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**NAMB organizational structure
based upon 'process model'**

By Herb Hollinger

**Baptist Press
12/17/96**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--The organizational structure of the Southern Baptist Convention's new North American Mission Board will follow the "process model," according to the Implementation Task Force.

After months of study and dialogue with consultants and a "wide range of Southern Baptist leaders," the ITF determined the most effective method of organization for NAMB was a "process model," according to David E. Hankins, chairman of the NAMB transition communications team and vice president for convention policy for the SBC Executive Committee. The model was approved at an ITF meeting in Atlanta Dec. 10.

The ITF is a 10-member committee appointed by the SBC Executive Committee to assist in the restructuring of the denomination, called "Covenant for a New Century," as approved at the 1995 SBC annual meeting in Atlanta.

The North American Mission Board will officially be birthed following the June 1997 annual meeting of the SBC in Dallas. NAMB is the new agency resulting from the merger of the Home Mission Board, Radio and Television Commission and Brotherhood Commission.

The "process model," according to ITF members, begins with the mission statement and builds the organization around the processes (tasks or activities) that contribute to accomplishing that mission. It is a model often used in corporate structuring, according to the ITF.

"To proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, start New Testament congregations, and minister to persons in the name of Christ and to assist churches in the United State and Canada in effectively performing these functions" is the mission statement of the NAMB as adopted in the "Covenant for a New Century."

The "process" organizational model centers on the two primary processes: evangelism and church planting, Hankins said.

"A significance of the organizational model for NAMB is that it is a 'matrix' design rather than a hierarchical design," Hankins said. "The advantages of the matrix, or grid, organization are increased cooperation, communication, flexibility and rapid response." In this model, people are encouraged to work outside their own compartments as team members, he said.

This guards against a bureaucratic mind-set, the limitations of narrow job descriptions and turf protection. It requires less middle management and more teamwork, Hankins explained.

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An evangelization group will give leadership to SBC churches in direct evangelism strategies such as witness to various faith, cultural and age groups. The group also will provide strategic assistance to event or mass evangelism. The church planting group will develop the process for achieving the objective of starting New Testament congregations.

In the NAMB model, Hankins said, the two primary processes, evangelization and church planting, are assisted in their tasks by three support areas: the media and mission education group, the strategic planning and mobilization group, and the business services group.

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(BP) graphic posted in SBCNet News Room.

**U.S. evacuates 357 Kurds
related to Southern Baptists**

**Baptist Press
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ANKARA, Turkey (BP)--The United States began evacuating Dec. 4 about 5,000 Kurdish relief workers and their families from northern Iraq -- where their lives were at risk from Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein.

Among those rescued were 357 Kurds connected to an international relief agency through which Southern Baptists have aided the Kurds in northern Iraq since the end of the Persian Gulf War.

The challenge now is to find places for the Kurds to begin rebuilding their lives, said Paul Smith, a Southern Baptist who worked in northern Iraq until his recent retirement.

The evacuation came almost three months after U.S. forces cleared out about 2,000 Kurds connected to American military and U.S. government agencies operating in northern Iraq, leaving behind about 5,000 people related to nongovernmental relief agencies. American aid workers feared Saddam Hussein would make good on his threat to kill Kurds who had collaborated with his enemies.

InterAction, a Washington-based umbrella coalition of 150 humanitarian agencies, mounted an intensive campaign to convince the U.S. government to evacuate the remaining relief workers and their families. President Clinton approved the evacuation after the November presidential election.

The workers and their families were bussed to the Turkish border, where representatives of the relief agencies vouched for them individually. After thorough questioning by Turkish troops, the Kurds were then taken to an air base and flown by military transport to Guam, to be processed for refugee resettlement in the United States and elsewhere.

"They were turning back about 15 percent of the people at the border," Smith said. "But none of ours were turned back. That's quite good, and we're real thankful."

One group of refugees may eventually resettle in Greenville, N.C., where they have been offered jobs by a drilling company they worked for in Iraq, Smith said. Several dozen other families, however, will need sponsors to help them begin life in the United States.

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**Rankin: Still time to join God
in bringing the world to Christ**

By Mark Kelly

**Baptist Press
12/17/96**

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--The world's need for the gospel has never been greater, and Southern Baptists have been given unprecedented opportunities to help bring it to Christ.

But if you want to play a part, you'll have to hurry.

"God is moving as never before to bring a lost world to Christ," said Jerry Rankin, president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board. "He's moving quickly to fulfill his promise that the gospel will be preached to all peoples before the end comes.

"There are only a few nations left in the world still closed to the gospel. I can count them on my hands," he said. "We may, in fact, be sending out the last generation of missionaries."

The Foreign Mission Board recently released a list of 750 new missionary requests for 1997 -- 50 of which were labeled strategic priorities. The requests reflect needs among ethnic people groups that have never heard the gospel as well as "harvest fields" where potential response is great.

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The door of opportunity has been thrown wide open in places like Russia, where Baptist leaders have requested 150 new missionaries to help start and develop churches. In other places, God has provided strategic moments to start new work in countries like Bosnia, where war has left people very receptive to the gospel.

In some places, like Mozambique or Cambodia or Mexico, response to the gospel is limited only by the number of workers available. Among some peoples, Christian professionals can carry the good news of God's love where no one has ever heard it.

The opportunities to serve are many and varied, said Lloyd Atkinson, who directs the board's missionary selection department.

"The needs are so great we could have listed 10,000 requests," Atkinson said. "But because of limited resources we ask missionaries on the field to narrow the number down. These top 50 requests are the highest priority of the highest priority."

"As urgent as the needs are, however, at least three-fourths of these requests may not be filled," Atkinson added. "That's a real burden for me."

"But God's the one who lays a people group or country on someone's heart. He's the one who designs them through their gifts and experiences for their assignments."

"Surely God has someone prepared for each of these requests."

For more information about responding to needs for new missionaries, call 800-999-3113, ext. 1635.

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(BP) file photo (horizontal) to be mailed Dec. 16 to state Baptist newspapers by the Richmond bureau of Baptist Press. Cutline available in SBCNet BP Photo Library.

SIDEBAR

**Workers needed overseas
include pastors, teachers**

**Baptist Press
12/17/96**

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--A sampling of priority requests for new overseas workers:

English teacher -- Teach literature, writing, grammar and conversational English 12 to 18 hours per week while developing relationships for lifestyle outreach. China.

Church developer -- Strengthen churches and train church leaders and pastors using Theological Education by Extension in several responsive areas around the world where trained pastors and church leaders are needed. Mozambique, Russia, Cambodia, Nigeria.

Church planter -- Start and develop churches. Opportunities in areas where local Baptists have appealed for assistance, among ethnic groups with little or no access to the gospel and in countries recovering from civil war. Russia, Ukraine, Central Asia, Cote d'Ivoire, Honduras, Peru, Hungary, Madagascar, Bosnia.

Community center ministry -- Manage the work of a community center, teach English and vocational/technical classes to reach people with the gospel and start house churches. Guinea.

Student worker -- Work with state youth organization and university students; help churches develop ministries to these groups. Brazil.

Urban evangelist -- Witness, disciple and plant churches; develop a model that can be used in other areas. Sao Paulo, Brazil.

Rural health worker -- Develop a community health ministry and use contacts as opportunities for evangelism and church planting. Nigeria.

Strategy coordinator -- Study the language, culture and demographics of an ethnic group with little or no access to the gospel; develop and implement a strategy for evangelism. Asia, Southern Asia, Africa, Russia.

Nurse -- Develop mobile medical clinics as a method of sharing the gospel with Muslims whose country has been devastated by civil war. Africa.

Trade evangelist -- Learn the language and find employment using a secular skill to establish a presence and practice lifestyle ministry. Egypt.

Hospital administrator -- Manage the work of a Baptist hospital that admits 4,000 patients a year. Yemen.

Community development evangelist -- Work as an evangelist, agriculturist or public health worker to begin ministry to an ethnic group with little or no access to the gospel. Mali.

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There are dozens of other needs -- for surgeons, and well drillers and children's workers and business managers and pilots and musicians -- even a chemical engineer.

For information on specific needs -- or to talk with someone about God's call to overseas service -- call the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board at 1-800-999-3113, ext. 1635.

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**127 S.C. ministers endorse
gov's Confederate flag plea**

By Don Kirkland

**Baptist Press
12/17/96**

COLUMBIA, S.C. (BP)--As controversy swirled around the unfurled Confederate battle flag flying over the South Carolina statehouse, more than 100 ministers joined ranks in Columbia Dec. 12 behind Gov. David Beasley's "desire to bring about racial reconciliation."

They met for a noon news conference at Trinity Cathedral, directly across the street from the capitol and in the shadow of a banner that has caused emotions to churn ever since Beasley proposed that it be removed from the dome to another site on the statehouse grounds.

"It is our desire," said a statement released by the group of 127 ministers, "that divisions be lessened between the races of our state and between the sincerely held points of view regarding the place of this flag."

The statement, shaped in part by the governor's pastor, Dick Lincoln of Shandon Baptist Church, Columbia, said "while the flag holds a position of high honor in the minds of many South Carolinians, it is a source of anguish for many others."

Calling for the flag controversy to be approached by both sides as "first and foremost a spiritual matter," the statement asked for South Carolinians to put personal preferences aside and "ask God to guide us to a place of reconciliation and a future of togetherness."

A day earlier at the Blatt Building in Columbia, 16 ministers said Beasley is "driving a wedge in the body of the church" by his efforts to remove the flag from the capitol dome. Bobby Eubanks, pastor of Ridge Baptist Church, Summerville, urged the governor to get back to his agenda to "put families first" instead of "wasting his moral and his political capital on the Confederate battle flag."

Lincoln issued a plea for "people to come together in prayer and civil discourse." Referring to Romans 14 dealing with a conflict among Christians in Rome, Lincoln said, "There can be differences of opinion, but there should be civility and unity."

The Shandon pastor said the group was not meeting to say that there's a single solution to the controversy, but to promote "a spiritual level of discourse that will aid in racial reconciliation."

Mike Hamlet, pastor of First Baptist Church, North Spartanburg, and newly elected president of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, said the controversy offers "a great challenge for us as a state."

He also described it as a "good time of opportunity for us. We need to deal with this issue. Today, we are appealing to people of faith to seek what is right and to grab the high ground together. Then we'll be victorious as a people and as a state."

Several hours after the news conference, the executive board of the South Carolina convention, holding its organizational meeting for 1997, approved a motion "encouraging South Carolina Baptists to pray for racial reconciliation and also for our state leaders as they deal with issues regarding the Confederate battle flag."

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**Billy Graham to utilize
Internet for new believers**

**Baptist Press
12/17/96**

MINNEAPOLIS (BP)--In addition to calling a telephone number shown on the TV screen, new believers also will be able to report their decisions for Christ after a Billy Graham telecast via a special Internet web site.

On Dec. 19 in most markets the evangelist will utilize a broadcast-specific Internet site for the first-ever on-line follow-up for one of his syndicated specials, this one titled, "A Joyful Christmas in a Fragile World."

Traditionally, Billy Graham crusade telecasts include a phone number which viewers can call for spiritual counseling, to report a commitment to Christ or request follow-up materials. From now on, Billy Graham television specials also will incorporate a special Internet address -- <http://www.billygraham.org>.

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"Using the Internet to expand Mr. Graham's ministry is a logical step in his progressive use of emerging technologies," said Stan Jackson, director of administration for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA). "This will enable individuals to hear from Mr. Graham immediately after making a commitment to Christ and obtain our traditional follow-up materials at their convenience, 24 hours a day."

Visitors to the site initially will see a graphic from the program and be able to access nine interactive blocks, based on their individual need. Those making first-time or recommitment decisions to Christ can download a special letter from Graham along with the same follow-up materials used in his live crusades.

In addition to information on how to accept Christ and follow him, the web site includes frequently asked questions and answers about Christianity. A half-dozen still photos from the program are available and several items also are offered free of charge, including a copy of the New Living Bible offered in the Christmas special and a one-year subscription to *Decision*, BGEA's monthly magazine.

The site has several hyperlinks including one to the permanent home page of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, <http://www.graham-assn.org>. Another is to Operation Christmas Child, a holiday ministry outreach of Samaritan's Purse, a relief organization headed by Graham's son Franklin, which is featured in the telecast.

The new web site opened Dec. 16 and will remain on-line for three weeks. In the future, specific follow-up materials will be provided at the same Internet address concurrent with each BGEA television outreach.

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**Prepare well for trips abroad,
new book tells mission vols**

By Keith Hinson

**Baptist Press
12/17/96**

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Members of volunteer missions teams must be well-prepared or run the risk of being embarrassed, incompetent or accidentally rude, according to a new book titled, "Successful Mission Teams: A Guide for Volunteers" (Birmingham: New Hope, 1996).

Martha VanCise, the book's author, worked for many years as a missionary in Haiti. She developed a training program for American volunteers on short-term mission projects.

"We found they didn't have any kind of orientation. Sometimes, they had a brochure, a list of maybe 10 do's and don'ts," recalled VanCise, who worked alongside several evangelical mission groups.

Before writing the book, VanCise spoke with a variety of missionaries about their experiences with volunteer teams. Their stories contain a mixture of humor, pain, awkwardness, embarrassment and ignorance.

VanCise writes of one American pastor who visited a poverty-stricken mission field to preach. "He chose as a subject the 'Soap Opera Lives of Joseph,'" VanCise recalled. "The bilingual pastor struggled with translation, then finally began preaching his own message on Joseph."

After the service, the American pastor commented, "It sounded to me like the (translator) said more than I did." VanCise's husband, Dave, explained people in cultures without electricity are unlikely to know what a soap opera is.

When the American pastor returned to preach the next night, he began his message by saying, "Puppy love is real to the puppy." The translator shrugged and asked, "What is 'the love of the puppy?'"

The new book has received high marks from missions executives, even beyond Southern Baptist life. Jim Reapsome, executive director of the Evangelical Missions Quarterly, commented, "I know of no better book for anyone thinking about being a short-term mission team volunteer, overseas or at home."

VanCise emphasizes complete information and careful planning as critical to an effective missions trip. One large American church sent a volunteer team to a Caribbean country, based on one handwritten letter and limited contact with a Caribbean pastor.

The American church's pastor was infuriated when he learned of the menu prepared for the team by their hosts. "Popcorn and gravy! That's all they fed my people," the pastor later told VanCise. "Do you think I'm going to let members of my congregation go to a mission field and be fed popcorn and gravy for a week? ... As far as I'm concerned, I'll never encourage my people to go on a mission team again."

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In further conversation, VanCise found the pastor had not worked within any denominational structure or even done sufficient research on his own. "I found it difficult to believe this ... church, that ministered to professionals, and had just launched a multimillion dollar building project, would give money and send church members to work with an uninvestigated organization."

So why would anyone feed popcorn and gravy to guests? "The pastor ... probably heard that Americans love popcorn and pour gravy on everything, so he went to great effort to locate and purchase the expensive packaged food that he thought pleased Americans," VanCise explained.

Volunteers should also be aware of the scruples and customs of other cultures, VanCise advises, citing tipping as a potentially touchy example.

"In Latin America, Africa and the Middle East, you must tip if you expect to get service. If you have an aversion to tipping, lay down your rights to your aversions and tip," VanCise declares. "Some North Americans have blurted out, 'I work for my money. No one tips me. I'm not going to pay someone to bring me a soda.'

"The missionaries constantly deal with the people you will be meeting. The service the missionary receives tomorrow will depend on the tips you give today," VanCise cautions volunteers.

Volunteers should also be careful to respect their missionary hosts, VanCise notes. "After one team spent a week in a missionary home, a team member said with disdain to the wife, 'You're no missionary. You're just a housewife and a mother.'"

The new book addresses a variety of topics, including etiquette, traveling abroad, proper attire, teamwork, sanitation and items to take or leave at home.

Even with mistakes that have been made, volunteers can still have a successful missions experience, VanCise notes. "Effective volunteers will not only exhibit the attitudes of servanthood, openness and flexibility, but they will inspire others to be mission volunteers," VanCise writes.

"These volunteers do not seek personal fulfillment, but rather the best interests of global missions. They fill a place in missions that no one else can fill. They are the links that unite the home church and the mission field."

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**Test your awareness
of volunteer missions**

By Keith Hinson

**Baptist Press
12/17/96**

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Volunteers on short-term mission trips can greatly aid or hinder the work of vocational missionaries, according to a new book titled, "Successful Mission Teams: A Guide for Volunteers" (Birmingham: New Hope, 1996).

Martha VanCise, the book's author, describes numerous "do's and don'ts" for team members who want a successful mission experience. As a way of testing volunteer missions awareness, try answering "true" or "false" to the following seven statements:

1. Volunteers should expect to see full-time missionaries in very difficult living conditions.
2. Volunteers should look at the mission field as a good place to begin developing a vibrant spiritual life.
3. Volunteers should dress for comfort for most construction projects.
4. Volunteers should avoid casual attire when arriving in many foreign airports.
5. Volunteers should be prepared to give up a great deal of privacy.
6. Volunteers should consistently practice generosity toward local people.
7. Volunteers should accept seats of honor at church, even when local people may be asked to move to another seat.

Answers:

1. False. "Missionaries do not take vows to suffer, but vows to serve," VanCise notes. "At times the missionary may have to sleep on a bug-infested mat and eat guinea pig. These experiences, though, are usually rare and of short duration."

2. False. "The mission field quickly separates those who speak of the fruit of the Spirit from those who possess the fruit," VanCise advises. "If you plan to serve the cause of global missions, don't leave home without a vital, growing spiritual life. Spiritual preparation cannot be left to the last minute."

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3. False. In many cultures, shorts are appropriate for men but seldom for women, according to VanCise. Also, men should not remove their shirts but wear T-shirts, she advises.

4. True. VanCise recalls one team's arrival when "the men wore jeans, work boots, mission logo T-shirts and caps emblazoned with the names of seed companies. Some girls came in T-shirts, long cotton skirts and sneakers. ... The problem is that teams think that the country is so poor that they don't want to come too spiffy. They don't realize that the people here dress in ruffles and frills to go to the airport."

5. True. VanCise quotes the advice of a missionary who said, "When you join a team, you have to give up your rights as an individual. Privacy and individual rights are left at the airport."

6. False. VanCise writes of one American team that had worked side by side with local people. "On the last day, against the request of the missionary, team members began distributing their clothes, shoes and watches to their new friends. A month later, when a second team arrived, ... the team members were besieged by requests for favorite shirts, jeans, shoes and watches. ... The team member who hands out gifts will definitely take home warm fuzzy feelings, but the ongoing cause of missions will be hindered," VanCise warns.

7. True. "In church, you will be given front choice seats. Others may be bumped from their front row seats to accommodate you. Although the practice may upset you, graciously accept the seat arrangements. ... Your reactions and countenance can be a positive or negative witness."

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Couple reaches 50 years of Christmas programs

By Julie McGowan

Baptist Press
12/17/96

STEELEVILLE, Mo. (BP)--People have been saying that Manford and Nancy Rhea have directed and accompanied Christmas cantatas at First Baptist Church, Steelville, Mo., for 50 consecutive years. But this year's Dec. 22 program, "King of Kings," won't be their 50th cantata, Manford Rhea insisted.

"We've been doing Christmas programs for 50 years," he explained, "but 50 years ago you didn't have cantatas." Instead, they began their tenure in 1946 as the church's choir director and pianist by presenting Christmas solos and ensembles. They have led choir music for the church during the service of 10 pastors.

The lack of organized "cantatas," as such, did not dampen the couple's enthusiasm for worship during the Christmas season. In the church setting, "it wasn't hard to find good Christmas music," Nancy Rhea emphasized.

Thus, they began a tradition of preparing their church for the birthday celebration of the Savior.

When Manford Rhea moved to Steelville in 1939, he met Nancy Wilkins at choir practice at First Baptist. Wilkins, whose parents lived in the small Missouri town, was a music major at Kansas State University in Manhattan. Rhea recently had graduated as a music major from State Teachers College (now Southwest Missouri State University) in Springfield and had accepted a teaching job in Steelville.

The Rheas were married in 1941. They presented their first annual Christmas program in 1946 after Rhea returned from World War II, where he served in the Second Army Air Corps (forerunner of the Air Force) as a B-17 pilot. Through the years, their enthusiasm for keeping Christmas has not dwindled.

Their zeal has been contagious in their family and church. Their son, Hal, is involved in music leadership at First Baptist Church, St. James, Mo., and their daughter, Rebecca, has a private voice studio in Vidalia, Ga. Generations of families have sung in the Steelville church's polished choir, known throughout the state for its quality, not its size. The choir also is known for its span of ages -- from teen-agers to Zelda Rand, the oldest singer at 84.

The Rheas are known affectionately not only for their special Christmas presentations, but for their tireless teaching. "Some singers (now in the choir) we taught from scratch," Manford said. "There are some good voices in that bunch, and we try to keep young ones coming in."

Nancy taught several adult choir members to sing in one of her many children's choirs. "At one time, we had six children's choirs going," she recalled. In addition, she served as training union director for many years.

Rhea contends his wife is the true musician -- "I just stand up there in front."

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The longest-tenured member of the choir today is Georgia Beth Hopkins Barksdale, who has sung for 47 years. She began as a "meek voice" in 1949, and the Rheas have helped strengthen her voice. As a high school student, Georgia Beth sometimes would go to the Rheas' home for a free voice lesson. Now, at choir practice, Manford tells her to move away from the microphone when she hits the high notes.

"Mrs. Rhea also has taught several people to play the organ, and never (charged) a dime," Georgia Beth said. In fact, in their 50-plus years of music service through the church, the Rheas have never been on salary.

Jim Barksdale has sung in the choir 42 years. He joined the group to meet a certain soprano. He and Georgia Beth Hopkins later were married, with a young Hal Rhea as the ring bearer in their wedding. Later, continuing the special tie, Georgia Beth would sing in Rebecca Rhea's wedding.

Through the years, Manford Rhea has developed a reputation of expecting excellence from his choir. "You don't get by with many mistakes," Jim Barksdale said. "You mispronounce a word and he catches it right away."

For some longtime choir members like Jacqueline Witt, who has sung at First Baptist for 32 years, that excellence is coupled with regard for the director. "He's a perfectionist and that's why I admire him so much," Witt said. "He wants it done right, and that's why this small church choir is so well known all over the state."

The Rheas have proven to be a couple who inspires others not only in worship, but also in dedication and responsibility. Their hard work has been touched by the dedication of Carolyn Hawkins, a church pianist; Wanda Ransom, an assistant organist whom Nancy Rhea taught to play in high school; and committed choir members like Verniece Lea, who has sung under the Rheas' direction for 40 years.

Pastor Cardis Bryan has lauded the choir as the best in the state for a small congregation. "He really knows how to work with them," he said of Rhea.

The cantata chosen for this year, "King of Kings," fits right in with the church's advent theme, "The Birthday of the King."

Bryan noted the Rheas' dedication to finding choir anthems that fit well with the theme of every worship service. "Music is an important part of our worship. What the choir does is just tremendous. He picks choir music that just flows with the theme of the service."

The Rheas wouldn't have it any other way. "It's hard, but we enjoy it," Manford said. "Music is the best way in the world to praise the Lord, and the purpose of music is to prepare you for worship. That's what we try to do. If you're not more ready to worship after the special music, then the special music was a failure."

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**Kelley: What's ahead is like
a wrapped Christmas present**

By Debbie Moore

**Baptist Press
12/17/96**

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--"The purpose of seminary is not to give you answers," Chuck Kelley told December graduates at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary during commencement exercises Dec. 13.

The purpose of seminary is "to give you tools," he said, holding up his beat-up red toolbox and relating a story from his experiences with "Mike the Plumber." Kelley, who worked as a janitor for his apartment complex while a student at Baylor University in Texas, told of a day when he asked Mike, "What are we going to do if it won't work?" as water streamed from a turn-off valve on a Friday evening after quitting time.

Mike said, "What do you mean, if? It's not a question of 'if.' It's only a matter of 'when.' You keep at it until you get it done."

"When did they teach you in plumber's school how to handle a situation like this?" Kelley asked Mike.

"Probably 50 percent of the problems I fix I've never seen before," Mike told him.

Kelley asked Mike how he fixed things he didn't learn about in plumbing school, to which Mike replied, "They gave me the tools and they showed me how they work. It's my responsibility to make the applications and figure out the problems."

"That's what seminary is all about," Kelley said, "getting the tools to get the work done. The exciting adventure ahead of you is the discovery of how to make the applications."

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"The Lord your God did not give you a handbook of answers He gave you a tool, and by the anointing of his Holy Spirit he will enable you to size up the challenges and opportunities you face and know what to do with them."

The basic tool given out in seminary is "God's precious Word," Kelley said. "When you have this Bible in your heart and ministry, the Holy Spirit of God will be able to show you how to handle every challenge you face. ...

"Don't be surprised," Kelley said. "Expect it. You will not walk away with a handful of answers, but you will walk away with tools that will enable you to solve those problems as the Lord gives you wisdom and direction."

The most precious thing received during seminary "is like this present," Kelley said, holding up a beautifully wrapped box. "You know why we love presents so much and love to get them?" he asked. "One of the reasons is that we don't know what they are. We like to shake them, we like to look at them, we like to figure out what would go in a box that size.

"It's the not knowing that arouses your interest and arouses the joy of opening the package."

In the same way, on graduation day, "you don't know what's ahead of you," he said. While some students already have a place of ministry by the time they graduate, others don't know where they will be next month, he said, and none know where they will be for the whole journey.

"What each of you have ahead of you is like a wrapped Christmas present. It is an unknown future. ...

"But another wonderful thing about Christmas presents is that when someone gives you a present -- someone who knows you and loves you -- even though you don't know what it is, you know it's going to be just right for you. You know you are going to like it because that person who knows you and loves you picked it out especially for you."

Kelley then quoted from Jeremiah 29, a Scripture passage in which God tells the prophet Jeremiah to let his people know that even though they now have 70 years of captivity ahead of them, "I know the plans I have for you, plans for peace and not for evil, for I want to give to you a future and a hope."

"God has plans for you," Kelley told the graduates. "You don't know what it is. You don't know all that it will entail. But you can know as surely as you know your name that the Lord God who created you has planned that future for you. He will ensure that whatever unfolds, you will be equipped and you will have what you need."

The thing graduates must never forget, Kelley said, "is the promise of God: 'I have plans for you, and those plans are good. I have a future to give you and I have hope to give you.'

"So I don't know what's going to happen next in your life. I don't know where all you're going to go. I don't know what all is going to happen. But I do know God has put the package together with your best interest in mind, and you will have the delight of uncovering it all the rest of your life."

Following his charge to the graduates, Kelley presented diplomas to nine receiving associate degrees, 18 receiving baccalaureate degrees, five receiving master of music degrees, 25 receiving master of arts in Christian education degrees, 24 receiving master of divinity degrees, eight receiving doctor of ministry degrees, one receiving the doctor of musical arts degree and one receiving the doctor of philosophy degree.

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**Disconnected couple gains
help from book by sister**

By Linda Lawson

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NORFOLK, Va. (BP)--In January 1996 Rachel and Scott St. John-Gilbert's nine-year marriage hit a wall.

Communication between them was at an all-time low. They were emotionally disconnected and living separate lives under the same roof. Rachel described herself as the "bad guy" who wanted out. She was struggling "to reconcile my Christianity with my humanity. Does God really want to know me and understand the dark side of this marriage?" she wondered. "My pain was masquerading as anger and rage. I was so afraid of what God must be thinking of me. The only prayer I could muster was, 'God, have mercy on me!'"

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Rachel found herself experiencing the tender answer to her prayer in an unlikely place -- a book, "Marriage 911." The book was released early this year by the Baptist Sunday School Board's Broadman & Holman Publishers. The author, Becky Freeman, was Rachel's big sister.

Rachel was only 12 when Becky got married at age 17 and moved away from home. Becky and her husband, also named Scott, began having children and building their family while Rachel was busy being a teenager -- with all its pains and joys.

"During so much of our lives I didn't feel connected to her," Rachel recalled recently in an interview from her Virginia Beach, Va., home.

Describing herself as "not much of a reader," Rachel nevertheless had devoured her sister's two previous humorous books. "I found her style irresistible and mesmerizing," she said.

She picked up Marriage 911 because "I knew I'd get some belly laughs," she said. As Becky wrote about the highs and lows in her own marriage, Rachel got much more than laughs. She was moved to tears as she recognized herself on some of the pages.

Becky had included a letter from the writer Arthur Gordon, author of the best-selling "A Touch of Wonder." He observed that when marriages are in trouble the partners tend to "demonize" each other. In another chapter, Becky observed, "wouldn't it be ironic if the sign of a truly secure person is his ability to admit his insecurity?"

Marriage 911 ends happily with Becky expressing both joy and surprise that she and Scott have made it so far.

"I was happy things had worked out with her, but I wasn't sure what would happen with my marriage," Rachel said. "However, the book was like a little voice saying, 'I know what it's like to want to quit, but it can be done if you both are willing to get in and do your part.'"

Nine months later, Rachel and Scott have not solved all their problems, but they are working at doing so.

"We are still in our recovery process," she said. "I feel like a snake shedding my skin, and it's only halfway off."

They have attended counseling together. Scott has gotten help in dealing with being an adult child of an alcoholic parent. Rachel is working on her anger. Both have found mentors with whom they "enjoy the profound privilege of sharing unedited thoughts and feelings in an atmosphere of unconditional love and acceptance," Rachel said.

Also, Rachel and Scott took personality tests through the counseling department at nearby Regent University. They and 5-year-old Trevor are attending First Baptist Church of Norfolk. They go out together weekly and set aside specific times to work at improving communication.

"I think Scott and I both have realized we had just kind of winged it. We winged it right into a wall. It was a juvenile way to have a marriage," Rachel said.

A serendipity of the recovery process for Rachel has been a new, more intimate relationship with Becky. It started when Rachel called Becky in tears, acknowledging, "I'm messed up."

Becky's empathetic response, "Join the crowd."

"We're closer than we've ever been," Rachel said. "I really feel like I'm getting a sister I never had."

Rachel is convinced that one of Becky's greatest gifts, through her books, has been to help Christians see it's OK to acknowledge that life is not perfect.

"When Christians take off their masks and say, 'I am hurting and life isn't just a bowl of cherries,' then everybody else pipes in because they see it's safe to be human," Rachel said.

She and Scott are optimistic about their future because "we're learning to let go of the fantasy that our love should be the one thing in life we shouldn't have to work at. Now we realize it should be the thing we work at most. We owe this to each other, to our son and to those who feel divorce is the only way to end their heartache."

When they're further along in their own recovery, Rachel and Scott would like to help other Christian couples struggling in unhappy marriages.

"I have a heart for marriage, and it troubles me that we Christians feel we can't take off our masks and admit that we are hurting. Until we can, the church will likely be the last place where people turn in times of marital crisis. Marriage 911 is a call to reverse that trend."

**Point of Grace receives
home state recognition**

By Trennis Henderson

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (BP)--Nov. 14 was more than just another concert date for Point of Grace. It was officially proclaimed "Point of Grace Day" in Arkansas by Gov. Mike Huckabee.

The popular contemporary Christian recording artists, who got their start at Ouachita Baptist University, were back in the state for an evening performance at Barton Coliseum in Little Rock. Huckabee, also an alumnus and a trustee of Ouachita, invited the group to the state capitol for a brief proclamation ceremony.

"The state of Arkansas is extraordinarily proud of the group, Point of Grace," Huckabee noted. "They have been a point of grace across America, really presenting the gospel of Christ in an effective way."

Describing Point of Grace as "one of the most successful contemporary Christian music groups in the country," the proclamation emphasized the group "has inspired and influenced thousands of lives through their uplifting music and unapologetic stand for their Christian faith."

In addition to the recent proclamation, the group -- composed of Heather Floyd, Denise Jones, Terry Jones and Shelley Phillips -- has earned numerous national awards, including the Gospel Music Association's 1996 Dove Award for group of the year.

With the release of their third album, "Life, Love and Other Mysteries," the foursome recently saw their latest single, "Keep the Candle Burning," hit No. 1 on the adult contemporary Christian music chart. The song was the group's 12th single -- all 12 of which have reached No. 1, a feat unmatched by Elvis, the Beatles or any other artist in recording history.

Even amid their national success, the group members seek to keep their accomplishments in perspective and give God credit for their ministry. "God is who we are about," Heather explained. "He is the reason we are here."

"God Forbid," a song on their current album, "is a song that we measured every other song by because it speaks so loudly about who God is," Heather noted, adding the lyrics -- "God forbid that I should speak of you at all without a humble reverence in my heart" -- provide a constant reminder that God is "still the main thing in our lives."

"From the beginning, our goal has been to encourage people," Terry pointed out. "We've been very particular about making sure the lyrics are strong, godly Christian lyrics with a strong message."

Noting "we're blessed to be where we are and to do what we get to do," Denise remarked, "God has shown us he is faithful in the small things and the big things. He cares about all of it." As a result, many of the group's songs emphasize "God is in control of our lives and our relationships."

Among the messages the group shares with young people is the importance of sexual purity. Acknowledging many parents tell the group members they are role models for their children, Shelley said, "It's a big responsibility. We definitely take it very seriously."

"I think America is coming around to wanting to hear about people who have high morals and high standards," Heather agreed. "They want to hear songs that are encouraging and will lift them up."

While each of the four group members "holds each other accountable" in their Christian ministry together, Shelley noted being a role model is not limited to recording artists and other public figures.

"Any Christian has a responsibility to live the way you say you live," she emphasized.

Shelley's family still lives in her hometown of Little Rock. Her dad, Joe Phillips, was among the group's relatives and friends gathered backstage at Barton Coliseum as more than 6,000 people arrived to hear Point of Grace.

"It's been a blessing. God has led them all the way," he affirmed. "They're exactly what you see... They're really sincere."

"These kids are living their dreams," he added. "Every day is a blessing."

5 Christian county winners have Southern Baptist ties

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Several winners of 1996 awards in the Christian Country Music Association have Southern Baptist ties.

The female vocalist of the year, Paula McCulla, is a member of Tulip Grove Baptist Church in the Nashville, Tenn., area, while Randy Fox of the vocal group of the year, the Fox Brothers, is a member of First Baptist Church, Franklin, Tenn.

Seneca, winner of the vocal duo of the year, has worked in behalf of True Love Waits, the youth campaign for sexual abstinence before marriage which spread internationally after its launch by the Baptist Sunday School Board.

Don Pardoe, of Wilcox & Pardoe, named new artist of the year, is a member of First Baptist Church, Nashville.

The Christian Country Music Association's fourth annual awards show was Nov. 14 in Nashville's Ryman Auditorium. Winners were chosen by 1,200 CCMA members.

Among other winners: entertainer of the year, Lisa Dagg; male vocalist of the year, Ken Holloway; mainstream country artist of the year, Vince Gill, also honored for video of the year, "Go Rest High On That Mountain;" and song of the year, "Lake of Fire," by Jeff McKee and Buddy Hyatt; radio personality of the year, Marty Smith, of the syndicated program, "Cross Country;" radio station of the year, WSSA, Morrow, Ga.; and pioneer award, Gene Higgins, who founded the Christian Country Music Association.

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