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NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee
901 Commerce #750
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(615) 244-2355
Herb Hollinger, Vice President
Art Toalston, Editor
Fax (615) 782-8736
CompuServe ID # 70420,17

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Oklahoma governor takes lead
in spiritual awakening thrust

By Tammi Ledbetter

Baptist Press
10/16/96

OKLAHOMA CITY (BP)--The answer to declining moral values can be found in spiritual awakening. Not a surprising analysis for ministers of the gospel. But in the state of Oklahoma, it's the governor who is offering a spiritually based prescription for what ails America.

Gov. Frank Keating is encouraging Oklahoma's religious leaders to focus on spiritual solutions to the social problems his constituents and all Americans face. Joining him in the appeal is Southern Baptist Convention President Tom Elliff of Del City, Okla., chairman of an eight-week spiritual awakening emphasis initiated by the governor.

"It's refreshing to me to have a leader stick his neck out and take such a stand when it's not politically correct to make statements about faith, family values and the need for a spiritual awakening and God's intervention," Elliff said.

As part of the emphasis, two Southern Baptist pastors in Oklahoma will address the particular problems of AIDS and faith renewal, following on the heels of six other religious leaders representing Jewish, Catholic and various Protestant faiths.

Each Friday, a news release from the governor's office is sent to the media quoting comments by the clergyman designated to address that week's topic.

"America and Oklahoma need a spiritual awakening," Keating said in a Sept. 20 news conference. "As governor, I have heard countless stories of child abuse, spousal abuse and other problems depicting the decline of moral values.

"The answer to these problems is not always temporal or civic," Keating added, concluding, "It is spiritual."

Though Keating's reference to spiritual solutions may be an uncommon emphasis among government leaders, the practice of calling on citizens to pray for spiritual awakening was at one time the norm among American leaders.

During the early years of America's history, Congress issued proclamations for three nationwide fasts, according to R.D. Chatham, author of "Fasting: A Biblical-Historical Study." Several presidents pointed to the need for spiritual awakening, including John Adams and James Madison. And Abraham Lincoln repeatedly turned the nation's attention to God through national fasts during the Civil War.

Keating specified eight issues he hopes to see Oklahoma's religious leaders address, including child abuse, fatherhood, divorce and broken homes, crime and drugs, teen pregnancy, abortion, AIDS and renewing of faith.

Elliff told the Oklahoma Baptist Messenger newsjournal that the governor had called him following the June meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention to discuss the need for spiritual awakening.

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"This was the governor's initiative," Elliff said. "It's significant that we have a governor who realizes the challenges we face are spiritual and moral and not just political."

Noting this is not an election year for Keating, Elliff emphasized Keating's action is "not political."

"The governor said it is amazing we could do so well in the world's eyes on TV after the bombing, but we still have broken homes, abortion and child abuse," Elliff recounted, with a reference by the governor to last year's federal building bombing in Oklahoma City.

"We discussed how it is a problem of the heart, and legislatures cannot change hearts." Elliff said the governor wants to see people's hearts changed and knows that morality springs from the heart and not the halls of the legislature.

Rabbi David Packman of Temple B'Nai Israel in Oklahoma City led off the series of messages by giving attention to the issue of child abuse. Expressing his concern for a 60 percent rise in confirmed child abuse cases between 1985 and 1995 in Oklahoma, Packman said, "It's a tragic trend that we must do everything in our power to stop.

"Some of the answers are in government response with more and better trained child welfare workers and better trained judges, but we also must seek help from neighborhood associations, PTA organizations, civic clubs and religious congregations," Packman said.

Elliff reiterated Packman's call for action. "I urge the people of Oklahoma to beseech God on behalf of our children and parents and pray that God would create in us a deep appreciation for all life."

Keating said his desire to see attention focused on child abuse was sparked by "numerous horrific reports" throughout Oklahoma. "Government response to the problem is certainly important, but I felt we also needed a spiritual response," the governor said.

Religious leaders of all denominations and faiths were asked by Keating to focus on the problem of child abuse following Packman's message, whether it be through a sermon, newsletter emphasis or time of prayer.

Methodist pastor Nick Harris of Oklahoma City followed on Oct. 4 with a message on fatherhood. He pointed to three responsibilities all fathers must assume: providing for his children, protection from physical and social damage, and serving as a priest in shaping children's values.

"The future of society will be determined in the homes of America," Harris said. "It's a man's greatest challenge to be the kind of father his children need. It's time for dads to be dads."

Keating spoke of a Gallup survey indicating 80 percent of Americans feel the most significant family or social problem facing the nation is the absence of fathers from the home. "There must be a commitment from all sectors of society, especially the church, to focus on this severe problem," the governor insisted, noting that 22 million children live in absent-father homes.

Carlton Pearson of Higher Dimensions ministry in Tulsa addressed the spiritual implications of divorce and broken homes in an Oct. 11 address. Delivering the series' final two messages will be Wade Burleson, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Enid, on the subject of AIDS, and Dennis Newkirk, pastor of Henderson Hill Baptist Church in Edmond, on renewing of faith.

"We're not going to attempt to tell these spiritual leaders what to say or how to present it to their members," Keating said. "We want them to discuss these important issues consistent with their own religions."

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Bob E. Mathews contributed to this article.

BSSB, SBCnet add
Internet web sites

By Charles Willis

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--The Baptist Sunday School Board and SBCNet, the Southern Baptist Convention's computer network coordinated by the board, have launched web sites on the Internet.

The address for the BSSB site on the World Wide Web is <http://www.bssb.com>. The SBCNet site may be accessed at <http://www.sbcnet.org>.

"Baptist Sunday School Board Online" is the board's web site identification, according to Chip Alford, BSSB communications department design editor who coordinates corporate content for the site. Subject areas offered online visitors include:

-- "About the BSSB," including a definition and brief history of the agency, a statement of its vision, a listing of the executive management group, information about its facilities, financial facts and a listing of frequently called telephone numbers by departments, conference centers and Baptist Book Stores.

-- "Touching Lives," an area related to products, services and ministries. News and information (updated frequently), student ministry, True Loves Waits and new products are subjects to explore.

-- "Featured Product," detailed information about a selected new product, the needs it is designed to meet and ordering information. The featured product will change several times monthly.

-- "Conferences," including information about the board's national conference centers at Glorietta, N.M., and Ridgecrest, N.C., as well as the Church Program Training Center in Nashville. Conference calendars and registration options will be included.

-- "How to become a Christian" will include an opportunity to provide an e-mail response by those who accept Christ.

-- Links to SBCNet and other Baptist sites, providing links to the SBCNet web site and web pages by a variety of Baptist agencies and institutions.

In the coming months, additional choices will be added related to Bible Teaching-Reaching, Discipleship and Family, Centrifuge and Genevox resources, Broadman & Holman Publishers and Baptist Book Stores/Lifeway Christian Stores.

The SBCNet web site will focus on information about Southern Baptists, including material such as historical facts, the Baptist Faith and Message Statement and the plan of salvation. Also it will serve as a clearinghouse of links to other Southern Baptist web sites, including those of agencies, seminaries, colleges, universities and others.

According to David Haywood, webmaster for the board and SBCNet coordinator, the web site will differ from SBCNet on CompuServe. The site will introduce persons to Southern Baptists and the denomination's entities. SBCNet on CompuServe is a subscription service designed for use by Southern Baptists to obtain resources and participate in interactive forums.

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Pro-football chaplain follows
God's lead to Jacksonville

By Ken Walker

Baptist Press
10/16/96

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--When Jacksonville Jaguars' strength coach Jerry Palmeri asked Don Walker to become team chaplain, the veteran pastor felt his gift was in church planting, not nurturing the spiritual lives of athletes.

But Walker, who had led many sessions of "Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God" by Henry Blackaby and Claude King, knew enough to look and see if this opportunity signaled divine activity. It seemed God was calling him to a crisis of belief, one of seven spiritual realities enunciated by Blackaby: "God's invitation for you to work with him always leads to a crisis of belief that requires faith and action."

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"I think what most impacted me (from the study) was finding God at work and joining him," said Walker, who first participated in the study as a Baptist Student Union minister. "When we got to Jacksonville, I realized this was a place God was at work."

Reflecting on the unexpected turn of events that brought him south to Florida last year, he saw how four of the seven realities of "Experiencing God" affected his move. In addition to a crisis of belief, Walker saw:

-- How God had always been at work, leading him from BSU work at several different colleges to founding New Hope Community Church in Manhattan, Kan. The church was near Kansas State University, where Palmeri had worked as strength and conditioning coach for KSU's football team before he took a job with the Jaguars. (Reality one: "God is always at work around you.")

-- How God had invited him to join his work in professional athletics. After Palmeri's call, Walker recalled he had counseled many athletes in his positions as a pastor. (Reality three: "God invites you to become involved with him in his work.")

-- How God spoke through the Holy Spirit, changing the way he looked at his own plans versus the God's plans. (Reality four: "God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances and the church to reveal himself, his purposes and his ways.")

"Jerry (Palmeri) shared with me God's activity in Jacksonville," said Walker, who said he caught a vision for missions while working on a revival in Canada with Henry Blackaby.

"Jerry talked about the church life and morality he was experiencing (in Jacksonville) that he hadn't seen before. He was excited about the potential of what God was doing, and I caught the dream."

Another door opened for Walker. Because the chaplaincy is a volunteer post, he still had to earn a living. And it just so happened the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) needed a director for its northeast Florida office. Walker was hired.

After being hired by the FCA, a contingent of Jaguars players and cheerleaders helped stage a "Victory Banquet" that revitalized the Christian group's work around Jacksonville. Currently, there are nearly 50 FCA groups -- known as "Huddles" -- in area middle schools, high schools and colleges.

"There seems to be a major move of God in the city, not just with FCA," said Walker, a member of Jacksonville's Southside Baptist Church. "There's what God is doing on the team, and there is also the number of church plants springing up."

One of Walker's first team responsibilities was establishing trust with the players. Because so many people want to "use" professional athletes, he sought to emphasize his role as a servant. Walker began by holding chapel services at the team's first spring mini-camp. He even flew to Wisconsin to conduct Saturday night Bible studies during summer training.

The spiritual atmosphere led to the salvation of nine players over 18 months, according to Walker, who said that is a significant percentage of the 53 men on an NFL team's roster.

Miracles have happened on the field, too. One player recovered in two weeks from a separated shoulder after some of the team's Christians prayed over him.

"When guys get injured, their first response is, 'We need to pray,'" Walker said.

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Walker is a freelance writer in Louisville, Ky., coauthor of "Ultimate Warriors," released in October by Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Jacksonville Jaguars
tap 'Experiencing God'

By Ken Walker

Baptist Press
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JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--When Jimmy and Cassie Herndon headed to Florida for Jimmy's first season of professional football with the Jacksonville Jaguars, they never dreamed the assignment would include sponsoring an at-risk teenager from the Florida Baptist Children's Home.

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But after becoming involved in a study of "Experiencing God" with other members of the Jaguar team and their wives, the Herndons started looking for God at work. They found him across the street from their apartment.

Taking a closer look at the nearby children's home, they were impressed with daily devotions and church attendance that formed the backbone of the home's counseling of troubled youth.

"We had been praying about it and read in James 1 where it says religion is taking care of orphans and widows," said Cassie Herndon. "When we started looking at what they were doing, you could see God working. They take at-risk kids and turn them around, but not like the world would do it."

Jimmy Herndon said they now sponsor a 13-year-old resident of the children's home, spending at least once a week with her. "We usually bring her over for dinner or take her out to eat and talk about whatever she's dealing with."

Seven couples and one single team member of the Jaguars attend the study sessions of Experiencing God. Involvement in the study has been instrumental in leading two other participants -- Joel Smengee and his wife, Donelle -- to sponsor a girl from the children's home.

The study is just part of a spiritual move players say has created a Christian climate unlike anything they have seen elsewhere in football.

"There's an open atmosphere," said Rich Griffith, who came to the Jaguars from New England. "Players are so much more open to God and willing to learn."

"I've had opportunities to speak in different churches and other players are also growing in Christ. We definitely know the Lord is doing some neat things here, and this is where we're supposed to be."

Jimmy Herndon was one of the few active Christians on the University of Houston football team and was delighted to discover an established spiritual presence at his new home in Jacksonville.

"It's neat to see the backbone of this team is God," he said. "There are so many Christians on the team. Everyone knows he is moving. It's like a revival."

The journey through Experiencing God began last spring. Former offensive lineman Shawn Bouwens and his wife, Tracy, were praying about a study they could lead for the Jaguars, who will complete their second year as an NFL franchise this season.

Experiencing God kept popping up in their discussions with other Christians, the Bouwens said. Tracy's aunt, a missionary to Costa Rica, was among those who praised it. When the Bouwens looked over the aunt's workbook, their decision to study Experiencing God was cemented.

While the study is designed to cover 12 weeks, the Jaguars lessons started six months ago and are continuing. Players' travel schedules and limited free time during the fall have forced them to review a lesson only every other week. Vacations and six weeks of training camp halted classes for the summer. Yet, even though they are only halfway through the study, participants said the material has created an impact.

"What I'm getting out of it is being more bold," said Rich Griffith, a member of Casa Adobes Baptist Church in Tucson, Ariz. He, his wife, Keri, and their 1-year-old daughter, Caitlin, attend Hillcrest Baptist while living in Jacksonville.

"As I look back on my life, I see there's no way I could have done things on my own," he said. "It's helped me see where God has brought me and my family, to see where he is in every situation and how everything turns out for the good."

"We found out God brought us to Jacksonville not to play football, but to witness for him," Keri added. "Because society is so enamored with football, it gives Rich a great opportunity."

Keri said it has also opened doors for her. As the wife of a Jaguars player, speaking invitations extend her ministry past a supporting role of his work.

She has addressed several youth groups and Baptist meetings. She also taught Vacation Bible School at Hillcrest during the summer.

"We definitely feel God is working in the National Football League (NFL) and especially with the Jaguars," Keri said. "We've noticed great spiritual growth. There's a great need. The players and families are fairly financially secure, but their faith needs to grow."

In addition to leading her family to sponsor a wayward teen, Cassie Herndon said Experiencing God helped her see she needed to take the study to several women in her apartment complex. But when the Herndons, who are expecting a baby in April, moved to a larger apartment, the study disbanded.

"We keep in contact with them," Cassie said. "I keep praying for an opportune time to start it up again when it won't fizzle, and it will be in God's timing."

Ironically, the idea of searching for the Lord's activity also cost the Experiencing God study group their leaders. Cut during camp training in October, Shawn and Tracy Bouwens felt led to move back to Omaha, Neb. Although the offensive lineman hasn't given up on his pro football dreams, Tracy said they felt God was at work in Omaha and was calling them to be there. She said the Experiencing God study in Florida made a large impact on her and Shawn's lives.

"It was incredible to see the people who were being drawn to the study," she said. "It's awesome to see players praying for each other. Teammates are developing bonds that can't be explained to someone who's not a Christian."

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Hopson: Leave 'Jerusalem'
to see the world changed

By James A. Smith Sr.

Baptist Press
10/16/96

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--Many believers are comfortably ensconced in their "Jerusalem" rather than obeying the Great Commission commandment to go into all the nations with the gospel, an African American pastor told a Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary chapel audience Oct. 15.

"It's all right to start with your own kind. But (Jesus) said, 'Go into all the world,'" said Clarence Hopson, pastor of Broadview Missionary Baptist Church in metropolitan Chicago.

Preaching from Matthew 28:16-20, Hopson asked the seminarians, "How far have we gone from our Jerusalem?" referring to racial as well as geographic distinctions.

"Go out into those strange places that you're not so familiar with . . . Don't be afraid to tread in unfamiliar area. If we're going to follow Jesus, we're going to have to get away from our Jerusalem and move out into Judea and Samaria."

Calling it a "wonderful thing," Hopson praised Mark Coppenger, Midwestern's president, for his willingness to teach an evangelism course at the seminary's new Chicago extension program this fall. The Chicago program is the first northern extension in Midwestern's history, fulfilling an early goal of the Coppenger administration.

"Here's a man who has the message of God in his heart and is willing to share it, not only with you, but with people in Chicago," Hopson said as an illustration of what it means for believers to leave their "Jerusalems."

Hopson also praised Midwestern's conservative stand on the Bible, noting that a staff member of his church is now in Midwestern's Chicago extension program after leaving a compromising "liberal seminary."

God has blessed 20th-century Christians with technology -- airline travel, the Internet, television -- which permits the advance of the gospel, Hopson said.

Rather than taking advantage of that technology during this "last generation," Hopson said many Christians merely talk about the gospel ministry when "we don't have any time to lose."

"One of the church's greatest dangers is to talk about what the Scripture says, rather than doing what it says," Hopson said.

Ministers like to "huddle" like football teams, but never get around to actually moving the ball on the enemy. "We need to leave the huddle and make a touchdown for God," Hopson declared.

The results of witnessing, he noted, are the responsibility of the Holy Spirit.

"We find ourselves today trying to usurp the authority of the Holy Spirit. . . . All we need to do is obey the command of God. He does the drawing," Hopson said.

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"Leave it to God. Leave it to God," Hopson insisted. "You do the part he has commanded us to do and I tell you we will see the world changed!"

Hopson was invited to preach in chapel as a result of a partnership between Midwestern Seminary and the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board in which pastors who are exemplary in evangelism are brought to the Kansas City, Mo., campus of the seminary. The chapel speakers, Midwestern administrators believe, will show students that the churches in the Midwest/Great Plains region can be as successful as those in the South's "Bible Belt."

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Virginia board reorganizes
to heighten church focus

By Robert Dilday

Baptist Press
10/16/96

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--"Virginia Baptist Resource Center."

For most callers phoning the Virginia Baptist Building Oct. 3, that greeting from the receptionist was the first indication of organizational changes approved the day before by the Virginia Baptist General Board -- whose own name may be changed in November.

At their fall meeting, board members approved "Church First," a repositioning -- effective Dec. 1 -- of board staff members designed to make their work more responsive to churches affiliated with the Baptist General Association of Virginia. In addition to rechristening the Baptist building, "Church First" also:

- arranges staff members into six "groups" instead of divisions and departments. While each group is assigned specific tasks, many assignments overlap and the new structure relies on regular communication among group leaders. Board employees now will be called "Virginia Baptist Resource Center staff."

- divides the state into seven regions, each with a consultant from the resource center living in the region to respond more quickly to churches' requests.

- begins a new partnership with Woman's Missionary Union of Virginia for mission education and mobilization. WMU retains its auxiliary status but some staff members may be jointly employed by the resource center and WMU.

- eliminates some staff positions and creates several new ones, including a director of personal spiritual growth and a family ministries consultant.

As part of the changes, messengers attending the Nov. 12-13 meeting of the BGAV will be asked to change the board's name to "Virginia Baptist Mission Board" to reflect more clearly its purpose.

Tied to the reorganization is a recommendation to change two of the BGAV's three giving channels.

Under the budget, approved by board members without opposition but also requiring approval during the BGAV November meeting, Virginia Baptists will spend more money on ministries in their state in 1997, and less for national and international causes.

Almost all of the increased revenues for Virginia -- about \$1 million -- will be allocated to the Virginia Baptist General Board's reorganization.

Baptist General Association of Virginia budget planners are recommending a shift in two of the state convention's three giving tracks that divide funds between Virginia ministries and causes outside the state.

Churches affiliated with the BGAV give their mission money through one of the three giving tracks -- World Mission 1, 2 or 3 -- or craft their own plan.

World Mission 1 funds national and international missions through the Southern Baptist Convention; World Mission 2 through a mixture of SBC and other ministries; and World Mission 3 through the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

In the current \$15.4 million BGAV budget, all three tracks allocate 62 percent to Virginia causes, 2 percent to partnership missions and 36 percent to national and international missions.

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The \$15.5 million BGAV budget recommendation for 1997 increases Virginia's allocation in the World Mission 2 and 3 tracks to 68 percent, and reduces contributions to national and international causes to 30 percent. Partnership missions continues to receive 2 percent.

The World Mission 1 giving track remains unchanged.

Budget committee chairman Gene Watson said the percentages in the World Mission 1 track were left untouched because the option is the "traditional" one and churches which select it are intensely loyal to the Southern Baptist Convention.

Other BGAV officials have said that loyalty is especially important since the formation by Virginia Baptist conservatives of their own state convention, who separated from the BGAV last month in part because they believe the state association is weakening its ties to the SBC.

However, both the Southern Baptist Convention and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship will lose money under the proposal, said BGAV Treasurer Nat Kellum. He estimated the Southern Baptist Convention will receive approximately \$360,000 less from Virginia next year if the proposed budget is adopted. The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship will get about \$135,000 less.

The budget committee also is recommending the elimination of Americans United from the 1997 budget. Watson said the committee felt the organization, a Washington-based advocacy group for separation of church and state, no longer represents the needs of Virginia Baptists.

In the past few years, Americans United has drawn fire from conservatives who have opposed its positions on government-mandated prayer in school and tuition tax credits.

Americans United received about \$3,000 in last year's budget, Kellum said. The budget committee is recommending the funds be allocated to the Baptist Joint Committee, another Washington-based group working on religious liberty and church-state issues.

As to the reorganization, Shelton Miles of Nathalie, Va., who chaired the panel which recommended the changes, said, "We want to institute the idea that the Virginia Baptist General Board exists for the churches out there."

The new organizational structure is an outgrowth of a strategy plan approved at last November's annual BGAV meeting. The strategy planning committee's report stated that the board should decentralize its services to make them "needs-based and customized for the local church."

Earlier this year an implementation council was named to carry out the strategy plan and a "renewal team" was asked to propose a new structure for the board.

Most discussion from board members in their Oct. 2 meeting focused on the regional consultants, who some fear will compete for authority with directors of missions in the state's 43 district associations.

The consultants -- essentially service representatives for the resource center's ministries to the churches -- will work with churches and associational leadership to help them find products and services to benefit their ministries, assist with strategy planning, bring together consulting teams and work with leaders seeking continuing education and spiritual renewal resources. They will assume duties for conflict mediation services and will train pastor search committees, tasks previously handled by the office of church-minister relations.

Not all Virginia associations employ a director of missions, but those that do have assigned them similar tasks.

"In no way will they fill the role of a director of missions or compete with it," Miles stated. "If in the unlikely case an unfortunate situation arose, the director of missions would win a contest every time," he added, because of the association's smaller geographic area. The seven regions are expected to encompass between 200 and 300 churches and probably several district associations.

"The consultants will not compete with us, but complement our work," said Jesse Ramage III, director of missions in the Portsmouth Baptist Association and a member of the renewal team. "I'm looking forward to having access to new resources and information."

Reginald McDonough, executive director of the board, said he expects "very close working relationships" with the directors of missions. "This should not be viewed as inserting another level of organization."

McDonough said he expects a net gain of five employees after all positions are filled.

Under the proposed budget, a new item allocates \$103,000 for debt retirement on the Virginia Baptist Building -- now called the Virginia Baptist Resource Center. Total debt on the building, purchased in 1986, is \$230,000, said budget committee chairman Watson.

Other line items in the budget are identical or very close to current allocations.

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Church opens doors, witnesses
to Robert Duvall's film crew

By Lynn Clayton

Baptist Press
10/16/96

LAFAYETTE, La. (BP)--Drop-in guests are not unusual for pastors. East Bayou Baptist Church in Lafayette, La., even prays that non-church members who drive by the church plant will be drawn to come in. But this drop-in was different.

"Brother Mike, Robert Duvall wants to see you," the excited secretary told Mike Walker, the pastor.

"Who?"

"Robert Duvall. You know, the guy on 'Lonesome Dove,'" the popular western television mini-series.

"What does he want?"

What Duvall, Academy Award-winning actor, wanted was to turn the East Bayou church building and many of its members into movie stars. Well, at least movie actors and extras.

Duvall had been filming a movie in south Louisiana for two months. The movie, titled "Apostle E.F.," is about a charismatic pastor-evangelist in Dallas who kills a man and flees to Cajun land. While there, he comes under the influence of black charismatics and finds redemption.

Duvall was in Lafayette looking for a church building that could be used in the film. When he saw East Bayou's contemporary, upscale building, he believed he had found it.

In a matter of hours, a tentative agreement for the building's use had been reached.

"Five of us read the script and believed it would be all right for us to do this," Walker explained. "There is no profanity and no nudity or explicit sex. It is not a Billy Graham movie, but it does have a message of redemption."

Walker said he and the church membership believe God was providing them with a significant witnessing opportunity.

"Can East Bayou go to Hollywood to penetrate it with the gospel?" the pastor asked rhetorically. "No. But could God put Hollywood in our laps, in our property, to intermingle with them and minister to them?"

The church membership showed its support in its response to a casting call for extras in the worship scene with Apostle E.F., played by Duvall. More than 300 members showed up.

However, Walker acknowledged, cooperating with the movie company has not been without criticism.

"Some people -- not many, but a few -- think we are cooperating with the devil. But these movie folks need to get saved, too."

When some church members had reservations, Duvall came to a Wednesday evening prayer service. Afterward, he explained the movie project and answered questions members had.

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"Our people have prayed for them (actors and crew)," Walker said. "We've given a few of them Bibles, and we have shared our faith as we have opportunities. Just like with everyone else, some have been receptive and some have not. Some of them, we have discovered, are strong born-again Christians."

Producing the small-budget movie is almost an obsession of Duvall, its writer, producer, director and star.

"Several years ago I worked with two theologians from Rice (University in Houston) on a movie titled, 'The Institute,'" Duvall recounted. "I went down there every month for nine months or so. It became apparent it wasn't going to happen, and Hollywood wasn't going to cast me (in the starring role) anyway.

"I was disappointed. I was really into the research. I decided to do my own."

Duvall said he is trying to make an honest movie about Christian, charismatic or Pentecostal evangelists.

"I have a great amount of empathy for those who are sincere, although that is not necessarily my persuasion," Duvall said. "I have none for those who are insincere."

Duvall said he is using authentic, practicing evangelists for many of the movie's scenes, as well as using professional actors for others.

The movie crew was at the church site for three days -- one day to prepare, one day to film and one day to tear down and move. They paid the church's utilities and other minor expenses.

The day of filming was blessed with a Louisiana summer downpour of rain. That only seemed to add a note of drama to the brief outside scenes.

In the church's education building, 300-plus church members and other extras stood in line to have real Hollywood makeup applied to their faces. Some were told they would have more significant extra roles.

The filming was over as abruptly as it began, but church members will not soon forget the day Hollywood came to East Bayou Baptist Church.

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CORRECTION: In the (BP) story, "Parental school involvement advocated to guard children," dated 10/15/96, please correct the organization and contact number cited in the eighth paragraph to Family Research Institute (303-681-3113). Delete the address cited.

Thanks,
Baptist Press

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