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January 23, 1996

95-12

TENNESSEE--Church's giving a reason why CP set records in 27 states.  
TENNESSEE--Baptists respond to flooding in Pennsylvania, West Virginia.  
SOUTH CAROLINA--Baptist Sunday school quarterly helps woman find, share Christ.  
WASHINGTON--Analysis: ABC's Jennings reflects on 'news of the soul.'  
MASSACHUSETTS--Jennings: Religion coverage 'complicated ... inadequate.'  
NORTH CAROLINA--World A Resource Center opens at Baptist college.  
ARKANSAS--Communism, Tiananmen Square stirred his search for faith.  
BRAZIL--Baptists homeless from floods, missionary belongings ruined.  
MISSOURI--They target apartment dwellers who can buy everything, except ...  
FLORIDA--Mission finds responsiveness in midst of \$90,000 incomes.  
TEXAS--Leonard Sweet calls Christians 'to the very gates of hell.'  
TEXAS--Speakers point to discipleship as key for innovative churches.  
TENNESSEE--Correction.

EDITORS' NOTE: The following story can be used in tandem with the (BP) story, "Cooperative Program records celebrated in several states," dated 1/19/96.

Church's giving a reason why  
CP set records in 27 states

Baptist Press  
1/23/96

By David E. Reid & Art Toalston

BAY MINETTE, Ala. (BP)--Will God bless a church financially in proportion to the amount it gives to support missions through the Cooperative Program?

In the case of First Baptist Church, Bay Minette, Ala., the answer is a resounding "Yes," according to pastor Henry Cox.

First Baptist and other like-minded churches helped Alabama Baptists achieve a record year in Cooperative Program giving -- \$30,362,878. Records were set in at least 27 state conventions or regional fellowships.

"We believe that God is blessing First Baptist Church in the area of finances," Cox said, "primarily because of our commitment to missions and Cooperative Program giving. We think our financial history is good evidence of this truth."

Records for the past 25 years show that generally the church's undesignated receipts declined -- in some cases dramatically -- whenever it reduced the percentage of receipts it gave through the Cooperative Program. But receipts generally have increased significantly whenever the church has increased its CP percentage.

For instance, in 1973 the church increased Cooperative Program giving from 15.25 percent to 17 percent and saw 1973 receipts jump from \$143,337 to \$171,107.

The next big change came when the church cut CP giving to only 8.5 percent in 1975. Although receipts continued to increase that year, totaling \$239,921, offerings the following two years declined dramatically, even though the church increased its CP percentages back up to 19.5 percent. Undesignated receipts bottomed out at \$193,753 in 1977, the lowest amount received since 1973.

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"The decrease in undesignated offerings didn't always come in the same year the church reduced its Cooperative Program percentage," Cox explained. "Sometimes there was a delay of a year or two, but inevitably receipts would go down."

Offerings during the years 1978-81 seem to bear that out. Even though the church cut its CP percentage to 12 percent in 1978, receipts that year rocketed up almost \$100,000 more than those of the year before. Cox attributes the increase to the church's faithfulness in restoring and holding the percentage at 19.5 during the two years prior.

Then from their 1978 high, offerings fell significantly -- Cox would say predictably -- over the next two years. Receipts declined to \$275,927 in 1979 and further down to \$255,378 in 1980. Again, Cox attributed the decline to the church's decision to reduce its Cooperative Program percentage.

Then in 1982 the Bay Minette church voted to increase CP gifts to 17 percent. More significantly, the congregation decided that same year to increase its CP percentage by small amounts annually until it reached 20 percent. Immediately, undesignated receipts increased almost \$83,000 to a record high of \$340,335.

Since then, undesignated receipts have increased eight out of 12 years. With one exception, each decrease has been minor and six of the increases have been exceptional. Offerings increased almost \$30,000 in 1983; \$95,000 in 1984; \$55,000 in 1985; \$58,000 in 1989; \$82,000 in 1991; and a record \$101,000 in 1993. Receipts for last year were \$751,084.

Harrell Cushing, director of Cooperative Program promotion for the Alabama Baptist state board of missions, said other churches have had experiences similar to that of First Baptist, Bay Minette.

"Other pastors have shared similar experiences with me," Cushing said. "My own experience when I was a pastor was that even during major construction projects God blessed our commitment to missions through the Cooperative Program."

Cushing explained when a congregation gives sacrificially to support missions, it sets an example for individual members.

"Churches have a wonderful opportunity to help fulfill the Great Commission of our Lord through Cooperative Program gifts. When a church demonstrates sacrificial giving beyond itself, it also encourages members to be faithful in giving through the church," he said.

First Baptist reached its goal of giving 20 percent of undesignated receipts through the Cooperative Program in 1992 and has held steady since then. Cox said the church now is working on increasing the percentage it give to associational missions.

"We hope other churches will see how God has blessed us and be encouraged to increase their support through the Cooperative Program," Cox said.

A state-by-state review of record highs in 1995 Cooperative Program giving follows, in alphabetical order:

-- Alabama: \$30,362,878, 4.78 percent above 1994. Previous high: \$28,977,693, 1994.

-- Arkansas: \$16,020,117.15, 1.32 percent above 1994. Previous high: \$15,811,270.72, 1994.

-- California: \$6,061,602, 2.8 percent above 1994. Previous high: \$5,957,176, 1992.

-- Dakotas: \$192,428.81, 4.5 percent above 1994. Previous high: \$184,039.49, 1994.

-- Georgia: \$35,059,996, 4.73 percent above 1994. Previous high: \$33,475,868, 1994.

-- Florida: \$24,958,433, 1.83 percent above 1994. Previous high: \$24,509,276, 1994.

-- Illinois: \$5,302,741, up 4.2 percent above 1994. Previous high: \$5,090,649, 1994.

-- Indiana: \$1,939,646.30, 7.36 percent above 1994. Previous high: \$1,806,614.62, 1994.

-- Iowa: \$297,377, 1 percent above 1994. Previous high: 282,321, 1993.

-- Kansas-Nebraska: \$1,984,662, 4.4 percent above 1994. Previous high: \$1,900,380, 1994.

-- Louisiana: \$17,441,822, 1 percent above 1994. Previous high: \$17,264,950, 1994.

-- Michigan: \$1,290,175, 1.3 percent above 1994. Previous high: \$1,273,567, 1994.

-- Mississippi: \$23,216,436, 3.3 percent above 1994. Previous high: \$22,474,619, 1994.

-- Missouri: \$15,235,692, 1.78 percent above 1994. Previous high: \$15,016,932, 1992.

-- Montana: \$304,162.75, 3 percent above 1994. Previous high: \$295,488.36, 1994.

-- Nevada: \$638,351, 6.38 percent above 1994. Previous high: \$600,039, 1994.

-- New England: \$564,380, 1.69 percent above 1994. Previous high: \$557,784, 1993.

-- New Mexico: \$2,767,235.63, 1.05 percent above 1994. Previous high: \$2,738,331.28, 1994.

-- North Carolina: \$28,507,928, 2.9 percent above 1994. Previous high: \$27,703,911, 1994.

-- Northwest (Washington and Oregon): \$2,009,869, 6.5 percent above 1994. Previous high: \$1,886,675, 1994.

-- Ohio: \$3,688,748, 3 percent above 1994. Previous high: \$3,581,458, 1994.

-- Oklahoma: \$18,034,699, 3.32 percent above 1994. Previous high: \$17,454,498, 1994.

-- Pennsylvania/South Jersey: \$596,867.51, 1.23 percent above 1994. Previous high: \$593,958.76, 1991.

-- South Carolina: \$23,266,437.63, 3.3 percent above 1994. Previous high: \$22,739,725.96, 1991.

-- Tennessee: \$26,893,421, 2.62 percent above 1994. Previous high: \$26,206,772, 1994. (The state's fiscal year ends Oct. 31.)

-- Texas: \$63,705,447, 8.84 percent above 1994. Previous high: \$60,551,672, 1990.

-- West Virginia: \$740,537.69, 4 percent above 1994. Previous high: \$711,876.86, 1994.

Because of the crippling East Coast snowstorms, figures have not yet been compiled for the District of Columbia.

In Colorado, CP giving climbed to \$436,077 in '95 from \$408,854 in '94, but an office worker did not have records to indicate whether it was an all-time high.

In the SBC at large, the convention ended its 1994-95 fiscal year Sept. 30 with a record \$145,739,489 in Cooperative Program gifts, surpassing by nearly \$3 million the record total for the previous year, or a 2.01 percent increase.

The Cooperative Program is Southern Baptists' method of supporting missions and ministry efforts of state and regional conventions and the Southern Baptist Convention. State and regional conventions retain a percentage of Cooperative Program contributions they receive from the churches to support work in their areas and send the remaining funds to the SBC Executive Committee for national and international ministries. The percentage of distribution is at the discretion of each state or regional convention.

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Polly House and Betty Kemp contributed to this story.

Baptists respond to flooding  
in Pennsylvania, West Virginia

By Bob Carey

Baptist Press  
1/23/96

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--The snow and cold of the great blizzard of 1996 has turned to flooding and mud for many residents of Pennsylvania and West Virginia. The floodwater has overrun homes, businesses and even water supplies for many communities, sending the residents to shelters and leaving them in need of meals.

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The flooding has been declared a level-five disaster and brought quick response from Southern Baptist disaster relief teams. The teams are helping by providing meals and mud-out teams in the two states. Southern Baptist feeding units have four units operating in West Virginia and two in Pennsylvania.

"Over 8,000 people in Pennsylvania have been relocated from the floodwaters," said Terry Douglas of the Baptist Convention of Penn-South Jersey. More than 4,000 buildings have been flooded.

Despite the floodwaters receding in Pennsylvania, the damage is devastating. Firefighters in one community south of Harrisburg waded through water three feet deep to fight fires that destroyed eight homes.

"This is a cold-weather flood. The floodwaters have gone into homes and then frozen, damaging furnaces," Douglas added. "Many of the homes have no heat or fresh water."

Several communities near Harrisburg lost their water supply when the company that is their supplier was flooded and the water was contaminated. Residents have been warned to boil all water through the next weekend.

To assist in the feeding of the displaced in Pennsylvania, a feeding unit from the North Eastern Consortium (consisting of New England, Penn-South Jersey, Maryland/Delaware and New York) is locating at Dallas Baptist Church in Wilkes Barre. A unit from South Carolina is being located in Altoona.

In West Virginia, units from Ohio, Kentucky, North Carolina and Virginia are providing meals in four corners of the state. The Ohio unit is stationed at Madison Elementary School, Wheeling Island; Kentucky at West Ripley Baptist Church in Ripley; North Carolina at First Baptist Church, Fairlea; and Virginia at Old Fields (W.Va.) Baptist Church. The Kentucky mud-out unit has also been dispatched to Ripley.

The quick response of Southern Baptist disaster relief units has impressed West Virginians. "It's difficult to put into words the feelings of seeing Southern Baptists rally together so quickly to help," said Larry Wood, evangelism director for the West Virginia Convention of Southern Baptists. "It does my heart good to be a part of that effort."

It is that response the Brotherhood Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention has worked to develop.

"In the midst of major devastation and pain for these flood victims, I am grateful that Southern Baptists have a disaster response system in place," says James D. Williams, president of the commission based in Memphis, Tenn.

"The Southern Baptist response is supported by thousands of highly trained, dependable volunteers that come from our churches," Williams added.

The units are being coordinated on-site by Mickey Caison, Brotherhood's national disaster relief director. Caison is in the process of putting two additional feeding units on standby for Pennsylvania and is preparing to call in more mud-out units as needed.

"Our quick response is facilitated by the helpful cooperation in locating sites to station units by the convention staff in both states. Also the responding states have been helpful in activating their units so efficiently," Caison said.

Despite the tragedy, Wood has a positive outlook on the flooding. "We're thankful for the many volunteers coming. We're looking at it as an opportunity for ministry."

That opportunity is exactly the reason Williams cites for why the volunteers come. "There aren't many areas of mission service that require greater spiritual sensitivity and more rapid response to human need than a disaster. Beyond the meals that are served and persons helped, I give thanks to God for those who will come to Christ, for churches started and countless lives changed because of this caring ministry to the people affected by the flood."

Those wishing to help the flood victims in Pennsylvania and West Virginia may donate funds to the Brotherhood Commission, 1548 Poplar Ave., Memphis, TN 38104. For more information regarding the flooding, call (901) 272-2461 or 1-800-280-1891.

**Baptist Sunday school quarterly  
helps woman find, share Christ**

NORTH CHARLESTON, S.C. (BP)--Terri Putman-Hair took home two things from her first visit to an adult Sunday school class at Remount Baptist Church, North Charleston, S.C. -- the memory of a teacher's welcoming smile and a copy of "Life & Work Pursuits," a Bible study quarterly published by the Baptist Sunday School Board.

At first, she really didn't look at the quarterly much, except on Sunday mornings during Bible study. But she kept coming back.

Later, she joined a Christian aerobics class and a Christ-centered health program called "First Place."

"What I experienced and witnessed with this group of women was fellowship, love of Christ and one another, and what I can only describe as the 'glow of the spirit of Jesus Christ,'" Putman-Hair recalled in a recent letter. "It just seemed to glow and flow like a halo of light around them. I wanted that. I wanted it bad!"

She soon began wondering about how to have a personal relationship with Jesus. After a few failed attempts at responding during public invitations at church, she decided to "really look" at her Bible study quarterly.

"What I found was the answer to my problem. For on the inside front cover are instructions on 'How to Become a Christian.' I couldn't believe it."

Putman-Hair prayed to accept Christ and committed to serve him in any way she was led.

She didn't have to wait long. On a recent two-week annual tour with the U.S. Air Force Reserves, she roomed with a woman with a long history of emotional outbursts often related to drinking.

"She watched me as I read the Bible, (my) adult Bible study book, and had my daily devotion time," Putman-Hair recalled. "She commented on how she had noticed that I had really changed lately, and that she envied that change."

Later, the woman asked Putman-Hair "how to start" becoming a Christian.

"I simply gave her my (study book) and showed her the inside front cover," she said, adding she later slipped a card in the woman's bag letting her know she cared and God cared.

Putman-Hair returned home and resumed her civilian life. About 10 days later, she received a thank-you letter from the woman.

"She wrote that she had been to an AA meeting, picked up a white chip, and had not had a drink for seven days. She also began reading the Bible daily. I cried with joy."

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**ANALYSIS**

**ABC's Jennings reflects  
on 'news of the soul'**

**By Terry Mattingly**

**Baptist Press  
1/23/96**

WASHINGTON (BP)--Hours before the funeral of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, an ABC News colleague brought Peter Jennings a copy of "The Jewish Mourners Book of Why."

"I found the explanation of Jewish burial so fascinating that I incorporated a good deal of it into my funeral commentary," said the veteran anchorman, in a recent address at Harvard University's divinity school. "If my mail is a guide, the audience much appreciated it. Contrary to what many news executives have believed in the past, news of the soul is very much news."

It's been two years since Jennings raised eyebrows in major television newsrooms -- including his own -- by deciding that religion was worthy of full-time coverage by a journalist trained to handle this complex and powerful subject.

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People still ask why he did it. The answer, obviously, begins with Jennings' work in the Middle East, Russia, Northern Ireland, Bosnia and in the American South during the civil rights era. And in 1992, he said ABC crews kept returning from trips to Middle America with "this gnawing feeling that we were missing something if we didn't talk to people about the effect that their religious beliefs might have on their presidential choice."

Cutting to the bottom line, Jennings has, several times, said that American Agenda correspondent Peggy Wehmeyer's religion reports -- 27 so far -- have draw more audience response than any other subject covered on ABC's World News Tonight.

"It is ludicrous that we are the only national television network to have a full-time religion reporter," he said. "Every other human endeavor is the subject of continuing coverage by us -- politics and cooking, business and foreign policy, sports and sex and entertainment. But religion, which we know from every reasonable yardstick to be a crucial force in the daily life of the world, has so few specialists that they are hardly visible on the page or on the screen."

As a veteran CBS News producer once put it, the typical TV journalist is only interested in religion when the story is about "politics, pageantry or pedophilia."

Thus, most media reports ignore religion and appear to focus on the lives of "a nation of body doubles" -- people who have the bodies, but not the souls, of typical Americans, argues journalist Scott Morris. This is one reason the nation suffers from a condition he calls "Cultural Disconnect."

This split is not "between intellectuals and non-intellectuals -- it is not between bookish scholars and virile factory workers," said Morris, writing in The Weekly Standard. "The divide is between people who have been socialized and educated in a secular culture in a way that has sealed them off from religion, and people who are either religious or at least familiar with the language and motivations of religious people."

Naturally, many religious people claim America's media elites are on the cutting edge of a savvy conspiracy to hurt the faithful. This only adds to the confusion.

"But there is no such conspiracy," notes Morris. Instead, it helps to think of those who cannot grasp religion's power as "severely handicapped, in terms of their ability to understand America. They have eyes, but they cannot see. They have ears, but they cannot hear. American life appears to them as a bizarre pageant where people succumb to inexplicable motivations."

Jennings wasn't this blunt. But he did say some ABC staffers believe he has become "positively pedantic" about finding a spiritual angle in news stories -- from higher education to prime-time TV, from medicine to criminal justice. Wehmeyer's work has inspired so much comment that "inside the network, some people have been uncomfortable dealing with the issues she confronts, or with the language of spirituality that she often uses," he said.

Nevertheless, Wehmeyer will be a full participant in ABC's team covering the 1996 elections, said Jennings. Also, full-time campaign reporters have been assigned to cover the Christian Coalition and the Nation of Islam.

Meanwhile, each new religion story sets off another wave of reactions -- most positive, but some negative. "So many people," said Jennings, "seemed spooked by religion."

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Mattingly, who teaches at Milligan College in Tennessee, writes this weekly column for the Scripps Howard News Service.

Jennings: Religion coverage  
'complicated ... inadequate'

Baptist Press  
1/23/96

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. (BP)--Only recently has Peter Jennings come to understand how "complicated and inadequate, and occasionally horrifying, media coverage of religion has been."

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Jennings, in a recent talk at Harvard University's divinity school, said his view is shared by "others who cover religion much more thoroughly than I do," according to a report in the newsletter of the Religion Newswriters Association.

"I would venture that in the overwhelming majority of newsrooms in America there is an appalling ignorance of religion and faith," Jennings was quoted by the RNA as saying.

"Certainly religious practice is not a desirable litmus test," he said, "but without even a passing knowledge of the role that organized religion plays in the country, reporters and editors are susceptible to using stereotypes which, as we all know, leads readers and viewers of all religions to have fairly strong stereotypes of us. Which makes dialogue all that much tougher."

Jennings said he first came to see religion's enormous influence on behavior and world events while covering the civil rights movement in the 1960s and later as a correspondent in Europe and the Middle East, according to the RNA account. "Even before the election of a Polish pope, I saw how Catholicism was an element of survival for millions of people in the darkest days of communism."

But, he said, religion was not often the gist of network news broadcasts. He said his "gnawing feeling" that TV network news was "missing something" came into focus four years ago. "We talked with people about how their religious beliefs affected their presidential choice and came upon people for whom living by their faith was much more important than who was going to be the next senator or president," Jennings said.

But convincing ABC executives and his colleagues the network needed to hire a full-time religion reporter wasn't easy, he said. There are, he said, people who are "spooked" by the whole notion of religion, and others who feel more attention to religion crosses the separation of church and state.

Even today, he said, the stories produced by the network's religion correspondent, Peggy Wehmeyer, generate an enormous amount of discussion, and controversy, within the organization.

"Peggy has become an influential intellectual force in our newsroom, so much so, and often so provocative, that I feel the need for more like her," Jennings said. "Everything she does causes comment. Inside the network some people have been uncomfortable dealing with the issues she confronts, or with the language of spirituality which she often uses. But the support for what she contributes, both inside and out, is tremendous."

As for himself, Jennings, who was raised in what he called a "fairly predictable Anglican communion" in Canada, said he discovered a new spark to his own faith years ago, according to the RNA account.

"Though I am a dismal failure on many counts, as my friends would testify, I must confess that today I find there is much comfort and challenge in practicing my faith. It is something I try to live by," he said.

"But I must be honest and say -- and I think it is also true about other reporters who work the beat more assiduously than I -- that my own faith has helped me develop the eyes to see the spiritual dimension in many stories. And when we report on that added ingredient, we more accurately capture the human experience and become more relevant as reporters."

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World A Resource Center  
opens at Baptist college

By Michele Norman

Baptist Press  
1/23/96

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. (BP)--"The impact will be phenomenal," Roy Smith beamed when asked about a new missions resource center to serve the one-fourth of the world's population that has never been exposed to the gospel.

Smith, executive director-treasurer of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, was among 200 people on hand for the Jan. 16 opening and dedication of the World A Resource Center at Gardner-Webb University, Boiling Springs, N.C.

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"As many people in New York will use it as the people in North Carolina," Smith said. "It's not just a regional thing."

World A is a term that describes the least-evangelized area of the world, predominantly in Asia, 10,000 miles across, 4,000 miles deep.

The World A center was created to be a link between churches, organizations and individuals to mission opportunities and needs around the globe. Under the direction of Cathy Ollis, formerly of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, the center will utilize computer databases and networks to keep abreast of the changing needs and issues confronting the target areas and populations of World A. Ollis, who was with the FMB from 1980-94, worked in India, Thailand and Singapore.

"World A is full of Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and animists," said Jimmy Maroney, director of the FMB's global desk. "If you can picture an arrow, World A is the tip of the arrow; the focus of Christian missions today."

Smith spoke about a missionary in Africa who called him asking for leadership in cross-cultural organizations. The woman wanted to know if there was any such resource in North Carolina that could enable her to learn new ways to reach World A. Smith, in turn, was able to tell the missionary about the World A Resource Center at GWU.

Richard Brunson, executive director of North Carolina Baptist Men, said, "I can imagine Baptist churches across the state and hundreds of other churches across North Carolina, South Carolina and the East Coast praying for people whose names they cannot even pronounce."

The center is a partnership between the North Carolina Baptist convention and the Baptist-affiliated college's divinity school, with additional funding coming from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Representatives from about 50 groups, ranging from the FMB and CBF to Woman's Missionary Union, North Carolina Baptist Men and Youth With A Mission, participated in a "Pathways to World A and Beyond" exhibit in connection with the center's opening.

Shirley Alexander, of North Carolina's Woman's Missionary Union, manned a colorful exhibit of women and children who advocate for people in World A via prayer networks. Others had pictures, maps and memorabilia from countries and people groups that are no longer unknown.

Smith, who spoke at the dedication service, said, "It is significant that the Gardner-Webb school of divinity has created a World A Resource Center (because) the world is changing; it is becoming necessary to change the way we do missions. Yes, there will always be a need for career missionaries, but more than ever is the need for volunteers -- doctors, nurses, masons, carpenters, butchers, bakers. ... Gardner-Webb is housing a resource that is on the cutting edge of mission work."

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Norman is communications officer for Gardner-Webb's divinity school.

Communism, Tiananmen Square  
stirred his search for faith

By Russell N. Dilday

Baptist Press  
1/23/96

ARKADELPHIA, Ark. (BP)--Chol Chang, a former atheist, Communist Party member and student demonstrator in China, came to Arkadelphia, Ark., as a student at Ouachita Baptist University last August.

Before long, what began as a spiritual search for Chang, 32, led him to faith in God as he made a personal profession of faith in Christ at Arkadelphia's Park Hill Baptist Church.

Because of his ties to the Communist Party in China and the sensitive nature of passport renewal there, the names of him and his wife, Julia, have been changed in this article.

Chang said the spiritual journey that led him to Arkadelphia began while he was a boy.

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"I struggled for a long time spiritually," he recalled. "In China, I was taught atheism along with Marxism. I was a communist for a while. I got into the party in college."

His student travels also took him to Kuwait for two years. "It was there I began to think about a spiritual life. I read some books on Islam, since Kuwait is an Islamic country.

"The first time I bought a Bible was in Kuwait," he said. "I also bought a book by Billy Graham. So I read some books, but I didn't know God at that time. I thought about God. I knew there was God. But I didn't know if it was Yahweh, Christ or Allah or something else."

After returning to China in 1989, he joined the student protest movement there. "We demonstrated, we cried, we shouted. We also felt very painful after the (Tiananmen Square) massacre.

"After that, we felt aimless and that life was meaningless," he said. "We began to make money and we thought money would bring us happiness. So we tried to moonlight and take second jobs. We got almost everything: a nice house, VCR, a big-screen TV and a fax machine, but still we felt very miserable, aimless."

It was during that aimless time in their lives that Chang said he and his wife met two Baptists serving through the Southern Baptist relief and development organization, Cooperative Services International.

One of the workers attended a class Julia was teaching, Chang said. "As we began to know more about her, she shared Christianity with us. Julia became a Christian first. I was hesitant, but I supported her."

He said his hesitancy was because "it was too difficult for me to believe in the Bible. I knew Christianity was a good religion that teaches people to love each other, but I was taught evolution and atheism and couldn't believe the Bible literally. It's hard."

Local religious customs also made belief difficult. "Our parents believe in their dead ancestors," he explained. "My mother believes that every object is a God: The house is a house god, the well is a well god."

Added Julia, "I heard him say many times, 'I want to believe, but I can't believe there is a God.'"

She said before she became a Christian, she "believed in myself" as a deity. "I thought I was my own god.

"We never heard much about Jesus," she said. "We even didn't know if this person is in a fiction book. It took me more than a year to accept it."

Julia, who joined Chang in Arkansas with their young son, Jimmy, in December, accepted Christ more than a year ago. She said she was attracted to the Christian faith when her Southern Baptist friend gave her C.S. Lewis' "Chronicles of Narnia" series, which contain biblical references.

She also received a Bible from her friend. "I read it and said, 'This is a good philosophy.' First it was a philosophy, then it became a belief and now it is my life."

She said a disappointing event, being passed over for an opportunity to teach in Korea, produced a crisis in her life that caused her to eventually accept Christ. Angered about the situation, she prayed to God she would "be kind when people mistreat me ... or the system is not fair ... or my students don't care." As she prayed and trusted God, "suddenly I felt a peace in my heart. After a few days I went to (her friend). She asked me, 'Have you made a decision yet?' I said, 'Yes.'"

Because Julia was not baptized, she was baptized at Park Hill Jan. 14.

Although Chang supported his wife's faith, he did not accept Christ until he came to America. "I went to Ouachita and decided I would go to a Baptist church. I saw this church's flyer and remembered the address. So my first Sunday at Ouachita, I walked to Park Hill. I lost my way."

"He ended up walking about three miles," said Blake McKinney, the church's pastor. "I was outside the church building and this very sweaty Chinese person walks up during a very hot day in August," he laughed.

"But I found out he had walked all the way from Ouachita and was just floored that he had made that much effort to come to worship," McKinney said. "The more I got to know him, the more I understood part of that was because he didn't have the freedom to do that as a registered member of the Communist Party in China."

Chang accepted Christ during a salvation study emphasis in his Sunday school class.

McKinney's wife, Gayla, who leads the college ministry at the church, said Chang's conversion also proved a blessing to the class. "We were studying salvation the month he was saved and I remember wondering, 'Why are we doing this?' because most of my students are Christians. Chang's salvation gave a whole new angle to the class from someone who had not grown up in church. They learned through that how to minister to people who are not familiar with our way of doing things."

Joining Park Hill not only gave Chang and Julia a church home, but "parents" to go with it.

"A year or two ago, we started a college ministry Adopt-a-Student program," Gayla McKinney noted. "We didn't think about international students, but it's turned out to be wonderful. Chang signed up the first day he was here and Bill and Nancy Summars adopted Chang, then Julia and Jimmy."

"It's very easy to love Chang and now that his family is here, we love them too," said Summars. "Our role is not hard at all. We like to have him come to our house, eat and ride around and look at Christmas lights."

"We even want to get to play Grandma and Grandpa for Jimmy," Mrs. Summars added.

Summars said it is "amazing" they were assigned to Chang and Julia because "I was in the service in Korea from 1951-52. Her father was, too. Who would have ever thought that 43 years later, that the daughter of my enemy during the war would be in my house visiting and we just think the world of them? To me, that is God's work."

"I believe God has plans for us," Julia affirmed. "If we have the opportunity, we would like to ... do some kind of mission work in our country."

There are problems, though, with doing that, Chang acknowledged. "Since we are Chinese citizens, we cannot go back to China to preach or be missionaries. That is impossible. Maybe we can be missionaries in another country."

"They've already been doing some mission work," pastor McKinney said. "Chang has brought a number of international students with him to church and the two of them, just this past Sunday night, brought another Chinese couple with them to church."

"They already are practicing what they are planning on practicing in the future and it's exciting to see," McKinney continued. "Literally, from the Sunday Chang was baptized he was bringing other international students to church. If that can become contagious, that could really transform a church."

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Baptists homeless from floods,  
missionary belongings ruined

By Wally Poor

Baptist Press  
1/23/96

FLORIANOPOLIS, Brazil (BP)--Baptist families were among about 28,000 people left homeless by flooding in the southern Brazilian states of Rio Grande do Sul, Minas Gerais and Santa Catarina in late December.

At least 44 people died in the flooding and landslides that followed nearly a week of heavy rains.

Seven feet of water washed through Trinity Baptist Church in a Florianopolis suburb. Only a great hole remained where the basement had been.

The flood also destroyed furnishings owned by a missionary couple who had transferred out of the country. The couple, Jerry and Karen Cowin of Imperial, Mo., and House Springs, Mo., respectively, had already arrived at their new post in Antigua, a Caribbean island.

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Most of the Cowins' household furnishings had been stored in Brazil while they worked to overcome delays in government paper work. Ironically, a hurricane destroyed the household goods the Cowins took with them to Antigua five months earlier.

They had taken only a few essentials for housekeeping, such as a couple of beds, until their shipment could arrive from Brazil. Unfazed by the news of his latest loss, Cowin remarked, "The Lord's going to take care of us. We're where he wants us to be."

A 24-hour deluge touched off the flooding in these three southern-most states. "It just rained and rained," said Foreign Mission Board missionary Sherry Blackwell of Baton Rouge, La. The street in front of the Blackwell house became a raging river. Afterward, "It looked like it had been bombed. You can just make it down the street by zigzagging," she said.

Baptist churches unaffected by the flooding gathered clothing and food to help flood victims, said Sherry's husband, Ron, of Monticello, Ark., who has directed the work of a Baptist Friendship House for 17 years. Local governments had relief efforts "pretty well controlled," he said.

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They target apartment dwellers  
who can buy everything, except ...

Baptist Press  
1/23/96

By Jennifer Mauldin

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--How do you reach people for Christ who seem to have everything money can buy and don't think they need anything else?

That is the challenge facing Ed and Diana Stucky, students at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. They have started ministering in apartment complexes in affluent Johnson County, Kan.

Nail Avenue Baptist Church, Prairie Village, Kan., sponsors the apartment work. The church called the Stuckys as ministers of missions and asked them to start adult nondenominational Bible studies.

There are 250 apartment complexes in Johnson County. The couple pinpointed those closest to the church and made contact at more than 75.

In seminary classes, the Stuckys had read about work in low-income apartment areas, where Christians could help meet physical needs. "Johnson County is a different ball game," says Diana. "Those people don't need for you to bring them clothes or food. They can buy everything they need except a relationship with Jesus."

The Stuckys faced some tough work. They could not go knocking on doors due to apartment regulations, and most managers restricted where they could post signs. In their survey work, they found most people living in the apartments were single or divorced. The families often were just there temporarily as they looked for a house or waited for a new house to be built.

Their foot in the door was a "person of peace," a person who lived in the apartments and wanted to start a Bible study. "We didn't go in and try to invite all these people," says Diana. "We used the person of peace who could go in and invite them. Someone living in their midst. Someone they knew or at least recognized. You're more likely to come to a Bible study when someone asks you personally."

The Stuckys used a special Bible study developed to allow Christians and non-Christians to participate. They would ask opinion-based questions after reading Scripture so everyone could contribute without the fear of being wrong.

The first series of lessons asks, "What is happiness?"

Each study is aimed "so people will see for themselves that they need Christ," says Diana. "It's the obvious conclusion."

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The Bible study groups have filled a need for many apartment residents. Ed recalls how one woman commented "it was a shame that every apartment complex doesn't have a group like this where people can share problems. Maybe it would help."

Diana adds, "A lot of times the reason people showed up was because they're lonely or had a need in their lives."

Ed and Diana say some people in the apartments were thinking of moving out because they hadn't gotten to know anyone. "They're just like a small town but they're not aware of each other in the same way," Ed says. "It's a whole community without the relationships."

Some people attending the Bible studies are Christians. They work during traditional church hours. The Stuckys described one woman who said she even used that as an excuse for not going to church at all. The group member says when she saw the notice for the Bible study, she knew God was speaking to her and this was her gift from God.

Ed and Diana took on the apartment ministry as a team and say they complement each other in the work. Ed handles the teaching at the Bible studies. "He can take anything and explain it to you so you can understand," explains Diana. "I tend to be the one who is good at drawing you out and getting you to talk about yourself."

After starting with two Bible studies last fall, Ed and Diana have arranged their seminary schedules so they can continue and expand the work at the Johnson County apartments.

"It was fun. It was hard to come back to school. It makes you really see the need. It was overwhelming."

Ed and Diana Stucky graduate from MWBTS in May. Ed is in the master of divinity program and Diana is studying for her master's in religious education.

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Mission finds responsiveness  
in midst of \$90,000 incomes

By Barbara Denman

Baptist Press  
1/23/96

HOLLYWOOD, Fla. (BP)--It had been a summer when her family and marriage were sailing through turbulent waters. A phone call inviting the family to a new church in the community "touched my heart for a second," recalled Lorraine Miller. After learning it was a Baptist church, her heart began to sink.

Bob and Lorraine Miller had been "born and raised Catholics" but had not attended church for a while. Neither had ever attended a non-Catholic worship service, and neither could imagine attending a worship service that fit their preconceived idea of a Baptist church.

The woman caller from Sheridan Hills Baptist Church, Hollywood, Fla., called back again and again. She sent brochures on a planned mission church which the Millers, like most families, placed on their refrigerator and "pondered" their response.

One Sunday Lorraine determined she and the girls were going to attend the worship service at the new Baptist church. Bob decided to go along. When they arrived they "were as nervous as can be," Lorraine recalled. But the first person they met was Laura Beville, the pastor's wife. "They welcomed us, took us in," she recalled. "We felt totally, totally, called by God that day. We felt at peace."

Eight weeks later, the Millers each accepted Christ as personal Savior. Two of their daughters made professions of faith soon thereafter, then the other two.

"This has totally changed our family," Lorraine said. "It changed our television. It changed the music we listen to. I am a testimony.

"When I got that call, I needed it so. Had I not gotten that call, we would not be in church today. The caller knew I was apprehensive, but she also knew I was almost there. One day I want to meet that person."

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Pastor Eddie Bevill would like to know the identity of that persistent caller, too, and say thanks. "Little did I know that they (Millers) could become such leaders in our congregation."

Parkland Baptist Church, located in one of Broward County's more posh communities, was started after Bill Billingsley, pastor at the Sheridan Hills church, "heard a Word of God through the Southern Baptist Convention," according to Bevill. In 1991, a challenge was issued by SBC leader Morris Chapman to start 1,000 churches on Easter 1992.

Billingsley waited a few months for Bevill, his son-in-law and former staff member, to finish seminary training. Billingsley led the church to call Bevill to start the new Parkland congregation the following September.

From a telemarketing campaign that placed telephone calls to 20,000 homes, a 2,000-name mailing list was devised. The first service on Sept. 20, 1992, attracted 250 residents. The next Sunday, attendance dropped to 80 and then steadily began growing to an average of 160 people. Many of the visitors had responded to the creative direct mail campaign. By May 1993, 200 worshippers were in attendance.

The congregation meets in the Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School but has recently purchased a 12.8-acre church site for just over \$1 million. Located at the intersection of the Sawgrass Expressway and Coral Ridge Drive, the site is near an area where 26,000 homes are expected to be built within the next two years, bringing an estimated 6,000 new residents to the area.

The average home in the Parkland area costs \$320,000 and the median family income is \$90,000. At last count, more than 300 attorneys live in the community.

The first time Bevill visited prospects, he found himself at a \$500,000 house, meeting the 35-year-old owner. Bevill admits such experiences initially were "overwhelming" for the recent seminary graduate.

"These people were not much older than I. I couldn't fathom how they could own these homes," he said. "But spiritually, they were just as poverty stricken as in the inner city," where Bevill served as a seminary student. "Now I don't notice."

The 30-something congregation includes accountants, corporate heads, bankers and dozens of children. Providing quality Bible teaching, and not just child care for these children, has been one of the biggest challenges for the young pastor.

Bevill is reaching a cultural mix, including former residents of New York State. Eight members are converts of Judaism, and several are former Catholics, including one whose brother is a priest. Bevill has seen many couples at the same time come to know the Lord.

But almost all of the current members did not attend any church before coming to Parkland. Bevill said in his mind that validates the need to start new churches. "I am convinced that the people who come to our church would not go to an established church. But when they are invited to attend a new church they think, 'I can start over again.'"

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Leonard Sweet calls Christians  
'to the very gates of hell'

By Ken Camp

Baptist Press  
1/23/96

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--"Are you a disciple of Jesus?" author and theologian Leonard Sweet asked participants in the opening session of the Innovative Church Conference in Fort Worth, Jan. 14-17.

"Then go to hell," challenged Sweet, saying Christians are commanded to "bring the living water of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the very gates of hell."

Sweet, dean of the school of theology at Drew University, Madison, N.J., was among the speakers at the meeting held in partnership with the annual Texas Baptist evangelism conference.

Today's Christians -- living at the dawn of the third millennium -- are called to take the church of Jesus Christ "not to the people who want it most, but to the people who need it most," added Sweet, a United Methodist minister.

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Jesus declared to his disciples, "Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it," Sweet recounted. Jesus delivered that claim in Caesarea Philippi, a center of pagan worship well-known for a rock formation called the "gates of hell," he noted.

As society moves from the information age into the post-industrial genetic age, the church must recognize different generations of Americans -- popularly known as boosters, boomers, busters and millennials -- are at different "gates," Sweet said.

The church's responsibility is to meet members of each generation at their own gateway to hell, allowing the power of the gospel to overcome evil, he stressed.

"The world has enough hell-raisers. The world needs some hell-busters," he said. "The world has plenty of people who want to R-A-I-S-E hell. It is desperately crying out for some who will R-A-Z-E hell."

Churches also need leaders, said Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Valley Community Church, Mission Viejo, Calif.

Warren launched the church with seven people in his home in 1979. Now average attendance on Sunday is between 11,000 and 12,000, and the church baptized 1,365 new Christians last year, he said.

"It really doesn't matter if you are innovative or not innovative (or) contemporary or traditional," Warren told the crowd, comprised heavily of pastors. "It matters if you match your target."

Just as God created a vast array of people with various tastes and perspectives, "it takes all kinds of churches to reach all kinds of people," he said. However, churches that effectively reach people for Christ share one key common denominator, he said: "Everything rises or falls on leadership."

Warren listed four components necessary to develop and maintain leadership:

-- Never stop learning.

"The moment I think I've learned it all, I'm dead in the water," he said. "The secret of learning is asking questions -- having an inquisitive mind."

-- Never criticize what God is blessing.

"We've got to realize we're all trophies of God's grace," he explained. "As long as any method reaches a person for Christ, I'm for it. That's because I'm not for methods; I'm for people."

-- Never give up.

"Ministry is 100 times more complex than it was a generation ago," Warren said, citing the increasing complexities of church members' lives and related increases in demands on ministers. "You must have a rock-ribbed conviction God wants your church to grow, or you'll give up."

-- Never compare your church to another church.

"The Bible says that's stupid," he insisted, noting the exact biblical phrase for comparison with others is "not wise."

"God made you to be you," he told the ministers. "If God made you and called you to minister, then he's got a group of people that you can minister to better than anybody else."

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Marv Knox contributed to this story.

Speakers point to discipleship  
as key for innovative churches

By Marv Knox

Baptist Press  
1/23/96

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Effective churches focus on making disciples, not racking up decisions, speaker after speaker declared in Texas Baptists' "breakout to win" seminars on innovative churches.

The seminars were held in Fort Worth, Jan. 14-16, in conjunction with the annual Texas Baptist evangelism conference.

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"The goal is to make disciples, not just make decisions," said Bob Roberts Jr., pastor of NorthWood Baptist Church, Keller, Texas, who teamed with Chris Seay, pastor of University Baptist Church, Waco, to talk about fresh approaches to evangelism.

Evangelism and ministry that only produce public decisions for Christ very often do not result in mature Christians and strong churches, said Roberts, whose young church has been effective in reaching baby boomers and their growing families.

"If we view evangelism as only decision, we will degenerate," he said, noting new Christians who do not receive training in the faith often do not remain faithful.

While shallow or intimidating methods can produce large numbers of conversions, they don't necessarily yield strong Christians, he added. You can grow a church with techniques -- show pictures of Lassie dying and play on people's emotions," he said. "That's the scary thing."

But effective evangelism draws upon the strength of the Holy Spirit and leads people to personal holiness, he stressed.

Seay maintained authenticity is the key to evangelizing his generation, the baby busters -- young adults born since the mid-1960s.

"If you're plastic, they'll be out the door," Seay warned. The best evangelism is done "in realistic, everyday situations, where (Christians) share their faith authentically."

And that authentic evangelism results in strong disciples -- growing Christians who are nurtured through their relationships with solid, mature fellow Christians, he said.

A relatively new method of reaching unchurched people and also developing them into strong disciples is through small groups, reported Gene Wilkes, pastor of Legacy Drive Baptist Church, Plano, Texas.

"A disciple is someone who knows Christ, shares Christ and multiplies the life of Christ in another person," Wilkes said. "The process never stops."

The process is strengthened through small-group ministries, he added. The groups are comprised of about six to eight people who agree to meet weekly for Bible study, mutual support, ministry and/or fellowship.

The purpose of the groups is to "make disciples by providing a nurturing environment where genuine concern, intimacy, fellowship, encouragement, biblical application, spiritual maturation and outreach will flourish and attract others to Christ," he said.

The task of helping churches embrace ministries that specialize in developing disciples involves change, speakers agreed.

Change isn't painless, but it doesn't have to be deadly, insisted innovative church pastors Knox Talbert and Mike Slaughter.

"Sometimes God takes uncomfortable circumstances and situations to help fine-tune our vision," said Talbert of Willow Bend Baptist Church, Plano.

Talbert and Slaughter of West Salem, Va., led a seminar on "The Art and Science of Change." Both shared their experiences at leading established, traditional churches toward a more innovative, "seeker-sensitive worship" style attractive to non-Christians who are seeking the gospel.

Church leaders need to examine their reasons for wanting change before leading their congregations into unsettling transformations, Talbert said. Pastors should conduct a personal inventory characterized by prayer, fasting, Bible study and examination of motives, he suggested.

Churches respond responsibly to changes when vision-driven pastors are patient and make only the necessary changes to help their congregations become more relevant, he said.

Effective leaders in the 21st century will be able to create a clear vision and know how to measure the end results, said Bob Buford, president of Leadership Network in Tyler, Texas.

The ability to lead from the inside out -- driven by a clear, deep sense of purpose -- and from the outside in -- possessing a keen awareness of culture -- will be a vital skill in the new millennium, Buford said.

Church leaders will need to become "strategic brokers," drawing together task forces and temporary alliances from a variety of denominational, para-church and secular sources to meet specific needs, he predicted.

To be effective, they will need to adopt an entrepreneurial approach, discovering ways to shift resources into areas of higher productivity and greater yield, Buford said.

Churches, denominations and their leaders must revise their roles to become servant-leaders and providers of resources if they want to be relevant, he said.

"You'd better serve, or you won't be valued," Buford said. "You'll be ignored."

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Ken Camp contributed to this story.

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CORRECTION: In (BP) story titled, "WMU executive board reduces funding from Home Mission Board," dated 1/19/96, please change the name of the executive board member from Illinois in paragraph 12 to Donna Brewer, not Miller as reported.

Thanks,  
Baptist Press

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