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**SBC presidents: Times cry out
for prayer, spiritual awakening**

By Art Toalston

**Baptist Press
8/15/96**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Without doubt, the need is urgent for convocations for spiritual awakening, according to various former presidents of the Southern Baptist Convention.

The convocations "could not be more timely," said H. Edwin Young, SBC president from 1992-94 and pastor of Second Baptist Church, Houston.

"This may be the most challenging time in our nation's history, especially for the church and Christians," Young said. "America has moved away from God much as a child plays 'Mother may I?' -- first, baby steps -- then, giant steps. As our nation continues to seek solutions through education, legislation and other programs, God's people have never had a better opportunity to be salt and light in society."

New SBC President Tom Elliff initiated the series of one-day convocations for pastors and other church leaders to underscore the crucified life and pray for spiritual awakening on Baptist seminary campuses.

The initial convocation, Aug. 29, will be at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C.

From there, the convocations will be:

- Sept. 3 at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.
- Sept. 4, Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, Mill Valley, Calif.
- Sept. 10, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky.
- Sept. 11, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Mo.
- Sept. 12, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Each convocation will begin at 10 a.m.

A convocation also will be held Sept. 5 at Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, Memphis, Tenn.

"I am grateful that the Lord has laid this emphasis on our president's heart," said Jim Henry, SBC president from 1994-96 and pastor of First Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla. "About two or three years ago, I felt burdened to pray for revival in our church, the SBC, the churches of America and our nation. As time passed, I realized I was a part of a groundswell in the body of Christ that was experiencing the same thing.

"Our nation is at a precipitous point spiritually, morally, ecumenically and politically," Henry said. "Heaven only knows the results of our people humbling ourselves and asking God to do a mighty work that can only be explained in supernatural terms."

Morris H. Chapman, SBC president from 1990-92 and president of the SBC Executive Committee, said, "The moral and spiritual decline in America is worsening. Hearts are empty and unfulfilled. To millions, there is no hope for a bright tomorrow. America is in desperate need for spiritual awakening."

Chapman said he plans to attend the convocation at his alma mater, Southwestern Seminary, noting his hope that in the convocations "Southern Baptists will come together as a mighty army of prayer warriors, praying for God to purify the church, cleanse hearts and turn our world right side up."

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W.A. Criswell, SBC president from 1968-70 and pastor emeritus of First Baptist Church, Dallas, said the seminaries are a key place for convocations on the crucified life and spiritual awakening.

"(The) preacher-pastor is all-important to God in promoting and extending the saving ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ," Criswell said. "The seminaries where our men and women are taught are vital beyond compare to that tremendous commitment. With earnest supplication, our hearts will be with these groups as they meet on the campuses of our seminaries to promote this glorious revival awakening among all of our people and through all of our churches."

From a denominational standpoint, James T. Draper Jr., SBC president from 1982-84 and president of the Baptist Sunday School Board, observed, "We face the greatest challenge of our history as we move into the 21st century and undertake the massive restructuring of our Southern Baptist Convention," to be implemented at the conclusion of the June 1997 SBC annual meeting in Dallas, encompassing such changes as a new North American Mission Board and a reduction in SBC agencies from 19 to 12.

"My own heart has been deeply burdened that if God does not move in mighty revival, renewing power, all of this is futile," Draper said. "Our best organization, creativity and energy cannot replace the eternal need for the power and presence of God in our midst."

"These convocations called by President Elliff are opportunities for us to place ourselves in a position for God to draw our hearts to him in spiritual encounter. We desperately need that today and each day as we move forward. However effective our structure and efforts may be, they will not matter for eternity without his presence and power," Draper said.

Bailey Smith, SBC president from 1980-82 and an Atlanta-based evangelist, added other denominational observations.

"In the context of Southern Baptist life, spiritual awakening is a must indicated by several facts that most of us know," Smith said. "According to our Home Mission Board, 70 percent of our churches are now at a plateau or declining. It takes 40 Southern Baptists a year to win one person to Christ. The typical Southern Baptist church last year won five adults to Christ. If a church baptizes 23 in a year, it is in the upper 10 percent of our churches. To say it another way, only 10 percent of our churches baptize 23 or more, and 6,703 led no one to Christ last year."

"Another concern I have as I travel across this denomination literally from coast to coast is the great drop in Sunday night attendance," Smith said. "The average church in our denomination drops 60 percent from Sunday morning to Sunday night, many 80 percent, and currently 22 percent of our churches have totally done away with Sunday night services. This, of course, is a strong sign of decline because there was a day when that was the great evangelistic service in Southern Baptist life."

"I've also noticed a new lack of respect for what is holy," Smith said. "We are trivializing and cheapening the church service in far too many ways. I'm amazed at churches where I go and find women wearing clothes that most women should not wear to a shopping mall. Teenagers will bring candy bars and soft drinks into the worship service. Once again, when you treat the holy in such a casual way, it minimizes its importance and its significance, which will always reflect in our power and growth."

"So, the convocations are a must and I am 1,000 percent in favor of these meetings," Smith said, "but there needs to be prayerful concern that the message will reach beyond the meeting. There is a great deal of dead-end conferencing today. My prayer is that they will change us, our deacons, our average layperson, that we all may become more like Jesus and genuinely have a burden for a lost world. These meetings need to help us to be willing to make radical differences to become more effective in fulfilling the Great Commission. In other words, the convocations need to be not only revival discussion on the seminary, but revival demonstration in the sanctuary."

Elliff, in a July 15 mailing to 40,000 Southern Baptist pastors and other leaders, issued an "urgent invitation" to the convocations. The 20th century, he noted, "is rapidly drawing to a close. Tragically, this could be the first century in our nation's history to pass without a great, sweeping move of God. Will that be the case? Many of us believe the Lord is saying 'turn to me!' He is calling us to revival: calling us to the cross; calling us to the crucified life."

The seminaries are opening their campuses to all concerned pastors and church leaders for a day "when all energies and interests will be focused on revival," Elliff wrote. He urged Southern Baptists to travel to the nearest campus "on the day most suited to your schedule." Elected SBC president at the SBC's annual meeting in New Orleans in June, Elliff is pastor of First Southern Baptist Church, Del City, in suburban Oklahoma City.

The one-day convocations will not boast a list of speakers, Elliff stated, explaining, "We will be gathered to meet with God, not to be drawn to some noted personalities announced in advance." Prayer -- for Southern Baptists to turn to the crucified life with Jesus and for spiritual awakening -- will be emphasized, not just preaching or singing, Elliff said.

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(BP) graphic -- an information block for use in state Baptist newspapers and Baptist association and church newsletters -- is posted in SBCNet News Room and available upon request from Baptist Press' central office in Nashville, (615) 244-2355.

3 key congressional proposals await fate before adjournment

By Tom Strode

**Baptist Press
8/15/96**

WASHINGTON (BP)--Congress will reconvene Labor Day week with the future of three issues of significance for conservative Christians hanging in the balance: partial-birth abortion, homosexual marriage and a religious freedom constitutional amendment.

In the month before scheduled adjournment Oct. 4, Congress would appear to have a better chance of passing the Defense of Marriage Act than of either overriding a presidential veto of the Partial-birth Abortion Ban Act or adopting a religious freedom amendment.

The Defense of Marriage Act sailed through the House of Representatives in mid-July and is poised to be acted upon by the Senate the week it returns from the August recess. The attempt to override President Clinton's veto of the Partial-birth Abortion Ban Act appears threatened in the House and unlikely in the Senate. Meanwhile, it seems no decision has been made about action on the Religious Freedom Amendment now that a hearing has been held.

A Southern Baptist public policy specialist urged Christians to express their convictions, especially on the Defense of Marriage Act and the Partial-birth Abortion Ban.

"The Defense of Marriage Act should pass in the Senate, but we cannot take anything for granted, particularly this late in the term, when it is easy to defeat a bill simply by not taking action upon it," said Will Dodson, director of government relations for the Christian Life Commission.

"The Partial-birth Abortion Ban will undoubtedly be brought to a vote. While some think an override is unlikely, I believe there is a fighting chance. There has been a great outpouring of rage over this grisly procedure and over the president's veto of the ban of this procedure. It is important that we contact members of Congress and let them know how important their votes on this matter are."

The House approved the Defense of Marriage Act, H.R. 3396, with a 342-67 vote. Sen Don Nickles, R.-Okla., chief sponsor of the bill, has gained a unanimous consent agreement to bring DOMA to the Senate floor Sept. 5. Supporters of the bill are "optimistic" about its chances of passage, a spokesman for Nickles said.

The legislation is designed to strengthen states' ability to refuse recognition of homosexual marriages.

The measure has been on a fast track since it was introduced in both the House and Senate in early May in response to an expected Hawaii court ruling which threatens to legalize homosexual marriage in a sweeping way. In a case scheduled to go to trial this month, it is expected a Hawaii court will declare homosexual marriage constitutional.

If such a union made in Hawaii is legal, it likely would be considered legal in all other states under the full faith and credit clause of the U.S. Constitution, unless a state is able to show it has a compelling policy opposing such unions.

The bill says no state shall be required to recognize a homosexual marriage from another state. It also amends federal law to define marriage as "only a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife" and to define a spouse as "a person of the opposite sex who is a husband or a wife."

According to the Senate consent agreement, both supporters and proponents will be able to offer as many as four amendments.

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One of the amendments from opponents is expected to be the Employment Non-discrimination Act by Sen. Edward Kennedy, D.-Mass. The measure would add homosexuality, under the umbrella of "sexual orientation," to the classifications -- race, gender, religion, national origin, age and disability -- protected in federal law from discrimination in the work place.

If approved, the amendment would have the effect of expanding homosexual rights within legislation designed to limit such rights.

The White House has said the president will sign DOMA as approved by the House. Clinton, however, endorsed the Employment Non-discrimination Act last year.

Messengers to this year's Southern Baptist Convention approved a resolution opposing homosexual marriages.

While supporters of the Partial-birth Abortion Ban Act have been planning for an override attempt since Clinton vetoed the legislation in April, it is uncertain exactly when the effort will be made in September, said a spokeswoman for Rep. Charles Canady, R.-Fla., chief House sponsor.

An override requires a two-thirds majority in both houses. While House supporters of the bill reached two-thirds on two earlier votes, it appears the override may be extremely close. In the Senate, prospects seem much less likely. In that chamber, the bill passed by only a 54-44 vote.

The late-term procedure banned by the bill involves the delivery of an intact baby feet first until only the head is left in the birth canal. The doctor pierces the base of the baby's skull with surgical scissors, then inserts a catheter into the opening and suctions out the brain. The collapse of the skull enables easier removal of the dead child. The bill allows the use of the method only when the life of the mother is endangered.

Unprecedented opposition from some religious leaders met the president's veto. Then-SBC President Jim Henry and 10 former presidents called for Clinton to repent of his action. SBC messengers adopted a resolution condemning the veto and calling for an override. Evangelist Billy Graham told the president his veto was wrong. The country's Roman Catholic cardinals and the head of the church's bishops said they would work for an override.

Even pro-choice members of Clinton's party, such as Rep. Richard Gephardt, D.-Mo., the minority leader, and Rep. Patrick Kennedy, D.-R.I., voted to ban the grisly procedure.

The Constitution Subcommittee of the House Judiciary Committee held a July 23 hearing on the Religious Freedom Amendment, House Joint Resolution 184, but did not act on the proposal before Congress recessed Aug. 2. Supporters had hoped for subcommittee and possibly even committee approval before the recess. It is uncertain if there will even be a mark-up on the legislation before adjournment, a subcommittee staffer said.

The amendment, introduced by House Majority Leader Dick Armey, R.-Texas, reads:

"In order to secure the right of the people to acknowledge and serve God according to the dictates of conscience, neither the United States nor any state shall deny any person equal access to a benefit, or otherwise discriminate against any person, on account of religious belief, expression or exercise. This amendment does not authorize government to coerce or inhibit religious belief, expression or exercise."

At the hearing, Christian Life Commission President Richard Land endorsed the amendment, describing it as necessary because the three decades since the Supreme Court banned state-sponsored Bible reading and official prayers in the public schools "have witnessed an ever more aggressive, secularizing neutrality which has been hostile to, and has discriminated against, the religious free exercise rights of students."

Other organizations which support the amendment are the American Center for Law and Justice, the Christian Legal Society and the National Association of Evangelicals. Among organizations opposed to a religious liberty amendment are the Baptist Joint Committee, the National Council of Churches, Americans United for Separation of Church and State and People for the American Way.

The amendment's advocates "have accomplished a great deal in this session of Congress in moving forward the attempt to correct very bad jurisprudence on the part of the Supreme Court and its misinterpretation of the establishment clause," Dodson said. "It is unlikely that our goal of correcting the Supreme Court's misguided course will be realized in this session of Congress. However, amending the Constitution is, and should be, a cautious process. I think we should be happy with the progress that we have made.

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"The Armeiy amendment is the result of cautious and principled deliberation. However, because it was offered so late in the session, I do not believe it is realistic to think that most members of Congress will develop a level of comfort with the new language, given the time they have to do so. Our prospects for the future depend upon the commitment of candidates in the upcoming election to the principles of religious freedom which most Americans hold dear and which the Armeiy amendment seeks to re-establish."

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**Messianic panelists laud SBC
Jewish evangelism resolution**

By Daniel Guido

**Baptist Press
8/15/96**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--An evangelical scholar's book contending Jews don't need Jesus because of a separate covenant with God was the last straw for Jim Sibley, a Home Mission Board representative to the Jews.

"That's when I knew I had to make another push for my resolution," Sibley said. The resolution, calling for renewed evangelical outreach to Jews throughout the world, was among several adopted unanimously by messengers to the June 11-13 Southern Baptist Convention in New Orleans.

"I realized that as Southern Baptists, we were speaking from both sides of our mouths," Sibley said as part of a panel during the Southern Baptist Messianic Fellowship's annual training conference, Aug. 12-15 in Nashville, Tenn. "Some voices said everyone but the Jewish people needed salvation. Jewish evangelism was so marginalized."

Six Messianic believers on the panel lauded the SBC for its resolution, which has stirred national controversy.

Sibley said he had faithfully introduced the same resolution since 1991, only to see it get bottled up in the resolutions committee each year. But after a breakaway Southern Baptist group published a "two-and-a-half-page statement a year ago in March which decried a theology of conversion of the Jews," Sibley said he began thinking the time had come for his resolution to be adopted by the SBC.

"In my view, the very worst form of anti-Semitism is to withhold the gospel from the Jewish people," Sibley said. "Our failure to bring the gospel to the Jews will make Hitler's ovens pale in comparison to the heartache it causes the Lord."

Other panel members and several in the audience responded with loud "amens" and sustained applause.

Panel member Jerry Young, a Texas-based Jewish believer and traveling evangelist, said the time was right for a strong SBC resolution on Jewish evangelism.

"While we all would rather have done this a decade or more ago, this really seems like the ideal time to reach out to the Jewish people in love and compassion," Young said.

Young said he likewise had introduced a similar resolution in 1991 and 1992 that never made it out of committee.

Momentum toward passage of this year's resolution began to build after Southern Baptist Home Mission Board interfaith witness department director Phil Roberts told Sibley he was supporting the resolution's passage.

"The motive behind interfaith's endorsement was because we believed in creating a single voice calling for the evangelism of the entire world, and not leaving out any one people," Sibley said.

Young said reporters attending the convention told him the resolution would not pass because of the resolution's final statement, which states that Southern Baptists will "direct our energies and resources toward the proclamation of the gospel to the Jewish people."

Bruce Stokes, professor of anthropology at California Baptist College, acknowledged the problem of SBC resolutions often being used "to say something for political reasons which we don't intend to do."

Those involved in Messianic outreach "knew this thing would blow up on us," said Gus Elowitz, a Messianic congregational leader from Houston. "We knew Jews would take this as a Baptist effort to steal their children away from their faith."

"Unfortunately, we'll continue to take it on the chin until and unless we get other Christian denominations to support similar resolutions calling for a renewed outreach to Jews," Elowitz said.

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Southern Baptists need to "repent for not sharing the gospel with the Jews for so long," said Elliot Klayman, a professor at Ohio State University and the conference's keynote speaker.

"Talk is cheap, but the real work should be done from the local church and to the local community," Klayman said.

Klayman said Southern Baptists must realize trying to bring truth to the lost, especially Jews who often are on guard against Christian overtures, may cause pain and anguish among some who are willing to hear the truth.

"But pain in and of itself," Sibley said, "is not something to be avoided. Our intention is not to bring pain but to bring healing and help."

The resolution itself will not result in a sea of change immediately, Elowitz cautioned. "Currently, 99 percent of Southern Baptist resources go to everyone but Jews. That will not change very much. But the idea is that people will take the time to talk to their Jewish neighbors."

Sibley said some Jews "believe this could become spiritual genocide, while it will only help them maintain their lifestyle to come under the love, power and healing of Yeshua (Jesus). All we are trying to do is share, not just continue to sit still and watch while most Jews go without ever hearing the real gospel."

Klayman questioned whether the SBC will ever move to fully implement the resolution. "Or are we just going to throw this out there and leave it lie? Will there be any follow-up on this, or is this all that there will be on this? Once and done?"

Sibley said the SBC must get over the "very negative media coverage on this. Reporters who were Jewish and very hostile to my position didn't hide their contempt in their news reports.

"But we didn't get only a bad response," Sibley said. "I am getting e-mail from all around the world, praising us for 'knocking the ball out of the park.'

"Our measure of success on this resolution, as in everything we do, is whether we are being obedient to God," Sibley said. "Our success is realized if we are being obedient in presenting the gospel to the world."

Hopefully, the resolution will help the Southern Baptist Messianic Fellowship become known to more Southern Baptists, said Rick Drebenstedt, a Messianic congregational leader from Denver.

"Mostly, we are unknown to Southern Baptists and to Jews, unfortunately," Drebenstedt said.

Several SBC representatives in Israel, Sibley said, expressed "strong concern" that the SBC should have waited and not introduced the resolution so soon after the Israeli elections, Sibley said. "What they didn't realize is that this thing has been in the works since 1991 and was submitted to the resolutions committee several months before the elections were held."

But adverse reactions to the resolution are not limited to SBC workers in the Holy Land, Sibley said. "I've received hundreds of letters from people in other denominations who are upset because we Southern Baptists are going against the trend, against Vatican II and other such proclamations, in reaching out to evangelize Jews around the world."

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**College campus 'fertile ground'
for sexual abstinence message**

By Karen L. Willoughby

**Baptist Press
8/15/96**

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--"Nobody believes college students are sexually pure."

With these words Art Herron described his plan to take "True Love Waits" to college campuses across the United States.

Herron, a consultant with the Baptist Sunday School Board's National Student Ministry, heads the collegiate section for the True Love Waits team. Launched in 1993, True Love Waits is a BSSB-sponsored program to highlight commitment to remain chaste until marriage.

"About half of those who signed commitment cards are now college age," Herron said. "How many of them are on college campuses and just needing a rallying point?"

Herron is proposing college ministers and Baptist Student Union directors locate the students on their campuses who previously had signed commitment cards and conduct True Love Waits rallies this fall at that college campus.

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He met with the leaders during Student Week 1996 at Ridgecrest (N.C.) and Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference centers to brainstorm promotional ideas.

"This is a media happening," Herron said. "Everybody is interested in what goes on at college."

True Love Waits started at the high school level and attracted national attention as it spread from Southern Baptists to almost every major Protestant denomination and para-church group as well as to the Roman Catholic Church.

"Now, college -- that's fertile ground," Herron said.

Advertisements in campus newspapers promoting True Love Waits and sexual purity could be paid for by nearby churches. They could also underwrite part of the cost of True Love Waits T-shirts to bring the \$11 cost down to a student-affordable level. Those students who already have signed commitment cards could each take two more -- or more -- to give to their friends, which could triple the number of students committed to sexual purity even before a campus-wide rally.

Excitement and the number of commitment cards would continue to increase through small-group Bible studies and peer-level reinforcement until Valentine's Day 1997, when the cards would be displayed in mass at a prominent place on the university grounds as part of "True Love Waits Goes Campus." The number of cards would pique the attention of the local media. The number of local media stories would generate national attention.

A similar campaign is taking place on high school campuses, Herron said.

"A simultaneous display on thousands of high school and college campuses will provide great encouragement to sexually pure students and will make a dramatic impact on government leaders, educators, parents and students who are sexually confused," Herron said. "Most important of all, God will receive glory and his principles of life will receive the attention they deserve."

About 16 million people are enrolled in colleges in the United States this fall, Herron said.

"My goal really is to take True Love Waits to 2,000 college campuses this year," he said. "We may find that with all those who previously have signed commitment cards from all denominations that we have 200,000 people already at college who have decided to remain sexually pure until marriage. What if within two years 1 million students would make this decision? Think of the moral impact this will make on future leaders of our world."

There are two main reasons for remaining sexually chaste until marriage, Herron said.

"It's God's way," Herron said. "It's important we communicate to college students the message that this is God's way, to let them know what God's Word says -- and not waver."

Part of the fun of Christmas is waiting to see what's inside the presents, Herron said, quoting from True Love Waits promotional materials available from the Sunday School Board. The fun is spoiled for both the giver and the receiver when someone cheats and opens a present early. God doesn't say no to premarital sexual activity to be mean, but to protect the individuals and the marriage.

"Also, there is a statistically documented rise on college campuses in sexually transmitted diseases," Herron continued. "We may save their lives."

The True Love Waits pledge: "Believing that True Love Waits, I make a commitment to God, myself, my family, my friends, my future mate, and my future children to be sexually abstinent from this day until the day I enter a biblical marriage relationship."

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**Miss America gives testimony
to 5,000 Baptist teenagers**

By Dana Williamson

**Baptist Press
8/15/96**

DAVIS, Okla. (BP)--With her all-American good looks, she might have been just one of the campers.

But the personable 24-year-old strawberry blonde on the Falls Creek Baptist Assembly stage giving her testimony was none other than Miss America.

"I want to share with you how the Lord has been instrumental in my life, how he's helped me overcome some obstacles and how you can remain strong in the foundation you have formed this week and be a strong, strong Christian," Shawntel Smith told nearly 5,000 youth assembled in the Falls Creek tabernacle at the encampment operated by the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma. This year, more than 32,000 youth and sponsors attended five weeks of assemblies.

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Admitting she was a little nervous about speaking to so many young people, Smith, a former Miss Oklahoma, said she looks at being Miss America as an opportunity to not only speak about issues she truly believes in, but also to be a testimony for Christ as she travels across the nation.

"I see being Miss America as a blessing that my Lord and Savior gave me," she proclaimed. "Just knowing that I have touched people's lives, and they know where I stand, has made this year worth it."

Smith expressed appreciation to the campers for being at Falls Creek and taking a stand for the Lord "because he's our Savior. He's the sole reason we live."

She noted she was just Shawntel Smith from Muldrow, Okla, population 3,200, but the second the crown was placed on her head and she became Miss America, she was a national keynote speaker.

"That changed my life," she said. "I know it was the Lord's blessing.

"In Jeremiah, God talks about a plan for us. We may not know what that plan is, but he has a plan. We have to walk with him throughout life, and he will show us the way," she said.

She said as Shawntel Smith, a "regular" person, she had a good life, with parents and grandparents who served the Lord.

"I know for some of you here today, maybe your parents don't serve the Lord," she said. "But let me tell you, if you go home with the joy that's in your heart and let the Lord shine through you, they will wonder what all the excitement is about, and they will want to be a part of that excitement."

Smith, a member of Muldrow's Assembly of God church, said coming to church camp brought back a lot of memories for her.

"I went to church camp just up the road at Turner Falls," she told the teenagers. "Although I loved the Lord and was living for him, being with people my own age who thought the Lord was number one in their lives helped me build on my foundation. For those of you who have had that experience this week, I say more power to you. Go home and reach others in your community."

Smith said she realized there were those in the audience who didn't feel a strong bond with Christ.

"I encourage you to let the Lord into your heart, because this is where you can make that happen," she said.

Smith said she knew for most of the campers things were great at the moment because they were around friends who love and serve the Lord.

"But when you go home, it's a little tougher because you'll have friends wanting you to go out with them and do things that are not so good, and that you know aren't right," she said. "I will pray for you that you will have the courage to go back home and be that strong Christian you want to be."

Smith revealed there are some things she personally does to keep her walk with Christ straight.

First is prayer, she said. "Prayer can not only help you keep your commitment to the Lord, but can also get you through some challenging times," she said.

Second, holding a Bible given to her by her pastor and his wife after she was crowned Miss America, Smith said, "This is your source, your guide. Anything that happens to you, you can find out how to handle it right in this book."

Smith acknowledged she reads the Bible on a consistent basis because "the more I know, the stronger Christian I will be."

Third, she said, is to develop a personal commitment.

"If you don't make things happen for yourself, they won't happen," she avowed. "If you work hard to make yourself a good Christian, it's going to happen."

Smith said God gives everyone a mission on earth.

"In Romans 12, the Bible says if you are put on this earth to be a server, then serve with a cheerful heart; if you're here to be an encourager, encourage all you can," she said. "Don't give up on the dream the Lord has given you, whether it's to be a schoolteacher, doctor or NBA player. If you give up, you'll never achieve it."

Smith said to follow the dreams the Lord has given, have faith in him and yourself, have focus -- a plan for success -- and follow through with hard work, determination and perseverance. She noted she competed six years to become Miss America.

Smith said the Bible given to her by her pastor was inscribed "For such a time as this."

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"My pastor gave me this because he knew I had the opportunity to reach a lot of people this year," Smith said. "You do too. In your communities, your schools, you have an opportunity to reach hundreds of people and share with them your love for Jesus Christ.

"All of you here today are facing obstacles; you're going to have challenges. But I wish for every single one of you that you remain strong in Christ so that you will be able to reach others and share his Word with them as well. You never realize what people are going through, so always be willing to share your experiences and the love of the Lord."

Smith said Falls Creek was the only camp she will speak to this year. When asked why she accepted the Falls Creek invitation, she said she would never turn down an opportunity to share her faith.

"Besides, this place is incredible," she beamed.

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**Merritt: Media opens doors
internationally and locally**

By C.C. Risenhoover

**Baptist Press
8/15/96**

ATLANTA (BP)--Technology is a gift of God, James Merritt said, and the means by which the gospel can be preached throughout the world.

Merritt, pastor of First Baptist Church, Snellville, Ga., said he thinks technology will be the catalyst for fulfilling the words of Jesus Christ in Matthew 24:14, which reads: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."

"All truth is God's truth," Merritt said, "and the great technological discoveries of this century provide us unparalleled historical opportunities to proclaim the truth of Christ's love and saving grace to the entire world.

"It is incredible that we can stand before a camera and preach to someone in China or Mongolia. Just recently we received a call from a person in the Bahamas who came to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ through our television ministry. Even more recently three people from Pennsylvania who watched our program came to know Jesus. I can relate story after story of people saved as a result of our television ministry.

"To know you're proclaiming Christ to people throughout the nation, and to have many of them call in professing Jesus as their Savior, there's nothing quite like it."

Merritt's 30-minute weekly program, "Touching Lives," is telecast on FamilyNet, the broadcast television service of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission; the Inspiration Network; and WSB-TV, the ABC affiliate in Atlanta. Through cable and satellite transmission, the program can be seen throughout the nation.

"With increased technology, it is amazing how much exposure you can get," Merritt said. "We do a 30-minute program for two reasons. First, the cost of air time is prohibitive. Yet, in terms of results, it is a bargain. Second, we are concerned with quality and it's more difficult to do an hour of quality programming. It's also more difficult to get a viewer to commit an hour of his or her time.

"We're trying to do some groundbreaking things on 'Touching Lives,' and we're committed to issues-oriented programs. We deal with issues like absolute truth, because once a culture abandons truth it self-destructs. What we're trying to do is to reach people where they are."

Merritt said many people have allowed scandals to color their thinking as to what a television ministry is about, but one "bad apple" does not spoil the entire barrel.

"There is no substitute for integrity in a media ministry," he said. "That's why we've used the Billy Graham organization as a pattern for our ministry. I have nothing to do with the finances. We have a board of directors and a finance subcommittee.

"I'm never going to embarrass my church by raising money on the air. I tell viewers not to send their tithes to 'Touching Lives' because it's not biblical. I encourage people to tithe to their local church.

"Recently a man from Alabama sent us \$1,200 and a letter saying it was because we don't ask for money on the air. God honors integrity."

Purchase of media time for "Touching Lives" comes in part from a "5-52 Club." Becoming a member simply requires the commitment of an individual to contribute \$5 a week for 52 weeks above his or her regular tithes and offerings to the church.

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Merritt said "Touching Lives" receives many calls from the northern part of the United States.

"A lot of people have never really heard the gospel," he said, "and they get excited when they hear it.

"People want to hear biblical, expository preaching because that's the kind of preaching that is relevant. Let's face it, most so-called TV ministry is a circus that isn't worth watching. I want people who tune to 'Touching Lives' to know going in that they're going to hear solid biblical exposition that exalts the Lord, feeds their soul and offers salvation to the lost. There is very little verse-by-verse biblical exposition today, which is a sad commentary because every part of the Bible meets a felt need."

The pastor said when the new North American Mission Board gets going, his prayer is Southern Baptists will invade the North because the region is in such desperate need of the gospel.

Merritt also said the byproducts of a media ministry can bring many blessings to a church.

"The ability to reach out so far with the gospel message excites church members and gets them involved in evangelism," he said. "We've trained a number of our people, whom we call 'Biblical Guides,' to answer the telephone calls generated by our media ministry. Dealing with the needs, problems and questions of callers has turned these members on to soul-winning.

"One of our men told me he had never led anyone to Christ, had never even tried, until he became involved in our television ministry. But he's just one example. When people inside the church get their feet wet, they want to jump in over their heads."

Each week "Touching Lives" generates hundreds of calls and letters from people from all walks of life who have been stirred by the message and often are seeking spiritual help. There has even been a call from a tearful Methodist preacher who said his heart had been set on fire to reach lost people.

"For a year we were on WSB-TV on Sundays at 6:30 a.m. because there was no other time available and because air time in Atlanta costs mega-bucks," Merritt said. "But when our audience tripled and we began controlling the market at 6:30 a.m., the station moved us to 7:30 a.m. at no extra charge as a lead-in to the local news. We're grateful for God's goodness to us in opening this door.

"I'm also grateful to all the great Southern Baptist preachers who paved the way and continue to use media effectively in proclaiming Jesus Christ. But when it comes to using media as extensively as we should in telling the world about Jesus, we haven't yet touched the hem of the garment."

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**Jew-turned-New Ager found
access to God through Jesus**

By Daniel Guido

**Baptist Press
8/15/96**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--David Feinberg was driving along Victory Boulevard in the San Fernando Valley at 10 p.m. following a seance one night when he suddenly realized he was not alone.

Feinberg was contemplating how unique it was to dialogue with spirits, when he realized one was riding with him. A shadowy entity sat in the passenger seat.

As the hair on the back of his neck stood on end, Feinberg knew one of the seance's spirits had decided to come home with him. It was the first of many such spirits he would see as he delved deeper into New Age mysticism.

Feinberg, now 36, raised a Reformed Jew, left behind his New Age beliefs six years ago after hearing the gospel preached during a church service he attended after giving a friend a ride to the church.

During the Southern Baptist Messianic Fellowship's Aug. 12-15 annual training conference in Nashville, Tenn., Feinberg recounted how persuasive mysticism had become in his life.

"Once I entered the New Age lifestyle, I found I couldn't go anywhere but further down into the depths. Hearing the truth about Christ was a life rope, which I eagerly grabbed," Feinberg said.

Now a representative of the American European Bethel Mission of Santa Barbara, Calif., Feinberg spends his time raising funds for the ministry's outreach in Israel.

Feinberg's slide into mysticism began at age 15, when his spiritual hunger went unabated by his parents' Judaism. His grandmother, a card reader, taught him to read cards. Feinberg discovered he could make money by telling people's fortunes by reading everyday playing cards.

Soon he began attending seances (more commonly called channeling today) in which a medium would fall into a trance and become possessed by spirits who would speak through the medium to those in attendance.

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Spirits began appearing in Feinberg's life. At first, they appeared as shadowy creatures. Later, he would see "Indian guides" in full costume who would travel home with him from Native American pagan ceremonies. Later, he met a much more powerful "master spirit guide" whose communication was much clearer.

"This spirit guide, who was actually a demon, was someone I could actually see. The others were shadowy figures. But I could converse with the guide whenever I wanted. I called him master," Feinberg said.

Feinberg's descent into delusion deepened when he visited a beautiful meditation garden in Pacific Palisades designed by a Eastern guru named Paramahansa Yoganonda, founder of the Self-Realization Fellowship.

After regularly attending Sunday services at the garden's chapel led by the organization's swamis, Feinberg was initiated into the belief. He was required to complete regular correspondence lessons in Hindu-style meditations and breathing exercises. The exercises made him feel peaceful inside.

At long last, Feinberg felt something spiritual was happening in his life. The fellowship of the other devotees of the guru made him feel as though he was part of a large family.

"I felt as though I had come home," Feinberg said.

Having been taught by the guru all religions lead to God, Feinberg had no problem accepting a friend's invitation to attend church with him.

"Our guru often quoted the Bible and even taught us some things about Jesus," Feinberg said. "His Jesus, however, was not the one who could save me."

Sitting in church that day, Feinberg began to contemplate the pastor's sermon on Romans 5. Suddenly, it seemed as though the proverbial light bulb went off as the Lord opened his eyes to the gospel.

"I knew at once, sitting there, that I had access to God through Christ which I did not have before, even though I was working very hard, through meditation, to achieve on my own," Feinberg said.

That day, he turned from mysticism and has never looked back. Now, he travels the nation, evangelizing those trapped in the New Age movement and helping Christians understand how to reach New Agers for Christ.

"I learned not to be satisfied when someone says they love and trust Jesus. I learned to discover what Jesus they were talking about. The false faiths have their own Jesus, and he is not the one we know," Feinberg said.

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**Couple ministers to students
via collegiate Sunday school**

By Karen L. Willoughby

**Baptist Press
8/15/96**

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--When their daughter graduated from high school, Donnie and Susan Cook realized there was a gap in their church's Sunday school program.

"We called our youth pastor and told him we had a burden for college students," Donnie Cook said in an 11 p.m. after-worship interview at the Chuckwagon Snack Shack at Glorieta Baptist Conference Center in New Mexico.

The Cooks and 15 members of the college and career class they teach at New Hope First Baptist Church in Cedar Park, an Austin suburb, were at Glorieta to attend Student Week 1996. The annual conference is sponsored by the Baptist Sunday School Board's National Student Ministry.

"There seemed to us to be a need for a more full-blown college/career class than the small one that was being offered," Cook said. "Steve -- the youth pastor -- said he had been praying about that very need himself. That was an affirmation to us."

The class now has grown to about 30 members -- up from five. The members have gotten more involved in church ministries and become acquainted with other church members.

Bible study, rather than community ministries or casual fun, draws people to the class, Cook said.

"My commitment when I went into this was that this was not going to be a cookies and Kool-aid Sunday school class," Cook said. "There wasn't going to be any more drifting in the fog. Scripture draws lines and requires us to get on one side or the other.

"These young adults are at such a critical crossroads in their lives," he continued. "They need the right tools to make the right choices."

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Dee German, a student at Temple (Texas) Junior College and a member of the Cook's Sunday school class, said he has really grown as a Christian since joining.

"Donnie and Susan have really been an inspiration to me in their Christian life," German said. "They've taught me a lot about being Christian. They've taught me how to bring out my fruits of the Spirit."

During the class' first six months, the Cooks took members home for Sunday dinner. When there were too many for their home, they started going after the Sunday evening service to the homes of other members of the church.

The group now is too large to be easily accommodated in most people's homes, so they meet the first Sunday of the month in the church's Family Life Center for games and goodies. The third Sunday of each month, they go to the home of a church member.

Bible study remains the focus. A midweek group draws about 35 college students from the community for topical studies.

"Working with these young people has created such a passion for us," Cook said. "We've benefitted probably far beyond anything we've done for them."

Cook is an engineering design consultant; his wife is an executive assistant with the state of Texas.

"Both our children are grown. We're free from child-rearing so we can concentrate on these young adults," Cook said. "More and more my vocation, I feel, is a tentmaking endeavor as we become more heavily involved in ministry."

Cook said he's scaling back his business to have more time for the college students.

"College students require a lot of counseling," he said. "They're always having crises."

Cook does the Bible studies and most of the counseling. Susan handles the administrative part of the ministry and does some counseling as well.

"We recruited another couple to work with us," Cook said. "It's just another couple for the kids, who really love them. And with them, we're closer to being able to cover all the bases in this ministry."

His wife agreed.

"They're great prayer warriors and she writes notes each week to some of the kids," Susan said. "They have been a blessing to all of us."

Wedded bliss has become commonplace for the Sunday school class, Donnie Cook added.

"We've had four couples meet and marry in this group," he said. "There's maybe a couple more that are in the process."

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