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MEETINGS:

TEXAS--Radio and Television Commission trustee meeting, Fort Worth, Jan. 15-16.

1995 total: Annie Armstrong
reaches record \$38.9 million

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press
1/15/96

ALPHARETTA, Ga. (BP) -- Southern Baptists gave an unprecedented \$38.9 million for home missions through the 1995 Annie Armstrong Easter Offering, according to the Home Mission Board's chief financial officer.

The year-end total came to \$38,908,339, said Ernest Kelley. That represents a 4.66 percent increase compared to the 1994 offering of \$37,177,516.

Home missions supporters welcomed the news.

"I'm delighted that we have again this year set an all-time record in Annie Armstrong income," said HMB President Larry L. Lewis. "And I would express on behalf of all our staff and nearly 5,000 home missions personnel our deep appreciation to Southern Baptists for their strong support for home missions."

Lewis added he's grateful Southern Baptists continue to see missions as a priority and have given generously despite convention controversies and economic recessions in some areas of the country.

"In addition to being grateful for financial support, of course, we're also grateful for the prayer support that Southern Baptists give us for our work."

Woman's Missionary Union President Dellanna W. O'Brien also praised Southern Baptists for the increase.

"Because we Southern Baptists have been faithful in our missions giving in 1995 through the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering, men, women, boys and girls in our homeland will have the opportunity to hear the gospel in fresh new ways," she said.

"I am grateful to be a part of a denomination that keeps its mission vision clearly before us," she added. "Nearly \$39 million is a worthy offering, but not one cent more than our missionaries need to support their programs. We pray that these funds will be blessed as they are used by God in sharing the good news in our nation."

Brotherhood Commission President James D. Williams said exceeding the offering record is an indication the missions spirit is alive and well among Southern Baptists. "I rejoice in the blessings of God that this offering represents and, most importantly, the indication that Southern Baptists can still work together to share the gospel with everybody everywhere," he said.

"I'm especially grateful for the increased commitment on the part of Southern Baptist men and boys and their desire to share with women and girls our common missions task."

The 1995 total shatters the previous record offering of \$37.6 million in 1992. Woman's Missionary Union set an ambitious 1995 goal of \$50 million to coincide with the agency's 150th anniversary. The 1996 goal is \$42 million.

The offering represents 48.7 percent of the Home Mission Board's budget, but all offering dollars go to support home missionaries and projects on the field, Kelley noted.

"The offering did not exceed any previous offering by large gifts, corporate gifts, wills, etc.," he said. "The Annie Armstrong Easter Offering is given by dedicated hearts, often sacrificially, for the cause of missions in America."

Among the reasons Kelley suggested for the increase:

- Southern Baptists recognize that America is a growing mission field.
- WMU's challenging goal.
- Strong support from state Baptist convention leaders.
- Affirmation of the Home Mission Board's priorities -- evangelism, church starting and ministry.

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Restructuring needn't derail
SBC stewardship, leaders say

By Keith Hinson

Baptist Press
1/15/96

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--The excellence of stewardship education resources in the Southern Baptist Convention can continue -- especially if national SBC officials maintain and strengthen ties with state stewardship leaders, according to Ronald E. Chandler, president of the SBC Stewardship Commission and officials who work in stewardship education for state Baptist conventions.

State convention stewardship offices are "our strong partner," Chandler said. "We couldn't do it without them. They're a lot closer to the churches than we are.

"The responsibility they have is going to be even more important. Our depending on them is going to be stronger even than it is now. I don't think you can do it from a national office without the help of the state conventions," Chandler stated.

Under a restructuring plan adopted last summer by messengers to the annual meeting of the SBC, the 19 agencies of the SBC will be reduced to 12.

One of the agencies eliminated will be the Stewardship Commission, and its duties will be moved elsewhere. The SBC Executive Committee will assume responsibility nationally for promoting the Cooperative Program, Southern Baptists' method of supporting missions and ministry efforts of state conventions and, nationally and globally, the SBC.

Meanwhile, the Baptist Sunday School Board will receive the responsibility for church-based stewardship education, Chandler said. "How they're going to handle it at this point has not been determined. I'm sure they'll handle it well."

Harrell Cushing, director of stewardship and Cooperative Program promotion for the Alabama Baptist State Convention, was asked what the role of state conventions is likely to be in the restructured SBC.

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"It's too early to know a definitive answer to that," Cushing said. "At this point in time, we are trying to have input with the Sunday School Board that we could have materials provided that would meet our needs and the church's needs."

BSSB President James T. Draper Jr. noted the board intends to be in sync with Baptist stewardship leaders and their needs.

"We intend to put our full energies behind a strong continuation of stewardship education," Draper said. "We expect to give the widest distribution of stewardship topics through the more than 90 million pieces of church literature we distribute annually as well as through separate stewardship-related items.

"We will work closely with the SBC Stewardship Commission and with state stewardship leaders to assure a smooth transition," Draper continued. "We recognize that stewardship education in the denomination will be most effective as we work in partnership with our state conventions. We will be initiating efforts in this process if bylaws to implement the Program and Structure Study Committee recommendations are approved at the 1996 Southern Baptist Convention."

A partnership in stewardship education between the BSSB and state conventions is essential because of competition from para-church organizations and other "delivery systems" of stewardship education, said Clarence E. Hackett, director of the stewardship department for the Florida Baptist Convention.

"I think the (BSSB) must work with state conventions because of the competitors and the competition that's really out there," Hackett stated. "I think there needs to be in stewardship education a strong cooperative effort with the leadership of the state conventions. ... We've got to walk together in this effort."

The content of stewardship materials will be a key to success, Hackett suggested. He said the BSSB "will need to integrate the concept of stewardship in the context of discipleship and worship in all their materials and products, rather than just isolated as a once-a-year event."

Hackett said Baptists must be led to see stewardship "as a matter of our faith, not just as a crisis of economics. ... It must be a Spirit-led approach."

For now, there is an abundance of resources churches can use in stewardship education, according to stewardship leaders asked by Baptist Press which printed resources they would recommend. Their responses included:

-- "Forward Program of Church Finance," available from the Stewardship Commission. Cushing said this resource is the "favorite that I've used through the years in stewardship development. ... It is a thoroughgoing five-week emphasis on stewardship."

According to the Stewardship Commission, "Forward Program" is a five-Sunday emphasis in which local churches have mailings, Bible lessons, devotionals, testimonies, sermons and discussion on the subject of stewardship. The program calls for preliminary and follow-up visitation of church members and for adoption of a church budget and a time of commitment in which members are asked to pledge support for the budget.

-- "Live for the Lord," which Chandler said is "the best one that I would recommend to churches." Available from the Stewardship Commission, it is a three-Sunday emphasis designed to involve members in praying and making financial commitments. The emphasis calls for several activities, including a fellowship dinner, stewardship lesson, testimonies, sermons and "limited visitation."

-- "Partners with God: Bible Truths About Giving," by Bobby Eklund and Terry Austin (Nashville: Convention Press, 1994). The book is "one of the best pieces" on the topic of stewardship education, said Rod Wiltrout, director of stewardship for the California Southern Baptist Convention.

Wiltrout said he is teaching the book along with other resources and called it "one of the places to start educationally" in emphasizing stewardship.

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-- Books on Christian money management by authors Larry Burkett and Ron Blue. Ty Salter, who directs stewardship education for the State Convention of Baptists in Ohio, said Burkett and Blue's materials are "trying to help folks with their budgets. ... I think it's excellent. ... These guys are talking about money, and they're talking about the firstfruits need to go to God."

Blue's materials are distributed by the BSSB in a series of products titled "Master Your Money," including a video training kit, workbook, and hardcover book.

-- Materials that feature drama as a way of teaching the importance of stewardship. One such resource is "A Glimpse at Life," developed by stewardship director David Waganer of the South Carolina Baptist Convention.

Hackett noted "A Glimpse at Life" contains several dramas churches can produce during worship and other activities. Hackett also praised "And So We Give," available from the Stewardship Commission featuring 16 dramas, skits and other creative worship suggestions.

"We think dramas are an excellent way to communicate the gospel," Hackett said. "We think visually that the younger generation can be reached."

-- "WorshipLife," a new resource scheduled for release in January from the Stewardship Commission. Chandler said "WorshipLife" is a way to emphasize to church members "the biggest reason to give is not whether a church has bills to pay or not, but because we love the Lord. ... The contents are both biblical and practical."

The "WorshipLife" resources, designed for use any time during a church year, call for a "Firstfruits Offering Day" in which church members are asked to "bring an offering in a distinctive worship setting that reflects the priority of God in their lives."

Other WorshipLife resources will include: bulletin inserts, a drama, banner suggestions and a pastor's resource featuring a Bible study of firstfruits and a sermon idea.

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Older Christians give more,
stewardship workers report

By Keith Hinson

Baptist Press
1/15/96

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Older Christians are more likely to be faithful in financial giving than younger Christians, according to Ronald E. Chandler, president of the Southern Baptist Stewardship Commission.

"The older people are still giving generously, regularly and respecting the biblical teachings of tithing," said Chandler, who suggested the failure of younger adults to give generously is not entirely their fault.

"I wouldn't put the blame on the people as much as leadership," Chandler told Baptist Press. "I've been in this work for over 20 years. The leadership is afraid to talk about money, and the Bible says a great deal about it."

Several state stewardship directors largely agreed with Chandler's assessment.

"The bulk of giving stewardship in the churches is from people above age 50," said Rod Wiltrout, director of stewardship for the California Southern Baptist Convention. "Those who were raised in the Depression were also raised in the church. Boomers as a whole have not committed to stewardship in the sense of tithing.

"A lot of them left the church in the '60s, and they were never trained in the area of stewardship," Wiltrout said.

It should be noted some younger adults tithe and give faithfully, said Harrell Cushing, director of stewardship and Cooperative Program promotion for the Alabama Baptist State Convention.

"I'm hearing all along that the boomers and younger are not as faithful, not as consistent in their giving," Cushing said. "We ought also to say that there are exceptions to that. We don't want to paint them all with the same brush."

A variety of factors may explain the lesser giving of younger adults to the church, the stewardship officials said.

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One such factor is the American desire to gain more and more possessions, noted Clarence E. Hackett, director of the stewardship department for the Florida Baptist Convention.

"I have no question in Florida. It is the trend of materialism and consumerism," said Hackett, adding younger adults "have bought the materialistic message that things are more important than other values."

Hackett suggested younger adults are largely ignoring the long-term effects of buying on credit. "They somehow have been taught that there are no real consequences of debt in their lives. They don't seem to worry about that. They want everything. They want instant gratification. They want it now," he stated.

When families plan consumer spending and borrowing, they don't always include giving to the church in their calculations, said Ty Salter, director of church services and business support for the State Convention of Baptists in Ohio.

Salter, who has responsibility for stewardship education among Ohio Baptists, noted when young adults apply for a mortgage, the lending institution will not ask whether a tithe is part of a family's budget.

"A lot of people (applying for a mortgage) don't think, 'I need to take 10 percent off,'" said Salter.

Why don't younger adults give as well as their parents and grandparents? "It's probably a lack of education from their parents," Salter said. "We live in such a material-based society, and I'm as much to blame. The first house I lived in was a better house than my parents live in or my wife's parents lived in. We had a big mortgage on it, but both of us were working at that time, and we could afford that."

Wiltrout, who is also a baby boomer, recommends church members participate in Christian money management courses and seminars. "Consumer debt is very much a factor. It's buying into the world's view of wanting more. That's a part of the seminar. We help them work out basically a way of getting rid of consumer debt," Wiltrout said.

Young adults can benefit greatly from teaching on money management and Christian stewardship, Chandler said. "They need to learn how to manage their money better and postpone some of their wants that they think are needs. The church should most definitely be teaching how," he said.

While some specialists in church growth believe younger adults are hypersensitive to appeals about money at church, that's not necessarily true, Cushing said.

"When I was pastoring, there was a minority that fussed about stewardship sermons, but when you began to analyze that, it was usually folks that didn't want to give and didn't want to be bothered," Cushing noted.

A key to success in educating young adults about stewardship, Chandler said, is to ensure that preaching and teaching is rooted in Scripture.

"I think if we talk to them biblically, they'll listen, and they will respond," he said. "Preach and teach the biblical message. People respond to the Bible. They don't respond to manipulation."

Stewardship education should emphasize the connectedness between worship and financial giving, Cushing said. "In the Old Testament and New Testament, worship and giving were tied together. Worship and giving were almost synonymous."

Chandler also cautioned against "simply making (giving) an obligation rather than an opportunity to worship and to be obedient. I think the hard-nosed approach is out of line.

"The other big error is simply (the notion that) you give to get -- the prosperity thing," said Chandler, describing the error as believing "God has a big shovel, and you give to him so you can get more."

A remedy for future generations of young adults is early childhood training in stewardship, Salter said. "Parents don't educate their kids about tithing. ... The parents should be teaching them stewardship. It takes giving them a little allowance and saying, 'Here are your chores this week. ... You're supposed to give a 10th of your income to God.'"

Still the news is not all bad about giving trends among younger adults, Hackett suggested. He said many younger adults do give but often specify how their churches must spend the money.

"They tend to like direct appeals for designated items. We've learned they like to designate their money. ... I call that trend 'project-based giving,'" Hackett said.

The ultimate result of a lot of designated giving is the financial undermining of the overall church budget, Hackett noted.

He suggested churches can integrate the younger adults' giving to specific projects with budget planning. "I think that we need to listen to them and get their input as the budget is being developed. We need to magnify these special projects they're interested in, put those in the unified budget and along in the year lift up the special projects," Hackett said.

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EDITORS' NOTE: The following two stories can be used in conjunction with the Southern Baptist Convention's Sanctity of Human Life Sunday, Jan. 21.

Her vision yielded home
for pregnant, unwed women

By Barb Marshall

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PICKERINGTON, Ohio (BP)--With a vision but no financial capital, Virginia Sholl stepped out on faith eight years ago.

"The Lord first laid upon my heart the need for helping provide an abortion alternative when I observed my cousin Marcy's home for pregnant girls in Findlay, Ohio," says Virginia, looking back.

"I felt God's leading in my life for this type of ministry; a burden had been placed within me." She adds: "I was shocked when I discovered that my husband, Leland, also wanted to commit to such a ministry. The need was so great! In our area there were no homes available.

"We talked to Marcy and her husband. Their advice was: 'You need to pray earnestly about this. It's a long-term commitment!' Then we talked with our pastor, who was very supportive, (saying,) 'If you feel this is what the Lord wants you to do, go for it!'"

After much prayer, Virginia and Leland knew God was calling them into this ministry. Despite their years of parenting six children, now grown, and their 19 grandchildren, it wasn't long before the Sholls realized how much they didn't know. Education was the key, and they attended several conferences and abortion alternative courses.

The Lord provided key people for the couple at just the right time.

A Christian attorney volunteered his services free of charge for eight years. Through a bike-a-thon the Sholls raised \$900, enough money to get started. For the next eight months they conducted fund-raisers. Through a phone-a-thon \$7,000 was pledged that year.

They had planned to buy a big, older house to serve as a maternity home, but nothing seemed to work out.

In July 1987, three acres of land next to a church were donated to them. The builder of that church offered to build a 2,400-square-foot home for the Sholls with four bedrooms, three and a half baths, a dining room, kitchen, family room and a small houseparent suite for a very reasonable \$54,000.

"Six weeks into the construction of the house," Virginia recounts, "the builder came to us and said, 'I need to tear up your contract.'"

"What's going on here, Lord?" Virginia thought nervously.

The builder said, "I'll build it as you have the money. The Lord spoke to me and said I was not to be paid."

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"That was just the beginning of the miraculous provision of God!" Virginia says. "The money came in as we needed to buy materials, or I would get on the phone and stores donated materials." More than 50 volunteers -- men, women and children -- helped build the house. Some worked almost every week for two and a half years.

When it was time to put in the well, the Sholls had run out of money. A nurse from their church, unaware of the situation, told Virginia, "The Lord told me to give you \$600 -- the bonus I just got from my job." It was the exact amount needed.

"The Lord has been faithful through the entire process," Virginia says, then admitting, "although not always in my timing."

The provision and support from the community was overwhelming. Carpet and vinyl flooring were installed free of charge. New beds and furniture were donated from local stores and a doctor.

During the building process, the Sholls and three other families began the ministry of caring for pregnant young women by taking them into their homes. The year the house was finished, they had seven residents in their home (with only one bathroom).

Heritage Haven opened in September 1990, with a capacity to house nine young women and a live-in houseparent. Within two weeks, the house was full. Over the last eight years more than 600 women have been helped in some way. Some stay eight months, some only a couple of weeks. The home is licensed for women over 18 years old; the oldest resident has been 41. They come because they have no place else to go. Some are homeless, some put out by their parents.

Without help, many would probably have had abortions. Now they have a choice of keeping the baby, putting the child up for adoption or placing the child in foster care until they are able to care for him or her. Most have chosen to keep their babies.

Heritage Haven offers much more than just room and board; Virginia provides strong encouragement to the young women to finish their education by going to high school or getting their GED. The Sholls provide Bible studies once a week, require attendance at a church of each woman's choice and offer many free programs such as sewing, crafts, exercise and Lamaze.

A trained Christian counselor teaches a chastity program, "Your Right, Your Choice," for 17 weeks, two hours per week. From a biblical standpoint, the women learn how to make positive choices for the future.

Each resident is required to participate in "Bootie Camp" for five days, 24 hours per day. During this time they care for a life-size doll. While closely monitored, the young women bathe, change, feed and care for the "baby." They listen to crying and fussy audiotapes lasting up to 90 minutes. When the baby "sleeps," they are allowed to choose what to do with that time. When medical appointments are scheduled, the expectant mothers take the baby with them in a car seat or pay someone to baby-sit.

"This is the perfect reality check and training in how to care for a baby," Virginia says.

"Baby and Me" counseling is done once a week for several months and is taught like a school course with homework assignments. A budgeting class teaches how to handle finances.

The women also pay a maximum of \$6 per day and do household chores, Virginia explains. "Our housemothers are the only paid positions. Presently we have three women, working in three shifts, who provide 24-hour care."

Heritage Haven also has instituted a special relationship with some families in the community. Christian couples take a Heritage Haven resident home one weekend each month, call two or three times a month and often take them on an outing or to a movie. Many families give a baby shower. "It's like an extended family," Virginia notes.

"These girls know they are loved! We do anything we can for them. Our volunteers make most of this possible.

"The most encouraging thing I've seen is how attitudes change -- how they talk to each other, how they treat one another with respect. Some really appreciate the help. Only a small percentage don't," Virginia says of the residents.

"Over the years I've seen God bring dramatic changes," Virginia continues. One 23-year-old stands out in her memory as having a life-changing experience. "She entered the home belligerent, heavy into drugs and alcohol. Coming from a dysfunctional family, she had been living with her boyfriend when she became pregnant."

After six months at Heritage Haven, she accepted the Lord and was radically transformed. Shortly after she left, she returned to Heritage Haven -- to help as a housemother. "She is now married to a wonderful Christian man who adopted her little boy, and they have had a little girl since," Virginia says happily. "Together they run a photography business."

One recent resident had not been walking with the Lord when she arrived at Heritage Haven. "The Lord brought her back to himself and has completely stabilized her. She hasn't let other people affect her with their hurtful comments. She continually reads and studies her Bible. Nothing seems to make her waver now!"

There is a great need for this kind of ministry. In Ohio alone, there are less than a dozen homes with a capacity to house 13 at the most. Virginia says it is possible to start this type of ministry if a person has faith in God and his timing.

"Earnestly pray about it, commit to it, but most importantly -- love the girls," Virginia urges.

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Marshall is a free-lance writer in Pickerington, Ohio, who attends Sycamore Creek Community Church, a Southern Baptist mission. This article first appeared in the January 1996 edition of Experiencing God, a magazine published by the Baptist Sunday School Board.

FIRST-PERSON

Forgiveness for abortion
helped 'bricks fall away'

Baptist Press
1/15/96

By Margaret Birky, with Kurt Birky

PASADENA, Calif. (BP)--April 19, 1994, marked a very special day for my husband, Kurt, and me. Amidst tremendous love and joy, I gave birth to our son, Christian Mel Jeremiah Birky. As we saw our son for the first time and held him in our arms, we were overwhelmed with emotion -- elated happiness and heart-wrenching pain.

Feelings of deep-seated guilt and sadness swept over me as I thought of the impact of the decision we'd made eight years earlier.

Kurt and I had just finished our freshman year of college. We had just begun to date. Yet we made a mistake and I became pregnant.

My mind filled with panic. How could we tell our parents I was pregnant? How could I tell my parents I'd had sex? How would we finish college? How can we support ourselves and a baby? It's not time -- we just met.

At a local pregnancy center, I tearfully told the counselor I honestly didn't see how we could have this baby. The counselor asked about adoption, but I said we couldn't live with ourselves, knowing that a baby we had created from our love was out there somewhere, never knowing where or with whom. She nodded and explained that an abortion could be arranged.

She told us nothing about the "tissue" the doctor would be "removing" -- that it already had eyes, toes, a nose, fingers and even fingerprints. With very little discussion and no prayer, we scheduled the appointment.

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Abortions cannot be performed before the eighth week -- the fetus must have time to develop so it can be pieced back together after it has been ripped apart and removed to make certain no part of the "tissue" is left inside the uterus to cause infection. So, for five agonizing weeks, I desperately hoped my parents wouldn't notice how tired and sick I was. I shrank from any baby brought within 20 feet of me.

We had been informed there might be protesters at the clinic when we arrived. My heart raced! Someone would see us go inside? Someone might try to stop us? Why would those people try to torment me for doing something that's completely legal? Relief washed over me that day in August when there was no one on the steps of the abortion clinic when Kurt and I walked up.

During the following years of my darkness, I have wondered a million times whether we would have turned away had someone only made us aware of the consequences. Because Kurt and I had both been raised in Christian homes, we had a small inkling of the power of Jesus Christ. However, we -- and others -- completely left him out of this experience.

The abortion was painful physically as well as emotionally. I remember every detail of the room I was in and the nurse who held my hand. I can even remember the color of the calico-patterned fabric stitched over the jars where the parts of my baby were collected.

Afterward, I kept expecting the medical staff to sit Kurt and me down and tell us that we shouldn't be having sex. Instead, they sent us on our way with a little brown bag filled with a three-month supply of birth control pills.

The immediate sense of relief the abortion provided faded quickly, only to be replaced by lingering feelings of guilt, depression, rage and worthlessness. Like many women who have had abortions, I experienced a physical pain in my arms so intense that sometimes I could barely lift them. They ached and felt so empty.

Kurt and I tried to gloss over what happened. But when Kurt met Andy Wineman, a leader for Campus Crusade for Christ, the Lord began to work in our hearts.

Andy literally beamed with the love of Christ. "It was through Andy's gentle diligence in sharing the difference between having a religion and having a relationship with Jesus that I began to be convicted of the past. I made a life-changing decision to give my life completely over to Jesus," Kurt says.

Not long after that, Kurt shared with me he could no longer ask for forgiveness from God for something he knew we would do again. With that one sentence, Kurt went from being my "boyfriend" to being the man I was going to honor the rest of my life. With God's help, we made the decision to remain abstinent for the next three years, until our wedding night.

However, we were not fully convicted of what we had done until we settled in Los Angeles following our graduation and wedding. Our pastor, Tom Ciznar, frequently spoke about abortion, often to a hostile crowd at church. It was agonizing to sit in the pew and listen to him. Every cell in my body wanted to run away as far and as fast as I could. But I had to sit there and pretend that just hearing the dreaded word didn't make me panic. It is incredibly difficult to admit you paid someone to kill your child, so I tried rationalizing arguments for the pro-choice movement.

At one point, pastor Ciznar shared his testimony with us. While counseling a young pregnant girl who had no one to support her or her baby, he had done as he had been taught -- he advised her to have an abortion. Bravely, the young woman looked him in the eye and said, "Pastor, I already made one mistake. I'm not going to make another."

Later that year she came back to visit him with her baby. Seeing the very child he had advised her to abort changed his life forever. Tom Ciznar has since become a leader in the pro-life movement in southern California.

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One Sunday a woman from a local pregnancy assistance clinic came to church to make an announcement about a fund-raiser. Before the congregation she sang a song she had written to her aborted child. For those five minutes I writhed inside my skin in sheer agony and bitterness. But those five minutes also marked the beginning of my healing.

That day I cried for hours. Kurt held me tenderly and rocked me. But when I asked him why people like that had to be so mean, he took a deep breath and responded, "I think they're right."

My pulse raced. What??

Kurt proceeded to tell me he had been reading the Bible on the subject. He explained that even though we'd asked God to forgive us for this sin, we weren't really repenting. Ours became an empty gesture to God.

That day, for the first time, I felt the full weight of what Kurt and I had done. Like a brick wall on my shoulders, it had been crushing me. Yet by our taking that first step to condemn our sin, a few of the bricks fell away.

We began to attend pro-life groups. More bricks fell. I applied for a position at the Right to Life League and, for the first time in seven years, shared the truth of my past with the woman who interviewed me. Still more bricks came tumbling down. In the midst of my PACE (post-abortion counseling and education) Bible study, God led Kurt and me to tell our families the truth. So we wrote a letter.

As each call came in from our immediate family members, grieving yet sharing their love and support for our repentance, I was finally able to stand up straight in the eyes of people.

However, I still had to take the last and most important step. I had to accept the clean slate Jesus Christ offered me -- and believe it. In my mind I knew about forgiveness, but I had trouble feeling it in my heart. Kurt often soothed me with the knowledge that Jesus can and does forgive any sin. Today, God has given us his total peace and wholeness through the mercy of Jesus Christ and his ultimate sacrifice.

Confessing and repenting of this sin before our Holy God is not an easy road, but I know now it is the only path that leads to peace and wholeness.

Through PACE and through sharing God's promise of restoration with others, my wound has become a scar. I now use that scar and my knowledge of the deception and lies surrounding abortion to try to save others from the pain and darkness that follows abortion. My scar offers proof of the powerful healing hand of Christ to other post-abortion women.

As Kurt and I revel in the development of our beautiful son, Christian, we can't help but feel we should have already experienced this wonder of birth, instead of the nightmare of death. For us, our son represents the goodness of God's unfathomable grace.

The Jeremiah in Christian's name is a reminder to us -- and Christian -- of our first child, whom we never want to forget. The Bible testifies to the importance of all children in the eyes of God: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart" (Jer. 1:5).

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Birky is director of education for the Right to Life League of Southern California in Pasadena. This article first appeared in the January 1996 issue of Experiencing God magazine, published by the Baptist Sunday School Board.

Family's ordained ministers
stretches to 6th generation

By Barbara Denman

Baptist Press
1/15/96

GRAND RIDGE, Fla. (BP)--For five generations the Hall family has given their sons to Southern Baptist ministry. That tradition continued into a sixth generation Jan. 7 when Anthony Hall was ordained to the ministry by Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, Grand Ridge, Fla.

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And although some may surmise the young man is joining the family business, Hall said the decision to follow their footsteps was a personal decision between God and himself.

A recent graduate of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, Hall said he first felt called to the ministry when he was 16. Throughout college, however, his attention was focused on other interests as he prepared for a degree in sports science and served as a trainer for the University of Florida football team.

"When I was a senior in college, God was still knocking on the door, saying, 'I want you to work for me, not what you want me to do,'" Hall recounted. "I think I did fight it just because my dad was a minister. I lost the fight."

He followed God's leadership to seminary and now as a staff member at North Naples Baptist Church, Naples, Fla.

Standing behind Hall is a rich heritage of gospel preaching. His father, John Hall, has served as pastor of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church 27 years. His grandfather, Roscoe, who at 97 years of age and legally blind continues to preach on the radio and attend association and state meetings, also served the Pleasant Hill church as well as others in Florida. Roscoe Hall's father, grandfather and great-grandfather -- all named John Hall -- served Southern Baptist churches along the Cumberland Gap in Kentucky.

Standing behind Anthony Hall is a loyal congregation. The members of Pleasant Hill "have been constant in their prayer and support of me," he said. "The men in the church took me on fishing trips. As an intern there this fall, they included me in their meetings at a local restaurant, even though I was so young. They are my family." After all, the congregation has known him all of his life.

Hall said his father, who has served Pleasant Hill as a bivocational as well as full-time pastor, has told him the greatest aspect of ministry is to love people. It's a age-old secret, he said, passed down from generations.

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First Baptist Atlanta
unanimous for Reighard

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press
1/15/96

ATLANTA (BP)--First Baptist Church of Atlanta members voted unanimously Jan. 14 to call Dwight "Ike" Reighard as senior associate pastor.

Reighard will be the primary preacher for First Baptist's northeast Atlanta site, where leaders hope to bring the two worship groups together in one site. Senior pastor Charles Stanley continues to preach to those attending the Midtown location, which is for sale.

Following the vote, Reighard's introduction to the congregation and a standing ovation, he said, "I haven't been this nervous since I ran for fifth-grade class president." He called the vote a confirmation of God's calling in his life.

Reighard has served since 1978 as pastor of New Hope Baptist Church in Fayetteville, Ga. That church has grown to more than 5,000 members.

Before the vote, Stanley called Reighard "the right man for this position." Stanley praised Reighard as a godly man, a good preacher, a pastor respected by his peers and as an inerrantist in his views on the Bible.

Reighard will fill the pulpit vacated by Stanley's son, Andy, who resigned in the wake of divorce proceedings between his parents. The divorce suit, filed by his mother, Anna, is scheduled for a court date later this month. Charles Stanley's attorneys have asked for a jury trial. Stanley's lead counsel is a state representative, and the court date could be delayed until after the 1996 legislative session.

Members usually don't vote on assistant ministers but, Stanley said, "We wanted to give everybody in both locations the opportunity to express their opinion."

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Stanley told the congregation last year he would resign if the divorce becomes final, but rebuffed speculation that Reighard's call was to succeed him as senior pastor. Stanley said Sunday night he has no current plans to resign. "You have my word in the presence of God."

Using Proverbs 3:5,6 as his theme, Reighard said he's often asked himself why he would leave New Hope Baptist Church, where he said he is happy and comfortable. "When I was leaning to my own understanding, I wouldn't," he said.

"The choice for me is not between First Baptist and New Hope," he said. "The choice is between being in the center of God's will and being on the parameter of God's will." He added he's looking forward to working with Stanley, whom he called "my wife's favorite preacher."

The service concluded with members praying for their church to rekindle its vision of touching the whole world for God. Stanley also prayed that the two congregation be reunited and the Midtown property would sell. The church has operated two locations since a real estate deal to sell the Midtown property fell through.

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Christian recreators launch
new professional organization By Charles Willis

Baptist Press
1/15/96

LAKE YALE, Fla. (BP)--A geographically and denominationally diverse group of Christian recreators has taken the first steps in establishing a professional organization, thought to be the first independent organization of its kind.

Proposed Jan. 5-11 during the 31st anniversary meeting of Rec Lab, an annual week-long event sponsored by the church recreation program of Baptist Sunday School Board, the interdenominational group would be separate from the Rec Lab event and the board.

To be named the National Association of Church Recreators, the organization is planned as a Christ-centered, biblically based, national, ecumenical group committed to Christian ministry through sports and recreation.

A nine-member board of directors has selected Bob Sessoms, minister of recreation at First Baptist Church, Concord, in Knoxville, Tenn., as the association's first president and has outlined 10 goals "to provide both the platform and opportunity for church sports and recreational professionals to call people into a personal and growing relationship with Jesus Christ."

The goals call for sharing of ideas, developing professionalism, developing a personal support system, developing and enhancing conferences and seminars within the field, developing a sports and recreation certification program, promoting and encouraging development of sports and recreation ministry in local churches, encouraging related curricula and degrees in Christian colleges and seminaries, partnering with other sports and recreation ministry groups, developing and disseminating sports and recreation ministry resources as needed and providing credibility to sports and recreation professionals and their field of ministry.

Other officers are Butch Garman, director of sports ministry at Cedar Springs Presbyterian Church, Knoxville, Tenn., vice president; Jim Riley, director of recreation ministry at Highland Park Presbyterian Church, Dallas, secretary; and Greg Linville, director of recreation ministry at Canton (Ohio) First Friends, treasurer.

Board members planning to seek legal incorporation for the association, in addition to the first slate of officers, are Tim Adcox, minister of recreation and singles ministry at Smoke Rise Baptist Church, Stone Mountain, Ga.; Jan Averwater, director of recreation ministries at Christ United Methodist Church, Memphis, Tenn.; Bob Farmer, minister of recreation at First Baptist Church, Owensboro, Ky.; Roger Oswald, executive director of Church Sports International, San Jose, Calif.; and Barb Wagenfuhr, director of recreation at First Presbyterian Church, Colorado Springs, Colo.

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Professional Christian recreators interested in obtaining information about the proposed association may contact Sessoms at 11705 Mountain View Rd., Knoxville, TN 37922 or by leaving a message at (423) 675-1194.

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(BP) photo (horizontal) posted in SBCNet News Room and mailed to state Baptist newspapers. Cutline posted in the SBCNet News Room.

Sports can attract youth to church;
quality, challenges will keep them

Baptist Press
1/15/96

By Charles Willis

LAKE YALE, Fla. (BP)--Offering the opportunity to play sports can attract unchurched youth to your congregation, but quality programs and continuing challenge to youth interests will keep them, a youth and sports minister told participants in Rec Lab '96.

Speaking at Lake Yale (Fla.) Baptist Assembly, Todd Larson said church leaders need to go beyond attracting youth to evangelizing, discipling and keeping them.

Larson is minister of youth sports and junior high youth at First Friends Church, an Evangelical Friends (Quaker) congregation in Canton, Ohio.

In both sports and youth programs, quality and challenging variety are the elements that will keep youth interested, Larson insisted, adding, "it's youth ministry that will actually keep the kids.

"We use sports to attract young people to come to our church, and the program has to be quality. We do everything first class, because we are looking at attracting a non-churched individual. They look at the church program through secular eyes. If we run a poor quality youth program, it says something about the church and it says something about Jesus Christ.

Basic factors, such as starting games on time and having quality coaches and officials are important, Larson told church recreation leaders. An additional quality touch his congregation has used is putting the names of the youth on the backs of their church T-shirts, prompting the youth to wear them frequently.

"We want this to be their favorite shirt," he explained. "We want them to wear it to school around other kids."

And as for evangelizing and discipling youth, Larson said his church provides coaches with devotional curriculum materials to use.

"To communicate Christian values and principles is sometimes difficult for persons whose background is in sports," he continued, "so we provide material that helps coaches tell youth who God is, what sin is, who Jesus is, how to know him personally and how to make a decision."

Another set of materials on ethics outlines how to deal with teammates, how to relate to opponents, what success is and how to reach one's fullest potential in life.

Sports ministry encompasses persons at all levels of readiness to deal with the gospel, Larson said.

"We want a quick fix, but it takes time for us to make an impact on the non-believer. If we give them points of contact," he concluded, "when they are ready, they will come back to us.

"In keeping youth involved in our program, the important thing is keeping them challenged and involved so they multiply themselves. Always have something for them to look forward to and to grow on."

Rec Lab '96 was sponsored by the Baptist Sunday School Board's church recreation program.

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Three Rec Lab '96 photos (two vertical and one horizontal) posted in SBCNet News Room and mailed to state Baptist newspapers. Cutlines are posted in the SBCNet News Room.

**Emphasize 'Christmanship,'
coach tells recreators**

By Charles Willis

LAKE YALE, Fla. (BP)--"Christmanship" -- the concept of mankind bearing Christ -- should be substituted for sportsmanship in athletic competitions, a longtime coach and church recreation director told participants in Rec Lab '96 Jan. 5-11 at Lake Yale (Fla.) Baptist Assembly.

"We believe Christ is caught more than he is taught," observed Greg Linville, director of recreational ministry at Canton (Ohio) First Friends Church. "People will not hear your words if your faith is not lived out.

"Our faith is a struggle, as in an athletic competition," he continued. "It's easy to be a Christian in Sunday school, but when you are in athletic competition, it can be a completely different thing. If you can control yourself in an inconsequential situation like sports, you can control yourself in other, more crucial life situations."

While competition is amoral, people can choose to act in moral or immoral ways during competition, he said. Society only rewards winners, and as a result, sportsmanship "devolves" into gamesmanship of winning at any cost. For believers in Christ, Linville continued, bearing Christ and encompassing all that is good in sportsmanship can result in a higher standard he calls Christmanship.

In relating to teammates, he said, such a standard results in athletes "who strive to do the thing that will enhance a teammate's performance, including sacrificing one's own ambitions for the benefit of a teammate."

Athletes must always play with full intensity, he observed, while striving to live at peace with every other teammate.

Coaches, he said, must coach with the players' best interest at heart, attempt to win for the players and attempt to mold Christian men and women.

Officials must be viewed as facilitators, not enemies, Linville maintained. They must be viewed as people created in the image of God, and they must be loved, not "worked."

Opponents, in Christmanship, are viewed as co-competitors, not enemies. They also should be encouraged to succeed and pushed to excellence. Linville cites scriptural bases for every point, including Proverbs 27:17, which instructs that iron sharpens iron. Linville said he believes competitors sharpen each other.

"Competition is better than winning," he maintains, "because winning only means something if there is a competition." Winning because the competitor forfeited, he illustrates, doesn't provide a lot of personal satisfaction.

"Compete with yourself," he urges players. "Compare yourself to Christ."

Linville does not downplay the value of winning in competition, saying that while winning is important, so also is trying to win.

"I will never feel bad -- win, lose or draw -- if I have approached a game in an ethical way. But if I win, I will feel better," he laughs.

Success in athletics "is not the gift," he concluded, "but what one does with the gift."

Red Lab 96 was sponsored by the church recreation program of the Baptist Sunday School Board.

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**Recreator says families
are missions institutions**

By Charles Willis

Baptist Press
1/15/96

LAKE YALE, Fla. (BP)--Robby Speer's family is a missions institution, judging by their lifestyle.

From simple acts of one-on-one kindness to full-fledged projects, such as dusting all the church pews when the custodian is ill, Speer's family has viewed such local mission projects as part of the routine of life. So much a part of everyday life is witnessing for Christ that Speer said his children don't think witnessing to an adult is unusual for them.

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And while not every family may be gifted in the ways Speer's family is, he said he believes the family is a perfect teaching unit, a place to teach children that all of ministry is built around experiences and relationships.

Speer, of LaGrange, Ky., is executive director of Sports Reach, the sports fellowship of Baptists in Missions affiliated with the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission. And while his work is focused on missions with a recreational bent, he insists if all families would begin to teach missions and evangelism in the home, the effect on churches would be immeasurable.

"I believe God has ordained the family as the way to learn about missions," he told participants in Rec Lab '96, sponsored by the church recreation program of the Baptist Sunday School Board. Families, he continued, can find missions opportunities all around them "by learning to meet the needs of others, making a difference in the lives of everyday people."

"Everyday people" to Speer are those encountered in the routine of living -- co-workers, neighbors or people who provide services such as mail or newspaper delivery. He encouraged helping with chores or providing an unexpected gift -- a cool drink for the garbage collector, for example.

As for missions at a distance, he suggested adopting a foreign, home or state missionary to write letters of encouragement. Families filling milk jugs with money for a particular missions offering, he said, can help children see how they can directly help a missionary family.

Other family activities that make missions real, he suggested, include visits to Baptist organizations -- seminaries, hospitals and other agencies -- "just to see what they are like."

Among other ways families can participate in missions, Speer said, are:

- getting to know your neighbors,
- filling in for someone who is ill,
- going to a senior citizens' facility to sing,
- writing a note to someone who has experienced a tragedy,
- inviting internationals to your home for a meal,
- going to a deaf church or to a different-language church to visit,
- visiting inmates at the local jail or
- installing a basketball goal at a housing complex.

"Ministry is not always elaborate," Speer observed, "but it can be doing simple things to meet simple needs."

Resources for family missions involvement, "Families Making a Difference," are available from the Brotherhood Commission and from Baptist Book Stores.

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(BP) Rec Lab '96 photos (two vertical and one horizontal) are posted in the SBCNet News Room and are being mailed to state Baptist newspapers. Cutlines are posted in the News Room.

Black, white missions
share same facilities

By Connie Davis

Baptist Press
1/15/96

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--It seemed to be a perfect solution to the problems of both congregations.

One mission -- a beginning congregation not yet independent -- had a building, but too much debt.

The other mission had been sharing facilities with its sponsor but had begun looking for its own site.

So, it was proposed that the two congregations share facilities.

The only glitch was that one mission was African American and the other Anglo -- and Wesley Shotwell, pastor of Hickory Hollow Baptist Chapel, and Jay Wells, pastor of Simeon Baptist Mission, began talking when race was an issue in the United States like it hadn't been in recent years. O.J. Simpson was in the final stages of his trial and the Million Man March was being planned.

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But the two pastors continued talking, getting their Nashville, Tenn., congregations involved, with a successful result.

Shotwell noted he and Wells prepared carefully. A committee of members of both congregations developed an agreement for alternate use of the facilities until one or the other became financially autonomous. To forestall any problems, the church councils meet together every three months.

"Race and divisiveness are on the front burner, so we wanted to show people how Christ brings us together," said Shotwell.

Race continues to divide people in the United States, even Christians, Wells said, which reveals that "we've let culture dictate our faith to the point that it has become more important than the Bible."

Wrong interpretation of the Bible at one point in the nation's history resulted in slavery, noted Wells, who also is director of black church development for the Baptist Sunday School Board.

Both congregations had to move out of their comfort zones, said Wells, to forge a cross-cultural relationship, one of the goals to which the congregations agreed.

Shotwell explained the arrangement "is not a separate-but-equal issue, but a cultural issue because we both feel cultural identity is important." Additionally, the agreement allows good stewardship of facilities, he said.

To bridge cultures, Wells and Shotwell have preached for each other's congregations. The two churches joined with a neighboring Catholic church to hold a Thanksgiving service. Each congregation contributed to the service but did not have to forsake their culture to participate, Shotwell said. The congregations may hold a forum in a few months to openly discuss each other's cultures, in conjunction with Southern Baptists' Race Relations Sunday.

Karen Rollins, a member of the Simeon mission, downplayed the relationship by explaining that God "doesn't look at us as black or white, and that's the way we should look at it. I love my family here -- both families here," she said.

Larry Lindsey, Hickory Hollow's Sunday school director, said the two congregations share most classrooms and that both groups take down and store teaching materials, which has worked out well.

"Being together will do nothing but good to influence our children's minds away from racism, and what better place than a church?" said Lindsey.

Christina Crawley, minister of education for the Simeon congregation, noted Hickory Hollow had helped Simeon in many ways, including keeping its babies in extended session. The church "not only opened up their doors for us, but they opened up their hearts. When they did that, it made us feel comfortable."

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Wheaton professor to join
Southern Seminary faculty

Baptist Press
1/15/96

LOUISVILLE, Ky -- Timothy K. Beougher has been named associate professor of evangelism at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., effective June 1.

Beougher has been assistant professor of evangelism at the Wheaton College Graduate School since 1990 and has served the Illinois college as associate director of its Billy Graham Institute of Evangelism.

At Southern, he will be associate dean for North American ministries in the seminary's Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth.

Beougher holds the bachelor of science degree from Kansas State University, Manhattan; the master of divinity degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas; and the master of theology and doctor of philosophy degrees from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Ill.

He is the author of a 1993 book, "Overcoming Walls to Witnessing," and is the co-editor of two 1995 works, "Evangelism for a Changing World: Essays in Honor of Roy Fish" and "Accounts of a Campus Revival: Wheaton College 1995."

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He is co-pastor of New Hope Community Church, a Southern Baptist congregation he helped plant last spring in the west Chicago suburbs.

He serves on the board of the International Evangelism Association and the Chicago Airport Christian Ministry. Beougher was a member of the executive committee that helped plan the 1995 North American Conference for Itinerant Evangelists.

"We feel extremely fortunate that God has led Dr. Beougher to Southern Seminary and the Billy Graham School," said Graham school dean Thom S. Rainer. "His credentials in the field of evangelism are exemplary."

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ACTS, FamilyNet to air
rally prior to Super Bowl

By C.C. Risenhoover

Baptist Press
1/15/96

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--An edited one-hour video of the Arizona Southern Baptist Convention's "Super Rally '96" will air four times before the Super Bowl on ACTS and FamilyNet, the cable and broadcast television services of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission.

ACTS will air the program on Jan. 27 at 10 p.m. and Jan. 28 at 5 p.m. FamilyNet will air the program on Jan. 27 at 10 p.m. and Jan. 28 at 1 p.m. All times listed are Eastern.

The live two-hour event begins at 7 p.m. Jan. 24 at Veterans Memorial Coliseum in Phoenix and features country singer Ricky Skaggs, former Dallas Cowboys football coach Tom Landry and the contemporary Christian music group Sierra.

Others on the program include Jerry Colangelo, owner of the National Basketball Association Phoenix Suns, who will give the welcome; Miss Arizona Cara Jackson, who will sing the National Anthem; Phoenix TV anchor Mary Kim Titla, who will give her testimony; and Dan Yearly, pastor of North Phoenix Baptist Church.

Skaggs and Sierra will sing several songs and talk about their relationship to Christ during the music-driven program. Landry, who will give his testimony, is the keynote speaker. Yearly will follow Landry, speaking briefly prior to inviting the lost to accept Christ as Savior.

Rally organizers will have 30 teams of 10 counselors available to point individuals to Christ, all using the "People Sharing Jesus" New Testament.

"We're thankful that we have opportunity to bring to the nation via television the spiritual impact of what Arizona Baptists are doing," said Jack Johnson, RTVC president. "I can think of no better preface to the Super Bowl than a program of Christian music, testimonies of God's saving grace and an invitation that invites all to accept Christ as Lord and Savior."

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