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Poll: Religious conservatism
expanding its sway in U.S.

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press
6/27/96

WASHINGTON (BP)--A rising tide of religious conservatism is reported in polling released June 26 by The Pew Research Center For The People & The Press.

"The conservatism of white evangelical Protestants is clearly the most powerful religious force in politics today," the Pew center stated in a six-page summary of its survey, "The Diminishing Divide ... American Churches, American Politics."

The Pew study, based on polling from May 31 to June 9, received broad national attention upon its release, including front-page coverage in The New York Times. The entire 86-page study is available from the Washington-based Pew center at (202) 293-3126.

The polling involved telephone interviews of nearly 2,000 adults nationwide, with a sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points. For subgroups in the polling, such as white evangelical Protestants or Catholics, the margin of error was stated as plus or minus 5 percentage points.

On religious conservatism, the Pew summary recounted:

"Regardless of denomination, people who express faith are more conservative. People who engage in more religious practices are more conservative. Those who say religion plays a very important role in their lives are more conservative. The Center's polling finds indications that religious influences lead to a more liberal position on some issues, but there is little indication of a coherent pattern of liberal belief associated with any major religious group."

The Pew summary noted a key shift in public opinion toward church involvement in political affairs.

"There is more public acceptance of the role of religion and clergy in the political process than there was 30 years ago," the summary stated, adding "concerns nonetheless remain about how much political power specific religions have these days."

Quantifying the shift, the Pew summary noted:

-- "In 1965 the Gallup Poll found that Americans by a margin of 53 percent to 40 percent thought that churches should keep out of political matters, and only 22 percent thought it was ever right for clergy to discuss political candidates or issues from the pulpit."

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-- "In 1996 the balance of opinion has changed -- by a 54 percent to 43 percent margin, the public thinks the churches should express their views on day to day political issues, rather than staying out of politics. And 29 percent now favor outright politicking from the pulpit."

Summarizing the electorate, the Pew summary reported:

"White evangelical Protestants now represent 24 percent of registered voters, up from 19 percent in 1987. They also make up a greater share of voters who self-identify as Republicans (34 percent vs. 26 percent)." The report noted Baptists make up the largest share of white evangelicals.

The Pew summary continued: "White Catholics and white non-evangelical Protestants (or mainline Protestants) also now represent about one-fourth of the electorate. Black Christians constitute 8 percent of registered voters, non-religious Americans 6 percent (Non-religious refers to those respondents who express no religious preference or say they are atheist or agnostic.), Hispanic Catholics 2 percent, Mormons 2 percent, Jews 2 percent, Orthodox Christians 1 percent and other religions 2 percent."

The New York Times, reporting on other facets of the Pew study beyond the six-page summary, recounted several religious groups' beliefs on the following questions:

-- Absolutely certain of belief in God: white evangelical Protestants, 94 percent; black Christians, 89 percent; white Catholics, 71 percent; white non-evangelical Protestants, 64 percent; no religious preference, 29 percent.

-- Believe in heaven: white evangelical Protestants, 86 percent; black Christians, 82 percent; white Catholics, 81 percent; white non-evangelical Protestants, 68 percent; no preference, 28 percent.

-- Believe in hell: white evangelical Protestants, 81 percent; black Christians, 78 percent; white Catholics, 56 percent; white non-evangelical Protestants, 50 percent; no preference, 25 percent.

-- Believe Bible is literal word of God: white evangelical Protestants, 67 percent; black Christians, 60 percent; white non-evangelical Protestants, 23 percent; white Catholics, 20 percent; no preference, 11 percent.

-- Say religion is very important in their lives: black Christians, 93 percent; white evangelical Protestants, 85 percent; white Catholics, 54 percent; white non-evangelical Protestants, 45 percent; no preference, 15 percent.

-- Attend church weekly or more often: white evangelical Protestants, 69 percent; black Christians, 55 percent; white Catholics, 40 percent; white non-evangelical Protestants, 21 percent; no preference, 3 percent.

-- Watch religious TV, radio: black Christians, 80 percent; white evangelical Protestants, 75 percent; white non-evangelical Protestants, 41 percent, white Catholics, 24 percent; no preference, 18 percent.

-- Say grace at family meals: black Christians, 92 percent; white evangelical Protestants, 82 percent; white non-evangelical Protestants, 55 percent; white Catholics, 53 percent; no preference, 23 percent.

Among Americans at large, 72 percent say they are absolutely certain of a belief in God; 71 percent believe in heaven; 57 percent believe in hell; 35 percent believe the Bible is the literal word of God; 59 percent say religion is very important in their lives; 39 percent attend church weekly or more often; 45 percent watch religious TV, radio; and 60 percent say grace at family meals.

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35% of U.S. says media unfair
toward 'very religious people'

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press
6/26/96

WASHINGTON (BP)--Media distrust was registered by a sizable number of Americans in polling released June 26 by The Pew Research Center For The People & The Press.

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"About one-in-three Americans think that the news media portray very religious people unfairly (35 percent)," the Pew center stated in a six-page summary of its survey, "The Diminishing Divide ... American Churches, American Politics."

The full Pew study, 86 pages in length, reports on telephone interviews of nearly 2,000 adults nationwide from May 31 to June 9, with a sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points. For subgroups in the polling, such as white evangelical Protestants or Catholics, the margin of error was stated as plus or minus 5 percentage points. The study states Baptists "make up the largest share of evangelicals."

The Washington-based Pew center is financed by the Pew Charitable Trusts of Philadelphia and was formerly known as the Times Mirror Center.

On Americans' media perceptions, the summary continued, "A similar percentage (36 percent) believes news organizations are biased against fundamentalist Christians. However, discontent with media coverage is much greater among people with strong religious commitment (50 percent complain) and among white evangelical Protestants and black Christians (58 percent and 44 percent are displeased, respectively)."

In a related area, the summary noted: "Christian media have large audiences -- 45 percent say they tune in to religious programs on radio or TV, and 45 percent listen to religious music. A 57 percent majority of those 50 years of age and older use Christian broadcast media."

On a range of other topics in the Pew survey, the summary reported:

-- "By a margin of three-to-one, black Christians and white evangelical Protestants think that it is okay for the churches to be involved in politics. However, white Catholics and white mainline Protestants split evenly on the issue. Only majorities of progressive Catholics and the non-religious think the churches should stay out of politics. Remarkably similar majorities of Republicans, Democrats and Independents express support for churches political involvement."

-- "As many as one-in-five churchgoers say that their clergy speak out on candidates and elections. However partisan politicking from the pulpit is reported much more often by African American Christians (47 percent) and by white evangelical Protestants (20 percent) than by white Catholics (12 percent) or by white mainline Protestants (12 percent). Reflecting this pattern, nearly one-in-five white evangelical Protestants (18 percent) and an even larger percentage of black Christians (29 percent) said that campaign information was made available in their churches prior to the 1994 midterm elections. About one-in-twenty mainline Protestants or Catholics made such a report."

-- "While in principle Americans approve of churches expressing their views on political matters, a plurality of Americans wants each of the major religious groups in America to have less influence on politics than they now do. By a margin of 44 percent to 33 percent the public thinks that Protestants should have less rather than more political power. Somewhat greater margins want to see Roman Catholics (53 percent to 27 percent), evangelicals (51 percent to 27 percent) and Jews (49 percent to 27 percent) have less power."

-- "Fully 60 percent of churchgoers say their clergy speak out about abortion and almost as many, 56 percent, cite prayer in schools. Individual churches clearly differ in the issues they speak out on. Catholics hear about abortion (75 percent) and right to die laws (38 percent) more often than other churchgoers. White evangelical Protestants hear more frequently about abortion (66 percent), but their clergy also talk about pornography laws (59 percent), prayer in schools (71 percent) and laws about homosexuality (45 percent) more often than the average. African American churches have a mixed liberal/conservative political agenda. Black Christians are much more likely to have heard about health care reform (62 percent) from their ministers than white Christians (19 percent), but they just as often hear them speak out on prayer in schools (73 percent). Mainline Protestants report less talk in their churches about a range of contemporary political issues than do other religious groups."

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-- "The Christian Coalition gets a mixed rating from the public at large (45 percent favorable, 35 percent unfavorable), but a better one than Pat Robertson receives (29 percent favorable, 48 percent unfavorable). The Christian Coalition gets a 64 percent favorable rating from white evangelical Protestants."

-- "Only 7 percent of voters think of themselves as members of the 'religious right.'"

-- "The GOP was preferred over the Democrats by a 45 percent to 34 percent margin as the party most concerned with protecting religious values. That margin swells to 56 percent to 26 percent among white evangelical Protestants. Even as many as 34 percent of black Christians think the Republicans care more about religion than the Democrats."

The entire Pew study is available from the Washington-based Pew center at (202) 293-3126.

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Polly House contributed to the stories on the Pew study.

**Education Commission takes steps
toward SBC agency's dissolution** By R.G. Puckett

**Baptist Press
6/27/96**

PIPESTEM, W.Va. (BP)--Trustees of the Education Commission took steps June 23-24 to implement the actions of the Southern Baptist Convention abolishing the 81-year-old agency by June 1997. Trustees meanwhile expressed a desire to retain some flexibility in the process and to protect the best interests of staff who must find other positions of service.

The annual trustee meeting, at Pipestem (W.Va.) Resort State Park and hosted by Bluefield College, may be the last plenary session of the governing board of the agency which relates to the Southern Baptist seminaries, colleges, universities and schools.

Thomas A. Kinchen, president of Florida Baptist Theological College and trustee vice chairman, made a motion in the first session which would have effectively abolished the Education Commission as early as Dec. 31, 1996. The motion was approved without a specific date stipulated.

The trustee action prompted discussion during the night, and in the second session the next morning, a substitute motion was offered by Woodrow W. Burt Jr., president of Missouri's Hannibal-LaGrange College, designating June 19, 1997, as the termination date for commission staff and programs.

The Burt motion lost 9-8, which left the Kinchen motion standing. However, discussion on the matter produced a consensus that the trustees should retain flexibility in the agency's dissolution while keeping faith with the action and spirit of the SBC action, part of the convention-wide "Covenant for a New Century" now being implemented.

Technically, the dissolution of the Education Commission will become a merger with the SBC Executive Committee, under Tennessee laws. Both corporations have offices in Nashville.

Stephen P. Carleton, executive director-treasurer of the Education Commission, called attention to the "Transition Calendar" which had been developed for the dissolution of the agency.

The calendar begins with the action on Bylaw 15 of the SBC's governing documents by messengers to the SBC annual meeting June 11-13 in New Orleans, which completed the restructuring proposal that eliminates or merges seven of the 19 SBC agencies and institutions.

The transition calendar ends with the books officially closing on June 30, 1997. The SBC agreed to fund the Education Commission through June 1997 in the amount of \$370,148 in Cooperative Program funds.

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The Kinchen motion came as a surprise to some trustees and the staff because of the dates in the Transition Calendar. His motion placed implementation of the dissolution process in the hands of the commission's five-member administrative committee, chaired by E. Douglas Hodo, chairman of the commission's trustees and president of Houston Baptist University.

Others on the administrative committee are Kinchen; Tommy Middletown, secretary of the trustees and pastor of the Woodlawn Baptist Church, Baton Rouge, La.; C. Mack Roark, a professor at Oklahoma Baptist University; and John G. Rocovich Jr., an attorney and member of First Baptist Church, Roanoke, Va.

In a controlled but emotional statement the morning of June 24, Carleton urged trustees to consider the needs of the seven-member commission staff in the transition. Many of the trustees expressed their concern for the staff and the need for their work during the dissolution process of the agency.

The dissolution process, according to the Kinchen motion, would include four items:

- flexibility in dates while protecting the personnel as a first priority;
- through a grant of unused funds, assist the startup of a new dimension of the work of the Association of Southern Baptist Colleges and Schools (ASBCS) as it attempts to fill the vacuum created by the abolishment of the Education Commission, but without being a successor to it;
- negotiate a continuation of the trust fund which supplements doctoral and post-doctoral studies by faculty at Baptist schools;
- rebate any unused funds to the Implementation Task Force of the SBC for the costs incurred in the restructuring process.

If these goals cannot be achieved, however, trustee consensus was that the Education Commission will function until June 1997.

There was some hope expressed of as much as \$150,000 to \$200,000 being given to the ASBCS to "jumpstart" the new project. If the commission continues its work through June 1997, however, approximately \$65,000 would remain in unused reserves.

Representatives of the colleges/schools in the ASBCS, primarily the president and/or academic deans, met in conjunction with the Education Commission's annual meeting. The ASBCS has a transition committee of its own to consider what actions should be taken.

The ASBCS approved a five-point program which detailed essential functions which to date have been carried out by the Education Commission. Included in the program is the promotion of global missions involvement, with the association planning to ask that the Baptist colleges' and universities' Cooperative Services International Education Consortium become a part of this initiative. CSIEC entails educational exchange programs by 47 schools in more than 80 countries.

ASBCS also authorized the employment of an executive director and necessary staff to carry out the new program.

Because of the circumstances, current officers of the association were asked to continue for another year. Ben Elrod, president of Ouachita Baptist University, is ASBCS president.

Individual members asked to request support from their respective state conventions. A mission statement was adopted and a called meeting of the group was set for Sept. 26 at the University of Mobile (Ala.) in conjunction with CSIEC's annual meeting.

Elrod, during the ASBCS meeting, also was instructed to name a committee to study the constitution and bylaws and recommend any needed changes. Elrod later assigned the study to the association's transition committee.

**Pro-life Democrats lobbying
for platform conscience clause By Tim Ellsworth**

WASHINGTON (BP)--A group of pro-life Democrats met with Democratic National Committee Chairman Donald Fowler June 12 to lobby for a more lenient stance in the party's abortion platform.

"We have anywhere from 35 to 50 pro-life Democrats in Congress," U.S. Rep. Glenn Poshard, of Carterville, Ill., told the Illinois Baptist newsjournal in a telephone interview. "We have spoken to leadership for some time about the fact that there are millions of pro-life Democrats in this country and our platform does not acknowledge that, and it should."

Poshard, a member of First Baptist Church, Carterville, said his pro-life convictions stem from his faith in Christ. "God is unconditional love, and we are created as objects of that love," Poshard said. "That child at the moment of conception is created by God as an object of his great love" and is "to be protected at all costs"

"We have to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves."

Members of the pro-life delegation know they are in a minority in the Democratic Party and aren't going to get a pro-life plank in the platform, Poshard said. "We're asking that the party recognize that there are many pro-life Democrats in this country, and that there be a conscience clause. Those people have a valid viewpoint."

Poshard said Fowler was open to what group members had to say. "He listened very carefully. There was not one moment of tension or negative feedback," Poshard said. "He made no commitment, but it was not a negative meeting. He did not give off negative comments or attitudes at all."

Todd Glass, DNC deputy press secretary, called the meeting "very positive and productive" and said the dialogue on the issue would continue in the future. "We're definitely not preventing them from having their say," Glass said. "We've asked them to go through the process, which is what they're going to do."

Reps. Bill Lipinski of Chicago and Jerry Costello, of Belleville, Ill., also were part of the delegation, along with Reps. Tony Hall (Ohio), Harold Volkmer (Missouri), Bart Stupak (Michigan) and Jim Oberstar (Minnesota). The pro-life group plans to meet with Georgia Gov. Zell Miller, chairman of the platform committee, and Leon Panetta, White House chief of staff, in the near future.

"I'm hopeful," Poshard said. "At this point in time there's no certainty about anything. We will do what we can do."

"My faith compels me to continue to bring this to the attention of my party."

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**2 Ark. ministers proud
of SBC president brother**

By Linda S. Caillouet

**Baptist Press
6/27/96**

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (BP)--For two Arkansas ministers, the election of a new president of the Southern Baptist Convention hits close to home. He's their brother.

Tom Elliff, 52, of Oklahoma, was elected to the post during the SBC annual meeting June 11-13 in New Orleans.

His brother, Bill Elliff, 44, is pastor of First Baptist Church, Little Rock. His other brother, Jim Elliff, 48, is president of Christian Communicators Worldwide, Inc., of North Little Rock, which publishes Christian materials and conducts Christian conferences around the world.

With Tom Elliff as the convention's new president, there will be changes in store for his relatives.

"It certainly means we'll have to answer a lot more questions and talk to a lot more reporters," Jim Elliff said.

Still, he said, "We are all thrilled. We are quite confident Tom has the ability to do a very fine job for the convention."

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And since Tom Elliff had no opposition -- the first time in decades the presidency hasn't been contested -- his election didn't come as a surprise. But there are still big changes ahead in his life.

"He'll have to travel all around the world and stay in close contact with everything that's going on here," Jim Elliff said of his brother.

During the convention, Southern Baptists voted to consider a boycott of the Walt Disney Company's theme parks, movies and products.

The boycott will occur if the company does not renounce practices ranging from insuring partners of gay workers to releasing R-rated movies like "Priest" and "Pulp Fiction." Southern Baptists also object to Disney's choice of directors for last October's film "Powder." Victor Salva, who directed the picture, is a convicted child molester.

"I believe we simply can't be in support of those who advocate alternative lifestyles," Jim Elliff said. "This is contradictory to what this company has stood for in the past. I think it's foolish and they will have to pay a price."

But, Jim Elliff, who lived in Orlando before moving back to Arkansas, said he'll miss the Walt Disney World theme park located there.

"I've lived in Orlando and loved Disney," he said. "I've been there 16 times."

The president of the convention is often considered an honorary title, but Jim Elliff said the position also can be a powerful one.

"He will have appointment powers in terms of boards, such as schools and various agencies," Jim Elliff said.

He said the denomination had drifted toward moderation for many years but for several years now there has been a "stream of conservative resurgence."

"Tom fits into the flow of that and understands that," Jim Elliff said.

Tom Elliff is pastor of First Southern Baptist Church, Del City, Okla., but has strong ties to Arkansas.

Elliff, his two brothers and a sister are all Arkansas natives. His mother, the late Jewell Elliff, was from Warren. His grandfather, Aaron P. Elliff, was born in Pocahontas and ministered throughout Arkansas before settling in Fordyce. The three brothers' father, J.T. Elliff, 78, of Moore, Okla., was among those present in New Orleans when his oldest son was elected the convention's president.

Jim Elliff said the tradition of ministers in his family goes back four generations, beginning with his great-grandfather, James Thomas Elliff.

He went to Indian Territory near Fort Smith, Ark., about 1868, Elliff said.

"His wife got sick and died on the train right outside Little Rock. When she was dying, she asked him if he would commit his life to Jesus Christ and raise their baby as a Christian, because up to that point he hadn't been very religious," Elliff said. "He knelt and prayed in that train and he later became a vibrant Christian."

The Elliff brothers' grandfather, Aaron P. Elliff, became a minister and so did their father. And today, some of his nephews are already committed to joining the ministry.

The Elliff brothers and their sister, Sandy, who married widely known crusade evangelist Bailey Smith of Atlanta, were all raised in Arkansas and Oklahoma because their father traveled in his ministry work.

Sandy and Tom spent most of their early years in Lake Village, while Bill and Jim were born in Fordyce. In the 1960s, their father moved to Little Rock as director of missions and evangelism for the Arkansas Baptist Convention.

The Elliffs were raised as Southern Baptists but until recently Jim Elliff has been associated with an unaffiliated Bible church in North Little Rock.

In traveling to lecture and distribute the religious materials his organization produces, he often worked with Southern Baptist churches. He soon will move to Kansas City, Mo., to become the first resident consultant for the new Midwestern Center for Biblical Revival at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Several years ago, Bill and Jim Elliff pastored together at a mission church in west Little Rock. Last March they held the North American Convocation on Revival, a meeting of leaders from the United States and Canada who gather in support of authentic biblical revival. The brothers have another one scheduled for February 1997.

Jim Elliff said he doesn't expect Tom, who will be busy with his new duties, to attend. Maybe they'll all share a turkey together before then, though.

"We at least try to see each other at Thanksgiving," Jim Elliff said. "That's when the whole family gets together in Little Rock."

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**Luis Palau crusade pioneers
multifaceted thrust in Chicago**

**Baptist Press
6/27/96**

CHICAGO (BP)--Chicago stiffened its broad shoulders; Luis Palau preached on. In the end, the city looked the same, but thousands of individuals once lost in its darkness now have the light of Christ.

"Say Yes Chicago with Luis Palau," envisioned as testing a potential new model for evangelism in urban America, experimented with an extended, multifaceted approach to mass evangelism in the nation's third-largest city.

Palau -- an Argentine-born international evangelist based in Portland, Ore.-- and members of his evangelistic team and other evangelists proclaimed the gospel to 129,000 people at 75 events throughout greater Chicago from the first of April through Memorial Day.

More than 9,460 made public statements of commitment to Jesus Christ; 44 percent were first-time commitments.

As well, Palau presented the gospel through 27 one-hour television programs on four Chicago stations, originating in the studios of WCFC-TV38.

Many of those live call-in programs were carried by Southern Baptists' ACTS cable TV network, along with Inspirational and National Empowerment cable networks; Salem and USA radio networks; WMBI and WJJD radio in Chicago; and several television and radio stations in other cities across America. More than 650 callers indicated they prayed with Palau or with counselors, committing their lives to Christ.

Christians from about 1,800 churches participated in the campaign, and 12,000 attended Luis Palau Evangelistic Association "Bridgebuilder" training courses in friendship evangelism, counseling and follow-up.

"One of the great benefits of the crusade was to see the unity of hundreds of churches," said Erwin Lutzer, senior pastor of The Moody Church. "Many of us as pastors realized once again that God's ministry in Chicago is larger than any one church or denomination. The friendships and goodwill that developed will continue for years to come."

Palau credited the Chicago Metro Baptist Association as being "very committed from the beginning" to the evangelistic thrust. The evangelist voiced appreciation for CMBA Executive Director Jim Queen's involvement, while Palau's son, Kevin, LPEA vice president of crusade ministries, described CMBA evangelism director J.D. Ellis' efforts as "tireless."

Say Yes Chicago was by far the Palau association's longest in the United States, where a typical crusade lasts seven to 10 days.

Among about 55 "affinity group" events were five parenting seminars, which drew about a thousand parents and 79 decisions of people committing their lives to Christ.

Other affinity group events included children's and youth rallies, Hispanic and Asian rallies, women's luncheons and men's breakfasts.

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"These focused events clearly were successful," said Kevin Palau. "They generated the most excitement, and Christians felt comfortable bringing friends to hear the gospel."

On the other hand, with several nights of cold, rainy weather and competition with the Chicago Bulls, some of the 24 large venue events at west suburban Rosemont Horizon, south suburban World Music Theatre and UIC Pavilion in the city had disappointing attendance. The best-attended events in those venues were the three youth rallies, three children's rallies, and four Hispanic rallies.

"Crusade evangelism in America is not easy," Kevin Palau said. "We experimented with a new model and discovered we need to take a hard look at the generic campaign nights. People clearly chose an affinity group over a generic night. How can we create evening events for adults that capture some of the excitement of these affinity groups?"

"Even with our emphasis on friendship evangelism training, people are having a hard time figuring out how to invite someone to a stadium meeting," he said. "And it seems that the bigger the city, the more competition you have for people's time. As opposed to a small city, where the campaign becomes a major community event."

About 37,000 people attended four rallies at the Rosemont Horizon April 25-27, including the campaign's largest crowd, 18,000, on youth night for the Newsboys concert and 8,000 for the children's rally.

Glenview Evangelical Free Church turned its worship services April 28 into a testimony time.

Robin Olin invited her neighbor, Patricia, to Friday night's rally. "While we were driving there, she said, 'I'm not going forward or anything like that,'" Olin said. But at the invitation, Patricia turned to her friend and said, "I want to go down, but I'm not going by myself." The two women went forward together.

On their way home, Patricia asked Robin, "How do I tell my family?"

"Just tell them and let the Lord do the rest," Robin advised.

Late that night, Patricia turned on the TV and stumbled upon Luis Palau preaching in Spanish, one of nine special programs that aired Friday nights on Channel 44, the Telemundo network affiliate in Chicago. Patricia's family is from Ecuador. Her mother watched the program with her, attended the children's rally on Saturday with Patricia and her daughter and church Sunday morning with Robin.

That morning at Glenview Evangelical Free Church, a dozen red roses adorned the platform, each representing a life that members had helped lead to Christ. "This was the most concentrated time of harvest we've seen in many years," pastor Chuck Dake said.

At the Hispanic youth rally at the UIC Pavilion, Andres Panasiuk, administrator for Spanish programming at the Moody Broadcasting Network, was on the platform after the invitation when a man rushed to him with the news that gang members were in the arena.

"The first thing I thought was we're going to have a shootout, and I frantically looked around," he said. "Then the guy said, 'No, no, 12 gang members are coming to know the Lord right now, and your cousin is counseling them. Would you go and give him a hand?' They were quite sincere in their search for God and wanting to change."

John Ogle, LPEA vice president of development, was on the floor of the UIC Pavilion after a meeting when a pastor's wife said to him, "I don't know how you feel about the low attendance here, but I want you to know that almost all of my family came forward to receive Christ tonight." Later she explained that she and her husband had been praying for her family 15 years. She invited them to the UIC meetings, eight came and seven -- her mother, aunt and cousins -- went forward to confess Christ as Lord.

Howard Robbins, a self-employed businessman who served on the Say Yes Chicago executive committee, pointed to the thousands of people who made commitments to Christ when citing the benefits of the campaign, then added, "Some of my closest friends are people whom I've worked with on committees all over the U.S."

"That's what's happened here with this committee and these people. There's been a bonding built between black and white Christians and interfacing between businessmen that's going to further the kingdom of God and finance Christian work around the world. All because of a Palau crusade that took place in Chicago.

"I believe God has done a work here, a work we need to build on. It's not the end. Luis and the committee hadn't done anything of this magnitude before, and I knew it was going to have its hiccups," Robbins said. "That's all right, just as long as we learn from it and build on it. I know the Lord doesn't want us to stop right here with this. We are on to something here. It's just a matter of taking it to the next level."

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This article includes reporting from the Luis Palau Evangelistic Association and the Illinois Baptist newsjournal.

Youth group makes impact
on Polish church & city

By Lonnie Wilkey & Connie Davis

Baptist Press
6/27/96

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Seventy-eight youth and leaders from a Tennessee church made an impact not only on a Polish church but the city of Tarnow as well.

The group from First Baptist Church, Concord, in Knoxville, Tenn., returned June 15 from a one-week trip to Poland, where they served at Tarnow Baptist Church.

"The kids definitely made an impact on Tarnow," said Terry Sharp, director of the Tennessee Baptist Convention partnership missions department, noting it was the largest group to go to one location in a Tennessee Baptist partnership.

The youth group presented numerous concerts in schools and other locations in Tarnow.

An outdoor concert in the city's amphitheater attracted 1,000 people. When it was over, 100 had accepted Christ as Lord and Savior, said Denny Brinkman, the church's youth minister who led the group.

In a faxed communication to Sharp, Irek Skoczen, pastor of the Tarnow church, said, "The group's trip here was a big encouragement to us. We really did see God at work and the group from Concord was right in the middle of what he was doing."

Skoczen noted it was a historical occasion for the church because one of their baptisms, along with an open-air service, was shown on television.

The service at the amphitheater, he noted, "was the largest such event our church has ever put on."

The Polish pastor agreed the youth impacted the city as well as his church.

"They were certainly noticed here in the city and they were identified as being associated with the church. Teachers from the local schools clearly expressed their satisfaction. It was noticed that nothing that we did was done for money. Nobody has ever done as much around here for free before."

Skoczen praised the group for their discipline and behavior. "Denny Brinkman prepared the young people very well. Everything they said and their attitudes were a superb testimony to their maturity in the Lord.

"I'm encouraged, our youth are encouraged and the whole church here is too. We're still hearing some echoes from the group in the form of visitors to the church, new people at the youth meetings and comments we receive from outsiders," he said.

The trip also impacted the Tennessee youth, Brinkman said.

"Our kids were able to see God in a foreign culture as active, or in some cases, more active than at home," he said.

He noted they were allowed to share testimonies in Polish schools about what God has done in their lives -- something they could not have done here in the United States.

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In addition, he said, the Poland trip enabled the group to "develop a heart for foreign missions."

Brinkman, whose group raised \$100,000 for the trip "to keep the costs down to make sure everyone could go who wanted to," said he was surprised at the response of the city.

He noted a city official gave them gifts and thanked them for what the group had done, which was definitely a first, said Brinkman, who has led many mission trips during his 16 years of youth ministry.

Brinkman chose Poland for this overseas trip because of the Tennessee partnership, and it may not be their last trip there.

"We definitely opened up the door to go back," he said, and "expanded" their view of what such a group could do.

Sharp agreed. In fact, the youth group may have changed the course of the Poland partnership, he said.

Although the task of working with such a large group seemed at times insurmountable, Polish Baptists were willing to take the risks, Sharp said. "They soon realized what an impact such a group could make" after witnessing the youth team at work, he said.

As for pastor Irek Skoczen, he is convinced "that many seeds were definitely sown" by the youth team in the Polish city.

"Now we just have to wait and be ready to see what grows out of them. We hope the long-term effects will be as good as the short-term ones," he observed in his communication with Sharp.

In addition to the youth group, FBC, Concord, also sent six medical professionals, led by Larry Rogers, a doctor and member of FBC. They were joined in Poland by Nashville, Tenn., physician Dewey Dunn, a veteran medical volunteer.

Dunn had worked in Poland last year trying to develop the kind of ministry that clinics have had in other countries. It had not occurred although another health care team had worked there.

Dunn said it seemed the seven-member team again would be thwarted. The church in Kriniza, which is in south Poland, was dealing with a conflict and a storm hit, which kept patients away the first day a clinic was held.

But the day following the storm, the clinic at the Kriniza church was very successful as word spread, Dunn said. People even asked for information at the area post office. A Polish doctor joined them.

The team held clinics in Tarnow and visited several hospitals. They also treated children and teachers at two public schools.

The efforts were more successful than he had prayed for, Dunn noted.

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'I couldn't sleep for 4 months
I knew I had a purpose,' he says By Relma Hargus

Baptist Press
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BATON ROUGE, La. (BP)--Gordon Stablier remembers distinctly when God told him five years ago to become more involved in church life.

"I felt the Lord was calling me to special service. I felt like I was needed." But he couldn't find his place.

Because he is developmentally disabled, some people questioned whether he could be a contributing member of a community of faith.

Stablier knew he could. The call persisted. "I couldn't sleep for four months. I knew I had a purpose, but I didn't know what it was."

That is changed now. He moved his membership to Grace Baptist Church, Baton Rouge, La., a little over a year ago and has become the "tape minister."

Each Sunday morning he tapes the sermons, makes copies using a high-speed dubbing machine with dual tape heads and then gives them to participants in Grace's home ministry.

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"I really feel like a part of the congregation," Stablier says. People unable to attend church because of physical limitations are able to listen to the sermons through the tape ministry, he says.

"I can help," Stablier sums up.

Ace McVay, recently named as full-time minister at Grace, said the congregation has identified the tape ministry as one that helps fulfill their mission to reach beyond the church doors.

"Gordon needs the church; he needs the congregation. At the same time, his ministry gives him a feeling of belonging."

That give-and-take aspect of church membership is not unique to people with noticeable limitations, McVay says.

"We're all together. We are all one, but we all do our individual ministries."

As a selection from "That All May Worship," a publication of the National Organization on Disability written by Jenny Thornberg, notes:

"Each of us has abilities; each knows isolation and incompleteness."

A stock clerk at the State Department of Education, Stablier lives on his own, despite having been once told he would never leave the sheltered workshop where he once worked.

Stablier attends a special education Bible class Sunday mornings at Grace, as well as worship Sunday mornings and evenings.

He studies his Bible at home, he says, and often watches televised religious programs. Listening to Southern Gospel music is a favorite pastime, he says.

He also catches the church van for Wednesday evening services. And he is helping to plan a Vacation Bible School at Grace Baptist for people with special needs this summer.

Not only has he found his place, Stablier says, "I feel like I'm needed."

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Hargus is a reporter for the Baton Rouge Advocate.

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