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Missionaries in Peru pursue
 harvest amid Satan's attacks

By Mark Kelly

Baptist Press
 4/29/96

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--When God's Spirit begins to move and people previously resistant to the gospel begin to respond, is it any coincidence that suddenly things begin to go wrong?

In Peru, harvest is at hand. People are more responsive to the gospel than at any time in memory. Yet the 64 Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board missionaries there have struggled for two years with one setback after another.

"Twenty-five years ago, if you tried to talk about the gospel with people, they looked at you like you were some kind of fanatic," senior missionaries Beryl and Linda Boswell of Stafford, Va., and Bluefield, W.Va., respectively, recently told colleague Dan McLaughlin. "Now we see real openness and curiosity about the Bible. People are seeking to know more about God."

For example, in the city of Cajamarca, so many have come to Christ -- and so great is the movement of God's Spirit -- that leaders of mountain villages offer land to missionaries who will come and start a church. One missionary family suddenly found themselves working with five new congregations.

Yet the joy of the harvest has been marred by tragedy and difficulty. Giovana Cabanillas, an aerobics instructor at a Baptist recreation ministry in a Cajamarca gymnasium, was brutally murdered in mid-March. The resignation of a missionary couple there has stretched leadership resources even further.

Across the country, the theme repeats itself. "Many share the feeling Satan wants to use these things to detour us from our course," says McLaughlin, of Sterling, Va.

-- In March 1994, missionary Gary Crowell of Denison, Texas, nearly died after he was shot in the leg and arm in a robbery. Crowell continues to suffer from nerve damage and partial disability in his left arm, but is still serving in Peru.

-- Two months later, another missionary was diagnosed with a disorder that causes debilitating muscular pain and chronic fatigue.

-- In the following months, one missionary developed severe vision problems, followed by diabetes, and another experienced a retina detachment.

-- Another missionary struggled for months with foot pain and joint swelling before doctors diagnosed a rare disease. Yet another was hospitalized for surgery, as were both of her children.

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-- In November and December 1995, two missionary children were injured in accidents, and a third was diagnosed with Guillain-Barre syndrome, a nerve disorder that can cause permanent paralysis.

-- Early this year, another missionary child suffered nerve damage with a serious leg and ankle break, and a young missionary couple struggled with a miscarriage.

Then in February, double tragedy struck when all four members of the Wade Watts family were injured in an auto accident and missionary Lynn Davidson of Santa Fe, N.M., died in the crash of an airliner. Wade Watts, of Memphis, Tenn., remains in a coma in a Memphis hospital, and his 9-year-old son, Marcus, is fighting back from severe brain damage.

"When things like this happen to missionaries, it makes life and ministry very difficult," observes McLaughlin. Still, the onslaught has had benefits.

"This adversity also has driven us to deepen our prayer lives; it's drawn people together and taught us to rely on each other more. We've seen Peru Baptists galvanized to pray even more and to show care and compassion for missionaries," he says. "After the Watts and Davidson tragedies, they held citywide prayer meetings and vigils."

And on the day when many of the victims of the airline crash were being buried, Peruvians noticed Lynn Davidson's graveside service was characterized by singing and hope, not desperate tears like the others. The graveside sermons were televised and broadcast to five cities in the area.

"We have seen evidence that wherever God's Spirit is moving, missionaries can expect an inexplicable series of circumstances that seem to hinder the harvest," says Foreign Mission Board President Jerry Rankin, who himself served in southern Asia and the Pacific for 23 years. "If missionaries are to walk in victory and if a hedge of protection is to be sustained around their life and family and ministry, it is essential they have a strong base of prayer support.

"Only the prayers of God's people will break down the strongholds of Satan and provide that protection."

Missionaries gathered for a retreat in late March to help them process their intense feelings. "We are so grateful for being able to come together and share our hurts and concerns," one missionary said. "This has been a special gift from God to bring spiritual refreshing to our lives.

"This mission is now ready to forge ahead and tackle the challenge before us."

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Interfaith leaders: Spat shows
cult's desire for mainstream

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press
4/29/96

ALPHARETTA, Ga. (BP)--Reaction to the Fellowship of Christian Athletes' refusal to honor a Mormon student shows the cult's desire for mainstream status and the ignorance of many Christians about Mormon teachings, said Southern Baptist interfaith witness leaders.

"Over the last 10-plus years, the Mormon church has made a very deliberate, conscious effort to cast themselves as mainstream Protestants and evangelical," said Phil Roberts, director of the Home Mission Board's interfaith witness department. Such posturing, Roberts added, has "an ulterior motive to prostletize Protestants."

News reports state a Nashville, Tenn., chapter of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes informed a student he could not receive athlete of the year honors because he is a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

FCA members at Page High School backed their Mormon teammate, senior Aaron Walker, by refusing to attend the awards banquet, according to a story in the Nashville Banner newspaper.

The paper quoted Walker as saying, "I don't know why they would not consider us Christians. We believe Jesus Christ is our savior just like any other Christian."

But interfaith witness specialists say Latter-day Saints hold basic beliefs that differ significantly from Christianity, placing Mormons in the category of cults.

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"Mormons say, 'We worship the same Jesus.' Well, no they don't," said Mike Reynolds, director of Utah Missions, Inc., a Mormon watchdog group based in Marlow, Okla. "The Jesus of Mormonism is a created being who is a god, not God. There is your basic difference."

A Home Mission Board interfaith witness bulletin outlining Mormon beliefs states Mormons believe their god "lived on a planet as a mortal man before attaining 'godhood' or 'exaltation.'"

Reynolds and Roberts said the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints seeks acceptance by mainstream Christianity despite Mormon doctrines claiming to be the only true church and condemning all other churches as heretical.

"We don't have to say we stand apart from Mormons," Roberts said. "Doctrinally, and by their very confession and opinion of mainstream Christians, they have done that themselves."

Reynolds said many Christians are ignorant of the differences between their beliefs and Mormons. He compares it to his experience at age 14 when he asked his father, a deacon, about Mormons.

"My dad's basic statement was, 'I know they're wrong, but I don't know why.' And I find most Baptists (believe) that way today," he said.

"I think most of them know that Mormonism is incorrect and they know there's a little difference in the gods. But the terminology is confusing," Reynolds said. "It sounds like Baptist-ese, but it's not. It's Mormon-ese. It all has a different meaning; every last thing from baptism to God to son of God."

Reynolds said he expects interest in Mormonism to grow as the 1998 Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Salt Lake City nears.

More information about Mormon beliefs is available from state Baptist convention interfaith witness coordinators; the Home Mission Board interfaith witness department, (770) 410-6220; or Utah Missions, Inc., 1-800-654-3992.

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EDITORS' NOTE: "Latter-day Saints" with a small "d" is correct.

Brotherhood trustees discuss
restructuring with ITF rep

By Connie Davis

Baptist Press
4/29/96

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--Brotherhood Commission trustees expressed concerns about the Southern Baptist Convention restructuring plan at their April 26-27 meeting before approving the use of "incorporators" to establish a new missions agency. They also made transition plans and participated in a reunion with former trustees.

In their biannual session in Memphis, Tenn., trustees reported their concerns to Mike Hamlet, a member of the Implementation Task Force appointed by the SBC Executive Committee to oversee the "Covenant for a New Century" restructuring.

Approved by messengers at last year's SBC meeting in Atlanta, the restructuring calls for dissolving the Home Mission Board, the Brotherhood Commission and Radio and Television Commission and assigning their duties to a newly created North American Mission Board (NAMB).

The incorporators, as proposed by the ITF, would help establish the NAMB, nominate a president and propose officers for the agency's board of directors.

Introducing Hamlet, James Williams, Brotherhood Commission president, noted the commission staff felt more supported than at any time since the restructuring was announced. A year ago trustees addressed concerns to the committee which developed the restructuring plan, the Program and Structure Study Committee, and received no response, officials said.

Hamlet, pastor of First Baptist Church, North Spartanburg, S.C., answered questions of both trustees and 28 former trustees. He is one of two members of the task force assigned to the commission. Several questions centered around the appointment of the 13 incorporators, which includes two incorporators from each of the three agencies forming the NAMB and seven appointed by the ITF.

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Trustee Bill Prince of Georgia asked Hamlet about the objectivity of the incorporators, since more than half will be appointed by the ITF. "There's an appearance the incorporators could lack objectivity because a majority of them are appointed by the ITF and arguably influenced by the Executive Committee and its CEO, so it might not actually reflect the will of the convention, but the Executive Committee," Prince said.

Hamlet responded that if more agency representatives were incorporators, they might form voting blocks. "We felt this was somewhere in the middle ... because then you're getting people on that committee who understand a new entity that is for all Southern Baptists. We've not had any input from the Executive Committee except what we've taken to them." He noted a majority of ITF's 10 members are not Executive Committee members.

James McCollough of California asked if criteria existed for those appointed to entities. "Are they going to drop the barriers and let anyone who has been nominated (to be selected) or is there going to be a hidden agenda?"

"There is no hidden agenda," Hamlet said. If the incorporators make decisions based on 7-6 votes representing a division between those appointed by the agencies and those appointed by the ITF, those decisions, Hamlet predicted, would not be accepted by Southern Baptists.

Paul Schlett of New York questioned the proposed makeup of the NAMB board, which will be composed of all of the second-term trustees of the three entities or about 44 trustees of the Home Mission Board, 15 of the Brotherhood Commission and 15 of the RTVC.

Schlett said in pioneer areas like his state, laymen are not "empowered" as well as laymen in more evangelized states because many pastors are linked more strongly to the HMB's work than to Brotherhood work. This is natural because many of them are paid by the HMB, he explained.

Hamlet responded to this and several other questions about trustee representation of the three entities forming the NAMB. "Our task is not to be protective and I believe this is the way you want it to be. It's not to be protective of an entity; it is to be protective of that entity's ministry." He added, "There never has been the idea that this (Brotherhood work) has not worked."

Several trustees expressed concern that the restructuring would cause current increases in Brotherhood work to falter. They referred to a 15.9 percent increase in enrollment and participation totaling 749,000 in Brotherhood programs. One trustee questioned how World Changers, which needs a two- to three-year planning period, could be transferred without interruption.

Williams said the staff would continue its work until June 19, 1997, when the transition would be completed, or until told otherwise. Several trustees expressed their pain at not being asked for their input and asked if those with experience in Brotherhood work would be considered for the six at-large incorporator positions. Hamlet said it was possible, especially if they had not just rotated off a term as a trustee. The latter situation would give the person the appearance of bias toward the agency he/she had served, he added.

Hamlet stressed the ITF was open to any input by Southern Baptists and was working hard. The ITF has hired an Atlanta-based management firm which had met with the staff and begun its research for the possible transition.

After the dialogue, Williams told trustees he believed the concerns of the commission would be considered by the ITF. However, the commission would be "as positive and proactive as possible" in the transition period. "Our work is much bigger than the structure of the Southern Baptist Convention," he said. He added that the work could be "enhanced and empowered within the North American Mission Board, and not diminished."

Still to be worked out are new collaborative assignments for men's ministries, Williams said. According to the restructuring plan, for the first time the Baptist Sunday School Board formally would have the lead role in men's ministries rather than the commission.

Trustees elected Donley Brown, chairman of the board and a layman from Missouri and Keith Corrick, a minister in Maryland, as incorporators of the NAMB. Elected as alternates were Bob Himber, a layman from Alabama, and Kelly Burris, a minister in Virginia.

Trustees approved an incentive for employees who stay until June 1, 1997. The percentage was discussed at length because of the need to continue work but to retain assets to transfer to the NAMB. A one-time incentive of 25 percent of an employee's annual salary was approved.

The financial picture of the commission was reported by Jack Childs, a Brotherhood vice president. The mid-year report was that the commission would likely run short of its 1995-96 projected income by \$290,000. Actions to reduce expenditures to bring the budget into balance had been taken, Childs said.

He attributed a downturn in periodical sales to an SBC-wide fall in periodical sales and to reaction to the SBC restructuring.

The commission's short-term indebtedness of about \$500,000 was reported. Childs said plans were in place to significantly reduce it by the end of the fiscal year. A budget of \$5,661,740 for 1996-97 was adopted.

Staff introduced the commission's new curriculum, Mission Kids, for boys and girls in grades one through six, to be premiered at the SBC annual meeting June 11-13 in New Orleans. Staff also reported on growing response to Legacy Builders rallies for men and the expansion of Missions Today, the periodical for men. World Changers had drawn 9,045 participants this year as compared to 7,608 last year and gifts of \$500,000 had been collected for the North Korea Famine Project.

Activities for former trustees included a banquet and program. Williams commented that the number of former trustees who attended, paying their own transportation costs to the meeting, reflected the legacy of the commission.

The next trustee meeting is Oct. 25-26.

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(BP) photos to be provided to state newsjournals by the Brotherhood Commission.

Florida Senate weighs
church medical plan bill

Baptist Press
4/29/96

DALLAS (BP)--A bill to allow established church groups to fund benefits for their employees without interference by the Florida Department of Insurance has received unanimous approval by the Banking and Insurance Committee of the Florida Senate.

Legislative clarification respecting religious freedom had been sought by the Annuity Board of the Southern Baptist Convention to enable it to continue providing medical coverage for pastors and other employees of Southern Baptist churches in Florida.

"We are indebted to Sen. Charles Williams (D-Tallahassee) who sponsored the bill, and Sen. John Grant (R-Tampa Bay), who is chairman of the Banking and Insurance Committee, for their vigorous support of Senate Bill 2660, and we hope the full Senate will approve the bill when it reaches the floor," said Thomas E. Miller Jr., Annuity Board senior vice president for public relations.

At issue, according to Miller, is the ability of the Annuity Board to provide medical coverage within the Southern Baptist doctrine of congregational autonomy. "Southern Baptists are simply seeking to provide coverage without being discriminated against because we have no hierarchy to instruct churches how to be churches," Miller said.

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"Florida regulations discriminate in favor of hierarchical churches," said Miller. "We believe such regulations are a violation of our religious liberty. The Annuity Board's Personal Security Program provides individual coverage that requires individual underwriting (evidence of good health) for admission. The Florida Department of Insurance would require universal coverage, which could result in massive rate increases because of what is called 'selection against the plan' by sick people. The resulting rate increases would lead to withdrawals by people in good health who can qualify for individual coverage in plans not required to accept all applicants.

"In the past five years the Annuity Board has paid benefits totaling almost \$40 million in Florida. We have never canceled a participant's coverage because of high or frequent claims, but there is no way we can expose the Personal Security Program to the adverse consequences that would result if we did not require evidence of good health for initial enrollment," Miller said.

"Thanks to the efforts of lawmakers such as Sens. Williams and Grant, we expect to continue to offer our good program in Florida as we do in all the other 49 states," Miller said.

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Fred Powell to be nominee
for SBC first vice president

Baptist Press
4/29/96

AURORA, Colo. (BP)--Fred Powell, president of Communicators Ministries, Richmond, Mo., will be nominated for first vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention, according to an announcement by Jerry Johnson, pastor of Central Baptist Church, Aurora, Colo.

Election of SBC officers begins during the first day of the June 11-13 annual meeting in the Louisiana Superdome in New Orleans.

Powell also has served for several months as special assistant for transition to new Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary President Mark Coppenger, and Powell is director of development for Emmanuel Baptist Seminary, Oradea, Romania. He was chairman of the SBC Committee on Order of Business from 1992-95 and senior associate pastor of First Baptist Church, Atlanta, from 1984-90.

"This announcement flows out of my belief that we need competent, convictional conservatives at every level of leadership in our convention," said Johnson, trustee chairman at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky. "Dr. Fred Powell is that kind of leader."

No other nominees have been announced for SBC first vice president.

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RTVC to premiere documentary
after SBC's June 11 session

By C.C. Risenhoover

Baptist Press
4/29/96

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Messengers to the 1996 Southern Baptist Convention in New Orleans will have a chance to see the world premiere of a one-hour television documentary produced by the Radio and Television Commission that will later be broadcast by NBC affiliates.

The documentary, "The American Dream/Nightmare," will be shown at the SBC June 11 at 9 p.m. in quad rooms 7-11 of the SuperDome.

"Many Southern Baptists are not aware that we annually produce documentaries that are broadcast by affiliates of the ABC and NBC television networks," said Jack Johnson, RTVC president. "Having a premiere of 'The American Dream/Nightmare' at the convention is an opportunity to showcase the quality of work that we do.

"But, more important, this documentary deals with societal problems and issues that are of great concern to all Christians in this country. Anyone seeing this documentary will walk away with a renewed commitment to Christian family values."

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There are 1,000 free tickets available for the premiere. Tickets are on a first-come, first-serve basis and can be obtained at the RTVC's convention exhibit or by calling or writing Shawn Switzer at the RTVC prior to June 1. The telephone number is (817) 737-4011. The address is 6350 West Freeway, Fort Worth, TX 76150.

Rosser McDonald, RTVC producer of "The American Dream/Nightmare," said the documentary deals with only a sampling of the moral issues that concern society, not an exhaustive list.

"The crux of the program," he said, "is to make the viewer think about his or her own actions in the light of the moral issues that we present. We want the viewer to ask, 'Do I have my priorities straight?' We don't leave the viewer thinking about how bad others are, but about how he or she relates to the moral issues presented."

McDonald was recently nominated for an Emmy for another documentary he produced, "Haiti: Mountains and Hopes."

"The American Dream/Nightmare" was funded by the RTVC's "Covenant" ministry, whose stated purpose is to promote, produce and acquire Christian family values programming. Covenant recently received a \$100,000 grant from the Davidson Family Charitable Foundation to develop a series of programs on media morality.

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Pittman's legacy leaves
lasting imprint on SBC

By Robert O'Brien

Baptist Press
4/29/96

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--You might wonder if Sam Pittman ever has a serious thought as he jokes his way through a crowd at a Southern Baptist gathering.

Just the opposite. Pittman, 67, who retires June 30 as Foreign Mission Board executive director of public affairs, has left an imprint that will endure as a builder of bridges across Southern Baptist gulfs.

Pittman, down-to-earth and unassuming, has kept his wide circle of friends alert with his frankness -- and laughing at a joke or an anecdote funnier than fiction -- over 46 years of ministry, 23 of them at the board.

Caskets lined the walls of his first office -- at a funeral home -- when he became the first director of missions (DOM) for South Carolina's Beaverdam Baptist Association in 1970 after 20 years as a pastor.

Some pastors had no enthusiasm for the DOM role. One vowed: "We'll have a missions program over my dead body." But he quickly became enthusiastic. Why? "All he had to do was drop by the office and look around to realize we meant business," chuckles Pittman. "He either didn't really want to die -- or couldn't find a casket that fit."

Actually, doubters say Pittman won them with love, trust, wisdom, ideas, hard work and results. "When we saw what kind of man he was, we got involved and had one of the state's largest missions programs," said pastor Gene Burdette. "Other associations began asking how they could do the same."

Pittman practiced then what later became an art as he crisscrossed Southern Baptist life to build relations -- working under seven titles and three presidents since joining the board in 1973. Many co-workers call him a major architect and catalyst for improved communications among churches, associations and state and national bodies.

In his time, associations -- once treated like appendages -- became "an integral part of missions and the total denominational process," said Carl Duck, past national DOM president. "He's one of us -- a man who understands."

Working across denominational lines, he has helped develop a missionary-in-residence program with state conventions; the SBC Missions Education Council (that he says "held us together with a common purpose in perilous times"); and Cooperative Program promotion with the Stewardship Commission involving, for the first time, all the Southern Baptist spectrum.

Pittman emphasizes Southern Baptists have done this as a team. But many feel he's done more behind the scenes than anyone else in decades to get Southern Baptists to talk, plan and bridge self-described "turf."

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The Stewardship Commission's Jim Powell calls Pittman the "kind of Baptist who comes along once in 100 years" because of what he's done to strengthen the Cooperative Program -- Southern Baptists' financial lifeline.

FMB Executive Vice President Don Kammerdiener says, "We'll miss his wise counsel. He thinks theologically and practically and has spiritual and biblical wisdom. He's a team player but consistently and openly tries to say the same thing to everyone -- not different things to different people."

Many of Pittman's colleagues know him as a man of prayer. They say his deepest, most real self and his closeness to God are revealed in his prayer life. He and his wife, Ann, an ever-present supporter in ministry, pray for a bright future for the denomination. And, co-workers note, they spend hours trying to make people of all statuses feel heard and loved.

"Southern Baptists, for the sake of world redemption, must love each other. We can't truly love others until we love each other -- and until we rub balm, not salt, in our wounds," he says. "Everyone in the denomination -- that's much more than a convention structure -- is part of us."

Enduring values, absorbed early in the Camperdown textile community in Greenville, S.C., have kept him grounded. So did 23 years as a pastor and DOM. Those values -- colleagues see as tenacity, integrity, direct talk, Christian living, biblical truth, discipline, a common touch -- work anywhere.

Pittman's pilgrimage began at 12 when Sunday school teacher Lee Shivers came every Saturday to recruit him. After a month, Pittman's dad, a Mormon textile worker-turned-machinist, relented. Shivers led Pittman to accept Christ, and later Pittman led his dad and other family members to do the same.

His high school football coaches, Slick Moore and Speedy Speer, heard Pittman, the team captain, lead prayer at a team meal. Impressed, the two Christians separately asked: "Have you felt called to preach?"

"That shook me up; I'd been struggling with it," Pittman said. The AAA all-state guard, sought after by major colleges, opted to play at Furman, a Baptist school in his hometown, to prepare for ministry. He earned three degrees from Furman and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

That set him on the path to a ministry as peacemaker, servant and rare blend of denominational loyalist and grassroots ombudsman with a reputation for candid analysis and direct talk to people of all ranks and opinions.

"Sam listens long and shoots straight," said Dan Euliss, Home Mission Board promotion director. "He knows where land mines are and tries to keep us from stepping on them. It's wise to listen to him. He really cares."

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(BP) photo (horizontal) mailed 4/23/96 to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press. Outline available on SBCNet News Room.

**Masters champion Langer
speaks for the Master**

By Irene V. Bennett

Baptist Press
4/29/96

AUGUSTA, Ga. (BP)--"Golf, golf, golf, and then golf -- that was my priority," said Bernhard Langer, two-time Masters champion, at the third annual Augusta Golf Prayer Breakfast April 10.

"By 1985," he told the audience of 850 at Warren Baptist Church, "I was the number one player in the world, having won seven tournaments on five continents in that year. I had everything I had ever dreamed of, but something was missing."

That same year in a Bible study led by PGA chaplain Larry Moody, he heard for the first time that to enter the kingdom of God a person must be born again. Reared in a religious family in Anhauser, Germany, and believing that being a good person who kept the Ten Commandments, went to church, and prayed was enough to get into heaven, he was startled at age 28 by his Nicodemus-type conversation with Moody.

Langer's also talked about the trials of learning to play, the pleasures of being very successful and his struggles to overcome the "putting yips" before he won the coveted Green Jacket the second time, Easter Sunday, 1993.

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Langer said his priorities as a Christian are God first, family second and work third, and when priorities are right, everything is managed.

"It means a lot for me to represent my country in team championships like the Ryder Cup," he said, "but it is even more important to be on the team for Jesus Christ. Even though I sometimes lose at golf, I am a winner with Jesus Christ. My relationship with God and other believers will last forever."

The prayer breakfasts began in 1994 when Chuck Gordon, minister of students at Warren, arranged the inaugural event with the Players Outreach Ministry, a part of Search Ministries which sponsors the PGA Bible study program. Bobby Clampett, PGA pro golfer and a Masters commentator for CBS, directs the Players Outreach Ministry, begun by Clampett and Bill Poirer in 1993 to give players an avenue for sharing testimonies.

"Warren Baptist Church offers this prayer breakfast as a gift to the community of golf and Augusta," said pastor Frank Page.

Harold Gardner, local arrangements chairman for the event, agreed. "We see this as an opportunity for non-Christians to hear about Jesus and for Christians to be encouraged by the stories of Christian golfers." Attendance has grown from 150 to 850 at the event, funded by donations from church members.

This year the church and Players Outreach Ministry added a Wednesday evening concert for the community featuring Steve Camp and John MacArthur, pastor-teacher of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, Calif.

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Bennett is a correspondent for The Christian Index, Georgia Baptists' newsjournal.

Larry Lewis: Clown
around for the gospel

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press
4/29/96

GATLINBURG, Tenn. (BP)--Home Mission Board President Larry L. Lewis said he used to clown around when it came to evangelism.

The former church planter said he wore a clown suit and performed magic to gain opportunities to witness to children during Vacation Bible School.

"We saw the way to reach people in the community -- to go out," said Lewis, who called himself "Sardini," the fishy magician.

Lewis endorsed innovative ministry styles while speaking to the April 20-24 national resort and leisure ministers conference in Gatlinburg, Tenn., sponsored by the Southern Baptist agency. He noted the Bible commands Christians to seek the lost and find ways of sharing the gospel.

"There's not a verse that says the lost are supposed to go to church, but there are lots of verses that say the church is supposed to go to the lost."

Going outside the church is one of Lewis' mandates of ministry based on Luke 14:16-24. In that Scripture, Jesus told a parable of a master sending a servant through the town and into the country to invite people to a banquet.

Following that example, churches must meet needs throughout their communities, he said. "You don't do that inside the walls of the church if you're talking about the lost and dying."

Other principles he cited:

-- Servanthood. The master commanded the servant to go looking for people, and the servant obeyed, Lewis noted. Christians "are on marching orders for the Lord."

-- Urgency. The master commanded the servant to go quickly. "You wait around and the harvest will rot in the field," Lewis said. "People are waiting for that good word -- Jesus loves you and died for your sin."

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