

**(BP)****-- BAPTIST PRESS**

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

August 29, 1996

96-152

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#### Association ousts church over woman's ordination

By Tim Palmer

Baptist Press  
8/29/96

SIKESTON, Mo. (BP)--The executive board of Charleston Baptist Association in Missouri voted Aug. 19 to withdraw fellowship from First Baptist Church of Sikeston, Mo., over the ordination of a Sikeston woman to the gospel ministry.

The action, taken in a special called meeting of the board at the associational campgrounds near Benton, came at the recommendation of the board's three-member credentials committee.

Charleston Association director of missions Randy Fite said 54 of the 75 executive board members were present for the special meeting, along with 13 visitors. Twenty-eight of the association's 35 churches were represented. The balloted vote on the motion to withdraw fellowship from the Sikeston church was 40-8 in favor.

Sikeston ordained Billie Fair March 31. Fair graduated from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Mo., in May with a master of divinity degree. She has served as the church's outreach director and has said she hopes to become a hospital chaplain.

Fair asked the church to ordain her in a March 6 letter. The church voted one week later to honor her request. She was ordained in a March 31 afternoon service at the church after she preached in the morning service the same day.

Messengers to Charleston Association's mid-year meeting April 15 at Illmo Baptist Church, Scott City, instructed the credentials committee to meet with representatives of the Sikeston church concerning the matter. That meeting took place July 23 at Sikeston.

Fite described the July 23 meeting as "very cordial but very short." The credentials committee asked the church to explain why it ordained a woman and what Scripture it used to justify doing so.

Jim Guffie, Sikeston pastor, said the church responded that it had undergone a four-year process to arrive at its position, beginning when Fair entered seminary. As for Scripture, "There is no verse that says we can ordain women, but neither is there a verse that says we can't. For that matter, no verse says we can ordain a man."

Guffie said the church exercised the autonomy of a local church to decide for itself what it wants to do. He declined to elaborate. "I don't see any purpose in saying anything and aggravating a situation that's already here."

The Aug. 19 meeting also was short, Fite said. Charleston Association moderator Dale Merritt, pastor of First Baptist Church, Miner, described it as "surprisingly quiet." It began with a season of prayer at 7:30 p.m., then the credentials committee presented its report and its recommendation to withdraw fellowship from Sikeston. Executive board members asked a few questions, Fite noted -- "By eight o'clock they were counting the ballots."

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Fite said the action took effect immediately. A report on the matter will be presented to messengers at a business session in the association's annual meeting Sept. 17 at New Madrid Baptist Church, he added, but it does not require ratification there.

"We made a decision, but there were no winners," Fite remarked. He expressed concern over relationships between churches in Charleston Association. "The fellowship took a hard hit in all this." First Baptist, Sikeston, also is a major contributor to the association's annual budget.

Fair said Aug. 26 she had been misquoted by a local newspaper in an article about her ordination. Because of response to that article, she was referring subsequent requests for comment to Guffie.

Merritt said of the action to withdraw fellowship: "I don't feel that we had any other choice." Prior to meeting with the church, he said, the association asked the church to rescind the ordination or to withdraw voluntarily from the association. "Their response was a definite no to all of that."

The credentials committee report stated, "The committee has been dismayed that so much of the information relative to the ordination situation was publicly circulated before the committee had the opportunity to meet with First Baptist, Sikeston." Merritt said the comment referred to a two-page "questions and answers" document the church distributed to members April 21 and to newspaper articles about Fair's ordination.

"Basically they were just kind of calling our hand," he said. "Before the committee met with them, they were in public stating their case.

"They were not going to withdraw; they were going to force us to make the decision," he said.

Fair preached at an evening service Aug. 18 at Sikeston the night before the special called meeting. "To me it was another slap in the face to us right before we dealt with the issue," Merritt said. He noted the margin by which the motion to withdraw fellowship passed was indicative of the feelings of people in Charleston Association.

"I think we've dealt with it, and we dealt with it, I thought, in an appropriate way, and we're ready to go on with our association."

Guffie stated, "We'll accept their decision and we'll abide by it. We're not pleased with it, but we'll abide by it."

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### Binary code newest dialect of 'Experiencing God' study

By Terri Lackey

Baptist Press  
8/29/96

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--"Experiencing God" comes in many dialects -- Papiamento, Tagalog, mandarin, binary code. The first is spoken in the Netherlands Antilles; the second on an island in the Philippines, the third in China, and the fourth in space.

Cyberspace, that is.

Taught in at least 30 languages across the world, "Experiencing God," a 13-week study offering Christians the skills to find God's will for their lives, transcends time and space beginning Sept. 16. That is the day Christians and non-Christians alike from America to Zimbabwe will connect via computer and modem to begin jointly studying the popular course produced by the Baptist Sunday School Board's discipleship and family development division.

The idea of studying "Experiencing God" via internet originated with Thomas Kennedy, a native of Canada and resident of Holland, Mich. When Kennedy's work visa expired before his new one was issued this summer, the computer consultant found himself with time on his hands.

"God kind of used that time to kick this thing off," he said of the "Experiencing God" Internet study which will be launched three times a year in January, May and September "until the people quit subscribing."

Kennedy said he explored several on-line Bible studies recently, but had become disillusioned with them when the cyber chat about Scripture turned into theological bickering.

"I spent a lot of time on different Christian computer mailing lists, but it seemed like many of the people on them were just trying to throw Bible verses back and forth like they knew more about theology than the other person," he said. "I thought to myself, 'If I was a non-Christian, I wouldn't want anything to do with that.'

"I was ashamed that we had this incredible technology and it was being used to divide the body of Christ instead of joining people together to edify him," Kennedy said. Just as he was tiring of all computer-mediated Bible studies, Kennedy said a friend lent him an "Experiencing God" workbook.

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"After the first week, I was so excited about the study that I wanted to find some other people to study it with me. So I posted an e-mail message asking if anybody was interested in studying 'Experiencing God' with me.

"In the first three days, I received over 200 messages from all over the world. I was totally overwhelmed by it," he said. "Tears literally ran down my eyes."

Kennedy said before posting the message asking for "Experiencing God" study partners, he decided if God gave him 12 people, he would go through with coordinating the computer study.

"I guess I should have been more specific with God and requested a maximum of 12 people," joked Kennedy who indicated the number of people interested in the on-line study as of the end of August had reached 600 from 35 countries and was still rising.

Requirements after joining the study are simple, Kennedy said. Buy the adult workbook and study a chapter a week -- preferably the same one everybody else is studying. Those interested in posting comments on the newly created forum may do so.

"The list will be used for two purposes," Kennedy said. "One, I'll be sending e-mails to the list, offering food for thought and other ideas from the teacher's guide. And two, anybody going through a study problem, who doesn't understand something, or who just wants to issue a praise report can send it through the list. All e-mails come through me first for approval."

Once participants subscribe to the list, they receive a return e-mail outlining the rules and regulations, Kennedy said. To join, a person must send e-mail to "hub@XC.Org" (some people may find it necessary to put "Internet:" before that address). In the message field, not the subject field, write: subscribe expgod. Those who choose to be on a digest version of the list should write in the message field: subscribe expgod-digest. People who subscribe to the digest version of the study will receive a compilation of e-mail messages a couple of times a week, Kennedy said. They will not receive mail every time it is sent by a fellow member of the list group.

In his "welcome" message to new subscribers, Kennedy gives the price of the notebook (U.S. \$10.95 + 2.50 shipping and handling), and where and how to order it. For those who feel they cannot afford or obtain the book, Kennedy includes this message:

"Note: if you are unable to obtain a book for any reason (country, financial etc.) please send an e-mail to "TKennedy@XC.Org" with the subject, Book Needed. Include information on your address, etc. in the message text. We will do everything we can to get a book into your hands."

In the same welcome message, Kennedy then appeals to sponsors who can purchase a book for those who are unable to buy one for themselves.

"It is incredible how God works. We receive e-mails on a daily basis from those who are unable to afford the workbook and from those who wish to purchase workbooks for others. I have always had enough e-mails come in from sponsors to cover those in need. It is real neat to see God work in this area."

Kennedy said recently he received an e-mail from a person in the U.S. who wanted to sponsor someone overseas. The next day he received an e-mail from a lady in Denmark who needed a workbook.

"So I connected the two together," he said. "One thing I've learned is that when you obey, God accomplishes what only he could do."

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**'Experiencing God'  
to be aired in Arabic**

**Baptist Press  
8/29/96**

LARNACA, Cyprus (BP)--An Arabic-language version of the discipleship program "Experiencing God" is scheduled to be broadcast throughout the Middle East beginning Oct. 28.

The signal will originate from a powerful AM radio station in Cyprus, an island in the Mediterranean Sea. It will be broadcast five days a week in 15-minute segments.

The first-ever broadcast version of the Southern Baptist program was aired over radio waves in Russia in April. Broadcast versions are being developed in 10 languages.

The Foreign Mission Board's development office has already raised funds for developing "Experiencing God" broadcasts in several top priority languages: Arabic, Mandarin Chinese, Russian and Special English for Africa. It has yet to raise funds for Spanish or for Special English for Asia.

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A publication of LifeWay Press of the Baptist Sunday School Board, "Experiencing God" was written by Henry Blackaby and Claude King. The broadcast version, which closely follows material presented in the workbook, was adapted for radio in a project coordinated by the Foreign Mission Board.

Additional funds still are needed to develop broadcasting for the Spanish version, the Special English version for Asia, and broadcasts on local stations within Russia. Interested people should contact the Foreign Mission Board's Development Office, P.O. Box 6767, Richmond, VA 23230-0767 or by phone, 1-800-362-1322.

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**'Project Harvest' to rush  
missionaries to Bosnia**

**Baptist Press  
8/29/96**

WIESBADEN, Germany (BP)--Southern Baptists are responding to long sought peace in Bosnia by rushing foreign missionaries in to help the many people responding to the gospel there.

The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board expects to have four couples there by early September and two more by November in a response plan dubbed "Project Harvest Bosnia."

Three couples plan to transfer to Bosnia from western Europe. This unusual move comes because of the high response and because a year-old request for career missionaries has gone unfilled.

"The window of opportunity is presently open, but we do not know how long the cessation of war will last," said Larry Cox, field associate area director for Europe. "Everything is moving at warp speed, but this is God's timing."

Cox, based in Wiesbaden, Germany, oversees Southern Baptist ministry throughout central Europe, including the former Yugoslavia region.

During the past four years of conflict, Southern Baptists have sent more than \$1.5 million in humanitarian aid through several Baptist-related relief agencies based in Croatia and Serbia. Now, many who met Baptists and responded to the gospel in refugee camps are back living in their homes in Bosnia.

"These contacts and others made by our Baptist brothers and sisters involved in relief work have provided us with a network of people all over Bosnia ready and waiting for someone to come and teach them about the Lord Jesus. Our objective is to start home Bible studies with some of them resulting in church starts," Cox said.

Wayne and Florence Fredericks of Mississippi and Louisiana, respectively, are scheduled to transfer from France. Jim and Jean Leeper of Texas and Michigan, respectively, are expected to transfer from Germany. Both couples anticipate serving in Tuzla, Bosnia, beginning in early September.

Evangelistic campaigns by Croatian Baptists in Tuzla earlier this year have produced some 100 new believers who have nobody to lead them, Cox said.

Robert and Jerry Worley of New Mexico and Texas, respectively, are expected to transfer to Sarajevo, Bosnia, from Spain. Charles and Roberta Miller of Florida and Wisconsin, respectively, are expected to join them there Sept. 2. The Millers served from 1960 through September 1994 in the Philippines. Now retired, they will serve as International Service Corps volunteers.

Challenged with the need, the Millers responded almost immediately that they would be willing to go. "When the need is presented, the old missionary heart kicks into gear," Miller told the Europe area office team.

Another retired missionary couple who served in the South American country of Colombia is to arrive in November to open work in Banja Luka, a city in the Serb sector of Bosnia.

"It has been a joy to see veteran missionaries respond with enthusiasm to a need in an unsettled part of the world," Cox said. "We are praying for (still) another missionary unit to join them for special field orientation the first of November."

The missionaries will serve six-month terms, with the option of staying longer. Administrators hope during that time career workers will be led towards the region, Cox said.

Missionaries Bill and Debbie Steele, both of Georgia, have moved from Slovenia to the coastal city of Split, Croatia, so Steele can be better placed to coordinate the work within Bosnia. Steele also has coordinated the Foreign Mission Board humanitarian aid program in the region.

Because of their rapid deployment, the transferring missionaries will take only brief courses in the Serbo-Croatian language. Each couple will work with a national ministry partner who will serve as their interpreter. The missionaries will work with Bosnian Croats, Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Serbs, Cox said. More personnel may be called for later to build upon the foundation begun this fall, he said.

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## Human rights advocates cool conversion battle in Kuwait

By Marty Croll

WASHINGTON (BP)--With a Kuwaiti Christian's flight to the United States and a Kuwaiti government statement supporting religious freedom, human rights advocates are easing back from a battle with the Middle Eastern nation -- at least for now.

A coalition led by more than 90 members of the U.S. Senate and House has worked to convince Kuwait's ruling family that the country's constitution must be enforced despite a Muslim court's ruling for the Kuwaiti Christian's execution.

A coalition representative told Baptist Press in late August that many on Capitol Hill appreciate Kuwait's public statement that Kuwaiti citizens will be protected in their right to practice whatever religion they choose. They feel they have accomplished their aim, the representative said.

The coalition wrote letters on numerous occasions to Kuwait's amir, crown prince and ambassador, plus President Clinton and Secretary of State Warren Christopher. Several of them met personally with Kuwaiti Ambassador Mohammed S. Al-Sabah in Washington. And senior U.S. State Department officials met repeatedly with Kuwaiti officials.

At issue: would Kuwait strip Robert Hussein, 44, of his legal rights to citizenship simply because he became a Christian? In June Muslim court judge Jaafar Al-Qazveeni ruled to strip Hussein of his rights, but didn't stop there. He also quoted Muslim law saying Hussein should be killed by Muslim leaders for his allegiance to Jesus Christ.

The Hussein spectacle has brought nothing but embarrassment to Kuwait's ruling family. The government has had to fight for breathing room between the stifling pressures of the international community that helped defend it from Iraq scarcely more than five years ago and extremist Muslims who believe constitutional law must be interpreted in the context of Islam.

After more than a month of outcry from the West, the Kuwaiti government finally went public in the case. The same government-supported newspapers that had blasted Hussein for months printed excerpts of the government's decree that all Kuwaiti citizens have the right to practice the faith of their choice.

On July 20, all of Kuwait's Arabic daily papers, plus the Kuwait Times and Arab Times, quoted Justice Ministry Under-Secretary Salah Yousuf Bin Ali as saying "freedom of worship for all individuals had been mandated and guaranteed by the Kuwaiti constitution." Further, he stressed, "it is the duty of authorities to provide (Hussein) with protection against any threats."

Many Kuwaitis -- secular-minded and only moderate in the Islamic faith -- were heartened to see such a pronouncement. Extremists in Kuwait, as in many other traditionally Muslim nations, are a noisy minority.

Human rights sources say the line in Kuwait between its two power structures -- constitutional law and Muslim, or Sharia, law -- is fuzzy at best. One segment among Kuwaiti legislators is calling for the full adoption of Sharia. Elections for parliament are in October.

As late as mid-August, several Kuwaiti parliament members were reported to publicly be asking why Hussein had not been put to death yet. Only days later, on Aug. 17, Hussein fled to the United States with a six-month visa. He has not made public his whereabouts and it is not known when, or if, he will surface.

It is also not known whether he will appear in Kuwait Sept. 15 for a scheduled appeal hearing. At that hearing, he had planned to argue that the Kuwaiti constitution takes precedence over Muslim law in court cases. No one has ever mounted a court challenge to a Kuwaiti law which says only Muslims can be citizens.

For several months Hussein hid for his life with evangelical expatriates in Kuwait, many of whom relate to the National Evangelical Church of Kuwait. Church leaders, however, stress Hussein maintains no relationship with the church itself and has never submitted himself to discipleship there.

In fact, in recent weeks they publicly denied any connection to him or his actions. The day he left Kuwait, he attempted to schedule a press conference on the church's property. Church leaders blocked him.

While Article 35 of the Kuwaiti constitution clearly states any citizen can practice religion freely, Islamists claim that means only the religion they were born into. Sharia calls for death to anyone who converts from Islam and refuses to repent.

Other Islamic countries are watching to see how Kuwait responds to Hussein's challenge. Evangelical Christians and human rights advocates have seen Hussein as a test case. A decision in favor of freedom for Hussein could pave the way for Kuwait and other Arab nations to allow freedom for other Muslims who are worshipping Jesus Christ secretly.

**Marshall announces retirement  
as Kentucky executive secretary**

**By Mark Wingfield**

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--William W. Marshall has announced his intention to retire as executive secretary-treasurer of the Kentucky Baptist Convention Feb. 28, 1997, nine days after his 65th birthday.

In accordance with the KBC's constitution and bylaws, President Bill Tichenor will appoint a search committee to nominate Marshall's successor.

Marshall announced his retirement plans Aug. 22 to the administrative committee of the KBC executive board. That group acts as the executive board's personnel committee.

"I have a very, very strong and spiritually deliberate feeling that the time is right," Marshall told the administrative committee.

By the time of his retirement, Marshall will have completed 14 years as KBC executive secretary-treasurer. During his tenure, the convention has made numerous advances, the most notable being extensive statewide participation in partnership missions ventures with Baptists in Kenya, Brazil, Russia, Ohio, Utah-Idaho and New England.

Administrative committee chairman Charles Barnes said the announcement was accepted "with deep regret and appreciation."

"Bill Marshall's steady hand at the helm will be greatly missed," Barnes said. "We pray God's blessings on Bill, Alice and their family as they enjoy retirement and continue their ministry."

In retirement, Marshall and his wife, Alice, will serve as the first coordinators of the new Marshall Center for Ministry at Georgetown College in Georgetown, Ky. The center, which was named for them, has a five-fold mission related to issues of theology, academics, family, missions and leadership.

Georgetown College President Bill Crouch said the Marshalls will help launch the center by putting together an initial two-year plan and recruiting additional board members.

Counting accrued vacation time and time to attend the annual meeting of state Baptist convention executives, Marshall's last day in the office is projected to be Feb. 7.

Depending upon the speed with which the search committee works, a successor could be named prior to Marshall's departure. According to KBC policy, the executive secretary-treasurer is elected by the executive board. The larger Kentucky convention is then asked to "ratify" that election either in annual session or special session.

The next scheduled meeting of the executive board is Nov. 11, the day before the KBC annual meeting begins in Bowling Green. The executive board also has a meeting scheduled for Dec. 9-10.

Should a new executive secretary-treasurer not be elected by the time of Marshall's departure, it would be up to the executive board's administrative committee to make interim arrangements.

A Frankfort native, Marshall returned to Kentucky to assume the executive director's position in February 1983. He moved from the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, where he had been vice president for the office of human resources.

Earlier, the Marshalls were FMB career missionaries serving in the Middle East. Marshall also had served as associate secretary of the FMB's missionary personnel department.

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**Richard Melick named  
GGBTS guest professor**

**Baptist Press  
8/29/96**

MILL VALLEY, Calif. (BP)--Richard R. Melick, Jr., former president of the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies in Dallas, has been named guest professor of New Testament studies at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary this academic year.

"We are proud to have such an exceptional leader, scholar and teacher join the seminary family," said William Crews, president of the seminary. "Dr. Melick has served Southern Baptists and the wider evangelical world for many years and our students will certainly benefit from his experience, insights and teaching ministry."

Melick, 51, will teach courses in some of the New Testament epistles this semester. He received his doctor of philosophy from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, his master of divinity from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and his bachelor of arts from Columbia International University.

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In addition to serving as president of the Criswell Center from 1992-96, Melick has served at six other educational institutions during his teaching ministry:

- Evangelische Theologische Faculteit in Belgium as professor extraordinair (1985-present);
- Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary in Memphis, Tenn., as professor of New Testament and chairman of the New Testament department and the doctor of theology program (1983-92);
- Palm Beach Atlantic College in Palm Beach, Fla., as professor and chairman of the religion and philosophy department. He also served as academic vice president, acting dean of students and then acting president (1980-83);
- Miami Christian College in Miami, as chairman of the Bible and theology department (1977-79);
- Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., as visiting professor (1988).

A former pastor of two churches and numerous interim pastorates, Melick is a recognized author. He serves as consulting editor for the New American Commentary Series published by Broadman and Holman Publishers. He is author of the series' volume on "Philippians, Colossians and Philemon" and served as co-editor and contributor to "Authority and Interpretation: A Baptist Perspective", published by Baker Book House.

He also is author of chapters included in "Foundations for Biblical Interpretation: A Complete Library of Tools and Resources", "Handbook of Contemporary Preaching", and "Southern Baptists and American Evangelicals: The Conversation Continues," all published by Broadman and Holman Publishers.

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#### **Shari Schubert accepts post with Florida Baptist paper**

**Baptist Press  
8/29/96**

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (BP)--Missouri's Word & Way news writer Shari Schubert has been named news editor of the Florida Baptist Witness, effective Sept. 23.

During 10 years with Word & Way, Schubert has garnered national awards from Baptist Public Relations Association, including three first-place and two second-place for feature series, one second-place and one honorable mention for investigative/interpretive writing. Earlier this year, she earned an award from Associated Church Press for coverage of a Baptist women's meeting in Belarus.

"Shari has distinguished herself not only as an excellent writer but as a committed Christian," said Word & Way editor Bill Webb. "She is a complete journalist, capable in interviewing, researching, writing, editing, newspaper design and layout, advertising design, photography and darkroom work.

"We are painfully aware that Word & Way is losing a seasoned journalist, but our staff could not be more pleased for Shari as she embraces this new opportunity," Webb said. "Florida Baptists should feel fortunate indeed."

Schubert, 42, will occupy a newly created position when she becomes news editor for the Baptist Witness. Her last day in the office of the Missouri newspaper will be Sept. 13.

Florida editor Mike Chute said Schubert will serve as the newspaper's principal writer, supervise news writers, coordinate production and make story assignments.

"I am very pleased to have Shari Schubert join our staff," said Chute. "Shari is a very talented writer and editor with a heart for missions and evangelism. I know she will be sorely missed by Baptists in Missouri since she has served Word & Way with such distinction over these past 10 years."

A native of Lamar, Mo., Schubert attended Southwest Baptist College (University), Bolivar, Mo.; earned a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, and completed 32 hours toward a master's degree in elementary education at the University of Missouri, Columbia.

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**New minister: Transplant  
changes life perspective**

**By Jean Bihn**

CHINO VALLEY, Ariz. (BP)--Southern Baptists often hear about how Jesus Christ can give a new heart, but Herman Blevins of northern Arizona is one minister who can speak about the physical experience of getting a new heart as well. Two years ago this month the 48-year-old received a heart transplant when a 21-year-old Phoenix man died and Blevins was found to be a match for the donated organ.

Blevins was sick for years before the heart problem was discovered.

He said he had been sick since returning from a tour of duty in Vietnam in 1969. Diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis and on disability benefits since 1989, Blevins was forced to give up an electronics business in Virginia and move his family -- his wife Sharon and their two sons -- to Arizona for its warmer climate.

"I'd get up feeling pretty good, but it wouldn't last long," shared Blevins about his life back in Virginia. "I'd go to the doctor and they'd say, 'It's in your mind,' and I'd say, 'Hey my body says there's something wrong with me!'"

Once settled in the small farming community of Chino Valley, 17 miles north of Prescott, a tired and discouraged Blevins sought more medical advice.

When he went to Prescott's Yavapai Regional Medical Center, his heart was found to be three times its normal size and functioning at 10 to 15 percent. Doctors drew 11 pounds of fluid from the deteriorating organ. According to Blevins, one Prescott physician insisted he needed a transplant, although his family physician chose to treat him with medication for three months, with no success.

Following evaluation at the University of Arizona in September of 1993, Blevins was told a transplant was indeed necessary. "They said there wasn't anything (more) they could do with medication, the transplant was the only thing left," said Blevins.

In spite of the doctor's insistence, Blevins was cautious -- not for medical reasons, but for deeper, spiritual ones.

"It was then I said I didn't know if I wanted to monkey with God's creation. But every time I'd go to the doctor, I'd see these people sitting in the office -- two, three, seven, eleven years with a new heart," Blevins shared.

"Then they gave me less than six months to live."

Still seeking answers to his spiritual dilemma, Blevins spent much time in prayer.

"... I searched the Scriptures. I couldn't find anything in there that said this is wrong. The heart is just a pump, not the soul," he explained.

Later, in Tucson's University Medical Center awaiting the transplant, Blevins needed reassurance. He asked for a Bible and learned it had to be requisitioned. He also asked for a chaplain: "I said, I might die! I want somebody to come pray with me."

It took seven days for the chaplain to bring him a Bible, which Blevins then used to witness to him.

"Even the people in the (hospital) room were listening in, and I didn't know it," he said. "And it touched them. They responded to us later in letters. I went through that hospital and told everybody about the Lord!"

Even as he was sharing God's love with others, he continued to seek solace and guidance for himself.

"I told her (Sharon) to get on the phone and call every preacher around here and tell them I wanted to talk to someone," said Blevins.

Sharon called numerous churches in Tucson, eventually reaching Art Coates, then pastor of Faith Baptist Church. Pastor Coates and his wife went to the hospital to keep the anxious pair company. After talking with Coates, Blevins and his wife decided in favor of the transplant.

The morning of the transplant, Aug. 5, 1994, Blevins was confident: "I said, 'Lord, it's up to you.' I was prayed up ... I went into the operating room reading the 23rd Psalm, it was on my heart. I said 'if you want me to go home, I'm ready to go home'."

According to Blevins, he surrendered everything to God just before the surgery, asking him for a second chance.

"When I came out of the operating room, the first thing I did, I thanked the Lord for a second chance and (told him) if he wanted me to serve him, that's what I'd do.

"After the transplant, my toenails were pink, like a baby's. My back quit hurting."

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An enthusiastic patient, Blevins shared his faith with his surgeons: "I told all the doctors. They came in and said you're a real lucky man, and I said, no such thing -- God gets the credit for it all. That's what I told (Dr. Jack) Copeland and all of them.

"His hands have been on me from step one," said Blevins. "From every place ... the doctors, all the way through.

"Now I feel the best I've felt in a long time; I'm doing things I haven't done in years." Sharon agreed: "The difference is like day and night."

The Blevins children were kept informed throughout the illness and transplant process. "We didn't keep anything from them," said Sharon. "We were straight with them from the time we knew he needed a heart transplant."

After the surgery it was important to Sharon that the boys were aware of their father's condition. "I wanted them to see what he looked like, how he was doing," she shared. "It was hard on them, not knowing if their daddy was going to make it or how things were going to turn out."

Unchecked tears fell down his cheeks as Blevins talked about playing basketball with his sons, now 12 and 15, and the difference the new heart has made in his life as a father.

"I horse around and wrestle with them now. Now they can't outshoot me in basketball, they can't outride me on a bike, and it just about kills them -- but it makes me feel so good!"

The Blevins family met the family of the 21-year-old whose heart now beats in Herman's chest on Father's Day a year after the transplant. Blevins carries with him a well-worn photo album containing, among others, photographs of the doctors and the donor who saved his life. His two sons spent a week with the donor's family last summer, and are preparing for another visit this month.

"You look at life a little differently, especially when you get down to a desperate situation. I gave the Lord all of it. I surrendered all to him. I surrendered to the ministry; he wants me to preach the Gospel," stated Blevins.

Blevins was licensed to the ministry by First Southern Baptist Church of Chino Valley on July 16, 1995.

Two years after the transplant, despite two operations on his gums to remedy growth caused by an anti-rejection drug, Blevins is in good spirits and still feeling great.

Although he doesn't feel called to be a pastor -- he's turned down two churches -- Blevins preaches whenever the opportunity arises.

"I believe God is preparing me for what he has (in store) for me," Blevins said.

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Jean Bihn is a free lance writer and employed by the Arizona Baptist Senior Life Ministries.

### Churches accept challenge of growing population

By Shari Schubert

Baptist Press  
8/29/96

OZARK, Mo. (BP)--A favorite anecdote from the history of Hopedale Baptist Church in Ozark, Mo., is the story about "Old Blue." When Sunday attendance at the then-rural church began reaching up into the 50s, members began looking for some way to create a little more space.

"I wasn't sure at that point where we were headed," recalled Terry Kendrick, who began his second stint as pastor of Hopedale in December 1983. The small, rural church that he had served previously while attending Southwest Baptist University, Bolivar, Mo., ran about 18-20 in attendance.

In 1987 the growing church didn't have the money to launch a building program, and Kendrick was hesitant to get the church in debt.

The pastor found an old, blue trailer house for sale. Nothing fancy, but the price was right. The church bought it and remodeled it, and Old Blue began its new life as a three-classroom education building.

Then a certain evangelist arrived in Hopedale to lead a revival. And in the evangelist's opinion, "Old Blue" wasn't what God intended the church to settle for. Noting the nice houses being built in the community around the church, the evangelist told the congregation they needed to get on the ball and build something better. "It made me a little mad," Kendrick admitted. "I think it made us all mad."

But Old Blue's days were numbered. In fact, the evangelist hadn't even left town before a storm blew down an old oak tree in the church yard. The tree fell on the trailer, crushing it beyond repair.

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It might have been coincidence, or it might have been providence. At any rate, members of the church got on the stick and launched a building project.

The church has seen lots of building since then. The education building was completed in 1988, and the old sanctuary was replaced a short time later. About a year ago the church moved into a new 430-seat worship center. The previous sanctuary was renovated to provide more educational space. About 240 people now attend on a typical Sunday.

Hopedale's location -- visible from Highway 65 on the way from Springfield to Branson -- is conducive to growth. From 1990 to 1995, Christian County had the second-highest rate of growth (30.9 percent) of any county in Missouri, outpaced only by its neighbor to the south, Stone County (31.5 percent). Adjoining Taney County ranked third (26.2 percent). The three counties together experienced a net growth of nearly 22,800 people.

First Baptist Church of O'Fallon, Mo. -- west of St. Louis -- is another Missouri church that is feeling the effects of fast population growth. In 1980, there were 8,000 people in the O'Fallon city limits. In 1990 there were 17,000, and the figure now has risen to 30,000. By the year 2005, it is expected that 54,000 people will be living in O'Fallon.

In 1989, the church was averaging 328 people in Bible study, pastor Gary Taylor noted. For the year ending in June, the average was 619.

The church currently has two worship services and three Sunday morning Bible study periods, and it is about four months away from completion of a new \$2.3 million education/office building. Church offices have been located off-site in a shopping center for the past four years.

Overall, Missouri's population is on the rise, reversing the trend of decline that was evident in the 1980s. But population growth does not necessarily result in growth of churches.

Churches that successfully rise to the challenge of a growing, rapidly changing community -- or a major transition of any other kind -- are rare, said Mike Dennis, small church unit leader in the Missouri Baptist Convention missions department. Sometimes people who are established in a particular church are limited by a lack of awareness of the change taking place around them, Taylor pointed out. "They don't have a clue that it's growing like that."

Another hindrance, Taylor said, is a perception on the part of many Christians that "those people out there don't want to go to church" and that they are not interested in the gospel.

That perception is wrong, he said. "It's a lie from the pit of hell."

He told about a letter that was sent to the O'Fallon church. Inside was a dollar bill and a note that said, "Would you please pray for us?" The letter came from a wife who with her husband was dealing with alcohol abuse, financial difficulty, the prospect of a jail sentence for driving while intoxicated and the possibility of being evicted.

Taylor visited the couple and shared Christ with them. The response: "Preacher, that's the first time in my life I've ever heard that."

The wife prayed to receive Christ; her husband promised to think about such a decision. Church members continue to minister to the family.

"I've never seen a time when people were more receptive to the gospel," Taylor said. But churches have to get focused outward instead of inward if they're going to reach those people.

They also need to become focused on the future instead of the past, Dennis said.

"Past success can be one of our greatest hindrances to present and future accomplishments," Dennis remarked. "It's almost like a prison, and the wall is memory."

Churches that do not adapt successfully to change usually experience slow decline and eventual death, Dennis said. And when that begins to happen, many times the congregation's response is to feel victimized.

"They'll blame the city for overtaking them. They'll blame the people around them for not seeing what they have to offer. They'll often blame other churches who are reaching people. Or they may blame associations or denominations for not being of greater help."

What makes the difference between a church that grows and a church that falters?

Clearly, there is a spiritual factor. Reflecting on Hopedale's experience, Kendrick acknowledged, "I can't say that I looked down the road 13 years and saw what God would be doing ... . God decided to put his hand on it in a tremendous way that changed the direction of the church."

But he also pointed out "there's always strategy, there's always legwork" involved in church growth.

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Dennis stressed the importance of leadership. Church leaders -- and particularly the pastor -- must have a clear vision of what God wants the church to accomplish. A church leader needs to understand the community in which the church ministers and he must be willing to spend time cultivating relationships with people -- not only at the church, but in the hog house, under the tractor or at the businesses where they work.

The pastor needs to see his role in perspective, Dennis said. "He needs to understand that the church was there before he got there and it will be there after he's gone -- unless Jesus comes."

Kendrick said one of the factors that helped Hopedale grow was the willingness of lay leaders to make room for others to serve and to share in decision-making. "They gave up vested power. They reached out to new families when they came."

Kendrick cautions fellow pastors to be prepared for "the grief of growth."

"I have always been a small church pastor," he explained. "My comfort level is where I know everybody intimately." That is no longer possible.

Visiting a funeral home, Kendrick recounted, he heard a member of a bereaved family say to one of his deacons who had ministered to the family, "I don't know what we'd have done if you hadn't been there."

Kendrick said, "That used to be me. That had always been my relationship."

Growth also involves some tough decisions, Kendrick noted, and it is not always possible to work out a "win-win" situation. As a leader, "you have to make bottom-line decisions that will alienate some people. If you love people, that hurts."

Growth requires flexibility and a willingness to take some risks, Kendrick pointed out. "Church growth is not an exact science."

"We've tried a lot of things that haven't worked," he acknowledged. Like "Old Blue."

But when a plan goes awry, it doesn't help to hold anybody's feet to the flame, he emphasized. "We learned to laugh it off and go on."

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### **Motor Coach Ministry starts this fall in Branson**

**By Jacqueline A. Gillespie**

**Baptist Press  
8/29/96**

BRANSON, Mo. (BP)--Each Sunday morning finds Jean and Lee Grady, native Texans, boarding a motor coach with a one-way ticket, God's Word. The Gradys, coordinators of Motor Coach Ministry, share this ticket with interested people visiting the Branson, Mo., area in motor coach tour groups.

Motor Coach Ministry is operated through Mountain Country Ministries, an outreach provided by Baptists in southwest Missouri's Christian, Stone and Taney counties. The Gradys are Mission Service Corps volunteers, assigned by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. Grady was a pastor in the Fort Worth area before moving to Missouri.

About 12,000 motor coaches roll into Branson each year. Of the thousands of people riding them, 95 percent are senior adults. Their destination is a seemingly endless string of country music shows, lights, malls and attractions that have made the Ozark city a popular vacation spot.

With all of the activities available, however, some tour line operators have found there is something missing from their tours. Dick Berry of Heartland Tours, based in Springfield, Ill., discovered many of his tour members wanted to be a part of church on Sunday mornings. But with the traffic problems common in Branson and the diversity of denominational preferences aboard the coaches, Berry soon found a hitch in meeting this need.

Not dismissing the idea, he was directed to Dick Wakefield, director of missions for Tri County Baptist Association in Highlandville.

They came up with the idea of chapel on the coach -- a 25-minute non-denominational devotion time aboard the tour bus. Wakefield and his wife Mary began leading the devotional services. Interested tour members boarded the coach 25 minutes before departure, while those not wishing to participate waited outside. Wakefield soon saw the possibility of expanding the ministry, but he needed someone else to lead it. Meanwhile, Grady had retired and he and his wife had moved to Missouri. He had contacted Wakefield earlier to make himself available for some ministry supply or interim preaching, perhaps. After much prayer, and having gone through several channels without finding anyone to coordinate the motor coach ministry, Wakefield decided to approach the Gradys. They accepted the challenge.

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A year and a half later, the Gradys have trained 45 women and men to serve in Motor Coach Ministry. The Gradys also are making contact with a number of coach lines, motels and resorts in Branson to develop interest in the ministry.

"We had said that we would try to start the ministry next April," Wakefield noted. "God has kind of changed our mind." The first official Motor Coach Ministry assignment will begin Sept. 8 with a tour group from Ohio.

Plans call for the ministry to operate during April and May of each year, and then from September through December. Those are the peak months for motor coach tours, Wakefield explained. "Our goal is to be on 2,000 coaches. If that goal is reached, the ministry will be able to touch about 50,000 lives."

Grady said the ministry is dedicated to spreading the gospel through seed planting rather than evangelism because of the many differing denominations. He is depending on the promise of Isaiah 55:11, that God's Word will never return void, and he is depending on the Holy Spirit to convict minds and hearts of those who hear the Word.

Heartland Tours director Berry affirmed the devotional service provided by Missouri Baptists "has served the purpose for my people."

Anyone interested in becoming a part of Motor Coach Ministry may contact Jean and Lee Grady at 417-339-4136, or Dick Wakefield at Tri County Baptist Association, 417-587-3397.

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Jacqueline A. Gillespie is a Word & Way Correspondent.

**Midwestern students begin  
year praying over the campus**

**By James A. Smith Sr.**

**Baptist Press  
8/29/96**

KANSAS CITY, Mo.(BP)--Urging students, faculty and staff to "crack the shells" which stifle spiritual vibrance and renewal in their lives, Midwestern Seminary President Mark Coppenger began the new academic year by leading a time of prayer from a hilltop overlooking the campus.

Coppenger led the congregation out of the seminary auditorium across the Kansas City, Mo.-based campus to its highest point. More than 200 people gathered for 30 minutes of prayer directed, in turn, towards the needs and concerns of the student village, the classroom building, and the western and northern horizons, representing the missionary focus of the seminary -- the Midwest/Great Plains region.

The prayer meeting ended with singing of the traditional Christmas hymn, "Joy to the World."

The Aug. 27 chapel service began in the seminary auditorium where there was time of singing and brief remarks from Coppenger.

Reiterating his vision for the "prairie fire" of revival in Midwestern's region of the nation, Coppenger told the students just as fire is beneficial to crops as it "cracks the shell of the seeds helping germination occur more readily," some believers have "spiritual shells that constrict and deny our life and new growth" which need to be cracked.

Coppenger related a visit to the Gettysburg (Pa.) civil war battlefield, noting his discovery that the "heroic charge was from seminary ridge to cemetery ridge.

"It's my dream that we would come charging out of Midwestern Seminary and keep charging -- all the way to the grave," Coppenger said.

The hilltop prayer session, unexpected by most students and faculty, was well received.

"I think it says something about the focus of the year," said new student Tonette Kellett of Blue Eye, Mo. "I'm excited by the spiritual focus of our administration -- the prairie fire. That excites me.

"To be a part of this, even for a short time, makes me want to be here much longer than 20 (credit) hours," she noted. Kellett will begin service with the Foreign Mission Board in January teaching at a missionary school in Kenya.

"We hear so much talk about prayer in our churches and throughout our denomination, it was refreshing to see all that talk put into action here on campus," said second year master of divinity student Patrick Morgan. "It was a grand, outward testimony that we truly believe the source of our strength resides in God. I appreciate Dr. Coppenger's leadership in setting the right tone for the new year," added Morgan, who is originally from LaCrosse, Wis., and is currently pastor of Rose Hill Baptist Church in LaTour, Mo.

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Don Whitney, assistant professor of spiritual formation, said he thanked Coppenger for "doing seminary this way -- not being ashamed of putting in the forefront of an academic institution an emphasis on prayer, humility before the Lord, and spiritual awakening."

The prayer service could have been held in the seminary auditorium, Whitney said. Moving the service to the hilltop, with the inconveniences of the walk and warm weather, "demonstrates that this is more than just a notion or formality with Dr. Coppenger," Whitney added.

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**GGBTS president invites  
watch for revival signs**

**By Cameron Crabtree**

**Baptist Press  
8/29/96**

MILL VALLEY, Calif. (BP)--Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary President William Crews invited students to watch for "signposts on the road to revival" as they prepare for a new year of study and ministry

Speaking at the seminary's opening chapel of the fall, Crews said he was anticipating the convocation on revival and spiritual awakening at the seminary's Mill Valley campus Sept. 4.

The event is one in a series of convocations initiated by Southern Baptist Convention President Tom Elliff for pastors and church leaders across the denomination to meet on SBC seminary campuses to seek spiritual renewal individually and as a denomination.

"If there is something God wants to do in us that will greatly enhance our witness to the world, we want to be part of it," Crews emphasized. "I hope that folks will look to this place and be able to tell where the light (of God) has been."

Golden Gate Seminary, the only SBC agency in the western United States, is opening its campus to all Southern Baptist pastors and church leaders who can attend the convocation. It begins in the seminary chapel at 10 a.m.

Crews cited Nehemiah 8:1-12 to identify underlying principles of revival. He noted four "signposts" in the biblical text:

-- reconciliation among the people of God. "One of the great disgraces among the people of God is the division we demonstrate to the world around us," said Crews. "The world will never believe our message if it doesn't work in the hearts of the people of God."

-- reverence for the Scripture. "When revival comes, there is a hunger to know and understand what God has said in Scripture," Crews noted. "My observation is that we Southern Baptists do a great deal more talking about believing the truth of the Bible than we do practicing what it says."

-- repentance. "The great revivals (in history) center in the fact that people turn from their sins and turn toward God," Crews observed. "This becomes the public testimony that something different is happening."

-- rejoicing. "One of the things that will be evident of genuine revival is that we experience the joy of God in our service to him," he predicted. "It is not some kind of put-on joy, but it is a deep-seated joy ... that people will want to be part of."

President of Golden Gate since 1986, Crews noted spiritual renewal is an issue of leadership.

"The most important thing a leader does may not be exercising the leadership gifts in getting a job accomplished," he said. "The most important thing a leader does is to build people, to see what God can do in the hearts of people."

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