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ATLANTA Martin King, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 898-7522, CompuServe 70420,250  
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 333 N. Washington, Dallas, Texas 75246-1798, Telephone (214) 828-5232, CompuServe 70420,115  
NASHVILLE Linda Lawson, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300, CompuServe 70420,57  
RICHMOND Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151, CompuServe 70420,72  
WASHINGTON Tom Strode, Chief, 400 North Capitol St., #594, Washington, D.C. 20001, Telephone (202) 638-3223, CompuServe 71173,316

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KENTUCKY--Want your church to grow? Set a goal & make it known.

CALENDAR

NORTH CAROLINA--Southeastern Seminary trustees, March 11-12, Wake Forest.

TEXAS--Southwestern Seminary trustees, March 11-13, Fort Worth.

NEW ORLEANS-- New Orleans Seminary trustees, March 12-13, New Orleans.

Chapman: Solid operation ahead  
for Southern Baptist Foundation

Baptist Press  
3/8/96

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--The Southern Baptist Foundation, which is to become a corporation of the Executive Committee under the "Covenant for a New Century" restructuring of the Southern Baptist Convention, "will remain a high-trust operation," according to Morris Chapman, Executive Committee president and chief executive officer.

Chapman's statement was in response to some inquiries about the future of the foundation, in light of the Executive Committee's vote in September for a new charter, under which the foundation's trustees would be elected by the Executive Committee rather than the Southern Baptist Convention.

"It was the intent of the Program and Structure Study Committee that the foundation's work continue at a quality level," Chapman said. "The highest fiduciary integrity will continue under the new arrangement."

The seven-member PSSC framed the restructuring, which was approved by messengers to the 1995 SBC annual meeting in Atlanta.

Hollis Johnson has been president of the Southern Baptist Foundation for 19 and a half years. Chapman said he will recommend that Johnson continue to lead the foundation after the changeover in June 1997, assuming a favorable vote by messengers at this year's annual meeting, June 11-13 in New Orleans, on SBC Bylaw 15's listing of SBC entities and the proposed charter amendment for the foundation.

"Hollis Johnson has built longstanding relationships which will be vital to the foundation's future," Chapman noted.

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Johnson said there is absolutely no reason for donors to be anxious about the funds invested with the foundation. The trust funds will receive the same careful management in the future as they have in the past, he said, noting: "Fiduciary laws and our own sense of integrity will insure that the intent of every donor is honored."

The new board of the foundation would be reduced from 34 to seven in the charter amendment. "The Executive Committee will seek experienced business and financial minds in SBC life in considering board members for the SBF," Chapman said. "Prospective trustees can be selected from Executive Committee members, current and former foundation trustees and other qualified Southern Baptists."

Johnson said he plans to utilize the new board as he has the foundation's current investment committee in getting advice on investment strategies.

SBC attorney James P. Guenther, in answer to questions during the February Executive Committee meeting, addressed liability implications for the SBC and the Executive Committee created by the new corporation.

"The Tennessee nonprofit corporation act says specifically that a member of a corporation is not liable for the torts and debts of the corporation," Guenther said, "and we're satisfied we're not creating any ascending (lawsuit) liability either for the Executive Committee or for the Southern Baptist Convention."

Also during the meeting, Chapman noted the Executive Committee would not be managing donor funds.

"The SBC Foundation, although it is (to be) a subsidiary corporation of the Executive Committee, will nonetheless operate as a corporation," Chapman said. "It will have a board of trustees ... (and) a president in place who is equipped, who is professional and who will continue in the leadership of the management of funds."

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Compiled by Art Toalston.

Assisted suicide ruling rocks  
sanctity of life proponents

By Dwayne Hastings

Baptist Press  
3/8/96

WASHINGTON (BP)--A federal appeals court ruling in San Francisco shocked sanctity of life advocates March 6, perhaps opening the door to making physician-assisted suicide a legal reality across the United States.

The 8-3 ruling by the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco overturned a Washington state law which had held doctor-aided suicides a felony, indicating the law was a denial of due process of law under the 14th Amendment to the Constitution.

"When patients are no longer able to pursue liberty or happiness and do not wish to pursue life, the state's interest in forcing them to remain alive is clearly less compelling," appellate Judge Stephen Reinhardt wrote for the majority, according a report in the March 7 Washington Post. The court maintained that a mentally competent, terminally ill adult had a constitutional right to request a physician to aid in taking his life.

Drawing from a legal foundation built by earlier Supreme Court abortion cases, Reinhardt wrote, "Like the decision of whether or not to have an abortion, the decision how and when to die is one of the most intimate and personal choices a person may make in a lifetime, a choice central to personal dignity and autonomy."

While decrying the decision, C. Ben Mitchell, consultant on biomedical and life issues for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, said the ruling was a natural consequence of a society in which its members are so obsessed with self. "Autonomy, that is, individual self-determination, has sadly become the reigning value of our culture. The irony is that we spend millions of dollars annually funding suicide hot lines and providing intervention to stop people from taking their life."

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Reinhardt, in writing for the majority, also stated, "There is a constitutionally protected liberty interest in determining the time and manner of one's own death." The ruling overturns an earlier appellate court decision which held there was "no constitutional right to aid in killing oneself."

"This court has unearthed a previously undiscovered right to die," said Richard Land, CLC president. "This is a logical extension of the modern quality of life ethic which is subverting the sanctity of life ethic upon which this country and its culture was built."

"We need clearly to understand the implications of this decision," Mitchell added. "Not only does it overturn over 2,500 years of medical morality, but it licenses healers to become accomplices in murder."

Mitchell warned the decision was just one more step toward the eventual wholesale legalization of euthanasia. "Once the wall has been breached, there is virtually nothing to prevent voluntary assisted dying from becoming active euthanasia."

Reinhardt had noted that he feared the unchecked "exercise of arbitrary and intrusive power by the state" might deprive a terminally ill person of his right to choose the time of his death.

Rebutting Reinhardt's argument, Mitchell said the judge's concern is further evidence of "how deep the roots of the culture of death have sunk."

The ruling will have a dramatic impact on the medical community, Mitchell said, suggesting it "may become necessary for those physicians committed to the Hippocratic Oath to publicly advertise they do not participate in the intentional killing of their patients."

The court's jurisdiction includes nine far western states as well as U.S. holdings in the Pacific basin. Washington state officials are expected to appeal the decision to the U.S. Supreme Court.

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CLC elects Dwayne Hastings  
director of communications

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press  
3/8/96

WASHINGTON (BP)--The Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission elected Dwayne Hastings, news and information coordinator at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, as its director of communications during its semiannual meeting March 7.

The trustees also voted to give the CLC's 1996 John Leland Religious Liberty Award to evangelical theologian Carl F.H. Henry.

The board unanimously approved Hastings to fill a position left vacant Jan. 1 when Bill Merrell became vice president of convention relations for the SBC Executive Committee. Hastings is expected to begin working in the CLC's Nashville office April 1.

Hastings, a 1995 master of divinity graduate from Southeastern, edited Outlook magazine and The Olive Press newsjournal and wrote for Baptist Press during his two years in the news and information coordinator's job at the seminary. Before attending seminary, he served as an interim minister to youth for 18 months.

Previously, he worked for three different corporations for 14 years. While an undergraduate student at Vanderbilt University, Hastings was station manager and news director of a campus radio station. Hastings received a bachelor of arts from Vanderbilt.

"Dwayne has a perfect mix of interests and talents that we need at the Christian Life Commission," said CLC President Richard Land after the board's vote. In addition to his experience in print journalism, radio, marketing and market analysis, Hastings has a "real dedication to communications as a ministry to the people of God," Land said.

"We're anxious to get him on board as soon as possible and are already excited about some of the ideas he has for reformatting some of our publications and some of our periodicals."

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Hastings' radio experience is expected to be beneficial as the CLC prepares to inaugurate a weekly radio show. He also will write news releases; edit Light, the agency's ethics magazine; and supervise the agency's product development.

Henry, a Southern Baptist, has been a leading evangelical writer and thinker for nearly half a century. He also served as editor of Christianity Today. In recent years, he has called for religious liberty for Christians in Muslim-dominated countries as well as Israel. The CLC recently published his latest book, "Has Democracy Had Its Day?"

The board voted to change the job description and title of Will Dodson, who works in the Washington office. He will serve as legal counsel as well as director of government relations, the title he previously held. Trustees also approved a 17 percent salary increase for Dodson because of his expanded responsibilities.

The CLC plans to add another lawyer who will serve as legal counsel and director of citizenship concerns, Land said.

Previously, the CLC had a general counsel.

The board approved up to an additional \$12,000 from this year's budget to complete work on the Washington office. The Capitol Hill town house has been under renovation and is expected to be finished by spring or early summer. The additional funds will help pay for such needs as decorations and architectural fees, Land said.

Trustees also voted to provide \$5,000 for Nancy Schaefer to represent the CLC at the next United Nations-sponsored conference. The meeting will be in June in Istanbul, Turkey. The CLC also provided \$5,000 to help underwrite Schaefer's participation at the women's conference in September in Beijing, China.

The CLC's program committee approved the theme for the next annual seminar and the site for the 1998 meeting. The 1997 seminar will be the CLC's 50th anniversary as a SBC-funded agency. The theme will be "Fifty Years and Counting: Cherishing Our Past, Charting Our Future." The seminar will be at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. The committee approved Charleston, S.C., for the '98 seminar.

The board meeting was held at the Hyatt Regency Hotel on Capitol Hill, which also was the site of the annual seminar March 4-6.

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Violence down, sex up,  
according to AFA data

Baptist Press  
3/8/96

TUPELO, Miss. (BP)--Recent monitoring done by American Family Association shows that television violence was down by 30 percent compared to six months earlier, but sex was up by 31 percent and profanity was up 26 percent. The study of prime-time programming was done from Oct. 29-Nov. 25 of last year.

Benckiser (Calgon and Jovan and Stetson toiletries), MCI, Sony and Revlon were the top sponsors of violence, sex and profanity, according to the study. Other top sponsors included UPS, IBM, Nestle, Abbott Labs, Timex, MGM, Bayer and Bristol-Myers Squibb. MCI and Bristol-Myers Squibb were listed on the top sponsors list six months earlier, while the other advertisers were new to the list.

The monitoring showed that 94 percent of all prime-time programs contained violence, sex and/or profanity. Eighty-eight percent of all sex presented on the programs was depicted outside marriage.

Fox led the networks with an average violence, sex and profanity incidents at 17.57 per hour. NBC had 13.9, CBS 13.76 and ABC 7.8.

Results projected over a year would have the four networks airing 16,822 sex incidents, 26,195 profanity incidents and 9,412 violent incidents. The total combined violent, sex and profanity incidents projected over a year of prime-time programming was 52,429.

The monitoring summary is available from AFA, P.O. Drawer 2440, Tupelo, MS 38803.

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Take Matthew, Mark, Luke  
& John on your next date

OKEECHOBEE, Fla. (BP)--Teenagers should pray together as they start out on a date and then take their Bibles with them, according to David Burton, director of the Florida Baptist Convention's personal evangelism department.

"It will be very difficult for young men to climb over Matthew, Mark, Luke and John to get to a young lady," said Burton, addressing an area-wide rally sponsored by several churches in Okeechobee, Fla., northwest of West Palm Beach.

The area, atop Lake Okeechobee, has the ninth-highest teen pregnancy rate in the state.

More than 400 "True Love Waits" commitment cards were signed by youth -- and 26 made professions of faith in Christ -- at the Jan. 27 rally. The TLW cards call for teens to remain sexually abstinent until marriage.

"We came to realize what a tremendous problem teenage sexual activity was in our town," said Mark Fuss, minister of education at Okeechobee's Oakview Baptist Church, "and we felt like it was our duty as Christian men and women to do something about it."

The cooperating churches' goal, he said, is "to reach the young people in this community with the message that it's OK to wait to have sex until marriage."

The area-wide rally included testimonies from several youth, contemporary music and drama and a keynote message from Burton, who stated it is God's will for teens to resist temptations Satan throws their way to keep them from sexual purity until marriage.

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Based on reporting by Stella Anderson, a writer for the Florida Baptist Convention.

New England church celebrates  
10-year journey from car wash

By Dan Nicholas

Baptist Press  
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HUDSON, Mass. (BP)--Ten years ago, when Mark Acuff and 17 families decided to conduct the first public worship service of Grace Baptist Church in a rented A-framed building, a steady stream of cars lined up in front every Sunday. Residents were attracted not by the church, but by the car wash that occupied the front of the same lot in the New England town of Marlborough, Mass.

On Jan. 21, cars were lined up once again outside Grace Baptist Church, but this time for the congregation's homecoming celebration. The 300-member church opened and dedicated its new home, a 17,000-square-foot facility in neighboring Hudson, Mass. The single-story structure includes a 400-seat sanctuary, office space, a 17-classroom education wing and a modern kitchen. The sanctuary is expandable to accommodate 600 people.

At least 983 people jammed into the two morning worship services to be part of Grace Baptist's history. Dave Myers, one of the lay leaders of the volunteer-driven construction project, dedicated the building as "a house of worship and service to God."

Recalling nearly 600 volunteer carpenters, tradesmen of all sorts and general laborers who worked throughout the summer to build the \$1.5 million facility, Myers said, "God's blessing is the only way this building was possible."

Acuff called the church and its new facility "a place of celebrating and discovering, a place of life and vitality in Christ." Acuff is the Baptist Convention of New England's representative on the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee.

Massachusetts Lt. Gov. Paul Cellucci, who lives in Hudson, attended the grand opening and called the church facility "a wonderful addition to Hudson and the surrounding communities."

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Michael McGorty, mayor of Marlborough, in his remarks praised the "lively, wonderful, happy and prosperous community called Grace Baptist Church." In presenting a plaque from the city, McGorty joked, "It doesn't bother me that you're in Hudson."

After its first 15 months, the congregation moved from behind the Marlborough car wash to a nearby Adventist church building for another 18 months. As growth continued, the church rented the Marlborough Middle School, where they stayed until the grand opening.

Although the tattered plywood sign that hung on the school's fence each Sunday morning was ceremoniously retired at the grand opening, Grace Baptist members will continue to reach out to Marlborough and other municipalities that surround Hudson, Acuff said.

Construction volunteers came from several states in response to the call of Builders for Christ, a ministry based in Birmingham, Ala. Grace Baptist was the 14th summer project for Builders for Christ and the largest building project ever developed by a Baptist Convention of New England congregation.

Builders coordinator Lawrence Corley called the facility "a powerful tool of ministry that will enable your church to grow (and) share Jesus Christ with a lost and needy world."

The people of Grace Baptist intend to actively thank God for the blessing they received -- 40 members attended a January informational meeting to plan their involvement in a Builders for Christ project next summer in Lincoln, Neb.

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Cowboy enthusiast preaches  
from his wheelchair pulpit

By Stella Anderson

Baptist Press  
3/8/96

HAINES CITY, Fla. (BP)--On a typical Sunday morning, most pastors and evangelists can be found standing before a congregation sharing the message of Christ.

Evangelist Randy Johnson, however, won't be standing before a typical congregation and, in fact, won't be standing at all.

Bound to a motorized wheelchair, Johnson, of Haines City, Fla., shares the gospel dressed in jeans, boots and a cowboy hat to quite an unusual crowd.

Johnson and his wife, Kitt, members of Discipleship Baptist Church, Davenport, Fla., lead "Cowboy Church" for the Florida High School Rodeo and Florida Junior Rodeo Association circuits. The services are held in the stadium bleachers each Sunday during the rodeo circuit season -- September through June -- for contestants, family members and visitors. The couple also provides worship at several professional rodeos and open-shows around the state.

During Cowboy Church, the Johnsons share the gospel plan through messages, singing, skits and the distribution of "cowboy Bibles." Johnson serves as leader and pastor; his wife plays the guitar, sings and conducts the music services.

"The majority of the people who attend the worship services come from unchurched backgrounds," Johnson said. "This is the only church some will ever go to."

As a former rodeo cowboy himself, Johnson said he feels God has opened the door for him to be active in his former love after a near-fatal swimming accident left him paralyzed almost 20 years ago.

"I was never a pro, but I really enjoyed to break and ride," Johnson said. "The rodeo scene was my whole life."

It was during Johnson's near-death experience he made a profession of faith in Christ and committed to full-time ministry. "After I accepted Christ, I decided to leave all of my past life, except my family, in the past," he said.

Johnson distanced himself from the rodeo scene for 15 years following the accident. As a paraplegic, he believed he would "never be involved with the rodeo lifestyle again. It was something that I had accepted."

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In 1992, Johnson again discovered an opportunity to be a part of the rodeo circuit after reading a newspaper article from a western state about the Fellowship of Christian Cowboys (FCC), formerly the cowboy chapter of Fellowship of Christian Athletes.

He soon began exploring the possibility of establishing a Florida chapter. After much prayer and negotiations with local rodeo associations, Johnson said "the Lord opened many doors" for him to develop a FCC chapter in Florida and begin chaplaincy services at several professional, high school and junior high rodeos.

Johnson recently was given the opportunity to ride horses again through the donation of a specialized saddle designed for those with disabilities.

Eventually, he plans to develop "Reality Ranch," a summer youth camp at his ranch in Haines City. He hopes to offer troubled youth and inner-city kids opportunities to learn about rodeo life in a Christian atmosphere.

"It has been such a blessing how God has used me in an area that once consumed my life," Johnson said. "I feel honored God has given me the privilege to be able to go and share," he said.

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Anderson is a communications specialist for the Florida Baptist Convention.

Preacher 'right in there'  
with rodeo competitors

By Jennifer Davis

Baptist Press  
3/8/96

ROBERTSDALE, Ala. (BP)--Sitting up on a fence with spurs on his boots and tobacco altering his speech, a cowboy watches the restlessness of nearby livestock while dreaming about that bucking horse he's about to conquer. It's the rodeo life, known for its solitude and loneliness.

Cowboys and cowgirls dressed in denim and boots and, of course, those famous hats, gather rope, saddles and other equipment necessary for the upcoming competition. Then they pause just before showtime to go to church.

Church, at a rodeo? Cowboy church to be more specific, and yes, it really happens. Sporting a rough and tough, ride 'em cowboy reputation and living a life of wine, women and song is a thing of the past. These hard-core, independent spirits can now be found praying together, singing to the Lord and listening intently to the preacher man.

To see this scene come to life, just arrive about an hour and a half early to a rodeo sponsored by the Professional Cowboys Association (PCA). Rodeo pick-up man Mike Robertson, a native of Alabama, likely will be preachin' the Word.

"Very few cowboys can be at their home church because of the travel involved in rodeoing, so this gives them an opportunity to worship," Robertson said. "While the majority of the people that attend claim to be Christians, we want to reach everyone there. I preach to give the lost man a sense of God's love and to give the Christian a sense to be committed to God.

"We just preach the Word. It's not a feel-good, positive-thinking sort of thing," Robertson said. "The message is getting through, and the contestants look for our services. We've never had any opposition and have even gained the respect of the rough cowboys."

Named pick-up man of the year in 1995 by the bareback riders, Robertson said he has gained credibility and earned the right for the rodeoers to hear him.

"I don't sit in the bleachers, then try to preach to them and ask for an offering," he said. "I'm right in there with them."

Robertson has a dangerous job and is an important person to the rodeo contestants. He gets the bareback riders off the bucking horses, turns out the livestock and ropes and pins the bulls. His position with the contestants has helped influence many to come who would otherwise not be at a church service.

"Not always the ones you think will want to be there are the ones right up front. Then there are those who will not actually come into the group, but will hang around close enough to listen," he said.

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Robertson started his ministry to cowboys during the 1980s while serving as youth pastor at Wall Highway Baptist Church in Madison, Ala. While attending a rodeo in Huntsville, Robertson met a cowboy who asked him to do a church service for the rodeo.

A cowboy at heart and rodeo man himself for several years, Robertson got out of rodeoing to go into the ministry. "Now when I was rodeoing there weren't any church services and definitely no vocal Christians," Robertson said. "But things had changed and this looked like an opportunity for growth. We didn't expect many at our service, but to our surprise had 45 people attend and five people saved."

The service sparked excitement in Robertson and opened up a new door. He began pastoring a Southern Baptist church full-time and doing cowboy churches part-time. "When my schedule allowed, I would just show up at a rodeo a few hours early and try to round up the contestants to attend the church service," he said. "There was no stability, and the rodeos never knew for sure if I would be preaching."

In 1992, Robertson and his family decided to hit the rodeo scene full-time. They now travel from rodeo to rodeo doing Bible studies, holding preaching services and doing one-on-one witnessing. Robertson, his wife, and their three children stay at the rodeo grounds. The trailer has become a popular place for people to visit and talk about Jesus, he said. "We worked 37 rodeos in 1995 and saw 40 people saved, including my three children," Robertson said.

Two years ago, Bo Campbell, owner of Bo Campbell Rodeo Productions in Robertsdale, Ala., hired Robertson to be at all his rodeos. He has been producing rodeos for 17 years and knows rodeos have carried a bad reputation. "The church services have made a difference," Campbell said. "I've seemed some major changes in some people. I've seen some pretty tough nuts to crack cracked."

Cowboy churches have been held at the final competitions for a while, Campbell said, but the idea is fairly new for Alabama. "I now have church services at all my rodeos."

Robertson said he has seen the services grow from 10 to 15 in the early stages to 50 to 60 recently. "There are a lot of good Christian cowboys taking a stand," he said.

In fact, the PCA board of directors has noticed such a difference in the attitudes and atmosphere at the rodeos with cowboy churches that they want these services held at all PCA rodeos.

"This is a big step," Robertson said, "because not all of the PCA board of directors are Christians." PCA, which is based in Montgomery, has challenged Robertson to put together a group of men who already attend the rodeos and will be able to put on the services regularly.

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Rodeo couple's gratitude to God  
roped them for 'Cowboy Church' By Jennifer Davis

Baptist Press  
3/8/96

BLOUNTSVILLE, Ala. (BP)--For Randall and Leeann Newman, rodeo life involves a regimented schedule of feeding, training and riding horses. From March until November, practically every weekend is spent in a different town, at a different rodeo.

The lifestyle leaves little room for normal church attendance. But in the past year Randall and Leeann have found a place to worship right on the rodeo grounds - "Cowboy Church," as it is called, which is growing in popularity and having an impact among rodeoers.

Their involvement did not come on a whim. It was only after Randall had a serious accident while steer wrestling in November 1994 that God became priority in the couple's life.

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Riding horses before they could walk, Randall and Leeann both grew up rodeoing. Their families have always been involved in rodeos. In fact, a rodeo is what brought the Blountsville, Ala., couple together. Married almost seven years, the couple has continued a strong involvement in rodeos.

The Newmans attended church when they were young, but for several years church had not been part of their lives.

At the time of Randall's accident, Leeann, who normally runs barrels and does breakaway roping, had eight weeks to go in what had been a rough pregnancy. She had a hard time dealing with the accident that almost killed her husband, she recounted, bringing him home after several days in the hospital, still not sure if he would live. Within a few days, two of their favorite horses died and life seemed to get only worse.

"I felt like giving up on everything," Leeann said. "I could not understand why this was happening to me. I questioned why God would allow this to happen to me. I gave up on God."

Then, miraculously, Randall snapped out of every problem he was having and life changed in the Newman household. Not only did they have a new baby boy, Colby, but also a new man: Randall knew God had allowed him to live and had rededicated his life to the Lord.

While Randall discovered a renewed spirit, Leeann was still struggling with God and with her feelings. "Randall being back with the Lord actually put a strain on our marriage," she said. "I fought God because I had gone through so much, but when I finally went back to God, it all worked out.

"So it has really been this past year that I have grown strongly in the Lord," Leeann said. "Randall and I still love to rodeo, but we want to do it now mainly to give God the glory and to tell others what he has done for us."

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Troubled inner-city youth  
become cowboys for Christ

By Steve Achord

Baptist Press  
3/8/96

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Cowboys on horseback coming to rescue troubled youth in New Orleans may not sound right, but it is true.

Terrance Perrilloux knows firsthand the trials and temptations of being a teenager in an urban setting. Mean streets, fighting and bad influences were the beginning. Stealing, suspension from school and trouble with the police came next.

Fortunately, he came to understand the love of Christ by becoming a cowboy in the big city.

Terrance, 14, no longer walks the streets looking for the trouble that occupied his life a couple of years ago. Today, he is learning about hard work, responsibility and leadership by working on a ranch and riding horses he had to earn, not steal.

Nestled in the backyard of Louisiana's largest city, this unique Christian youth ministry utilizes horses, rodeos and farm chores to reach metropolitan teens for Christ.

"This is not a riding club," says Dave Blackwell, director of the Cowboys in Christ ministry program and mentor for many of the youth involved in the everyday ranch activities. "The horses are what we use to draw people to Christ."

This physically demanding ministry held on 19 acres encompasses stables, a riding arena, grazing land for the horses, a portable building for mandatory Bible study and a trailer for Blackwell, his wife, Tonya, and their family.

Blackwell is a federal law enforcement officer and a member of Williams Boulevard Baptist Church in Kenner. However, his ministry receives support from other churches and Baptist organizations as well.

Designed to give youth a hands-on commitment and show them they can accept responsibility and hard work in a Christian environment, Blackwell says his program offers another avenue of reaching youth who may not respond to conventional methods.

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"Friends tease me, but I keep coming back because he (Dave) showed me I can do things other people said I couldn't do," says Terrance Perrilloux. "The program has shown me you don't have to steal things -- you can work for them. Besides, riding horses is better than walking the streets."

Nurtured by more veteran members in the beginning, Perrilloux is now guiding some of the newer, less experienced riders around the dusty arena and hay-filled barns. His brother, Ramsey, also participated in the program.

Blackwell knows ranch work is hard. A native of north Louisiana who grew up working on a farm and doing ranch work in west Texas where this lifestyle is more commonplace, he understands the ridicule Christian cowboys and cowgirls face not only from strangers but from friends, as well.

"It takes courage to be a Christian cowboy in this area," Blackwell comments. "They wear jeans, cowboy boots and they talk about Jesus ... . They encounter persecution firsthand."

Despite the peer pressure, the program began in 1990 with two horses and two teenagers, grew rapidly to 19 youth but has leveled off with 10 youngsters taking care of a dozen horses and the ranch. "This is their ranch and in order to feel ownership, they must do the work," Blackwell says of the devoted adolescents.

Many of the youth volunteer to be in the program. Some are brought to see Dave by their parents and others are enrolled by juvenile authorities in hopes of teaching a wayward child responsibility before additional trouble develops in their young life.

No matter how the young people arrive, most leave changed.

"Even though I am a girl, I can do everything the boys can do," says charter member Abby McCarty, who at 17 and a senior at East St. John High School in LaPlace has stuck with the rewarding discipline for five years despite being labeled a cowkicker from friends at school. "It strengthens me physically and spiritually."

Always loving and compassionate, Blackwell demands and gets the attention and respect of all who come to the ranch, youth and parents. He and the board of directors of the ranch have set high standards that must be followed without exception. Following an initial interview, parents are told they "must saddle up" and make a commitment to bring their son or daughter to the ranch.

As participants, the youth must attend the church of his or her choice every week or lose riding privileges. They must also maintain a passing grade in all classes at school. Two Saturday workdays of eight hours are required every month. In a job outside of the home, the young people must earn \$40 a month to pay for the upkeep of their horse. Finally, each must obey the cowboy creed -- treat others like you want to be treated, help your brother and live a life pleasing to Jesus.

Participants are not given their own horse to take care of until a 30-day trial run has been completed. From there, the horse is their responsibility -- feeding, cleaning and maintaining the stalls are all part of the daily rigors.

"These are not old plugs," Blackwell says about the horses. "These are quality horses that have been donated or leased from people interested in the program."

With a burden to work with youth, Blackwell utilizes skills from his country upbringing to reach a generation and metro area the best way he knows how. Daily, he ministers to his small group of young people, but twice a month the ranch is open to visiting youth groups who come to participate in a rodeo, a barbecue lunch and a message from God's Word.

Youth from New Orleans and surrounding areas face the challenge of rodeo-style events, many riding horses for the first time. The fun and fellowship for the day-long event is brought to a close with Blackwell telling the youth the importance of following Christ and staying close to him no matter how tough life gets.

For Ron Holman, youth minister at Oak Park Baptist Church in Algiers, a day on the ranch was an opportunity for his 25 youth to build self-confidence and self-esteem. It is a ministry because young people see a different side of life than they are used to, Holman says.

But after the horses are fed and placed in their stalls, the day is not over for Blackwell and his young cowboys and cowgirls. Weekends find them on the rodeo circuit, ministering and telling professional cowboys about Jesus Christ. Through worship services and one-on-one contact, Blackwell is seeing older, experienced cowboys come to accept Jesus as their Savior.

Back home in his traditional western gear -- jeans, boots, spurs, cowboy hat and long-sleeved shirt -- Blackwell's satisfaction comes in seeing young boys and girls develop a deeper understanding of Christ, the Scriptures and a way of life that had only been found in a book, a movie or a television show for most of them.

The emblem on his shirt, "Cowboys for Christ -- Riding for the Cross," is not just a slogan, but a lifestyle. He meets the young people where they are and does not mind giving a helping hand. "Even men who were saddle pals with Jesus had problems," he says. "But these kids learn things here they take with them for the rest of their lives. We are about kids having an experience with Jesus on this ranch."

Among the needs Blackwell lists for his ranch are a small farm tractor, financial support and good hard prayer. Blackwell may be reached by calling (504) 652-7632.

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

Want your church to grow?  
Set a goal & make it known

By Melanie Childers

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SOMERSET, Ky. (BP)--Church leaders committed to the numerical and spiritual growth of their congregations should set a yearly baptism goal and "plaster it on every swinging door in the church," according to Neil Jackson.

"Without a vision, the people perish," he said, quoting Proverbs 29:18. "You have to have a vision."

Jackson, a retired senior growth consultant for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board and author of numerous books related to church growth and outreach addressed a group of about 65 church leaders gathered at First Baptist Church in Somerset -- one stop in the weeklong Small Church Growth Tour sponsored by the Kentucky Baptist Convention's Sunday school department.

The annual conference targets areas in a particular region with large concentrations of small churches, said Jeff Hicks, KBC Sunday school associate. About 800 church leaders attended one of this year's five sessions in January.

Churches should learn from commercial advertising that repetition reinforces behavior, Jackson said. Companies are willing to spend \$1.5 million on a 30-second television advertisement during the Super Bowl because they believe it will affect viewers' behavior, he noted.

Similarly, if pastors choose as a goal to baptize 25 people in a year, "they should plaster a sign that says 'Baptize 25' on every swinging door in the church," he said. "It works."

And after choosing a spiritual goal for baptisms, pastors should engage the entire congregation in reaching it, he added, suggesting that each department director be encouraged to set his or her own quarterly goal for new enrollees.

"Statistically, to be able to baptize one new person, you have to enroll three people," Jackson said. So Sunday school leaders should set a combined goal of at least 75 new enrollees in a year for the church to baptize 25.

"When a person has input to anything, they just committed," he said, emphasizing the importance of empowering Sunday school leaders to take ownership in the church-wide goal by setting their own goals.

Pastors and Sunday school directors should contact each department about progress toward its goal on the 10th week of each quarter, he suggested.

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And churches must reach out diligently from an updated prospect file at least as large as the Sunday school enrollment, Jackson added.

"You'll go over the top with this principle," he said.

Also during the conference, Jackson offered dozens of strategies to help churches improve their ministries to members and prospects:

-- Furniture talks. Set up a Sunday school room with one more chair than the number of people enrolled. On the front of each chair back, tape a card with a class member's name and telephone number. The card on the extra chair would read "New Member."

"That says to somebody, 'You're wanted, you're needed, you're expected.' And besides that, everyone will know when you're absent," Jackson said.

At the close of the lesson, ask each person to choose one of the names on the empty chairs to contact for the next week.

If only 10 or 12 chairs are set up when 25 people are enrolled, the furniture says, "We don't want any more people here," Jackson said.

-- Saturday night caller. "This is what I call my laid-back visitation program," Jackson said, because it can be done from a living room recliner.

The Saturday night caller begins about 5:30 p.m. on Saturday calling each person on the Sunday school class roll.

"It only takes 60 seconds," Jackson said. "I say, 'This is Neil; I'm calling to find out how many I'm going to have in Sunday school in the morning.'"

If the person will be out of town, respond positively by encouraging him or her to have a good time. Ask if the person has a specific prayer request. Finish the conversation by saying, "Be looking for you in Sunday school when you get back to town."

-- Hand of fellowship. Each person in the class traces his or her hand on a piece of paper, then writes his or her name, address, telephone number and birthday on the fingers and thumb. The sheets are shuffled and redistributed; members make contact each week with the person whose "hand" they received. A major benefit of this project is that class members who hardly know each other discover they have similar joys and struggles, Jackson said.

-- Seasonal visitation. Jackson explained his seasonal calendar for contacting inactive members and prospects. September through Thanksgiving, when the weather is pleasant and folks are settling into a routine, is an ideal time for personal visits. Thanksgiving through Valentine's Day, when the weather is bad and people travel for holidays, telephone contacts are ideal. Valentine's Day until May 30th presents another good season for personal visits. During the summer months of June, July and August, when people travel most extensively, notes and cards offer the best contact.

-- Absent, present, prospect. Attach name cards for each member and prospect on a bulletin board under one of three headings: Absent, present or prospect. When members arrive, they move their name from the absent list to the present list. At the end of the lesson, members use the board to select two absentees and one prospect to contact during the week.

HOUSE MAIL

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