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EDITORS' NOTE: The following story updates one with the same headline in Baptist Press Sept. 6.

**Southern Baptist disaster units
head for N.C. in wake of Fran**

By Steve Barber

**Baptist Press
9/9/96**

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--Southern Baptist disaster relief units were on the road the day after Hurricane Fran hit North Carolina Sept. 5; by Sunday, Sept. 8, they had served more than 31,000 meals.

The storm came ashore at Cape Fear, N.C., at about 8 p.m. Thursday night, Sept. 5, packing 115 mph winds. Reports by Sept. 9 indicated at least 25 people had been killed. Carolina Power and Light reported about 670,000 people were without electricity in North Carolina alone.

Mickey Caison, the Brotherhood Commission's on-site disaster relief coordinator, reported Sept. 9, "Well over 80 percent of the destruction of property is in three coastal counties centering on Wilmington. (People in other areas) are contending with flooding, downed trees and power lines."

Caison reported the following location assignments for disaster relief feeding units: North Carolina (first unit) and South Carolina (first unit) in Wilmington; North Carolina (second unit) in Goldsboro, N.C.; South Carolina (second unit) in Wilson; Alabama in Raleigh, N.C., along with a North Carolina associational unit; Florida in Fayetteville, N.C.; Kentucky in Jacksonville, N.C.; Georgia (two units) in Warsaw and Burgaw, N.C.; and a North Carolina associational unit in Durham.

The Ohio unit is being activated to go to West Virginia for flooding relief; the Virginia unit is going to Waynesville, Va.; and the Tennessee unit is now on standby.

Fran's arrival marked the second time this year the southeast coast has faced a major storm. In mid-July, Hurricane Bertha plowed into North and South Carolina, killing nine people and causing \$100 million in damage, with Southern Baptist feeding units from both states serving more than 70,000 meals in the aftermath.

The Southern Baptist response to Hurricane Andrew in August 1992 stands as the largest in the ministry's 26-year history. Feeding and child care units from 15 states were called into service, with 10,000 volunteers providing 2.6 million meals and care for hundreds of children in south Florida and Louisiana after Andrew killed 15 people and caused \$30 billion in damage.

The American Red Cross has estimated Southern Baptist disaster volunteers have prepared 80 percent of the meals served under ARC auspices since Hurricane Hugo in 1989.

The Brotherhood Commission coordinates multi-state disaster response on behalf of all Southern Baptists. Contributions in support of the disaster relief effort may be made to the Brotherhood Commission, 1548 Poplar Ave., Memphis, TN 38104.

EDITORS' NOTE: The following story updates one with the same heading in BP Friday, Sept. 6.

**N.C. assembly, SBC seminary
tormented by Hurricane Fran**

By Art Toalston

WILMINGTON, N.C. (BP)--The morning after Fran's assault on North Carolina, there was an ominous telephone recording at the coastal North Carolina Caswell Baptist Assembly saying it had been closed by the hurricane and, inland, a preliminary estimate of \$1 million in damage at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest.

The Caswell facility, which sustained \$250,000 in damages from Hurricane Bertha in July, was in Fran's landfall path Sept. 5. No damage assessment was available Sept. 9. The assembly's telephone recording Sept. 6 said calls should be directed to the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina offices in Cary, near Raleigh. Those offices, however, also were closed that day, the day after Fran exacted a toll that included more than 25 deaths in the Mid-Atlantic.

The facility, a former Army base purchased by North Carolina Baptists in 1948, has accommodations for several hundred and a mile of coastline.

At Southeastern Seminary, the \$1-million damage estimate included:

-- removal and cleanup of "trees everywhere," by one description -- stately trees uprooted by Fran, such as the magnolia in front of the president's home which had occasioned the resident's name, "Magnolia Hill," and two tall oaks in front of Binkley Chapel.

-- repair and cleanup of roof damage, which had given way to building leaks; broken windows; and 30 inches of flooding in the boiler room of the seminary's plant services building.

Additionally, students have lost cars, while faculty and administration homes were damaged by wind, rain and fallen trees, reported Greg Kingry, Southeastern's director of public relations.

The campus was without power, as was much of North Carolina and Virginia along Fran's northward route as a hurricane-turned-tropical storm. Southeastern officials were alerted the outage might last four or five days.

Southeastern President Paige Patterson stated, "We are profoundly grateful to God for the personal safety of our people. We have an assignment from God and we continue with that assignment, even as we join hands in a massive cleanup and rebuilding effort. Please pray for those who have lost so much."

Russ Bush, academic vice president and dean of the faculty, said classes nevertheless were to resume Saturday, Sept. 7, despite the power outage.

Jerry Lethco, director of missions for the 62-church Wilmington Baptist Association, said damage reports from Fran's 115 mph winds and rain were still being gathered Sept. 9. "As far as we can determine, our church buildings are pretty well intact," other than several steeples being toppled, flooding in one or more churches and other damage, he said.

The biggest challenge, Lethco said, is coordinating the influx of volunteers. Up to 10 Baptist chain saw teams were expected the evening of Sept. 9, he said, joining others already on site from North and South Carolina, Georgia and Tennessee tackling such tasks as removing fallen trees from houses and patching up roofs so people can return home.

Volunteers started arriving "as soon as the storm abated," Lethco said.

David Brisson, who directs inner-city ministries in the association and is helping coordinate teams with chain saws, noted, "I've got 45 requests from different churches for repairs that are needed. There's just an awesome relief effort."

Arrowwood Baptist Church of Chesnee, S.C., sent a team of 12 for cleanup who weathered a tornado in 1989 and were recipients of help as their town rebuilt. They have developed their own disaster relief unit since then and, in one of their first tasks in Wilmington, spent two hours on a man's yard. The man said the cleanup would have cost \$2,000 with a three-month wait for an independent contractor.

"We've got requests from people who have three and four trees fallen through their house," Brisson said. "I find it overwhelming to see what disaster relief is all about."

Many people in the area remain without electricity and water, Lethco said, thus underscoring the work of Baptist and other religious groups' feeding units on site.

Power at the associational office was restored Sept. 6 around 10 a.m.

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In Wilmington, Fran's winds toppled a Civil War-era 197-foot brick steeple atop First Baptist Church, a casualty seen nationally over network news broadcasts.

The church was built between 1860 and 1870 with two steeples. According to a book of the congregation's history, the taller, now-destroyed steeple had served as a lookout for Union and Confederate troops, depending on who was occupying the coastal city at the time. In 1958, the steeple had withstood Hurricane Helene's 135 mph winds.

Elsewhere in the city, named in colonial times for the Earl of Wilmington, markers commemorating conflicts from the French and Indian War to World War II were twisted and bullied by the hurricane.

In Richmond, Va., among the cities and towns hit by widespread power outages from Fran's winds and an anticipated six inches of rain -- with as much as 12 to 15 inches feared elsewhere in the state -- the offices of the Baptist General Association of Virginia were closed Sept. 6. At the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board in Richmond, a worker said the agency was "operating with limited staff due to the weather conditions."

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Clay Renick contributed to this story.

**Pansy blooms somehow intact
in Hurricane Fran's wake**

By Clay Renick

**Baptist Press
9/9/96**

WILMINGTON, N.C. (BP)--Flowers bloom near the damage wrought by Hurricane Fran.

"I've never seen devastation like this," said Michael Tutterow, pastor of Winter Park Baptist Church, Wilmington, N.C.

"It's like a widespread tornado," he said. "And yet you'll find pansies with their blooms on."

Tutterow stayed in his house as the eye of the storm hit with 100-plus mph winds.

"(You) could feel the house shudder and shake some," he said. "There were a few times I thought the window frames were going to pop out."

The storm left more than 25 people dead and an estimated \$625 million in damage to insured property owners. Tutterow had minor roof problems, but one of his church families lost their home.

The storm's eye hit Wilmington and followed the Cape Fear River toward Raleigh.

"We've had a lot of churches report a loss of power," said R.G. Puckett, editor of the Biblical Recorder, North Carolina's state Baptist newsjournal.

David Crocker, pastor of Snyder Memorial Baptist Church, Fayetteville, N.C., 20 miles to the west of the route of the storm's eye, weathered seven inches of rain. The Snyder church had minor roof damage and hosted a disaster relief feeding team from Florida. Snyder had been doing a sermon series on faith with one planned Sunday on how faith can be fun.

"That did not seem appropriate today," he said.

More than 1,000 people gathered for services, though. Crocker spoke on the need to give thanks in the midst of trouble.

"He just told us the Lord will sustain us," said Don Orr, a deacon at the Snyder congregation.

"It was a comforting message. The Lord will help us through this difficult time in our community."

Calvary Baptist Church in Wilmington planned for a guest speaker on Sunday but instead met and divided into prayer groups.

According to Richard Brunson with the North Carolina Baptist Men, more than 1 million people are without power in the Wilmington area.

"Everybody's affected," he said.

Tutterow led services the Sunday after Fran at his Winter Park church. The members went outside during part of the service and took requests from local residents needing prayer and repairs.

"I preached on Jesus and Peter walking on the water," he said. "It was good for us to be together."

North Carolina Baptist Men had a disaster feeding unit in the church parking lot. They served 14,000 meals on Saturday and 18,000 on Sunday.

"In some ways it strengthens faith," Tutterow said.

"God has a marvelous network of people who go the second mile. This is the evidence that the light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it."

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**Southwestern prayer gathering
akin to '85 spiritual renewal**

By Brian Smith

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--The Texas-sized prayer meeting at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary Sept. 3 reminded many people of 1985, when the Fort Worth school was "on the brink of a great awakening," according to Jess Moody, California pastor who preached the campus revival that year. Yet organizing a campus-wide prayer meeting proved difficult.

"Some of us sensed a great awakening coming, and T.W. Hunt (then-professor of church music) asked that we have a great organized time of prayer," said Moody, then pastor of First Baptist Church in Van Nuys, Calif., and now adjunct professor of church growth at Southwestern.

"We had prayer meetings in the dorms, but they were very regimented and strictly limited by time. There were those who felt that if a prayer is organized it's not prayer -- that it should be spontaneous. Well, there's an element of truth there, but every time they say that nothing happens. I found that out -- nothing happened," Moody recalled.

"Don't misunderstand; we had a great time. Everybody was thrilled and God moved, but we came so close to a great awakening."

In 1996, Moody entered his classroom following the Tom Elliff-led prayer chapel Sept. 3 to find students watching the service via closed-circuit television. "I'm not going to lecture today," Moody told the group. "This is better than anything I could teach you today."

The convocations for spiritual awakening led by Elliff, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, will continue Sept. 10 at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky.; Sept. 11 at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Mo.; and Sept. 12 at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Moody's voice cracked as he told the 1985 Southwestern story to his class. "That's why I was so touched when I saw our president (Ken Hemphill) so open and tearful over the spiritual condition of our city and our seminary that he hosted this meeting and said the (class) schedule was less important than doing business with God," Moody said. "I sensed some deep spiritual things going on that were akin to the great Baylor revival of 1945."

That revival 50 years ago when Moody was a student at Baylor became a "great awakening of Christian enlistment," he noted.

"We had prayer meetings that lasted 90 nights. Revival broke out, and a citywide crusade was held in Waco. I preached the first night of the first one and it went citywide Houston, citywide Dallas, citywide Fort Worth, citywide Oklahoma City and on and on all across the south. Thirty thousand young people gave themselves to Christian ministry and service over a period of five years. If you look at 1946-47-48 enrollment at Southwestern you'll see the difference between that and '45. That all came about as a result of the Baylor revival."

He said Southwestern and Elliff are to be commended for focusing on revival in the United States. "Thank God for a seminary that when revival comes it won't organize it out of existence or block it because of scheduling."

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**Butler defies cancer,
scoring winning run**

By Art Toalston

**Baptist Press
9/9/96**

LOS ANGELES (BP)--After two cancer surgeries and 32 radiation treatments, Los Angeles Dodgers center fielder Brett Butler returned to baseball Sept. 6 -- scoring an eighth-inning run to beat the visiting Pittsburgh Pirates.

Butler, a member of Hebron Baptist Church in the Atlanta suburb of Dacula, was diagnosed with throat cancer after being placed on the disabled list May 2 for a tonsillectomy.

Butler's pastor, Larry Wynn, affirmed: "Brett's commitment to Christ never wavered" during his battle with cancer. "His faith throughout all this was contagious."

Wynn recounted Butler, in early June, was part of a church-sponsored one-day baseball camp begun three years ago for youth in the community, featuring members of the Atlanta Braves and other Major League teams.

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Butler had given a batting demonstration each year, but this year organizers told him they weren't asking him to come because of his cancer treatments, Wynn said.

"He just refused not to come," Wynn said, and on a day when the temperature reached the high 90s Butler gave his batting demonstration and Christian testimony and stayed around to sign autographs.

"If anybody had a reason not to be there, or sit in the shade and just watch, it was Brett," Wynn said. "But he refused to do that."

Also part of Hebron Baptist Church are Butler's wife, Eveline, and their three young daughters and son. The Butlers have hosted a Bible study for ballplayers led by Atlanta-based Tim Cash who leads evangelistic baseball clinics throughout the United States and overseas.

Wynn is a former first vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Butler's dramatic return to baseball prompted such media comment as "The cancer patient scored the winning run" -- "the first winning run of the rest of his life."

But, of course, it wasn't easy. Earlier in his treatment, Butler, now 39, lived only on milk shakes, water and pills. He could only whisper. In private, he was in agony, but he hid it whenever his brother and sister came to visit.

"He was trying to be strong for us," Ben Butler told The New York Times. "Because of our mother," Betty Butler, who died of cancer a year earlier.

But Butler began predicting he would return to baseball, lifting weights with a physical trainer; eating vegetables, pastas and any immunity drug his doctors could find; and standing in an outfield for 15 minutes at a time.

Then came the Dodgers' invitation to return to the lineup.

The only special help he needed was permission to stash a water bottle in his pants pocket when he roams center field during games. He still has six more months of radiation ahead.

"My first at-bat, as I was walking up there, I had no composure at all," Butler told The New York Times. "As I stood up, I was panting, 'huh-huh,huh-huh,huh-huh.' I mean, I couldn't get my composure."

But with the Dodgers and Pirates tied at 1-1 in the bottom of the eighth, the Times recounted that Butler "fought off a disconcerting case of cotton mouth and drew a leadoff walk on Marc Wilkins's 3-and-2 inside fastball.

Butler had been nicknamed 'Bugsy' -- due to his darting bug eyes and the mischief he caused on the basepaths -- and the neophyte Wilkins was warned to keep Butler in the vicinity of first base.

The first pickoff throw was frighteningly close. 'The first time I dove back in, I thought I jammed my shoulder,' Butler said. 'And I was like, OK, what's up. I can't do that anymore.'

The second, third and fourth pickoff throws had similar juice on them."

But on a hit-and-run play, "Hollandsworth whiffed at strike three," the Times continued, "and all that was left was Butler versus the Pirate catcher Jason Kendall. Butler was late charging to second base -- 'Dead legs,' he said -- but Kendall's throw was late, too -- and errant. It kicked into center field and allowed Butler to hyperventilate his way to third base."

Then Butler was brought home on an Eric Karros sacrifice fly to right field.

Butler went 1 for 3 in the game.

His college coach, Don Parham of Southeast Oklahoma State, told the Times he had been despondent when he saw a gaunt 144-pound Butler lying in a hospital bed three months earlier.

"This was after the second surgery, and he looked awful," Parham said. "Just broke my heart. He could hardly swallow, hardly talk.

"All he could eat was a pinch of mashed potato with a pea on it. And if he wasn't careful, the pea would end up in the wrong place and he'd gag."

But, at the hospital, Parham also was heartened by remembering a day when Butler in college had chased down a towering fly ball and then blindly ran smack into a football goalpost. "Thought he was dead," Parham said. "But then he got up and stayed in the game."

"That winning run he scored wasn't by coincidence," Butler's teammate Karros told the Times after the game. "That's his game. I mean, we always used to kid Brett about nearly getting picked off all the time, and then there he was tonight almost getting picked off again! Immediately, I turned to our batting coach Reggie Smith and I said, 'Well, Butler's back, isn't he? Butler's back.'"

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"It's nothing short of a miracle," Butler said before the game at his locker, where there was a water bottle, a pamphlet titled "What God Has Joined Together" and a color photo with his 8-year-old son, Blake, a reminder of the family that kept him going during the months when he wasn't sure he would live.

"Basically, I've been through hell and back," Butler admitted.

"What an inspiration," Dodgers pitcher Tom Candiotti told the Associated Press. "He has set an example of inspiration for everybody."

At the time of his diagnosis, Butler had issued a statement, noting, "We have many friends in and out of baseball and this will come as a shock. It is impossible to speak to all of them personally. My wife and I would ask for your prayers for us and our children at this difficult time."

Butler's field Terry Pendleton, third baseman for the Florida Marlins, said at the time, "With God on his side, he's in a win-win situation."

During the tonsillectomy, doctors had found a cancerous tumor the size of a plum and removed it. The survival rate for the type of cancer Butler has, called Squamous Cell Carcinoma, is said to be 70 percent -- or perhaps better for Butler because of his physical conditioning.

Butler was a 1991 All-Star, setting a National League season record for most games without an error by an outfielder, 161. He has recorded a 307-game errorless streak in his career and, in 14 seasons, had committed just 38 errors. He was the first player in National League history to lead the league in singles four straight seasons, 1990-93.

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**Ike Reighard resigns
First Baptist, Atlanta**

**Baptist Press
9/9/96**

ATLANTA (BP)--Ike Reighard, senior associate pastor of Atlanta's First Baptist Church since January, resigned Sept. 8, apparently in a dispute over responsibilities and titles.

Reighard's primary responsibility at First Baptist was to preach at the church's northeast Atlanta site. In a prepared statement to the north Atlanta congregation, Charles Stanley, senior pastor, said Reighard expected to be promoted to co-pastor and have equal authority as the pastor.

"The Oversight Committee as well as myself felt we were clear verbally and in writing that no such guarantee was being made," Stanley said.

Reighard said in a written statement that he was not promised the position, but was told the congregation would vote within six months on whether he should have the title. A vote was never taken.

After discussing the issue with Stanley and two advisors, Reighard said he was told to meet privately with the Oversight Committee or he would be fired.

"Rather than risk going to the meeting alone under duress, I submitted my resignation Sept. 8 to save the embarrassment for my family," Reighard said.

Stanley said he took Reighard's request to be considered co-pastor to the Oversight Committee, but the committee rejected it. "In my judgement their decision was the right one," Stanley added.

Reighard said he would not seriously consider another position for weeks or perhaps months, according to The Atlanta Journal Constitution. The northeast congregation was described as silent and stunned after Stanley read Reighard's resignation letter.

In his resignation letter to the congregation, Reighard said, "With every fiber of our beings Robin and I believe that God called us here. Therefore you can imagine our confusion, hurt and sorrow at this moment. However, it remains true among us humans that misunderstandings arise and are, in fact, virtually unavoidable."

Reighard was pastor of New Hope Baptist Church, Fayetteville, Ga., for 18 years before taking the First Baptist post. The Fayetteville church grew to more than 5,000 members under his leadership and was the second fastest-growing church in the Southern Baptist Convention in the early 1980s. He has been president of the Georgia Baptist Convention and Southern Baptist Pastors' Conference. He is currently a member of the Home Mission Board board of directors.

When Reighard joined the First Baptist staff in January, he said, "I haven't been this nervous since I ran for fifth-grade class president." In January Stanley called Reighard "the right man for this position," describing him as a godly man, good preacher and respected pastor.

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The previous pastor for the northeast congregation was Stanley's son who resigned last year in the wake of divorce proceedings between his parents. The younger Stanley has since started a nondenominational church in a north Atlanta suburb.

Stanley's wife, Anna, filed for divorce in 1993. After three years of negotiations, she dismissed her law suit in March of this year.

First Baptist bought the northeast Atlanta property in 1988 with plans to sell its Midtown property and relocate. A sale on the original property fell through, however, and the church decided to hold services in both locations. Church leaders have said they intend to unite the congregations at the north location at some point in the future.

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**Vestal to be nominated
as CBF's next leader**

**Baptist Press
9/9/96**

ATLANTA (BP)--Daniel Vestal will be nominated as Cecil Sherman's successor as coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a moderate organization formed in opposition to Southern Baptist Convention leadership five years ago.

Vestal, 51, pastor of Tallowood Baptist Church in Houston and one of CBF's initial organizers, will be voted on by the 84-member Coordinating Council during its Sept. 26-28 meeting in Atlanta.

Carolyn Crumpler, a former Woman's Missionary Union executive director who chaired the year-long search by an 11-member committee, told Associated Baptist Press, a moderate-related news service based in Jacksonville, Fla., that Vestal was the only candidate to receive the unanimous support of the committee.

Sherman retired in July.

ABP reported members of the Coordinating Council were notified of the committee's recommendation by mail Sept. 6, the same day the CBF's Atlanta staff was told, while Vestal was scheduled to inform his church of the nomination Sept. 8. The Associated Baptist Press story, dated Sept. 6, was released Sept. 9.

Vestal, a Texas native, is a former pastor of Atlanta's Dunwoody Baptist Church before he accepted the Houston pastorate in 1991. He also is a former pastor of First Baptist Church, Midland, Texas.

ABP reported Vestal turned down the CBF job when it was offered to him in February then, according to Crumpler, asked her to be reconsidered during the CBF general assembly in June.

ABP quoted Vestal as explaining: "I don't think any one thing changed my mind. It was a process that just took some time for me. ... The will of God has always been an unfolding experience for me."

Leaving pastoral ministry after 27 years was "part of the struggle" in accepting the CBF job, Vestal told ABP. "The pastorate is not just a position; it is a way of life. Yet I'm facing this task with a great deal of joy that God is leading me in a new direction."

Vestal, a member of the Southern Baptist Convention Peace Committee in the mid-1980s, ran for SBC president in 1989 and 1990, then turned to launching organizational efforts for what became the CBF. He chaired the CBF's interim steering committee and served on the search committee that hired Sherman in 1992.

Vestal is a graduate of Baylor University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He and his wife, Earlene, have three children.

Vestal told ABP Sept. 5 he is not willing to talk about his vision for the CBF until the Coordinating Council has a chance to hear it. But he acknowledged one key to its future will be developing a younger generation of Baptists, ABP reported.

ABP reported seven people were interviewed during the CBF search process: Vestal; Pat Anderson, a college professor from Lakeland, Fla., and former CBF moderator; Hardy Clemons, pastor of First Baptist Church, Greenville, S.C., and a former CBF moderator; Greg Hunt, pastor of Holmeswood Baptist Church, Kansas City, Mo.; Gary Parker of Atlanta, Baptist principles coordinator for the Fellowship; John Tyler, a telecommunications executive from St. Louis; and Scott Walker, pastor of First Baptist Church, Waco, Texas.

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**Mohler: Secularized preaching
is crisis for Southern Baptists**

By Lee Weeks

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--Secularized preaching, heavy on opinion and light on doctrine, is to blame for an increasingly "widespread biblical ignorance among Southern Baptists," said R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

"I believe there is a crisis indeed in Southern Baptist preaching, and it is a crisis to which we had better give our attention," Mohler said Sept. 4 during a chapel address on the campus of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C.

"I believe it is seen and evidenced by immature and even (biblically) ignorant Christians in the pew, many falling prey to false doctrines," Mohler said. "It is seen by an increasingly worldly church proclaiming an evermore worldly message we see not just out in the world but in the church confusion, secularity, lack of discipline, weak and absent doctrine."

Preachers of the gospel must be true to their calling by following the apostle Paul's charge to his protegee Timothy to "preach the Word," Mohler stated.

"That imperative had better be the imperative by which you enter the pulpit," he asserted.

Preachers on both ends of the theological spectrum, Mohler said, too often are concerned about giving "itching ears what itching ears want to hear."

"On the left wing of the church, the Bible's authority and inspiration are often rejected and thus the Scriptures are entirely absent. But among evangelicals, the Bible's authority and inspiration are confessed, but the Scriptures are often abandoned. Evangelicals are so easily seduced by the culture around us. The Bible is often displaced by the authority of popular culture, pragmatic concerns and personal experience."

Yet without God's Word, Mohler said, there would be nothing to preach.

"This canon which came together by the inspiration of God and the superintendency of the Holy Spirit is the canon of Scripture that does not err, will never mislead and is the substance of our message, or we are preaching some other gospel."

Still there are those who scoff at the notion the Bible is the inerrant and infallible Word of God, Mohler said.

Mohler quoted from a book by David Buttrick, homiletics professor at Vanderbilt Divinity School in Nashville, Tenn., "Preaching To Captives: The Liberation of Preaching:"

"So the Bible offers meaning -- not in every little passage; some Bible passages may be largely irrelevant or even sub-Christian -- the Bible offers meaning by handing out a story with a beginning and an end and, in between, a narrative understanding of how God may interface with our sinful humanity."

And Mohler quoted Edward Farley, professor of theology at Vanderbilt Divinity School, who wrote in a 1994 article in *Theology Today*: "The Christian church is summoned to the apostolic task of preaching the good news, and to preach biblical passages is to reject that summons. ... But why would someone who thinks that the Bible originated historically, contextually, and editorially, thus reflecting the human and even corrupted perspectives of its writers, think that any passage one happens to select must contain something in it or about it that is proclaimable?"

While writings such as these are unthinkable by evangelicals, Mohler noted there are many inerrantists who routinely fail to preach expositively.

"We cringe and we flinch and we're repelled when we see the Bible rejected and impugned and maligned by those witnesses and we say surely evangelicals preach the Word.

"We hold to the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture. We honor the Word. But I have to tell you, oftentimes I wonder. Do we really preach the Word? We confess the authority, the total truthfulness, the inerrancy, the infallibility and the plenary verbal inspiration of the Bible only to abandon the text as we preach."

Preachers must be careful not to interfere with the intended message from God's Word, Mohler said. "It is our business to get out of the way. We stand in the pulpit as a door to be opened and not closed. The goal of expository preaching ... is to let the text talk and to make clear what the text speaks.

"We are heralds. We are not originators. We are charged to preach a message we have received, not to invent or design a message we believe will be well-received. We are not to develop. We are not to alter. We are not to update. We are not to reformulate. We are not to contaminate. We are to preach the Word."

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Mohler cited a recent study conducted by Princeton University sociologist Marsha Whitten to illustrate his point that a kind of "Christianity Lite" is being served up in too many Southern Baptist churches.

In Whitten's book, "All Is Forgiven," the author compared the sermons from mainstream and liberal Protestant churches and evangelical churches, with the largest sample among Southern Baptists. The sermons analyzed were from the Luke 15 prodigal son parable.

"The message was frighteningly secularized," Mohler said. "There was seen an accommodation to modern culture, especially in the predominance of therapeutic concerns.

"No notion of atonement, no demand, no discipleship, just a blithe, general, soothing non-confrontational message -- all is forgiven. Don't worry about it. You're going to be taken care of. God loves you."

Too many pulpits lack the holy boldness that comes with proclaiming God's truths, Mohler said.

"There is a false humility in the part of so many pulpits and so many preachers where there is no exhortation because quite frankly he who preaches has no confidence in what he says. ... But if it is (God's) Word, it is not confidence in our word, but confidence in God himself, who is its author."

Mohler said "theological seminaries must be measured by whether or not our graduates preach the Word in season and out of season."

"Preach it when it works and when it doesn't seem to work," Mohler exhorted. "Preach it when it bears visible fruit and when it appears to be barren. Preach it when it is appreciated.

"Preach the word when it is denounced. ... Preach the Word. Preach the Word. Peach the Word."

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Centrifuge/Mission-Fuge campers give \$227,902 to foreign missions

**Baptist Press
9/9/96**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--A check for \$227,902.60 to be presented by the Baptist Sunday School Board for foreign missions projects is evidence young people care about spreading the gospel to all parts of the world.

The money is a gift collected from 41,518 campers and counselors during 1996 Centrifuge and Mission-Fuge camps, sponsored by the board's discipleship and family development division.

Joe Palmer, manager of the board's Centrifuge/Crosspoint section, presented BSSB President James T. Draper Jr. with the check during chapel services Sept. 6. Draper, in turn, will give the check to the SBC Executive Committee for use by the Foreign Mission Board in a variety of locations and ministries.

Also during the chapel service, Draper read to employees a proclamation from Mayor Michael Dow of Mobile, Ala., who praised the work of Mission-Fuge campers for "meeting the physical and spiritual needs of our community. ... As a result of tireless efforts, many in our city will now enjoy a changed life -- knowing that someone cares enough to love them in a vary special way. ...

"Because you pleased the citizens of the city of Mobile with your talents and skills," the proclamation continued, "we invite you to continue to use our city to reach your goals."

Mission-Fuge is the newest of the board-sponsored camps. Held this summer in Mobile, Ala., and West Palm Beach, Fla., the camp combines Bible study with physical labor. Campers who participate in Mission-Fuge spread out through the city working on construction and clean-up projects for underprivileged persons.

A total of 132 weeks of Centrifuge and Mission-Fuge camps were conducted this summer at 15 locations across the United States. Young people in the seventh through 12th grade are eligible to participate in the camps. Mission-Fuge will be held in the summer of 1997 at two additional locations -- Riverside, Calif., and Nashville, Tenn.

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Hotline number opened for BSSB's LeaderCare

**Baptist Press
9/9/96**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--A toll-free crisis hotline has been activated by the Baptist Sunday School Board's LeaderCare staff to offer help to pastors and other professional church staff people. The network provider service may be reached at 1-888-789-1911 from 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Central time Mondays through Fridays.

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LeaderCare, announced earlier this year, is designed to provide personal development for pastors and other professional staff. The service is conducted in partnership with state conventions, associations and other minister support groups, taking advantage of established resources. Located in the personal development section of the board's pastor-staff leadership department, LeaderCare is designed to provide personal development resources as well as crisis prevention, intervention and restoration resources for pastors, professional staff members and their families.

Brooks Faulkner, manager of the section, said the LeaderCare staff "is prepared to intervene, offer suggestions for direction, counseling, encouragement, mentoring and restoration help when church staff persons face dilemmas that seem potentially catastrophic."

Barbara Harris and Amy Wrye will answer the hotline number, referring callers to the appropriate staff person, depending on the caller's need. Both are trained to facilitate confidential calls, Faulkner said.

The LeaderCare staff also includes Neil Knierim, whose specialty is vocational guidance; Linda Miniard, women in ministry leadership positions; Tommy Yessick, wellness ministry; and Norris Smith, forced terminations and conflict mediation.

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**Deal with children one-on-one,
HMB evangelism materials urge**

By C. Lacy Thompson

**Baptist Press
9/9/96**

ALEXANDRIA, La. (BP)--Ever since Jesus instructed his disciples to "let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them," Christians have struggled with exactly how to bring children to faith.

For some reason, many people associate age 12 with the age of accountability. Until then, they reason, a child simply isn't mature enough to understand what a faith decision involves.

Others cite studies showing a vast majority of people -- 86 percent -- come to faith in Christ before age 15.

Children should be reached as soon as possible, they insist; age makes no difference. They often point to instances of committed Christians who made professions of faith at early ages. The problem, however, is it can lead to pressing children into decisions they are not prepared to make.

So what's a person to do?

Camille Hamilton sees a middle road. "We need to share the gospel with children at age-appropriate levels ... and we need to be prepared to deal with each child on an individual basis regardless of age," says Hamilton, author of "God's Special Plan" materials on reaching children, published by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

"That's where we run into trouble a lot of times with children -- because we try to deal with them as a group. But there's no way you can truly determine whether a child is ready (to make a decision for Christ) unless you sit down one-on-one and talk with the child, regardless of the age."

The HMB materials, including a special tract, help adults do just that, Hamilton says.

To begin with, adults must understand what a child needs to know in order to make a decision for Christ, Hamilton says. Usually, if children indicate they know what sin is and believe themselves to be sinners, adults assume they are ready to make a decision for Christ.

However, Hamilton says children need to understand four things before making a decision for Christ:

- the meaning of sin.
- the fact the child is a sinner.
- the fact the child has sinned against God.
- the fact the child is separated from God due to sin.

The distinctions are important, Hamilton notes. Until a certain age, children determine what's right and wrong on the basis of pain and pleasure and whether others approve, she says. "It's not an inner sense of what's right and wrong. It's a case of, 'How do the people around me respond to me when I do it?'"

In that world, if children do something and it hurts or they are punished for it, it is wrong. If it feels good and they are praised, it is right. But there comes a time when children have to learn that some things are wrong because God says they are, Hamilton explains. "Children have to understand they did something that disobeys God, not just something that mamma doesn't like."

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At that point, the true meaning of sin grows clearer. Sin relates to God, to something consciously done against God, and children need to be aware of this in order to make decisions for Christ, Hamilton maintains.

Children also must understand the effect of sin -- that it breaks their relationship with God, Hamilton says. "A child may understand he has sinned against God but not understand that he is separated from God because of his sin. He may understand the fact but not the consequences or the seriousness of his sin. Like an adult, a child must repent. He must be sorry enough for his sin to turn from it and decide to live his life to please Jesus. If he does not understand that he is separated from God (by sin), he cannot do this."

Thus, determining whether a child knows enough to make a decision for Christ is crucial in sharing the gospel with children, Hamilton says.

But how is that determination made?

"The only way you can determine whether a child is ready is to ask questions and listen carefully to the answers," Hamilton says. She stresses both aspects -- asking the right questions and waiting for children to answer instead of leading them to answers.

Hamilton offers several pointers at this point:

-- Never assume anything. "Most people believe when a child starts asking questions, the child is ready to be saved," Hamilton says. "That may be true. That may not be true. This is a necessary stage children will go through in order to be saved. They start asking questions. ... They want to know."

Children may express an interest in making a decision -- they may even come forward during an invitation for a variety of reasons, Hamilton says. They may do so because they are genuinely ready; to get attention; because their friends did so; out of curiosity; because they have questions; or even out of fear.

For whatever reason a child comes forward or expresses an interest, however, adults need to be prepared to respond to questions and help the child understand his or her feelings, Hamilton says. A listening adult then can determine whether the child is ready to make a decision for Christ.

-- Do not use "yes-or-no" questions. Hamilton has seen many well-meaning counselors ask two simple questions of children -- "Have you ever sinned?" and "Do you want to ask Jesus in your heart?" -- before leading them to a decision for Christ.

"These are well-meaning people who want the very best for that child. But with two 'yes-or-no' questions, you cannot determine whether a child is ready (to make a decision). So we don't use 'yes-or-no' questions, not because we're trying to trick the child but because we want to know what the child is thinking and where the child is spiritually."

If one should use a "yes-or-no" question, Hamilton says, immediately follow it with a question of "why?"

-- Do not ask questions with built-in answers. Hamilton recalls seeing one counselor ask a child, "You want to ask Jesus into your heart, don't you?"

She notes the counselor had "already built in the answer she wanted the child to say. So be careful that you don't ask questions with such built-in answers."

-- Do not ask questions for which children have memorized answers. When children use phrases not normal for them, make sure they understand what the words mean, Hamilton says. "There's a lot of terminology -- language of Zion -- you and I are used to. But there's a lot of time that a child will not understand those words. Make sure you draw that child out to see if they know what they're talking about."

-- Ask questions in a language a child understands. Hamilton tells of a mother who responded to her daughter's questions by telling her of the Garden of Eden and how Eve ate the "apple" and gave it to Adam and sin came into the world. The mother concluded the talk by asking her daughter, "Now, who really ate that apple?" And the daughter, in all seriousness, replied, "Mom, Snow White ate the apple."

Such scenarios are common when adults use terms children cannot understand, Hamilton says. For that reason, visuals often are very effective.

Obviously, every child is not going to be ready to make a decision for Christ the first time he or she asks a question, Hamilton says. Indeed, there are three possible decisions children may make at that time:

-- step toward God. Children must not be forced to make a profession of faith decision, Hamilton notes. "We need to be careful that we let God do the convicting work in the heart of a child."

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Hamilton warned a premature decision for Christ can work like a vaccination giving children just enough of a religious experience to create a barrier they will have to cross in order to have a genuine conversion later in life. But if children are not ready to make a decision, it is important they understand they are involved in a significant process, Hamilton says. They need to understand everything is OK at that time but will not always be OK, that there will come a time when they do not feel close to God and will need to talk more about these feelings. By explaining to children they have taken a step toward God and conversion is a next step somewhere down the line, one will have prepared them to come forward and take that next step when appropriate, Hamilton says.

-- profession of faith. Of course, some children will be ready to make a decision for Christ, Hamilton says. Again, a counselor must be careful to allow a child to make the decision on his or her own instead of leading the child to such a point.

The "God's Special Plan" tract helps a counselor do this. It is designed to guide a dialogue between an adult and child and is flexible for an adult to adapt as needed.

In counseling a child, an adult must help him or her understand the decision is merely a beginning, that follow-up needs to be done to explain assurance of salvation, baptism and church membership.

Hamilton cites the need to explain the meaning of salvation to children -- that it's more than just being saved from hell. "What we need to do is tell these children from the first, 'Yes, you're saved from hell, but Jesus also is now your Lord. Jesus is your boss.'"

-- assurance of salvation. At times, children who have made a decision for Christ will come forward to do so again. Perhaps the child did not understand the previous decision or has questions about it, Hamilton says. The key is to ask questions about how the child is feeling and about his or her understanding of Jesus and sin and the spiritual life. "Help a child determine if the commitment was genuine. If it was, lead him to pray a prayer of forgiveness. Explain assurance of salvation. If the previous experience was not genuine, present the gospel and ask the child what God wants him to do now. If he still does not understand, treat the decision as a step toward God," Hamilton advises.

While conversion is a one-time experience, Hamilton says a child who makes a decision early in life may feel a need to recommit himself or herself later on because of a deeper understanding of that act. This does not mean the earlier commitment was not genuine but that it is growing, she notes. "When a teenager or young adult says, 'I was baptized as a child but did not know what I was doing,' do not simply pray a prayer of commitment with him. Go back to the experience. Ask questions! It may be the commitment was genuine and he needs to mature that commitment and make Jesus Lord of his adult life."

Obviously, Hamilton's approach to sharing the gospel with children is not easily accomplished. It takes training and commitment. She urges churches to train adults specifically for counseling children and to set up an accountability system to make sure follow-up is done. Helps for doing both are included in God's Special Plan materials.

Tips for using mass evangelism to reach children also are included in the resource. But however children are approached, Hamilton comes back once again to the need to deal with each child individually.

"Do mass evangelism," she says. "Share the gospel with groups of children. Give an invitation if you want to. But when it comes to prayer and it comes to the counseling, ... always deal with the children one-on-one."

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**Church uses rural roots
to reach inner-city kids**

By Michael Clingenpeel

**Baptist Press
9/9/96**

ROANOKE, Va. (BP)--For three summers volunteers from Mill Creek Baptist Church in rural Virginia led a week-long Vacation Bible School at Trinity Baptist Church, a central-city Southern Baptist congregation in Philadelphia. As many as 20 Mill Creek members were involved, and people felt good about their witness to children in Trinity's day camp ministry.

When members of Mill Creek sat down last September to evaluate their summer missions trip, however, some wanted to try a new approach.

Trinity's small building, active children and Philadelphia's oppressive summer heat left the volunteers uncomfortable and exhausted, according to Mill Creek member Bob Allen, a Roanoke, Va., neonatologist.

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"Some people said we should receive a collection and buy portable air conditioners to take with us in the summer. I said we ought to bring the children down here to this comfortable country and host them for Bible school."

Allen's idea won out and, after an all-day bus ride from Philadelphia in mid-August, 26 children and their four adult leaders arrived at Mill Creek for a week in the country.

For the next six days, the host church, located north of Roanoke between Troutville and Buchanan, introduced their urban guests to potato digging, peach picking, hiking, swimming and milking cows. Every night the children attended Vacation Bible School at the church.

For many children, a week in a predominantly rural community would be bland, even boring, stuff. But not for the children who come from Trinity's day camp program.

The Philadelphia church, which was started over a century ago by American Baptists but has been Southern Baptist since 1980, has about 85 children enrolled each day in its weekday ministries and 30 in Sunday school. Most of the children had never traveled out of Philadelphia, according to Tom Cairns, Trinity's pastor since 1988.

And it wasn't easy to get all of them out of the city for a rural destination. "It's ironic," said Cairns, a bivocational pastor committed to inner-city ministry. "We live in a high-crime area, yet many parents needed to be assured about their children's safety while they were down here in Virginia."

The children who made the trip were between grades two and eight. Most are raised by one parent or by grandparents. "I don't know of many fathers at all," said Tracy Kohl, who directs the church's weekday programs and who traveled to Virginia to help chaperon the group.

"We establish a set of standards in our day care program, so the kids know what is expected of them," Cairns said. "We had to leave three kids at home because we knew they wouldn't behave."

A new world was opened to the children who gained permission to make the trip. "This is the first time some of them have had a regular mealtime and have been told to go to bed at a specific time. They resist the limits, but they really sense someone loves them," said Kohl, who was enthusiastic that the experience of being away from home, traveling with a group and sampling a life very different from the streets of Philadelphia will have positive results.

One morning a farmer in the Mill Creek church demonstrated how to milk a cow and invited the children to let a calf suck their fingers. One child, more than slightly aghast, vowed never to drink milk again.

Another Mill Creek couple, Philip and Barbara Zahl, grew a "Philadelphia garden." The Zahls met the children and let them pick tomatoes, onions and cucumbers and dig potatoes.

"You would think they had found gold," said Mill Creek pastor Jim George as he watched children crowd around Zahl as he unearthed shovel after shovel of dirt and potatoes.

Since Allen offered the idea last September, the staff and members of Mill Creek have been planning for the week's activities. Marsha Davidson, Mill Creek's associate pastor, said hosting instead of traveling for a missions week has involved many more people than previous missions trips.

"Rather than me be the one planning the missions trip, it has been led by the lay folks. They've done most of the work." Davidson estimated more than 100 church members were active in some part of the planning and implementation of the week.

Children stayed in the homes of church members. One member drove the bus each day to sites visited by the children. Numerous adults and youth acted as team leaders during the daily outings to local sites such as the Peaks of Otter, Natural Bridge and local farms.

Sister churches and community organizations got in on the action as news of Mill Creek's plan spread. A local bank donated hats and gift bags to be filled with personal items. A dentist donated toothbrushes for each child. Church members prepared bags with numerous personal items for each child. Women on Mission from North Roanoke Baptist Church gave toothpaste and lotion for the bags. Two local grocery stores donated all the food used during the week. Every day the group was transported on a bus loaned by Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, and the Roanoke Valley Baptist Association contributed \$1,000 from missions funds to assist the church with its project.

One day the Philadelphians were joined by members of Staunton Baptist Church in Huddleston, another Virginia Baptist congregation that has sent a mission team to Trinity.

By week's end, more than 150 children were enrolled in Mill Creek's Bible school, an increase of more than 50 percent over last year, according to Allen. "Camp Friendship," the VBS theme, had turned into precisely that as the Mill Creek congregation learned that missions involves hosting as well as going.

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