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Lighting contractor finds
Light of the World at SBC

By Mark Kelly

Baptist Press
6/14/96

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--When Mike Smith came to the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in New Orleans, it was strictly a business trip. But God had other plans.

Smith, 38, provided the lighting system for the meeting, held in the Louisiana Superdome June 11-13. His MDS Lighting Inc. of Warner Robbins, Ga., has helped light and stage events and concerts all over the country.

The Southern Baptist meeting in New Orleans was just another job for the successful young businessman.

But as he sat at his control panel, located on the auditorium floor right in front of the platform, he listened for two days as one speaker after another talked about how God had changed their hearts and put their shattered lives back together.

"I listened to the preaching and singing. I heard the testimonies of people who came from broken families and drug and alcohol abuse and God saved them," said Smith. "Finally, it all got to me, and I decided it was time for a change."

Smith, who himself came from a family torn apart by alcoholism, felt his own drinking and vices made him unworthy of God's love. When he heard the testimonies, he knew he could be forgiven too.

"I sat and thought about my life, that I'd be 39 in August. I wondered where I would be in 11 years at age 50," he said. "I wondered what kind of father I am to my two kids, what kind of values I'm passing along to them. I wondered what kind of husband I am to my wife.

"And then there's the afterlife."

On his way to the Superdome at midday Tuesday, June 11, Smith met a couple of men in the hotel elevator. The two talked between themselves about people they were praying for. He told them, "You guys pray for me too. My life is a mess."

As they walked from the hotel to the convention center, one of the men, Alan Puckett, minister of evangelism for Beaver Run Baptist Church, Norcross, Ga., talked with Smith. Puckett prayed for Smith before they parted company.

Later, during the afternoon session of the convention, Smith sat at the lighting control board and thought about his life.

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"I felt like my life was just going down the tubes," he said. "I was tired of living that way."

Suddenly Puckett was there at Smith's station. They talked for a few moments, and then Smith prayed to receive Christ.

"I felt it in my heart when I gave my life to Christ," he said. "Now I feel clean. I've got a new beginning. I've got a fresh start on my life."

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RESOLUTIONS WRAP-UP

SBC resolutions speak strongly
on numerous moral issues

By Dwayne Hastings

Baptist Press
6/14/96

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Meeting within blocks of the New Orleans French Quarter -- an area renown for its decidedly irreligious atmosphere -- messengers to the June 11-13 annual session of the Southern Baptist Convention spoke out strongly on a variety of moral issues.

They adopted 14 resolutions condemning the Walt Disney Company's embrace of homosexuality, President Clinton's veto of partial-birth abortion ban legislation and the arson of African American churches. They endorsed creation of a national commission to study the effects of gambling.

Expressing "deep disappointment" at the erosion of moral leadership within Walt Disney Company's leadership, Southern Baptists threatened to boycott Disney theme parks and stores unless the entertainment giant turns from its "anti-family, anti-Christian trend."

Messengers overwhelmingly passed the resolution which cited Disney's policy of providing benefits to the partners of its homosexual employees and production of "objectional material" through its subsidiaries. The resolution encourages "the Southern Baptist family to support this resolution with (their) purchasing power, letters and influence."

The Disney resolution proposed by the Resolutions Committee did not call for a boycott but instead urged messengers to give "serious and prayerful reconsideration (of) their purchase and support of Disney products."

Convention messengers were quick to support an amendment proposed by Wiley Drake, a pastor from Buena Park, Calif., which threatened a boycott of Disney theme parks and retail stores if the company is unresponsive to the resolution.

Disney officials expressed surprise at the action, saying, "We find it curious that a group that claims to espouse family values would vote to boycott the world's largest producer of wholesome family entertainment."

Drake, who lives just seven and a half miles from Disneyland, said he will refrain from shopping at Disney retail stores and probably will not renew his family's season passes to the theme park.

"I'll start slow and gain momentum," he said.

In another resolution, SBC messengers indicated their opposition to the legalization of homosexual marriage, affirming "the Bible's teaching that promotion of homosexual conduct relationships is an abominable sin calling for God's swift judgment upon any such society."

The resolution indicated support for pending congressional legislation which would bar the federal government from recognizing same-sex marriages.

Without opposition, messengers passed a resolution expressing profound disdain at the arson-blamed fires of African American churches, promising to "pray for, support, encourage, stand with and assist our sister churches and fellow believers in the African-American community who have been victims of these criminal acts."

"We deplore these acts of blind hatred," Jim Henry, outgoing president of the convention, said in a June 11 address. To thunderous applause, Henry added, "May the world hear that as the heartbeat of Southern Baptists."

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"This desecration and destruction of churches is a particularly heinous form of hatred," Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, said. "To burn a black church is to plunge a dagger deep into the heart of the African American community."

In an outpouring of support for the victimized congregations, Southern Baptist messengers collected more than \$280,000 to aid in the rebuilding of the destroyed or damaged churches.

Messengers condemned President Bill Clinton's veto of the partial-birth abortion ban, calling his decision to veto the legislation "shameful."

The resolution expresses strong disapproval of the action of the President and congressmen who opposed the legislation, taking particular offense at Clinton's statement he prayed about the decision.

"We express our disapproval of the President's suggestion that God would reveal to him in prayer than any abortion method "would ever have God's approval," the resolution states.

Clinton told Congress he would sign the bill if it included an exception in the case of "serious adverse health consequences to the mother."

Mike Powell, pastor of Pachuta (Miss.) Baptist Church, who submitted one of several resolutions on the issue, said in reaction to Clinton's comments, "Someone needs to speak out for the babies."

On a related matter, messengers called on the Republican National Convention to maintain its pro-life platform plank and urged the Democratic National Convention to adopt such a plank.

Messengers spoke against physician-assisted suicide, affirming "biblical and Hippocratic prohibitions" against the practice.

Noting the resolution was consistent with the convention's longstanding affirmation of the sanctity of life, the statement read in part, "We vigorously denounce assisted suicide as an appropriate means of treating suffering."

"This resolution reacts to a culture which would rather coldly and conveniently kill the suffering patient than walk with him through the valley of the shadow of death," C. Ben Mitchell, consultant for biomedical and life issues for the Christian Life Commission, said.

A resolution protesting the worldwide persecution and denial of human rights of Christians was approved by messengers. Land noted there is a growing consensus in the U.S. Congress and society at large that the persecution is a matter which must be addressed.

He said the U.S. State Department has been "pathetically uninvolved" in the matter, saying the situation was no better under previous administrations. Christians in Ethiopia and the Sudan are "literally being crucified."

In adopting a resolution on Jewish evangelism, messengers urged the convention to make a planned and concerted effort to proclaim the gospel to the Jewish people.

"This resolution would seem to be the next logical step in continuing efforts of the Southern Baptist Convention to reclaim its evangelical roots and its commitment to minister to all people," said R. Michael Smith, president of the Southern Baptist Messianic Fellowship.

"The Great Commission is to the Jewish people too," added Gus Elowitz, a congregational leader at Beth Yeshua Hamaschiach in Houston, the first Southern Baptist Messianic congregation.

Reacting to a feared tide of creeping ecumenism, members of the Resolutions Committee approved a resolution which criticized blurring of the historical distinctives of the Baptist faith.

Messengers approved a resolution affirming Baptist autonomy and speaking against any long-term commitments with parachurch groups, saying Baptist entities should not become "an organic part of any other body."

Some committee members expressed concern about open-ended permanent unions with parachurch groups, suggesting there is a tendency for some Baptists "to jump on a bandwagon and discover later it's not going where they thought it was."

A member of the Resolutions Committee said Southern Baptists must be careful of "turning their back" on Baptists' historical refusal to become engaged in ecumenical endeavors which have no time limit.

The committee denied the resolution was aimed at a single parachurch group.

In other action, a resolution in support of a National Commission on Gambling, the focus of legislation recently passed by the U.S. House of Representatives, was endorsed by messengers. The commission will study the effects of gambling on society.

Noting gambling is "taking the nation like kudzu," committee members cited recent studies revealing at least 65 percent of adults have gambled and that legal gaming revenues have climbed from \$17 billion in 1976 to over \$500 billion last year.

"Gambling is a terrible scourge in our nation, which destroys lives, families and finances," Land said. "There is nothing positive about gambling. Every part of it is negative and destructive."

Other resolutions accepted by the messengers:

-- Affirmed parents' rights to direct the education of their children, encouraging legislators "to develop the means and methods of returning educational and funding choices to parents."

-- Urged Southern Baptists to multiply their efforts to provide for global and domestic hunger and relief needs. The resolution noted giving to hunger and relief ministries is experiencing steep decline and commends the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, Home Mission Board and Christian Life Commission for their new partnership in hunger awareness.

-- Called for Southern Baptists to join in a 40-day season of prayer beginning Sept. 27 for "the future of our country." The resolution also notes election day, Nov. 5, as a National Day of Prayer.

-- Expressed appreciation for the "kind hospitality of the people of New Orleans."

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MOTIONS WRAP-UP

Messenger dogs his motion,
gains floor consideration

By Joni Hannigan

Baptist Press
6/14/96

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--"Are they going to simply say, 'We are not going to act on it,' without any explanation?" messenger Robert L. Garringer asked Wednesday morning, June 12, during a session of the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Garringer, of Memphis, Mo., questioned the status of his motion "instructing" the SBC Annuity Board to refrain from investing in companies that profit from the sale of alcohol, tobacco or materials which "undermine biblical morality."

Learning it was to be referred to the Annuity Board, Garringer said he wanted messengers, not the denomination's retirement plan agency, to decide whether it was a good motion.

In a determined quest to follow his motion and assure its consideration, Garringer doggedly returned to the microphone to first introduce the motion, then request it be amended to read "strongly recommend" in place of "instructed," to move that his motion be voted on "immediately, ... as soon as possible -- today" and finally to speak in support of his motion.

Messengers in the Wednesday morning business session eventually voted to move the debate up a day, overriding the decision of the Committee on Order of Business that first suggested the motion be referred to the Annuity Board and then had placed it on the schedule to be debated Thursday.

Calling for Annuity Board leaders to "screen every company competing for Baptist dollars," Garringer said they should immediately confess their "failures" and not repeat what he characterized as "elitist" practices of the past.

Speaking against the motion, Thomas E. Miller Jr., Annuity Board senior vice president for public relations, said the board's internal investment policy, unanimously approved by trustees, prohibits investments in companies that are publicly recognized as engaged in activity contrary to Southern Baptist principles.

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Liquor, tobacco, gambling, pornography and abortion industries are named in the policy, which, according to Miller, also excludes any company whose products, services or activities are publicly recognized as being incompatible with the moral and ethical posture of the Annuity Board.

Although Miller said he was in "spiritual agreement" with Garringer, he said the motion would be "literally impossible" to enact without increasing the risk of "punitive damages" to the board.

The motion failed after finally coming to a vote on the convention floor.

Three motions decrying the recent burnings of African American churches joined almost a dozen resolutions presented on the same subject.

Tom Cocklereece, University Baptist Church, Fairbanks, Alaska, proposed assisting African American churches with financial support and volunteer labor. His motion was referred to the Brotherhood Commission for further consideration.

Other motions proposing prayer and assistance to African American churches destroyed or damaged by fire were introduced by R. Zack Zbinden, Briarwood Baptist Church, Ringgold, Ga., and Dennis Sartain, Lebanon Baptist Church, Anderson S.C. Zbinden's motion was referred to the SBC Executive Committee for further action, while Sartain withdrew his motion based on the numerous actions already suggested.

By the close of the Tuesday night session, a total of 29 motions had been presented. They ranged from a request to "bombard" the White House with complaints of how Christians are persecuted in some countries to a call for an SBC bylaw change to exclude agency heads from recommending candidates for trustees of their agencies to the SBC Committee on Nominations.

The lone motion scheduled for debate during the closing session of the annual meeting on Thursday was a motion by F. Leslie Kammerdiener Jr., Osawatomie (Kan.) Southern Baptist Church.

Kammerdiener's motion called for the Executive Committee to report at each convention meeting on actions taken regarding all motions referred to the Executive Committee at the previous year's convention.

Executive Committee President Morris H. Chapman said he "totally approved" of the motion's intent.

The motion passed handily.

Two motions similar to Kammerdiener's, one made by Larry Blackmon, First Baptist Church, Hearne, Texas, and one by Fred Smith, Central Baptist Church, Grand Prairie, Texas, were referred to the Executive Committee, along with the following motions:

- By Thomas Houston, Laurel Hill Baptist Church, Charlottesville, Va., to ensure at least one of the three top SBC offices -- president, first and second vice president -- be filled by a layman.
- By Wyndham Cook, Westside Baptist Church, El Dorado, Ark., requesting a bylaw change to prevent SBC agency heads or their staff from recommending individuals to serve as trustees of their entities. An effort to divide the question for an immediate vote failed.
- By Albert Lee Smith, First Baptist Church, Birmingham, Ala., asking the Executive Committee to prepare and distribute pamphlets and other information contrasting the theological views of the SBC with those of the Alliance of Baptists, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and others.
- By David Rice, Kingsley Lake Baptist Church, Starke, Fla., to establish a four-year liberal arts university accountable to the SBC.
- By Ron Wilson, First Baptist Church, Thousand Oaks, Calif., involving the re-routing of Cooperative Program funds through the SBC Executive Committee.
- By T.C. Pinckney, Good News Baptist Church, Alexandria, Va., to determine when a church is in violation of Article III of the SBC constitution. Article III lists criteria for messengers who are members of cooperating Southern Baptist churches.

Among other motions sent to the SBC Executive Committee were four requests involving geographical or time changes to the SBC annual meeting. The motions entailed were requests that:

- The annual meeting be scheduled later in the month of June, by Eldridge Cullum, Fairmount Memorial Baptist Church, Richmond, Va.

-- The annual meeting be held regularly in cities where SBC work is not well established, by David B. Roberts, Beaconsfield Baptist Church, Eastpointe, Mich.

-- The convention meeting be held one year in the Northeast United States, by John Gillert, Berkeley Baptist Church, Berkeley Springs, W.V.

-- Annual SBC meetings be held by satellite broadcast or in regional locations, by Bob Lilly, Catonsville Baptist Church, Baltimore.

In the first motion addressed to the North American Mission Board -- to be created from a merger of the Home Mission Board, Brotherhood Commission and Radio and Television Commission -- Michigan messenger Roberts requested the development of a series of television and radio spots to "enhance the image of Southern Baptists."

Two motions referred to the Committee on Order of Business for consideration in planning the 1997 annual meeting were:

-- A request to recognize the "God-given talents of a more representative panel of preachers, readers, speakers, singers, and other leaders" at future SBC annual meetings, by Randy Woods, Cordesville First Baptist, Moncks Corner, S.C.

-- A proposal that people from the New England states and those north of the "Mason-Dixon Line" be asked to participate in the programs of the SBC annual meeting programs, by William Miller, messenger and pastor of the First Baptist Church, LaPlata, Md.

Two motions referred to the Baptist Sunday School Board were:

-- By Chester Ward, Northeast Baptist Church, Ponca City, Okla., asking the board not to use the name "LifeWay Press" on materials sold to other denominations or non-Baptist groups.

-- By Kenneth Barnett, Christ Baptist Church, Denver, requesting the board to stop publishing the "old" 12-volume Broadman Commentary.

Three motions referred to the Christian Life Commission included:

-- By Anis Shorosh, Cottage Hill Baptist Church, Mobile, Ala., to "bombard" embassies and the White House to protest for human rights and freedom of religion for Christians being persecuted in other countries.

-- By Joe Strahan, Northside Baptist Church, Vicksburg, Miss., asking the commission to establish a proxy voting system to communicate with corporate managers.

-- By Marlene Boswell, Grove Avenue Baptist Church, Richmond, Va., recommending the agency's name be changed to the "Christian Ethics and Religious Commission."

A single motion dealing with Christian education was referred to all SBC agencies and institutions. The motion, calling for better use of "empty" church facilities, was made by Martin T. Angell, Northrich Baptist Church, Richardson, Texas.

Motions ruled out of order were:

-- By Henry Alfred Mecenery II, Collins Boulevard Baptist Church, city not named, titled, "What to do about positive tolerance in the White House."

-- By Wes Bell, Calvary Baptist Church, Decatur, Ill., to use the money saved from restructuring the SBC to be directly spent on missions.

-- By messenger Steve Weir of Missouri, who moved that a committee be formed to investigate the promotion of homosexuality in a Kansas City church.

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Jeanette Henry speaks
to ministers' wives

By Debbie Moore

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6/14/96

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--"Life isn't always fair, but the light who created life is, and I'm stepping into the light," Jeanette Henry told a capacity crowd of 800 women at the 41st annual conference of Southern Baptist Ministers' Wives June 11 in New Orleans' Hyatt Regency Hotel ballroom.

Henry, in a rare appearance as a public speaker outside Sunday school classrooms, told of her growth experiences as a minister's wife. Her husband, Jim Henry, is pastor of First Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla., and outgoing president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

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In other conference actions, Carolyn Weatherhood Crumpler, former executive director of Woman's Missionary Union, was presented the Mrs. J.M. Dawson Distinguished Service Award for "distinct denominational contribution beyond the local church."

Accepting the award, Crumpler said she was led to the Lord by her pastor's wife and was mentored in her spiritual life by Mrs. J.D. Grey of New Orleans' First Baptist Church. "I wanted to be just like Mrs. J.D. Grey," she said.

Crumpler became a minister's wife in 1989 when she married Ohio pastor Joe Crumpler, who is now retired.

Conference participants also learned \$75,000 has been raised for the Ministers' Wives Endowment Fund. Another \$25,000 is needed to provide annual funds to defray annual luncheon costs to make the conference more affordable for every minister's wife, according to conference president Betty Baggott, Opelika, Ala.

In her presentation, Henry described herself as "a small-town country girl" from Cave City, Ky., in a senior class of 29. Although she was fearful and shy, she "came with excitement into this life" of being a minister's wife. That adventure began in New Orleans 36 years ago as she was the wife of a seminary student at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

"Our first home was in New Orleans (at 4528-C Seminary Place), our first furniture, my first full-time job (at Charity Hospital), our first baby, our first income tax filing (and we owed), our first hurricane and our first pastorate," she said, addressing the luncheon theme of "Stepping in the Light."

"I remember always knowing about the light," Henry said concerning her spiritual life. "But I really saw the light when I was 9 years old."

Becoming a Christian gave her purpose in life, Henry said, "and that purpose was to please him."

However, Henry said she did not have a focused purpose "until I fell in love with a 120-pound hunk of personality who loved people and politics and who wanted to be the governor of Tennessee," Jim Henry.

"I knew he was struggling with the decision to be a preacher," Henry said. She was struggling herself with the need to be focused in her spiritual life.

On the night she made a commitment to full-time Christian service while a student at Georgetown College in Kentucky, she had no idea Jim would tell God the same night, hundreds of miles away in Panama City, Fla., that he wanted to give up his dreams of political life and do whatever God wanted him to do.

"Up until that night I had a purpose, but I didn't have passion. Purpose is passive. Passion is active. Passion is the active way I work out the purpose.

"It's like dusting," she said. "I can plan to dust my house, sometime. But it's not going to get done until I know you're on your way to my house. Then I have passion and I dust that house!"

Now Henry had purpose and plan, but "I had a long way to go," she said. "I needed polishing. I had a lot to learn."

Learning to share her faith on an individual basis was quite a struggle for her, she said, but "I needed to learn to obey" God's command to share the light.

Learning about God's gifts was another important step in her life, Henry said.

"I always wondered why I never thought of taking a pie or casserole to someone, and when I was supposed to fix something, I always had to be reminded.

"Then I found out I don't have the service gifts. I have the teaching and leading gifts," Henry said. "That knowledge relieved me of the guilt I had for years. I still had a responsibility, but now I could focus on how God really wanted to use me. I learned God gifts us all in different ways."

While the path of each minister's wife is different, "our purpose is the same," Henry said. "We step in the light and the light gives us purpose, passion, provision and peace. We have different paths and we wear different shoes, but we are one body and each member belongs to the other."

Henry received a spontaneous standing ovation from the audience at the conclusion of her address.

Officers for 1997 are: Dolores Taylor, president, wife of John Lee Taylor, pastor of First Baptist Church, Gainesville, Ga.; Marcie Hatfield, vice president, wife of Stephen Hatfield, pastor of First Baptist Church, Lewisville, Texas; Jo Ann Berger, corresponding secretary, wife of George Berger, director of missions of Lebanon Baptist Association in Hattiesburg, Miss.; and Peggy Walker, recording secretary and treasurer, wife of John Walker, director of missions of Severns Valley Association in Elizabethtown, Ky.

Next year's luncheon will be held in Dallas on June 17, with the theme "Singing in the Rain." Speakers will be Mrs. Charles Lusher, a two-time pastor's wife, who lived through the death of her first husband, and Dennis Swanberg, known in Southern Baptist circles as "The Minister of Encouragement."

Contributions to the Ministers' Wives Endowment Fund may be sent to Mrs. John (Nancy) Sullivan, Florida Baptist Convention, 1230 Hendricks Ave., Jacksonville, FL 32207.

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Repentance, humility urged
by SBC theme speakers

By Lee Weeks

Baptist Press
6/14/96

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--God's blessings will not be fully realized until Christians humble themselves before God and repent of their sins, according to six theme interpretation speakers during the June 11-13 annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in New Orleans.

They cited 2 Chronicles 7:14, "If my people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

"Jesus is the 'name above every name,'" Missouri pastor Larry Nail, said.

Nail, pastor of First Baptist Church, Eldorado Springs, Mo., said God is passionate about lost souls. Voices in heaven shout when one sinner repents, Nail said, and churches need to capture the heart of God on this matter.

"Being a child of God means being called by his name," Nail continued. He challenged SBC messengers to "look at the face of the one on the center of the cross. We are the people called by his name."

Evangelist Ron Dunn of Irving, Texas, said that before people can seek the face of God through prayer they must first humble themselves.

"That's your responsibility," Dunn challenged the audience. "That's something you must do."

Too often, Dunn said, believers limit what God wants and can do in their lives because they are not obedient to his will.

"Most of us will not stoop to walk with God, to humble ourselves," he said. "We will not stoop to pray. We will not stoop to seek God's face."

A seminary professor said that reformation in prayer would ignite revival across the world.

"We don't just need new hearts to go in the same old direction," said Donald Whitney, assistant professor of spiritual formation at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Mo. "We need new directions as well. That's reformation."

"I want to call us to a reformation of prayer," Whitney said. "For I believe a reformation in prayer can lead to a revival of prayer in our lives. God is often pleased to send a genuine widespread reformation and revival upon a revival of prayer."

Don McMinn, a professional associate for Intimate Life Ministries, Irving, Texas, cited what he termed a national crisis where 1,000 ministers are leaving their positions each year. The answer to this spiritual problem of epidemic proportions calls for Christians including ministers to "seek the Lord in worship."

"We seek your face as we repent of our sins," McMinn prayed. "Heal our land, our families and our churches."

Houston layman Paul Pressler called Southern Baptists to turn from any wicked ways.

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He said "anything that turns us away from pursuing a holy life and a deeper walk with our Savior is a wicked way."

Pressler also called for the nation to turn back to God.

"We sin as a nation when life is cheapened by the murder of the unborn and of the elderly," he said. "Our nation sins when adultery and fornication are no longer a bar for holding high political office and principles of biblical morality and sexual purity are no longer promoted. We sin when perversion is promoted and not penalized."

Pressler said Christians have a choice.

"If we turn from our wicked ways, God will forgive and heal as he has promised. But if we persist in selfishness, we will reach far fewer people for Christ and we will have a society in which it is very difficult to live," Pressler said.

John Avant, pastor of Coggin Avenue Baptist Church, Brownwood, Texas, said he has seen firsthand where true repentance and confession of sin has spurred revival.

It happened on Jan. 22, 1995, after a student from nearby Howard Payne University read from the Old Testament Book of Joel during the invitation and wept for revival.

"Our altar suddenly filled with people weeping, praying and seeking God," Avant said. "God came and our schedule went. We continued on through the Sunday school hour, through the late service and the lunch hour and for more than three hours that night.

"In the weeks ahead we saw deep confession and brokenness, public testimonies from leaders in our community, restored families, restored relationships, great joy, racial healing, healing across denominational lines and, to this day, changed lives and the greatest number of conversions our church has ever seen.

"Now the battle is on for the soul of America," Avant said.

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Karen Willoughby, Steve Achord, Tammi Ledbetter, Orville Scott and Lonnie Wilkey contributed to this story.

Williams challenges Brotherhood
to move forward with confidence

By Steve Barber

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NEW ORLEANS (BP)--"It is now final. We are Alpharetta bound!"

With that, Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission President James D. Williams gave an official confirmation to the move of most of the 89-year-old agency's functions to the Atlanta suburb, in a June 12 speech to what may have been the last national Brotherhood Breakfast.

Approval of a bylaw change by Southern Baptist Convention messengers attending the annual convention meeting June 11 in New Orleans was the final step in approving the "Covenant for a New Century." The Brotherhood Commission will be dissolved and its functions merged into a new North American Mission Board to be located in Alpharetta, Ga.

Along with the confirmation, Williams sought to give inspiration to the agency's trustees, state convention leaders and staff, with the transition to the NAMB set to gain speed during the year ahead.

"My question to each of you who are leaders in our Brotherhood system is, 'Will you dare to dream? Will you etch out your personal vision for our world in the NAMB? Will you dare to articulate high hopes?'" Williams asked.

"You can do this with full reverence and respect for our rich heritage without allowing the past to rob you of perspective and commitment for what is now a known future," he said. "So, let's determine that these days and months just ahead of us will receive our very best effort, our finest stewardship.

"Let us resolve by God's grace that this will be the best year yet," Williams said. "What better way to move into the new North American Mission Board than to build strength upon strength and move full speed ahead?"

Williams added that the new day can be a heyday for leaders with vision.

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"Visionaries will welcome the future with open arms and an open mind, with anticipation and joy," he said. "As new leaders seek to mine the riches of the human spirit and fulfill the mission of Christ, they must strive always to free themselves from the negative pull of the forces of the past.

"As the apostle Paul reminded us, forgetting those things which are behind, I press on to those things which are ahead," he concluded.

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**Travel to Israel called safer
than most American cities: Young By Daniel Guido**

**Baptist Press
6/14/96**

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Traveling to Israel is safer than walking around most American cities, H. Edwin Young, pastor of Second Baptist Church, Houston, told a group of Christian pastors and laymen attending the June 10 Israel breakfast meeting prior to the June 11-13 annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention at the Louisiana Superdome in New Orleans.

"There were more people killed in Houston last month than in the first six months of this year in all of Israel," Young said at the meeting hosted by the Israel Ministry of Tourism.

The breakfast was attended by pastors and laymen interested in leading Christian groups on pilgrimages to Israel.

The outreach to Southern Baptists is an outgrowth of a new Israeli strategy to directly encourage Christian tourism, according to Rafi Shalev, director of Israeli tourism for the southern United States.

"It used to be travel to Israel was primarily a Jewish thing, where Jews would go to visit their family and friends," Shalev said.

"But while Jewish trips have remained about constant, Christian tourism is surging," he said, adding about 60 percent of tourist trips to Israel are Christian.

Young predicted Israel will remain a safe destination even if there is fallout from the recent election of Benjamin Netanyahu as prime minister. Young has visited Israel some 16 times and plans to return at Thanksgiving 1996 and Easter 1997.

"You are well protected as guests of Israel," he added. "You can walk around Tel Aviv or Jerusalem in the early morning hours, like I have at 1 a.m., and not be bothered."

Shalev, an Israeli citizen, said the "rethinking" of his country's tourism stance has resulted in a consolidation of the Israeli tourism office's southern district from three offices to one, in order to present "a consistent message to the Christian evangelical audience." Offices in Florida and Georgia have been closed and the staff expanded at the Dallas office.

The evangelical emphasis is illustrated by the country's new tourism slogan: "Israel: Where Heaven and Earth Meet."

Shalev said he suggested the policy change to the tourism ministry after he began to realize the "deep, but mostly untapped desire by American Christians to 'Walk in the Footsteps of Jesus,'" another new Israeli tourism slogan.

Having been posted to England before being assigned to America, Shalev said he was accustomed to promoting Israel as a recreational destination. "The British will take the four-hour plane flight to Israel to go to our beaches or to enjoy hiking in the mountains. Here in America, Israel is a spiritual journey. I almost couldn't fathom that when I first arrived."

Shalev's recommendations resulted in the new slogans, the consolidated offices and a \$250,000 exhibit, "Walk in the Footsteps of Jesus," which travels the southern region of the USA. At each stop, usually in a large metropolitan church, hundreds of people come and walk around inside the three-dimensional exhibit. Seven thousand people walked through it recently at two large city churches in the South, Shalev said.

"There is an incredible desire among Christians to be where Jesus was," Shalev said. "We hope to help bring visiting Israel into the forefront of all pastors' minds so they can come and bring their flock along."

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To accomplish that, the Israeli tourism ministry is sponsoring the Israel Christian Advisory Council. The new group hopes to invite up to 20 American pastors to visit Israel for three days of consultations with government leaders. Afterward, the group will be occasionally consulted for input on how Israel should reach out to the American Christian community.

"America has no better friend in the world than Israel," said Young. "And Israel has no better friend than America. We pray that our two nations become even closer."

Young said it is incumbent for evangelicals to "pray for the peace of Israel" and to help foster and maintain excellent relations between both nations. "All Christians everywhere should want to visit," Young said, "but beware -- you will find it is impossible to go only once!"

There is "nothing like the sensation that washes over a Christian as El Al touches down and you first walk out on Israeli soil. It's like coming home," Young said.

All other vacation destinations pale in comparison with Israel, Young said. "Security is excellent. Transportation is modern, comfortable and timely. Accommodations are among the best in the world. Dollar for dollar, you can find no better value than staying in the Holy Land."

Most Christians will travel to Israel no matter the circumstances, Young said. "You're drawn there like steel to a magnet."

Shalev agreed, saying that even during the worst of the Infatada, the Arab uprising against Israeli rule, American Christians did not cancel their visits.

"Europeans canceled in droves. But to an American Christian, coming to Israel is a pilgrimage. You people realize, more than most people, that the God who protects you in America, will protect you in Israel or anywhere you go. Your fate is in his hands, whether you are here or overseas."

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Theological reflection urged
at Founders' Conference

By James A. Smith Sr.

Baptist Press
6/14/96

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--While a church history professor called for more critical theological reflection in Southern Baptist life, a seminary president analyzed the debate on church growth methods during a meeting of Southern Baptist Calvinists.

Tom Nettles and Mark Coppenger spoke to the annual fellowship breakfast of the Southern Baptist Founders' Conference June 11 held in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in New Orleans.

Nettles is professor of church history at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in suburban Chicago. Coppenger is president of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Mo.

The Founders' Conference is an organization dedicated to spiritual and theological reformation and renewal based on the historic Southern Baptist theology, according to conference leader Tom Ascol, a Florida pastor.

"A greatly increased awareness of the importance of the Bible's place in God's gracious revelation of himself to man has arrested the flight from biblical authority and catapulted Southern Baptists into an unprecedented era of theological reaffirmation," Nettles said.

"This reaffirmation will be best served if the door is opened for confident and respectful theological discussion and a more comprehensive theological recovery," he said.

While noting the necessity of the biblical reaffirmation, Nettles said, "this has never been recognized as a sufficient Christian confession. Likewise, the desire for revival and the search for an experience with God will have the stamina of bread dough unless braced and mobilized by believing and critical doctrinal reflection."

By going back to their "founding fathers," Nettles said Southern Baptists would discover the teachings which have the potential of a great spiritual revival.

"Such a reformation and revival among the Southern Baptists under God could significantly influence the missions, theological education, worship and evangelism in the entire modern evangelical world," Nettles said.

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Noting "reformation and revival never come without great tribulation," he said controversy is sometimes necessary.

"We must distance ourselves, however, from the immaturity which feels that intellectual rigor and critical reflection is unspiritual and not play the part of the proverbial fool who refuses to benefit from correction," Nettles said.

"One of the great strengths of our 19th-century progenitors was their willingness to criticize constructively with biblical knowledge and motivation and a willingness to listen to such criticism," Nettles said. "This was true in both doctrine and practice."

The debate concerning church growth techniques was the subject of Coppenger's presentation.

He noted he had recently spoken to Calvinists on Charles Haddon Spurgeon's book, "The Soul Winner," and reviewed "The Purpose Driven Church" by Southern Baptist pastor Rick Warren. "I found more congruence than conflict, and it set me to thinking on how this might be, how the children of Spurgeon might find common ground with the children of Warren, or might even be the same," Coppenger said.

He noted the contrast between the miraculous and the "merely marvelous."

"There are gratifying patterns and principles of conversion and growth -- predictable, learnable and blessed," Coppenger said. "On the other hand, there are dumbfounding and thrilling departures from these patterns, departures which produce great results defying prediction."

He recounted a testimony of a Gideon in his church who told how a scrap of the Bible found by a man in India led to his conversion to Christianity. "Would it not be irresponsible of us to rely strictly upon the miraculous and astonishing for our work in evangelism and growing churches?" Coppenger asked.

"Isn't it much more reasonable, and yes, pious, to take note of those things which normally frustrate the work of God and those things which normally advance it?" he said.

Coppenger said the charge of capitulation to pragmatics, while accurate in some respects, is more like simply "paying attention" and urged that "we be slow to condemn those who appeal to statistics to prescribe adjustments in church practice."

Removing the hindrances to revival and church growth is "reminiscent of Michaelangelo's notion of stone sculpture as chipping away everything that wasn't David," Coppenger said.

"So much of what we might dismiss as manipulation is mere civility," Coppenger said. He took note of the wide diversity he has found among churches in how they accommodate visitors.

Coppenger compared Warren's attempt to "remove needless barriers to inquirers, chipping away the pointlessly offensive, bewildering or intimidating" with Spurgeon's counsel that preachers know grammar well so as not to offend their listeners and, thus, "cause most serious results."

"Now one could huff and puff about his interest in slick talking dandies relying on their own eloquence rather than the simple power of God," Coppenger said. "But one would more reasonably note Spurgeon's counsel of humility, asking preachers to submit themselves to schooling for the sake of less distraction and offense in their speech. Yes, God can use the most inarticulate spokesman to do his work, but what business do we have in clinging to our blundering grammar that he might enjoy the greater glory?"

"Neither he nor Warren nor I urge that we honor all the sensitivities of the lost, for that is to give away the church," Coppenger added. "There is no room for compromise on biblical principles, no room for hedging on the full counsel of God. But since when is winsomeness and thoughtfulness sub-Christian?"

The danger in some church growth techniques, Coppenger warned, is that churches may sometimes "satisfy unregenerate dispositions."

"Clearly, there are rocks on both sides," Coppenger said. "The revivalist and church growth zealot can crash on the rocks of compromise, irreverence and reticence. The Calvinist can crash on the rocks of studied awkwardness and insolence.

"When properly understood, sound doctrine and thoughtful means are not enemies at all, and the sooner we get over that confusion, the sooner the Lord would bless us with bounty. Unless, of course, he wants to work a miracle of deliverance from our boneheadedness."

While Christian leaders should not hesitate to criticize clearly unbiblical techniques, Coppenger said it should be done with "great humility" and individuals should be considered "innocent until proven guilty."

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God made men, women different
to make them one, Rogers says By James A. Smith Sr.

Baptist Press
6/14/96

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Sounding as much like a comedian as a Baptist preacher, Adrian Rogers gave a lighthearted message on the differences between the sexes in an address to pastors and their wives at a June 10 luncheon hosted by Rapha.

Leaders of RaphaCare, a Christian counseling service endorsed by many Southern Baptist leaders, also announced a new program offering support services to ministers.

Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Cordova, Tenn., a Memphis suburb, repeatedly told the gathering, "God made us different so that he could make us one."

"The difference between the sexes is God-ordained and it is absolutely, incredibly wonderful," Rogers told the audience.

Noting he would be making generalizations to which there are always exceptions, Rogers contrasted women and men in four ways:

- Beauty and the beast;
- The tortoise and the hare;
- The romantic and the mechanic; and
- Radar and computer.

Because women are the "weaker sex," men are physically stronger than women, Rogers said, citing 1 Peter 3:7.

"She is beauty, you're the beast," Rogers, former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, told pastors in the predominantly male audience.

Although men were designed to provide and protect, God created women to be life-givers and nurturers, Rogers said.

Rogers hastened to point out that even though women generally are weaker than men, that does not make them inferior. He illustrated the point by noting the differences between canvas and silk and steel and porcelain.

"I really believe that the strength of the weaker sex is the weakness of the stronger sex for the weaker sex," Rogers said jokingly.

Rogers illustrated the physiological contrasts between the sexes. First he pointed out that men generally have greater lung capacity than women. "I guess that's because God didn't call women to preach," Rogers said to a chorus of laughter.

"The man is physically strong. Does that mean he is superior?" Rogers rhetorically asked. "Not at all -- just different."

The second contrast between the sexes noted by Rogers was that women are like tortoises, while men are like hares.

"The man has more stamina than a woman in almost every area except shopping," Rogers said.

"God equipped me for fight, for flight, to protect, to provide," Rogers said. "God equipped her to be a nurturer, a caretaker, to be a keeper at home."

Rogers reported after the age of 20, women's bodies deteriorate at the rate of 2 percent per decade, while men deteriorate at 10 percent per decade.

While men are more suited to the 100-yard dash, Rogers said, women are designed for the marathon.

"One is not better than the other, just different. God made us different that he might make us one."

The third contrast cited by Rogers was between women as romantics and men who are mechanics.

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Speaking to men, Rogers said, "Your job is to dress and keep the garden. Her job is to be the nurturer. That's the reason that God gave you a harder outer shell. That's the reason that men do not crave intimate relationships like women do.

"Ladies, you need to learn that he will never be like you. Your desire for all this intimacy -- take as much as you can get, but for him to give more he'll have to have a brain transplant," Rogers said jokingly.

Citing Ephesians 5:33, Rogers said the Bible teaches that husbands are to love their wives like Christ loved the church, while women are to give respect and admiration to their husbands.

"Women don't want to be equal with men. Joyce says that she's not coming down for anything!" Rogers said about his wife.

Rogers told the audience about a recent bungee jump with his granddaughter he did because his wife scoffed at his feigned initial excuse not to perform the stunt.

When she scoffed, he said, "... something rose up in me!"

As he approached the jump from a six-story structure, Rogers said, "I thought, 'I am incredibly insane to do this.' I turned around and stepped off backward into the blue. Why? Because of that thing right there," pointing at his wife to the amusement of the audience.

The final contrast between the sexes Rogers noted is that women are like radar, while men are akin to computers. While women share, men report.

Rogers said that the minds of men and women process information differently. Men think from the left side of the brain, from which the analytical and logical thinking takes place. He said women think with the emotional right side of the brain, as well as the analytical side.

"So women are kind of right when they say that men have half a brain," Rogers said, joking with the audience.

Women are not less logical, however, Rogers noted.

"Because women use both sides, they are more verbal than men as a general rule, unless the man is a preacher," Rogers said.

"You need to understand, ladies, that he doesn't want to talk as much as you want to talk."

Rogers told the men that women want to share in the lives of their husbands, even while men find it difficult to pray with their wives.

"Women crave their husbands to pray with them," Rogers said. "I've had to learn how to pray with Joyce."

Rogers concluded with a tribute to his wife. "I want to say before all of you I love that girl, I thank God for her."

During the lunch, Bruce Cook, president and chief executive officer of RaphaCare, announced the start of "MinisterCare," a new program to help pastors struggling with the stress of the ministry.

James T. Draper Jr., president of the Baptist Sunday School Board, also gave brief remarks during the luncheon and encouraged pastors to complete a questionnaire being used to research and discover resources for struggling or terminated ministers.

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Vietnamese pastor has
multi-state ministry

By Karen L. Willoughby

Baptist Press
6/14/96

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--A medical doctor who survived a concentration camp and seven years of separation from his family now is a key church starter of nine congregations in three states.

Vinh Ngoc Le owned a general practice medical clinic when war broke out in South Vietnam. He was inducted into the South Vietnamese army in 1966. He became a field hospital traumatic surgeon and worked in both South Vietnamese and U.S. army hospitals.

When communist forces swept through South Vietnam in 1975, he was sent to a concentration camp. Four months later, he fell in a hole one night, broke his leg and was allowed to return to his home. The price he paid was the clinic he had managed to maintain while working for two armies.

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Reared in a Christian home, Le was baptized when he was 16 and dedicated his life to God.

"Since then, God has used me in a special way," Le said. He was a music director, young people's minister, deacon and chairman of the mission board in his church when war overtook his country.

When he lost his clinic in the mid-1970s, he joined the Christian church that had been outlawed by communist officials.

"I boldly joined. I was not afraid," Le said in an interview at the newsroom during the Southern Baptist Convention in the Louisiana Superdome in New Orleans.

"Whoever loses his life for the Lord's sake will find it," Le continued. "I applied these words and during seven years the Lord protected me. I boldly served him through evangelistic programs and many, many people came to know the Lord.

"When we boldly serve the Lord, he protects us," Lee said. "When the communists tried to put me again in the concentration camp, God opened the door for me to escape."

However, he was forced to leave his wife and their six children behind. It would be seven years before he would see them again.

When Le arrived at a refugee camp in Hong Kong in July 1982, he found six Christians. Within six months, there were 250 Christians because of his evangelistic efforts.

He was transferred to a refugee camp in the Philippines, where he started to work with Southern Baptist missionaries. He became a chairman of deacons and a doctor in the refugee camp hospital.

"I can help people physically and spiritually then," Le said with a wide smile.

A year later he entered the United States as a refugee immigrant. For two years he studied for medical proficiency tests, and passed the first two, before he decided to devote himself to full-time ministry.

"I know God called me to ministry so I quit the study of medicine and God opened the door to Denver Seminary to study his work," Le said. Even before receiving a master of divinity degree in 1989, he started the Vietnamese Baptist church in Denver.

"I was living in Aurora and I thought, 'God has a plan for me in Aurora,'" Le said. "When Denver had 60 people, they called another pastor and in 1991 I started Vietnamese Baptist Church of Aurora."

Since then, Le has started Vietnamese Baptist Church in Boulder, Westminster, Colorado Springs and Englewood -- all Colorado cities -- and in Garden City, Dodge City and Liberal, Kan., and Albuquerque, N.M.

His method is always the same, Le said. He wins people to the Lord, brings them together in a church body and immediately trains them to take responsibility so he doesn't have to constantly be on site. The distances are too great for that, Le said. "I go back and forth, back and forth. Thanks be to God, these missions grow well now."

Vietnamese Baptist Church in Aurora has a building fund, is looking for a building and plans to constitute as a full-fledged church this year. The church also anticipates being fully self-supporting in 1998.

The six Colorado congregations are led by four pastors, so Le preaches in each only once a month. He spends three days a month in Kansas, where there is one pastor for the three mission churches.

New Mexico's need for additional Vietnamese churches is great, Le said. There are 6,000 Vietnamese people in the state and just the one mission church of about 25 people, who are led by a lay pastor who does not feel called to full-time ministry.

There is a great need for Vietnamese pastors, Le said.

Future plans call for Le to develop additional works in Colorado, Kansas and New Mexico, and he's praying about Utah, Nevada and Nebraska.

"When we organize evangelistic program and invite them to come to us, they are indifferent," Le said. "So we have to come to them. This is the way we build. It is a beginning."

Le also is studying for a doctor of ministry degree from Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, Mill Valley, Calif. His project is in the area of administration.

"So now I start churches the Southern Baptist way," Le said with a grin. "I just want to follow my Jesus and my church. When Jesus was on earth he healed people physically and spiritually. God gave me the gift of healing and evangelism. My dream is how to use my gift for his glory."

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CORRECTION: In (BP) story titled "Henry expresses disappointment at Clinton's abortion response," dated 6/12/96, please correct the attribution of a quote in paragraph 19 to Hern, not Henry.

Thanks,
Baptist Press
