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VIRGINIA--Prayer Plus partnerships to link churches, unreached peoples, FMB.
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Media airs Jewish evangelism debate
over SBC resolution, HMB workers

Baptist Press
6/19/96

By Sarah Zimmerman

ALPHARETTA, Ga. (BP)--Southern Baptist efforts to continue evangelistic work among Jewish people have drawn media interest, criticism from Jews and debate about Christians' role in witnessing to Jews.

On June 13 messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in New Orleans approved a resolution calling Southern Baptists to pray for the salvation of Jewish people and to direct energies and resources toward the proclamation of the gospel to Jewish people.

On June 10 Home Mission Board directors appointed a couple, Jim and Kathy Sibley, as home missionaries to develop evangelistic ministries among Jews and start churches in predominantly Jewish communities. The Home Mission Board's work with Jewish people began in 1921 when Jacob Gartenhouse was appointed a missionary for Jewish evangelism. While the missionary position was suspended in 1989, work among Jewish people has continued through the Southern Baptist Messianic Fellowship and dialogue with Jewish leaders.

The resolution and the Sibleys' appointment created a national stir in the media, beginning with a June 14 story in The New York Times. Larry Lewis, Home Mission Board president, has appeared on the "ABC World News Tonight" program and a national CBS morning news show; Sibley was featured on a 30-state, two-hour radio talk show; and numerous radio stations and newspapers have contacted the Home Mission Board and the SBC Executive Committee requesting information.

Jewish leaders referred to the Southern Baptist actions as a "great setback" to Christian-Jewish relations, a "spiritual attempt at genocide" and an act of arrogance.

Southern Baptist spokesmen, however, insist this represents a serious misreading of the resolution's intent. Paige Patterson, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in North Carolina, said the nation of Israel and the American Jewish community have no better friends than Southern Baptists and other evangelical Christians.

"When everyone else has forsaken the nation of Israel and Jews around the world," Patterson said, "evangelical Christians will be standing beside them, defending their rights."

Phil Roberts, director of the Home Mission Board's interfaith witness department, said the media attention over the SBC resolution and HMB appointment of the Sibleys "has resulted in perhaps the greatest opportunity to highlight the claims of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah in recent history."

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While some theologians propose a "dual covenant view" of Jewish evangelism, meaning Jews are saved by keeping the Old Testament law while Gentiles are saved by faith in Christ, Southern Baptists and other evangelical groups claim that Jesus Christ is the only means for salvation.

A 1980 paper from the Lausanne Committee on World Evangelism said, "Because Christ died the atoning death on the cross and was raised from the dead in order to provide forgiveness of sins and new life and hope for His own people, Israel, he is also the one Savior and Mediator between God and man for the people of all nations."

On "CBS This Morning" Lewis said, "We have a deep love for the Jewish people, a deep appreciation for Jewish people. In fact, our entire heritage is Jewish It was the Jewish believers who brought the gospel to the gentiles. Now we in turn want to share that gospel with not just the Jews, but everybody in the world. This is our command, this is our mandate, and we want to be faithful in doing that."

In another statement, Lewis noted evangelism does not force anyone to become a Christian or renounce their heritage. "Our evangelistic efforts are to share Christ in love with all people and at the same time respect their religious liberty. Faith in Jesus Christ as the Messiah does not in any way, in our opinion, repudiate Jewish heritage."

At least 30 Southern Baptist churches are Messianic congregations, said Russell Begaye, HMB director of language church extension. The church members are Jews who have professed faith in Christ and continue to observe Jewish customs, religious traditions and maintain Jewish heritage.

This year's resolution was proposed by Sibley and the Southern Baptist Messianic Fellowship. The resolution was needed, Sibley said in a presentation to the fellowship, to raise the profile of Jewish ministry in the Southern Baptist Convention. Between 1867 and 1921, Southern Baptists approved 10 resolutions that dealt with Jewish evangelism, he said. Sibley added it has been 75 years since a resolution specifically mentioned Jewish evangelism, although Southern Baptists passed resolutions condemning anti-Semitism in 1972 and 1981.

Roberts said he strongly supports this year's resolution and Sibley's appointments. Jews and Southern Baptists affirm common concerns for religious liberty, he noted, and many Baptists and other evangelicals believe the establishment of the state of Israel fulfills biblical prophecy.

Tom Elliff, newly elected SBC president and pastor of First Southern Baptist Church, Del City, Okla., said, "Southern Baptists have led the way in championing the unique heritage and contribution of the Jewish community. In the closing years of this millennium, it would be distressing to me if we fail to adequately share our faith with people for whom we have such love and respect."

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(BP) photo (vertical) mailed to state Baptist newspapers by HMB bureau of Baptist Press.

Prayer Plus partnerships to link
churches, unreached peoples, FMB By Tim Palmer

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RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Churches across the Southern Baptist Convention have a new Great Commission opportunity -- "Prayer Plus" partnerships with people groups around the world that have had little or no access to the gospel.

The Prayer Plus emphasis originated with Missouri native Randy Sprinkle, director of the Foreign Mission Board's international prayer strategy office. "It came out of my own seeking and praying for a comprehensive prayer strategy to reach these 'Last Frontier' peoples," Sprinkle said.

Foreign Mission Board President Jerry Rankin said, "The Last Frontier is simply to complete the Great Commission. ∴ Randy's prayer thrust is at the front end of that."

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The Last Frontier takes in more than 2,000 people groups, Sprinkle noted. At last count, 187 of those groups had a population in excess of 1 million. "Our ultimate goal is to link churches with every single one of the Last Frontier people groups.

"Jesus told us to take the gospel to all the peoples of the world," he pointed out. "This is an act of obedience, really."

Like no generation before, Sprinkle noted, Baptists today know exactly where the "uttermost parts" of the earth are. "Jesus said to the church: 'You shall be my witnesses here, there, over there and to the uttermost parts of the earth,'" Sprinkle noted. "We've been everywhere but the uttermost."

For centuries, Christian missionaries have worked their way in from the edges of a vast world, Sprinkle said. Today, the gospel covers the globe, except for an area in the middle -- the so-called "10/40 Window" across Africa, the Middle East and Asia where few people have had the opportunity to hear the good news of salvation in Christ.

"Jesus said: 'I came that they might have life,'" Sprinkle said. "For the first time in history, we are hearing that word spoken directly to us and pointed specifically at them."

In a Prayer Plus partnership, a church is linked with a specific Last Frontier people group and commits, at least through the year 2000, to:

-- Prayer without ceasing for the opening and evangelizing of an unreached people group.

-- Plus obedience to God in whatever he directs them to do in coordinated effort with the Foreign Mission Board to evangelize their group.

"The local church could be involved in any number of ways," Sprinkle said. Possibilities include "prayerwalk teams" -- volunteers who engage in on-site intercessory prayer -- and support of special projects geared to a people group, such as showing of the "Jesus" film.

Sprinkle said Missouri Baptists' nine-year prayer commitment to the south African nation of Lesotho, for example, where he formerly served as a missionary, was a model for the Prayer Plus concept.

Congregations can call the International Prayer Strategy Office toll-free at 1-888-462-7729 to receive information about how to enter into a Prayer Plus partnership with a Last Frontier people group. The office will provide information on several potential partner groups and will ask the churches to seek God's will for a partnership.

Once the linking group is determined, the Foreign Mission Board will supply as much information as is available on that people, along with suggestions on how the church can do research of its own.

The church then will persist in prayer for the evangelization of that unreached people, joining with other Southern Baptists and evangelical Christians also committed to that group, Sprinkle said. As God creates opportunities, the church will do its part to help take the gospel to those who have never heard.

"This plan follows God's sequence: He speaks, we respond; we pray, he answers," Sprinkle said. "Then the strongholds begin to be pulled down.

"And like at Jericho, God's people need to be ready to go in when the walls come down. These churches will be ready when Jesus says, 'Go in and take the land.'"

To say Sprinkle is excited about the potential for Prayer Plus partnerships would be an understatement. "This is the march of the church of Jesus Christ in a way that has never even been dreamed of."

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Perkins selected as editor
of Mississippi newsjournal

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JACKSON, Miss. (BP)--William H. "Dusty" Perkins Jr. was named as the 11th editor of The Baptist Record by the executive committee of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board June 18, replacing W. Guy Henderson, who recently announced his June 30 retirement from the position he has held almost six years.

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Perkins, 40, has served four years as associate editor of the 119-year-old Mississippi Baptist newsjournal -- the fourth-largest in circulation in the Southern Baptist Convention.

He initiated several popular features, including the Bible-based "Bibliocipher" word puzzle now published by a number of state Baptist newsjournals and the "LifeAnswers" counseling column.

His news articles and features on the work of Mississippi Baptists have received wide exposure through Baptist Press, the Southern Baptist worldwide news service.

Perkins, a lifelong Mississippi Baptist, was a general assignments reporter/photographer at The Daily Sentinel-Star newspaper in Grenada, Miss., where he and the editorial staff won several awards from the Mississippi Press Association.

He also worked as a press aide and photographer for former Mississippi Gov. William F. Winter and served as public information officer for the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency.

Perkins is a native of Belzoni in the Mississippi Delta. He and his wife, Marla Karen, have been married 11 years. They have a 4-year-old daughter, Brynne, and a 2-year-old son, William III.

The Perkinses are active in a number of ministries at their longtime home church, First Baptist in Jackson.

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Old Testament professor leaving
Golden Gate for faculty in Waco

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MILL VALLEY, Calif. (BP)--Lai Ling "Elizabeth" Ngan, associate professor of Old Testament at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, has resigned effective July 31 to teach on the faculty of Baylor University's George W. Truett Theological Seminary in Waco, Texas.

Ngan, on Golden Gate's faculty since 1993, also has served since 1985 in various capacities, including associate minister and minister of education at Stockton Chinese Baptist Church in Stockton, Calif., a city located about an hour from Golden Gate's Mill Valley campus.

"We deeply regret the loss of this fine scholar, wonderful teacher and great friend," said seminary President William Crews. "But we yield to what Dr. Ngan believes to be the will of God in her life."

Ngan received a bachelor of science from California Baptist College in Riverside, a master of arts from Loma Linda University in southern California and master of divinity and doctor of philosophy degrees from Golden Gate.

"I will miss a lot of people here because this is home, but I feel very strongly that this is how God is leading me, so I'm trying my best to do God's will," said Ngan. "Its quite an adventure."

She has been a graduate fellow, teaching assistant and instructor of biblical Hebrew at Golden Gate, research assistant in anesthesiology at Loma Linda University and teaching assistant at Cal Baptist.

Ngan's honors and awards include the Will Edd Langford Scholarship Award from Golden Gate; Outstanding Young Women of America for six years; and Who's Who in American Universities and Colleges.

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Secretary to SBC presidents
retires at Oklahoma church

By Dana Williamson

Baptist Press
6/19/96

DEL CITY, Okla (BP)--With the election of Tom Elliff as president of the Southern Baptist Convention June 11, Marge Malone made history by serving as secretary to three men who have served the SBC as its highest elected official.

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Malone, who retired June 1 as pastor's secretary at First Southern Baptist Church, Del City, Okla., has not only been secretary, but advisor, friend and constant source of encouragement to Elliff, Bailey Smith (SBC president, 1981-82) and James T. Draper Jr. (SBC president, 1983-84). Another former pastor, John Bisagno, and Elliff also served as president of the SBC Pastors' Conference, and Smith was president of the BGCO in 1979.

"I have never known a staff member anywhere in captivity who was kept by every successive pastor," said Bisagno, who hired Malone 31 years ago. "All the pastors saw such marvelous skills, spirit and gifts in this woman, they said, 'Let's keep Marge.'"

Because of the positions her "bosses" have held in the convention, her voice is recognized by secretaries, pastors and convention leaders across the country.

"There are very few people in the convention who don't know Marge," said Elliff. "She's raised three pastors and is working on a fourth," laughed First Southern's current pastor.

Smith said Malone was probably retired once it became likely Elliff would be the new SBC president.

"She was my secretary when I held that position," Smith joked, "and no one with her intelligence would want to do that twice."

A graduate of Wewoka (Okla.) High School, Malone attended business college in Tulsa and took her first job with Alexander Wholesale Drug Company in Oklahoma City.

She quit work for a while after her daughter, Donna Ruth, was born, but returned to work as secretary at Wilmont Place Baptist Church in Oklahoma City. Then followed 10 years working for Guy Bellamy, superintendent for Negro and Indian work for the Home Mission Board, who had offices in the Baptist Building in Oklahoma City.

In 1965, she was employed by Bisagno as his secretary. She worked for him five years until he resigned to become pastor of First Baptist Church, Houston. Bisagno was followed by Draper, 1970-73. He moved from First Southern to First Baptist Church, Dallas, then to First Baptist Church, Euless, Texas, and now serves a president of the Sunday School Board in Nashville.

Following Draper was Bailey Smith, who was pastor from 1973-85. He resigned to begin an evangelism ministry headquartered in Atlanta. Elliff, Smith's brother-in-law, moved from Applewood Baptist Church, Wheat Ridge, Colo., to become pastor in 1986.

"Across the Southern Baptist Convention, Marge Malone is considered the standard by which church pastoral secretaries are measured," Elliff commented. "Pastors need to talk to her to find out how to run an office."

Elliff said Malone has an "unbelievable work ethic."

"She is steadfast and discreet. She never has a negative word to say about anyone."

Draper noted "no one ever served with more skill, more devotion and more effectiveness."

"Her godly character and compassionate heart is still a great blessing to all of our family," Draper said. "She is a remarkable person to have survived Johnny Bisagno, Jimmy Draper, Bailey Smith and Tom Elliff."

Elliff said Malone's 47-year-old daughter has multiple sclerosis, and after working with Donna until 10:30 p.m. and sometimes getting up in the night two or three times with her, she is always on the job the next morning. Malone's husband, Don, died in 1974.

Admitting he doesn't have the vocabulary to adequately describe Malone, Elliff said she is known around First Southern for her willing heart and hands and her discreet, confidential nature.

"She is everybody's friend, faithful and constant," he said. "She is gracious, but persistent. She will get the job done, whatever it takes."

He said she can get people on the phone even if they are "unavailable."

Why has someone who will be 74 in August stayed at the same job so long?

"I have never considered this a job," Malone said. "It's been a joy to work here. I've had no desire to quit."

Malone said the job has been filled with excitement.

"There's always an aura of expectation. Each of the pastors has a gift to make people respond."

She recalled that the first time she was given a list of people to call for volunteer assignments, everyone she talked to responded positively.

"You won't find that happening in many churches," she said.

Malone refused to compare the pastors she's worked with, but said although each is an individual, all had visions for First Southern, and "it was a joy to assist in the development of those visions."

Malone is a member of Wilmont Place and didn't join First Southern 31 years ago because she had just moved her daughter from her friends, and didn't want to do it again.

The longtime secretary was honored by First Southern members May 5 with a reception, an entertainment center, lounge and money tree.

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