



--FEATURES
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Church Phone Ministry
Reaching New Orleans

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--When William M. Hinson closes his Sunday morning service at New Orleans' First Baptist Church, he tells the television audience watching the services, "Call our church office if we can help you."

His part of the service is over. But another group's ministry has just begun.

The telephone number is flashed on the home screen and the telephones begin to ring. Some very special people are waiting in the church offices for the calls.

"The counselors who handle the telephone calls from people who respond to our church service range in age from teenagers on up," said Joyce Harrington, the church's television counselors coordinator.

"We are very selective about who is asked to be on the committee. We look for people who are caring and loving. I also ask some of our church Sunday School teachers for suggestions on who is knowledgeable about the Bible and on how to minister."

There are 47 counselors on the committee and, right now, only four telephone lines are available so a rotation system is in effect. Each week the four counselors scheduled to work the following Sunday are encouraged to begin praying that the right person will get the right call.

One of the first things Ms. Harrington noticed when she took the job is "the many lonely people who call. The first question is usually, 'Will you pray for me?'" she said. "I always say yes and ask if there is a special prayer need they have in mind."

That question invariably opens the way for the caller to define the real problem. And it gives the counselor the opportunity to ask if Jesus is their Savior.

"The next move is to tell people how to know Jesus and give them an opportunity to decide. The first statement, or question, usually isn't the problem. Very few people will come right out and say 'I have such and such a problem and I'm really hurting.' But a caring person can put it together."

Counselors ask callers if they'd like to be visited in their homes. "If they say yes, we get their name, address and telephone number and tell them a minister from our church will make an appointment to visit them," she said. "We especially want to visit people who are in doubt of their salvation."

"Also, every one who leaves a name and address receives follow-up material from the church. Dr. Hinson writes to thank them for calling and to tell them we're praying for them. If someone has asked about salvation, they are sent scriptures, tracts, and other information."

Personal decisions for Christ on the telephone are not unusual. "A rock band star who had been at the Superdome was packing to return to Los Angeles and saw our worship service," Ms. Harrington recalled. "He called and talked with a counselor and accepted Jesus as Savior. We wrote him, encouraging him to get into a New Testament church in California and sent him some Bible-study material."

Ms. Harrington sounds a note of caution for churches planning to offer a telephone counseling service.

"Be sure there are enough lines to handle the calls," she said. "If a person calls and gets a busy signal he may call back, but if the busy signal continues that person may stop calling."



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Captain Kangaroo Offers
Help for Television Viewers

By David R. Wilkinson

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--The most effective way for Christian parents to cope with television is by being better parents.

So advised Bob Keeshan, better known as TV's "Captain Kangaroo," at a regional "Help for Television Viewers" workshop sponsored by the Southern Baptist Convention's Christian Life Commission.

"Getting parents to parent," Keeshan said, is a difficult task but one that the church is uniquely qualified to deal with.

"You have a unique opportunity, because of the values you share, to let parents know that how they use TV is not as important as how they parent," he said in response to a question from the Tennessee Baptist audience. "TV is not going to be a problem in the home where the parent is a parent."

Keeshan, a veteran of some 10,000 television shows, said in his prepared remarks that too many parents are concerned about the quality of television programs while they pay little attention to the quantity of programs their children watch.

"Despite the efforts of consumer groups..., the people who count the most--the vast majority of American parents--seem to care very little about the viewing habits of their children, especially their very young children," he claimed.

"In fact, they encourage excess viewing and unsuitable program viewing."

Another speaker at the workshop agreed that parents must use television more responsibly, but was less willing to let the television industry off the hook, particularly in the area of programming and advertising for children.

Tipper Gore, wife of U. S. Congressman Albert Gore Jr., D.-Tenn., called the industry to task for its "excesses," particularly the amount of violence, the amount of time devoted to commercials and the nature of those commercials.

Mrs. Gore claimed that television violence "is not only a disruptive and negative influence in American society, but could well be defined as a secondary form of child abuse."

The past chairman of the Congressional Wives Task Force, which launched an exhaustive investigation of television's impact on children, also stung the industry for excessive advertising, pointing out that daytime TV gets 16 minutes of commercials per hour even though a Federal Communications Commission economist said the industry could "break even" with an average of 6 minutes of commercials per hour.

"The industry complains that the parents are responsible for what their children eat, consume and watch," Mrs. Gore said. "Yet the very same industry doesn't sell to those parents. It sells directly to the children."

Mrs. Gore claimed that although the television industry reaped record profits in 1977, very little money is being devoted to developing creative children's programming. "I think a little more than an occasional afternoon special should and could be provided for our children," she said.

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She called upon the religious community to "force more social responsibility" from the television industry through dialogue with industry officials, with advertisers ("with product boycotts used as a last resort") and with others to increase awareness.

Such dialogue is crucial at this time, she said, because of "the potential change in the government regulatory framework" with the re-write of the Communications Act of 1934 now being considered in Congress and the Federal Trade Commission's consideration of rules which could change the way products are advertised to children on television.

The one-day workshop also included a panel discussion of three Nashville television executives and a workshop led by Harry N. Hollis, John Wood and William Elder of the Christian Life Commission.

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Helms Wins, Loses
Senate Prayer Votes

By Stan Haste

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WASHINGTON (BP)--Conservative U.S. Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., won a tainted victory when his effort to remove "voluntary" school prayer from the jurisdiction of the federal courts won one vote, then lost another more important test in Senate action April 9.

Helms, a Southern Baptist who has for years opposed his denomination's position on the explosive subject of prayer in the public schools, first saw his amendment attached to a bill refining certain jurisdictional questions for the U.S. Supreme Court. But then he watched as Senate leaders stripped the amendment from a measure which would create a new Department of Education.

The Senate leadership, keyed by Majority Leader Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va., devised the strategy after Helms' amendment surprisingly was attached to the Department of Education's bill on April 5. The leadership opposed that action for fear that it would scuttle the measure. If enacted, the bill would take education out of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) and set up a separate cabinet-level Department for Education alone.

Byrd's strategy worked to perfection. After introducing the Helms language as an amendment to the Supreme Court bill, Byrd proceeded to vote for the Helms proposal, which passed 51-40. Immediately after that vote, however, Byrd moved to strip the Helms language from the Department of Education bill, succeeding in a 53-40 roll call vote.

During debate on the latter move, Helms argued that his proposal would be "effectively killed" if left attached only to the Supreme Court measure. He said that the chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, U.S. Rep. Peter W. Rodino Jr., D-N.J., whose committee will have jurisdiction in the House of Representatives, has reportedly expressed opposition to the Supreme Court bill.

Rodino is also opposed to Helms' efforts to circumvent the Supreme Court's 1962 and 1963 decisions declaring unconstitutional government-sponsored prayer in the schools.

During the five-and-one-half-hour debate, Helms declared that the current "trouble" in the public schools "parallels almost precisely" the 1962 and 1963 decisions of the high court.

He repeatedly challenged his Senate colleagues to rise and cite one child who has been harmed by voluntary prayer in the schools. "I just don't understand" opposition to letting "little school children" have the "right of voluntary prayer," he said.

Helms pledged to seek to attach his proposal to every bill that comes before the Senate until both houses of Congress are forced to consider it.

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Joining the recently-reelected North Carolina senator was his fellow Southern Baptist, Sen. Strom Thurmond, R-S.C., who made an impassioned plea that if U.S. senators can have weekly prayer meetings in the Capitol building and have their daily sessions opened with prayer, school children should be allowed to do the same.

On the other side, the fight against the Helms proposal was led all afternoon by Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., who argued repeatedly the traditional Baptist stance on separation of church and state.

Kennedy, a Roman Catholic, labeled the Helms proposal an "assault" on the Supreme Court and warned that the move would be a "precedent for all types of mischief." He said the Senate would then feel it could remove from jurisdiction of the federal courts, including the Supreme Court, itself, any matter it chose, thereby provoking a constitutional crisis involving the separation of powers between Congress and the Supreme Court.

Helms' proposal, Kennedy argued, pointed the way to an "extremely dangerous and foreboding path."

Kennedy cited the opposition of numerous religious denominations to the Helms position, including a letter from Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs Executive Director James E. Wood Jr. Wood's letter was read by Kennedy into the Congressional Record.

Joining the Massachusetts senator was Sen. Charles McC. Mathias Jr., R-Md., who predicted a "chaotic situation" if the Helms proposal ever became law. "It would have the effect of wiping the name of John Marshall from the annals of the Supreme Court," he said, referring to the high court's famed chief justice who led the court in 1803 to rule that it has jurisdiction over laws passed by Congress.

Mathias said members of the Senate would "do violence" to their oath of office to uphold the Constitution by voting for Helms' proposal.

Helms' effort is the latest in a long series of moves to overturn the effect of the Supreme Court's rulings that government may not require or officially sponsor religious devotionals in the public schools.

He has repeatedly introduced a constitutional amendment to allow "voluntary" prayer. That effort has always failed, however, due largely to the opposition of the chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments, Sen. Birch Bayh, D-Ind.

During recent years, Helms has turned to the seldom-used device provided for in the Constitution for removing from federal court jurisdiction a given issue.

As tenacious as Helms has been, he has always encountered the official opposition of his own denomination. The Southern Baptist Convention went on record in 1964 supporting the Supreme Court position on prayer and Bible reading in the schools. The denomination's Washington-based Baptist Joint Committee has consistently opposed all efforts to amend the Constitution as well as the jurisdictional device employed by Helms to overturn the effect of the high court's decisions.

Wood, the agency's chief executive, declared in a statement after the Senate actions that Helms' proposal is "totally unnecessary," noting that the Supreme Court "has never ruled against voluntary prayer in the public schools."

He said he was "saddened" by the vote attaching the Helms language to the Supreme Court bill and warned that removing from the federal courts the question of the constitutionality of prayer in schools "is dangerous to the concept of free society" and "injurious to both a free church and a free state."