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TENNESSEE--Stewardship Commission endorses merger plan, okays staff bonuses.

BELGIUM--Sweet outreach to Dutch offered by missionaries.

WASHINGTON--Revival in midst of hardship evident in Cuba, BWA team says.

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ATLANTA--Randy Kennedy ministers among basketball's best; photos.

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FLORIDA--Venezuelan volunteer helps Florida Baptists' new start.

NEW MEXICO--Two mission boards big winners in BPRA awards.

Stewardship Commission endorses
merger plan, staff incentives

By Herb Hollinger

Baptist Press
3/25/96

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--The 30-member Stewardship Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention endorsed the portion of the denominational restructuring plan which will dissolve the agency and also approved incentive packages for employees who stay until the plan is implemented.

Commissioners, meeting in Nashville March 21-22 for their annual meeting, also approved a nine-month budget for 1996-97 of \$1,400,000. The nine-month budget, October through June, would be necessary if the messengers to the SBC annual meeting this June in New Orleans approve, for a second time, a change in SBC bylaw 15. If the bylaw change is approved, the Stewardship Commission -- and seven other SBC agencies -- would be dissolved, merged or eliminated by June 1997 as part of the "Covenant for a New Century" denominational restructuring plan.

Although not wanting to be seen as presuming approval of the vote in New Orleans, nevertheless, commissioners approved a resolution endorsing a plan which would merge the commission with the SBC Executive Committee and transfer two program assignments to the Baptist Sunday School Board. The resolution also expressed the commission's appreciation to the "Implementation Task Force for their sensitivity to the commission and its staff in making this transition."

The ITF is a 10-member special committee appointed by the SBC Executive Committee to assist the affected agencies during the implementation of the restructuring plan. Under the proposed plan, the commission would merge with the Executive Committee -- from which the commission was formed in 1960. The program assignments for stewardship development and capital fund raising would be transferred to the Sunday School Board.

Ronald Chandler, commission president who a year ago publicly opposed the restructuring plan, told commissioners he was "confident the second vote on the (bylaw) will be approved ... Any opposition (by me) ceased to be, after the (covenant) vote." Chandler was referring to the passage of the restructuring plan in Atlanta in 1995.

Chandler also lamented that the commission's request for additional funds "in order to transfer effective programs over to the BSSB and Executive Committee was not granted. The budget being presented is not one of great vision and effectiveness."

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Chandler told the commissioners that a merging of the agency, instead of a dissolution, is better "legally ... since legal liability is assumed by the Executive Committee." He said the effective date for the merge is June 19, 1997.

Citing concerns for the 13-member staff and also for the future of benefits earned by employees, Chandler said "at this point we still do not have definitive answers. Legal counsel has been retained to protect the commission's interest."

An ongoing concern about SBC agencies going out of existence is the continuing retirement benefits given employees which creates a future financial liability for the SBC.

However, Chandler was optimistic in negotiations with the Sunday School Board.

"Discussions with the BSSB have been very encouraging. The board is making plans to put resources into stewardship and capital fund-raising that the commission would never have. My fears of stewardship getting lost in the board organization were wrong. Just the opposite seems to be true -- the plans the board has for these two areas of ministry have my endorsement for whatever that is worth," Chandler told commissioners.

Chandler said there was still "an element of disappointment that the dreams I had in leading this commission will not be realized." He was elected to the post in 1994.

Commissioners approved incentive bonuses for employees who will stay until their positions are deleted, they are "transitioned to another agency," or until June 19, 1997. Employees with two years of service or less will receive two months salary and housing, employees with two to five years will receive three months salary and housing, and those over five years will receive four months salary and housing.

Also, the benefit packages -- medical and life insurance -- of those employees also will extend with the bonuses. And, any employee on June 19, 1997 who is still unemployed "may choose an employment agency with the commission paying the fee." The commission set a limit of \$2,000 for this benefit.

Commissioners were told the total bonus package was estimated to cost \$311,650 but that doesn't include the employment agency fees. A special bonus package for Chandler was referred for further study with the commission to consider it at its March 1997 annual meeting.

Employees must take their allotted vacations before June 19, 1997, commissioners decided. Also, the commission's regular compensation policy for employees who retire or leave would continue without change.

Figures released at the meeting indicated the commission, at this time, has about \$600,000 in reserves to pay for the bonus packages, although some of that amount could also be needed for the operating budget prior to the merger.

Commissioners heard from David Hankins, SBC Executive Committee vice president and staff liaison for the ITF, who said the ITF wants to be a "facilitator" in assisting the commission. He said the ITF hoped a transition plan that "everybody could agree to, could sign off on" would be approved in the next 60-90 days. He said the ITF wants to be "communicative, cooperative, and caring."

Eugene O. Mims, Sunday School Board vice president, told commissioners the BSSB would give stewardship "high visibility, departmental status." He said the board would give present commission employees "first and complete consideration."

In other action, commissioners approved:

-- their executive committee to serve as a "transition committee" to work with other entities in the transition process.

-- Charles Sullivan, executive director of the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana, as chairman of the commission; Samuel J. Hodges III, government architect, Washington, as vice chairman; and Ronald L. Fannin, Oklahoma Baptist Foundation executive, as secretary.

-- giving Chandler authority to work with SBC Executive Committee officials in the disposition of commission equipment. Three employees have expressed a desire to purchase some of the equipment.

-- employment of the firm of Marlin and Edmondson, Nashville, as auditor.

-- March 20-21, 1997 in Nashville for the probable last annual meeting of the commission.

-- several referrals from the 1995 SBC annual meeting.

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Sweet outreach to Dutch
offered by missionaries

By Mike Creswell

Baptist Press
3/25/96

BORNEM, Belgium (BP)--Evangelism is sweet in Belgium, at least the way Southern Baptist foreign missionaries Clif and Laurie Ingram practice it.

For Valentine's Day they handed out 600 boxes of chocolate to city hall employees, policemen and shopkeepers in the northern Belgian town of Bornem. Each red box contained a piece of Belgian chocolate and carried the words, "God loves you" in Dutch on the top. The sides said, "And we do too."

Unfolded, each heart-shaped box carried the question, "What is love?" and answered with 1 John 3:16, along with the name of the church and telephone number.

"We simply told them we appreciated the services they provided to the community and wanted to give them a Valentine's gift," Ingram explained. "The response seemed to be quite positive."

Passing out candy will be a way to associate their church "with service and love to the community, as we share the love of Christ," he said. "As we cut out, folded and filled 600 boxes, we couldn't help thinking that seminary never prepared us for this kind of evangelism!"

Belgium is a small country of about 10 million people situated between France, Germany and the Netherlands. Evangelicals make up less than 1 percent of the population. Although about 90 percent call themselves Roman Catholic, only an estimated 10-15 percent of these take an active role in church.

Only a few hundred Baptists exist in Belgium and they are not officially recognized by the Belgian government, which means they pay higher taxes and have fewer privileges than the Catholics. The Ingrams hope their "sweet evangelism" will help Baptists be known as people with a message that needs a hearing.

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Revival in midst of hardship
evident in Cuba, BWA team says

By Wendy Ryan

Baptist Press
3/25/96

WASHINGTON (BP)--Severe economic hardships have not quelled the joy of believers in Cuba and have increased the spiritual hunger of the people, Baptist World Alliance President Nilson Fanini and General Secretary Denton Lotz reported after a March 8-15 visit to the country.

Fanini and Lotz were joined by BWA regional secretaries Daniel Carro, Latin America, and Peter Pinder, the Caribbean. In preaching in Baptist churches, the four men witnessed more than 600 respond for the first time to accept Jesus Christ as Savior.

"Cuba is experiencing a revival," Lotz said. "All the churches are growing and every Sunday there are conversions. People feel freer now to attend church and ask questions. It is indeed harvest time in Cuba.

"Every church the BWA team visited was filled to capacity and overflowing," Lotz recounted. Churches vary in size from 200 to 400 to 2,000, and the worship is spirited and intense, he said.

Lotz said many pastors told him in spite of the growing hostilities and embargo imposed on Cuba by the United States, they are not afraid of what might happen. "We have nothing to lose now," one pastor said.

The BWA team visited leaders and churches of both the Eastern and Western Baptist Conventions in Cuba and also met with a delegation of the Free Baptist Convention.

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Nilo Dominguez, president of the Western Baptist Convention, said the convention has a goal to have 200 churches by the year 2000. Now there are 121 churches; in the last four years, they have started 30 churches and baptized 7,000 new members. Roy Acosta of the Eastern Baptist Convention reported similar statistics. They have grown to more than 12,000, double the number of five years ago.

Cuban Baptist pastors also told of hundreds of house churches all over the island that grow as large as 60 to 100. These are forbidden by the government, and building permits are denied when these churches organize to build. Those that build without permission sometimes have their buildings torn down or confiscated.

Everywhere the BWA team went, they reported seeing a need for transportation, gas and even food, especially at the Baptist seminaries.

At the Santiago Seminary of the Eastern Convention, there are about 50 students. Built before the revolution, the seminary needs a second floor, but the government has not given permission and there are no supplies with which to build.

At the seminary of the Western convention, with 32 students, food is supplied by the Woman's Missionary Union of Cuba, whose members collect 70,000 pesos a year for the project. There are another 100 young people who want to go to the seminary but there is no room.

All of these conditions, Dominguez said, make Cuban Baptists thankful for the larger Baptist family "where there is neither rich nor poor, black or white, but all brothers and sisters in Christ."

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BWA sending medical shipment
to Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia

Baptist Press
3/25/96

WASHINGTON (BP)--Baptist World Aid, the relief and development arm of the Baptist World Alliance, will send \$1.75 million worth of urgently needed medical supplies and medicines to Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia.

The shipment will be channeled through Croatian Baptist Aid to one of its cooperating groups, Duhovna Stvarnost, in Zagreb where half of the supplies will go immediately to a medical clinic in Bosnia.

The rest of the BWAid medical shipment will be divided for use in Croatia for refugees and displaced people, and a direct shipment will go to Serbia, where Bread for Life, a Baptist humanitarian group in Belgrade, will help refugees there.

The BWAid shipment is the result of recent visits to the three countries by BWAid director Paul Montacute.

Montacute's most recent visit was to Sarajevo, March 15-16, during the time the Serbs were handing over areas they formerly controlled to the Bosnian government, in accord with the Dayton peace agreement. He was accompanied by Zeiljko Mraz, general secretary of the Baptist Convention of Croatia; Vinko Peterlin, head of Croatian Baptist Aid; and Stevo Dereta, head of a therapeutic Christian center which specializes in helping those traumatized through the war.

"We were dazed by the level of destruction we saw," Montacute reported. "As part of our tour of Sarajevo, we drove to the airport area where almost every property had been destroyed."

While the Serbs did not have to leave Sarajevo, many of them fled for fear, Montacute said, while Muslims had come in, "looking to see what they could take from what was left behind."

But there were moments of hope, especially with the visit to the Baptist church located in the old downtown Muslim area of the city, where Montacute met the pastor, Teufik Cerovic, and his wife, Vojislava.

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Helped by the Baptist Union of Croatia, Cerovic and his wife, who came to the Baptist church before the war, reclaimed the church building from Muslim refugees after the war started. With help from BWAid, and permission from the Muslim authorities, Cerovic helped resettle the Muslim refugees who lived in the church, where about 40 people now meet.

At a specially arranged church service, Montacute assured the Baptists in Sarajevo of the love and concern of the wider Baptist family.

Attending the service was Sabina, a young woman who had lost one eye and had the other badly damaged from shrapnel in the war. With help from BWAid, Sabina will go to Zagreb to have a new plastic eye fitted and the other eye repaired.

Plans also have been made to take the 40 members of the Sarajevo church community to Croatia to Dereta's clinic for help there.

"This is just a start of what we hope to do," Montacute said, "as huge amounts of aid will be needed in Bosnia, especially."

BWAid has launched a special appeal for funds to assist refugees and displaced persons from the conflict in the former Yugoslavia and also for those still leaving their homes under the peace agreement.

Donations may be sent to Baptist World Aid, Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia Appeal, 6733 Curran Street, McLean, VA 22101-6005.

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Randy Kennedy ministers
among basketball's best

By John D. Pierce

Baptist Press
3/25/96

ATLANTA (BP)--Randy Kennedy serves a small -- though tall -- congregation which meets just 42 times a year, with attendance rarely reaching double figures. As chaplain for the Atlanta Hawks of the National Basketball Association, Kennedy coordinates pre-game devotions -- called chapel -- before each of the team's home games.

Players, their wives, coaches, team officials and members of the opposing team are invited to join Kennedy near the locker room for a brief time of inspiration and prayer before taking to the court. A variety of guests, including numerous Georgia Baptist pastors and other leaders, are enlisted by Kennedy to address the informal gathering. Former heavyweight boxing champion Evander Holyfield and bodybuilder Lee Haney are among those who have led the pre-game devotions at Kennedy's invitation.

"(The players') needs are just like ours," Kennedy stated. "They need to have a relationship with Jesus Christ."

Still, there is much that's unique about these professional athletes, Kennedy said. Throughout the basketball season, the players face a demanding schedule of cross-country travel, intensive training and highly competitive games. Often players are away from their families for extended periods.

Privacy is an important issue for the gifted athletes. "They are very cautious about who they let into their world because so many try to take advantage of them," Kennedy said. That is why he's so appreciative of the way the team has accepted, even embraced him. Evidence of such acceptance comes whenever a player gives his home or car phone number to the chaplain. Kennedy realizes then a relationship of trust has been established. But it does not come quickly or easily.

Kennedy has served as team chaplain for three years, following his brother, Marty, who held the position 12 years. After serving as pastor of Georgia Baptist churches for 17 years, Kennedy founded The Institute For Growth and Development, which provides congregations and other organizations with resources and training in personality profiles, leadership and growth strategies. Although based in Macon, Kennedy plans to relocate to his hometown of Atlanta soon, which will shorten his drive to The Omni when the Hawks are playing.

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Chapel programs are held for most NBA teams around the country, enabling players to attend these activities while on the road as well, Kennedy said. Usually greeted simply as "Rev," he visits the locker rooms of both teams just prior to games in Atlanta. He has established contacts with Christian players on visiting teams as well. This encourages guests to attend the pre-game services.

"David Robinson usually brings about five (teammates) from San Antonio," said Kennedy of the highly respected center for the Spurs.

Careful not to appear pressuring, Kennedy quietly invites players and other members of the Hawks family to the chapel sessions.

"First, I want to be their friend," said Kennedy, who sees his ministry to the team in terms of relationships more than programming. Kennedy often uses his own skills as a low-handicap golfer to build friendships with players regardless of their expressed interest in spiritual matters. The golf outings give him the opportunity to become better acquainted with individual athletes who appreciate the way Kennedy excels at the sport.

Extending his ministry to the players' families, he sits with the wives and other guests during home games and remains open to ministry opportunities. "I try to find out what their needs, hopes and wants are," he said.

Testimonies to his effectiveness come easy from the players. Alan Henderson has a deep appreciation for both Kennedy's personal ministry and the chapel program. Of the latter he stated, "You can get focused on what is really important. A lot of times we can't go to church on Sundays." Since his childhood in Indianapolis, Henderson has actively attended church. Upon entering the NBA, he has found the chapel programs help meet his spiritual needs during the busy basketball season. "I try to go when we get on the road, too," added the Hawks forward.

Guard Craig Ehlo, whose family worships at Johnson Ferry Baptist Church in Marietta, Ga., agreed with his teammate.

"During the season we're not on a regular schedule, we're on an NBA schedule," Ehlo explained. He, too, finds Kennedy's personal ministry to be beneficial to his spiritual growth.

"He can hold me accountable," said Ehlo, who regularly participates in chapel services and Bible studies. "I have his phone number and can call him whenever I need him. We've developed a good friendship -- and his door is always open."

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(BP) photos (color) available from Georgia Baptists' newsjournal, The Christian Index.

New York's Quinn Pugh
announces retirement

Baptist Press
3/25/96

EAST SYRACUSE, N.Y. (BP)--R. Quinn Pugh, executive director- treasurer of the Baptist Convention of New York the past 12 years, announced his retirement, effective July 31, in a letter to convention President Samuel Simpson and executive board chairman Terry Robertson.

Pugh, 66, stated in his letter, "While Norma and I had anticipated this course at an earlier time, it is now appropriate to set the precise date for closure of my ministry in this position, allowing time for establishing interim arrangements and a search process."

The executive board's administrative committee, which serves as the personnel committee, received word of Pugh's retirement in its March 15 meeting. This committee will recommend the search process for a successor.

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"Over the next several weeks, I shall give myself unreservedly, as through these past years, in fulfillment of my responsibilities to the convention," Pugh wrote. "In particular, I am, without constraint, committed to work with you and our convention leaders in addressing and resolving the challenges which are distinctly ours. Because of the Saviour's love for the millions in this beautifully compelling tri-state area ... and because of his call to us for ministry here ... , ours, Norma's and mine, shall be an undying love for the Baptist Convention of New York. We believe its future in God's plan is filled with great Gospel promise."

Robertson said, "Dr. R. Quinn Pugh, with the partnership of his wife, Norma, has significantly impacted the life and work of the Baptist Convention of New York. Numerous pastors across our convention territory fondly refer to Dr. Pugh as their mentor. Both Dr. and Mrs. Pugh have touched our lives, leaving us with a sense of profound gratitude for the past and an ever-growing anticipation for the work of our Lord in the days ahead."

Simpson said, "I receive this word (of Pugh's retirement) with regret. Dr. Pugh has served the Baptist Convention of New York well for over 12 years as executive director-treasurer. Both he and Norma have endeared themselves to the Baptist work in the Northeast as pioneers for over 30 years."

Pugh's future plans are to continue missions service through interim ministries, teaching and writing.

He was the 1993 president of the Southern Baptist Association of State Executive Directors.

Pugh was executive director of the Metropolitan New York Baptist Association, 1979-84, and, previously, a pastor for more than 20 years, leading churches in Maryland, New Jersey and Georgia. A native of Palestine, Texas, he received a bachelor of divinity degree from Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, Ga., in 1959 and a doctor of ministry degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., in 1972.

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Venezuelan volunteer helps
Florida Baptists' new start

By Bonnie Verlander

Baptist Press
3/25/96

HOLLYWOOD, Fla. (BP)--Many key thinkers on the subject of world missions predict America will one day become a foreign mission field for other nations.

Although that day has not yet arrived, a volunteer missionary from Venezuela has arrived in Florida to train Baptists in Broward County in using discipleship groups as a church-starting tool.

Vernig Suarez, who is a design engineer in Venezuela, has spent the past several months training workers in how to use what the Venezuelans call the "evangelistic march."

Using this strategy, teams scour the community in an intense witnessing effort. Those new converts are then disciplined and used as a core group for the new church start, according to Stewart Pickle, director of church extension for the Gulf Stream Baptist Association, Hollywood.

Suarez has participated in this program in Venezuela and has trained 118 people in eight churches since he has been in Broward County.

The program is "based on discipleship. You go out and evangelize and then make disciples to do the same," said Victor Ponce, who is serving as pastor of the new mission Sheridan Hills Hispanic Mission, Hollywood.

Originally the church was scheduled to begin meeting March 31 but during the first week of door-to-door visitation, 97 decisions were made, Ponce said. Realizing they could not postpone opportunities for worship, the starting date was moved to Feb. 11. However, Palm Sunday (March 31) is still the official launch date for the new church.

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"We had 107 people attend the first service and collected \$2,300 during the first offering," Ponce said.

To prepare for the effort, an intensive retreat was held at Pembroke Road Church, Miramar.

Over 69 people came from other states and countries to train for this type of church start, Pickle added. "The goal was to have people fully committed to the Lord and trained completely."

These leaders now have returned to their respective churches and will train their members, he continued. "We're not taking people away from other churches," Pickle stated. "We want them to stay where they are and implement it there."

The leaders were trained to bring new believers to the church through discipleship. "You can't make disciples by a course. It must be a part of their life," Pickle remarked. "Jesus called disciples to be with him and learn with him."

On March 31, the organizers hope for 200 people at the first official service of Sheridan Hills Hispanic Mission, which is meeting in the chapel of its sponsor, Sheridan Hills Baptist Church.

Within a few years, Pickle hopes to establish a network of 70 churches nationwide with at least 70 trained disciples. He also plans to develop a similar plan for English-speaking churches. The one being used in Broward County was developed for Hispanic church starts.

Involvement in the project has been astronomical, Pickle declared. "Twenty-three Venezuelans came to Florida to help with the effort because they saw God working," Pickle continued, noting they had been praying the movement which had been going on for 20 years in Venezuela would reach the United States.

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Two mission boards big winners in BPRA awards

By Philip Poole

Baptist Press
3/25/96

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Southern Baptists' two mission boards were big winners in the annual Wilmer C. Fields Awards sponsored by the Baptist Public Relations Association. The awards were presented March 9 during the organization's annual workshop at Glorieta (N.M.) Conference Center.

A total of 125 awards was given in 53 categories to 109 different individuals and organizations.

The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board received the most awards, 15, followed by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board with 12 total awards. Employees of the two boards also took three of the four grand prize awards.

Mark Sandlin, HMB photo journalist received the Fon H. Scofield Award for exceptional achievement in print photography. Sandlin had earned four first place honors and one second place award in the photography division.

Rachel Gill, associate editor of MissionsUSA magazine, received the Frank Burkhalter Award for exceptional achievement in writing. Her entry, "The Promise of Another Chance," earned a first place award in the feature writing category for national magazines. MissionsUSA is published by the Home Mission Board.

Trish Landers Ragsdale, an FMB producer, earned the M.E. Dodd Award for exceptional achievement in video production. Ragsdale earned three first place awards and a second place honor. She received the Dodd Award for the music video "What Will It Take?"

Rebecca J. Woosley, director of marketing at Palm Beach Atlantic College, West Palm Beach, Fla., received the Albert McClellan Award for exceptional achievement in print media. The college's student recruitment materials earlier earned a first place award in the brochures/booklets category.

FMB employees also had the largest group of first place awards with nine, followed by the six first place awards received by HMB employees.

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North Carolina Baptist Children's Homes earned seven total awards, including three first place awards. Receiving six total awards each were William Jewell College, Liberty, Mo., including three first places; Word & Way, weekly newsjournal of the Missouri Baptist Convention; and the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina.

Earning five awards each were Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, including three first place awards; Florida Baptist Convention, including two first place awards, and The Christian Index, newsjournal of the Georgia Baptist Convention.

Teri and David Capshaw of Brad Price Design Studio, Fort Worth, Texas, received four first place awards in design categories. The Baptist General Convention of Texas received four first place awards, including three awards shared with the Brad Price Design Studio. Others earning four total awards were Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union, including three first place awards; the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, including two first place awards; and Details Marketing and Design for Churches, a Birmingham-based public relations agency.

Receiving three total awards each were the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission, Memphis, Tenn., including two first places; Buckner Baptist Benevolences, Dallas, including two first place awards; Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Atlanta; Durham Media Group, Inc., Raleigh, N.C.; Missouri Baptist Convention; and the South Carolina Baptist Convention.

Associated Baptist Press, Jacksonville, Fla., and Western Recorder, the Kentucky Baptist weekly newsjournal, both garnered two first place awards in writing categories. Others receiving two awards were the Arizona Baptist Foundation, Phoenix, the Baptist General Association of Virginia, Carson-Newman College, Jefferson City, Tenn., The Baptist Messenger, Oklahoma Baptists' weekly newsjournal, and The Baptist Message, weekly newsjournal of the Louisiana Baptist Convention.

Single award winners were Louisiana Baptist Children's Homes, Monroe; Union University, Jackson, Tenn.; Houston Baptist University, The Illinois Baptist; and Central Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Kan.

BPRA is a national organization of more than 300 professional communicators. The annual awards competition is named for W.C. Fields, who retired in 1987 after serving 27 years as vice president for public relations for the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee.

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