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367 new churches prove
'Last Frontier' reachable

By Erich Bridges

Baptist Press
3/14/96

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--"The Last Frontier" of missions might be unreached, but it's not unreachable.

Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board missionaries and their overseas partners proved that in 1995. They started 367 churches and baptized 6,548 new believers in some of the toughest places on earth.

Those churches sprang up among people groups collectively called The Last Frontier, or "World A" -- 2,466 groups, adding up to 1.7 billion people, largely denied access to the Christian gospel by hostile cultures, religions and governments. Many live in the Muslim world of north Africa, the Mideast and Asia.

The new churches account for nearly 15 percent of the 2,612 churches begun worldwide last year by Southern Baptist missionaries and their overseas partners. The Last Frontier ranked third-highest in new churches among the 10 world regions identified by the Foreign Mission Board.

Adding to the significance of this: Missionaries assigned to these peoples began with a support base of zero churches only a few years ago -- not the hundreds or thousands of established congregations in older, stronger mission fields.

"These are the hardest places in the world," explained evangelism and church growth analyst Jim Slack, who compiled the recently released FMB statistical report for 1995. "They have the least number of churches, the least number of Bibles, the fewest literates. Christians there have to maintain security while they plant churches, which doesn't allow them to fly the missionary or Christian flag to attract people.

"Yet they get the job done even when world religions and governments actively try to stop them. When you look at the odds and the barriers to a Christian church planting movement, their achievements are phenomenal."

Some examples from 1995:

-- In one location workers shared the gospel with more than 1,000 people, most of whom were hearing it for the first time. Five churches were begun after 125 people prayed to receive Christ as Savior.

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-- In a people group with no known Christian church and only one known Christian, two people came to faith in Christ and are now being disciplined.

-- For the first time in the history of one people group, the Bible was translated into their language.

-- A young Muslim man, torn from his country years ago by ongoing war, came to a missionary one evening. He had heard about a book called "Injil" (the New Testament) and wanted one. "I gave him a copy in his own dialect," the missionary reported. "He devoured it in a matter of days, and his questions were continuous. He said, 'If my people read the Injil, then peace would come to my homeland.'" He now talks about Jesus with his schoolmates and has sent a New Testament to his father, who still lives in his homeland.

"The misconception we have is that these are unresponsive people," Slack observed. "But it's the governments and world religions we face that are unresponsive and try to keep Christianity out." Once there, missionaries find responsiveness equal to that on traditional "harvest fields," he said.

Mike Stroope, who coordinates the work of many Southern Baptists in The Last Frontier, sees the mobilizing of local Christians -- some very young in the faith -- as crucial.

"These people have only been believers for a matter of months or a few years," he noted. But with training, they are seeing dramatic results.

"They have become the primary church planters and disciplers. Our role must be providing appropriate training and then stepping out of the way."

The statistics bear him out: Last Frontier churches connected with Foreign Mission Board work multiplied from 55 in 1992 -- the first year they were reported -- to 1,027 last year. During the same period, membership expanded from 1,830 to nearly 59,000, and annual baptisms climbed from 919 to 6,548. And if 1995 sets a trend, a third of the additional 1,091 "preaching points" reported last year will mature into churches in 1996.

By early 1995, a decade after they began working in The Last Frontier, Foreign Mission Board missionaries were targeting 69 of the 2,466 least-evangelized people groups with 429 missionaries. During the year, 50 missionaries were appointed to The Last Frontier, the most new missionaries for any world region in 1995. Eight additional people groups were targeted.

Why is the light of Christ spreading now among peoples long accustomed to deep darkness?

Mission leaders say it's because modern evangelical Christians, including Southern Baptists, have finally realized such isolated peoples can and must be reached, with or without an invitation from hostile cultures. That realization has turned into a worldwide prayer movement for lost peoples -- and into action.

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(BP) graphic (horizontal) and photo (horizontal) mailed 3/13/96 to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press. Color graphic and cutlines available in SBCNet News Room.

Post-communist Bulgaria denies
evangelicals religious freedom

Baptist Press
3/14/96

SOFIA, Bulgaria (BP)--Airport police refused to allow American James Duke to fly to a pastors' meeting in Germany recently. Their reason? He couldn't prove he had paid the annual tax on his car.

Duke is pastor of an English-language Baptist church in Sofia. That makes him a target for government harassment -- a fact of life for Bulgarian evangelicals these days.

"I've had this kind of treatment the whole three years I've been in Bulgaria, but this was a new one," said Duke, a Southern Baptist pastor from Texas. "Next day I took the document back to the airport, but the guard said I didn't need it to leave," he said, his voice tinged with resignation.

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Bulgaria threw out its communist government several years ago, but voters soon returned their former leaders to office. These politicians have forged an unusual partnership with the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in its fight to regain pre-communist status as the state religion.

Since 1994 the government has led a propaganda campaign against evangelicals, accusing them of everything from killing babies to getting young people hooked on drugs. It has canceled registration of evangelical churches and blocked them from building, owning or renting places to meet.

Denied access to radio, television and newspapers, evangelicals have been unable to defend themselves. Baptists have appealed to Christians in other countries for support, and some leading Bulgarians have begun to speak out.

Alexey Ivanov, a regional court judge in Sofia and member of Duke's church, addressed a religious liberty briefing on Capitol Hill in Washington in November. He told U.S. congressmen Bulgaria's constitution considers Eastern Orthodoxy "the traditional religion in the Republic of Bulgaria."

But it also states: "The practice of any religion shall be free," according to Ivanov. "It is clear that our constitution provides for a 'level playing field' and 'open competition' of religious ideas," he said.

"The problems facing Protestants are very practical ones," said Ivanov. "Protestants do not ask for preferential treatment in Bulgaria, but they do not want to be treated worse, either. All they ask is they be treated by the government as equal before the law as the constitution requires."

A partly built school, orphanage and church complex planned by the Union of Baptist Churches of Bulgaria has been delayed by Sofia officials more than a year. Officials first threatened to repossess the land. That would have cost Baptists more than \$170,000 already spent on the project.

Last July the city said the project could continue, but since then has refused to provide documents required for the work. Sofia's mayor has declined to meet with Bulgarian Baptist leader Theo Angelov.

Denton Lotz, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, wrote the mayor to protest the unwarranted delay. "We had thought that with the new freedom that has come to Bulgaria, religious freedom would be guaranteed for all people," Lotz said.

Duke's work in organizing an English-language church affiliated with the European Baptist Convention has drawn attention. Not only is he an evangelical, but he is a foreigner as well.

A late-January article in an English-language newspaper in Sofia shows the government's paranoid fear of foreign influence. The capital city is the "target of expansion to non-traditional religious societies" the article said, quoting a government agency.

A campaign by foreign sects to recruit state officials, military officers and financial and economic leaders "reveals aspirations to create lobbies ... through which to ... disturb the national interests," the article warned.

Early this year, the Bulgarian Evangelical Alliance (BEA) wrote an urgent appeal to the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Conference of European Churches (CEC). A copy went to Bulgarian President Zhelio Zhelev.

In its appeal, the BEA challenged a stance that lumps evangelicals historically tied to Bulgaria -- some for 150-plus years -- with newcomer sects. It accused Bulgarian Orthodox Patriarch Maxim of demanding Zhelev cooperate to expel "unorthodox faiths."

The BEA complained that while Bulgarian Orthodoxy appears to cooperate with evangelicals in the WCC and CEC, "in its own country, it takes a resolute stand against all unorthodox denominations, and especially against the Christian (non)-orthodox denominations."

In December, a speech by Angelov appeared to shock participants of a CEC workshop at an Orthodox conference center in the Czech Republic. An Orthodox bishop from the Czech Republic said he was "deeply concerned about the behavior of the Orthodox Church in Bulgaria." He understands evangelicals' plight: Czech Orthodoxy suffers under the majority power of Roman Catholics.

"Pre-conversations" set for May 10-14 between Baptists and Eastern Orthodox -- and "official dialogues" that could follow -- offer a faint glow of hope. But for now, Bulgarian evangelicals' plight is a vivid reminder that the old days of communism might not be so far gone after all.

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Written by Marty Croll, with reporting from Mike Creswell and the European Baptist Press Service.

**Judge buttresses charities
in ruling on national case**

By Marv Knox

Baptist Press
3/14/96

DENTON, Texas (BP)--Justice has come down on the side of charities in a lawsuit that has threatened their ability to function nationwide.

Judge Don Windle of Denton, Texas, has ruled the Lutheran Foundation of Texas did not break any laws when it issued charitable gift annuities to a 96-year-old north Texas woman, according to the Denton Record-Chronicle newspaper.

Charitable gift annuities allow donors to give large amounts of money to charities but to continue receiving income from the proceeds of those gifts as long as they live. The donors receive tax deductions, and the charities receive the residue of the money when the donors die.

Relatives of Louise T. Peter of Wichita Falls, Texas, sued the foundation, contending it did not have the legal right to issue the gift annuities.

Later, that action was expanded to a class-action lawsuit. Included were the Baptist Foundation of Texas, the Southern Baptist Convention, the American Red Cross, the Salvation Army and about 1,900 other charities.

Subsequently, two Texas laws and two federal laws were passed in 1995. All four bills were aimed at guaranteeing charities the right to issue the gift annuities.

Still, the case proceeded in the Denton County, Texas, probate court and in a Wichita Falls federal court. Judge Windle worried charity executives earlier this winter when he announced he intended to disregard one of the new Texas laws designed to protect charities from harassing lawsuits.

But in his summary judgment hearing March 1, the judge ruled the 1995 Texas laws could be applied retroactively to the Peter case, which began in 1992, the Denton newspaper reported.

"One would have to be intellectually challenged in a major way not to know that" the Texas laws were enacted specifically to address the issues of the case, Windle told lawyers who gathered to receive his ruling.

"Charities around the state and nation are very pleased and gratified that Judge Windle has ruled in such a way as to reinforce the earlier unanimous action of the Texas Legislature, Gov. (George W.) Bush and State District Judge Pete Lowry," noted Tal Roberts, executive vice president of the Baptist Foundation of Texas and chairman of the American Council on Gift Annuities.

"As Judge Windle so forcefully stated, this action leaves no doubt that charities have now, and always have had, the right to issue gift annuities and serve as trustee in Texas," Roberts said.

William M. Pinson Jr., executive director of the Texas Baptist executive board, echoed Roberts' remarks.

"When the Congress and president of the United States, the (state) legislature and governor of Texas and highly respected judges all agree regarding the matter of charitable gift annuities, surely the matter will not be further cause of attack," Pinson said.

"All Americans can rejoice that because of recent court rulings the marvelous ministries of our nation's charities evidently will not be hurt by adverse lawsuits."

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Global evangelistic goals
endorsed by Baptist leaders

By Wendy Ryan

WASHINGTON (BP)--Baptist leaders on every continent have embraced the evangelistic goal of Nilson do Amaral Fanini, president of the Baptist World Alliance, for each Baptist to seek to win one person to Jesus Christ and each church plant another church by the year 2000.

They also promised to help in prayer and follow-up with the evangelistic meetings Fanini plans to hold for Baptists around the world, emphasizing worldwide evangelism and missions with the theme of "Jesus Christ, the Hope of the World."

"As a result of the strong emphasis we Baptists have placed upon evangelism, I have been receiving invitations to preach from all around the globe," Fanini reported to the March 4-7 executive committee meeting of the Baptist World Alliance.

"Baptists of the world unite; let's win the world for Jesus Christ," Fanini said when he was elected president of the Baptist World Alliance at the 17th Baptist World Congress last August in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Fanini heard leader after leader endorse this evangelistic focus for the BWA.

Angel Baez, of Asuncion, Paraguay, president of BWA's men's department, said the department will recruit volunteers to go overseas and prepare the way for the evangelistic effort as well as stay after for follow-up work.

The women's department also will organize a special prayer network for the crusades, said director Willene Pierce.

"We want to be partners with people all over the world in evangelism and mission," said Harold C. Bennett, president of the North American Baptist Fellowship, "and we want to be a part of Fanini's plans."

"Latin American Baptists salute the promotion of evangelism by Dr. Fanini," said Daniel Carro, leader of Latin American Baptists. "We hope this will lead to many new converts in our region from now to the year 2000."

Because Christianity is growing fastest in parts of the world still dependent economically on Western countries, Carro warned, "We must be careful that, in our efforts to evangelize the world, that we carry Christ to the world, not a particular culture."

"When we unite our plans with your plans, Mr. President, it will help us a long way in evangelizing the Caribbean," said Peter Pinder, leader of the Caribbean Baptist Fellowship.

"When I left the Congress in Argentina, there was no doubt about our single focus and unity of purpose to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ around the world," said Warren Stewart, pastor of the Institutional Baptist Church, Phoenix, and member of the executive committee of the evangelism and education division.

Other leaders during the meeting noted Baptists are starting churches and sending missionaries as never before.

While African Baptists faces challenges of war, lack of resources and transport difficulties, they are still determined to send home missionaries to new areas, said Eleazar Ziherambere, leader of African Baptists.

"Romanian Baptists plan to start 300 churches," said Karl-Heinz Walter, BWA leader of European Baptists.

Walter said he already had requests for more than 2,000 prefabricated churches.

"As a European, I see signs that God is beginning to move," said David Coffey, leader of British Baptists. "We are not in wintertime -- it is certainly not harvest time, but we are beginning to see spring."

In Asia, they are seeing harvest time, according to Edwin Lopez, BWA regional secretary for Asia.

Lopez highlighted what he called a "troop movement" in Asia as Baptists take to heart the call to evangelize the unevangelized and unreached peoples of Asia.

"We are already in the '10/40' movement," he declared as he told how hundreds of indigenous missionaries in Nepal, northeast India and other countries are ready to take the gospel to their people and how Baptists in Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines are ready to support them.

Lopez said even the Karbi Anglong, a recently converted tribal group in India, had started a fund for sending missionaries.

Lopez said Baptist pastors in Nepal are committed to plant 200 churches by the year 2000 and Nagaland Baptists already had sent out 1,000 of the 10,000 missionaries they hope to have by 2000.

As they look beyond their borders, Baptists in northeast India will walk and pray from April 20-24 in a prayer caravan to the Bhutan border to pray for the gospel to penetrate that country. They have set a goal of 200 vehicles to meet at Guwahati, northeast India, and then walk as they pray for three hours to the border.

"The movement for God's army is there in Asia," Lopez said. "If properly motivated and mobilized, it will inspire our Baptists all over the world."

The BWA's evangelism and education division is encouraging BWA member bodies to join together for a special evangelistic focus in April 1999 and communicate their specific plans to the BWA. This request will be brought to the BWA general council meeting in Hong Kong in July for approval.

"This generation of Baptists has got the privilege of being God's Baptist people in this decade of the millennium, always a critical period," Coffey said. "It is his birthday in 2000 that we are celebrating."

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Good news for Baptists heard
from world's trouble spots

By Wendy Ryan

Baptist Press
3/14/96

WASHINGTON (BP)--From Lebanon, Nigeria, Bulgaria and other countries, stories of growth and faithfulness of Baptist churches ministering in political trouble spots were reported during a meeting of the BWA executive committee.

"Like the indestructible cedars of Lebanon, we are rising out of the ashes of our 16-year civil war," said Mona Khauli, vice president of the Baptist World Alliance.

Khauli, a member of the Ras Beirut Baptist Church, told the executive committee of the BWA at its March 4-7 meeting Lebanon was now "one big construction project."

Ras Baptist is one of 28 churches of the Lebanese Baptist Convention, and Khauli said each one has membership programs and structures to reach out to a broken community.

These church outreach programs target children, young people on drugs and jobless adults.

As they look beyond their borders, "we believe God has a role for Lebanon and its ministry in this predominantly non-Christian East," Khauli said.

In predominantly Islamic Nigeria, Christians are persecuted by Muslims, but both Muslims and Christians preach against the military regime, according to Samuel Fadeji, the Nigerian president of the All Africa Baptist Fellowship.

However, Christians still have freedom to preach the gospel and evangelize. "So far, not one preacher has been arrested for preaching anything in his pulpit by the government," Fadeji reported.

The same cannot be said for Baptist pastors in Euro-Asia where Karl-Heinz Walter, BWA regional secretary for Europe reported the secret police are active again and some pastors have been questioned as they were under communistic rule.

"This is a result of the old communists and leaders of the Orthodox church together," Walter said, "so we put an emphasis on mission where possible since we do not know how much time we have."

In Tajikistan, where there is still a civil war between the government and opposition forces, the Dushanbe Baptist Church continues to evangelize after the murder of eight of its members in 1994. The church still has trouble with the authorities, "but there is an awakening," Walter said, and the European Baptist Federation will help five missionaries there.

Church membership in the Baptist Union of Georgia has tripled in the last five years to a new high of over 3,600, "and they feel strong enough to evangelize on their own," Walter said.

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In Bulgaria, the story of government harassment of Baptists continues.

"Yes, it is excellent to be free," said Theodor Angelov, head of Bulgarian Baptists, "but now we face the government and local authorities and a mass media campaign against evangelicals."

Angelov said there are numerous restrictions for Baptists, especially with land for church buildings. Some 60- and 70-year-old churches still have no buildings, and many buildings that have been started have been stopped, "and the authorities give no reason."

In one small village, a lady donated land for a church, Angelov said, and the authorities would not permit the church to have it. They especially do not want the Baptists caring for the children and orphans, he said.

"It is sad," Angelov said, "that some of the same accusations leveled against us in 1972 are now being said again."

For all the restrictions they face, "we are preaching and our churches are growing and we are doing social work," Angelov said. Seventy-seven people were recently baptized in Sophia, "and the persecution is uniting Christians as they fight for their right to exist."

"We have survived the communist times and we will survive democracy too," Angelov said.

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Global shifts seen
in new BWA leadership

By Wendy Ryan

Baptist Press
3/14/96

WASHINGTON (BP)--The rapid, attention-getting growth of Christianity in Latin America, Asia and Africa has placed leaders from those countries at the front of global Baptist life as a force for renewal and change.

This is more true than ever in the Baptist World Alliance, a movement of more than 100 million Baptists which welcomed a new president, new vice presidents, some new regional secretaries and a host of new chairpersons of committees at its March 4 executive committee session at BWA headquarters in suburban Washington. More than half of the leaders come from Latin America, Asia and Africa.

Many of these new BWA leaders demonstrate the shift of leadership from the West to the East and South, consistent with the growth of Christianity in Asia and Latin America.

President Nilson do Amaral Fanini of Brazil chaired his first meeting as BWA president and heard how his call for Baptists of the world to unite and win the world for Jesus is finding a receptive welcome from Baptists everywhere.

Seven of the 12 new BWA vice presidents attended, including executive committee members Mona Khauli, Lebanon; Paul Eustache, Venezuela; Mercy Jeyaraja Rao, India; and C. Sam Reid, Jamaica.

These, along with new committee and commission members, and regional world leaders gave a greater than usual international representation and a freshness, liveliness of thought and high level of participation at the annual March meeting.

Eleazar Ziherambere, BWA regional secretary for Africa, announced Zambia as the new home of the All Africa Baptist Fellowship, and with it, a new home for him and his family after years of living as a refugee from Rwanda.

At this his first meeting, Peter Pinder, elected general secretary of the Caribbean Baptist Fellowship in 1995, reported the CBF offices moved from Jamaica to the Bahamas, his country, and will be led by a new team.

The women's and men's department's new leaders were also present. Mercy Jeyaraja Rao, India, and Angel Baez, Paraguay, also reflective of the shift of leadership from the West in the BWA.

"This is a time for change," Baez said of his department. "We have to show men they have to serve the Lord."

The BWA staff also introduced a new member, Douglas Inglis of Scotland who not only chaired his first meeting of promotion and development, but signaled a new impetus for fund-raising in the BWA, and Willene Pierce, director of the women's department, in her first BWA executive meeting.

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"This is a new day for the internationalization of the leadership of the BWA," said Denton Lotz, general secretary.

Lotz called on Baptists again to love one another. "When we do not love one another we are preventing the world from loving Christ," Lotz said. "There is something that still unites us as Baptists."

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Australians promise Baptists a personal encounter in 2000

Baptist Press
3/14/96

WASHINGTON (BP)--Whether it is one or 10,000, Baptists in Australia promise to contact each person before they arrive in Melbourne, Australia, January 2000, for the 18th Baptist World Congress, sponsored by the Baptist World Alliance.

"Australian Baptists are a one-on-one relational people," said John Simpson, general secretary of the Baptist Union of Victoria, "and we want to relate to each person who comes to the congress." He promised to house at least 1,000 persons in homes.

Simpson was head of a team of Australian Baptists that reported to the March 4-7 executive committee meeting of the BWA on plans for Melbourne 2000. While the Baptist Union of Australia invited the BWA to hold its congress in Australia, it is in the city of Melbourne, Victoria, where there is the greatest concentration of Baptists, where the Congress will be held.

"We see the Congress as God's gift to us in Australia and especially to the people of Melbourne," Simpson said. "We have a great spirit among Australian Baptists on this and we look forward to what global Baptists will say to us."

Australian Baptists launched their congress team last December and have planned an international celebration for every July until the congress. Simpson invited Baptists from around the world to come to Australia even before the congress in 2000 and participate in these mid-winter celebrations.

"We want international Baptists to be guests as part of helping Australians understand the possibilities of the congress," he said.

Leon Norsworthy, chair of the Australian local arrangements committee, told the BWA executive committee Australian Baptists want the impact of the congress "to touch national and state lives and the world."

"We hope for 15,000," Norsworthy said. "In 1993 the Rotary had 23,000 and we have flexibility to accommodate more," he said. He was referring especially to the new Exhibition Center recently completed in Melbourne.

While it is far too early to decide on definite days or a congress theme, the congress program committee, composed of leaders from an cross-section of BWA membership, led by James Scott, former president of the American Baptist Churches USA, as chair, agreed on some key points:

- The congress heralds a new millennium of evangelism possibilities.
- There will be a special track for pastors who also will be invited to preach in churches.
- The congress must be affordable to as many people as possible.
- There is a goal to enlist every Baptist church for prayer.
- Evangelism will be the focus.
- There will be cross-cultural and cross-generational experiences.
- There will be a strong focus on youth.
- Delegates may be involved in some type of beach resort mission.

"Every Congress takes on the character of the region in which we meet," said Denton Lotz, general secretary of the BWA, "and this will be a South Pacific Congress.

"We want to be so enriched by our meeting that we will go out and spread further the gospel of Jesus Christ," Lotz said.

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**BWA youth congress theme
chosen for Houston in '98**

WASHINGTON (BP)--Evangelism, discipleship, social justice, reconciliation, revival and awakening will all be addressed when young people meet in Houston July 22-26, 1998, for the 13th Baptist Youth World Conference, sponsored by the youth department of the Baptist World Alliance.

"Now Is The Time" will be the theme guiding the conference, with more than 15,000 young people from all over the world expected to gather at the George R. Brown Convention Center in Houston.

Each evening, the theme "Now Is the time" will lead into subthemes: "to tell my world," "to walk in my world," "to serve my world," "to heal my world" and "to change my world."

"This conference will create an atmosphere for young people whatever their race, gender or nationality, to set an agenda that will address the many problems facing this generation," said Emmett Dunn, BWA youth department director, during the annual BWA executive meeting in March in suburban Washington.

Dunn appealed to leaders of Baptist unions to help the youth department fulfill its goal of at least one representative from each of the unions and conventions of the BWA.

As he looked at the BWA executive members, Dunn said, "With all due respect Mr. President, look around this room and see why we need the youth!"

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**'Landlocked' church
plans for more growth**

By Charles Willis

Baptist Press
3/14/96

HENDERSON, Nev. (BP)--A growing church, landlocked with fewer than five acres of property in a residential neighborhood, is using architectural master planning to ensure its continued enlarging ministry.

Green Valley Baptist Church, located in a planned community on the edge of Las Vegas, Nev., is raising funds for its second building, with space allotted for a future third structure.

Through the range of services offered by the Baptist Sunday School Board's church architecture services, the almost-800-member congregation, can look to more years of growth.

A month after moving into its first building in 1990, the congregation expanded to two Sunday morning worship services. Within a few months, a second Sunday school was added. By October 1991, three Sunday schools became the norm, according to Mark Terry, associate pastor/minister of music.

Sunday school classes have met in rented facilities and temporary buildings leased and brought to the property.

When a third Sunday morning worship service was added, a corresponding 30 percent growth occurred in every organization in the church during the first quarter of the church year.

More and more Sunday school classes had to be moved to rented space. Today, classes from fifth grade up to senior adults meet in rented space.

Along with the membership and attendance growth has been consistently strong financial giving, which the staff anticipates will allow the church to retire its present debt before building new space.

How to accommodate the enlarged congregation and maintain growth became a legitimate concern with limited land surrounded by homes. The roughly triangular lot would need to be used wisely.

Building committee chairman Tim Kent said interviews with local architects had left committee members "less than 100 percent enthusiastic about moving forward."

"When we learned about the Sunday School Board's church architecture services, we met with architect Steve Newton and the relationship clicked really quickly. That was an answer to prayer."

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Kent, president of the Las Vegas division of Greystone Homes, said as a residential developer he knows the role of the architect in designing homes.

"There is quite a bit of difference in what I do and in designing and building commercial or church buildings," he said. "For a church building, the architect is more involved with construction details.

"One of the attractive things about the board's service is they have a wealth of experience in building Southern Baptist churches. And there were cost savings and will continue to be potential cost savings."

Terry agreed, "When we work with the architecture services at the board, we are working with people who are familiar with Southern Baptists. That was an important thing for us, to have someone who understands the balance between worship, Sunday school and all the other activities.

"Steve Newton has been extremely sensitive to our particular needs and has listened to us exceptionally well."

When Green Valley's pastor, Frank Lewis, left to become a national consultant in preaching and worship for the board, more responsibility for work with the property and building planning process fell to other staff members.

Steve Pearson, associate pastor/minister of education, said flexibility in the design of space was critical, since the church's education program "is based on the needs of the learners. Some Bible study groups meet in small groups, others use a master teacher in large groups followed by small-group discussion."

Because of the continuing growth, Pearson said, "everything changes at least annually. The church is always in the process of change."

Kent said four years from the formation of the building committee, the congregation hopes to occupy new space in February 1998, and they anticipate continuing to offer two Sunday schools and two worship services.

The new worship center will increase seating capacity from approximately 300 to 640, and an urgently needed larger preschool area will be included. More on-site parking will be added, and the present preschool space will be retrofitted for use by children and adults. The now-cramped worship space will become a fellowship hall.

"I've learned a lot," Kent said of his first two years on the committee. "It's much more involved than you might think. If you think the time is right to build a new facility, begin early. Get the church body behind you, and help people see that growth is necessary."

While no one can predict when the third building will be built for new offices, a music suite and more classrooms, the congregation already has a plan that can conceivably accommodate indefinite growth.

"We'll complete this property," Terry said, "and then we'll be a mission-starting church."

For information about the Sunday School Board's church architecture services, including on-site consultation, master site planning, architectural design, interior design, publications and other resources for church building committees, write to Church Architecture Services, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, TN 37234-0168 or telephone (615) 251-2466.

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(BP) photo (horizontal, color) posted in the SBCNet News Room.

Timothy George urges test
of ecstasy's authenticity

By Pat Cole

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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Christians should "test the spirits" to determine the authenticity of ecstatic religious experiences, a church historian told a Southern Baptist Theological Seminary chapel audience.

"May we never be guilty of making light of anything that is genuinely of God," said Timothy George, dean of Samford University's Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Ala. However, in his March 12 address at the Louisville, Ky., seminary, George indicated some popular expressions of religious euphoria are not readily found in the Bible.

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"In the Scriptures, the evidence of the glory of God is not giggling," George said. "It is weeping. It is not falling backwards in ecstasy so much as it is falling forward prostrate in repentance."

"Holy laughter" and "falling down" are religious expressions frequently associated with the Toronto Blessing, a movement that began during a 1994 revival in Canada. While controversial among many Christians, people around the world report they have experienced the bliss of Toronto.

Beyond his critique of the Toronto Blessing, George stressed the need for Christians to be empowered by God's presence, saying Christians should leave worship with a "sense that God has been here."

"Many times when we go to church the only thing that moves is the offering plate," said George. He pointed to the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel as one who had experienced God's majesty. Ezekiel saw a valley filled with dry bones and was asked by God if the bones could again live.

"He had seen the glory of God and he couldn't say no to this question," George declared.

George said the issue of God's power has confronted people through the ages. Today some believe God cares about the world but lacks the power to intervene, George said, while others think God is all-powerful but unconcerned about the events on earth.

Even some conservative Christians hold beliefs that deny God's power, George said. Such Christians, he maintained, will say: "Yes, God used to be a God of power but that was a long time ago, at least 2,000 years ago. We haven't heard of him doing anything lately."

Other Christians, meanwhile, are too quick and flippant in their attitude toward God's power, George emphasized. They live by such slogans as "a miracle a minute," "name it and claim it," "believe it, receive it," "feel it and heal it" and "more power by the hour," he said.

These "easy affirmations," George said, lack a sense of God's transcendence. He compared this vision of God with that described by Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis. Freud believed God is a projection of human egos.

"For many people, that is the only God they know: a dog on a leash, some quarters in a Coke machine," George said. "But the God and Father of our Lord Jesus God is not a God we can domesticate and manipulate like that. This God is a consuming fire."

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EDITORS' NOTE: This story replaces one in Baptist Press with the same headline dated 3/13/96.

Reclaim Christianity's thrust,
Baptist men's leaders urged

By Steve Barber

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ATLANTA (BP)--The men of local churches must lead a "strategic retreat" as Christ did in Matthew 16 to reclaim and revitalize the mission of evangelical Christianity, according to Crawford Loritts of Campus Crusade for Christ.

Loritts addressed more than 200 Southern Baptist men's ministries leaders and pastors attending the Southeast Regional Legacy Builders rally at Atlanta's Rehoboth Baptist Church March 8-9.

Many churches, Loritts said, become "monuments" that turn inward with a tendency to defend and protect what they have, but Christians are called ultimately to a movement to reach a broken world with the gospel message, not to an institution.

"The church has lost its urgency" in relation to this calling, he said. "We've become obnoxious evangelical snobs because we have become used to being the center, the target audience, rather than God's dynamic vehicle for hope and deliverance out there in the real market."

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To become that vehicle, churches and their men should ask, as Christ did, "What do men say that I am?" and get a more accurate picture of their effectiveness in the world "out there on Main Street."

"We can make the dastardly assumption that knowledge and content (from church programs, conferences, tapes, broadcast media and the like) equals mission and direction. But information alone does not change a life."

The rally, to be duplicated later this month in St. Louis, guided conferees in using new men's ministries strategies developed by the sponsoring Brotherhood Commission. Its theme, "Men Building a Christian Legacy Through the Local Church," was reflected by other speakers and conference leaders, including host pastor Richard Lee and Promise Keepers vice president Glenn Wagner.

Lee, noting the continuing decline in the length of tenure for the average Southern Baptist pastor, said building a legacy for Christ will depend on pastors and laymen "joining hands."

"Pastors are going to have to stay in those churches ... and commit themselves to lifelong ministry. But laymen are going to have to do the same. They are going to have to say, 'God planted me in this church, just as he did the pastor. Therefore, I have an obligation not to be a thorn in the pastor's side, not to be an adversary,'" Lee said.

"We're missing commitment today, what the old folks used to call 'stick-to-ivity,'" Lee continued. "That means staying power. Today, if anything goes wrong, people just leave. If they don't like something, they don't even tell you anymore. They just fly the coop. What kind of a legacy is that leaving to our teenage boys and girls in our churches? None at all."

Lee urged the conferees to look to the example of Moses as illustrated in Hebrews 11, who had "the most commitment of anyone I know in that whole beautiful chapter."

According to Promise Keepers' Wagner, the Promise Keepers "movement" is intended to serve only as an entry point for men interested in ministry through the local church, not as an end in itself.

"Promise Keepers is committed to the local church and its ministry," Wagner said. "That's why we exist, and all that we've sought to design has been to that end."

He explained Promise Keepers is the "entry point" at the top of a "funnel" that draws men into deeper involvement in events and programs within the local church. He said other men may feel more comfortable entering directly into church-based programs such as Brotherhood Men's Ministries and should be allowed to do so.

Wagner called the Promise Keeper rallies a "mountaintop experience" that can help churches jump-start their local men's ministries but added, "every mountaintop experience wears off."

"You can't live in a mountaintop experience your whole life, but we can, in our churches, take that experience where a man comes face to face with almighty God and makes promises and commitments, and we can help him bring that into the reality of life, (helping him) stay true to the promises he's made," Wagner said. "That's where the pastor and the men of the local church need to find their effective ministry."

The local church strategy for involving men beyond Promise Keepers should begin with special men's events that serve as "non-threatening entry points," such as a home repair project, a father-son softball tournament or a hunter's banquet. A men's breakfast -- but not a prayer breakfast, which Wagner called "too intimidating" for some -- also would be appropriate.

The process should continue through training seminars designed to address specific issues in men's lives, such as career support and parenting, and then progress to larger "men's congregational gatherings" such as retreats, Wagner said, explaining that as relationships deepen, participants would then be ready for smaller accountability groups.

The Midwest Regional Legacy Builders rally is scheduled March 29-30 at First Baptist Church of Ferguson in suburban St. Louis. For information, call (573) 635-7931, ext. 440, or (901) 272-2461.

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