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PENNSYLVANIA--Baptists in northeast U.S., Canada launch new conference; photo.
 OKLAHOMA CITY--Pastor's son/legislator intent on justice for parents' murder.
 VIRGINIA--ANALYSIS: Here's one use of computers with eternal significance; graphic.
 NEW MEXICO--Be intentional and informed to reach blacks, minister says.
 NEW MEXICO--Southern Baptist athletic group planning overseas sports clinics.
 CALIFORNIA--GGBTS names director for Rocky Mtn. campus.
 ALABAMA--165 youth help residents in high-crime neighborhoods.
 LOUISIANA--Church voices appreciation for law enforcement officers.
 TENNESSEE--Correction.

Baptists in northeast U.S.,
 Canada launch new conference

By Dan Nicholas

Baptist Press
 8/13/96

ST. DAVIDS, PENN. (BP)--When Tony Kebreau returned to inner-city Boston from the first-ever Northeast Baptist Leadership Development Conference, he was intent on helping the 400-member Haitian congregation he leads grow again.

Kebreau was among 250 pastors, Sunday school teachers, deacons, discipleship trainers, missions programmers and other leaders from the Baptist conventions of New England, New York, Pennsylvania/South Jersey and Maryland/Delaware and the Canadian Convention of Southern Baptists participating in a leadership development conference (LDC) Aug. 5-9 on the campus of Eastern College, St. Davids, Pa.

The conference provided attendees with a wide variety of practical information -- and fellowship -- in a setting within a manageable distance from home. Without the LDC, Southern Baptists across the region seeking the same training would have had to travel hundreds of additional miles to Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center near Asheville, N.C.

"The conference gives me a challenge because, before coming here, I was on the verge of restructuring the administration of the church, in terms of both activities and leadership," said Kebreau, pastor since 1984 of Haitian Baptist Church of New Jerusalem, in Boston's Dorchester neighborhood. His church's attendance has been around 400 people since 1990, experiencing only "transfer growth" from other congregations.

Kebreau said he will apply what he heard at the LDC to guide church leaders in writing mission and vision statements, in revamping the Sunday school strategy and in building teamwork aimed at improving their outreach, teaching and fellowship.

Cosette Choeiri, one of three leaders from Arabic Evangelical Baptist Church, Ottawa, Ontario, said she learned principles to help her lead children in worship and "not just baby-sit them." Choeiri, who is from Lebanon, picked up ideas to "help the story time and the singing become more interesting" for the preschool through grade six classes at her 50-member congregation.

Meanwhile, Yolly Vergara, a Mission Service Corps volunteer in New York City, took home concepts to help her become a better English as a Second Language teacher for immigrant Russian Jews in LeFrak City, Queens. A Filipino who works as receptionist for the Metropolitan New York Baptist Association, Vergara will apply "the better method" she learned at the LDC to reach out to others by starting an ESL group, rather than continue teaching ESL individually.

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Vergara's Christian faith was renewed by the LDC's evening worship preachers, John Sullivan, executive director of the Florida Baptist Convention, and David Waltz, executive director of the Baptist Convention of Pennsylvania/South Jersey, and the music leadership of Bob Burroughs, church music director of the Florida Baptist Convention. A member of United Trinity Baptist Church, LeFrak City, Queens, Vergara came to Christian faith in October 1994 following an automobile accident that killed one person.

William Johnson, pastor of Christian Mission Fellowship Baptist Church, a racially mixed urban congregation in Philadelphia, was one of many local participants who attended the LDC, returning home daily to carry on their various responsibilities. Johnson, president of the Baptist Convention of Pennsylvania/South Jersey from 1992-94, came to the LDC to "get a new vision for the task" he faces each day in the violence-prone neighborhood in which he ministers. Last summer, he said, 18 homicides were reported near his church building.

Attendance at Johnson's 150-member church, which he started 19 years ago, plateaued some five years ago. He left the LDC "with a real clear signal that there's a strategy that we're not now doing. We've got to go back to developing more dynamic worship. Like Moses, I'm asking God to speak to my heart."

A Chinese pastor and church planter from Mississauga, Ontario, Tong Kong Ng, received "lots of concepts and understandings that are refreshing" from the workshops he attended. "There are a lot of struggles in church planting," observed Tong, who started two churches in Hong Kong, two more in Houston, and served as pastor of a 400-member Chinese congregation in Mississauga before launching his present 35-member mission 18 months ago.

Tong said he benefitted from information received at the LDC on how to assimilate people into the life of the church. "Many people will backslide unless we do something to plug the hole. We need God's mercy to keep them in our midst. We have to be faithful servants, doing whatever God tells us to do," he noted.

Aubrey Stewart, Sunday school director for the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware and one of the conference planners, said the LDC "provided readily accessible training for churches in the northeastern United States that is contextualized for the setting."

Much of the Southern Baptist training material and programs are, by design, "tied to the Bible belt training strategy," while the LDC participants "work in a setting that is not as open to the strategies used in southern states," said Stewart, a Texan who has served in the Northeast 25 years.

Stewart noted that the LDC's emphasis was intentionally placed on multi-disciplinary leadership development rather than on specific program development because "people in the Northeast wear many hats" in their churches and have limited time for training.

"We have people who cannot go to Ridgecrest for four weeks every summer" for the programmatic training, he stated. "That's why this conference provides principles that are applicable across the board." He observed a "good response" to the first LDC, both in terms of attendance -- 252 people, surpassing the planners' goal of 200 -- and "the spirit people have exhibited."

Another LDC planner, Mark Fischer, education director of the Baptist Convention of New York, said the fact that the LDC was contextualized training for the Northeast was "absolutely necessary for our church growth. This gathering helps us create a Northeast identity that is multicultural and, with the involvement of Canada, multinational."

Fischer stated that the LDC "allows us to reflect on who and what we are and gives us a base on which to grow" as a group of Southern Baptists outside the South. "I don't really believe that we will break out with great evangelistic growth until our people believe that God can do it through us without us being totally dependent on somebody doing it for us," he said.

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Neal Davidson, church growth team leader for the Baptist Convention of New England and one of the leaders who helped make the LDC a reality, called the gathering "a great beginning. It has substantially achieved our basic objectives of offering relevant, principle-centered leadership training for our churches in the Northeast, giving us a credible experience to build upon to make it more effective in the future."

The team that developed the LDC, said Davidson, tried to plan core conferences that were "directly applicable to what our churches are doing. A big church for us is considered a small church within the Southern Baptist Convention," he noted. "Leadership development is a process." The LDC, Davidson added, provided "growing leaders for growing churches."

David Wyman, a New Mexican who has spent the past 27 years as a Southern Baptist leader in Mexico and now in Canada, praised the LDC for providing the "privilege of a whole new concept of regional conferencing" in the Northeast. As director of the church growth division of the 125-congregation Canadian Convention of Southern Baptists, Wyman enjoyed seeing the Canadian participants developing new ideas and, overall, "the spiritual growth of the conferees." One Canadian woman, Wyman said, was excited because the LDC trip allowed her to worship with more people at one time than she will worship with all year long.

Individuals from the seven Canadian churches represented at the LDC traveled many hundreds of miles at significant personal sacrifice. One such long-distance attendee was Wallace Jordan, pastor of the 60-member Community Baptist Church of Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. Community Baptist is the eastern-most Southern Baptist congregation in North America and the only one in the Atlantic time zone. The LDC has renewed Jordan's vision for starting Southern Baptist missions in the larger cities of the Maritime provinces such as Halifax, Nova Scotia.

"The growth of the new work requires that we develop ministries for discipleship and outreach, along with enlarging our Sunday school," Jordan stated. "It is vital that our members reproduce themselves, which of course is discipleship." As a result of the LDC training in the pastor/staff core conference he attended, Jordan said he will begin to structure his 3-year-old church by attempting to answer the question, "What do we have to offer to the person who comes to our church?"

While the adults were kept busy with special-interest conferences -- everything from "Contagious Christianity" to "Moving Beyond Baby Sitting" to "Teaching for the 21st Century" -- about 40 teens were active in a "Summer Youth Celebration" that included worship and recreation, and the children were cared for with a program of their own. The most popular "core conference" for adults was the pastor/staff session.

The LDC was made possible by the partnership the five regional Baptist conventions, the Florida Baptist Convention, the South Carolina Baptist Convention, the Baptist Convention of North Carolina, the Baptist Sunday School Board and others. A seed money gift from the Cecil B. Day Foundation of Georgia made the first LDC a financial reality and will provide a financial base from which next year's gathering will be possible, the first week in August 1997.

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(BP) photo available from Neal Davidson at the Baptist Convention of New England, (508) 393-6013.

Pastor's son/legislator intent
on justice for parents' murder

By Dave Parker

Baptist Press
8/13/96

OKLAHOMA CITY (BP)--The date was Oct. 15, 1979. Richard Douglass and his wife, Marilyn, were getting ready for dinner with their two children in their rural home near Okarche, Okla., 30 miles northwest of Oklahoma City.

Douglass, pastor of Oklahoma City's Putnam City Baptist Church for seven years, formerly had been pastor of several churches across the state, president of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma and a missionary to Brazil.

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The Douglass family moved away from the city to let the children experience country living but had decided to move back, since Brooks, 16, was a senior at Putnam City High School and Leslie, 12, attended Hefner Middle School in the same district.

Leslie, a Miss Teen Oklahoma, heard a knock at the door and answered. Glenn Burton Ake asked if she knew where "the Mitchells lived." She said "no," and Brooks told Ake they had never heard of the Mitchells.

Ake asked to use the phone but said he first needed to get the number from his car. He returned with Steven Keith Hatch. Each was armed with a pistol and a shotgun.

The men hog-tied the Douglass family, ate their dinner, sexually assaulted Leslie, then Ake shot them and left them to die.

Brooks and Leslie survived, then had to endure a seemingly endless stream of hearings and trials. Ake was found guilty and sentenced to die, but the U.S. Supreme Court ruled his rights had been violated when Oklahoma failed to provide him a psychiatrist.

In the retrial, Ake was convicted and given two life sentences and two 200-year sentences. Even with such hefty sentences, though, he was up for parole in 1995 and is eligible again in 1998.

Hatch also was found guilty and sentenced to die. That sentence was overturned twice on technicalities before a judge handed down his final death sentence.

At 12:17 a.m. Aug. 9, nearly 17 years after the murders, Hatch was executed for his crimes.

Brooks, now a state senator, witnessed the execution; thanks to a bill he authored, victims' families can now witness executions in a separate room.

"I think there is more to it than watching him die," Douglass said. "It is also knowing it will never happen again. I testified against him five times over a 17-year period. That's something I will never have to go through again.

"Justice ultimately has been served."

After witnessing the execution, Brooks read a three-sentence statement to the press, then walked out with Leslie. Later in the morning, Leslie was interviewed on NBC's "Today Show" by anchor Katie Couric. She said she watched the execution "a little for myself, partly for my parents and for other victims' families who were never allowed to witness an execution."

She said she "saw a man lying there with his eyes closed, going to sleep" much easier than her own parents' deaths.

She also said it was "extremely frustrating" that Ake is still alive.

"I guess we wish he had been there with Steven Hatch tonight," she said.

One thing Brooks has learned the past 17 years is that he had many misconceptions about the judicial system.

"We were always told as children that the police are there to protect you and that the courts will punish the bad guys," he said. "But some things happen where the police don't protect you and the courts seem to punish you. You are only a piece of evidence the prosecution will use.

"And if the court says it is going to lock someone up and throw away the key, that is not true, either.

"This process has almost destroyed my confidence in the criminal justice system, that there is any accountability for people's actions," Brooks said. "Knowing that Hatch is executed helps restore some of my confidence in the system, that people ultimately do pay for their actions."

Until the end, Hatch maintained he had never hurt anyone and should not be executed. Brooks disagreed.

As Hatch's clemency hearing was coming up July 24, Brooks said he struggled with whether the death penalty applied to Hatch.

"After 17 years, not only does the public forget, but I forgot a lot, too," he said. "It came right down to resolving whether I believed it was right."

Thinking back on the night of the murders, he realized there were many times Hatch had choices to make, and he always made the wrong choices.

"There were many instances where he could have expressed that it was not his will to hurt us, but he didn't," Brooks said. "When Ake left the room, he (Hatch) could have eased the situation. Rather than ease it, though, he made it worse. He carried his own brand of torture."

Ake took Leslie to her bedroom, forced her to disrobe and sexually assaulted her. The family could hear her crying and sobbing, and Brooks said his mother started crying, too.

"I tried to console her, to tell her Leslie would be OK, but then Hatch came over," Brooks recalled. "He clearly knew what was going on -- we all knew what was going on -- but he put the shotgun to the back of my head and said, 'If I hear any more talking, I am going to blow your head off.'"

"I was so angry, I just knew that if I tried hard enough I could break the ropes loose. I wanted to kill him."

During the clemency hearing, Hatch testified he went back to the room, saw what Ake was doing and tried to pull him off. He said he fell on Leslie, so she mistakenly thought he was trying to rape her.

Brooks said Hatch had earlier testified he was afraid his former brother-in-law would kill him if he didn't cooperate; if that was true, he would not have tried to stop the rape attempt.

"Ake said for him to go outside, turn the car around and listen for the sound," Brooks said. "I knew at that time that I was getting ready to get shot. I think Mother and Dad knew, too."

Therefore, he said he believes Hatch also knew Ake planned to kill them.

After the shootings, Brooks and Leslie worked their way free and Brooks drove them both to the home of a neighbor, who was also a doctor.

Hospitalized for several weeks, the brother and sister then started on the long road to emotional recovery. Brooks graduated from Putnam City High School in May 1980. In the fall, he enrolled at Oklahoma Baptist University, but that only lasted eight weeks.

"It was very small, and my dad had been one of their trustees, so everyone knew him," Brooks recounted. "It was too small, too soon after the murders and too constricting. It was hard to develop relationships."

So, he withdrew his money from the bank, packed his belongings into his car and began drifting around the country. He took odd jobs at bus stations, convenience stores and restaurants. On his way to Florida, he stopped to visit his grandmother in Alabama.

His grandmother called his uncle, who lived in Chattanooga, Tenn., and the uncle invited Brooks to live with him for a while. He moved to Knoxville, started school, then transferred to Baylor University, where he graduated in 1985.

In February 1986, Ake was convicted for the second time, this time receiving two life sentences and two 200-year sentences. Brooks moved back to Oklahoma, started two businesses, started law school and then sold his businesses.

"At the end of the year I was looking for something to do, so I got married," he said. He married a woman he had known from church. Although she attended Baylor at the same time he did, they did not start dating until three months before getting married.

At one point, with all the court hearings and trials going on, they decided to move to Atlanta to get away from it all. They found jobs and an apartment and came back to Oklahoma City for their last load of furniture.

"We saw on TV that Hatch was going to be given a new resentencing hearing," Brooks said. "I confirmed that I would have to be here for it. Within a few weeks, it became apparent that it would be impossible to leave Oklahoma City at that time."

Just five months after leaving, they were back.

In May 1990, Brooks received his master's degree in business administration and took 19 hours of school in the summer, all at the same time running for the state senate. He was elected in November and received his law degree in December.

Just as things were getting together for him, though, they fell apart again. All the stress and publicity from the trial, from school and from politics had taken a toll on his marriage.

The legislative session started in February, and his wife left him soon afterward.

"It took two years for me to get back on my feet," he said.

In June, he remarried in Colorado, this time to a fellow lawyer. Rod Masteller, pastor of Putnam City Baptist Church since the Douglass deaths, officiated at the wedding.

Brooks said he feels a close bond to Masteller as his pastor.

"Rod has been very good for the church," he said. "He was able to come in here and be compassionate and understand that people were hurting."

Except for his time out of state, Brooks has remained a member of Putnam City Baptist Church.

"Putnam City and a lot of other churches have been very supportive," he said. "It has been very difficult for members of the church.

"While we were in the hospital, members would try to console Leslie and me; before it was over, we ended up consoling them.

"We had been prepared to do that, though, watching Mom and Dad," he added. "Secondly, we were so numb we really didn't know what was happening.

"We still get prayer-grams from members of the church," he said. "The church has been very supportive through the hearings and trials, and they have helped in campaign victories and defeats."

Leslie also has coped well, Brooks said. After attending Oklahoma State University and Southwestern Oklahoma State University, she now is a schoolteacher in El Reno near Oklahoma City.

During the clemency hearing, she appeared to be very angry, but Brooks said that is unusual for her.

"There are a lot of things that Leslie just found out about in the last few weeks," he said. "She was never aware that Hatch had denied assaulting her."

During the clemency hearing, Hatch's attorney said his client had not committed the murders and had never hurt anyone. Leslie asked Brooks, "What about me? He assaulted me."

Brooks told her Hatch had always denied that, saying Leslie had misunderstood what was happening.

It was at that point that Leslie decided to testify at the clemency hearing. She testified that Hatch had, in fact, tried to rape her.

"She's very angry, once she starts talking about it, but she's not an angry person."

One of the most dramatic confrontations Brooks has ever experienced occurred in 1995 when he was touring the state prison at McAlester. He came face to face with Ake, who was out in the yard.

Brooks then asked to meet with the man who murdered his parents, and Ake agreed.

For an hour and 15 minutes, the two men talked. Brooks said it was "the most dramatic time of my life, other than the night of the shooting."

At the end of the conversation, Brooks said he forgave him.

"It was like water running out of my head, down to my feet," Brooks recalled. "At first it took my breath away, then I felt I could breathe for the first time in 15-16 years."

He said both men cried as they talked.

But even though he has forgiven Ake, Brooks said he still feels the man should be punished for his crimes.

"I don't want to see him out," Brooks said. "I don't believe he is safe out of prison. I told him that day I believe his actions still deserve the death penalty."

He said that day Ake was on 23-hour lockdown at the prison, which meant that for 23 hours a day, he remained in his cell, while one hour a day he was allowed to walk around in the prison yard.

Prisoners are usually put in lockdown because they are a danger to themselves or others.

Still, Ake was up for parole in 1995 and will be again in October 1998.

Douglass said he plans to appear at every appeal.

"I can forgive them, but that is a personal thing," he said. "I no longer carry around a grudge.

"But that doesn't mean it absolves them from paying the penalty for their actions."

In an ironic twist to the story, Amnesty International protested Hatch's execution, since he did not actually commit the crime. Until Texas authorities heard that, they did not realize Ake was not sentenced to die. As a result of Amnesty International's pleas, Texas authorities are considering refiling charges against Ake for killing two men there.

If convicted, he could be executed in Texas.

After all he has been through, Brooks said his personal relationship with God has been strengthened.

"I realize that I wouldn't even be here right now if God hadn't intervened," he said. "There are many things we wouldn't have been able to get through if God hadn't sustained us.

"I really can't think of a time that I felt a lot of bitterness toward God.

"I remember asking God why he let these things happen. And I remember feeling that way after I got divorced."

"I am not nearly as active in church as I was, because I am gone a lot of weekends," he said. "But we still attend church here, and I am very close to (pastor) Rod."

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ANALYSIS

Here's one use of computers
with eternal significance

By Erich Bridges

Baptist Press
8/13/96

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--The 18-wheel truckload of hype introducing "Windows '95" software last year lumbered through slowly enough even for computer illiterates to notice.

Now another product promising some "windows" has appeared -- the 1996 Status of Global Evangelization Annual Report issued by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's global research office. No hype here. It delivers what it promises: a snapshot look at where evangelical Christians stand in their Great Commission campaign to make disciples among all peoples.

Working in cooperation with other evangelical agencies, researchers at the Foreign Mission Board attempt to track all the peoples of the world and their level of evangelization. The data they gather become part of the Integrated Strategic Planning Database, which actually contains more than 50 active databases.

The evangelization "model" used by FMB researchers in this continuing task places each of the world's more than 12,000 ethno-linguistic people groups (a self-identified ethnic group speaking its own language and with a common history and customs) into one of five categories:

1. **WORLD A PEOPLE:** A people group in which the majority of the population has little or no access to the Christian gospel, whether through churches, local Christians, Bibles in the people's "heart" language or other avenues.

2. **UNREACHED PEOPLE:** Such groups may have some access to the gospel, but lack an indigenous church movement strong enough to sustain itself and multiply.

3. **UNEVANGELIZED PEOPLE:** Again, access to the gospel may exist. But the majority has never heard the message in a way that enables them to understand, then accept or reject salvation in Christ.

4. **EVANGELIZED PEOPLE:** The majority has heard and understood the gospel in their cultural context sufficiently to accept or reject it.

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5. CHRISTIAN PEOPLE: The majority of the people group's members actually have professed personal faith in Christ.

This approach opens a clearer window on the world than the traditional evangelized/unevangelized model. It also reveals the unfinished task Christians face. Some Christians undoubtedly find such numbers discouraging. Others may find them cold and lifeless. Why spend so much time and energy collecting them?

Here's why:

Careful tabulation and distribution of such data over the last decade have helped Southern Baptists and other evangelical Christians move beyond talking about world evangelization and begin focusing on what it will take to actually evangelize the world -- the whole world. That is Christ's command in Matthew 28:19, as well as the Foreign Mission Board's vision statement: "to be on mission with God to bring all the peoples of the world to saving faith in Jesus Christ."

The numbers help missionaries worldwide develop specific strategies for evangelizing the lost and deciding how best to use precious resources. They help Christians become aware of the least-evangelized peoples and pray specifically for them.

Finally, they turn into results. When the 1996 evangelization status report was released, Southern Baptists were targeting 89 of the 2,161 World A people groups with 485 missionaries through the Foreign Mission Board. Another 447 missionaries were targeting 36 unreached peoples.

That may not sound like much compared to the total world task, but it represents enormous progress over the last decade. And scores of other mission agencies -- representing not just North American and European evangelicals, but Asians, Latin Americans and Africans, too -- are sending missionaries and other workers to the least-evangelized.

By the end of last year FMB missionaries and their partners had begun 367 churches and baptized more than 6,500 people among the hardest-to-reach groups -- often under difficult circumstances of hostility and persecution.

Next year's Status of Global Evangelization report will show how much progress has been made in the worldwide effort this year.

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Adapted from the May 1996 issue of The Commission, the Foreign Mission Board's monthly magazine. (BP) graphic (horizontal) and cutline from Richmond bureau of Baptist Press available on SBCNet News Room.

Be intentional and informed
to reach blacks, minister says By Karen L. Willoughby

Baptist Press
8/13/96

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--White and black Southern Baptists share a common purpose, according to a black Baptist Student Ministries director.

"We're all caught up in this thing I call life, and we're all going to have to get together to do it efficiently," James L. Thomas said during a Student Week 1996 small-group session at Glorieta Baptist Conference Center in central New Mexico.

Student Week is sponsored by the Baptist Sunday School Board's National Student Ministry.

Thomas, leader of the "Developing a Ministry to African Americans" seminar, said he was speaking out of his background. He is a BSM director at Grambling (La.) State University, a predominantly black institution with about 8,000 students. He is pastor at the all-black New Rocky Valley Baptist Church. And he lives in the predominantly black township of Grambling, which has a population of about 5,000.

"I think you have to be intentional about some things if you want to reach blacks," Thomas, who is African American, said to a group of about 15 white, Hispanic and Filipino Baptist Student Ministries directors. "You need to be intentional in going where blacks hang out, where blacks shop for groceries, where blacks live."

Just as important as being intentional is being informed, Thomas continued.

"You've got to learn the history," he said. "You cannot circumvent this if you're going to reach these people."

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He suggested "The Original African-American Heritage Study Bible" as one resource; books and papers written by W.E.B. Dubois and Martin Luther King Jr. among others. The King James Version study Bible includes 121 pages of black history, plus study notes throughout that emphasize the black connection to the Scriptures.

"The white people who know my history, they're the ones I feel closer to, a deeper bonding," Thomas continued. "Black people and black men in particular have been not only castrated physically, they have been demeaned. Their history was taken away from them."

Great inroads have been made in the last quarter century to return their history to blacks, Thomas said. Now whites need to learn it.

"I think the church must deal with the race issue," Thomas said. "I think ultimately we are the family of God. Racism is ordained of the devil to keep us divided, keep us fighting, instead of reaching others for Jesus Christ."

He talked about "white flight," the cultural tendency for whites to move from a neighborhood when blacks move in. White flight hurts churches and the cause of Christ, Thomas said.

"I guarantee you, when the church stands against racism and white flight, you'll see a better community," Thomas said. "And when you're trying to reach African Americans, remember: They're individuals. We are not a monolithic group. We are not all alike. We don't all hate white folks. And let me say this. Hear me on this. In order to endorse Afro-centrism, it doesn't mean you're not endorsing Euro-centrism.

"We're saying we need to be included in this civilization. We have been excluded and the nation has suffered," Thomas said. "Slavery has had a profound effect on everyone in this country, black and white."

But it was blacks who suffered from it, he added.

"One basic reality is I am a product of slaves just as some of your progenitors have been white supremacists," Thomas said. "So there is a part of me who has had to fight the slave mentality."

He spoke of "genetic memory," a concept he first heard of from author Richard M. King.

"There are some things I think about that I can't even express to you," Thomas said. "We can look in the faces of our elders and see humiliation, see the pain they endured -- and just relate with it."

At a deep subconscious level, he said he accepts being stared at when he goes into stores frequented by white customers. He accepts the fear generated when two or more blacks congregate anywhere. He accepts the inclination to submission learned from his grandfather and father. These all are indicators of racism, Thomas said.

"What can white Southern Baptists do? Listen to us with your heart," Thomas said. "Recognize that we're in this dilemma called life together. Help us reach African Americans for the Lord. The biblical basis for this is love. I think love is the bottom line."

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Southern Baptist athletic group
planning overseas sports clinics

Baptist Press
8/13/96

By Karen L. Willoughby

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Mickey Porter is recruiting athletes.

Porter, a Baptist Student Ministries director at Southwest State University, San Marcos, Texas, wants to bring together several teams of athletes to lead sports clinics overseas, alongside Southern Baptist Olympic gold medalists.

Porter led a session on "Ministering Through Athletics" during Student Week 1996 held Aug. 10-16 at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center. Student Week is sponsored by the Baptist Sunday School Board's National Student Ministry department.

In addition to his work with college students, Porter is chairman of the board of trustees of the International Sports Federation, a Southern Baptist organization established in 1993 as an entre to nations officially closed to the gospel.

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"With the success of the 1996 Olympics, the American public in general and hopefully Southern Baptists in particular have a greater awareness of the opportunity for spreading the gospel through sports," Porter said. "In ISF, we're hoping to give Olympic athletes an opportunity to join God in sharing their faith among unreached people groups."

Athletes with Olympic credentials would be greeted with open arms in nations closed to an evangelistic witness, Porter said.

"You and I couldn't get into some of these countries, but I guarantee if some of the gold medalists for the 1996 Olympics offered to come into their country and teach their athletes how to be Olympic athletes, many doors would be open," Porter said.

Several gold medalists have Southern Baptist connections, he said.

Gold medalist runner Michael Johnson is a graduate of Baylor University, a Baptist school in Waco, Texas. Gold medalist high jumper Charles Austin and gold medalist swimmers Josh Davis and Sheila Taormina are all members of Southern Baptist churches.

The plan of the International Sports Federation is to take several college students also to work in the sports clinics.

"The last time we recruited during Student Week at Glorieta and Ridgecrest, we had 70 people sign up," Porter said. "They serve as Foreign Mission Board short-term mission volunteers. What makes ISF unique is that when we leave a country, we have missionaries there to follow up with those who made decisions."

ISF was organized in 1993 to meet a need for a Southern Baptist sports organization able to enter a country officially closed to Christian missionaries, Porter said. That year they went on the Indian Ocean Islands Sports Evangelism Tour under the joint sponsorship of the Foreign Mission Board, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and ISF.

No decisions were reported that year. But in 1994, there were more than 1,800 professions of faith in Madagascar and four churches were established. ISF has returned three more times to Madagascar. In all, they have sent 18 teams into 12 different nations to work with 20 missionaries.

More than 5,000 people have made professions of a newfound faith in Jesus Christ.

"Sports is a natural draw for people," Porter said. "Everyone wants to see the teams play and hear what they have to say."

Through sports, volunteers are able to break down the typical barriers that hinder evangelism, Porter said.

"Statistics tell us that more than 93 percent of the people in the world are in one way or another involved in sports, either as a participant or a spectator," he said. "It's no secret that it is a sporting event that brings the entire world to common ground. We know that there are countries where it is illegal to openly evangelize, but nowhere on earth is it illegal to carry around a basketball and use it to build a relationship."

Last summer ISF was asked to host all non-athletic activities for the athletes at the All African Games in Zimbabwe. This is an indication the organization is becoming known as a player in the international sports arena, Porter said.

Four sports evangelism tours are set for 1997:

- A 15-man soccer team will play local club teams in Central Asia in June.
- A 9-man semi-pro volleyball team will play exhibition games and work with a national team in Central Asia in June.
- Basketball camps in South Africa in July have places for 10 men and 10 women.
- And a 15-woman softball team will play exhibition games and lead clinics for the Zimbabwe national team in July.

Tours with Olympic gold medalists still are in the planning stage.

In addition to players, ICF needs support personnel such as coaches, trainers and a squad of encouragers. All participants will be involved in one-on-one evangelism.

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"Our desire is to help Christians utilize the universal nature of sports to share the gospel, provide discipleship and support the local church," Porter said. "If that fits in with the areas the Lord has gifted you in, give us a call in Dallas at (214) 286-9473."

Participants would go as short-term Foreign Mission Board volunteer missions personnel and would be responsible for all expenses.

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GGBTS names director
for Rocky Mtn. campus

Baptist Press
8/13/96

MILL VALLEY, Calif. (BP)--Arizona pastor Emerson E. Falls has been named director of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary's Rocky Mountain Campus, which opens this fall in partnership with the Colorado Baptist General Convention.

"We are proud to have Dr. Falls join our faculty and staff," said William Crews, president of Golden Gate Seminary. "He brings with him proven pastoral leadership in a multicultural context and a track record for starting new work. The fact Dr. Falls is one of our graduates only endears him to our hearts all the more."

The presidential appointment is effective Aug. 15. Seminary trustees will be asked to formally affirm the appointment at their fall meeting in October. Golden Gate is one of six Southern Baptist Convention seminaries and the only SBC agency in the western United States. The seminary begins offering courses toward the master of divinity, master of arts in Christian education and diploma in theology degrees this fall at the state convention office building in Englewood.

Falls, 48, the first Native American to hold a high-level administrative post at an SBC seminary, has been pastor of First Indian Baptist Church in Phoenix since 1987.

"Wherever he has ministered, his church has risen up to be a leader of ministry and a model for other churches in that area," said Rodrick Durst, vice president for academic affairs at Golden Gate. "He has a mature approach to urban evangelism and church planting that will stimulate our students to be effective in a variety of contexts."

During his tenure at First Indian Baptist, the church increased average Sunday school attendance from 68 to 140, sponsored five new works -- three Native American, one Korean, one deaf -- and established an American Indian School of Theology to train leaders within the state. He also implemented a pastoral intern program and led short-term mission programs.

Previously, he was pastor of American Indian Baptist Church in Oakland, Calif., from 1982-87. While in Oakland, Falls helped the church increase Sunday school and worship attendance, sponsored one new work and implemented a community ministries program.

"Emerson Falls is an outstanding preacher, thinker, leader and writer," Durst said. "He leads out of the relationships that he makes and builds. I expect to grow because I serve at Golden Gate with Emerson Falls."

Falls served as deputy chief of administrative services at the United States Public Health Service in Oklahoma City from 1971-82.

Involved in extensive denominational service, Falls is a member of the Arizona Southern Baptist Convention executive board, currently serving as vice president of the state missions board and as a member of the operations and denominational affairs committee. He was president of the Native American Southern Baptist Fellowship from 1991-92, at that time helping the Baptist Sunday School Board develop a periodical for Native Americans. He remains a member of that organization.

He has been a curriculum writer for the Sunday School Board and a feature writer for a Woman's Missionary Union magazine. While a pastor in Oakland, he served as vice moderator of the East Bay Baptist Association.

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In the Phoenix community, he has served as president of the chaplains association, directing the work of ordained clergy providing chaplains services to a local hospital, and was faculty sponsor for the Native American Student Association at Grand Canyon University.

Falls received his doctor of ministry and master of divinity degrees from Golden Gate and his bachelor of arts from Central State University, Edmond, Okla. He and his wife, Shirley, have two children.

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165 youth help residents
in high-crime neighborhoods

By Laurie A. Lattimore

Baptist Press
8/13/96

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (BP)--Cutting down on crime has a new meaning for 165 Montgomery youth who cut, trimmed, plucked, raked and hedged yards of local residents in an effort to "crime-proof" their city.

Youth from 17 Montgomery churches volunteered their Saturday morning July 20 to do yard work for "Youth Cutting Down on Crime," an annual crime prevention effort sponsored by Neighbors Who Care, a Montgomery-based national program. It was started in Montgomery as part of the victims' services arm of Prison Fellowship, a prison ministry founded by Charles Colson.

The youth cleaned up the yards of 33 Montgomery homes. Six of the participating churches were Baptist: Capital Heights, Eastern Hills, First Southern, Lowndesboro, Pinedale and Westside. Last year 60 teens did yard work on 15 homes.

Carla Hammonds, director of Montgomery Neighbors Who Care, said this second-year effort was "fabulous. These kids are really on fire for Christ."

Crime often occurs in run-down neighborhoods because a burglar may not think anyone is home or because it is easy to break in without being noticed, Montgomery police officers noted. Well-kept yards are less attractive to criminals because the potential for being seen is greater.

But many residents living in high-crime neighborhoods cannot afford or are physically unable to do the necessary upkeep to ensure safety.

Avis Lewis, who is physically disabled, had her yard cleaned up in just a few hours.

"God is a good God. He provides for us, and it was just like a miracle having those kids," she said. "It was like I saw angels when I looked outside."

But it wasn't just a blessing for the homeowners. Sally Sievers, a 13-year-old at Eastern Hills, said the chance to help was worth the Saturday morning sacrifice.

"Many of these people live in a side of Montgomery where they chance dying every day," she said. "I feel like while I'm young and can help, I want to do that for them."

Sievers, who plans on participating again next year, noted the opportunity to show God's love through their volunteer work. The youth teams often prayed with the residents once they were finished.

Alan Loving, youth pastor at Eastern Hills, said the missions effort showed the homeowners that "teenagers have a heart for the Lord."

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Church voices appreciation
for law enforcement officers

By Mitzi Roton

Baptist Press
8/13/96

FRANKLIN, La. (BP)--A Louisiana church gave special meaning to National Law Day earlier this year by giving tangible thanks to local law enforcement officers for risking their lives daily to protect and serve, often with little thanks.

"We wanted to express our appreciation to the men and women for the difficult and dangerous job they do in serving the community," said Bobby Hines Sr., pastor of First Baptist Church, Franklin, La.

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Ellen Hebert, secretary at the Chitimacha Police Department, noted, "So many times the media only reports the negative things. People hear the bad and not the good stuff. It is good to know the people appreciate what we do."

The church's "Law Enforcement Appreciation Day" kicked off with a breakfast from 5 to 7 a.m. Officers coming on or getting off duty could stop and eat breakfast at the church fellowship hall. Some officers received added special treatment.

"I had to work that day," said Deputy Deborah Jagneaux of the St. Mary Parish sheriff's office, "so they delivered breakfast to me here."

Throughout the day, members of the church baked and delivered cookies to each station in the community.

An appreciation supper and recognition banquet for the officers and their families started at 7 p.m. Pastor Hines welcomed the guests, then First Baptist's choir performed several songs praising the officers.

The church also provided a nursery for the guests. "The nursery was very handy. I have a 2-year-old son and would not have been able to stay otherwise," said Lilly Verrett, switchboard operator for the sheriff's office.

Captain Ronny Theriot, Troop I Commander for the Louisiana State Police Department, was the guest speaker. "I was honored to speak at the banquet," said Theriot. "The glory of God helped me say the right words at the right time."

Theriot said law enforcement is a mission field for Christians in the law enforcement profession, and a calling from God.

"If you read Romans 13, in the Living Bible, it specifically says 'the policeman is sent by God to help you.'"

Hines said Theriot's message inspired many of the officers to join "Cops for Christ," a national organization of Christian police officers who witness to others.

Following Theriot's testimony, each regular and reserve officer was awarded a certificate of appreciation for their efforts in keeping Franklin a safe community.

More than 135 officers, plus family members, attended the "Law Enforcement Appreciation Day" festivities. The officers were from the Franklin City Police Department, Baldwin City Police Department, Chitimacha Police Department, St. Mary Parish Sheriff's Department and Louisiana State Police Troop C and I.

"We had a great turnout" Hines said, "and next year it's going to be even better. The officers were really excited about it."

"I've spoken at several banquets and this was the biggest crowd ever," said Theriot.

"I think the services left a lasting impression on many of the officers," said Huey P. Bourgeois, St. Mary Parish sheriff said.

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CORRECTION: In the (BP) story, "World Changers build, renovate homes on Catawba reservation," dated 8/9/96, please correct the name cited in the first paragraph to Elsie Blue George's, not Gregory's.

Thanks,
Baptist Press

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