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February 20, 1996

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Executive Committee approves  
first SBC restructuring steps

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press  
2/20/96

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Four initial recommendations for implementing a sweeping restructuring of the Southern Baptist Convention were approved Feb. 19 by the SBC Executive Committee.

Among them: the hiring of a management consulting company to assist in creating a new North American Mission Board "at a cost not to exceed \$495,000," according to Executive Committee approval of a recommendation from its 10-member Implementation Task Force (ITF).

The new mission board, which would replace the SBC's current Home Mission Board, Brotherhood Commission and Radio and Television Commission, is a key component of the "Covenant for a New Century" convention restructuring and heightened Great Commission emphasis approved by messengers to the convention's 1995 annual meeting in Atlanta.

The other three ITF recommendations involved a proposed charter for the NAMB and proposed legal documents relating to several SBC agencies slated for dissolution or merger.

The recommendations will be forwarded to the 1996 SBC annual meeting in New Orleans, where a required second vote is slated on an amendment to SBC bylaw 15, which lists the names of SBC entities.

In the case of the Southern Baptist Foundation, to be merged with the Executive Committee, the Executive Committee approved a proposed charter to enable the foundation's ongoing operation as a separate corporation.

Under the proposal, the Executive Committee would be the foundation corporation's one "member" and will select the foundation's trustees.

Explained SBC legal counsel James Guenther of Nashville: "The Tennessee nonprofit corporation act says specifically that a member of a corporation is not liable for the torts and debts of the corporation ... and we're satisfied we're not creating any ascending (lawsuit) liability either for the Executive Committee or for the Southern Baptist Convention."

Morris Chapman, Executive Committee president and chief executive officer, also noted the Executive Committee would not be managing donor funds.

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"The SBC Foundation, although it is (to be) a subsidiary corporation of the Executive Committee, will nonetheless operate as a corporation," Chapman said. "It will have a board of trustees ... (and) a president in place who is equipped, who is professional and who will continue in the leadership of the management of funds."

The name of the management consulting company to be hired was not disclosed in Executive Committee materials Feb. 19.

The vote to hire a consulting firm was preceded by an explanation from Ted Warren, ITF member and chief operating officer of the Baptist Sunday School Board.

"Based on my 22 years of leading organizations of \$50 million to \$500 million," Warren said, "I can tell you that no commercial enterprise would undertake such a large and meaningful reorganization without the assistance of a professional management consulting firm. The need for objective assistance is even greater, I believe, in a religious, not-for-profit organization.

"An investment of less than \$500,000 can be recovered in less than one year from the savings we anticipate," Warren said. "The cost in efficiency and effectiveness of a restructuring poorly done can be millions of dollars that we have to live with year after year for many years."

Warren said a management consulting company would provide expertise "in the various disciplines related to organizational change, based on their experience of assisting many organizations through this process. ... Their major areas of work will be in 1) the change management process, 2) business analysis and 3) human resources."

An "engagement letter" for the management consulting company is being prepared and probably will be sent to the firm the week of Feb. 26, Warren told Baptist Press Feb. 20. "Actual work by the firm will probably begin in March," first working with the task force on a cost management and business analysis, then doing further work after the vote on bylaw 15 at the SBC annual meeting, Warren said.

Since the letter, or contract, has not been signed, Warren said it would be improper to identify the firm at this point.

Funding proposals for the maximum \$495,000 expenditure on the firm's services were to be considered later during the three-day Executive Committee meeting.

Warren told the Executive Committee the firm comes with "excellent" references and has done work for the Georgia Baptist Hospital and other Baptist entities. He said 10 companies were initially contacted, five of which were then interviewed, and three of which then made formal presentations before a final selection.

Other ITF recommendations approved by the Executive Committee were:

-- proposed legal documents to dissolve the Historical Commission and to transfer the former agency's archives and management to a new corporation called the Council of Seminary Presidents, as recommended in the Covenant for a New Century. The corporation's six members will be the six SBC seminaries, and its board of directors will consist of the seminaries' presidents.

-- a proposed charter for the North American Mission Board and proposed legal documents dissolving the Home Mission Board, Brotherhood Commission, Radio and Television Commission, Education Commission, Stewardship Commission and Southern Baptist Commission on The American Baptist Theological Seminary.

Before the vote on the NAMB charter and documents relating to the three entities being merged to form it, one Executive Committee member moved to table the matter until the next evening, so Executive Committee members could review the materials. Another committee member opposed tabling the vote, saying the ITF should be trusted to have properly overseen the process.

The motion to table was overwhelmingly defeated. Executive Committee chairman Ronnie Floyd, a Springdale, Ark., pastor, then gave committee members several minutes to review the 18 pages of materials before the vote.

ITF chairman Robert Reccord, a Norfolk, Va., pastor, in comments to the Executive Committee, said: "The overarching issue (in the restructuring) is: How can Southern Baptists most effectively carry out our Great Commission's mission -- the greatest level of faithfulness, the highest standard of stewardship that is forward-focused, mission-centered and local church based.

"We stand today standing on the strong and solid shoulders of our past," Reccord said, but noted: "We cannot stand on program statements made in the '60s, as good as they were, as we stand in the '90s and beyond." Both past and new structures target "the same needs, basically, but it is a vastly different world in which those needs are faced," he said.

Acknowledging it is easy "to want to stay comfortable," Reccord reminded, "A strong theological grounding is found in this book (the Bible) and Southern Baptist history for change."

Reccord said ITF members began their meetings "on our knees together -- praying for the heads of agencies, for the families affected by change." They then divided into teams to be in touch with each agency affected in the transition, he said, and have met with their leaders "often multiple times."

"From the very beginning, we wanted to be in touch and communicating. We wanted to hear what those affected had to say. We wanted to listen," he said.

Reccord commended the agency leaders for their cooperative spirit for a smooth transition.

He also reported meeting with state convention executive directors and asking them to name "a small resource group who could help us in hearing from state issues, what impacts them in this whole change process."

Said Reccord, "There is a world watching how we do this. We can unite, we can prayerfully and biblically walk shoulder to shoulder. We can move into one of the most significant transformations of a religious body the world has ever seen."

Christ's prayer for unity in John 17 is what Reccord said "I pray that our guideline will be ... . If we can set forth that kind of example, it may be amazing what happens in the impact of the Southern Baptist Convention."

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Herb Hollinger contributed to this story.

Henry's call to leaders:  
Do 'what is good' for SBC

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press  
2/20/96

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Do "what is good" for the Southern Baptist Convention, Jim Henry kindly urged Executive Committee members, SBC agency leaders, state convention leaders and editors.

Henry, in his second term as SBC president, based his remarks on numerous references to doing good in the New Testament epistle of Titus, during the opening session of the Executive Committee's Feb. 19-21 meeting in Nashville, Tenn.

Henry focused on doing good in four areas:

- 1) involving more laypeople and pastors in SBC work.
- 2) staying focused on evangelism, missions and the starting and nurturing of churches.
- 3) undergirding SBC institutions with capable trustees.
- 4) including more minorities and women on SBC trustee boards.

Concerning each area, Henry, pastor of First Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla., said:

1) "The more involvement we have with the talent-rich and spiritually gifted men and women in our denomination, the more likely we are to succeed and the closer we are to the biblical pattern. We all win when we bring more aboard to share ... in the pilgrimage."

2) Evangelism, missions and growing churches are "the main thing that has made us the strongest, largest evangelical denomination in the world."

But, Henry warned, "If we get diverted by defectors or detractors or theological controversies that are not basic to the non-negotiables -- or when we use pen, platform or position to judge and pre-judge the family of faith -- we do ourselves a disservice and we become vulnerable to the bewildered scorn of saints and sinners."

3) "Every one of our institutions is a multi-million-dollar institution, and trusteeship is a guardianship," requiring "the most capable leaders ... we can find," Henry said.

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SBC executives should develop profiles of the qualities needed in trustee-leaders for their respective agencies for the years ahead and submit the profiles to those involved in the SBC process of nominating trustees, Henry said.

Also, Southern Baptists must "do all that we can to work together ... at the state and local and Southern Baptist Convention levels. ... We've got to be teammates. We've got to work together. It's critical. If we do not, we run the danger of Balkan-izing the SBC," Henry said, referring to the war-torn Balkan region of former Yugoslavia -- "and killing ourselves off with spiritual friendly fire."

4) In the area of inclusiveness, Henry said he is asking each person who will serve on the SBC Committee on Committees -- verbally and in writing -- "will you please be sensitive and please be representative of minorities and women on our trusteeships." While noting the SBC has no quotas, Henry said he believes members of the Committee on Committees and other appointment-making SBC committees will respond to the need for "representation of minorities and women at a larger scale" in the SBC.

Henry also commended the SBC Inter-Agency Council for its boldness in creating a task force of SBC agency representatives to work toward implementing into SBC life the racial reconciliation resolution passed during the 1995 SBC sesquicentennial in Atlanta.

And, Henry recounted, he and SBC Second Vice President Gary Frost, an African American pastor from Youngstown, Ohio, have met with representatives of the Baptist World Alliance and presidents and representatives of 30 of the 40 million Baptists in America, encompassing the SBC, National Baptists and others.

"We listened to each other. We had some differences. But we also had a lot of things that we agreed on. They saw some sides and we saw some sides," Henry said, noting another meeting is slated for May "to continue to build this network with our African American friends."

"We're well on the road," Henry said, "to doing what I think probably has not been done with an evangelical group -- to the scope that we're going to do it (in racial reconciliation) -- anyplace in this country."

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EDITORS' NOTE: The following three paragraphs can be added to the (BP) story titled "SBC Inter-Agency Council names racial reconciliation task force," dated 2/19/96:

Gary Frost, an African American in his second term as SBC second vice president and pastor of Rising Star Baptist Church, Youngstown, Ohio, issued a statement Feb. 19 commending the IAC for "bold leadership ... in striving to attain the high and godly goals of the (racial reconciliation) resolution: 'to eradicate racism in all its forms from Southern Baptist life and ministry.'"

Citing Ephesians 4:1-3, Frost said the New Testament passage "challenges us ... 'to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.' I would encourage Southern Baptists everywhere to 'pray without ceasing' for this bold endeavoring process, that our fellowship would move with a sense of urgency to bring about a biblical, practical and visible unity of all parts of our great Southern Baptist family. Thereby we can show the world that we are truly Christ's disciples in the way we love one another."

Frost also commended the IAC for selecting Land to lead the task force. "Having worked closely with Dr. Land in the formulation of the racial reconciliation resolution, I have found him to be a conscientious and Spirit-led churchman with a 'reconciler's heart.' I am confident he will provide sensitive and balanced leadership to this critical assignment."

Thanks,  
Baptist Press

Ga. legislature weighs  
bill targeting sex signs

By William T. Neal III

ATLANTA (BP)--The public outcry against offensive billboards along Georgia interstate highways has resulted in pending legislation to restrict them. A bill passed by the Georgia State Senate to limit all billboard ads for nude dance clubs to the club's property now is before the State House of Representatives, where it also is expected to pass.

The billboards in question are along Interstate 75 in south Georgia advertising "adult entertainment" establishments that feature nude dancers. Drivers have especially complained about the highly suggestive signs being so blatantly visible and offensive to residents and travelers passing through with their families.

The Georgia Baptist Convention, meeting last November in Albany, passed a resolution that expressed its disapproval of such advertising as highly offensive and called upon the Georgia General Assembly to enact legislation to prohibit such advertising. The issue was also addressed in a meeting of the convention's public affairs committee and has been a concern of the Georgia Council on Moral and Civic Affairs.

J. Emmett Henderson, executive director of the Georgia Council, said he is pleased with the legislature's action on the matter, but noted the real test will come in the courts. He said the bill had been carefully written to avoid challenge on First Amendment grounds, basing the prohibition of the signs on the fact that 1) they result in reduced property values in the immediate area since people will assume that undesirable establishments are located nearby and 2) that the signs themselves are an unsafe distraction to drivers.

"The signs themselves are obnoxious and offensive, but they are not legally obscene," Henderson said, noting the courts have set up specific standards for obscenity which are not violated by the signs. "So how do you deal with it? How they are dealing with it is through property values and highway safety."

Henderson said if the bill is passed by the legislature and signed by Gov. Zell Miller, then an attempt could be made to get an injunction barring its enforcement until a decision has been made by the courts. This could further delay removal of the signs, he said.

"The courts are going to have to decide whether these concerns are of sufficient weight to offset the First Amendment concerns that are going to be raised," he said.

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Information age casts ministers  
as data interpreters, McManus says

By Pat Cole

Baptist Press  
2/20/96

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--People are looking to the church to find meaning for their lives, not information for their minds, a Los Angeles pastor told Southern Baptist religious educators.

"Information is no longer the viable commodity if you want to talk about the future," said Erwin McManus, pastor of The Church on Brady in Los Angeles, at a meeting of the Southern Baptist Religious Education Association. "Information has moved from diamonds to gold to silver. Information now has the worth of paper. Everybody has information who wants it."

Ministers must "be able to want to give meaning to all of this data," stressed McManus during the Feb. 15-17 gathering at the Galt House Hotel in Louisville, Ky. In addition to serving as pastor of a growing Southern Baptist church in east Los Angeles, McManus is a consultant to congregations and denominations on topics ranging from leadership development to urban and global issues.

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Many ministers cannot be interpreters of information, because they see no correlation between their ministry and the world around them, said McManus. In fact, he noted, laypeople often are more likely than ministers to take advantage of the numerous accesses to information available today through the Internet, numerous broadcast outlets and print media. This situation is in stark contrast to previous generations when the pastor had more education and information than anyone in the community, he said.

"We live in a world that is inundated with information," he said. "People are overwhelmed and they cannot determine the value of the data. My job (as pastor) is to help people in this world of complexity figure out what are the simple things that pull everything together which give life meaning."

In his address, McManus listed several "currents" facing today's ministers. They include:

-- Rapid population growth. Every 12 or 13 years, another 1 billion people are added to the world. In America, church structures are not keeping pace with the population increases.

-- Urbanization. Southern Baptists are not prepared for the fast growth of cities, McManus said. "Most Southern Baptists think God is the God of the country, at best the suburbs, and that Satan is the God of the cities," he said, noting, however, the growth of cities presents a "great opportunity for evangelism."

-- Two-Thirds World movement. While the gospel is spreading rapidly around the world, the Western church is struggling. In 1950, only seven cities had more than 5 million people. In another 30 years, 93 cities will have more than 5 million people and 80 of those cities will be in the Two-Thirds World. "The major world cities will be what we now consider Third World cities and they will shape culture," McManus said.

-- Pac Rim shift. There is a movement of influence from Western Europe and New York to the Pacific Rim and the West Coast of the United States. "The problem in our strategies (in the United States)," McManus said, "is that we are looking eastward to get our church cues and society is looking westward to get its cultural cues."

-- Secularization. America is not becoming an atheistic nation, but a nation of multiple religious views, McManus said. "We will become a nation of many gods," he said. "Secularization is a transitional period."

-- Postmodernity. The modern period, with its emphasis on science and rationalism, has ended, McManus said. Absolute truth has been replaced by relativism, which has created a new context for ministry.

At the meeting, SBREA elected officers for the 1996-97 year. They are Jeter Basden, religion professor at Baylor University, Waco, Texas, president; Gail Motley, director of women's ministries, First Baptist Church, Norfolk, Va., vice president; Glen R. Cummins, associate pastor/Christian education, Immanuel Baptist Church, Lexington, Ky., eastern vice president; Steve Cretin, director of the ministry and leadership development department at the Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville, Tenn., central vice president; Pete DeMoss, minister of education/staff coordinator, Germantown (Tenn.) Baptist Church, midwestern vice president; Steve Pate, church growth consultant, Denton Baptist Association, Denton, Texas, western vice president; Lawrence Klemptner, vice president for student services, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, secretary/treasurer; and Cindy Franks, program associate, Tennessee Baptist Convention, Brentwood, assistant secretary/treasurer.

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Koreans learn musicianship,  
ministry at Southwestern

By Dena Dyer

Baptist Press  
2/20/96

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--The group of Koreans applauded heartily following the practice session, expressing admiration for the organ professor's musicianship. His response?

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They were unceremoniously told to leave.

"He got angry at us when we applauded and made us leave the practice hall," said Jang Choi, owner of South Korea's largest church music publishing company. "I ask myself, why does he play organ? Church musicianship is more than just excellence."

He had been on a tour of American schools looking for the institution where he would bring Korean church musicians for training in both music and ministry.

To Choi, church music also means ministry. "Some other professors in other schools," he said, "are not ministers."

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary won him over and, for the second year, hosted a Korean Church Music Workshop. This year's conference was held in January. And though Choi takes the students to such events as Choral Music Explosion in Florida, Southwestern's is the only workshop designed especially for them.

"Choi loves Southwestern," said Al Travis, professor of organ at Southwestern, "because we are an evangelical seminary with strong training and emphasis in church music. He has a vision to help church musicians and music programs in Korea grow by plugging into the extraordinary program of church music that Southern Baptists have developed."

During the workshop, more than 30 Korean musicians of all ages and training levels pored over choral anthems, listened to hymn improvisations, learned about recent developments in American church music and worshiped in Reynolds Auditorium on Southwestern's Fort Worth, Texas, campus.

Some were conductors, others were church pianists or organists. Each paid his or her own travel expenses to come to Southwestern for an intense time of learning and renewal.

"It challenged me to practice more," said Hyun Sun Suh, an organist from Seoul. "Even though most church musicians are not full-time in Korea, we can still be excellent. I have to take more time out of my week to prepare for church services."

Church music in Korea is on a different level than in the United States, Choi said. "Seminaries and schools in Korea have small, general programs in music. There is nowhere for church musicians to learn how to be excellent in their field while ministering to their congregations."

Travis said South Korea is like America was in the 1950s -- "exploding with churches and new church music programs."

"I do not say that America has all good church music," Choi noted, "but as a rule, the level of musicianship and creativity is much higher here. That's why I bring students over. We spend several days in a music workshop setting so that they can get a good idea of what goes on in a school of church music such as Southwestern's."

Choi dreams of creating a Korean retreat center, modeled after Glorieta (N.M.) and Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist conference centers, in which Korean church musicians could study in their field on a regular basis.

"Students who come on these trips say to me that they never realized there was so much good material and information out there for church musicians," Choi said.

Suh said the workshop was taught her several new ideas about church music.

"Even though we can't bring all American church music and methods to Korea, this workshop has helped me to see that, as Dr. Travis said, it's a step-by-step process, I can make some changes in the way I do things and start small."

Choi agreed changes in Korea's church music program will be gradual.

"I would like to see church musicians in Korea work together, instead of competing. We need to see one another as part of a team and work little by little to spread the higher concept of worship and excellence in church music that Southwestern has."

Should his dreamed-of Korean retreat center become reality, Choi would like to see Southwestern supply the faculty.

"Faculty from the United States can help us to learn traditional music and methods, as well as show us new ideas," Choi said. "And although I am emphasizing musicianship right now, I want to devote at least half my time towards the ministry of church music in my programs."

"In essence," Travis said, "we could have an international off-campus center."

Travis said Southwestern's workshop was a wonderful opportunity for both the Koreans and Southwestern.

"We are able to minister to them, and they can take what they learn back to Korea. It's a two-way street -- we can have a part in helping church music grow and prosper in Korea, and they can have a chance to see what it would be like to further their education at a Southern Baptist seminary."

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(BP) photos available on SBCNet and from Southwestern's office of public relations.

Sister, 6 Corts brothers still  
strive to reach their potential

By Victor Lee

Baptist Press  
2/20/96

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (BP)--Start with the president and chief operating officer of the most well-known evangelistic association in the world.

Add one of the Southern Baptist Convention's most respected pastors; a Baptist university president; a Baptist college president; a Christian Church pastor; an attorney; and a middle-school teacher and wife of an SBC pastor.

It would make an impressive board of directors. In this case, however, it is the Corts family -- with a sister and five of her six younger brothers dedicated to preaching the gospel and Christian education.

Exactly how did one family produce so many leaders of the faith?

"That's a fascinating subject, fascinating even to us," said Mark Corts, second-oldest and for 33 years pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Winston-Salem, N.C.

"If you try to figure out the psychological basis for this type of thing, I guess sibling rivalry was used in the best way," Corts said. "We were always helpful of each other. It was never a jealous thing. We might fight among ourselves, but don't dare touch us from outside the family."

The Cortses were raised in Ohio by Harold and Hazel Corts, he a part-time preacher in the old Pilgrim Holiness Church and part-time teacher, she working outside the home frequently to help pay the bills. The roots of Christian commitment were set deeply.

"My parents were committed, bright people," Mark Corts said. "We were quite poor, though we didn't know it. From a spiritual standpoint, we were taken to church regularly. It was never an option. My father was a very pious and devout man. I can remember getting up in the middle of the night and seeing my father praying over his family on an old linoleum floor."

Prayer was a major part of the Corts family. "At the dinner table, even when the food was hot, there'd be four or five prayers while we all peked to see if the chicken had disappeared," Mark said.

Thomas Corts, president of Samford University in Birmingham, Ala., said consistency was the hallmark of his parents, who still live in Ohio.

"They didn't believe because it was convenient and comfortable," he said. "There was consistency and sincerity in their faith. My mother is a saintly woman. She worked outside of the home, but I remember these huge baskets of ironing she had to do. With so many of us, it must have been interminable. At the same time, she used to drop everything and go play catch if there was nobody around at the moment to play. It was always very prominent that we were their priority."

Perhaps the best perspective of the six brothers is held by the oldest child, Naomi Corts White. Married to George White, a Southern Baptist pastor in East Brunswick, N.J., she helped influence the education and denominational leanings of most of the boys.

She recalled her father "always wanting the boys to go into ministry."

And although five of them have gone into Christian service of some form, Naomi said they are not clones.

John, 60, is the president of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

"John was a very private person growing up," Naomi said. "He started out with Billy Graham in very humble surroundings, helping in crusades as a general worker, then going overseas to help, and he's worked his way up slowly through the lines and earned his position."

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Mark has led Calvary Baptist from 184 average attendance to about 2,650.

"Mark is extremely outgoing, he loves people," Naomi said. "He would bring out the frivolous nature in people. He likes to have a good time and joke around, and he would find the humor in all situations."

Mark describes David, pastor of Mountain Christian Church, Joppa, Md., as an excellent balance between a visionary and a detail person. "He's a very strong leader, but very kind," Mark said.

Naomi recalled that kindness from childhood.

"I did a lot of work for Dad when he had a business college," she said. "I used to put out 3,000 pieces of literature every month for a company Dad had a contract with, and David -- when he was just a little boy -- would always come and help me fold and stuff envelopes."

Naomi said Tom is "the most generous person I know" and the most conscientious about staying in touch with the rest of the family. Mark said Tom is one "who exudes confidence in people and from people" and a man with "a heart of compassion."

Paul is president of Palm Beach Atlantic College in West Palm Beach, Fla. Mark said Paul is similar to Tom in his ability to build confidence in others but is "more of a visionary and slightly less of a detailed person. He has a tremendous capacity to size things up and calculate the large picture," Mark said.

Phillip is the youngest Corts by six years. A non-practicing attorney, Mark described Phillip as a man who became disenchanted with society. "It's fair to say he has rejected society and the organized church and has become a rather free spirit." The family hears from him infrequently.

The sibling who started the string of successes is Naomi Ruth, whom Mark described as "very bright, organized and very much a leadership type." Said Mark, "Each one of the boys has manifested a lot of that leadership ability."

Within it is a stubborn determination to succeed. As Mark said, "Most Corts are pretty independent. If you like them, fine. If you don't, it's not going to bother them. You can weep all the way to the cross and it's not going to change our course."

The individual successes of his sister and brothers might not surprise him -- but collectively, Mark said, "We never dreamed this. It's not like we all sat down and made a pact. There is an enormous amount of appreciation for each other, and enormous admiration of respect. We learn from each other, help each other, support each other."

And they don't stop striving.

"I think the characteristic of all Corts," said Mark, "would be the feeling that they haven't achieved their potential."

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Lee is a free-lance writer in Wake Forest, N.C.

Mark Corts, 33-year pastor  
& helper of young preachers

By Victor Lee

Baptist Press  
2/20/96

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (BP)--In an era when many pastors change churches every two or three years, Mark Corts has led Calvary Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, N.C., for 33 years and become a denominational stalwart and a mentor to thousands.

Paige Patterson, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in nearby Wake Forest, N.C., calls Corts "the pastoral counselor to the eastern seaboard."

Said Patterson, "Mark has not only built a fabulous church, but he also has provided a paradigm for all the pastors to follow in terms of the diversity of his service. He's a fine expositor and he has proven his denominational statesmanship.

"He has always produced in his church a veritable parade of young ministers and missionaries."

What is the key to staying fresh and effective for 33 years?

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"I think the key, for me, is understanding that my work is never done and keeping a fresh vision for that work," said Cortis, who has served as chairman of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board and has ministered on every continent and in more than 50 countries. "I can never be satisfied with what I've done. Another key is loving your people. And, don't sweep anything under the rug. Deal with issues. Don't be afraid to face anybody in the church. Admit your mistakes, deal with your errors quickly and cover them with the blood of Christ.

"Keep the vision fresh because you've always got something else to shoot for."

Cortis said it is also important to surround oneself with competitive people to love, encourage and -- foremost -- pray for you.

"My deacons are my best friends," he said. "My staff are my best friends. They're always staying on their knees, not letting problems build up."

Always ready with words of wisdom, Cortis sounds like a mentor. He recently hosted 18 pastors of churches with 400-plus people in attendance on Sundays for a leadership conference and recently helped lead a conference at Southeastern Seminary on expository preaching.

"Pastoral leadership, helping young pastors, is the best way I can use my life at this point," Cortis said.

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Influencing teen girls  
is 73-year-old's goal

By Mike Trice

Baptist Press  
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KENTWOOD, La. (BP)--Marie Green Lewis still recalls the day as a 9-year old she was baptized in the Bogue Chitto River.

"We sang 'Shall We Gather at the River' and 'There is a Fountain Filled With Blood,'" she recalls. She had made a profession of faith during revival services at Enon (La.) Baptist Church.

"My father and mother thought I was too young," she says, "but we talked about it and they decided I understood what I was doing."

Rest assured, Mr. and Mrs. Green. For the past 64 years, Lewis has been living proof of the sincerity of that commitment.

Nowhere is her sincerity more evident than in her work with missions organizations, particularly Acteens.

Lewis, 73, has led the Acteens group at Mount Hermon Baptist Church, Kentwood, La., since 1982 and has been Acteens director for the Washington Baptist Association since 1992. She previously served in Girls in Action groups.

Lewis is more comfortable talking about her Acteens than herself. She smiles as she lists the number of state awards and recognitions her girls have received over the years and shows photos of her most recent crop of award recipients, including two of her granddaughters.

"Two of my former Acteens are now Acteen directors themselves," she says, "and two have gone into full-time Christian service."

While full-time ministry is not the calling of every Acteen, Lewis says she hopes each grows during the five years she has them. "The most satisfying part of teaching them is watching them mature spiritually. As they mature spiritually, they become able to witness and assume responsibility."

She recalls how one girl entered her group as a shy, quiet girl who was reluctant to participate. By her senior year, Lewis recounts, she was one of the leaders of the group. "That's my big goal, to see them mature."

Lewis says she views her work with Acteens as an opportunity to work with a group with whom she might not otherwise come in contact. "They (youth) have many influences today," Lewis says. "This is my one opportunity that God has given me to help them be influenced in a positive way."

Lewis has always been involved in the lives of young people. She taught home economics 18 years at Chesbrough High School. She also assisted her husband, Truett, manage a dairy on their farm outside of Kentwood.

In 1982, after her husband lost a fight with cancer, she continued to manage the dairy another seven years.

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Despite the other demands, the mother of three daughters was always a leader in her church. She spent several years as church training director and Bible drill leader and taught a ladies' Sunday school class for 25 years in addition to her leadership in mission organizations.

Lewis says she coped with her husband's death by relying on God. "I had always been taught that God would give you the strength to deal with every situation." She says she turned to her family for love and support. "I did not get bitter. I did not question why."

That same strength will help her as she prepares younger women to continue her work with Acteens at Mount Hermon. "I'm experienced enough to know that the girls need a younger woman in there. I know that the day is coming."

But, she admits, she is not ready to give it up just yet. "It is very stimulating to be around the girls." And, she insists, she is only doing what the Lord has called her to do. "He's given us talents and gifts that he expects us to use."

"I think missions is an investment for her," says Janie Reynolds, Louisiana Baptist Mission Friends/Girls in Action/Acteens director. "It is rare and unique to find someone with her non-stop commitment to motivating teenage girls to learn about and take part in missions."

Lewis' pastor, Scott Jones, says she leads by example. "She gives her all to those teenage girls." She expects her girls to do the same, Reynolds says. "She pushes her girls . . . . They know what is expected of them."

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Football player found faith  
at end of 'sincere effort'

By Laura Horne

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ABILENE, Texas (BP)--Give it a sincere effort.

That was a start for Damon Dunn, wide receiver and kickoff returner for the Stanford University Cardinals, toward a personal relationship with Christ.

During high school, he attended church regularly because his mother made him, but he never really took it seriously, Dunn recounted during a visit to Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, Texas, for a recent Fellowship of Christian Athletes rally.

One Sunday morning, however, the pastor said something that caught Dunn's attention: "If I'm wrong about Jesus Christ, what will I have lost? Nothing except maybe I believed in an illusion. But if you are wrong, what will you have lost? You will have lost your soul."

Dunn figured he at least owed it to himself to investigate. So, he prayed and asked God to reveal himself if he were real.

"I prayed that prayer and tried to be better. I didn't do the worldly things my friends were doing, and I received persecution for it," Dunn said, acknowledging he almost decided to give up, tired of being ridiculed for trying to give a sincere effort and do the right thing. Yet at that moment, God became real to him, and the persecution turned into respect, Dunn said, reflecting, "It was God's way of revealing himself to me."

During his senior year at Sam Houston High School in Arlington, Texas, Dunn served as president of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes huddle.

A God-given ability to speak afforded Dunn opportunities to speak at FCA meetings and other gatherings throughout the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex and the surrounding area.

In August of last year, Dunn was ordained to preach the gospel by his home church, Morning Star Baptist Church in Grand Prairie. Despite his busy schedule as a student and football player at Stanford -- as a sophomore, he finished last year first in the PAC-10 and third in the nation in kickoff returns -- he finds the time to preach at local churches at least one Sunday a month.

"When God works in me, I owe him my time," Dunn said.

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He added, "Preaching is something you do if there's nothing else you can be. You preach because there is a vast hole that can only be fulfilled by sharing the Word of God."

Dunn said he is not sure which direction the Lord will lead him after he finishes his public policy degree at Stanford. He only knows God is directing his path, which could include seminary, graduate school and possibly professional football.

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Horne is a student writer in the media relations office at Hardin-Simmons University.

18-year-old's turnaround:  
from rock music to preaching

By Dana Williamson

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SAYRE, Okla. (BP)--He's just 18 years old. God called him to preach less than seven months ago, and he's only preached one sermon. Yet Andy Pope says he can't imagine ever wanting to retire from preaching.

All this comes from a young man who just over a year and a half ago had hair down to his waist and whose greatest passion was heavy metal, hard rock music.

Pope, of Sayre, Okla., said his whole life centered around that music. "It wasn't that I was rebellious," he said. "I never did drugs, but just didn't know God, and I cared more about myself than anyone else."

Pope was an excellent student, co-valedictorian of his high school class, MVP of his high school academic team and played trumpet in the school band, but he said he was totally into himself, not caring what anyone else thought.

Pope's life was turned around through a friend who played drums in his band.

"My drummer friend had been a Christian since he was 8, but his dad died a short time after the family moved to Sayre, and he turned away from God," Pope said. "He rededicated his life his sophomore year in high school and became a powerful influence in my life." During Pope's senior year in high school, his friend invited him to visit the "Judgment House," an alternative to a Halloween haunted house, sponsored by First Baptist Church of Elk City, Okla.

"It was real neat to see the dramatization of the rapture, tribulation and second coming," Pope recounted. "But what it was all about didn't hit me until afterwards when we were brought into a room and presented the gospel."

Pope was saved that night, Oct. 27, 1994, and joined First Baptist Church, Sayre, the next Sunday.

He said church members were ecstatic when he made his decision known.

"I was always so independent, they didn't think I would ever be saved," he said.

He learned friends in the church's youth group, youth director Ken Reich and others in the church had been praying for him.

A week after joining the church, he was asked to go on a mission trip to Montana the next summer. Although he said he was apprehensive about the trip, he felt the Lord wanted him to go.

The day after returning from the trip, July 4, 1995, Pope said he was depressed. He no longer had the mission trip to look forward to and he was getting ready to leave home for the first time to go to college. Although he felt the Lord had revealed he wanted Pope to go to Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee, Pope had no idea what career he was going to pursue.

"I spent that evening praying and studying," Pope said. "And as I was getting into bed, I felt an overwhelming urge from God that he was calling me to be a preacher."

Pope said he started praying again, and God said, "That's really what I want you to do."

"I was in total amazement and wonder," Pope said, "thinking about what all that would entail. I cried for about 30 minutes out of happiness."

As the church youth group left for Falls Creek Baptist Assembly the next week, Pope had not told anyone about his call to preach. Falls Creek is a summer camp for youth owned by the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma.

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"During our devotion time at Falls Creek exactly one week after the call, I felt God wanted me to make my decision known," Pope said.

Pope talked to his Sunday school teacher, then Reich, then pastor Tom Cooksey, then revealed his decision to the entire youth group and made his decision public during the Falls Creek invitation.

During the youth group's Falls Creek presentation the next Sunday at church, Pope's father, Rodney, who was saved as a teenager but had not been in church for years, came forward during the invitation.

Like Andy, Rodney Pope has become active at the church, attending worship services, the men's accountability group, Sunday morning men's prayer time and other activities.

The Sayre church has a strong youth group, with about 40 attending Sunday school each week, said youth worker Dayva Spitzer.

"Andy became a spiritual leader immediately," Spitzer said. "I have never seen a more radical change in any young person. His salvation was so apparent, and he was sincerely allowing God to change his life. His walk and his talk were totally different. His hair cut was different! It was an absolute delight to hear him pray. What a blessing from the Lord to see such a radical change in a young man's life."

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