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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee

901 Commerce #750

Nashville, Tennessee 37203

(615) 244-2355

Herb Hollinger, Vice President

Fax (615) 742-8919

CompuServe ID# 70420,17

**(BP)**

## BUREAUS

ATLANTA Martin King, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 898-7522

DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 333 N. Washington, Dallas, Texas 75246-1798, Telephone (214) 828-5232

NASHVILLE 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300

RICHMOND Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va., 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151

WASHINGTON Tom Strode, Chief, 400 North Capitol St., #594, Washington, D.C. 20001, Telephone (202) 638-3223

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Disney boycott could reflect  
 civil rights, Kmart examples

By Ken Walker

Baptist Press  
 7/8/96

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Despite the overwhelming odds of taking on a corporate giant like the Walt Disney Company, Christians involved in other boycotts say they can work if they have enough committed, grassroots support.

"You have to stay with it," said Don Wildmon, president of the American Family Association (AFA) in Tupelo, Miss. "It's slow to catch on, but once it does it's about impossible to overcome."

He finds agreement from Christian financial newsletter publisher Austin Pryor, who supported the AFA's five-year boycott of Kmart.

"To do an effective job of withholding support from objectionable companies, we must be ready to boycott -- not their securities, but their products and services," he wrote in a recent issue of his Sound Mind Investing newsletter.

"Companies profit from our spending, not our investing," added Pryor, a conservative evangelical from Louisville, Ky. "Targeting our routine daily spending can be a potent force for change, as we saw in the recently concluded ... battle with Kmart over its pornography sales."

Boycotts aren't limited to conservative Christians. Over the years they have been used for a variety of purposes, most notably the historic Montgomery, Ala., bus boycott of 1955 that sparked the modern civil rights movement.

Others followed. In the late 1970s the AFL-CIO boycotted Coors Brewery in a labor dispute and in 1992 homosexuals targeted Colorado for its passage of an anti-homosexual rights measure. A coalition of civil rights activists successfully boycotted Arizona for the state's refusal to adopt Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday as a holiday.

Larry Hilliard, vice president of the Phoenix and Valley of the Sun Convention and Visitors Bureau, said it cost Arizona \$190 million over six years. It ended in 1993 when voters approved the holiday.

"There were groups that canceled, and later on we found out that there were other groups that fully intended to come to Arizona but didn't because of the Dr. King issue," Hilliard told the Los Angeles Times recently. "So you can see that the \$190 million figure was a conservative number."

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Although technically the Southern Baptist Convention resolution June 12 only threatens action if Disney does not change its ways, Wildmon said the public has perceived the resolution as a boycott. He said that gave a huge push to his group's 1995 call for similar action.

The corporate giant has never responded to AFA's letters offering to discuss their concerns, Wildmon said.

A few days after the SBC resolution, Disney Chairman Michael Eisner told the Los Angeles Times: "We think they're a very small group of the Southern Baptists that took a very extreme position, which we think is foolish. They seem to have been off on a tangent this year."

"Traditional family values are neither, as Mr. Eisner suggests, a 'tangent' or an 'extreme,'" replied Bill Merrell, vice president for convention relations for the SBC Executive Committee. "Disney Company has been the trusted friend of families for decades. But that well-earned trust and the carefully nurtured image as a trustworthy provider of family entertainment is at risk."

The wisdom of the convention's move has been questioned in numerous news media accounts and by Wall Street analysts who say it will have little impact on Disney's stock or operations.

During the ABC report, entertainment industry analyst Harold Vogel said that with so many people around the world using Disney products, it is highly improbable enough people will take the move seriously.

Smith Barney analyst Jill S. Krutick told Associated Press, "They're very far flung and it's very hard to avoid Walt Disney. They're an important part of our cultural fabric."

Not all Christians agree with it, either. Contemporary Christian singer Peabo Bryson followed through with his plans to sing at the premiere of Disney's new animated movie, "The Hunchback of Notre Dame."

Others point out it could hurt Christians employed in Disney's far-flung operations. "I think their heart is right, but their head is in the wrong place," gospel music agent Phillip Myles told the Los Angeles Times.

However, some believe the SBC already has had an impact. In an interview with the Los Angeles Times, Wall Street analyst Mario Gabelli said the resolution may not affect Disney's stock but could cause the company other problems.

"Will it get Michael Eisner's attention?" he asked. "Absolutely."

Miramax, the Disney subsidiary responsible for such R-rated fare as "Priest" and "Pulp Fiction," was "a mistake, and he (Eisner) knows it," Gabelli said. "This may focus Disney's attention back on the family entertainment that made the company great."

"This will definitely get Disney's attention," Wildmon echoed. "I think there will be a call from Disney to some Southern Baptists within about nine months. If they don't make that call, they're not as intelligent as I think they are."

In his newsletter, Pryor listed three distinct advantages to boycotts:

1) Participation. Not everyone has a large investment portfolio, but "all of us are consumers."

2) Ease of recruitment: "It's relatively easy to hand your friends an article on a targeted company and ask that they take this information into account before doing further business with them."

3) Concentration of forces. It is easier for groups to readily make their influence felt when directing efforts at a single decision-maker, usually the company president, Pryor noted.

The latter point became noticeable at the end of an extended battle AFA fought in the mid-80s over 7-Eleven's sales of Playboy, Penthouse and other pornographic materials.

Wildmon said the day the Southland Corporation announced it would discontinue such sales in corporate-owned 7-Eleven stores, Playboy and Penthouse lost a key sales channel -- and their circulation dropped significantly.

The United Methodist minister also questioned analysts who say boycotts are ineffective. In addition to Southland, he mentioned past public statements by Clorox and Burger King to settle AFA boycotts, with the latter placing advertisements in major newspapers nationwide.

The Kmart boycott particularly shows what can be accomplished, he said. When it began in 1991, they were the number two retailer in the nation and expected to be number one within a year, he said.

After a long economic slide, the board of directors fired its chairman and the company is still struggling to turn around its finances, he said.

A U.S. News and World Report story last November chronicled Kmart's economic slide, although it indicated competition from Wal-Mart had much to do with the retailer's problems. In 1994, Wal-Mart's sales totaled \$82 billion compared to \$34 billion for Kmart, whose stock slid from \$24.50 a share in the fall of 1993 to \$9.38 two years later.

Nevertheless, company spokeswoman Shawn Kahle told the newsmagazine that "in certain regions of the country, the boycott affected the amount of store traffic, without a doubt."

During the boycott, the association received several phone calls and letters from managers saying, "I don't know if it's hurting anyone else but it's hurting me, big time," Wildmon recalled.

He agreed to curtail the boycott last fall after the chain divested itself of Waldenbooks, whose sales of pornography had sparked picketing by AFA. New Chairman Floyd Hall requested the AFA change, the second time he had contacted the organization last year.

"That was clear proof that the boycott was effective and contributed in a significant way to the financial problems suffered by Kmart," Wildmon said. "Our boycott was not totally responsible for the economic woes of Kmart, but it was certainly a major part of their economic decline."

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Walker is a freelance writer in Louisville, Ky.

Wildmon mails Disney packet  
to 28,500 Baptist pastors

By Ken Walker

Baptist Press  
7/8/96

TUPELO, Miss. (BP)--Southern Baptist pastors looking for additional reasons to support a boycott of the Walt Disney Company will be finding them in their mailboxes.

On July 3, the American Family Association (AFA) mailed packets to 28,500 SBC pastors containing a letter, fact sheet explaining reasons for the boycott and a list of Disney's products. The packet will include a postcard that can be returned to Disney Chairman Michael Eisner.

Wildmon said AFA has printed 500,000 boycott cards, which are perforated to allow the sender to mail a message to Eisner and retain the product list.

The AFA also is mailing a series of public service announcements to approximately 1,200 Christian radio stations. President Donald Wildmon said these outlets generally have been supportive of past boycotts by airing the PSAs.

Boycotts generally take up to two years to have an impact, Wildmon said, adding because of Disney's size, it could take two and a half to three years before the company sees any difference on its bottom line.

"I've done this for 20 years and I know how it works," he said. "If the SBC or AFA calls for a boycott, you're not going to see any effect in 30 days. It's foolish to think you are. But if you aggressively promote it ... you'll see an impact.

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"We're getting feedback from the public about Disney, wanting information or verification (of its actions). This is the way boycotts normally catch on, from the grassroots level. I saw an editorial from the Texas Catholic, the diocese paper for Dallas, which has endorsed it. I expect other denominations to come on board."

The SBC resolution cited five primary reasons for its concern about Disney, such as extending insurance benefits to employees' homosexual partners, hosting homosexual theme nights at its amusement parks and distributing films that attack Christian values.

The AFA fact sheet provides further details of the company's actions. Among them:

-- Objectionable elements in children's movies, such as censoring Pocohontas' conversion to Christianity in its recent animated feature. It also portrayed two characters in "The Lion King" as homosexual. For the latter claim, it cited a New York Times interview with the actors who played the roles.

-- Hiring a director specifically to produce a movie belittling Christian beliefs and another movie about a man's pursuit of a lesbian. Disney also hired a lesbian director to develop female and lesbian movies, drawing praise from a gay magazine.

-- A company subsidiary, Miramax, distributing movies that contain graphic and sexually-explicit language, are excessively violent or pro-homosexual or contain nudity.

-- Helping underwrite a Hollywood benefit for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

-- Including the actual number of a phone-sex line in the 1994 movie, "The Santa Clause."

Those who want to boycott Disney may find it tough to forego all contact with the entertainment giant, which owns the ESPN sports network and ABC, which features such family oriented fare as "Home Improvement" and Friday night's "TGIF" programming.

Disney companies also hold the rights to popular shows like "Live With Regis and Kathie Lee" and "Siskel & Ebert," market numerous family oriented videos and own a host of daily newspapers and radio and TV stations.

Wildmon acknowledged the company's size will make the battle extremely difficult and make it hard for people to avoid all contact. Given the situation, he said participants should shun Disney products at a level that is comfortable for them.

A boycott is something you can't force people to participate with, he said. Obviously, not all Christians will participate; some don't agree with the idea of boycotts, he added.

Despite criticism of the measure, he said he expects it will eventually register when viewers either cancel or refuse to take cable's Disney Channel and stop purchasing other Disney products.

"This is a matter of Christian stewardship," Wildmon said. "It's about spending your money where it would make a difference for the kingdom of God, and where it would not be detrimental to his kingdom.

"You don't fight battles because you can win 'em. You fight them because they're the right battles to fight, and this is the right battle to fight."

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Baptist Olympic ministries  
ready with 'More Than Gold'

By Barbara Denman

Baptist Press  
7/8/96

ATLANTA (BP)--In downtown Atlanta where five major arteries intersect and create the area known as Five Points, the Reebok sports apparel manufacturer has created an interactive learning center in a storefront facing Woodruff Park.

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Reebok has nothing to sell at the center, only hospitality and activities for thousands of people who will be roaming downtown streets while attending the Olympic games. The sole purpose of the hospitality center's existence is name recognition.

About a block away, in a storefront located between Woodruff Park and the Five Points MARTA Station, the Bottom Line Ministry Center will serve as another hospitality area to visitors. As part of Southern Baptists' outreach to the 1996 Olympic Summer Games, Atlanta International Ministries '96 also is counting on the ministry center for name recognition -- the name and message of Jesus Christ.

Throughout the city, Fortune 500 companies and nations of the world are carving out niches in storefronts and billboards to proclaim their messages. A city once known for the color peach is now being painted in red, white and blue. Southern Baptists will be sharing their message, too -- that the Christian faith offers "More Than Gold."

Beginning the last week of June and continuing through August, Southern Baptist volunteers began offering street entertainment, a children's ministry, a cool respite and large-screen televisions tuned to the Olympic games at the downtown ministry center. Through each of these activities, volunteers are sharing their faith.

In its first week of operation, 35 people made professions of faith.

The downtown ministry center is the cornerstone of AIM '96's efforts which will disburse more than 8,000 Southern Baptist volunteers across Georgia and neighboring states where the Olympic games will be held July 19-Aug. 4 and the Paralympics games Aug. 15-25.

While AIM '96 efforts will be directed to the 2 million spectators and visitors to the Olympics, Southern Baptists also will have a presence inside the Olympic Village among the athletes.

Elmer Goble, director of the volunteer projects department of the Home Mission Board, has been named the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games (ACOG) director of interfaith religious services inside the Olympic Village. Goble's main responsibility is to provide worship opportunities for 17,000 athletes from 200 nations while they are in Atlanta.

The Georgia Tech Baptist Student Union located inside the village will serve as the primary religious center for the athletes. Chris Fuller, a Savannah-area BSU campus minister, will serve as interfaith religious services director for athletes competing at the Savannah venue.

The games also are expected to bring nearly 2,500 law enforcement officers representing 49 countries who will volunteer their time and experience to provide security for the Olympic Village. Lowell Lawson of the HMB chaplaincy department will serve as chaplain to the law enforcement personnel, coordinating ministries and developing relationships with this group.

The results of these efforts will give Southern Baptists their most comprehensive Olympic ministry ever.

AIM '96 is coordinating ministries at eight venues (locations where the games will be held): downtown Atlanta; Athens, Columbus, Gainesville, Savannah, Stone Mountain and Conyers, Ga.; and Benton, Tenn. Ministries also are being planned at 10 visitors centers across the state. Alabama Baptists are sponsoring a variety of ministries for Olympic visitors attending the soccer games at the Birmingham venue.

Each venue will have several ministry sites where volunteers will have an opportunity to welcome visitors and share a face-to-face gospel witness.

The downtown venue sites include Bottom Line Ministry Center; Georgia State University's BSU; Olympic Stadium in coordination with the Martin Street Church of God; Techwood Baptist Center, located just outside the Olympic Village; Euclid Avenue Baptist Church in the heart of Little Five Points neighborhood; First Baptist Church of Decatur; and hotel ministries.

Volunteers will offer a variety of mime, puppetry and musical presentations; language, medical and children's services; and coffee and hospitality houses in these locations. Evangelism teams will travel the streets of Atlanta on foot and the MARTA transit system, distributing information about AIM '96 hospitality centers, upcoming events and sharing their faith with people they meet through personal testimony and evangelistic materials.

Atlanta Olympic officials are expecting masses of people as the downtown area becomes a big street festival, according to Ginger Howell, AIM '96 downtown venue coordinator. "And Southern Baptists will be there," she said.

Two Atlanta-area venues, Stone Mountain and Conyers, will offer 13 combined ministry sites. These ministries will include creative arts, hospitality, information, children's activities, backyard Bible clubs in multihousing locations, chaplaincy services to area hotels and interpreters. AIM '96 and area churches are providing ministries and entertainment as the Olympic torch passes through the venues on its way to Atlanta.

Similar ministries equipped with trained evangelistic witnesses will be held at the other venues.

Several resources have been developed by AIM '96 and the HMB to assist volunteers in sharing their message that the Christian life is worth "More than Gold." Because pin trading is a popular hobby in the international sporting events, a label pin, with the words "More Than Gold" has been developed. As a witnessing aid, the colors -- royal blue, purple, red, gold and green -- on the pin offer an evangelistic outline, similar to the "salvation bracelet concept."

A "More than Gold" Interactive Pocket Guide is a guide to the Olympic events with an attractive gospel presentation. A Sports New Testament featuring Olympic athletes in several languages was developed in part by Southern Baptists and is available through the American Bible Society. Frisbees with the gospel message also are available for distribution.

Woman's Missionary Union groups throughout the Southern Baptist Convention have contributed hospitality bags to distribute to Olympic visitors. These bags will include lip balm, pieces of candy, sun block, postcards and a gospel tract.

Four Atlanta-area churches will hold five "More than Gold" evangelistic rallies while the Olympics are being held, featuring testimonies from Christian Athletes and musical performances. The churches are New Hope Baptist Church in Fayetteville, Greenforest Baptist Church in Decatur, Roswell Street Baptist Church in Marietta (which will hold two rallies) and First Baptist Church of Atlanta.

According to Linda Johnson, AIM '96 director, the ministries offered by the organization "could not have been done without the dedication and commitment of local Georgia Baptist churches."

Russ Barker, Atlanta director of missions, agreed. "Even if no one makes a profession of faith, this ministry has served a great value in pulling Atlanta churches together in a common task with a spirit of enthusiasm and cooperation."

He added, "It has brought a new focus on prayer, that all churches -- large, small, rural and inner city -- have a common goal."

Now that the volunteers are trained, ministries are in place and the athletes are arriving, Baptists are saying, "Let the games begin."

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Orlando was training ground  
for Johnson's Olympic ministry By Barbara Denman

Baptist Press  
7/8/96

ORLANDO, Fla. (BP)--When Southern Baptists began looking for a person to coordinate a ministry during the Olympics -- an event destined to bring people from every nation to the heart of the Bible Belt -- they looked to a city that serves as the world's number one tourist destination.

This summer, due to the Olympics, Atlanta will look very much like Orlando, Fla., does every day -- with the world at its doorsteps.

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For more than 10 years, Linda Johnson coordinated resort and special ministries for the Greater Orlando Baptist Association. There she enlisted Orlando Baptist churches in a variety of special ministries designed to share the gospel with people who are at leisure, people who may never attend a church.

These efforts included day camps in hotels, motels and campgrounds, marketplace ministries, creative art ministries at fairs, festivals, parades, theme parks and rest stops and sport ministries during soccer's World Cup Championship games.

In 1994, a group of Atlanta-area Baptists tapped Johnson to serve as director of AIM '96 (Atlanta International Ministries), an organization created to promote and coordinate volunteerism at the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta. "Without a doubt, Orlando served as a training ground for the ministry I have here," said Johnson, 37. "Almost all the principles of doing resort work in Orlando have been transferred to Atlanta."

Opening ceremonies for the Olympics begin July 19 and closing ceremonies will be Aug. 4.

At last count, more than 8,000 volunteers from across the Southern Baptist Convention -- and more than 60 Florida Baptist churches -- and volunteers from Atlanta-area Baptist churches, will serve as AIM '96 volunteers. Ministries will be provided primarily to tourists in almost every venue (a location where the Olympic games will be played), including Atlanta, Stone Mountain, Conyers, Athens, Gainesville, Savannah, Columbus and the Ocoee River.

The ministry Johnson has put together is beyond the vision of the original committee, said Russell Barker, director of missions for the Atlanta Baptist Association who helped bring Johnson to AIM '96. "The scope, the types of ministry, the number of people involved is beyond anyone's expectation."

Johnson expanded the AIM '96 effort "to fit her own interests and capabilities to exceed her and our expectations," he added.

"Linda was a real godsend," Barker noted. "I can honestly blame it all on God. We could not have found her on our own. God sent her to us."

Noting the committee interviewed more than 10 "extremely well-qualified persons" for the post, Barker added, "Anyone could have done an adequate job, but when Linda came before the committee we could see a special unique quality above anyone else, and it was unanimous that this is the person prepared for the job."

Barker credits Johnson with the ability to imagine, dream and envision what can be created, not just rely on what had been done in the past.

Southern Baptists through the Home Mission Board have offered Olympic ministries in the past when the summer games were held in Los Angeles in 1984 and the winter games in Lake Placid in 1980. The Foreign Mission Board sponsored ministries in Seoul in 1988 and Lillehammer in 1994.

When the call came for Johnson to assume the AIM '96 duties, she and her husband, Lloyd, and two daughters left Orlando for a three-year stint in Atlanta. They did so even without knowing if Johnson would have another job when the Olympics are completed. Johnson still does not know what she will do when the Olympics are over.

But that possibility doesn't seem to frighten Johnson, who said she knew "beyond a shadow of a doubt that this was where the Lord wanted me."

Working in the midst of the Olympic hoopla brings back bittersweet memories for Johnson. In 1982, just months after she assumed the resort ministry in Orlando, her fiancée was killed in a plane crash in her native Oklahoma. He, too, had chased the Olympic dream, qualifying for the Olympic team in 1980 in the 110 high hurdle event. But that year, Russian troops invaded Afghanistan, prompting President Jimmy Carter to withdraw American teams from participating in Olympic games on Russian soil. As he was training for the 1984 games, his life was tragically cut short.

"I've wondered if that is an underlying reason for what I'm doing," Johnson said. "Perhaps God has placed me here because I know what the Olympic athletes and their families are going through."

As she has worked with more than 40 parachurch and denominational organizations to pull together a Southern Baptist Olympic ministry, Johnson seemed to zoom ahead of the pack, filling niches and carving out specific roles of involvement for Southern Baptist volunteers. She has met with churches, community and civic leaders and Olympic committees. The results of her work: "There is not a ministry area we're not involved in. We have an avenue into everything I wanted."

But coming to that place has not been easy, as Johnson has had to overcome biases against religious groups' involvement and her own gender. "I've lost a few battles, but I'm winning the war," she said laughingly. "I expect to win all the time."

The past two and a half years have been a "roller coaster ride," Johnson said. "Within an hour's time, you have highs and lows. You don't have a chance to stop for a break."

Noting the experience has "improved my prayer life," Johnson said, "I've seen God more actively at work than I've ever seen before. I have seen things happen and I know that it was only possible through him."

The purpose of her role, she added, "is to get Baptists as involved as possible, because its scriptural. Things happen in the world and Baptists let them fly off. They need to be in the Olympic ministry because this summer the Olympics is at the center of the world."

Beth Ann Mauney, who was working with AIM '96 before Johnson was hired, said she doubts "if anyone else could do the job, just because Linda is hugely creative and has the ability to see and address the big picture."

Mauney credits Johnson with teaching her the basics of Christian special ministries. "If you have your people trained and ready, the opportunity will come about. Be professional in all you do. Do your best and be where people are, even if that's not a typical place where a Christian presence may be."

Entering the AIM '96 office located in the Georgia Baptist Convention building, you can't help but notice a quote placed on the wall, sent to the staff by Sandra White of Palm Coast. "Something of this size you can't treat it like it's in your backyard."

Starting July 19, Atlanta will be the backyard of the world. Southern Baptists will be there, in part, due to the efforts of Johnson.

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Retirees invest 18 months  
in Baptist Olympic outreach

Baptist Press  
7/8/96

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--By most accounts, Bud and Norma Taylor should be traveling around the country in their recreational vehicle, leisurely enjoying the good life.

After he retired in 1978, the Taylors built a home in Eustis, Fla., planning to take it easy. Then in 1984 the "mission bug" bit the couple and their life has never been the same -- mission trips to Honduras, building churches in the Midwest, coordinating the Mission Service Corps volunteer program in Florida and ministering at fairs, festivals and in the aftermath of hurricanes.

For the past 18 months, the Taylors have been unpaid volunteers who have traveled across the South inspiring and enlisting volunteers to get involved Southern Baptists' Olympic ministries.

But more than that, the Taylors have been the glue that holds together the staff of the Atlanta International Ministries '96.

When Linda Johnson assumed the role of AIM '96 director, she began talking with the Taylors, who served as Florida Baptist mission volunteers coordinator, about helping her pull the Olympic ministry together. "I needed someone who knew how to work with volunteers, talk softly with them," Johnson said.

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She also needed someone to serve as a counselor and grandparent to the 10-member staff, who, except for Johnson, are in their early 20s. "There is no way this would have been successful without them. We have a young staff. They've added a depth and maturity that we needed."

"Above everything else, the Taylors have brought a sense of stability to the organization," said Russell Barker, director of missions for the Atlanta Baptist Association. "Their experience, maturity was exactly what was needed to counterbalance the youthful energy."

The Taylors, members of Bay Street Baptist Church, Eustis, Fla., moved to Atlanta in March 1995. They will remain until after the Olympics and leave in September. They have spoken to 50-60 churches and associations encouraging Southern Baptists to be involved in the Olympic ministries.

Norma Taylor joked she has talked to all 8,000 volunteers on the phone, or so it seems. They also have helped in developing volunteers guides. She said the hardest thing about the work with AIM '96 is so much of the work is administrative and not hands-on ministry.

During the Olympics, the couple will give up the house where they have been residing so it can be used by volunteers. They will live in their motor home outside the AIM '96 office, working night and day in the command center.

The year has been a defining one for the Taylors too. Two close central Florida friends, including Florida Baptist volunteer Marie Smith, died this past year. "We began questioning, how much does God expect us to sacrifice?" she said.

After that, the Taylors began making more time for themselves, taking trips to get away from the stress. It also helps to know their tenure will be ending in several months, she added.

"This is the biggest thing I've ever been involved in," said Bud Taylor. "The magnitude of what is being accomplished by AIM is overwhelming.

"There is only one person who can pull this off -- God. With all our efforts, unless God pulls this together it won't be done," he said.

"They're heroes to me," said Barker. "They are retired and should be people at leisure. Here they are giving time, money, commitment, everything to a high level."

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Death row inmates helped  
to believe in Jesus & sing

By Steve Achord

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ANGOLA, La. (BP)--In the shadow of the lethal injection table, 61 men -- scheduled to die -- eat, sleep, wait and pray. Occasionally, they sing.

"I'm going home on the morning train, get right church and let's go home. Evening train might be too late, oh Lord, might be too late."

Echoing out of the darkened six- by eight-foot cells of death row at Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola, La., the light of Jesus is reaching some of the state's most hardened criminals.

Considered to be unworthy and unreachable by many, death row inmates' spiritual and physical needs nevertheless are addressed by death row counselors and chaplains.

"I'm there to love them and bring them Jesus," says Carol Morgan, a Home Missions Service Corp volunteer involved in ministering to the men. "He died for them and it's up to them to accept or reject Jesus,"

The plight of both the inmates and spiritual advisers garnered national attention following the release of "Dead Man Walking," a motion picture inspired from the book with the same title written by a Louisiana nun, Helen Prejean. The title originates from the words guards at San Quentin Prison are said to have yelled when a death-row inmate was let out of his cell: "Dead man walking!"

Six years ago at age 48, Morgan saw herself starting over following the death of her husband.

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"When my husband died, the Lord spoke to me and said I want you to start a grief support group," Morgan recounts.

Although reluctant, she moved forward with the encouragement of her pastor, writing what she thought should be a grief and bereavement program to be used primarily in churches and hospitals.

Morgan prayed, "Lord, if you open the door, I will walk through it and do what you want me to do."

Several years later, Morgan found herself walking through the open iron doors leading to the tiers of Angola's death row where she has led many of the men in 14-week sessions on grief and bereavement and, currently, spiritual warfare.

For Morgan, being consistent and meeting the men where they are is what has made the difference. "Carol is genuinely interested in us," says Glen, a death row inmate since 1989. "She has the love of God and she radiates that to us."

She visits weekly, meeting with the men face to face in the small chapel on the row. Standing next to a chalkboard with 39 of the death row inmates seated around her, Morgan's weekly Bible studies are giving the men opportunities to pray together, discuss Scriptures, fellowship with other inmates, but most importantly see a positive role model.

Southern Baptist Chaplain Wiley Magee from Covington, La., spent nearly five years meeting the needs of death row inmates. Currently, there is no chaplain assigned to death row on a full-time basis. Now, Magee and other chaplains divide their time in several areas on the vast 18,000-acre prison farm. During his time on the tier, however, Magee says God used him and he was able to see lives changed.

"Ministering on death row is very difficult," Magee says. "Teaching Scripture and putting them in an incarceration context is what you have to do. Church setting sermons don't apply here." But for the most part, he says, most of the men were receptive to hearing about Christ as long as they knew he was consistent and meant what he said.

As one inmate put it, "Wiley Magee walks the talk."

Before ending up on death row, finding positive role models and mentors who walked the talk was hard to come by, if nonexistent for many of the inmates. For 19-year-old Roger, the youngest man on death row, death row has led him to see the need for positive role models, not like the ones he had on the streets. "All you can do is pray. It's sad you have to come here to see the wrong steps you have taken in your life," Roger says.

The needs on death row are great, Magee says, explaining most men on death row don't know what they believe and are crying out to know what God is really like. "We need people who would support us consistently, not for one time only," he says of needed volunteers.

Back at the chalkboard, Morgan listens to the men sing and constantly reminds them of Jesus' example and how he lived his life while on the earth.

"We're all fighting the death penalty, but I'm ready to meet the Lord," says inmate Larry. "Everyone wants to go to heaven, but no one wants to die."

The singing continues.

"We're going see the King, no more dying there, we're going to see the King. Hallelujah, Hallelujah, we're going to see the King."

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Achord is director of food services at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and a freelance writer.

**Teens need divorce support  
at church, counselor says**

**By Charles Willis**

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Teenagers dealing with the pain of their parents' divorce need support at church, a licensed professional counselor maintains.

Of the 50,000-plus divorce recovery support groups in the United States, most are offered by schools, hospitals and community agencies, Sandi Black told participants in Discipleship and Family Development Week at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center, July 6-12.

Black, a Southern Baptist and staff member with Texas Christian Counseling Centers in Fort Worth, Texas, said she believes "church is a place where families need to heal." And she added Southern Baptists now appear to be leading out in the effort with discipleship courses like "Healing the Wounds: Teenagers Learning to Cope with Divorce," curriculum produced by the Baptist Sunday School Board for youth affected by divorce or those interested in helping friends affected by divorce.

"I can remember when churches wouldn't even talk about (divorce), as though it were not in their church. It was somewhere else," she said. "The typical family is no longer a mother, father, two children, a dog and a picket fence."

Youth ministry also has changed, she continued.

"Youth ministers used to be the people who took youth on trips and kept them too busy to sin," she joked.

But the proliferation of single-parent homes and joint custody arrangements for children, she said, means youth ministry goes beyond relating to youth. The youth minister must work with the parents, too.

The road to recovery for divorce is much like the grief and loss process, Black said. Youth coping with the loss of family as they have known it first express shock, numbness and the denial response of "this isn't happening."

Anger follows, she said, with statements such as "this isn't fair." Resentment, hostility and rage emerge as numbness wears off and reality is faced. Many times teens assume they are to blame for the divorce, feeling they are in the middle between parents in conflict.

The next emotional step is one of bargaining, believing "this can be worked out." Teens may hold hope their parents will get back together.

Depression follows when teens realize the situation cannot be changed. Fatalistic thinking may lead teens to feel they do not want to continue living because their parents are not together.

With time, she said the final stage of recovery -- hope -- allows teens to begin to live life again.

"We have a whole generation of parents who didn't learn parenting from their parents," Black said. Youth ministers face the challenge of helping divorced parents see how some teenage behavior problems may be the result of the parents' marital problems or broken marriage, even years after a divorce.

Among the issues teens face when parents divorce are whether to take the side of one parent over another, who to live with, possible separation from siblings, visitation with the absent parent, personal blame for the divorce, a possible move, an uncertain financial future, a change in schools, dating and remarriage of a parent, difficult holiday arrangements, the perceptions of friends and an increase in family responsibilities.

Black said youth ministers may recognize family problems by identifying characteristics of dysfunctional families. Among those are the focus of a family's attention completely on an emotionally needy family member, placing limits on the expression of feelings, discouraging open discussion of obvious problems, permitting destructive roles such as children assuming adult responsibilities, failure to provide appropriate nurture for developing children and being closed as a family to the outside world.

Discipleship and Family Development Week was sponsored by the Baptist Sunday School Board's discipleship and family development division.

53 youth bike 700 miles,  
often witnessing for Christ

By Wes Fulton

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Youth minister Steve Bell wanted to show teenagers that excitement and fulfillments in life are not found through drugs, alcohol or sex. He wanted to show teenagers that, if they put their minds to it, they could accomplish anything.

Inspired by a program sponsored by Whitesburg Baptist Church, Huntsville, Ala., Bell put those principles in action this summer at First Baptist Church, Gardendale, Ala., leading a group of 53 Birmingham high school students on a 700-mile bike ride from Chicago back to Birmingham.

The ride was part of the church's "Extreme" youth ministry, an innovative program Bell started to encourage teens to "go beyond mediocrity and strive to achieve greatness in every area of their lives."

The group left Chicago June 7, bundled in warm clothes. "It was cold as a whip there," Bell recounted. The group arrived back at the Gardendale church June 15.

"We wanted to show the kids that if they worked hard enough, they could accomplish a lot, not just physical-wise, but spiritual-wise," said Chris Snow, one of the participants in the ride. The team stayed in churches along the way, worshiping with different congregations and giving presentations to youth groups. The team also used their status as a curiosity to witness and hand out tracts to bystanders.

The team began preparing for the grueling trip last November. In March, team members began training on bikes. Each member was required to keep a log of the total miles he or she had cycled, with a minimum of 1,500 completed miles before being able to qualify for the Chicago-to-Birmingham ride. Participants also were expected to maintain a GPA of 2.0 or better and to participate in one of eight activity teams, including gymnastics, karate, drama, music, mimes, singing, clowns and puppets.

Seeing the support and teamwork in action was the most significant part of the trip for him, Snow said. "We were all trying to make it, and nobody felt like doing it. When the kids started encouraging each other, pushing each other on, I think that was the best part of it for me."

Snow also was impressed by some of the mission opportunities arising during the trip.

"One day, we were riding and it was pouring down rain. We pulled into a school, and they let us stay in the gym. As soon as we came in, we saw these kids peek around the corner. It turns out, there was this driver's ed class going on. The teacher invited us to come in and speak to the class and talk about what we were doing, so we actually got to share the gospel in a public high school."

Bell noted "if it hadn't been pouring down rain, we never would have had the opportunity to do that"

Though the trip itself was nearly 700 miles, the actual significance is beyond mere facts and figures, Bells said. "There's no way you can measure on paper the magnitude of what these kids have accomplished."

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Fulton is a summer intern at The Alabama Baptist newsjournal.

He taught Sunday school via  
cellular phone from a bike

By Marv Knox

AUSTIN, Texas (BP)--Gerald Pollard really covered some territory when he taught a Sunday school lesson on 1 Thessalonians to his class this spring.

Pollard pedaled several miles during the lesson, thanks to a little creativity, high technology and a good bicycle.

Pollard taught his class at WestOak Woods Baptist Church, Austin, Texas, while participating in a Houston-to-Austin road rally to raise money for multiple sclerosis research and treatment.

"My wife, Rosanne, has MS, so I've been biking in this fund-raiser for seven or eight years," Pollard said of his involvement in the 168-mile bicycle journey.

However, he approached this year's bikeathon with mixed loyalties. Of course, he was going to do his part to fight the disease that cripples thousands of adults. But he still had an obligation for Sunday morning.

"This spring, I started teaching a Sunday school class at our church," he said. "And I didn't want to miss another Sunday out of the classroom.

"So, I thought, cellular phones are supposed to work everywhere. Why don't I get a cellular phone and teach from the road?"

Pollard stowed a couple of battery-powered cellular phones in his backpack, made sure a speaker phone was in his classroom and called in to teach at 10 Sunday morning.

"Class starts at 9:45, so they had read the Scripture and were ready to go when I called. Then we talked for about 30 minutes," he said of the class, which he taught in his usual dialogue format.

Pollard held the phone in one hand and steered his bike with the other. "My biking arm got tired, so I had to switch ears with the phone a few times," he recounted. And at times, the wind whistled through his telephone, making hearing a bit difficult.

Still, the technology held up, and the class was a success, he said.

"If I did it again, I would try to find a secluded spot and get off the bike. But the participants seemed to like it, and I'm glad we did it."

The New Beginnings Class dubbed Pollard's on-the-road lesson "Hi-Tech Sunday." And even with the teacher teaching unusually, the usual crowd of nine to 12 members attended, he said.

The non-Sunday school part of the weekend was a success, too. Pollard completed the rally and raise "a little over \$900" to fight multiple sclerosis.

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