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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

**NATIONAL OFFICE**

SBC Executive Committee  
 901 Commerce #750  
 Nashville, Tennessee 37203  
 (615) 244-2355  
 Wilmer C. Fields, Director  
 Dan Martin, News Editor  
 Craig Bird, Feature Editor

**BUREAUS**

**ATLANTA** Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W. Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 873-4041  
**DALLAS** Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 511 N. Akard, Dallas, Texas 75201-3355, Telephone (214) 720-0550  
**NASHVILLE** (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300  
**RICHMOND** (Foreign) Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151  
**WASHINGTON** Stan L. Haste, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

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85-87

Israeli Religious Freedom  
 Questioned By R. Keith Parks

By Art Toalston

**RICHMOND, Va. (BP)**—In a July 19 letter to 55 members of Congress, the president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board has raised the question of whether religious freedom in Israel has been "neglected or abandoned."

R. Keith Parks, wrote 22 U.S. senators and 33 representatives, expressing concern "extremist elements" in Israel have, to date, stalled the rebuilding of a Jerusalem Baptist church destroyed by arsonists in 1982. Also cited were "several incidents where congregations of Jewish believers in Jesus as the Christ have been harassed and persecuted."

Such problems, Parks wrote, reflect an "apparent disregard" for statements in the declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel, May 14, 1948, that, "The State of Israel...will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will insure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education, and culture...."

In an interview, Parks said the incidents of harassment "are not numerous and they're not frequent, but they are often enough to create a concern."

Antagonism toward Christians in Israel, he said, is "not what we believe the Israeli government or the people in general approve."

Parks described his letter to selected members of Congress as "a personalized approach" to ask that they "exert some quiet influence" for Israeli officials to "uniformly apply their policy of religious freedom." Parks said he intends no "public campaign."

The members of Congress were selected in consultation with the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, Parks said. The senators and representatives are Baptists or others "sensitive to the situation in Israel" who might "want to help correct it."

Parks said he also has relayed his concerns by telephone to Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, director of the American Jewish Committee's International Relations Department in New York City, and by letter to Jerusalem's mayor, Teddy Kollek.

Robert Lindsey, pastor of the 300-member English-language congregation which lost its chapel to arson, the Narkis Street Baptist Church, said rebuilding plans "were processed through the various departments of the municipality over a period of more than two years" and were approved last fall. "Most of the people...were very helpful," he said.

But the plans have been delayed by an Israeli government regional development committee. Although a hearing was held earlier this year, several months have passed without action. A meeting with Kollek about a month ago was congenial but without results, Lindsey said.

Before the hearing, a conservative Jewish organization antagonistic toward Christianity in Israel, Y'ad L'achim, staged a protest in front of the church property. It was promoted with posters throughout Jerusalem and about 100 people participated. Also, one unnamed ultra-conservative Orthodox Jewish leader has told the Jerusalem Post that his political party, Shas, will withdraw from the municipal coalition if the congregation is granted a building permit.

The congregation continues to worship in a tent-like structure where the chapel was located.

Apart from criticism by radicals, Lindsey said, a couple of individuals in the church neighborhood have objected that reconstruction plans entail a larger facility than the former chapel built in 1933. Temporary roofs and tarpaulins had been used for added space.

About \$500,000 of the needed \$1 million has been raised for the new facility, to include a 400-seat auditorium, offices and several Sunday school rooms. Funds have come from individuals, congregations and groups (many from the United States) in numerous countries. After the fire, Kollek established a fund that has received various donations from Israelis.

Parks said the congregation has "responded in patience and forbearance" to the delay. "They've not lashed out in any way. My impression is that the people who know the congregation and Bob Lindsey and know what's happening there have real appreciation for them and a good relationship with them."

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Pennsylvania Church Doubles  
Attendance In Six Months

Baptist Press  
7/26/85

DRIFTWOOD, Pa. (BP)—Attendance at Down County Baptist Church has doubled in the last six months, with almost half of the town's 200 population attending worship services weekly.

"We're in the midst of a tremendous revival here, and the whole town is amazed at the response," said Dwight Simpson, pastor of the church for the past two years.

Simpson baptized 19 new converts following a weekend revival in June led by Hal Crane, director of missions for the Baptist Convention of Pennsylvania-South Jersey. Since then, 22 others have accepted Christ and are awaiting baptism, bringing the total number of new converts this year to 44, Simpson said.

Attendance, which averaged 52 for the month of February, has exceeded 100 every Sunday in July, Simpson said. "It's amazing what God is doing," he added.

The revival started after 49-year-old Lawrence Morton accepted Christ last February while undergoing treatment for cancer in an area hospital, Simpson said. Morton, who died on May 31, was able to fulfill his pledge "to be in church every Sunday until I die."

As a direct result of Morton's witness, five members of his family accepted Christ, including his 83-year-old father, 73-year-old mother, brother, sister and sister-in-law.

After he came home from the hospital, Morton spent most of his time on the telephone, inviting people to church. Simpson said at least 18 men who never attended previously started coming to church as a result of Morton's telephone calls.

When Crane came to Driftwood for the revival, the community was receptive, Simpson said. Fifteen minutes after Crane drove into the church parking lot, a 70-year-old man who lives across the street accepted Christ. "We'd been trying to reach him for years," Simpson said.

A team of volunteers from First Baptist Church, Sneads, Fla., led a series of Backyard Bible Clubs for children as part of a sister church partnership coordinated through the Florida and Pennsylvania-South Jersey conventions. Concerned about the needs, the Sneads church has contributed about \$800 to help support the Driftwood mission, and has provided additional folding chairs to provide seating for record crowds.

Attendance is overflowing the church's doublewide trailer which will barely seat 90 people, Simpson said. The church has bought 10 acres of land on which to build, but does not have the funds for construction.

Simpson said if the space were available, he believes the church could have 200 in worship services every Sunday.

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Crane said sparsely-populated Cameron County, located about 125 miles northeast of Pittsburgh, has a higher population of deer than people. According to 1980 census data, Driftwood has a population of 163 and Cameron County has about 6,675 residents.

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Seven Mission Professors  
Affirm Cooperative Missions

By Craig Bird

Baptist Press  
7/26/85

DEERFIELD, Ill. (BP)—Seven Southern Baptist mission professors have publicly affirmed their support of cooperative missions and SBC mission agency leaders and expressed "profound concern over current trends among Southern Baptist churches."

The six paragraph statement was penned by Earl Martin of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, incorporating ideas expressed within the group during a general discussion of ongoing strife in the 14.3 million-member Southern Baptist Convention.

The professors, six from SBC seminaries and one from a Southern Baptist college, pledged to "seek to magnify missions as the original purpose for the formation of the SBC in 1845," and "to intensify our teaching in support of the Cooperative Program as the distinctive, and wonderfully effective, Southern Baptist way to undergird missions."

The Cooperative Program (the voluntary national unified budget which underwrites the worldwide mission and educational programs of the SBC through undesignated gifts), and the six SBC seminaries have been the focus of much discussion across the nation's largest non-Catholic denomination since 1979.

One side has charged liberal theology is being taught in the seminaries and that churches should be able to give to the Cooperative Program without supporting the alleged liberalism. The other side claims the charge of liberalism is a cover for a grab for political power by a group which includes churches not active in the convention or committed to the Southern Baptist way of doing missions.

There has been much speculation that continued controversy would result in a decline in giving to the Cooperative Program which, in turn, would hinder the mission boards of the SBC.

"In light of recent developments in the Southern Baptist Convention," the statement said, "we...affirm the cooperative way of doing missions," and "rejoice in the reports of progress for Bold Mission Thrust (an SBC emphasis to present the gospel of Jesus Christ to every person in the world by the year 2000)."

They expressed encouragement most Bold Mission Thrust goals are on or ahead of schedule and were heartened by the widespread involvement of layment in short-term volunteer programs.

The death of Baker James Cauthen, longtime head of the Foreign Mission Board, was noted "with sadness" but the professors noted the "mantle of leadership" in global missions has "been ably taken" by current FMB President R. Keith Parks. Parks was commended for "his courage in continuing to magnify the cooperative vision" as he "consistently calls us to constancy in our main task of missions and evangelism."

Also affirmed for "steadfast missionary statesmanship in their respective positions of leadership," were William Tanner, president of the Home Mission Board; Carolyn Weatherford, president of the Woman's Missionary Union, and James Smith, president of the Brotherhood Commission.

"Profound concern" was signaled over "current trends among Southern Baptist churches to promote and support independent missions to the detriment of the SBC mission programs," a development, "alarmingly reminiscent of the menace of the Gospel Mission controversy that nearly destroyed our convention almost a hundred years ago," in the statement.

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The Gospel Mission movement appeared in Southern Baptist life in the 1880's, lead by missionaries to China. It urged local churches or groups of churches to select and support their own missionaries and transmit money directly to the missionaries and that the Foreign Mission Board have no voice in the selection or approval of missionaries or the location or method of work. The resignation from the service of the Foreign Mission Board of the missionaries from China who founded the movement in the mid-1890's ended the controversy in the SBC, though the Gospel Mission movement continued in other circles.

The professors said it is their "earnest prayer that God grant us the ability to rise above the current lamentable controversy and safeguard the continuing upward thrust of bold missions to the end of this century and beyond as long as our Lord Christ carries."

Copies of the statement were sent to Parks, Tanner, Weatherford, Smith and Baptist Press.

Present at the meeting at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Ill., were: Justice C. Anderson from Southwestern seminary; George Braswell from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.; Francis DuBose, Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif.; Martin; Alan Neely, Southeastern seminary; Jack Partain, Gardner-Webb College, Boiling Springs, N.C., and Daniel Sanchez, Southwestern seminary.

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National Baptist Convention  
President James Sams Dies

Baptist Press  
7/26/85

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)—James C. Sams, 74, president of the National Baptist Convention of America, died recently in a hospital in Jacksonville, Fla.

He had been a pastor in Jacksonville for 32 years.

The Convention over which he presided for 15 years is the second largest of three national black Baptist conventions. It has about 3.5 million members.

In addition to being a church pastor and leading the National Baptist Convention, Sams was president of the Florida Progressive Baptist Convention for 17 years.

The Cochran, Ga., native was listed in Who's Who in Religion in 1977 and Ebony, a black monthly magazine, named him among America's 100 most influential black Americans every year since 1971.

Surviving are his wife, Cornelia Sams, and two sisters, Algertha Jenkins and Minnie Lee Thomas, all of Jacksonville.

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Georgia Baptists Tell  
New England 'Good News'

By Leisa A. Hammett

Baptist Press  
7/26/85

WORCESTER, Mass. (BP)—Before a group of 350 Atlanta suburbanites converged on Worcester, Mass., many people in this New England city southwest of Boston equated Southern Baptists with snake handlers, holy rollers or Jerry Falwell.

But 350 members of Eastside Baptist Church, Marietta, Ga., paid their own expenses and took a week of vacation time to communicate a different—and accurate—image of Southern Baptists and tell Massachusetts' second largest city God loves them.

The 4,600-member church spent approximately \$50,000 to promote their message in Worcester (New Englanders pronounce the city "Wursta"), described by local Christians as the "graveyard of evangelism." Billboards, newspaper advertisements and complimentary drinking cups touted "Good News Worcester: God Loves You!" the theme of Eastside's four-day crusade.

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It was the first time in 20 years evangelicals in Worcester had banded together for revival, according to James H. Currin, executive director of the New England Baptist Convention. Though spearheaded by Southern Baptists, other evangelicals were invited and some became a vital part of the evangelistic crusade.

The crusade drew over 4,000 and resulted in 176 public professions of faith, 85 percent of which were first time decisions. Eastside officials added the 176 do not include the "intangible" number of decisions made in Eastsiders' daily personal witnessing and backyard Bible clubs held in the Worcester area.

The exhibition hall of the Centrum, a major convention center, was rented for the crusade. Ten billboards throughout the city stated, "Good News Worcester: God Loves You! Find out how much. Attend the crusade at the Centrum, July 14-17." Radio ads were abundant on several major stations. Two daily newspapers carried feature stories concerning the crusade.

A businessmen's luncheon July 15, attracted approximately 200 people. Those present included the immediate past governor of Massachusetts and the mayor of Worcester. Jerry Lucas, former three-time all-American and seven-time NBA all-pro, was the featured speaker.

In addition to assisting with the nightly crusades held in the auditorium which is central to six New England states, the Georgians "canvassed" New England communities, visiting door to door with complimentary New Testaments and crusade promotion. They also held daytime children's ministries and aided local Southern Baptists in building a church and a parsonage.

Eastside's idea of combining a mission trip with a mass crusade stemmed from Pastor Clark Hutchinson's participation in a mission tour of New England last May for Southern Baptist Home Mission Board directors. Currin invited Hutchinson to come back and preach a revival. It was decided Eastside's 140-voice youth choir, The Rising Son Choir, would come too.

The idea kept expanding, said Hutchinson, recalling a sermon Currin preached at Eastside later that year. At the conclusion of Currin's sermon, approximately 200 Eastsiders (not including the youth choir) responded to Hutchinson's challenge to spend a week in Worcester that summer at their own expense.

Next, Hutchinson hired recent Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary graduate Randy Bennett to oversee onsite crusade coordination. In his 10-month coordination task, Bennett worked with Atlanta-based public relations professionals, also Eastside members, to promote the week-long event with "class and credibility."

"We shied away from the negative 'turn or burn,' scare tactic gospel presentation," said Bennett. "We strived to present the positive gospel of God's love, he added. Currin said Eastside's efforts were "well received" by the predominately Catholic community.

Upon the mid-July arrival of the Atlanta guests Worcester Mayor Joseph M. Tinsley proclaimed "Good News Worcester: God Loves You! week." Massachusetts Governor Micheal Dukakis' proclamation urged citizens to participate in Eastside's effort to "promote good will."

"Good News Worcester: God Loves You!" will continue to affect New England, Currin said. Both Currin and Eastside officials anticipated the crusade would "raise the image" of Southern Baptists and support the efforts of both Southern Baptists and other denominations in the Worcester vicinity.

Bruce Allen, pastor of First Baptist Church of Shrewsbury, a neighboring community, agreed the crusade's promotion gave a needed boost to local perception of Southern Baptists. As a direct result of the crusade, First Baptist of Shrewsbury has created a new believers Sunday school class and plans to baptize several people, Allen said.

Direct results and mission trips are not new ventures for Eastside membership, officials say. But, in terms of monies, members and endeavors, they said "Good News Worcester" is the largest mission trip the church has attempted.

Currin continued, "A model was enlisted by joining the resources of a strong church, a young convention, a Baptist association, the Home Mission Board and a private foundation."

Currin pointed out all of these entities made significant contributions (the private foundation chose not to be identified). He was quick to say, however, the major financial resource was the Eastside Baptist Church of Marietta, Ga.

C. Richard Risas, director of missions for Massachusetts Baptist Association, said pastors already are planning another crusade next year, hopefully in the Centrum.

The only offering taken in the entire crusade was given to world hunger relief. The amount was \$2,010.79.

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Missionaries In Burkina Faso  
To Give Bibles To Military

Baptist Press  
7/26/85

OUAGADOUGOU, Burkina Faso (BP)--Southern Baptist missionaries have obtained government permission to distribute Bibles to about 25,000 military personnel in the west African nation of Burkina Faso (formerly Upper Volta.)

Bible distribution among the military can have real significance in a country where the military is in control, said John Mills, the Foreign Mission Board's director for west Africa. "If the Bible does what we say it does, this is worth doing," he added.

Al Hodges, Southern Baptist missionary from Texas, is in charge of distribution to all Burkinabe military personnel, using more than \$56,000 from the Foreign Mission Board.

Mills encouraged the Burkina Faso missionaries to seek permission for the distribution after seeing the success of Baptist ministries to the military in Korea. In 19 years of evangelism to the Korean army, Southern Baptist missionaries have seen 75,000 make professions of faith and 18,000 be baptized.

The Baptist mission will mark each Bible as a gift of the mission and will deliver them individually whenever possible, said Mills.

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Poverty Strikes Children  
In One-Parent Families

By David Wilkinson

Baptist Press  
7/26/85

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Instability and economic stress are wrecking many American families and recent studies indicate children who live in households headed by single females may be the biggest casualties.

Last year 22 percent of America's children were living in poverty, according to the Bureau of the Census. Many of them were living in one-parent families maintained by the mother.

Almost half of those households--whether affected by divorce, death or other circumstances--were living below the poverty line. For black and Hispanic families headed by single females, the rate was almost 70 percent.

"The plight of America's children in poverty and the burden of their single mothers is a national scandal," said Foy Valentine, executive director of the Southern Baptist Convention's Christian Life Commission. The Nashville-based agency addresses issues related to family life and other areas of Christian social concern.

Valentine pointed out that in 1969 only 13.8 percent of children were living in poverty, an indication "our society is losing ground in the struggle to care for those least able to care for themselves. In a nation as healthy and strong as America, it is a moral outrage when more than one out of every five children is compelled to live in poverty."

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Valentine noted that while government policies under the Reagan administration have increased spending for programs benefiting groups which represent well-organized and politically-powerful voting blocs, such as the aging, the per-child figures for government support of poor children reflects a substantial decline in the real value of benefits.

In the decade 1973-83, cash and food-stamp benefits for children in poverty declined about five percent with inflation factored in, Valentine pointed out.

Noting nearly 90 percent of single parents are women, he also decried the "cruel paradox" in society's attitude toward many of those persons.

"In the case of divorce, our society assumes in most instances the mother should have equal custody of the children," he said. "Yet neither women's salaries nor government programs provide the financial support necessary for many of them to carry out the minimal responsibilities of parenting except in conditions of abject poverty."

Meanwhile, the transition from the nuclear family to the one-parent family is expected to continue. Currently about 25 percent of families with children under 18 are headed by single parents. Experts predict by 1990 more than one-third--and perhaps as many as one-half--of families with children under 18 will be headed by single parents.

"The emotional stress and spiritual drain on these households is so intense it is utterly absurd for this nation to continue to complicate their lives by perpetuating the burden of poverty," said Valentine. "Public policy must be fashioned to meet these crying human needs."

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Gardner-Webb College  
President Resigns

Baptist Press  
7/26/85

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (BP)--Craven E. Williams, president of Gardner-Webb College since Aug. 1, 1976, has resigned. He will continue to lead the Baptist school until June 30, 1986.

In submitting his resignation Williams said, "I have been a college administrator and/or a teacher for twenty years. I have been part of a major private university, a women's college, a men's college and a co-educational college. Now, I have been president of a private, church-related college for 10 years. It is a good time for Gardner-Webb College to continue its growth and development under new leadership, and it is a good time for me and my family to pursue other interests and opportunities."

Williams will become president of Dominion Corporation in Raleigh, a corporation involved in land development, new construction, property management and other personal and family ventures.

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ACTS Gives Hospital Patients  
Television Alternative

Baptist Press  
7/26/85

SAN ANTONIO, Texas (BP)--Patients in the Baptist Memorial Hospital System in San Antonio are finding their visits more bearable with the addition of the American Christian Television System (ACTS) to the hospital closed circuit television programming.

"We chose ACTS primarily because it is a network sponsored by the Radio and Television Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention," noted Chaplain G. Howard Linton, director of the department of religion at Baptist Memorial Hospital System.

Linton added the family orientation and varied format of the network, plus a high degree of confidence in network management, made it a top choice. More than 43,000 patients were admitted to the 1,204-bed system last year.

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Reception of the ACTS network was made possible this spring with the installation of satellite receiver dishes at Baptist Medical Center, Northeast Baptist Hospital and Southeast Baptist Hospital. The hospital system's Institute of Health Education also will use the satellite receivers for educational programming, seminars, teleconferences and possibly even to originate broadcasting from the hospital system.

"It has almost unlimited possibilities now," said Callie Smith, dean of the Institute of Health Education at Baptist Memorial Hospital System.

Some of the earliest uses beyond reception of ACTS for patient viewing were the presentation of a regional teleconference on the Future of the Healthcare Marketplace, and the live broadcast of the Southern Baptist Convention held in Dallas in June.

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Southern Baptists Challenged  
To Walk, Talk Missions

By Michael Tutterow

Baptist Press  
7/26/85

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--"Our nation is a montage of confused and hurting people without any hope of redemption--and they are our responsibility," charged William G. Tanner, president of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

Tanner set the tone for the board's annual conference at Glorieta Baptist Conference Center by challenging the more than 2,000 participants to get personally involved in the lives of hurting people and offer them hope in Jesus Christ.

"If we're serious about our commitment to a hurting land, why don't we do what Jesus did," Tanner suggested. Jesus didn't use "a computer printout to find needy people," he added. "(Missions) always requires personal involvement if you're serious about being a good person."

F. Jack Redford, Home Mission Board director of church extension, echoed Tanner's sentiments to a small-group meeting of church extension workers but charged without new churches, Southern Baptists will have no means to minister to the needs of people.

"A lot of ministry will never be done without churches to do it," claimed Redford. "If we can get churches started and teach them to minister, they will search out the needs and begin to help people."

Redford compared church extension personnel to Allied troops which stormed the Normandy Beach on D-Day during World War II. Many soldiers gave their lives for democracy, he explained, "But I believe we have an even greater cause to which to give our lives: the growing and strengthening of God's church."

He called for a commitment to begin at least 15,000 more churches by the end of the century.

Southern Baptists still have the greatest challenge in front of them: meeting the vast spiritual needs of the American public, said Clifton C. DuVall, the board's national evangelism consultant for prospect discovery. DuVall's conference focused on locating unchurched people for the denomination's 1986 simultaneous crusades, slated for next spring.

DuVall claimed all Christians have a responsibility to act as "shepherds" who are constantly looking for persons without Christ.

"Around all of our churches there are evangelistic prospects, but they are in groups, organizations and housing units unknown to us," he said, challenging Baptists to see individuals within the masses and to cultivate a "people-consciousness" among church members.

"Encourage church members to look for new people moving in," he said. "Set an example yourself, which will encourage them."

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Conference preacher Perry Sanders, pastor of FBC, Lafayette, La., called on Southern Baptists to build "mature" churches which exhibit sensitivity to the world and a total commitment to a biblical purpose while avoiding theological and methodological extremes.

Sanders said any successful strategy of missions "demands the penetration of the whole world, the mobilization of the whole church and the utilization of every method." He noted the Apostle Paul, who said he had become all things to all people in order to share Christ with them, exercised "flexibility" in his approach to missions.

While Southern Baptists must maintain theological integrity in sharing the gospel, "we must not be locked into some narrow approach," said Sanders. "We as God's people must be flexible, imaginative, creative, (while) looking for every avenue, every technique, every method (with which) to share the gospel." He called on Southern Baptists to employ a variety of evangelistic methods, ranging from mass evangelism to the "literary evangelism" employed by Southern Baptist seminary professors.

Sanders said he is weary of "the criticism and condemnation of Southern Baptist seminary professors," adding he personally knows most SBC seminary professors and has found them to be conservative, Bible-believing people. He applauded seminary professors for their commitment to "literary evangelism," or teaching Southern Baptist students a scholarly approach to the Bible.

He also claimed Southern Baptists must be willing to serve those in need. "You can't win a world to Jesus unless you're willing to serve that world and meet its needs," he explained. Through loving actions Southern Baptists can convince others of God's care, he added.

Above all, a verbal presentation of the gospel is needed to complete the church's witness to the world, he said. "If you're only living the Christian life but are not faithful with your mouth in telling the story of Jesus Christ and his love, you have missed one-third of a successful evangelistic ministry," he charged. "We must proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ."

Sanders challenged Southern Baptists to allow their fellowship, their service and their proclamation of the gospel to act as three strands of rope working together "to wrestle the world and bring it to Christ."

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Denomination's Future  
Hinges On Role Of DOMs

By Michael Tutterow

Baptist Press  
7/26/85

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--A Southern Baptist missions leader told more than 150 directors of missions they are the key to the denomination's future in missions, evangelism and education.

Gerald B. Palmer, missions vice-president for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, reminded the group, assembled for Home Missions Conference at Glorieta Baptist Conference Center, the association continues to be the first line of denominational cooperation.

Missions responsibility belongs to local churches, not denominational agencies, explained Palmer, because, "missions must begin within the churches if (missions) is ever to make it out of the churches." Within the association, he added, churches first learn and practice cooperation for the common causes of missions, evangelism and education.

Because directors of missions can either make or break cooperation, they hold "the most strategic role in all of Southern Baptist life," claimed Palmer. "The future of Southern Baptists may well depend on your ability to communicate to and from the churches. You are the living expression of our (denominational) concerns which we cannot, by the nature of distance, express to each church and each church leader."

Though they may receive state or agency funding, "we do not own you," Palmer said, noting the highest expression of the autonomous nature of an association and its integrity and identity is its willingness to cooperate on and with every level of denominational life.

"You are never more free than when you choose to cooperate," Palmer insisted, but cooperation must be anchored to strong theological moorings.

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The British Baptist Union and the Northern Baptist Convention "were weakened and ultimately eliminated as a major evangelistic force (earlier in this century) because they tolerated heresy in the bosom of their denomination," he said. "They were not lost to the cause of missions because they no longer gave to or did missions. They were lost because they lost their reason for doing missions."

Southern Baptists have drawn narrow parameters for faith, Palmer said. Though some may feel "we may draw them too broad, we recognize it is our common purpose in mission, evangelism, education and other concerns which brought us together and hold us together."

Palmer maintained "certain theological assumptions," like a belief in God and personal faith in Christ, undergird the framework of cooperation. "I hear people say what we believe is not important, we just need to work together and love one another," said Palmer. "But...our salvation is dependent upon what we believe. Our actions are dependent upon what we believe. Our motivation (to do missions) finds its wellspring in what we believe."

While theological unity is important, "doctrinal beliefs, no matter how well stated, are of no value unless the beliefs are lived out in love and service," added Palmer. "We could be doctrinally acceptable and yet lose all we have gained in our commitment to the causes of Christ as expressed through the Southern Baptist Convention."

Though "the tide is rising" in support of SBC-wide causes such as volunteerism, state partnerships and commitment to Bold Mission Thrust, the denomination's goal to reach every person with the gospel by the year 2000, Palmer identified several "undertows" which may yet drag the denomination away from its goal of missions and evangelism, warned Palmer.

Southern Baptists are "ignoring the signs of numerical bankruptcy," charged Palmer, who questioned how denominational leaders can honestly "brag about having 14 million members and we know four million of these are non-resident and another three million are inactive."

He added, "Of even greater tragedy than our self-deception are the lives of millions of people who have professed faith in Jesus Christ who either did not mean what they said or have been lost to the service of Christ and his church."

Moral issues, such as alcohol abuse and abortion on demand, have crept into the life of the church and weakened its voice in society, said Palmer. "What is legally permissible is not necessarily morally right," he explained.

Public scandals have erupted in many churches, making it "increasingly difficult for a church to call for moral conduct from its members or to offer a promise of victory for those outside the church struggling with the sins of the flesh," he added. Palmer called on directors of missions to help churches "deal gently with sinners and still deal firmly with sin."

Palmer admitted diversity has left the denomination struggling "to stretch the cloth of fellowship" wide enough to cover all members. "We are still reaping the benefits and dealing with the problems inherent in a people with a cultural unity suddenly dispersed across the face of the nation," he said. "The alternative was a gradual shrinking of the Southern Baptist Convention. We could have inevitably become a people turned in upon ourselves."

Palmer claimed inclusion of ethnics as associational leaders will be one way the association will enable Southern Baptists to deal with diversity. "We will not retain diversity without allowing for freedom of ethnic congregations and electing ethnics to positions of leadership," said Palmer. "If we do not respond to their needs as we ask them to respond to our initiatives, we will fail (in ethnic ministry). We need them more than they need us."

A new generation of leaders who possess an "unquestioned belief in the verities of the faith" and "an unwavering cooperative commitment to missions and evangelism" is needed in Southern Baptist life, said Palmer.

"If Southern Baptists fail (in Bold Mission Thrust), it will not be because we do not know how to cooperate," maintained Palmer. "It will be that our self-interests will so dominate our thinking that we forget that our self-interests are best accomplished as we merge our concerns and resources in accomplishing the purposes of God."

LYNN MAY HO  
HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
901 COMMERCE  
NASHVILLE, TN. 37203

901 Commerce #750  
Nashville, Tennessee 37203

**BAPTIST PRESS**

