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**Newspaper's editorial explores
Coppenger stance on women pastors**

By James A. Smith Sr.

**Baptist Press
11/21/96**

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--A growing theological distinction between two Baptist seminaries in Kansas City has caught the attention of the area's largest newspaper.

Contrasting convictions about women pastors was the subject of a Nov. 20 editorial in The Kansas City Star focusing on the differing positions on the issue at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and Central Baptist Theological Seminary.

"As Southern Baptists struggle over the role of women in the clergy, two of the most prominent voices on opposite sides of the issue are coming from Kansas City seminaries," the editorial states.

The views of Mark Coppenger, president of Midwestern Seminary, and Molly Marshall, visiting professor of theology, worship and spiritual formation at Central Seminary, were highlighted in the editorial.

Coppenger is Midwestern's third president, having taken office at the Kansas City, Mo., seminary in August 1995. Marshall joined the Central faculty in August 1995.

While Midwestern Seminary is an agency of the Southern Baptist Convention, Central Seminary is affiliated with the American Baptist Churches, USA and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

"The drive to place women in the pastor's role is as clear a case of the culture's co-opting the church as you can find," the editorial quotes Coppenger as saying.

"The equality of men and women in ministry must be held forth as a key identifying feature of the church if it is to move into the future with integrity," Marshall is quoted as saying in contrast to Coppenger's position. The editorial reports Marshall is no longer a Southern Baptist, having affiliated with the American Baptists.

The editorial notes Southern Baptists, meeting in Kansas City in 1984, adopted a resolution saying, "we encourage the service of women in all aspects of church life and work other than pastoral functions and leadership roles entailing ordination."

The debate concerning women pastors flared again in April after Coppenger addressed the subject in a chapel message at Midwestern, the newspaper noted. Coppenger, who preached on the subject at the request of a student leader, said the Bible does not permit women to be pastors.

"The Scripture is quite pointed and politically incorrect," Coppenger told the Kansas City Star. "And we affirm that the Bible is inerrant."

For Marshall, women serving as pastors is a "test case for the issue of inerrancy," according to the editorial.

Those who hold to Coppenger's position, Marshall told the Star, "only reveal a retrenching of patriarchal ideology, with its fear of the feminine and its death-like grip on masculine authority."

The Star editorial agreed with Coppenger's assessment that the issue of women in ministry is an issue which many denominations are "grappling with."

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"But it's one of those substantive matters that elements of the larger Christian church are certain to debate for a long time," the editorial concluded, "because those who disagree are so sure their religious beliefs have led them to the truth. And though many denominations ordain women to full clergy roles, the Baptist turmoil reveals a wider church struggle that won't be settled anytime soon."

In an interview with Baptist Press, Coppenger said of the editorial, "I welcome the distinction" between the seminaries, noting neither Midwestern nor Central is "embarrassed" by the positions each school holds.

"Those people in the community who are serious about the traditional understanding of the Word of God will resonate with this. It will encourage our friends and probably upset the people who need to be upset," Coppenger said, adding, "I'm a great fan of crisp distinctions."

Coppenger took issue with Marshall's assertion that opponents of women pastors advocate "patriarchal ideology."

Such characterizations "call the clear biblical standard a dirty name, a sub-Christian name," Coppenger said. "It assigns low and fearful motives to a noble and high biblical direction."

In addition to the theological distinction, Coppenger also welcomed the editorial attention.

"It shows that the Star recognizes the seminary to be a substantial citizen of Kansas City life. We hope to be a very plain-spoken and edifying citizen of the Kansas City community," Coppenger said.

The Central Seminary board of trustees elected Marshall Nov. 15 to the permanent tenured position of professor of theology and spiritual formation to be effective Aug. 1. Marshall, who taught more than 10 years at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., is the first tenured woman professor in the history of the Kansas City, Kan., school.

Over the last several years four faculty and three staff members have left Midwestern for similar roles at Central.

At the invitation of Central Seminary, the national office of Baptist Women in Ministry was moved to the school's campus earlier this year. BWM's office previously was housed at Crescent Hill Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky. from its founding in 1983.

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Mich. Baptists honor prosecutor for taking Kevorkian to court

**Baptist Press
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MIDLAND, Mich. (BP)--Michigan Baptists honored the prosecutor who has taken suicide doctor Jack Kevorkian to court during their Nov. 5-7 annual meeting at Emmanuel Baptist Church, Midland.

Convention President Bob Galey's gave a special "President's Presentation" to Oakland County Prosecutor Richard Thompson in recognition of his fight against assisted suicide. Galey, pastor of Oakland Woods Baptist Church, Clarkston, received approval for the special honor and a plaque from the convention's executive board in October.

Thompson, a member of an independent Baptist church, was defeated in his bid for re-election in the Republican primary by a candidate who said he would wage no further prosecutions of Kevorkian.

Unable to attend the presentation due to court conflicts, Thompson provided a video taped response to the honor.

Thompson on two occasions has unsuccessfully prosecuted Kevorkian in court in the county where the physician has executed 36 or more of his nearly 50 assisted suicides. Thompson has once again charged Kevorkian, although the court action may end when Thompson leaves office. Thompson's latest effort charges Kevorkian, of West Bloomfield, Mich., with nine felonies and 10 misdemeanors in the deaths of 10 people between June 20 and Sept. 7 of this year.

Messengers also approved a resolution stating Michigan Baptists "vigorously denounce assisted suicide as an appropriate means of treating suffering," and they called on federal, state and local governments "to prosecute under the law physicians or others who practice assisted suicide."

The resolution also noted Western medicine has followed both Judeo-Christian tradition and, for more than 2,500 years, the "Hippocratic tradition forbidding physicians to assist in the death of their patients."

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And, the resolution reminded, "the Bible teaches that God created human life in His own image and declares human life to be sacred from conception until natural death," and the Bible "likewise teaches that murder, including self-murder, is immoral."

In another resolution, the convention called on "God's people in Michigan to pray and fast, as He might lead, during the period between Good Friday, March 28, 1997, and the National Day of Prayer, May 1, 1997."

In other convention action, messengers sent the proposed budget of \$2,833,906 back to the executive board for revisions. As presented, the budget entailed no increase over the current year due to tight finances, and it would have scaled back Michigan Cooperative Program giving to Southern Baptist causes from 32 to 25 percent. The convention will meet again in a special called meeting Jan. 30, 1997, at Bethany Baptist Church, Lansing, in an attempt to approve an amended budget.

All officers were elected by acclamation: president, Ray Shelton, pastor of Friendship Baptist Church, Lincoln Park; first vice president, James Kennedy, pastor of Mt. Carmel Baptist Church, Flint; second vice president, George Fountain, bivocational pastor of Raisinville Baptist Church, Monroe; and recording secretary, Mike Lee, pastor of Gorham Baptist Church, Jackson.

In additional resolutions, the convention:

-- voiced opposition to the late-term partial-birth abortion procedure, expressing "our strong disapproval of President Clinton's veto" of congressional legislation this year which would have banned it.

-- voiced appreciation for the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission's "faithful service ... (and) their continued commitment during very anxious days" when the SBC agency is being merged into a new North American Mission Board.

The resolution noted the 89-year-old Brotherhood has played a key role in Southern Baptist disaster relief ministries, in missions opportunities particularly for youth and in missions education in local churches.

The convention was attended by 259 messengers, representing all 14 associations and more than 100 of the state's 300-plus congregations. Prayer times were led by pastors' wives from around the state.

Next year's annual meeting will be Nov. 4-6 at Lakeside Community Church, St. Clair Shores.

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Reported by Julie Scheving and Art Toalston.

Success can kill pastors, burnout survivor preaches

By Charles Willis

Baptist Press
11/21/96

COLUMBIA, S.C. (BP)--"Success can kill you just as well as problems can," a survivor of ministry burnout preaches regularly to church leaders and their spouses.

The mismanagement of one's personal life because of preoccupation with church members' needs can leave a minister spiritually, emotionally and physically bankrupt, Reggie McNeal warns.

Until recently, no organized help in locating ministry burnout recovery resources existed, as McNeal discovered in a time of personal need. Today, he directs the South Carolina Baptist Convention's leadership development and pastoral ministries department. He offers to others suffering burnout from out-of-control ministry success the help and hope he had to find on his own.

In the early 1980s and fresh out of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, McNeal and his wife, Cathy, took their degrees, limited experiences and untarnished enthusiasm to Mount Pleasant, Texas, to begin a new church at the request of a small group.

With 18 people, Trinity Baptist Church was begun in 1983. In the next decade, the McNeals would see the congregation grow to 650 people, a tract of land purchased and a large facility built to house its ministries. They would also experience the downside of a successful pastorate -- ministerial burnout.

Neither Reggie nor Cathy McNeal can point to the exact time seemingly enviable circumstances began to eat away at his personal joy in ministry. But one day in 1990, he recalled, awareness of an emptiness inside him began to grow. He needed more and more sleep. Concentrating became more difficult, and the need to escape became greater. Cathy remembers that Reggie often wanted to go out of town to eat and looked for ways to insulate himself from the world. Two tragic deaths and several diagnoses of terminal illnesses among church members compounded the darkness he saw engulfing him.

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"I felt as though I was an observer rather than a participant in life," he said. "I was afraid."

On an out-of-town trip to attend a seminar, McNeal had time alone to ponder his condition, and he felt clearly God telling him to talk to his congregation about the situation. Though he questioned God's directive to discuss in such a public forum his depleted personal resources, the reassurance to trust and obey came.

So on a spring Sunday in 1991, McNeal told the Trinity congregation he was "out of gas." His method, however, brought not only support, but also an outpouring of messages from people who admitted they, too, shared some of his failures. In couching his message as a warning to avoid the mistakes he felt he had made, McNeal gave others the courage to say they also had neglected their walk with the Lord, their families, their physical health and their emotional needs.

Over the next few months, McNeal sought on his own to find ways to heal all the wounded areas of his life.

"Compliant people are afraid to say 'no' to someone's request, no matter how outlandish," he cautions others in ministry. Fear of people in the church becoming angry, he observes, can lead to a loss of joy in the minister's life and unmanaged anger toward others. Hearing people say, "I don't know what we'd do without you," was addictive, he recognizes now. The success of a growing congregation carried with it more people who needed more of his time, which he gave without regard for his own well-being.

"I never took any time for personal maintenance before," he said, but the experience of depleted personal resources for ministry led him to set boundaries, announcing times when he would not be available to the church in order to have time for personal "sabbathing" and for his family.

In the absence of any organized resources for his situation, McNeal began a program of reading self-help books with a theological bent.

"I retooled my personal time with God. Eventually, I realized I'm not alone. Out of that, I began to sense the call to help others. Ultimately, we are our own tool kit," he said of church staff people. "Whatever we bring to the job is us."

With the help of an older brother, McNeal began to put together the story of his "family of origin" to understand what inherited circumstances and emotions might contribute to who he is. From that he concluded that "food and work became the drugs of choice in our family." Today, with a better understanding of his heritage, he continues to fight tendencies to let his workload and his diet get out of control. He also has worked on managing criticism.

"In a way, I did self-surgery," he concluded. "I'm trying to keep other people from having to do that."

As a state convention denominational employee, McNeal is in a role he never anticipated during the early days of his ministry. Today he leads conferences in his home state on "Shepherding the Shepherd" for church staff people and their spouses. And he applauds the networking strategy of the Baptist Sunday School Board's LeaderCare for having raised the issues of personal development for ministry couples as a denominational agenda.

LeaderCare is a strategy to provide a network of personal development help for pastors and staff. Resources and help in personal crisis prevention, intervention and restoration are provided through the board's pastor-staff leadership department.

LeaderCare resources and services are provided in partnership with state conventions, associations and other minister support groups, taking advantage of established sources for help rather than duplicating efforts, according to Brooks Faulkner, manager of the personal development section.

Guidance and support for the minister's spouse and family are available through marriage, parenting and family enrichment materials and events.

Crisis intervention includes a toll-free emergency telephone number, 1-888-789-1911, for ministers and their spouses.

Mediation services and assistance toward renewal in ministry and restoration in discipleship are available.

LeaderCare offers the opportunity to develop a personal enrichment and development plan, Faulkner said. Its objectives are for pastors and staff leaders to discern and follow the call of God, grow in Christlike character, discern and use their God-given competencies and to lead lives that are balance physically, spiritually, socially and emotionally.

As an added dimension to LeaderCare, wellness consultation, resources, services and events are being developed for ministers, their spouses and their families.

McNeal said he has learned appropriate help often can lead ministers to answer personal crisis questions for themselves. Without such guidance, he observed, "emotionally wasted persons don't have the energy to deal with their own stuff."

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(BP) photo (horizontal, color) posted in BP PHOTOS. The file name is MCNEAL.JPG.

**Draper tells pastors:
'We all struggle'**

By Charles Willis

**Baptist Press
11/21/96**

COLUMBIA, S.C. (BP)--Every pastor at some time has feelings of insufficient wisdom and strength, James T. Draper Jr., told South Carolina pastors and other professional church staff during a LeaderCare conference Nov. 18.

"We all struggle with those feelings of 'How am I going to do this job?' We go at such a pace it depletes our energies," observed Draper, president of the Baptist Sunday School Board and a longtime Southern Baptist pastor.

"What we have perfected is the ability to stay so busy that we do the work of God in our own strength," he continued.

Recalling his encounters with pastors who have faced personal and professional crises, he said, "I've always been a pastor's pastor. One time I had 26 evangelists in my church. I've always had pastors call me or come to visit in my home. It seems God has given me that kind of passion. My father, who also was a pastor, told me many years ago, 'Son, be kind to everybody, because everybody is having a hard time.'

"We need to help and encourage each other," Draper told more than 60 participants in the first conference focused on LeaderCare, the Sunday School Board's personal development strategy for pastors and other church staff and their families.

"We have no intention nor any thought that we can do this ministry alone," he said. "What we can do is network resources across the country."

Draper said outward appearances and circumstances surrounding ministers can be misleading.

"The ones who look like they need help the least may need it the most. Sometimes we look past people who may need encouragement tremendously," he added. "I want to be known as someone who cares about those who are hurting."

While the human body is designed to handle short-term stress, Draper said, "None of us was made to endure chronic stress." But the frequent reality is that chronic stress makes ministry "the most stress-filled work in the world. We lose our sense of focus and we feel frustrated by our performance. We become bored. One day we experience meltdown, but because we are in ministry, we feel we can't show it. Ministers aren't supposed to have problems. We are locked in. We have no place to go."

Draper maintained the size of the church and the age of the pastor are irrelevant factors in potential crises.

"All of us are at risk," he said. "Maybe we don't know where we are. We just know something is not right. If Jesus said his yoke is easy and his burden is light, why is ministry so difficult? We need to practice the things we preach.

"How does your family come unglued? How does your church work become soured? It comes one experience at a time," he said. "When you put them together, it becomes a crisis. It comes little by little. Our choices do have consequences."

Draper said ministers can convince themselves they are not spiritually hungry because they are always preparing to preach to others. Many times, he said, they wind up in rebellion against God.

"Remember, there is nothing you won't do," Draper cautioned. "Inside your heart and mine is the seed of every conceivable sin. God uses us in spite of us, not because of us.

"Most of our problem is not that we don't know what to do," he said. "It's that we know what to do, and we don't do it."

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Brooks Faulkner, manager of the board's personal development section which coordinates LeaderCare, said while Christians have been accused of "shooting our wounded," he believes pastors and church staff members do not know what to say or do when their colleagues make mistakes.

The resulting loneliness and despair leave people in crisis feeling God is silent, Faulkner said.

"He is often silent, but never absent. We keep looking for reasons for that, and I sometimes feel God's silence tells us he is sad when people forsake their calling -- when they get exasperated and desperate with their calling and bail out."

He may be silent, Faulkner said, waiting for the minister to take the next step so the providence of God can take effect. Sometimes he appears to be silent because he is planning something better.

James Reimer, pastor of First Baptist Church, Bothell, Wash., told of financial and career crises he experienced as the result of what he called "careless record keeping" in a business he began while serving as a pastor in another church. Recovery and restoration to ministry, he said, came only after years of government agency investigations, loss of his career, his home and personal possessions.

"God was at the bottom, and he was waiting for me," Reimer said. "He got me where I needed to be, at the point where he could break me and minister to me."

Reimer said Draper was among the few pastors who contacted him to offer encouragement, and that practical help from a congregation and pastor who paid bills and helped with employment "showed restorative grace. I lived all of my life on performance. Worth and value came from performance.

"God began a healing process of restoring me and showing me the importance of just being. Material things don't matter. When we lose it all, he is there and that's all that matters. The message is to get up and go on. God is the God of the second chance."

Draper told conference participants Reimer modeled "facing the issues that eat away at us until we get real with God. Jim took responsibility, confessed, admitted anger and bitterness and received restoration and grace."

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Participants in the Columbia, S.C., LeaderCare Conference compiled a list of actions to demonstrate concern and support to ministers and families in crisis. An adaptation of that list is posted in the SBCNet News Room under the filename Care.txt. (BP) photo (horizontal, color) is posted in BP PHOTOS. The file name is LEADER.JPG.

**Indiana Baptists underscore
Southern Baptist commitments**

By John Yeats

**Baptist Press
11/21/96**

INDIANAPOLIS (BP)--A resolution of support of Southern Baptist Convention ministries was adopted by messengers to the 38th annual meeting of the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana.

The resolution, adopted during Nov. 12-13 sessions at Chapelwood Baptist Church, Indianapolis, notes:

"... we affirm the work of the SBC Executive Committee, and each of the agencies and institutions and commissions of the SBC that help us carry out our mission of preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ to every creature."

"... we encourage our churches to give with a servant's heart, a surrendered heart and with a sacrificial heart to support the work of missions in Indiana and across the world."

During the Wednesday afternoon session, Hoosier Baptists overwhelmingly affirmed a partnership with Oklahoma Baptists proposed by the Indiana convention's executive committee and state staff.

The three-year partnership will link Baptists to a state-to-state -- and association-to-association and church-to-church -- relationship in several areas of ministry, such as evangelism, church starts, church organizational development, Christian education and leadership development.

Carrol Fowler, Indiana's director of mission development, was in Oklahoma when the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma earlier voted overwhelmingly for the partnership. He said their enthusiastic response was also a pledge for the partnership to become more than a paper agreement. "The Oklahoma Baptists were cheering as they voted in favor of the partnership," Fowler recounted.

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In other action by the 319 messengers at the Indiana convention, the state constitution and bylaws were replaced with a new set of bylaws. The new document is designed to clear up some procedural contradictions in the former documents and clarify the cooperative agreement the state convention has with associations and local churches. In addition, the executive committee said it would avoid any confusion with ascending or descending liability questions, because courts sometimes are confused by the nonconnective autonomy facet of Baptist polity.

John Rogers, pastor of Eastlake Baptist Church, Crown Point, was elected president in a two-nominee ballot. Mark Hearn, pastor of Grace Baptist Church, Evansville, was elected first vice president and J.E. Hail, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Greenfield, was elected second vice president, both by acclamation. Sarah Burke of Grace Baptist Church, Evansville, was elected secretary.

Jerry Rankin, president of the Foreign Mission Board and one of the convention's guest speakers, focused on "end-time missionaries," saying he believes most of the missionaries sent out in recent days will be on the mission field when the Jesus returns.

The mark of a great church, Rankin stated, is not how many buildings they have or how big their organizations are, but how many people the church sends out to share the gospel to the lost world.

Other resolutions passed at the convention addressed:

-- the potential for damaging legislation in the state legislature this winter, with the resolution noting that double taxation through levies on church assets are not fair, or just.

-- opposition to abortion on demand and euthanasia.

A 1997 budget of \$3.4 million was adopted by the convention, a 2.4 percent increase over the current year. From the contributions given by Indiana's 558 churches and missions, encompassing nearly 100,000 members, 32.25 percent is committed to SBC causes, the same percent of budget as the current year.

The 1997 convention will be Oct. 27-28 at the Vann Avenue Baptist Church, Evansville.

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Stewardship about more than money, pastor says

By Keith Hinson

Baptist Press
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BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Stewardship is about much more than money, according to Calvin T. Partain, author of a new book, "Trusted Steward: Moving Toward Total Stewardship" (Birmingham, Ala.: Woman's Missionary Union, 1996).

"There's certainly still work to do in the area of tithing," Partain acknowledged, "but tithing, as I see it, is the starting point. It's preschool. Where your treasure is, that's where your heart is."

Partain said tithing is important but added tithing alone does not guarantee spiritual health.

"I've run across a few people who were tithers, but their hearts were not really in the Lord's work," Partain observed. "The point should be made that we are really responsible to God for everything. We should pull the fuse on the idea that tithing is just a way of getting the budget for the next year."

Partain, interim pastor of First Baptist Church, Rio Rancho, N.M., cautions pastors about overemphasizing money.

"I pastored for about 42 years, and I came to the conclusion that if all you do is try to talk to people about their money, that soon gets pretty slick," Partain said. "It can become manipulating, if you cannot get them to see what the Lord really wants is you."

The book describes biblical foundations of stewardship and how God holds Christians accountable as stewards in several areas, including: mind, ability, time, relationships, possessions, position, the gospel and the human body.

"Stewardship of the body is not primarily physical fitness. It's really coming out of 1 Corinthians 6 and Romans 12," Partain noted. "We can be physically fit and not be a good steward of our body. When considering our body, we should ask if we've committed it to God -- 'to present your body a living sacrifice.'"

Partain indicated he practices principles of physical fitness in his own life. "I walk, I exercise, I try to be physically fit and I try to watch my diet and fat intake. I'm into that," he said.

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"Yet some people are physically fit, but they're not good stewards of their body. They're standing in front of a mirror admiring themselves," Partain said. "That could be a sham and a fake, (but) there's nothing wrong with physical fitness."

Partain said Christians should remember 1 Timothy 4:8: "For bodily exercise profits little. But godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

Throughout the book, Partain has sprinkled personal experiences and sermon illustrations from his many years of pastoral ministry.

In one story, Partain writes of a wealthy building contractor who embarked on a world tour. Before leaving, he told his superintendent, "While I am away, I want you to build me a house. Spare no expense. I want you to choose the design and the materials so I will have a pleasant surprise when I return."

During the contractor's absence, the superintendent built the house but used cheaper materials in places where it would not be noticed -- thinking he could personally pocket the savings. The result was a beautiful house with shoddy construction.

When the contractor returned, the superintendent took him to see the new house, Partain wrote. "At the end of the tour, the contractor handed the house keys to the superintendent (and said), 'You have worked 25 years for me, and I wanted to reward you. This is your house.'"

Even small deeds of kindness can mean a great deal in God's kingdom, Partain stated. "Any ability, no matter how small, can be used to glorify God and inspire others," said Partain, recalling a woman from his hometown.

"When she heard of someone who needed an emotional lift, she would bake a cake or some cookies and quietly slip it into their house," Partain said. "She would leave a note, 'Given in the name of our Blessed Lord.' Her cooking never won a prize at the county fair, but it did win many people to Christ, because she loved enough to do what she could."

The book is designed for small groups and study course settings in the local church. Each chapter has questions for reflection, and teaching suggestions are given at the end of the book.

The final chapter, "Trusted with the Secret of Successful Stewardship," emphasizes the importance of God's power. "Wake up to reality," Partain urges. "God has all power. God wants us to serve, be stewards and work for Him in His power. ... The secret of successful stewardship is found in switching from our power to God's power."

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**It takes more than a guitar
for a country music church**

By Debbie Sanders

**Baptist Press
11/21/96**

BRANSON, Mo. (BP)--People who like their music with more than a little twang to it may find their hearts skip a beat when they hear about the latest trend making its way through Southern Baptist churches. Country music -- long associated with honky-tonks, steel guitars and big hair -- is gradually making a place for itself in worship services.

To learn more about this trend, about 120 people from around the nation attended the National Country Music Church Conference at the Day Star Ministry Center in Branson, Mo., in early November.

The three-day conference, sponsored by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, had representatives from states as far away as North Dakota, Washington, Maryland, Kentucky, Wyoming and California.

"The purpose of the conference was to allow pastors and worship leaders to mingle and exchange ideas on worship styles and trends," said Sheila Artt, communications director at Day Star Church. "Music has a lot to do with how people perceive the entire service. It has the emotional appeal. I think that's why people are really looking at ways of presenting the gospel in different music styles."

Day Star plans to start a Saturday night country music service after the first of the year.

The conference featured country gospel bands from across the country, as well as several guest speakers. Program personalities included Henry Smart, associate director of field servicing for the Home Mission Board, and J.V. Thomas, national consultant in key church strategy for the Home Mission Board.

Most speakers tried to hammer home the same point to the church leaders in attendance: "Never change your message, but always change your methods."

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Smart explained, "We are trying to get the message across that there are different lifestyle approaches churches can use to reach a secular society. Open the doors through music, and make the secular person want to come to church.

"Don't compromise the gospel, just put it into a different verbal and song package," Smart said. "There are different options for reaching people for Christ." While country music won't work for all people or all churches, Smart listed a number of tips for starting a country music church.

One of the first steps is to study demographics and survey the people in the area, which is just exactly what Steve Martin and the Harrisburg, Ill., congregation he serves did. Martin, pastor of First Baptist Church there and lead vocalist in the band Country Sunrise, takes part in an 8 a.m. country music worship service started within a traditional church. Country Sunrise performed at the conference in Branson.

"We started a country music church as an alternative worship service because we were not reaching as many as we would like through traditional services," Martin said. "Many families have come to our church that would never have come except to the country music service."

The church, which recently celebrated its 125th anniversary, had reached a stagnant period and many members were ready to give up. Then Martin and other pastors surveyed the community and found there was one unifying theme. Country music was by far the most popular type of music people in the area listened to.

The idea for an alternative worship service was born, and it has proven to be successful.

"There is an excitement within our 8 a.m. service that can't be duplicated in our regular service," Martin said. "Country music is the music, the heartbeat, of common people."

While the church in Harrisburg still has its traditional service at 10:45 a.m., Thomas, who is considered an expert on church planting, advised the best route for others may be simply to start a new church.

"If we want to market the gospel through country music, we need to do it through church planting," he said. "With a new congregation, you're multiplying, not adding."

While music can be a tool to draw people in, Thomas said one aspect must remain strong: "By definition, a country music church is having church and using country music. There's no such thing as Christian music. Music is music. What makes it Christian is the words, the lyrics. Whatever kind of music it is, if it tells the story of Jesus, it's Christian."

Thomas urged people interested in Christian music to remain focused. "Our purpose has to be to win people to Jesus. If we have any other purpose, I don't think it will work."

However, Thomas sees the country music church as a means of spreading the news of Jesus in ways never dreamed of before. Basically, it's a matter of presenting the gospel in a way that will reach people where they are.

"Country music is a unique strategy at a unique time with which to evangelize America," he said. "I believe we can take it to the very gates of hell, to the honky-tonks and other places Satan has used throughout the years."

Starting a country music church means prayer, planning and plenty of energy, if the program is to stay in tune with the goal of reaching souls for Christ. The HMB's Smart has outlined a plan for starting a country music church. Excerpts from his tips follow:

-- Pray and earnestly seek the will of God. A church starter approaches every aspect of the task with humble reliance on the leadership of the Spirit as discerned through prayer.

-- Decipher the demographics. Locate clusters of people who like country music.

Study listener surveys conducted by radio stations. Reviewing demographics can be a spiritual experience.

Pray for guidance as you interpret percentages, ethnic makeup, population statistics and other information. Census taking has been around since there were people to count. God can use statistics to bring about a new beginning for a lost people group.

-- Ask the experts. Interview the disc jockeys of local country music radio stations. Obviously, if there is no country music station in an area, or if the area does not pick up a country music station, the possibility of starting this type of lifestyle church is slim.

-- Take your own survey. Interview people on the street, go door-to-door, or use the telephone for a random survey. Prepare an attractive brochure that will encourage people to participate in the survey. People who like country music are out there. Find ways to locate them.

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-- Discover dedicated leaders. Prayerfully seek a pastor who can communicate the gospel to the target group. Also pray for a music leader. He or she should be a gifted singer who enjoys and understands country music. Ideally, this person should play the guitar.

-- Work out the details. The pastor, music leader and other leaders should discuss a variety of issues, including budget, date of first public service, meeting time and place, publicity and promotion, organization of church, relationship with partner church, how to select a band, and whether the type of music should be young country, classic country or bluegrass.

Decide how to start the church. One option is to begin holding services by sponsoring a concert by a well-known country music artist.

-- Develop a calendar flow chart. Determine when the first public service or event will take place. Work backward from that date to the present date. Schedule the steps needed to produce a successful start.

-- Evangelize. Lifestyle churches grow as evangelism, telling the good news, is made a priority. Evangelism is taught, sung, caught, preached, told, modeled and published. The church is now meeting, so the pastor and people must tell the good news by every means available.

Stay focused on building relationships. The new church must start relationally and continue relationally to assimilate those who come to Christ.

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Sanders is a correspondent for Word & Way, Missouri Baptists' newsjournal.

**FamilyNet stations to broadcast
holiday special Nov. 28-Dec. 8**

By C.C. Risenhoover

**Baptist Press
11/21/96**

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--FamilyNet affiliates will be airing a Thanksgiving special between Nov. 28 and Dec. 8 that features footage from the 1996 Dove Awards.

FamilyNet, the broadcast television service of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission, will feed the two-hour Dove Awards program to its affiliates at 6 p.m. Eastern Nov. 28, along with a 30-minute program, "Keep the Faith -- The Quest for Love Happiness and Purpose."

The Dove Awards, originally broadcast last April from the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, Tenn., is hosted by platinum recording artist Michael W. Smith. The special being aired by FamilyNet includes all-new footage, holiday greetings and interviews.

Performers include Steven Curtis Chapman, Twila Paris, Point of Grace, Jars of Clay, dc Talk, 4 Him, Out of the Grey, Anointed, Kathy Troccoli, Sierra, Susan Ashton, Clay Crosse, Andrae Crouch, BeBe and CeCe Winans, Gary Chapman, Amy Grant and others.

The "Keep the Faith" program features Carman, Yolanda Adams, Lisa Bevill, Chapman, Paris, Ashton and Point of Grace.

FamilyNet affiliates may run the holiday special as many as five times daily. Viewers are encouraged to check local listings for the times the program will be aired in their area.

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