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He says churches, homosexuals
need Jesus' transformation

By Linda Lawson

Baptist Press
7/9/96

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--People engaging in homosexual behavior need transformation that can only come through the power of Jesus Christ. Churches need similar renewal.

That's the message of Tim Wilkins, an ordained Southern Baptist minister who acknowledges he engaged in homosexual behavior with about five partners in 10 years before deciding his Christian faith required a celibate lifestyle. Now happily married, Wilkins experienced transformation through a process of Bible study, spiritual growth and "healing prayer."

"Just as the homosexual needs a renewing of the mind, so does the church," said Wilkins, director of CROSS (Created for the Opposite Sex) Ministries of Raleigh, N.C. He led a seminar, "Hope, Help and Healing for the Homosexual," during Jericho: A Southern Baptist Missions Festival, June 29-July 5 at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center.

"The thing that's needed most is unconditional love," Wilkins said. "Condoning love and unconditional love are not the same thing."

Growing up in a home he described as "chaos," Wilkins said he first experienced feelings of attraction to men at about age 7. He said he now realizes those feelings resulted from a troubled, violent home life and lack of a positive male role model.

"Homosexuality is primarily an issue of identity before it's an issue of sexuality. Homosexuality is an illegitimate response to a legitimate need, the need for unconditional love and affirmation," he said.

Wilkins became a Christian at age 9. He began engaging in occasional homosexual behavior at about 12. His behavior was "covert" as he continued to attend church regularly. Neither friends nor family members suspected his struggles.

Feeling he could not talk to anyone about his problem, he wrote on a small piece of paper, "Lord, I am trusting you for healing," and wore it for years under his leather watch band.

"If I had not known Jesus loved me, I would have immersed myself in the (homosexual) lifestyle," he said. "Heterosexuality was as repulsive to me as homosexuality is to you."

Wilkins ceased homosexual behavior 20 years ago at age 22, but his faith did not extend to the possibility of becoming heterosexual.

"I did believe God could make me celibate, but it was a number of years before I realized God could make me heterosexual," Wilkins said. "I remained celibate, cynical and single."

Wilkins began to immerse himself in Scripture, focusing on God rather than his problems.

"I had to want God more than heterosexuality," he said.

He dared to ask God "to teach me the right way to love a woman." He said he first experienced heterosexual desire 10 years ago.

Transformation for Wilkins was a process that happened gradually. It was, he firmly believes, "a supernatural act of God."

"This mind that was once repulsed by heterosexuality is now repulsed by homosexuality," Wilkins said.

He acknowledged he still occasionally experiences homosexual feelings, but he said the constant, insatiable desires of the homosexual lifestyle were taken away with his spiritual transformation.

Also, he emphasized, "one of the things that provides healing to the homosexual is healthy, same-sex relationships."

The transformation process moved another step forward when Wilkins married his wife, Lisa, on Aug. 21, 1993. She married him with full knowledge and understanding of his background, his struggles and the transformation that had occurred in his life.

Through CROSS ministries, Wilkins seeks to help others struggling with homosexuality but also to challenge churches "to break the silence" on the issue.

"When is the church going to recognize the need to hear the testimony of the former homosexual?" he asked. "When will the church allow a person to stand up and testify to the transforming power of Christ?"

Unfortunately, he said, daytime talk shows often are more willing than churches to allow a former homosexual to share his story.

Using the illustration of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead but calling on members of the crowd to remove the burial clothes and "loose him and let him go," Wilkins said, "Jesus Christ is transforming men and women who have struggled with homosexuality, but the church is not loosing them and letting them go.

"The church needs to be providing redemption and transformation for the homosexual," he said. "We have a responsibility to condemn the practice of homosexuality but offer healing to the homosexual."

Wilkins is available to speak to churches and organizations. He can be reached through CROSS Ministries, P.O. Box 18843, Raleigh, NC 27619-8843; phone, (919) 676-8811.

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A list of resources on dealing with homosexuality is posted in the SBCNet News Room. Filename is list.txt.

Couple claims promise
in journey to openness

By Linda Lawson

Baptist Press
7/9/96

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--"God is able," proclaims a framed quotation from Ephesians 3:20 which hangs in the foyer of Lisa and Tim Wilkins' home.

It's a promise they've claimed often in their three-year marriage.

Lisa met Tim, a Southern Baptist minister, at a nondenominational singles group in 1992. They dated, grew close, talked about many life issues and knew they were falling in love. Then one evening, Tim told Lisa he needed to talk with her.

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Lisa recalled she knew it had to be a serious matter because he moved to the far end of the couch, leaving a cushion of space between them.

He told her that, in addition to his troubled childhood which they had talked about earlier, he had struggled with homosexuality. After engaging in homosexual behavior for about 10 years, he had, with God's help, stopped the behavior 17 years earlier.

Through a process of Bible study, spiritual growth and prayer, Tim said he had experienced a supernatural transformation and become a man with heterosexual feelings and desires, a transformation made possible only by Jesus Christ.

Then Tim handed to Lisa a large box of materials documenting his struggles, his study and his transformation. He suggested they not see each other for several days to allow her to digest all he had told her before letting him know if she was willing for their relationship to continue.

Tim Wilkins told this story during conferences at Jericho: A Southern Baptist Missions Festival, June 29-July 5 at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center. Together, they described their journey and relationship in an interview.

"I was shocked in the sense that I had no idea" about Tim's struggles, Lisa said. "I wasn't shocked in the sense of being repulsed. If anything, I wanted to be there and embrace him. I was thankful he had walked through it."

However, Tim insisted Lisa take some time to think, "to let it percolate."

Tim's decision to talk with Lisa about his past was made out of love, he said. "I owed it to her to share with her what Christ has done in my life. I knew I had to do it."

Lisa drew on her understanding of Tim's character from their long talks together. She also drew on her parents' teaching about Christianity, "that I'm just as much a sinner" as others.

"I can honestly say I trust him," Lisa said. "I know Tim in a different way than anyone on the earth does. He worked through the process of healing from a biblical perspective. I can see his mind has been renewed."

The couple married Aug. 21, 1993.

Tim had been putting together material he hoped to include in a book about his story. Lisa agreed the story should be told. They decided he would write under a pseudonym to protect their families and the children they hope to have.

However, they have become convinced through a gradual process of spiritual reflection and seeing the healing impact of Tim's experiences on others that God wants Tim to openly share his story.

While the book remains unfinished, Tim has established CROSS (Created for the Opposite Sex) Ministries. They have moved to Raleigh, N.C., where Lisa continues her career as a family day-care provider and also works with Creative Memories, a company which sells photo-safe family scrapbook albums.

Tim is available to speak in churches, schools and other organizations throughout the country.

However, before they could take the step into openly telling their story, Tim and Lisa had to tell their parents about Tim's struggles.

Lisa's parents asked questions out of love and concern for their daughter. After being satisfied with the answers they received, they have been affirming and supportive.

Even though Tim had been living at home during some of the years he had engaged in homosexual behavior, family members did not know of his struggles.

Their response has been less positive. Talks continue.

Lisa acknowledged the impact of going public may include some negative consequences.

"As God made this more clear to us, I realized God's grace was sufficient. This doesn't mean it will always be easy," she said. "We wouldn't be who we are now if we hadn't been through this. By the grace of God we've been given the opportunity to use struggles in life to help and encourage others.

"The more I hear Tim talk about this and see the importance of it, the more committed I am to our ministry. My life has been touched by the men and women who've walked out of the homosexual lifestyle," Lisa added.

"The number one driving force in my life is obedience to Christ who has called me to this ministry," Tim said. "However, if my testimony will help one person in my lifetime, it's worth it all."

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Commitment to 'give your life'
underscored at Jericho sessions By Linda Lawson

Baptist Press
7/9/96

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--In exploring a call to mission service, people can get so preoccupied with how God wants them to serve they fail to concentrate on the most important issue, participants in Jericho: A Southern Baptist Missions Festival were told.

"It's not important that you know what God wants you to do or where he wants you to go. What's important is that you give your life," Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board President Jerry Rankin said during the June 29-July 5 conference at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center.

Approximately 1,000 people attended the week-long conference where they experienced missions in the United States and around the world through simulations, role-play, videos, conferences, an outdoor missions fair, daily missions encounters and talking with approximately 75 home and foreign missionaries.

Also, volunteers worked throughout the week to construct furniture for New Faith Baptist Church in Pleasant Hill, Ala. A pulpit, Lord's Supper table, 14 12-foot pews, two deacon benches and wooden toys for preschoolers will be delivered to the church, said Mission Service Corps volunteer M.B. Howard, who coordinated the project.

The EEE Sunday school class of Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church in Atlanta provided \$1,300 and six volunteers for the project.

"Why are people reluctant to give their lives to the Lord?" Rankin asked.

"Maybe the reason we're reluctant is that we don't see the world as God sees it. We don't love as God loves."

As Southern Baptists enter the 21st century, Rankin said he envisions more than tripling the denomination's foreign missions force from the present 4,200 to 15,000 missionaries serving throughout the world. He said the expanded foreign missions force would enable deployment of as many as 1,000 in Eastern Europe, 1,000 working with unreached people groups and opportunities to better share the gospel more effectively in all parts of the world.

Home Mission Board President Larry Lewis said "the salvation of the world waits on two things -- the senders and the goers. My friends, the doors of the world are open like never in history."

Lewis said 100,000 Southern Baptists are needed to commit themselves to mission support by praying daily for home and foreign missionaries. Giving also must increase to reach the ends of the earth with the gospel.

During the week, dozens committed themselves to career, short-term and volunteer missions service while many others turned in cards of commitment to mission support through prayer, giving and encouraging their churches to greater support.

In the closing service, members of "The Company," the drama group from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, who had performed throughout the week were commissioned as they left for Europe and then will minister during the Olympics in Atlanta.

Brotherhood Commission President James Williams said when God calls people to mission service he always goes ahead to prepare the way.

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"God is forever in the sending business," Williams said. "Is your strategy for ministry that God is already at work where you are called to serve? God will never send you to a work he has not already started."

Tony Tench, who with his wife, Janet, committed themselves to mission service at Jericho in 1991, returned to this year's Ridgecrest Jericho after completing their first term as missionaries to the east African nation of Malawi.

"In 1991 we promised God we would join him as disciple-makers," Tony Tench said. "I praise God for all those who were waiting and praying that we would come."

Several missionaries testified that service on the mission field has included tasks they did not feel prepared to accomplish.

In 10 years of service in Mozambique, Alabama native Jim Brock said he has seen the establishment of 200 missions, ordination of eight pastors and salvation of 5,000 people.

"I didn't know how to do any of those things when I left here," he said.

"I've stood on the face of a foreign land and preached into the faces of foreign people, and they've seen the face of the God who had already been there," Brock said. "Don't look on what you cannot do. God will equip, and God will sustain."

"The biggest place I'd lived in before Cairo had 25,000 people," said Mike Edens, a native of Louisiana who has now completed 16 years in the Egyptian capital. "For a country boy to feel at home in a city of more than 14 million people is strange. But God doesn't call us to things that are bad for us."

In another service, Madelyn Edens said mission service has caused her to draw on many interests and skills instilled by her parents, including hospitality.

"I have served many cups of tea to people Mike has met on the Metro," she said.

Other speakers warned increased secularization of the world combined with self-centeredness of some churches presents major challenges to the task of world evangelization.

"We're comforted by the fact that (in the United States) most live close enough to a church that they could walk if they wanted to. The problem is they don't want to," said Woman's Missionary Union Executive Director Dellanna O'Brien. Also, some churches "have turned in on themselves."

Larry Ellis, command chaplain of Naval support activity in Memphis, Tenn., predicted the 20th century will become known in history as the "century when the church lost dominance over the culture."

Ellis said he and other military chaplains endorsed by the Home Mission Board "are sent to claim a secular segment of the world. Most of the people we spend our time with do not know the Lord. We are in great need of the affirmation and support of the churches we serve. We need to know that you know we have risked ourselves in the name of the Lord."

Bill Hall, who has served for 20 years as chaplain at the 16-story, high-rise Western Youth Institute in Morganton, N.C., said his work requires patience in building relationships while waiting for the moment when inmates will be receptive to a Christian witness.

"At some point in their incarceration," Hall said, "they come to the realization that something is wrong; something needs fixing. It is at the point of something needs to be changed that we can present the gospel. The truth of Jesus is refreshing to those who've lived on the lies that others have told them."

Making difficult choices is a regular challenge of mission service, said Paul Grossman, who serves in the African nation of Burkino Faso. In 1995, the mission had equipment to bring pure water to 15 villages but 50 were in need.

"It's not much fun choosing who will get water and who won't," he said. "We believe it is important to help people in a physical way when we can to show them Jesus is the water of life. May it never be said of Southern Baptists people that we don't care."

With the immensity of the task of missionary service, Randy Bradley, who serves in Argentina, said making time to be alone with God can be a struggle.

"There's so much to do that if you're not careful you'll do a lot of good things and not let God do the best things," he said.

Born in Poland, Jerzy Ratz now ministers in Philadelphia to crew members of ships arriving from many countries.

"It's wonderful to be a foreigner serving in the U.S.," he said. "Every ship that comes is an opportunity to share with people from many countries. The Lord Jesus is catching people."

Fred Loper, national medical missionary for the HMB, likened the Jericho learning experience to the medical school teaching-learning philosophy of "see one, do one, teach one."

"We've learned so much about missions and we're already missionaries," said Loper, who has attended every Jericho since its inception in 1989.

Jericho was sponsored by the Southern Baptist Home and Foreign Mission boards, Sunday School Board, Brotherhood Commission and Woman's Missionary Union.

Jericho conferences will be held June 21-27, 1997, at Ridgecrest and July 26-Aug. 1 at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center.

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Five (BP) photos (four horizontal and one vertical) to accompany this story are posted in the SBCNet News Room.

**HMB worker says churches needed
in African American communities** By Linda Lawson

**Baptist Press
7/9/96**

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--In the 1990s, the likelihood a black American will be murdered is 10 times greater than that for a white American.

There is a 40 percent greater likelihood blacks will be burglarized and a 25 percent greater chance they will be assaulted.

One-fourth of black males, 15-24, are jailed or on parole.

"No social program, no welfare system, no jobs program is going to be as effective as the church," Robert Wilson told participants in a conference on starting churches in African American communities. "We need to be sure the church is doing its job of being the church."

The conference was held in conjunction with Jericho: A Southern Baptist Missions Festival, June 29-July 5 at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center.

"Our goal is to be sure a strong, evangelical Southern Baptist church is present in every African American community," said Wilson, who works with the HMB in black church extension.

Of the approximately 15 million African Americans in the United States, about one-half are congregationalized, Wilson said. The 16-million-member Southern Baptist Convention includes about 1 million African Americans.

Wilson warned that Muslims and Mormons (who in earlier years did not allow black members) are making inroads in African American communities as they build personal relationships and offer messages of hope about the future.

He said he urges African American and Anglo Southern Baptists to reach out with the gospel to all people, not just their own groups.

"Is homogeneous what God asked us to be?" Wilson asked. "Some say birds of a feather flock together, but I say we're not birds."

He urged creative approaches in locating facilities for starting churches in African American communities.

"There are a lot of Seventh-day Adventist churches available on Sundays," Wilson said. "There are Anglo Baptist churches with facilities available" for the use by an African American church. Additionally, a new African American congregation could hold services in an existing church at a nontraditional time such as 1 p.m.

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Storefronts in places such as strip malls also represent attractive locations for new churches, he said. "Locations in strip malls already include parking and open space."

In some housing communities, administrators will allow a church to use a meeting room or apartment in exchange for security or help in dealing with violence, Wilson said.

For Anglos to minister effectively among African Americans, they must learn to use terms acceptable to the groups with whom they work, Wilson said.

"African American" is generally the preferred term with people of African descent. However, the U.S. population includes many people of dark skin who are from Hispanic or Caribbean countries.

"African American was chosen because it identifies back with a continent. It gives people ties back to a land," Wilson said. "But not all blacks are African American. And some African Americans prefer other terms such as black or Negro."

To learn the best terminology to use, Wilson suggested listening to how people identify themselves or asking people what they prefer.

He praised progress being made in starting Southern Baptist churches in African American communities. For example, 51 new churches have been started this year in Florida alone.

Once a Bible study, mission or church is started, Wilson said evaluation should be continuous. Five questions should be asked:

- What are we doing?
- Why are we doing it?
- How well are we doing it?
- What actions should we add?
- How can we do it better?

Jericho was sponsored by the Southern Baptist Home and Foreign Mission boards, Sunday School Board, Brotherhood Commission and Woman's Missionary Union.

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WRAP-UP

BWA council meeting underscores evangelism, Hong Kong support

By Wendy Ryan

**Baptist Press
7/9/96**

HONG KONG (BP)--Against the backdrop of Hong Kong's uncertain future when it reverts to China in less than a year, Hong Kong Baptists received the support of Baptist leaders from around the world who met in Hong Kong for the Baptist World Alliance annual general council July 3-9 at the Tsimshatsui Baptist Church.

"We promise to pray for you," Nilson do Amaral Fanini, BWA president, told Cecil Chan, president of the 50,000-member of the Hong Kong Baptist Convention.

"We are here to celebrate with our Baptist brothers and sisters in Hong Kong our love and appreciation for them and our solidarity with Hong Kong Baptists as they revert back to the People's Republic of China," said Denton Lotz, BWA general secretary, on behalf of the 500 Baptists from around the world meeting in Hong Kong.

For their part, Hong Kong Baptists expressed confidence in their future.

"When Hong Kong reverts to China, we expect a lot of changes," Chan said. "One thing we are sure of, God holds the future. We shall have no fear but continue to move forward with courage, grace and strength.

"We face a new era and there are numerous challenges for individual Christians and churches," he said, "but Hong Kong is situated at the gateway to China and can be the path to bring the gospel to people in China.

"There are 1.2 billion people in China who share our culture," Chan said, "and in less than 360 days, the barrier to spread the gospel in China will be removed."

Chan thanked Baptists for coming to Hong Kong at this particular time. "You have come at this crucial time of history to show us your love," he said.

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He asked Baptists around the world to pray for Hong Kong so that, "whether rain or sunshine, good times or bad times, we will be strengthened and continue to march forward with Christ as our commander."

Global reports of Baptist leaders and actions taken at the annual meeting reflected a march forward in evangelism, justice, aid and fellowship.

Led by Fanini, a Brazilian pastor from the Rio de Janeiro area, BWA's call to focus on evangelism has never been clearer.

In the 11 months since Fanini was elected BWA president in Argentina, he has traveled to every continent and seen more than 8,000 people make first-time decisions to follow Jesus Christ in response to evangelistic preaching.

In keeping with his call to Baptists of the world to unite and "win the world for Jesus Christ," Fanini has preached to more than 50,000 people in northeast India, held evangelistic meetings in Cuba and Honduras, participated in evangelism seminars in Thailand, France and India and preached to Baptists in Germany and Africa.

The general council voted to reaffirm the priority the BWA gives to evangelism. It expressed its appreciation and support for Fanini's leadership in evangelism "and eagerly anticipates his continuing efforts in this area."

And the Baptist leaders called upon all BWA member bodies to set aside one month for a special evangelistic effort during 1999 and recommended the month in which Easter falls as an appropriate month for concerted evangelistic effort.

To demonstrate support for Fanini, David Coffey, chair of the BWA evangelism and education committee, Tony Cupit, BWA evangelism and education director, and several leaders laid hands on Fanini as John Peterson, pastor of Alfred Street Baptist Church in Virginia and former BWA vice president, prayed for God to bless Fanini's evangelistic ministries.

The council received encouraging reports from Billy Kim, president of the Asian Baptist Federation, and the federation's general secretary, Edwin Lopez, on the growth of the church in Asia, specifically citing new Baptist groups and witness in Cambodia, Mongolia, Nepal and Vietnam. "A new spirit of evangelism pervades our Baptist groups," Kim said.

"We will undermine our work for evangelism, however, if we do not address the problems of racism," said Daniel E. Weiss, general secretary of the American Baptist Churches USA and president of the North American Baptist Fellowship (NABF), another of the BWA's six regional bodies.

Weiss described racism in North America as "a major moral crisis."

"The NABF must now determine to go beyond well-intentioned words and aggressively address the problem for the sake of Jesus Christ," Weiss said. "He called on Baptist leaders to regain leadership in fighting racism."

Wallace Charles Smith, pastor Shiloh Baptist Church, Washington, and chair of the BWA Commission on Baptists Against Racism, said the ultimate goal of the commission "is not just talk but action and the commitment to integrate our staff and see minority groups get access to our time and money, among other things."

A resolution adopted on church burnings in the United States, largely attributed to racism, called Baptist churches everywhere to commit themselves to work together for healing and reconciliation "to counteract the evils of racism."

Lotz appealed for healing and reconciliation worldwide among Baptists. He condemned racism and ethnocentrism in many parts of the world and reported on the reconciliation work of the BWA in northeast India and South Africa.

"The great tragedy of the church is that we talk a lot but do not live love," Lotz said.

"How can we make this real in the work of the BWA with all of our differences?" he asked. "This is the mission of the BWA, to show the love of Jesus Christ to the whole world. We belong to one another because we belong to Jesus Christ."

Mindful of the fact Baptists belong to the larger body of believers in Jesus Christ, the general council also spoke out against the persecution of Christians around the world.

In a resolution on the subject, they noted vast numbers of Christians have experienced persecution, imprisonment and martyrdom and in some places the Christian faith is restricted or banned.

The resolution calls Christians worldwide to "fervent prayer for the constant protection and power of the Holy Spirit in the daily lives of all believers everywhere who may be vulnerable to persecution."

Among other business of the council:

- a \$1.6 million 1997 operating BWA budget was approved.
- the dates of Jan. 5-9, 2000, were announced for the 18th Baptist World Congress in Melbourne, Australia.
- \$1.8 million for Baptist World Aid for 1996/1997 for disaster relief, development projects and fellowship assistance was approved.
- BWA membership statistics of 153,310 churches and 40,701,320 baptized members were reported.
- the 8th World Meeting of Baptist Men will be held July 13-15, 1997, in Taipei, Taiwan, prior to the meeting of the Asian Baptist Federation.
- the BWA general secretary will lead a human rights visit to Karen refugees in Thailand this November.
- the 1997 annual general council meeting to which all Baptists are invited will be held July 3-9 in Vancouver, Canada, and the 1998 meeting will be in South Africa.

The council received into membership the Nepal Baptist Christian Council and the Slovenia Baptist Union. It voted to remove the Baptist Union of Transkei, which has been dissolved and is now a part of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa.

Among speakers at the meeting, Warren H. Stewart Sr., pastor of First Institutional Baptist Church, Phoenix, and a member of the BWA evangelism and education committee, said, "It is our divine assignment to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to lead sinners to salvation and abundant life, and it is equally our God-ordained mandate to liberate those who are oppressed in order that they may experience the true and whole freedom for which they are so created." He called this the "E and E Connection," evangelism and emancipation.

Stewart said, "It is right that the BWA makes evangelism their priority and it is also right that the BWA make liberation a priority."

The council meeting concluded with a call from Fanini to pray, teach the Word, defend human rights and religious liberty, do more for aid and work to win the world for Jesus Christ.

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Their future in God's hands,
Hong Kong Baptist leaders say

By Wendy Ryan

Baptist Press
7/9/96

HONG KONG (BP)--"No one knows or can accurately predict what will happen after 1997," said Cecil Chan, president of the Hong Kong Baptist Convention, "but by faith we believe the words of Jesus in Matthew 16:18, 'Upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.'"

Chan welcomed more than 500 Baptist guests from around the world to Hong Kong for Baptist World Alliance general council meeting July 3-9.

When Hong Kong reverts to China, we expect a lot of changes," Chan said. "One thing we are sure of, God holds the future. We shall have no fear but continue to move forward with courage, grace and strength.

"We face a new era and there are numerous challenges for individual Christians and churches," Chan said, "but Hong Kong is situated at the gateway to China and can be the path to bring the gospel to people in China."

"There are 1.2 billion people in China who share our culture," Chan said, "and in less than 360 days, the barrier to spread the gospel in China will be removed."

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"In the last year that barrier has been greatly disappearing," Chan said, and Hong Kong Baptists had already begun to prepare for the change. Baptist leaders have encouraged their members to learn Mandarin, since the people of Hong Kong speak mostly Cantonese, and the Baptist seminary has intensified its Mandarin-language training.

Hong Kong Baptists also have visited the churches in mainland China. These visits range from organized groups of Baptist leaders and pastors to singing groups and individuals.

Chan said these visits have brought about better understanding and have led to various forms of cooperation, and Baptists from Hong Kong have helped to restore several churches.

Chan said he was also encouraged by invitations from Chinese pastors to Hong Kong pastors to speak in their churches.

Because so many Christian missions have their headquarters in Hong Kong and many Chinese Christians depend on Hong Kong for their spiritual life, Hong Kong is "a natural bridge between China churches and the world," Chan said.

Chan thanked Baptists for coming to Hong Kong at this particular time. "You have come at this crucial time of history to show us your love."

He asked Baptists around the world to pray for Hong Kong so that "whether rain or sunshine, good times or bad times, we will be strengthened and continue to march forward with Christ as our commander."

"We promise to pray for you," said Nilson do Amaral Fanini of Brazil, BWA president.

"We are here to celebrate with our Baptist brothers and sisters in Hong Kong our love and appreciation for them and our solidarity with Hong Kong Baptists as they revert back to the People's Republic of China," said Denton Lotz, BWA general secretary.

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Fanini's evangelism efforts
recounted to BWA council

Baptist Press
7/9/96

HONG KONG (BP)--In the 11 months since Nilson do Amaral Fanini of Brazil was elected Baptist World Alliance president, he has traveled to every continent and seen more than 8,000 people make first-time decisions to follow Jesus Christ in response to evangelistic preaching.

Fanini, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Niteroi in the Rio de Janeiro area, has preached to more than 50,000 people in northeast India and also has held evangelistic meetings in Cuba and Honduras.

In keeping with his call to Baptists of the world to unite and "win the world for Jesus Christ," Fanini also has participated in evangelism seminars in Thailand, France and India and preached to Baptists in Germany and Africa.

Fanini was elected to lead the BWA in August 1995 at the Baptist World Congress in Argentina.

In his first report to the BWA general council during its July 3-9 meeting in Hong Kong, Fanini said he has found doors open to the gospel in Nepal, Cuba and, now, Croatia, and he called for 10 million Baptists to pray for the evangelization of the world.

Among highlights of his first year travel, Fanini reported:

-- 6,750 people made decisions for Christ in northeast India in meetings attended by more than 50,000 people.

-- 800 people decided for Christ in Honduras in three nights and 2,000 promised to pray for the evangelization of the world.

-- a visit with Billy Graham on Feb. 28.

-- evangelistic meetings in Cuba where 600 people accepted Jesus Christ.

-- a visit with the deputy of the president of Croatia, Ivo Sander.

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The general council voted to reaffirm the priority the BWA gives to evangelism. It expressed its appreciation and support for Fanini's leadership in evangelism "and eagerly anticipates his continuing efforts in this area."

In a resolution on evangelism, the Baptist leaders called upon all BWA member bodies to set aside one month for a special evangelistic effort during 1999 and recommended the month in which Easter falls as an appropriate month for concerted evangelistic effort.

In a moment of support for Fanini, David Coffey, chair of the BWA evangelism and education committee, Tony Cupit, BWA director for evangelism and education, and several leaders laid hands on Fanini as John Peterson, a Virginia pastor and former BWA vice president, prayed for God to bless Fanini's evangelistic ministries.

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Church burnings, persecution
addressed by global Baptists

By Wendy Ryan

Baptist Press
7/9/96

HONG KONG (BP)--Resolutions condemning church burnings in the United States and persecution of Christians around the world were adopted during the Baptist World Alliance annual general council meeting July 3-9 in Hong Kong.

The Baptist leaders asked individual Christians and churches to observe Sept. 29 this year as an International Day of Prayer for persecuted Christians around the world.

In a resolution, they noted vast numbers of Christians have experienced persecution, imprisonment and martyrdom and in some places the Christian faith is restricted or banned. They lamented Christian minorities, especially evangelicals, too often face persecution and discrimination as targets for popular hatred of the United States and the West.

The resolution called Christians worldwide to "fervent prayer for the constant protection and power of the Holy Spirit in the daily lives of all believers everywhere who may be vulnerable to persecution."

With more than 40 churches burned in the last 18 months in the United States, many of which are African American, Baptist leaders denounced the racism which seems to motivate these burnings and which also damages community relationships.

"These attacks are not simply on church buildings," they said in a resolution on the subject, "but impact the worshiping and witnessing community which risks crippling one of society's most effective institutions for mediation and conciliation."

Baptist churches everywhere are encouraged to commit themselves to work together for healing and reconciliation "to counteract the evils of racism."

As the days wind down when Hong Kong returns to China, Baptist leaders also addressed the Christian churches of Hong Kong and China, encouraging them to seize the opportunities presented by the change and pledged their "continued prayerful support" for Christians in both places.

BWA officers said they will monitor the situation and respond with appropriate initiatives.

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BWA to start millennium
in Melbourne, Australia

By Wendy Ryan

Baptist Press
7/9/96

HONG KONG (BP)--In three and a half years it will be time to welcome a new millennium. The Baptist World Alliance will do so in Melbourne, Australia, Jan. 5-9, 2000, at the 18th Baptist World Congress at the Melbourne Exhibition Center.

Dates for the congress were announced July 6 in Hong Kong at the Baptist World Alliance general council meeting at Tsim Sha Tsui Baptist Church.

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"For Baptists this congress will be a time to challenge the future and face 2000 with hope, courage and informed debate," said James A. Scott, BWA Congress Committee chairperson and pastor of Bethany Baptist Church, Newark, N.J.

While the specific wording of the congress theme is yet to be decided, "Jesus Christ who is Lord forever" will be the focus of the theme, said Dellanna O'Brien, vice chairperson for congress program planning and executive director of the Woman's Missionary Union of the Southern Baptist Convention.

O'Brien also said while there is much work to do on the congress program, every effort will be made using special focus groups to make it inclusive for pastors, theologians, communicators, musicians, men, women and youth.

"Australian Baptists are sold out on this congress," said John Simpson, general secretary of the Baptist Union of Victoria, which will host the congress on behalf of the Australian Baptist Union. "We are preparing ourselves for your coming to us," he said, "and it will be a special honor to extend our hospitality to you. We hope no one arrives without a warm personal greeting from us."

As a practical way of preparing Victorian Baptists of Australia for their role in the hosting of the congress, Simpson reported, four mid-winter celebrations have been planned for July 1996-1999. The first is scheduled for Sunday, July 14th, at the Melbourne Concert Hall.

Michael Quicke, principal of Spurgeons College, will be the speaker. All 2,500 seats have been allocated, with demand exceeding the limit by 1,000-plus requests. Next year's celebration will be at the Entertainment Centre with 7,500 seats available.

In 1998 and 1999 it is proposed to use the 15,000-seat Tennis Centre, home of the Australian Open.

"The view from 'Down Under' is that we have made a good start," Simpson said.

Leon Norsworthy, chair of the Australian Baptist local arrangements committee, assured Baptist leaders at the general council meeting Australian Baptists will work to keep costs to a minimum and provide the highest quality services to make the congress a success.

Norsworthy said Baptists in Australia will prepare for 10,000 people "but hope for and can accommodate 15,000 or more."

"This congress is your congress, take ownership of it," said Douglas Inglis, BWA congress coordinator. He urged Baptist leaders to start a saving plan now to enable themselves and Baptists around the world to attend.

"Why are we doing this?" asked Scott.

"We envision a worldwide fellowship to act, energize and renew Baptists for ministry," Scott said. "We are filled with hope that Jesus Christ is the answer. We are aware of the need. There are deep cleavages between the gospel and culture, but our hope is grounded in Jesus Christ."

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Charlie Warren to direct
public relations at OBU

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SHAWNEE, Okla. (BP)--Charlie Warren, editor of "Home Life" magazine for the past eight years, has been named director of public relations at Oklahoma Baptist University, according to John W. Parrish, OBU executive vice president.

Warren has worked in Southern Baptist communications nearly 27 years. Since January 1988, he has been editor of Home Life, the Baptist Sunday School Board's monthly family magazine with a monthly circulation of 525,000.

During his tenure at the magazine, he directed a major redesign that was based on extensive research of target audience needs and desires. The magazine regularly includes marriage enrichment and personal development articles. Warren also has led a variety of family related workshops at Glorieta (N.M.) and Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference centers.

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A 1969 OBU graduate, Warren will replace Marty O'Gwynn, OBU public relations director since April 1991. O'Gwynn will become the university's assistant vice president for alumni affairs, effective Aug. 1.

"We are pleased to have Charlie join us at OBU," Parrish said. "He has a wealth of experience in journalism and in Baptist life. His skills, dedication to Christian communication work and understanding of our constituencies will make him a valuable part of our team."

As director of public relations, Warren will oversee OBU's communication efforts, including production of three quarterly publications, news and information services, photography, graphics production and the university's site on the World Wide Web.

As a member of OBU's executive cabinet, he will be involved in strategic planning for the university, which has seen enrollment grow by more than 70 percent since 1982.

Before moving to Home Life, Warren was associate editor of the Baptist and Reflector, weekly newsjournal of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, for nine years. Prior to that, he was associate editor of the Brotherhood Commission's "World Mission Journal." He was senior editor for press relations at the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board from 1973-77, and a staff writer in the public relations department of the Baptist General Convention of Texas from 1972-73. He served for two years as publications coordinator at the Baptist Publishing House in Lusaka, Zambia.

The Virginia native completed an associate's degree at Bluefield College before enrolling at OBU, where he earned a bachelor's degree in journalism. He completed a master of arts degree in religious education at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, in 1973.

Warren and his wife, the former Sandra Hilton, met while serving as Journeyman missionaries and were married in 1971. They have three children, Todd, 23, Brad, 20, and Jan, 12.

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