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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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Wrapup

RA Congress Urges Boys
To 'Go Boldly' for Christ

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--About 2,300 Southern Baptist boys and their leaders from across the nation were urged to "go boldly" for Christ during the 6th National Royal Ambassador Congress at the Grand Ole Opry House in Nashville in mid-July.

Comedian Grady Nutt, emcee for the three-day meeting, asked the participants from 24 different states to "become one in our Father and bold ambassadors for Christ. Two thousand three hundred people with this quality would just scare the world to death," he quipped. "Let's be giving ourselves away for all of the right reasons."

The congress was designed to lead boys in the Southern Baptist Royal Ambassador mission organization to commit themselves to assume personal responsibility to share Christ with the world through service and witness, congress planners said.

Country and western recording star Larry Gatlin, a member of Woodmont Baptist Church, Nashville, opened the congress by performing for the youth, and all-pro forward Bobby Jones of the Philadelphia 76ers National Basketball Association team talked to the youth about the importance of physical and spiritual growth.

On the physical side, the 6'9", 210-pounder said, "From the time I was 12 years old until I was 17, my age and my shoe size were always the same."

But of spiritual growth he cautioned, "I'm not here to say that accepting Christ will make you a super athlete or whatever you want to be. But from my freshman year to my sophomore year there was a complete change in me. That's when I asked Christ to come back into my life," said Jones, who was voted the top defensive player in the league each of his first four seasons in pro basketball.

"I didn't even make starter on my college team that year, but I was chosen from 175 players to become a member of the 10-man 1972 U.S. Olympic team, and I started every game."

Using only a few prepared notes, Jones traced his spiritual growth while playing for the Denver Nuggets for four years before being traded last year to the 76ers.

"I just know that God put me in this place," Jones said, referring to his career in pro basketball. "Looking back I can see that Denver was really my first mission field."

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At Philadelphia last year, Jones helped start a pre-game chapel service in the 76ers' locker room, and the idea has spread now to at least three other clubs in the NBA.

Nevertheless, he says, in pro ball he is frequently confronted by non-Christians.

"The big thing for me," he says, "is being equipped to handle these situations. The most important thing Christ talked about while he was here was love and how to love other people."

In a later session Chris Elkins, a former member of the Unification Church of Sun M'Yung Moon, warned the boys against involvement with cults and non-Christian religions.

Elkins, now a college student and consultant with the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, told the youth how easy it was to become involved with the Moonies.

"I was an RA and very active in all areas of the church," he said. "Over 70 percent of the people who join cults are young people from Sunday School backgrounds."

"Since 1960 more than 2,000 new religions have moved into the United States," Elkins continued, "and many of the people who join these new groups are Baptists."

Elkins pointed out that the young people selling flowers and other items can make a million dollars in five days for the Unification Church.

Bunny Martin, world yo-yo champion, shared the platform with Elkins. He gave his Christian testimony and dazzled the Royal Ambassadors with yo-yo feats such as "the atom bomb," "reach the moon," "walk the dog," and "brain twister."

Nutt, who interviewed numerous home and foreign missionaries during the sessions, concluded the congress program by telling the story of Pinocchio and emphasizing the importance of not being a puppet controlled by others.

"Life is a war for the strings of your life," Nutt said, tying together the program personalities of the week. Nutt explained that the boys could be like the strings on a guitar that must be played, the strings on a basketball net just hanging around, or the strings on a yo-yo that go up and down but cannot do anything alone.

"Some of the most meaningful times of my life have been where I have ceased to care what other people think," Nutt continued.

"I'm standing on a circle of wood here at the Opry House where people have become rich and famous...and miserable and lonely. Riches and fame don't guarantee you anything, but God does," he said. "We get trapped by the things that look so good," he added. "Many young people are puppets today, controlled by their peers."

"You want freedom, you say. Freedom, to many, means not being tied down to 'nothing or nowhere,'" he observed. "But the freest person I know is the person who has deep roots in God and gives his strings to God."

The National Royal Ambassador Congress, which is held every five years, was jointly sponsored by the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission and the state Baptist Brotherhood departments.

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(BP) photo and other photos mailed to state Baptist editors by Memphis Bureau of Baptist Press.

Clarke College Names
Johnson To Presidency

NEWTON, Miss. (BP)--A.C. Johnson has been named president of Clarke College, a Baptist junior college in Newton, Miss.

Johnson, 65, succeeds S. L. Harris, who resigned recently to accept a vice presidential post at Howard Payne College, a Baptist four-year college in Brownwood, Texas.

The new president came to Clarke in 1977 as chairman of the division of social science and business and instructor in history and government. He was appointed director of development of the college in August 1978.

A native of Mississippi, he is a graduate of East Central Junior College and holds a bachelor of science degree from the University of Southern Mississippi, a master of arts degree from the University of Mississippi, bachelor of laws and juris doctor degrees from the University of Alabama, and the doctor of human letters from the London Institute of Applied Research.

Johnson is a former high school principal and served on the faculties of the University of Southern Mississippi and Meridian Junior College before coming to Clarke College. He is a member of the Mississippi Bar.

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A Wheelchair Doesn't
Stop Bob Blackman

By Herb Hollinger

Baptist Press
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LAKESIDE, Ore. (BP)--No baptism is ordinary. But Tenmile Lakes in southern Oregon may have been the site of one of the most unique baptisms yet.

Four new believers from the same family were baptized there by Bob Blackman, pastor of Baptist Chapel. What is so unique about that? Blackman is paralyzed from the chest down and administered the baptisms in his wheelchair!

This was Blackman's first baptism since he entered the ministry in 1974. He led Friendship Baptist Chapel, Lynden, Wash., earlier where 20 people were baptized but the ordinance was always administered by a deacon.

"Baptisms are always exciting," said Blackman, 33, "but watching one doesn't begin to compare with the excitement of being directly involved."

A freeway accident nine years ago left him paralyzed from a broken neck.

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The baptism in Tenmile Lakes, maybe a first for the lake, created public interest and as a result Oregon's south coast regional newspaper, The World, gave the immersion front page coverage. A writer for the paper also wrote a feature story about Blackman.

"We plan to do all of our baptisms in the lake," Blackman said. "The whole point of baptism is a witness to the world; do it in a public place and everybody sees." A crowd of about 40 people, less than half church members, witnessed the baptisms.

In an interview with The World newspaper, Blackman said he had been married just six months when the accident occurred and his wife, Carrie, received advice from friends and counselors that she go her own way after his bitterness grew.

"We hadn't known each other all that long, and it all seemed to fall apart," he said. "But she was very serious with her marriage vows, and she refused to leave me. Her faith in me was one of the real turning points." They now have two children, Aaron, 9, and Sarah, 5.

A Canadian evangelist's advice, his name since forgotten, also became a turning point in 1974.

"He asked me whether God was running my life. He let me know that if He wasn't, I had no business complaining. That really struck home."

"I originally felt God was calling me to the ministry when I was 16," he said, "but I never did anything with it..

..Maybe the accident was needed to put me in a position to follow up a vow I'd already made...Maybe God really had to restructure me by putting me in a wheelchair to refrain from getting into some serious trouble."

Blackman came to the Lakeside chapel in April following a year at Golden Gate seminary in Mill Valley, Calif. He has ambitious plans for the church. A five-year plan that the church adopted projects a membership of 200 in 1984 from its current 20-plus.

"If you take it week by week, month by month, it's amazing what you can get done," he noted.

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NOTE TO BAPTIST PRESS RECIPIENTS:

If the pages of Baptist Press look shorter to you, that's because they are. We had to cut down our 8 1/2 x 14 paper to 8 1/2 x 12 to meet the new size specifications of the U.S. Post Office. However, we will not lose space, because we can send more of the shorter pages for the same postage. Remember, too, that articles will appear longer on the shorter paper.

Thanks,

Baptist Press