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Unified Ministry Urged For Preaching

By Jim Lowry

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Single strategy preaching, even when that one strategy is evangelism, isolates the pastor's ministry from other equally important New Testament teachings, according to William E. Hull.

"If you concentrate on one issue, you ignore others," said Hull, pastor of First Baptist Church, Shreveport, La. "It is essential for pastors to adopt a unified approach to ministry, because in the New Testament no one area is put above others."

Six facets, or 'marks,' Hull lists as essential to a balanced, inclusive ministry are worship, outreach, nurture, fellowship, service and support.

"Every church, whether consciously or unconsciously, has these six areas in its ministry," he said. "The question is whether you organize the efforts."

"A minister needs to be seen as an evangelist, but also as a preacher, friend, teacher, counselor, missionary and organization executive," Hull said. "If any one is exaggerated, the image of the minister is distorted."

A unified ministry coordinating objective is especially important in the church because the organization is made up of volunteers. The staff must keep church members informed and provide goals toward which the pastor and members can strive.

"In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit did not fall on isolated persons, but on the community," he said. "The spirit is guiding everyone, not just a handful of pastors. The pastor with a pipeline to God is not in the Bible. All have the Holy Spirit."

"Ministers must trust members to find them targets at which they can aim sermons," Hull continued. "Preachers are not experts on members' needs--the members are. Members may have doubts and secret sins the preacher can't know about."

"Unless the sermon is perceived as an integral part of leadership responsibilities in which the minister is engaged throughout the week, it may well become a magnificent irrelevancy," Hull said. "It will be admired for its momentary inspirational impact but isolated from the larger strategies by which a church is guided to fulfill its destiny."

"If you trust people that they are being guided by the Holy Spirit, you are saying to them together you are partners in the sermon," he explained. "Preachers get ideas from other preachers, sermon books and magazines, so why not from the people they work with veryday?"

To integrate these six essential areas into the ministry requires planning, balance, time management and involvement of church members, deacons, and if possible, other staff members.

"Size is not a factor in coordinating your church ministries, because these six categories are based on the nature of the church," Hull said. He added he had served in three churches where he was the only staff member and he still worked to give attention to each of the six areas of ministry.

"Fragmentation is a great danger both to the minister and the church," he explained. "The minister can lose direction and momentum and tensions can arise in the church because groups are working in different areas without organization. Misunderstanding and conflict can be the result of the lack of a unified ministry."

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Hull said he thought pastoral turnover is "not so much failure, but a minister saying, 'My work is finished here.' He has no compelling goals to work toward, so the members become restless and he loses momentum."

According to Hull, part of the problem with preachers having difficulty balancing all the responsibilities of the minister could be that many texts teach preaching is all a minister has to do. "What needs to be taught is a unified approach to the task that includes not the primacy of preaching over everything else, but the unity of preaching with other tasks the preacher must perform equally well."

"The minister's preaching ought to call church members to make progress in all six areas," Hull said. "People are drawn into involvement through the goal process rather than a guilt process. Too often the pulpit uses guilt instead."

"Coordinating preaching with church objectives is a matter of learning how to integrate all of the roles of pastoral leadership into one harmonious lifestyle rather than segregating these roles so they war with each other," he concluded. "Ultimately, it is a matter of preaching intentionally rather than haphazardly, holistically rather than haphazardly and proportionately rather than preferentially."

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Death Threats Delay
Seminary Education

By Anita Bowden

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PENANG, Malaysia (BP)--Death threats from his family and a stolen passport delayed Jasbir Singh's seminary education.

But today he, his wife, Supang, and daughter, Jassmina, are at the Baptist seminary in Penang, Malaysia. The first Sikh in Malaysia to become a Christian, he is preparing to be an evangelist among his people in Sarawak.

He's come a long way from the bearded, turbaned Sikh who self-righteously hated Christians. And he owes much of his change to a Christian co-worker who didn't give up.

Though Singh realized his Christian friend's life was happier and more joyful than his own, he rejected his friend's witness. He had studied the Bible in school and didn't think the friend could tell him anything new. But the Christian stuck close, helping Singh with chores and waiting for opportunities to present scripture.

Finally he challenged Singh to ask God through prayer if Jesus were the only way to salvation. Singh readily agreed, hoping to prove his own religion right. He was proud to be a Sikh but he had doubted God heard his prayers and wondered about the meaning of life.

Months went by and Singh had no answer. Then he heard a conversation between his Christian friend and a strong Moslem. The Christian asked the Moslem to tell him how God had changed his life. Without answering, the Moslem walked away.

"At that moment God spoke to me," Singh says. "I turned to my Christian friend and said, 'Yes, Christ is the only way.'" That day, Feb. 23, 1973, he became a Christian. Trouble with his family began almost immediately.

His sister found memory verses in his pockets and burned them. His parents forbade him to read the Bible. He could meet with other Christians only in secret.

Thinking his new faith would wear thin in a Hindu land, his family sent him to India to study engineering. Before his ship left, his Christian friends tossed him the book his parents had forbidden--a Bible. While in India for two years he was baptized and became active in a Christian group.

When he returned to his home in Miri, he joined the Baptist church but pressure from his family continued. They expected him to visit the Sikh temple and follow the Sikh traditions.

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Meanwhile, Singh was feeling God wanted him to prepare for full-time evangelism, but again his family intervened. All the relatives gathered to tell him he could not go to seminary and they would kill him if he tried to leave Miri. They blamed the Baptist church members and threatened them also. About the same time his passport disappeared.

Singh decided not to push the issue. At his family's request he agreed to go with his mother to the Punjab area of India to settle some family property. His passport mysteriously reappeared.

After he was in India he realized the purpose of the trip was to marry him to a Sikh girl and immerse him in Sikh traditions and worship in the hopes of changing his mind about Christianity. It failed.

Back in Malaysia Singh worked for his brother-in-law, who refused to pay him a salary and blocked a job offer from a friend. "All my family members ignored me," says Singh, "but our Lord never left me even for a while. He heard my prayers."

Soon the company Singh had worked for earlier offered him a branch manager position. Despite threats from his family, he and his Christian girlfriend married and moved to the coastal city where the new job was. Singh's work allowed him time for business on the side and he became successful.

Hearing of his prosperity, his family invited him to come home. He and his wife helped his family financially and let a jobless brother-in-law live with them while working for Singh's company. Suddenly everyone needed them.

"But I had not forgotten God's calling me," Singh says. "I have experienced what money can do for a man. But the Lord's calling was always there." The one thing holding him back from seminary was a need for his wife to feel God wanted her in full-time ministry, also. That came in January 1983.

"We realize in this world life is very short and we are just passing through," explained Singh. "The choice is ours whether we want to continue building treasures for ourselves or to serve him as long as we live in this world."

Singh and his wife have chosen the latter.

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Bill Weber Urges Priority
On Reaching Unchurched People

By Linda Lawson

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GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--"The hope of Southern Baptists must be to identify, understand, relate to and reach unchurched people," said Bill Weber.

He's practicing that conviction in Dallas, at Prestonwood Baptist Church which was begun in 1977 as a satellite of Northway Baptist Church and now has a membership of 3,600. Weber was the preacher during the last three Sunday School Leadership Conferences at Glorieta Baptist Conference Center.

"One of our common limitations as Southern Baptists is we build churches with programs to reach our kind of people"--white, middle class, conservative--Weber said in an interview. "The problem is our kind represent less than three percent of the world's population," he emphasized.

Also, he contended, unchurched people represent an untapped resource of abilities, and new Christians can more effectively reach other unchurched persons. "Most of us conservative Baptists have isolated ourselves around other conservative friends like ourselves."

At the same time, Weber said, "I'm not saying we don't want to reach healthy, mature Christians. We need them--especially in roles such as teaching the Bible. But my goal is not to see how many Baptists I can shake out of other churches."

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Weber defines unchurched persons as those who haven't attended any church in at least six months. He said the most common reasons people do not attend church are they've experienced failure and felt isolated at church, were involved in a church conflict or doubt the church can meet their needs.

At Prestonwood, located in an upper middle-class suburban area of North Dallas, Weber said the Sunday morning services, publicity about church activities and the architecture of the building are geared to appeal to persons unfamiliar with traditional Baptist ways.

"I see Sunday morning as the time when you reach unchurched people," said Weber, who has preached on topics such as overcoming defeat and failure. "That's where the people are. If I preached to myself I'd preach expository messages because that's what I like."

Architecturally, Weber favors warmth, dignity and spontaneity through the use of colors, glass, greenery and open space. He favors the circular style of seating for worship. "When you're looking at the back of someone's head, you don't have the same reaction as when you see others' faces," he said.

Publicity about the church is focused on the needs of the target group instead of the church. "If we were trying to reach church people, we would show a picture of me holding a Bible. That's not what we are trying to do." Instead, printed pieces talk about ministries to help parents with their children, how to enrich your personality or have a fulfilling life.

"I acknowledge these are lesser motivations, but first you've got to get tuned into their channel--start where the people are," Weber said.

In addition to Sunday morning Bible study at the church, classes have been held in schools, recreation centers, hotels, theaters, a country club and other available places in the community. "I've tried to identify people in the community and develop strategies that reach them," Weber said. The country club class attempts to involve persons who regularly play tennis or golf on Sunday mornings.

"Our goal is not to get people to join our church. Our goal is to help people. If you're meeting needs, God will take care of the church," he emphasized.

Another goal of Weber's is to establish a personality enrichment institute of weektime seminars on subjects such as divorce, alcoholism, communication in marriage, drugs, unemployment, loneliness and anxiety. "These subjects are not threatening to unchurched persons and they represent an opportunity to make a witness for Christ," Weber said.

He also emphasizes the importance of Sunday school Bible study at the church. "We're convinced God's word has the answer to everybody's needs," he said. "We encourage everyone to get into a Bible study class and will continue to make that a priority."

To be effective, Weber said, Bible study must include both historical Bible truth and practical application. "When you're properly communicating Bible truths, it comes with application. Truth isn't truth without application."

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Missionary Thompson Killed
In Ecuador's Worst Air Crash

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QUITO, Ecuador (BP)--Southern Baptist missionary Roger L. Thompson and 118 other people died July 11 when the Ecuadorean airliner they were aboard slammed into a mountain. It was the worst air disaster in Ecuador's history.

The Boeing 737, operated by the Ecuadorean airline TAME, was attempting to land in the mountain city of Cuenca after a 40-minute flight from Quito. Eyewitness reports the plane exploded in the air before crashing could not be confirmed by aviation officials but an investigation of possible sabotage has been ordered.

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Thompson, 35, who taught Old Testament at Baptist Theological Institute in Quito, was enroute to Cuenca to teach an evangelistic witnessing training session at First Baptist Church. He had preached July 10 at an English-language Baptist church in Quito.

Thompson's wife, the former Susan C. Rich, and their three children were in the United States visiting her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Rich of Burtonsville, Md.

The Thompsons' home in Quito was badly damaged in a mudslide April 30 and they had been living in temporary quarters. Mrs. Thompson and the children flew to the United States while awaiting completion of permanent accommodations and had planned to return to Ecuador July 14.

Survivors include Mrs. Thompson and the children, Rachel, 8, Derek, 6, and Rebecca, almost 3, and Thompson's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester Thompson of Linthicum Heights, Md.

Weather and visibility were reported normal at the airport in Cuenca. The Boeing 737 was one of a new fleet of jets purchased after two TAME planes crashed in 1978 and 1979. A maintenance report indicated the aircraft was in excellent condition.

Thompson was the second Southern Baptist missionary to die in a commercial airline crash. Julius R. Hickerson Jr. of Tennessee was killed in 1951 on a flight from Cali to Cartagena, Colombia, after inspecting the site for a new seminary in Cali. Several missionaries have lost their lives in private plane accidents.

The Thompsons were appointed missionaries to Ecuador in December 1980. In addition to teaching, he preached regularly. Mrs. Thompson has assisted in the music program of several churches.

Before appointment he served from June 1979 through 1980 as a regional personnel representative with the Foreign Mission Board, working with Baptists in the Atlantic Coast states who were considering missionary service.

A graduate of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C., Thompson was pastor at Union Chapel Baptist Church, Clarksville, Va., and interim pastor of Liberty Lak Baptist Chapel, Randallstown, Md.

Born Jan. 20, 1948, in Brookville, Pa., Thompson lived in Richardsville, Pa., and Linthicum Heights while growing up. He was a graduate of the University of Maryland.

Funeral arrangements were incomplete July 12.