

LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

Historical Commission, SBC

Nashville, Tennessee

--- BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE:

SBC Executive Committee

901 Commerce #7501

Nashville, Tennessee 37203

(615) 244-2355

Herb Hollinger, Vice President

Fax (615) 742-8919

CompuServe ID# 70420,171

(BP)

BUREAUS

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

March 11, 1996

96-42

NEW MEXICO--Church's message, not methods, is sacred, Rick Warren says.

NEW MEXICO--Warren proposes 12-step plan to revitalize SBC.

NEW MEXICO--Baptist communicators focus on technology; change name.

FLORIDA--Banker-turned-broadcaster heads 'station of the year.'

TEXAS--RTVC series to examine 'Morality in Media' theme.

KENTUCKY--Her coffee shop is hub for race-track ministry.

KENTUCKY--Baptist horse enthusiasts saddling up for ministry.

FLORIDA--Church lost a building, gained insight into God.

Church's message, not methods,
is sacred, Rick Warren says

By Mark A. Wyatt

Baptist Press
3/11/96

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Rick Warren has a simple message for churches wanting to grow -- proclaim the gospel using methods that work and keep up with rapidly changing technology. But, Warren told a gathering of Baptist communicators, church growth is not the most important issue facing churches.

"The issue of the 21st century is going to be church health," said Warren, senior pastor of Saddleback Valley Community Church in Orange County, Calif. Unfortunately, he said, many churches and their leaders have confused growth with health.

"Bigger is not better," Warren declared; "better is better."

Warren delivered the keynote address at the Baptist Public Relations Association's 1996 workshop, Mar. 7-10 at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center.

Church health results when the five purposes of the church -- worship, ministry, evangelism, fellowship and discipleship -- are kept in balance, Warren said. When that happens, he said, growth occurs.

"When the church of Jesus Christ is balanced, it is healthy, and when it is healthy, it grows," he explained. "If a church is healthy, growth is automatic. Balance makes a healthy church."

That includes keeping "a balance between methods and message," Warren said. He urged Baptist communicators and churches alike to "use technology but don't worship it."

However, Warren observed, "That's not the problem in most churches. Most are 10 years behind. They're just discovering fax machines."

The problem with that, Warren said, is that continuing advances in computers and communication technology means "fax machines are almost irrelevant."

Since its beginning with seven members, Saddleback has grown to an average weekly worship attendance of 12,000, making it the fastest-growing Southern Baptist church in history. Warren recalled that when he started the church in 1980, "we didn't have any VCR recorders or fax machines or cellular telephones or Windows personal computers. Now I depend on all these things daily."

Warren described a number of ways Saddleback uses technology in its ministries today, such as providing silent pagers to summon parents of preschoolers without disrupting worship services and issuing bar-coded identification cards to make sure children are returned to their proper guardians.

--more--

Staying current with technology helps churches and individuals by increasing communication, saving time and effectively shortening distances between people, Warren said. "With e-mail I am often as close with people who are great distances away as I am with someone in the next office," he explained.

But he warned against using technology without a purpose. And he said most people make two mistakes concerning technology which "can be fatal to industry, to denominations" and to individuals.

"We either worship it or fear it -- one or the other," Warren said. The root of both errors about technology is confusing the message with the method, he said.

"Some people worship technology, but technology's never going to save anybody," Warren declared. "Technology must always be the servant of the church and always be the servant of ministry, not vice versa." The church must "be very aware of not letting the tail wag the dog," he added.

"That's why (at Saddleback) we're not going on TV and radio," Warren stated. Besides, he said, he just wants to be a pastor -- not a fund-raiser or a celebrity.

"Always being in the spotlight blinds you, it's bad for your character," Warren said.

He also spoke about the danger of fearing or resenting technology.

"Many of our churches, really in our heart of hearts, believe the 1950s was the 'golden age of church growth' and they're going to do everything they can to preserve it," Warren observed. But he said such a view is "dishonest" because its proponents try to create a biblical basis for a personal bias.

"It is a human habit of nature that we erect theological walls to protect human preferences," he stated.

"I admire the Amish because they're honest about it. They believe the ideal culture was the mid-1800s and they don't make any bones about it," Warren said. In contrast, he suggested, some Baptists "say we've still got to do the programs of the '60s because 'it's the New Testament way.'"

"No method was meant to last forever. No method has lasted forever. Methods are not sacred, the message is," Warren stressed. Consequently, he said, while the gospel message must never change, methods of sharing it have to change with every generation.

"You can see it in music," Warren said. "Music is going to be the fault line in churches in the next 10 years," he predicted. "Music divides generations, music divides families, and yet we listen to it, we drive to it.

"America's favorite pastime is not baseball, it's talking about music," he asserted.

Warren said he learned a lot while exploring a variety of worship approaches during Saddleback's early days, when a single worship service often featured several styles of music.

"We went from Bach to rock" and offended just about everybody, he recalled. From that experience, Warren came to realize that each church has to develop its own style of worship.

"You have to specialize. You tell me the music you're using and I'll tell you who you're reaching and who you're never going to reach," he said.

"When we do not change methods, we in essence cut off the message, and that's called being unfaithful," Warren said. "Most people define faithfulness in terms of orthodox belief. Jesus always measured faithfulness in terms of behavior."

But Warren encouraged church leaders to try new things and be willing to risk failure while striving for success. "If you're not taking any risks in your ministry, you don't need any faith," he said.

"Don't be afraid to go out on a limb -- that's where the fruit is," Warren encouraged his audience. "Don't be afraid to rock the boat if Jesus is your captain."

Warren reminded those at the conference that as communicators "you really are a strategic part of our convention. You are very influential -- many times you don't realize how influential you are."

He cited response to a magazine article about Saddleback, which he said led to more than 50 churches being started.

He also said the articles the communicators write have an impact on other leaders. "All leaders are readers because all readers are learners. The moment you stop learning, you stop leading," Warren said.

And he commended the Baptist communicators for their commitment to learning.

"You came here to sharpen some skills. That means you are a leader. You're never wasting your time when you're sharpening your skills."

--30--

Warren proposes 12-step
plan to revitalize SBC

By Mark A. Wyatt

Baptist Press
3/11/96

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--The first step toward revitalizing denominational organizations is understanding why their influence is declining, Rick Warren told Baptist communicators meeting recently in New Mexico.

Warren, senior pastor of Saddleback Valley Community Church in Orange County, Calif., named the Southern Baptist Convention as one denomination needing to "face the spiritual and sociological causes of that decline with courage, frankness and humility."

Speaking at the annual workshop of the Baptist Public Relations Association at the Glorieta Baptist Conference Center, Warren presented a "12-step plan for revitalizing denominational organizations." He said it grew out of "a recovery program, like a 12-step recovery program" he recently proposed in a speech to leaders of the Methodist denomination.

"These are great days of change in the SBC," Warren told the BPRG gathering. "I have more hope for our convention than I have in the last 10 years."

But while Warren favors the restructuring plan now under way in the Southern Baptist Convention, he said "restructuring will not be enough -- you must also have revitalization."

The SBC restructuring plan, called a "Covenant for a New Century," was approved at the 1995 Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Atlanta. A proposed bylaw change scheduled for a vote at this year's SBC meeting in New Orleans would clear the way to reduce the number of SBC agencies from 19 to 12 by merging three existing agencies into a single new entity, the North American Mission Board, and combining or dissolving several others.

Warren acknowledged the Covenant for a New Century deals with structure and expresses some statements of vision and purpose. What it lacks, he said, is the strategy needed to help the plan succeed.

Besides coming to grips with the causes of their declining influence, Warren said denominations must:

- shift from being program-driven to being purpose-driven. Denominations need to "recommit to assisting congregations to fulfill the New Testament purposes of worship, evangelism, education, ministry and fellowship," Warren said.

- shift from being tradition-bound to being need-sensitive. Examine the validity and effectiveness of every denominational task, Warren recommended. "Ask: What's working? What's not working? What's missing? and What's unclear?" Don't automatically discard traditions, but don't confuse tradition with orthodoxy either, he said.

- refocus on supporting and strengthening pastors, both personally and professionally. "Reposition the denomination as the pastor's greatest ally," Warren suggested. "Forget about preserving programs and assume the role of servant to the shepherds."

- return to defining the denomination and allegiance to it by doctrinal distinctives and purposes rather than by programs, polity or worship style. "Different does not mean disloyal or demonic," Warren observed. He said the SBC should once again "emphasize unity in belief while enjoying and encouraging diversity in local church expression."

--more--

-- offer choices in everything the denomination supplies to churches. Warren said the "one-size-fits-all" approach to servicing churches no longer works. He recommended offering choices in programming, resources, assistance, mission support and involvement.

-- draw on the strength of the largest churches in the denomination rather than resenting, fearing or discounting them as aberrations. Large churches are the "research and development department" of the denomination, Warren said. "Watch them closely for what is working and be wise enough to use whatever is adaptable."

-- take full advantage of state-of-the-art technology to increase two-way communication with pastors and churches and to enable faster development and delivery of services. Feedback is the secret of effectiveness in an ever-changing world, Warren said. He suggested replacing one-way communication (program promotion) with "opportunities for churches to explain what they need and offer suggestions."

-- allow designated giving. Warren said churches want to know exactly where their gifts are going. "Don't treat designated gifts as second-class gifts," he stressed.

-- invest in fruitfulness, not just faithfulness. "Reward fruitful ministries and stop subsidizing failures," Warren recommended. He said assistance funds should be redirected to new or growing churches which "demonstrate the potential to become mid-sized or large churches that will give back to the denomination in the long run." Also, invest larger amounts over a shorter period of time with a definite cut-off date and eliminate long-term subsidies of non-growth situations.

-- streamline the structure to maximize ministry and minimize maintenance. Reduce the number of denominational meetings, Warren said. When possible, he continued, use technology to accomplish what previously has required a meeting and do not measure denominational loyalty by attendance at meetings.

"Respect the increased time demands that are felt by local church leaders," Warren urged.

-- identify and promote the value of association and the benefits of churches cooperating together in a denomination. Provide real examples showing "how cooperating in a denomination allows a church to accomplish more than it could on its own," Warren proposed. He said that includes emphasizing a "kingdom-building mind-set" eager to cooperate with other like-minded groups on various projects "for the fulfillment of the Great Commission."

--30--

Baptist communicators focus
on technology; change name

Baptist Press
3/11/96

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Baptist communication professionals focused on the technical aspects of their work during an annual workshop Mar. 7-10 at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center and also approved several structural changes including a new name.

The Baptist Public Relations Association became Baptist Communicators Association following a near-unanimous vote by the 100 members attending the meeting. References to "public relations" were removed from the group's bylaws to reflect a new emphasis on "communications." The 310-member association is composed of communication professionals in various Baptist groups including many Baptist colleges and universities and Southern Baptist Convention agencies.

Elected president for 1996-97 was Sarah Zimmerman, associate director of news and information for the SBC Home Mission Board.

Honored with a "lifetime" membership was a former association president and recently retired editor of the South Carolina Baptist Courier, John Roberts. Roberts was given the honor because of "significant contribution" to the association in which he has been a member since 1958.

--more--

"Tek Trek" was the theme for the group's annual workshop, highlighted by a keynote address by Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Valley Community Church, Lake Forest, Calif., who spoke on the importance of utilizing communications technology and "lifting up the changeless, biblical gospel." Also on the program were Stan Anglen, owner of an Albuquerque, N.M., printing firm; Scott Faulk, an Intel Corporation official, also from Albuquerque; and John Loudat, editor of the Baptist New Mexican.

Most of the workshop sessions were directed at the growing technological emphasis among communications professionals.

In addition to the name change, the association redesigned its structure to allow for its members to participate in one "professional development group:" editorial, electronic media, graphic design, institutional public relations, management or photography. A chairman from each of those groups would form a professional development advisory council which will help in planning future annual workshops.

Also approved was a refining of one of the association's scholarship programs for minorities and internationals. The Alan Compton and Bob Stanley Minority and International Scholarships received funding approval for awards beginning in 1997. Awards of up to \$1,000 annually will go to a minority individual pursuing a career in communications and one professional scholarship of up to \$500 to a current or prospective association member working in a communications-related capacity for a Baptist institution or agency.

The worship concluded with a banquet and the presentation of the 1996 Wilmer C. Fields awards for work during the year submitted by members to a panel of judges.

Other officers elected were: awards chairman, Trennis Henderson, outgoing association president, Arkansas Baptist Newsmagazine; newsletter editor, Tim Yarbrough, public relations department of the Missouri Baptist Convention; membership chairman, Barbara Denman, public relations department of the Florida Baptist Convention; and 1998 program vice president, Ken Camp, public relations department of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. Other officers include historian, Polly House, Baptist Press central office; treasurer, Bob Allen, Associated Baptist Press; and program vice president for the 1997 workshop in Atlanta, Bill Neal, Georgia Baptists' state paper, The Christian Index.

The 1998 annual workshop will be held in San Antonio, Texas.

--30--

Banker-turned-broadcaster
heads 'station of the year'

By C.C. Risenhoover

Baptist Press
3/11/96

ORLANDO, Fla. (BP)--A banker talking to the Lord about discontent with his job resulted in creation of one of the most powerful Christian television stations in America.

That station, FamilyNet affiliate WTGL-TV (Channel 52) in Orlando, Fla., was recently named "station of the year" by the National Religious Broadcasters.

FamilyNet is the broadcast television service of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission reaching into more than 33 million households nationwide through more than 100 affiliates.

"We're humbled that our peers nominated and elected us for this prestigious honor," said Ken Mikesell, general manager of WTGL-TV and the former banker instrumental in helping start Channel 52. "We think we're doing things correctly, ethically, and it's nice to have the affirmation of peers. From our beginning in 1981, our intent has been to bring integrity to Christian broadcasting through selective programming and a strong emphasis on the local communities we serve."

In the early 1970s, Mikesell said, he was midway through a successful banking career but wasn't happy.

--more--

"I closed my office door one day and asked God why I wasn't happy," he said. "I clearly heard the Lord tell me I was in the wrong business. Though I had no formal education in broadcasting, the Lord was loud and clear in pointing me in that direction."

With the help of friends and borrowed money, Mikesell helped create the first Christian channel on cable radio in Gainesville, Fla., where he was a banker.

In 1981, he moved to Orlando and helped start Channel 52.

A graduate of the University of Florida's school of banking, Mikesell had some background in television as a result of being involved in the media ministry of North Central Baptist Church in Gainesville, where he was a deacon.

"The church had a TV ministry on the local ABC affiliate," he said, "and later the local cable company gave the church a channel. My involvement enabled me to see what could be done for Christ through the medium of television."

Mikesell said the tourist attractions in Orlando provide many opportunities for his station to reach out to people from all parts of the world.

"Our programs reach into most of the hotels and motels in the area," he said, "so our station is the first experience many people from around the world have with Christian television. Obviously, we take this opportunity to minister to people from various areas of the world very seriously."

For the past 10 years Channel 52 has satellite uplinked the Easter sunrise service from Sea World to TV stations around the world and to the Armed Forces Network. In the past the station has also uplinked Walt Disney's "Night of Joy."

With the station's project called "Neighbors Who Care," Channel 52 works closely with local churches.

"We have a clothing and food closet, and funds that we put into a benevolence account each year," Mikesell said. "We like to administer these things through a local church so that the individual receiving help can identify such help with a local church. Our goal is for the individual to have a relationship with a church. In addition, we match funds with local churches for worthwhile projects that help people in need."

Channel 52 also helps para-church ministries.

"This year we've chosen to help 13 ministries by providing each with creative and technical support in developing a five- to seven-minute video for their fund-raising effort," Mikesell said. "By shooting videos for these ministries, we're saving each a minimum of \$1,000. And, while this is costing us, we believe what we're doing will seed many times over in spreading God's Word."

The station has a staff of 25, which he said is "as lean as possible to do the Lord's work."

The general manager said one of the station's greatest blessings is its relationship with FamilyNet.

"We carry at least three hours of FamilyNet programming daily," he said, "and they're excellent programs, such as the 'Family Enrichment Series,' 'Home Life' and 'Cope.' We also carry 25 to 30 hours of local programs each week and quite a few specials during the year. We've also made a serious commitment to programs for children and teenagers. Through our programs designed for children and youth, we're making a strong investment in the future of Christianity."

Last year "Bottom Line," a Channel 52-produced program geared to teens, received a "Covenant" award. Covenant is a ministry of the RTVC committed to promoting and supporting Christian family values in media.

"It's amazing how the Lord has taken what we started in 1981 and enabled us to reach into almost a million households in this area," Mikesell said. "And it's amazing that through satellite technology we've been able to make an impact for Christ throughout the world."

It's amazing but possible when a banker hears God's voice and responds.

RTVC series to examine
'Morality in Media' theme

By C.C. Risenhoover

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--The Radio and Television Commission will be the first Southern Baptist agency to do a series of three television documentaries on the subject of "Morality in Media."

The agency recently received its second \$50,000 grant from the Davidson Family Charitable Foundation for development of the series.

Jack Johnson, president of the RTVC, received the first \$50,000 grant last November. It was presented by Davidson Foundation advisory committee members Hilton T. Ray and James Stewart, both of Fort Worth, Texas.

The first "Morality in Media" documentary, to be aired by the NBC television network, is scheduled for completion this spring. The host will be John Schneider, former "Dukes of Hazzard" TV star who founded FaithWorks Productions, a San Antonio, Texas, -based film company dedicated to the production of quality family entertainment.

Schneider said there was a time in his life when he didn't want to have anything to do with people who used the word Jesus, but now he lists himself as an avid Christian committed to making a genuine difference for Christ in the world.

"There are very few shows on television today that I can watch with my children," he said. "Having kids changed my perspective of what I can and can't do on television. Frankly, I'm scared to allow my kids to watch TV alone. What TV is capable of planting in their minds is hard, if not impossible, to unlearn.

"Pollution is pollution, and prevention is better than rehabilitation."

Schneider said he is excited about his role in the first of the "Morality in Media" documentaries, especially the positive message it will send as to what Christians can do in developing family values media.

Johnson praised the foundation for the grant, which will "enable us to show America what can be done for Christian family values in media."

He said the documentaries on "Morality in Media" are being done in cooperation with the RTVC's "Covenant" emphasis. "Covenant" is a ministry committed to producing and acquiring family values programming.

Rosser McDonald, an RTVC producer responsible for the first of the "Morality in Media" documentaries, was instrumental in helping secure the grant from the foundation. Ray was his guest at the premiere of an RTVC documentary he produced for distribution to the NBC television stations. At the premiere, Ray heard Johnson speak about "Covenant" and suggested the RTVC make application for a grant from the foundation.

"When people understand what we're trying to do in terms of developing and producing Christian family values programming, they want to help," McDonald said. "Almost everyone who hears about Covenant wants to be part of such a vital ministry."

Johnson said content and development of the three documentaries will be determined by Jerry Stamps, senior vice president of administration; Deborah Key, vice president of network operations; Bob Thornton, vice president of television production; and McDonald.

--30--

Her coffee shop is hub
for race-track ministry

By Melanie Childers

Baptist Press
3/11/96

FLORENCE, Ky. (BP)--Anita Roberts' concern for the backside has made her a frontrunner in ministry to people in the horse-racing industry.

Six mornings a week, long before the break of dawn, Roberts opens her modest coffee shop on the backside at Turfway Park in Florence, Ky.

The tiny facility -- a converted tack room for storing horses' equipment -- radiates activity from 4:30 until around 10:30 or 11 each morning.

--more--

Even against the chill of a crisp morning, the door stands wide open, allowing the aroma from a big coffee pot and fresh pastries to mingle with the more rustic odors of the track.

The brightly lit room and Roberts' unassuming smile greet exercise riders, hot walkers and grooms who filter in one or two at a time to take a breather. They huddle around the coffee pot or sit down for a moment on a bench in front of the television, which gives the room a homey atmosphere. It's a convenient place to rest before going back to work.

Although she's not the official chaplain, Roberts' willingness to set up shop among the backsideers and become "one of them" has earned their trust and created a powerful sense of rapport and camaraderie. She dresses casually like them; she can speak their language.

"I'm like a mother or a grandmother to them, depending on their age," she said.

Indeed, Roberts, 48, answers to a variety of affectionate names from the workers, including "mama," "granny" and "cookie lady."

A longtime member of Elsmere Baptist Church near Florence, Roberts first got involved in racetrack ministry 10 years ago when she brought a group of GAs to sing in the chapel service at Christmas, she said.

Now she's commissioned as a Mission Service Corps volunteer through the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

Her ministry is financially supported by the Northern Kentucky Baptist Association and through local Baptist churches' donations.

"That's our library over there," Roberts said, pointing to a sagging bookshelf in one corner of the coffee shop. It overflows with Bibles, devotional literature and books on a variety of subjects.

Bibles she particularly likes to give away are called "Life's Condition Book." Backsideers understand that language: A condition book in the horse-racing industry provides comprehensive data about horses to race at the track, including their genealogy and racing statistics, Roberts said.

She pulled a scrapbook off the bookshelf and dusted it off. "I mop this floor two or three times a day," she said as an aside, noting how quickly dirt and dust collect in this environment.

The pages of the scrapbook display pictures of trainers, exercise riders, hot walkers and aids -- mostly taken during special events Roberts helped organize for them.

"It really gets rough for them back here," she acknowledged. Every face has a name and a story.

Almost everyone trying to scrounge a living on the backside has financial struggles. Some also confide with her about problems with drugs, abusive relationships, unwanted pregnancies.

"I don't condemn anybody," Roberts said simply. "Jesus didn't. I don't."

Instead, she does whatever she can to help them, such as:

- taking single mothers to the health clinic.
- bringing the health department in to give flu shots and offer seminars.
- coordinating a food and clothing closet for emergency use.
- finding off-track housing for people who have children.
- keeping a 4-year-old boy some mornings while his mother works.
- learning Spanish so she can communicate with Hispanics who work at the track.
- coordinating a Thanksgiving dinner through local Woman's Missionary Union groups and planning a Christmas party, complete with gifts, for backsideers and their families each December.

Last December she prepared for 200 children, noting, "Sometimes this is the only holiday they have."

For people unfamiliar with the equestrian subculture, Roberts compares backsideers to migrant farm laborers. Conditions often are barely adequate; families struggle to eke out a living. And many of them migrate from track to track, depending on the season.

But the traditional stereotype of backsiders as gambling drunkards is unfair and untrue, Roberts added.

"A lot of them are very caring people," she said. "They really look out for each other's needs. ... They take pride in what they do."

Roberts is especially concerned about the health and status of women who work on the backside.

"There's no privacy," she said. "Women are not respected back there." She has tried to improve conditions by installing shower curtains and supplying shower rooms with personal items donated by local WMU groups.

Conditions on the backside sometimes set workers up for despondency and trouble, explained Doretta Powell.

"There's not much back here to do," said Powell, a clinical social worker with backsiders. "Working here often leads to exhaustion and depression. Anita tries to provide a place for them to come and hang out and talk to somebody.

"She makes a great impact," Powell said of Roberts. "She's the one person people can come to. She baby-sits, finds food and clothing ... but more than anything, she's a listening ear."

While she invests a lot into helping meet people's physical needs, Roberts also conducts a women's Bible study group on Monday evenings and encourages people to attend chapel. Whenever she has an opportunity, she talks with them about spiritual matters.

"I think God wants us to tell everybody the good news and not keep it to ourselves," she said. "I don't want my print on the pew to be my only sign of faithfulness."

--30--

**Baptist horse enthusiasts
saddling up for ministry**

By Melanie Childers

**Baptist Press
3/11/96**

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Mounting enthusiasm for recreational and leisure horse riding has inspired Baptist equestrians to saddle up for ministry.

While race-track chaplains and rodeo ministries have flourished for many years, little organized work has been done with the growing population that rides horses for the fun of it, said Larry Martin, director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention's missions and evangelism division.

Martin, a longtime horse owner, has helped organize state and national para-church groups to support equestrian ministries. He was one of 11 people from four states who attended a think tank at Georgetown College last May.

Representatives at that meeting developed Equestrian Ministry International -- an organization created to equip and assist people who have horses to share their faith naturally, Martin said.

Although the organization is in a formative stage, Baptists in several states now are involved, Martin said. He expects several events to be organized this year.

Kentuckians who own and care for the more than 200,000 horses in the state not only provide a flourishing market for horse-lovers' newspapers and magazines, but also create a specific intergenerational subculture as much in need of Jesus Christ as any other, Martin said.

Christians involved in equestrian activities often have unique opportunities to participate in a kind of rural marketplace evangelism, he explained.

"Horses open the door to meet people and begin conversations with people," he said, noting people in recreational settings often are more relaxed and feel less resistant to talking about spiritual matters.

"This is not a matter of sending people into the marketplace, but identifying those who are already there and equipping them to share their faith in natural ways," Martin said.

Ministry opportunities abound for Christian equestrians:

--more--

-- Harold Burton serves as volunteer equestrian ministries director for the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina. He has written a manual on equestrian ministry and will lead part of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's ministry during the Olympics. Burton's ministries have included dressing as a circuit rider and offering horse rides to children at North Carolina interstate rest areas.

-- Ray Allen, director of evangelism for the Baptist Convention of New England, led a woman to make a profession of faith in Jesus Christ after he volunteered to feed her horses while she was on vacation.

-- Randy Foster, vice president of an outfitters association in Jackson Hole, Wyo., owns and leases horses and has trained his staff to use natural elements to share their Christian faith.

-- Steve Hampson, a bivocational pastor in Illinois, has become the unofficial chaplain of a nine-day Illinois trail ride involving 2,000 people. Last year he organized a tent with gospel singing; local churches brought homemade ice cream; and a Sunday morning worship service was attended by more than 70 people.

-- Three Kentucky directors of missions participated in a Labor Day trail ride at Wranglers Campground in Kentucky's Land Between the Lakes -- attended by more than 3,000 people. Bob Morrison of Little Bethel Baptist Association, Wilburn Bonta of East Lynn and Russell Creek Baptist associations and Charles Simmons of Graves County Baptist Association received permission to set up a revival tent to host a gospel quartet, a Sunday morning worship service and afternoon children's activities.

-- At its annual convention Oct. 6-7, Kentucky Baptist Brotherhood voted to launch Equestrian Ministries of Kentucky, a brand-new organization to support statewide Christian activities among equestrian sports and leisure events. Bonta and Simmons were named program director and assistant director, respectively.

Equestrian Ministry International will provide opportunities for developing camaraderie, sharing ministry ideas and nurturing moral support among those who love horses and want to use their interest to share their faith in Jesus Christ, Martin said.

Anyone who would like more information may call Martin at (502) 245-4101.

--30--

Church lost a building,
gained insight into God

Baptist Press
3/11/96

ORANGE PARK, Fla. (BP)--It was a bolt of lightning that destroyed the church building, but strengthened the church.

Members of Island View Baptist Church, Orange Park, Fla., were in Sunday school when a booming clap of thunder exploded over their part of town in September 1991.

Pastor James Hoffman Jr. and a few others were in the sanctuary checking the sound system for the upcoming worship service when the receptacles began to spark and smoke.

"I thought we'd blown a speaker," Hoffman recalled.

An usher came in and alerted them of a problem, but at first Hoffman didn't think it too worrisome. "I felt sure the fire department would arrive in time."

In reality, a bolt of lightning had struck the steeple, traveling down the ground wire into the sanctuary -- and setting the church's pine rafters ablaze almost instantaneously.

Soon realizing the severity, Hoffman gathered all the members outside in the rain. They watched the building burn to the ground in about 45 minutes. The fire department was able to save only the education building.

That night the congregation met in the fellowship hall -- to talk, cry and pray.

"It was almost like watching yourself die," Hoffman said. "It was a very emotional and draining experience and one that caught us all. We were brought down to level ground.

--more--

"But it unified the members. We had a purpose -- to rebuild. The fire burned off lots of things that didn't matter. What was left mattered -- our people and our lives together. The whole experience was one of renewal. It was a rallying point for the church."

In addition to the 34-year-old sanctuary, which church members had been contemplating refurbishing, the fire destroyed the church offices and music suite. The congregation met two years in the fellowship hall, and in September 1993 dedicated their new \$2.2 million facility. The insurance paid approximately \$700,000 and the congregation borrowed \$1 million.

The church, which is in use in the community seven days a week, was able to build about twice the amount of space it had before the fire. The new building seats 800 people and has a pipe organ and state-of-the-art lighting and sound equipment.

"People have been incredibly faithful with their giving," Hoffman said. "We were arguing whether we should spend \$60,000 on refurbishing the building and now we are ahead of schedule in paying off our loan, which is much larger than \$60,000. When we are challenged by God, we can do so much more.

"People know where we are now. When we are out talking to people in the community, they know about the fire," Hoffman said.

More importantly: "It was a humbling, grieving, rejoicing experience -- we walked through every emotion. ... It was an opportunity to see again what God can do and see how God works through every one of our circumstances, and how he has a plan for us. I wouldn't trade that experience for anything; that kind of tragedy is like joy wrapped in sadness."

--30--

Based on reporting by Michael Chute.

HOUSE MAIL

(BP)

BAPTIST PRESS
901 Commerce #750
Nashville, TN 37234

**F
I
R
S
T

C
L
A
S
S**

Southern Baptist Library
and Archives