Baptist Church, Baton Rouge, La., provides a daily routine of Scripture reading and specific prayer suggestions. For example, "Day 1" directs the reader to Ephesians 6:4, and then asks him to "pray for your pastor as he shows Christ to his children and family ... and for the witness of your pastor's family in their neighborhood."

"All the requests are focused on the particular needs that the pastor has," said Don Aycock, a former pastor who now directs special projects like Pray for Your Pastor for the Brotherhood Commission. "Not only does it help the pastor, but is also helps the people in their prayer life by putting them in the shoes of the pastor for a while."

The process also can defuse some of the tension that may exist in certain situations, according to Aycock.

"It can draw people closer to the pastor, defusing some of that tension. It works both ways, too. When the pastor knows that his people are praying for him, naturally he would feel closer to them."

Aycock added deacon chairmen or church Brotherhood directors should take the lead in using Pray for Your Pastor and order a copy for every family active in the church.

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The booklets are made to fit inside a man's shirt pocket, measuring four-and-one-half inches by three inches, "so we hope they will haul it around and pray for their pastor wherever they go," Aycock said.

"Can you imagine what would happen in our churches if our people were praying for their pastors over 40 days?" he asked. "Can you imagine how much good would come out of that?"

To order Pray for Your Pastor, contact the Brotherhood Commission at 1-800-727-6466.

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Logos for Pray for Your Pastor are available on SBCNet News Room.

Fasting may be overlooked,
misunderstood, but still ... By Joni B. Hannigan

Baptist Press
1/4/96

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Is it a spiritual discipline or a spontaneous response to a deepening relationship with God? And why are Baptists more known for their feasting than fasting?

Fasting is both an Old and New Testament teaching, mentioned more times in Scripture than baptism, says Don Whitney in his book, "Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life."

Whitney, assistant professor of spiritual formation at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Mo., defines fasting as a "Christian's voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes."

In order for God to bless a fast, it must be God-centered in its purpose and not "coerced," he adds, calling fasting the "most feared and misunderstood of all the spiritual disciplines." As evidence, Whitney points to the lack of sermons addressing the subject. Yet, Whitney writes, Jesus "expects us to fast."

"... In the strictest sense, Jesus did not command fasting," says Quaker author Richard Foster in his book, "The Celebration of Discipline." "But it is obvious that he proceeded on the principle that the children of the kingdom of God would fast."

These and other writers discuss Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6 to not give, fast or pray so that others will see and self will be glorified.

"There's always those who are afraid to talk about (fasting), because it takes the glory away ..., but you know, we pray silently and in secret and we talk about prayer," says Alvin Reid, associate professor of evangelism and church growth at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C.

The dangers of legalism don't justify silence, adds Reid, who says he never heard about fasting until he went to college and met a man who fasted. Since then, it has been something he does when he is about to make a big decision, or when he desires to take a personal spiritual inventory or retreat alone with God. Although not opposed to lengthy fasts, Reid typically fasts for only one day at a time for "deep and concerted" prayer.

However, fasting for 40 days, as did Moses, Elijah and Jesus, is the current challenge in Bill Bright's book, "The Coming Revival." Bright, founder and president of Campus Crusade for Christ, recounts his own 40-day fast and says God has led him to pray that at least 2 million North Americans will fast and pray 40 days for an awakening in America and the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

Not wanting to be accused of "beating a fasting drum," Bright says he's committed to the Great Commission but is convinced fasting and prayer by a large number of Christians will facilitate and accelerate evangelism and discipleship as well. Prominent Christian leaders joined Bright in December 1994 for "A Special Call to Prayer and Fasting for America" in Orlando, Fla. Expecting about 300 participants, Bright wrote "God moved far beyond my expectations as more than six hundred came to fast and pray."

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Adrian Rogers, a suburban Memphis, Tenn., pastor and former Southern Baptist Convention president, and Jim Henry, an Orlando pastor and current SBC president, were among those at the prayer meeting. Rogers, in an introduction to Bright's book, says, "For many, revival is a shopworn phrase, but Dr. Bright points out that by massive fasting, repentance, praying and obedience it can be a vital reality."

Henry says he's familiar with churches that have prayed and fasted: "And I have seen God do some absolutely phenomenal things. I know that when we pray and fast, it gets the attention of heaven, and God moves in and with his people."

There are those who argue that fasting is misunderstood if it is employed in an attempt to get something from God. Henry Blackaby, author of "Experiencing God" and director of prayer and spiritual awakening at the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, warns that God is not obligated to respond to certain spiritual exercises.

"... I think that is heretical. God is God and we don't put God on the spot," Blackaby says.

Fasting is "not a spiritual discipline but rather the spontaneous response of a life that is fully concentrated on the Lord and will not break for a meal," Blackaby says. Jesus went without food when he was focused on his relationship with God to a degree that he could not break for a meal. This is different, according to Blackaby, than a person who exercises discipline in his life in hopes of producing a response from heaven.

"Fasting is a by-product of a relationship with God, rather than a means to a relationship with God," Blackaby says.

At the same time, he says he doesn't fault those who do fast for that reason. Admitting he would "hesitate" about enlisting others to fast for revival, nonetheless, Blackaby does not discount that revival could happen in that situation.

"If fasting produces a holiness and a deep commitment, and if a lot of the people fasting were led to repentance and the holiness of life," reflects Blackaby, "that creates a highway for which God can go for revival."

Scripturally, historically and personally, Blackaby defends his position, and equates it to prayer. "I don't have a quiet time in order to have a relationship with God; I have a quiet time because I have a relationship with God. I pray, not because I believe in prayer, as much as I believe in the God who answers prayer," Blackaby asserts.

He says people often are taught activity, but "you can teach people to pray (who will) have no heart relationship with God. A person who has a relationship to God -- there's no way you can keep them from giving, prayer and fasting"

It's not inconsistent to acknowledge that fasting could be both a discipline and a spontaneous response to God's love, says Dallas Willard, philosophy professor at the University of Southern California. However, he adds it is not necessarily both and cannot be both at the same time.

Willard, author of "The Spirit of the Disciplines" and an ordained Southern Baptist minister, says he believes there has been a lack of teaching about fasting in Baptist churches that is rooted in "anti-Catholicism" extremes.

This reaction harks all the way back to Martin Luther's accusations against the Catholic church about the excesses of outward punishments against the flesh that had little regard for the "grace" teachings adhered to by Baptists, Willard says. But, he adds, those teachings on grace have prompted some Baptists to sit in the pew and do little toward developing their faith, the very thing the disciplines are designed to aid.

Reid says Southern Baptists may have become too privatized and individualistic in their faith. "I do think revival and spiritual awakening is somewhat of a corrective of our theology and our ... orthopraxy. There is a hunger to know God intimately," Reid says, adding he believes spiritual awakening is when God begins to move in different places and touches different areas and hearts in the same ways.

"I think these things are of God and God is moving in the hearts of his people," Read says. "I'm encouraged, and I'm not so afraid of the wildfire that I want to miss the real fire."

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Hannigan is a writer in Ellettsville, Ind., and Baptist Student Union director at Indiana University-Bloomington. This article first appeared in the December issue of SBC Life, published by the SBC Executive Committee.

Revival and fasting:
one man's journey

By Joni B. Hannigan

Baptist Press
1/4/96

SPRINGDALE, Ark. (BP)--With a quiet but forceful voice, Ronnie Floyd, before a crowd of his peers, shared a personal testimony of God's movement in his life. Twenty-four pounds lighter than just a few months before, he explained he was not the victim of some terrible disease, but instead a man humbled by God after fasting for 40 days.

What had prompted him to drink only the juice of fruits and vegetables for such a long period of time? An answer to a call from God, said Floyd, senior pastor of First Baptist Church, Springdale, Ark., and chairman of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee.

"The Lord spoke to me and told me to pray and fast for 40 days for revival in America, my church and in my life."

After sensing that call, Floyd walked into his office and found a copy of Campus Crusade for Christ founder Bill Bright's new book, "The Coming Revival." Left by a church member, Bright's book detailed his own call to fast and pray 40 days for revival and his vision that 2 million Americans would join him.

Floyd saw confirmation of his own call in Bright's book. "I thought (a 40-day fast) was unusual. I thought it was extreme," said Floyd. "But honestly, it has been the clearest call in my life since my call to ministry. Because of that journey with God, my life will never be the same again."

While fasting, Floyd said God answered his question: What is spiritual revival?

"I believe today that spiritual revival is the manifested presence of God in your life. Revival is when the inner man can be opened up to God, when Jesus is free to be himself within you," said Floyd.

"I believe with all my heart that God is going to bring a mighty spiritual revival before he comes again," he said. "I believe it will transcend all denominational lines, all cultures, all ethnic groups, all races.

"It's far past time we repent of the arrogance we (Southern Baptists) have had for years," Floyd said. "God doesn't need the Southern Baptist Convention for revival."

Gleaning from the Old Testament Book of Haggai, Floyd highlighted three specific scriptural times leading to revival: a time of sin, a time for change and a time for revival. Quoting statistics on abortion and pornography and commenting about the conditions of America's schools and churches, Floyd said the sin of self-indulgence is evident across the nation.

Self-indulgence is "nothing more than egotism. It is self-worship" warned Floyd. "God is not pleased where many of us are. When pride walks into our churches, God walks out."

While fasting, Floyd said he read Isaiah 57:16, and "God annihilated my pride. God took me to the room and chastened me mightily.

"I believe God's greatest accomplishment in my life during this time with him was the breaking of my selfish pride which, unknown to me, had bound me so often from the fullness of everything God wanted me to have in him."

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Floyd would agree prayer and fasting is a "lost art" in the life of 20th-century believers. "Most believers do not even understand the principle, much less how to fulfill the practice. ... We must obey God when he calls us to fast, whether it be one meal, one day, three or 14 days or even a 40-day fast. We must obey God," he said.

"I'm no longer going to worship the unholy trinity of baptism, buildings and budgets. It is possible God can bring a revival to a preacher. It has come to this one. We need to (begin) praying and fasting for spiritual revival.

"God is moving greatly in our days," Floyd said. "God asks, 'Will you pay the price?' It's time for revival. ... It can happen. You need to let go, and let God do what he needs to do."

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Compiled by from Ronnie Floyd's sermon at the 1995 Southern Baptist Pastors' Conference and an article in the First Baptist Church, Springdale, Ark., magazine, Priority. This article first appeared in the December issue of SBC Life, published by the SBC Executive Committee.

First Baptist, Atlanta, to vote
on 'Ike' Reighard as associate By Herb Hollinger

Baptist Press
1/4/96

ATLANTA (BP)--First Baptist Church, Atlanta, will vote Jan. 7 whether to call Dwight "Ike" Reighard, former Georgia Baptist Convention president and SBC Pastor's Conference president, as senior associate pastor.

Reighard, 17-year senior pastor of New Hope Baptist Church, Fayetteville, south of Atlanta, would have primary responsibility for the Atlanta church's northern location in Dunwoody and sometimes preach at the church's main location in Midtown.

Reighard will assist senior pastor Charles Stanley, 62, who has led the state's largest church 26 years and is one of the country's most popular television preachers. If Reighard is elected and accepts, he said he would begin at the Atlanta church in February.

Reighard, 45, came to the Fayetteville church 20 years ago as a summer youth minister and three years later was called as pastor. It has become one of the state's fastest-growing congregations.

The Atlanta Constitution, in a Jan. 3 story, speculated the vote and the recent publicity about Stanley's marriage problems might mean Reighard would be coming to the church not only as senior associate but also as successor to "one of his denomination's most prominent pulpits." Stanley's wife, Anna, has filed for divorce in Cobb County Superior Court and recently Stanley's lawyers asked for a jury trial later this year. The Stanleys have been married 40 years but have lived apart since 1992.

"I would be thrilled to come work with (Stanley)," Reighard told Baptist Press Jan. 4. "I would love to have many years to work alongside him." Regarding the "succession" question, Reighard said that would be something the church would have to make a decision on and there "certainly is no guarantee that anything like that would take place. My prayer is that Dr. Stanley will be there for a long time."

Stanley told the congregation last year he would resign if the divorce becomes final.

Reighard told the Atlanta newspaper his intention is to "shoulder part of the burden" for Stanley as he deals with his personal difficulties. He said he is counting on Stanley's leadership to relocate the Midtown main campus to the Dunwoody location which was purchased as a future site of First Baptist. The church has operated two locations since a real estate deal to sell the Midtown property fell through.

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**Former Alaska state exec
dies in Arkansas Nov. 30**

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (BP)--Allen Meeks, former executive director for the Alaska Baptist Convention, died Nov. 30 in Mountain Home, Ark. He was 77.

According to Cloyd Sullins, Alaska executive director in his comments in the January issue of the Alaska Baptist Messenger, Meeks died in his sleep at his home in Arkansas. Meeks took a permanent medical leave of absence as Alaska's executive in 1981 as continuing health problems prompted his physician to recommend retirement.

Meeks, a native of Arkansas, came to Alaska in 1960 to help establish a new church in Anchorage and was elected executive director of the state convention at the 1980 annual meeting. Upon moving to Alaska, Meeks worked as a bivocational minister and served three churches in the Anchorage area. He became director of religious education for the convention in 1964 and served as interim executive director on three occasions, 1966, 1971 and 1979-80.

Meeks was a graduate of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

He is survived by his wife of 54 years, Ruth, and four children, 10 grandchildren and one great-granddaughter born four days before his death.

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