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In The Land Of Jesus' Birth,
Some Finding Hope, Brotherhood

By Bob Stanley

JERUSALEM, Israel (BP)--Almost 2,000 years after the angels proclaimed the birth of a savior in nearby Bethlehem, the name of Jesus stirs new hope in the hearts of a tiny minority in this land.

For some, he has overcome centuries of hatred to create a new sense of brotherhood between Jewish and Arab believers.

At a recent MasterLife conference in Cyprus a believer from Lebanon said until then the only contact he'd had with a Jew was with an Israeli soldier who told him it was time to get off the street because of a curfew.

Four Jewish believers attending the conference rejoiced over their warm acceptance by Arab representatives.

In the Galilee area, where Jesus grew up and later ministered, a recent meeting of a women's fellowship group included about one-third Jewish believers, another third Arab, and the others expatriates, including the Southern Baptist representative who started the group six years ago.

Together, they find fellowship and strength.

Baptists are not numerous in Israel. The seven churches that make up the Association of Baptist Churches have fewer than 500 members, mostly Arab in background. But these figures don't include churches in the occupied territories (Gaza and the West Bank) nor a number of small groups of Jewish believers that meet in homes. Many of the Jewish groups are not affiliated with any denomination but welcome participation and assistance by Baptist representatives.

Some Jews have found personal faith in Christ while overseas. Most do not renounce their Judaism but prefer to consider themselves Jewish believers, or in some cases Messianic Jews.

New song books have been published containing hymns written by Jewish believers. The words are in Hebrew, spelled phonetically so non-Hebrew worshipers can join in, but the tempo and rhythm reflect the songs' indigenous origin.

In Tel Aviv people come in off the street to see paintings by believers and browse through books in both Hebrew and English at Dugith Gallery, formerly a well known commercial art gallery which now seeks to minister through the arts. Some of the books encourage believers in their study of the Bible and their spiritual growth. Others are for those who are seeking.

And many are seeking in modern-day Israel. The 10 years since the Yom Kippur war of 1973 have disillusioned many who are weary of warfare. The country's material prosperity, which has jammed Jerusalem's streets with cars, has been battered this year by inflation that drives up prices almost 20 percent a month.

Salaries are indexed to the cost of living, but even so the spiral has forced many to tighten their budgets and worry about the rising national debt.

Most of those searching for fulfillment are turning to Scientology, Transcendental Meditation, the occult or gurus from India, according to one Baptist representative.

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But some also find faith in Christ. When they do, said one representative, it's as if all the years of being taught the Old Testament suddenly come into focus with the full revelation of God's love in Jesus.

Numerically, the strongest growth continues to be among Arab believers. Nazareth Baptist School, which has firmly established itself for quality training, has 620 students. A number of students took their first steps toward Christ in a two-week evangelistic emphasis earlier this year, and several accepted him as savior.

This school and the Baptist Village at Petah Tiqva are the best-known Baptist institutions in Israel. Thousands of campers pass through the picnic-type acreage of the village, where a friendly welcome or a cool glass of water first introduce many to Baptists.

One of the most zealous new converts is a young man from Germany who lives in Eilat, a resort city on the southernmost tip of Israel. Excited about the change God has made in his life, he has vowed not to miss a day witnessing to someone.

When he found himself without a tract, he tore a page from his Bible to give to a person he was witnessing to. Soon he had torn out so many pages he said he was going to have to buy a new Bible.

A Southern Baptist representative hopes he and others can go to Eilat to conduct leadership training.

He said the new believer commented, "We are just young believers. We want to share the joy of Christ, but we don't have guidance in Christian growth."

Yet, for him and a number of others throughout this land, the Christmas season has new meaning this year. Through the babe of Bethlehem, a new faith has been born in their hearts.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press

Issue Among Baptists
Polity, Cothen Warns

By Linda Lawson

Baptist Press
12/9/83

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--"Any Baptist who thinks he knows what another Baptist ought to be is in danger of not being a Baptist," Grady C. Cothen has warned.

Cothen, president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, told state convention leaders attending December planning meetings he believes the adoption of secular values within Southern Baptist churches and the "vociferous individuality of our day" have contributed to a confusion in the denomination.

"We have had a generation of folk grow up in Southern Baptist life who think they know what Southern Baptists ought to be and what Southern Baptists ought to believe," said Cothen. However, he emphasized, the heart of the issue is Baptist polity, not personalities.

"Believe or depart is not the prerogative of any single Baptist or group of Baptists," said Cothen. "The assumption of authority by any group of Baptists is to cease to be Baptists."

Four issues which are creating confusion in the denomination, according to Cothen, are changes of liberalism in institutions, debates about creeds, elections of trustees and efforts to make peripheral issues a test of faith.

Cothen said he has heard charges of liberalism in denominational institutions for 40 years. "The time has come to say, Who is it? We'll help you get rid of him. We need some specifics. It is time, if they (liberals) are here, to say so and identify them. If not, let's get on with the work of the Lord."

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Concerning creeds, Cothen said, "I am personally against anybody's creed, including my own. I am adamantly opposed to measuring your faith by my statement of what faith ought to be."

He called the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message an "excellent statement." However, he said, "It in no sense can possibly include all that I believe."

"I personally believe Southern Baptists should stop trying to adopt a creed everybody can agree on. If everybody can agree on it, it's not going to be worth much," said Cothen. "Holy Scripture is an adequate creed."

He noted he served on several boards of trustees before becoming a chief executive officer and then worked with boards at the Southern Baptist General Convention of California, Oklahoma Baptist University, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and the Sunday School Board.

"The Sunday School Board needs on its board of trustees the finest legal, financial, organizational and theological minds in the Southern Baptist Convention," said Cothen.

"We don't need anyone trying to grind a biased axe. We need people as trustees of all the agencies and institutions of the states and denomination who can help the institutions be what Southern Baptists created them to be."

On the positive side, Cothen said Southern Baptists enjoy many strengths, including freedom, a common heritage, common bonds of interdependence and great resources.

"Our freedom allows for differences without rupture of fellowship," said Cothen. "Our freedom lets God do with us what he chooses to do."

Southern Baptists' common heritage means "in the mind of God, the church of 300 members that is doing its job in its community, reaching its people for Jesus Christ, may be just as great as the big church doing the same kind of job."

A spirit of interdependence impacts "the cooperative decisionmaking we do, our mutuality of interests that control the major directions of our denominational life, our unity in the bond of love for each other, our common tasks that make us want to do the same kinds of things and our combination of efforts," said Cothen.

"Basically what we're going to do is make disciples, baptize, teach them to observe all things and try to get them to do the same kind of things," he emphasized.

Cothen said he believes the denomination has great resources because "honest and intelligent effort is going on at every level of the convention to reach people for Christ and teach them to be disciples."

He cited Southern Baptists' theological education system as "unparalleled in the world," but noted, "I am sure they make mistakes. I am confident they are not all perfect who teach on the faculties. But I can also say the finest basic theological education in the world today is available to Southern Baptists."

"If we've got problems with it, let's change it; let's not kill it," said Cothen.

"When my father passed the torch of my little fragment of Southern Baptist life on to me, it was joyous, free, exhilarating and hopeful faith that said, be all you can be, do all you can do, love all you can love, reach all you can reach without the strictures of small minds telling you what you can and cannot do," said Cothen.

After his Feb. 1 retirement, Cothen said, "I'm going to go right on doing what I've been doing all my life--help try to confront a lost world with the gospel of Christ."

National Enquirer Readers
Request Bible Study Helps

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Advertising a Bible study magazine in the National Enquirer may sound strange, but it begins to make sense if a key target audience of the magazine is unchurched people.

The Home Bible Study Guide, a free monthly publication of the Baptist Sunday School Board, was advertised in the September issues of the weekly newspaper which tends to cover the seamier sides of the entertainment industry and claims to have the "largest circulation of any paper in America."

The ad, which appeared in the "Personals" classified advertisement column, generated letters from 400 persons in the United States, Canada and the West Indies, requesting the guide.

The guide includes four Bible study lessons in each issue and readers may answer questions about the lessons, mail in response cards to be graded and receive the correct answers.

D. Lewis White, supervisor of the church programs and services special ministries unit, said the ad, a test project, was placed in the "Personals" column because "we figured more persons would read it there."

"The primary audiences of Home Bible Study are church members not enrolled in Sunday school and unchurched people," said White. "I don't believe many unchurched people are likely to be reached through ads in religious publications."

Approximately 97,000 persons currently are active members of Home Bible Study, according to White.

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New BNF Members Noted
For Spirit Of Service

By Carol Sisson

Baptist Press
12/9/83

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Baptist nursing professionals pooled diverse skills and common beliefs when they gathered in Oklahoma City, for the Nov. 4 organizational meeting of the Baptist Nursing Fellowship (BNF).

The BNF was formed during the national meeting of the Baptist Medical-Dental Fellowship, and will be a sister organization to that seven-year-old group. Forty-two people attended the organizational meeting in which officers were elected and bylaws approved.

Ellen Tabor of Winston-Salem, N.C., newly elected BNF president, said the BNF will seek to provide nurses and nursing students opportunities for worship, witnessing and ministering through professional association.

Education and learning experiences through Bible study, theological training, ethical study and evaluation of denominational work and professional education will be emphasized.

The BNF will also provide its members with opportunities for expanded Christian service and witness through personal involvement in home and foreign missions activities, and through disaster relief projects.

Tabor and her husband, Charles G. Tabor, former missionaries to Korea, will conduct a three-week health survey in Togo, West Africa, this January as members of a partnership missions project between North Carolina and Togo Baptists.

Tabor's hope is this is the kind of endeavor in which BNF nurses can become involved. "They will be able to exercise the professional aspect of a calling," she said.

Woman's Missionary Union, SBC, is providing advisory and administrative support for BNF. June Whitlow, a WMU associate executive director, was named BNF executive director.

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Annual dues are \$25 for nursing professionals, \$5 for nursing students and no charge for missionary nurses. Charter membership will be held open until the end of 1983.

Those interested in joining may send dues to or request information from BNF, Woman's Missionary Union, P.O. Box C-10, Birmingham, Ala. 35283--0010.

The national organization is encouraging the formation of state BNF chapters.

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Hands Reach Out Of The Dark
In War-Weary South West Africa

Baptist Press
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TSUMEB, South West Africa (BP)--Linus Matongo never dreamed the book he found would change his life.

But by the time the African postmaster finished reading the book on Baptists, he had decided to become one, even though the closest Baptist pastor was almost 800 miles away. Today the large jovial man leads Baptists in the thriving town of Katima Mulilo in South West Africa's Caprivi Strip.

Growing a Baptist church in the remote Caprivi Strip hasn't been easy. The small finger of land juts out of northern South West Africa (almost called Namibia) into central Africa, isolated from most of the country. Itself part of a country plagued by guerrilla warfare, it shares a border with Angola, another site of unrest.

Besides that, Matongo knew no other Baptists in the area. He wrote for help to Baptists in the capital city of Windhoek, who forwarded the letter to the Baptist Union of South Africa. The union contacted the only Baptist pastor in the north, 775 miles away.

He in turn contacted the only Baptist mission family, Charles and Betty Whitson, to go with him to see Matongo. They encouraged Matongo to begin work and assisted him although they couldn't visit often because of the distance and the guerrilla war.

Finally, the Whitsons, who had been the only Southern Baptist missionaries in the country, got reinforcements, Myrtice and Carlos Owens. As soon as they could, the Whitsons took the Owensens for a visit in the Caprivi Strip, a visit that filled Matongo with exuberance.

Although they arrived at his home at 9 p.m. after a long day's travel over gravel roads, the missionaries were excited by the group that assembled at the back of Matongo's house. At bedtime, about 40 people had gathered to greet the guests and have a worship service.

But that wasn't enough for Matongo. He wanted them to visit the people at a nearby village also.

Arriving at 10:30 p.m., the missionaries could see only the outline of small, grass-roofed huts in every direction. Small fires where families had cooked their evening meal burned outside each one. They walked down the path in a follow-the-leader style, having faith Matongo would lead them safely through the darkness. His "night eyes" were much better than theirs.

As they reached the home of one of the leaders, he announced the arrival of his guests with a megaphone. People began to gather. They were told who the missionaries were and why they came.

Immediately, hundreds of hands reached out of the darkness to welcome them; their hands reached back. They couldn't see the faces, but felt the warmth, hospitality and generous welcome of their African brethren receiving their missionaries.

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Hamptons Bring Good Hope
To South Africa's Cape

By Robert O'Brien

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (BP)--Several years ago, Charles Hampton might have taken offense if someone had told him he had "a white face but a black heart."

But not now. That's a compliment when a black man says it to a white man--as one did to the 62-year-old Hampton--in Cape Province, South Africa.

But rebuffs have come to Charles and Evelyn Hampton, and how they've responded to them has shaped their ministry as Southern Baptist missionaries on the South African Cape of Good Hope.

Some rebuffs have been the every day kind; others more difficult as the Hamptons have gone about a remarkably successful effort to bridge the gulf between white, "colored (mixed race)," Indians and blacks in Cape Province.

The Hamptons won't soon forget the time they drove through a black South African township after losing their way enroute to a colored township.

A crowd of black people, going through a period of rebellious attitudes against whites, picked up rocks and began to yell: "Out, Whitey. Out, Whitey. What're you doing here, Whitey?" Instead of stepping on the gas, Hampton stepped out of the car.

"My what a lovely looking group of people," he said in his best Arkansas accent. "Your community is so clean; your flowers are so pretty."

His attitude and his accent worked wonders. Someone hollered. "He's an American. He's an Am rican." They dropped the rocks and asked, "What are you doing in our township? What are you doing in South Africa?"

"I'm a Southern Baptist foreign missionary," Hampton replied, and a woman began to shout, "He's a preach. He's a preach." She took out a little New Testament, beat it on her hand and said, "Preach to us. Preach to us."

Hampton read some Scripture. By that time he had an audience of about 100 people, so he did what came naturally. He preached.

Diverse blacks, Indians, coloreds and whites call the Hamptons a "pivot point" between the races, a "hand in the glove of South Africa," a "bridge" over which love and relationships flow, a "common ground" on which the racial groups can relate in Baptist efforts to reach the Cape for Jesus Christ.

Leaders in the Baptist Union of South Africa in dissolving have made progress in racial barriers in their churches and outreach in South Africa. But representatives of all groups admit the apartheid environment creates a gulf between them--a gulf they have eased by relating to the Hamptons.

"W need neutral people to stabilize us," said Desmond Hoffmeister, a young colored pastor in the modern colored township of Mitchells' Plain. "South Africa sits on the potential for either a major revolution or a major spiritual revival. The Lord must come and work in all of our hearts so we can have revival rather than revolution. We need people like Hampton and Evelyn to help us."

Michael Dwaba, black pastor in the black township of Langa, echoed Hoffmeister. "To many Christians, the biblical Great Commission to win people to Christ is the 'great omission.' They just sit in their church and don't reach anyone. If we can win more people, we can have revival, not revolution," said Dwaba.

"When the Hamptons came here, no one wanted to accept them," Hoffmeister recalled. "Four years later, just before they left on furlough, the response to them was overwhelming. Our people just couldn't believe a white man would love us or would put on his work clothes and get his hands dirty helping us build a church without an ulterior motive. Hampton has wiped out those suspicions."

When the two Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary graduates came in 1977 to do church development and religious education, the association had 43 churches. Now it has 110 churches and outreach points, including 67 new ones made up of 52 colored groups, eight white, six black and one Indian.

Syd Hudson-Reed, white executive coordinator of the Western Province Baptist Association, sees the Hamptons as "active catalysts in getting the work going." Hudson-Reed said the Hamptons found a solid base on which to build when they arrived, but they brought historical perspective, experience, maturity, expertise and understanding of what would work in religious education and church growth.

Currently, Southern Baptists have 20 missionary personnel under appointment for work in various South African locations and would like more. But some missionaries privately have expressed concern that world opinion about South Africa may blind some potential missionary candidates to the great needs and opportunities for ministry there.

Although racially divided living areas and other problems make integrated worship difficult, it is legal and the number of mixed Baptist congregations is growing.

The Baptist Union of South Africa has joined a number of other denominations in officially protesting the Group Areas Act which designates living areas by race, but it continues to do what it can to reach people for Christ now.

Baptists on the Cape of Good Hope see their work here as a model for what can happen in race relations throughout South Africa.

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Adapted from an upcoming issue of The Commission, magazine of the Foreign Mission Board. (BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press

Radio, Television Crossing
Literacy Barriers

By Bonita Sparrow

Baptist Press
12/9/83

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--One cassette recording, received at the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission recently, did more than ten thousand written words to remind listeners of barriers radio and television cross with the gospel.

"My name is Joe Johnson (not his real name) and we would like to say hello to Fort Worth, Texas, and thank you for 'Country Crossroads,'" the cassette began. "'Country Crossroads' really brought back memories of when I was a little kid. It comes on at 7 a.m. on Sunday and we appreciate radio stations that play programs like that."

Johnson said he was "raised up" on a farm where "we made homemade molasses, apple cider for vinegar and took our corn to the mill to be ground." A note of pride crept into his voice when he said he now makes his living as a mill textile worker.

"I tell people at the mill about 'Country Crossroads,'" he said. "One morning one of my friends at the mill told me he and his daddy listened to 'Country Crossroads' while they was eating breakfast. I told him 'bless his heart.'"

Johnson said he grew up in a Baptist church community. "Baptists have always been good loving people, good liking people."

He brought his young son to the microphone.

"Tell the people your name."

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"Joe, Junior."

"Tell 'em how old you are."

"Ten."

"Tell then what you did this morning." The child's voice swelled happily. "I joined the church." The father explained. "I was real proud of him. I think listening to 'Country Crossroads' had a lot to do with him feeling the way he did."

He turned back to his son. "Tell the people why we're making this tape instead of writing a letter." There was silence on the tape. "Come on, son," urged his father. "Tell the people it's because your daddy can't read or write."

As the child hesitated, his father spoke again. "That's right. I didn't learn to read or write but I like to talk to people. Radio and cassettes are ways to communicate with people, to let people find out what other people have on their minds, to hear about folks in for ign countries, new ideas. Even if you can't read or write.

"We'll be listening for the next 'Country Crossroads.' I have another son coming along and in a few years he'll need to be thinking about what 'Country Crossroads' has been saying about Christianity, too."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Radio-Television Commission.

'Theology of the Laity'
Urged at Convocation

By Jack V. Harwell

Baptist Press
12/9/83

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--A call for Southern Baptists to develop a "biblically based, generally proclaimed theology of the laity" was sounded at a first-time Convocation of the Laity at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

About 200 persons from a broad spectrum of Southern Baptist life heard W. Owen Cooper of Yazoo City, Miss., say: "The greatest heresy among Southern Baptists is we have divided the people of God into two groups...the ordained and lay persons."

Cooper claimed lay persons "are considered without a call, without a ministry, largely exempt from the Great Commission and relegated to a second-class position among the people of God."

Cooper, the last lay person to serve as president of the Southern Baptist Convention, was keynote speaker for a three-day convocation which was to explore many aspects of lay ministry in local churches and denominational agencies.

Cooper said, "I find no basis in the scripture for this division of ordained and laity. There seems to be no theological justification for it and it has resulted in irreparable losses to the kingdom of God."

Cooper urged a series of steps to develop "a theology of the laity, not for the laity," and that would heighten lay leadership in church and denominational life.

"There is a need to multiply many times the channels and places to serve God through our churches, state conventions, SBC and Baptist World Alliance by opening new and challenging places of service and involvement to the unordained," he said. "Less than five hundred positions are available to challenge the eight million members of the Southern Baptist laity."

Cooper said, "Any theology is inadequate that does not provide for God calling and using all of his children. I need a theology that will help me validate my call to serve where I am, and to challenge me to the same degree of commitment for Christian ministries as the person who is ordained."

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He added, "It is rare to find an unordained person who believes they are performing a ministry. They have seldom been told this, they are called laymen or amateurs, and they are not aware of a theology that acknowledges they too are ministers."

Porter W. Routh, a layman who retired in 1979 after 28 years as executive secretary-treasurer of the SBC Executive Committee, told the group: "There should be no hierarchy in the realms of Christian service...one of our problems may be a predetermined view of the laity. The New Testament says there is a variety of gifts."

He added, "We laymen can make our most effective contribution as kingdom builders when we work in the local churches."

Mary Crowley of Dallas, told the convocation's opening session: "In our busyness, Christianity is not a way of doing certain things; it is a certain way of doing all things."

The famed businesswoman, head of a large home furnishings company with 39,000 saleswomen worldwide, added, "We train our company leaders through the book of Proverbs...every person who claims the name of Christ is a minister...people's needs don't fit into a nine-to-five schedule. Their needs can be felt at some of the most inconvenient times."

Crowley added, "Southern Baptists ought to change the name of the Cooperative Program to Cooperative Ministries. People don't want programs anymore; they want ministries."

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Chaney Named President
At Southwest Baptist

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BOLIVAR, Mo. (BP)--Charles L. Chaney, vice president for academic affairs, has been elected president of Southwest Baptist University, effective immediately.

He succeeds Harlan Spurgeon, who resigned in June to become vice president for human resources at the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

Chaney, a native of Texas, came to SBU in February of 1981 as dean of the Redford School of Theology and Church Vocations. He was promoted in August of 1983 to vice president of academic affairs. Prior to accepting the SBU position, Chaney was director of the division of church extension with the Illinois Baptist State Association.

He received a BA degree from Howard Payne University, Brownwood, Texas, the BD and ThM degrees from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., and the MA and PhD degrees from the University of Chicago.

He has been pastor of churches in Texas, Kentucky and Illinois.

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MK/DK Messages To Parents
More Than Casual Greeting

By Carol Sisson

Baptist Press
12/9/83

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--As hard as they tried to be casual, unconcerned college students, the 44 missionary and denominational kids (MKs and DKs) couldn't keep a little poignancy from edging into the personal messages they recently taped at Woman's Missionary Union headquarters for parents and family members far away.

The Samford University students were the guests of Woman's Missionary Union at the annual fall MK/DK dinner. The dinner is held for college students in the Birmingham area who are children of missionaries and denominational workers.

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Because the Samford MKs and DKs are located in the same city with WMU national headquarters, it's possible for WMU, SBC to give them this fellowship. Leaders hope state and associational WMUs in other areas will do the same.

The 44 students represented 24 countries and several SBC agencies and boards. Nine sets of brothers and sisters attended the dinner.

They are almost all members of a club whose initiation is leaving family and familiarity on the mission field to return "home" to a country where it's easy to feel alien and alone.

Woman's Missionary Union seeks to ease that transition for them as much as possible. One way they do this is through the camaraderie of these annual dinners.

"We'll send this tape on to you as a way of assuring you of our prayers, and other tangible ways we support your sons and daughters who are in school in the Birmingham area," Carolyn Weatherford, WMU executive director, told parents on the tape's introduction.

The real stars of the evening were the MKs and DKs themselves. Standing in front of the room crowded with their peers, they told who they were, where they were from and added a personal note to their parents.

Some of the comments universal to the group were received with good natured, almost philosophical understanding.

"I'm from Pineville, Ga. Right now."

"I don't know how to say where my parents live, 'cause they just moved. But I'll try. Bophuthatswana."

The response was a satisfying laugh of "Yeah, I know what you mean."

For all the differences peculiar to the group, in many ways they were typical children, checking in with concerned parents through the tape.

"Yes, the car still runs well."

"I took my state boards."

"Summer at the beach was great!"

The MKs and DKs shared with each other as they spoke to their parents. At the dinner, they were the insiders, and they knew the territory.

A spring dinner will be held in March. The meal may be different, the jokes may change. But if another tape is made, one message will certainly reappear.

"Hi Mom and Dad. I love you a lot. And I'm praying for you."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by WMU, SBC.