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### NATIONAL OFFICE

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

### BUREAUS

ATLANTA Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 873-4041  
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 103 Baptist Building, Dallas, Texas 75201, Telephone (214) 741-1996  
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

November 11, 1986

86-167

Young Requests Prayer  
For Study Committee

By Marv Knox

PHOENIX, Ariz. (BP)--Prayer has been requested for the special fact-finding committee currently studying the relationship between the Southern Baptist Convention and the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.

The seven-member committee was named during the September meeting of the SBC Executive Committee to study a motion made during the 1986 annual meeting of the SBC that called for severing the convention's relationship with the Baptist Joint Committee.

The Baptist Joint Committee is composed of nine Baptist groups in the United States and Canada. Its major task is to support Baptist positions regarding the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

The SBC motion on the Baptist Joint Committee was referred to the Executive Committee, which is to deal with the issue and report back to the convention during its annual meeting next summer. The special committee will report during the next meeting of the Executive Committee in February.

The call to prayer was issued by Gary Young, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church of Phoenix, Ariz., and chairman of the fact-finding committee. "We will meet Nov. 20-21 in Washington with the Baptist Joint Committee staff," he announced. "This will be the first meeting in which our full committee will meet with the Joint Committee staff. It will be our first opportunity to discuss with each other the issues involved.

"It will be a confrontational-type meeting. If the confrontation is healthy, it could lead to solutions. If it is unhealthy, it could complicate our task," he noted, explaining he has requested all Southern Baptists pray for the committee and the meeting, because "I want it to be a healthy meeting."

"This meeting is perhaps more crucial than our report to the Executive Committee, because this meeting probably will shape that report more than any other meeting," Young stressed.

In addition to Young, other members of the special committee are Vice Chairman James Yates, pastor of First Baptist Church of Yazoo City, Miss.; Secretary Carolyn Miller, a homemaker from Huntsville, Ala.; Frank Ingraham, an attorney from Nashville, Tenn.; Frank Lady, an attorney from Jonesboro, Ark.; Paul Pressler, a judge from Houston; and Darrell Robinson, pastor of Dauphin Way Baptist Church in Mobile, Ala.

Ex officio members of the committee are David Maddox, a real estate developer from Fullerton, Calif., and chairman of the Executive Committee, and James Jones, pastor of Campbellsville (Ky.) Baptist Church, chairman of the Executive Committee's administrative and convention arrangements subcommittee.

The fact-finding committee has hired two specialists to help with its research, Young said.

Albert Wardin, history professor at Belmont College in Nashville, Tenn., is doing an integrated study of information about the Joint Committee the special committee has received. As of Nov. 6, the committee had received correspondence from "about 60 sources, coming from all over the Southern Baptist Convention and representing a variety of views," Young said. "We have received about the same number of pieces of press articles, documents, papers and other sources."

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SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL  
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Wardin also is researching editorials, and letters to the editor on the Baptist Joint Committee that have been published in Baptist state papers, Young said. And he is researching resolutions on the Joint Committee that have been passed at the SBC and state convention annual meetings.

In addition, Hugh Wamble, professor of church history at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo., is doing an integrated study of the governmental issues with which the Washington-based agency has dealt during the past 15 years, as well as the results of the Joint Committee's efforts.

The fact-finding committee has received "one large notebook full" of materials for its study, Young said. He is classifying and indexing each piece of material as it is received so committee members will have easy reference and access to material as they do their work.

Duplication of the materials is being done free-of-charge by a family who has joined the Sunday school at Young's church but has not yet joined the congregation. "Our copy machine at church could not handle the load," he said. "We're talking about reams of paper."

The fact-finding committee's meeting with the Baptist Joint Committee staff will be from 1 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 20, to 4 p.m. Friday, Nov. 21, Eastern Standard Time. The meetings will be open to the public, Young said.

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AIDS Medical Group  
Says Pastors Can Help

By David Wilkinson

Baptist Press  
11/11/86

DALLAS (BP)--Pastors, not just physicians, will be key players in the nation's battle against AIDS, claimed members of a special AIDS Task Force at Baylor University Medical Center in Dallas.

Ministers, they said, can help in two critical areas: educating the public about AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) and counseling AIDS victims and their families.

"I think ministers, above everyone else, need to be educated about AIDS," stressed William Sutker, a Baylor University Medical Center internist who specializes in infectious diseases.

Sutker, who has treated about 85 AIDS patients, said AIDS victims "may or may not get accurate medical information and proper medical care, but regardless, they are going to need the emotional and spiritual support that the pastor and the church can give."

AIDS results from a virus that attacks the body's immune system, leaving the victim defenseless against deadly "opportunistic diseases." The disease already has killed 15,000 Americans, most of them homosexual men.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, more than 1 million Americans have been infected with the AIDS virus.

There is no cure for AIDS, although a new drug may prolong the life of AIDS victims by inhibiting the virus.

While homosexual men and intravenous drug abusers are the two groups most affected thus far, Surgeon General C. Everett Koop has warned the disease is now moving increasingly into the heterosexual community. In response to the AIDS threat, Koop has called for increased sex education among teenagers and children.

Seven members of the Baylor task force were interviewed for Baptist Press a week after the release of the surgeon general's report on AIDS.

While calling for increased leadership from pastors and confronting the AIDS crisis, Sutker and other task force members warned the task will be difficult. In addressing the AIDS issue, pastors must deal with "a double-edged sword," said Sutker.

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"On the one hand, you must deal with the facts. AIDS is a terrible disease, and there is no cure," he explained. "People need to know you can get the virus through sexual contact. On the other hand, this is a virus that is hard to get. People are already paranoid about this, and it's easy to feed this kind of mass hysteria if you don't know the facts."

Alain Marengo-Roe, director of special hematology and the blood bank at Baylor, pointed out pastors can be helpful in providing factual information about blood donations and transfusions. A person, he noted, cannot get AIDS by donating blood. In the case of blood transfusions, an effective test has been developed to screen out AIDS-infected blood so transfusions now carry little risk—about one in 100,000, according to the surgeon general's report.

Marengo-Roe urged pastors to join appeals to high-risk persons—homosexual men and intravenous drug abusers—to exclude themselves from blood donations. "Unfortunately," he said, "my impression has been that the more religious a person is, the more likely he is not to tell the truth, whereas the person who could care less about sexual morality will be truthful" in answering pre-donation screening questions.

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Houston Church Begins To FOCUS  
Ministry On AIDS Patients, Families

By Ken Camp

Baptist Press  
11/11/86

HOUSTON (BP)—A small group at South Main Baptist Church in Houston is reaching out in compassion to a group often ignored—and even purposely rejected—by some Christians.

The ministry group is called FOCUS—short for Focus On Caring, Understanding and Support—and its purpose is to offer a supportive Christian community to AIDS victims and their families.

"We're not on any kind of crusade. We're not trying to make a social statement," says Bill Turner, pastor of South Main Church. "Some people saw a need, we issued an invitation and a group responded."

AIDS, acquired immune deficiency syndrome, is a viral disease that attacks the body's immune system, leaving patients vulnerable to infection. More than 25,000 cases of AIDS have been reported in the United States since 1981, and about 15,000 Americans already have died as a result.

"Almost every church in our city either has been or soon will be impacted by AIDS," says Turner, noting South Main directed its attention to AIDS following a citywide clergy consultation on AIDS involving about 50 ministers from various denominations. "The reality of this thing is that if AIDS hasn't impacted your church this year, it probably will next year," he adds.

Because the AIDS virus is transmitted through body fluids, it has been most common among intravenous drug users and among homosexual and bisexual males in this country. However, in Haiti and parts of Africa, the disease has become more common among heterosexuals, and experts fear it could spread in a similar manner in the United States. Medical evidence indicates the virus cannot be spread through casual contact with patients.

Turner emphasizes AIDS is not an exclusively homosexual disease, and it should not be seen as divine retribution directed toward that group.

"I don't believe it's God's judgment on homosexuals, as some have said," says Turner. "In a church our size, there may be some of our members who feel that it is. But regardless of that, we all realize the larger theological issue: We need to minister to people in need."

The FOCUS ministry was begun last May under the direction of Robert Carter, a counselor at West Oaks Psychiatric Hospital. Carter, a graduate of the clinical pastoral ministry program at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, was working as a volunteer with the Houston AIDS Foundation prior to beginning FOCUS.

Carter says his first task in preparing South Main for an AIDS-related ministry was education. "Most of the first month was spent in education—teaching people what AIDS was and what it wasn't. I spent a lot of time trying to answer the fears and questions people had."

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FOCUS group members work in cooperation with South Main's food pantry and on-site feeding ministry to prepare and deliver food to AIDS patients, as well as visiting patients at home or in hospitals to offer help and counsel.

When the specialized diets of AIDS patients require food that is not stocked in the pantry, the groceries are purchased using money from a designated fund at South Main. Carter says members of other Baptist churches in Houston have contributed to the fund.

When patients' family members from out-of-town come to visit, FOCUS group members arrange housing for the families, opening their own homes to the visitors.

Recently, FOCUS helped to begin a support group for the families of AIDS patients which meets twice a month at South Main Church. The support group, the first of its kind in Houston, is led by two therapists from Covenant Baptist Church, a congregation dually aligned with the Southern Baptist Convention and American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.

"Getting the word out to families is difficult," says Carter, noting families of AIDS patients often are reluctant to let anyone know they have relatives with the disease. Families who do attend the support group are assured their identity and anything they say in the group will be treated confidentially.

Although the purpose of the FOCUS ministry is not expressly evangelistic, group members have had occasion to offer spiritual as well as physical ministry to patients.

"I don't have any agenda going in that I'm going to talk about the Bible and Jesus with patients, but without exception, the topic does come up eventually," says Carter. He adds that of those he has dealt with who have died, all had made their peace with God. Carter led memorial services at South Main for two AIDS victims to whom the FOCUS group had ministered, one a Catholic, the other Methodist.

Turner says the one serious drawback to the FOCUS ministry is that it has been misunderstood by some who view it as South Main's acceptance of homosexuality. He explained in a recent church newsletter column that the FOCUS ministry is meant to be a compassionate, Christian response to hurting people and should not be seen as endorsement of a homosexual lifestyle.

"It's obvious that the biblical sexual ethic calls for heterosexual relationships within the context of marriage, viewing homosexuality as an unacceptable lifestyle," Turner wrote. "Not living up to the biblical ideal, however, is not restricted to one group—thus, homosexual individuals are not objects for our condemnation. They are persons of value, created in God's image."

"The more I work in this area, the harder it gets not to get angry at people who are judgmental," says Carter. "But I realize that those attitudes come out of ignorance and fear, and only through education about AIDS can we relieve those fears."

Turner says South Main Church has a long history of ministry to people in need through its food pantry for the poor, its international ministry and its ministry to cancer patients at M.D. Anderson Medical Center. He views the FOCUS ministry as the logical next step.

"We're not here to judge lifestyles. We're here to minister to patients and their families," says Turner. "Our FOCUS ministry simply is a group of people who don't endorse homosexuality as an acceptable Christian lifestyle but who realize that the larger moral imperative is to minister to 'the least of these' as Jesus commanded."

Poor Hurt The Most  
By El Salvador Quake

By Erich Bridges

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador (BP)—The poor of San Salvador, El Salvador, who could least afford it, were hurt most by the earthquake that struck the city in October.

Between 150,000 and 300,000 people remain homeless in a city of 1.1 million, according to varying government and private estimates. Authorities admit there is no reliable way to determine a precise number.

Southern Baptist missionary Lee Ann McAninch explains why. "I was taking down names and addresses for the people who were to receive the food we were giving out," she says, describing missionary relief efforts in the days after the quake. "And one after another I got a whole list of people who said they don't have an address anymore."

Two of the homeless people McAninch encountered were a grandmother and small child. The child "had sores all over his face, and his foot had been hit by something, and he had a big sore on his foot," she recalls. "He was sitting on the ground, picking at the sore with his filthy hands while his grandmother was waiting in line to get some food we were handing out. All she had put on him was a little piece of rag she had tied around his foot. They didn't have any water there, so she couldn't bathe him or clean him up."

Beyond the many identifiable neighborhoods ruined by the quake and its aftershocks, countless squatter shacks scattered around the city disappeared. Their anonymous inhabitants now join the other homeless who are living, literally, on the streets. Traffic remains snarled in some areas while authorities struggle to prevent people from setting up makeshift shelters in the middle of intersections.

Tremors continue, and many people fear going back indoors. But the U.S. government has contributed \$50 million for reconstruction efforts, and numerous private groups, including Salvadoran Baptists and Southern Baptist missionaries, are working to provide temporary and permanent shelters for the homeless.

"We think there's probably enough that has been sent into the country to take care of most of the people now," McAninch reports. "The problem is getting it to the people who really need it."

Confusion reigned during early relief efforts as international volunteers and emergency aid shipments inundated the city. Then "the committee"—a joint government-private sector group—began overseeing relief work and distribution of incoming aid. Coordination improved, officials say, but some relief agencies expressed concern that aid shipments might not reach their intended destinations.

At the missionaries' request, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board sent aid money directly to the field rather than shipping in relief materials from outside El Salvador. A number of other private groups did the same. U.S. officials still are recommending that approach.

Meanwhile, the six Southern Baptist missionaries and their families are trying to put their own lives back into order. McAninch, who was downtown when the earthquake hit hard, remembers "feeling like I was all cut off and I couldn't get to my children," Kristie, 13, and Julia, 10."

Once she knew her family was safe, she admits being tempted to jump on a plane and get out. She could not sleep for several nights until sheer exhaustion from relief work overcame worry about the continuing tremors.

"It seems kind of strange, because we've lived here for so long and we've gotten used to knowing there's a guerrilla war going on and you have to be careful where you go," she reflects. "But that in comparison to this is nothing, because a guerrilla attack is so isolated. It doesn't hit everywhere at one time. But the earthquake ... there's just nowhere to go to get away from the tremors unless you leave the city completely. It was just a terrible feeling of helplessness."

Missionary Peggy Alums, who recently transferred from Panama with her husband and two children, experienced the same feelings. The Alums family slept outside the first night after the quake, and, like the other families, slept on the floor in the living room, nearer the exit door, for several nights until their apartment was confirmed to be safe. But like McAninch, Alums immersed herself in relief efforts and even found herself in areas she once feared entering.

"We are new here, and there are a lot of areas where I have not felt comfortable going because of the war situation," she relates. But taking food into some of those places helped her overcome her misgivings. "Mothers and grandmothers come over, and it is a very close feeling, that we had shared (this experience) with them."

Even the missionary kids who were old enough got involved, helping cut plastic sheeting for temporary shelters, loading trucks and riding along to deliver supplies to stricken neighborhoods.

The two missionaries also credit veteran colleagues Bill and Libby Stennett, who experienced the deadly Guatemala earthquake of 1976, with "calming everybody down."

The Baptist bookstore, which received minor damage, has reopened, although numerous buildings nearby collapsed during and after the quake. Salvadoran Baptists are aiding hundreds of homeless families, including many church members. Life goes on.

There is talk of moving the capital to another location, away from the large fault it sits on. But one Salvadoran newspaper reported the region has suffered 20 major earthquakes since 1575. Every time, history reveals, the inhabitants rebuilt on the same spot.

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

West Virginians  
Exchange Execs

Baptist Press  
11/11/86

MORGANTOWN, W.Va. (BP)—West Virginia Baptists said goodbye to one executive director and greeted another at their annual meeting Nov. 7-8 at Calvary Baptist Church in Morgantown.

Messengers bid farewell to Thomas E. Halsell, who has been executive secretary of the West Virginia Convention of Southern Baptists for seven years. He will retire Dec. 31. Messengers officially greeted Thomas A. Kinchen, who has been a professor at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, who will take over the executive position Jan. 1, 1987.

The convention adopted a record budget of \$1,519,076, of which West Virginia congregations will contribute \$678,965. The remainder will come from contributions by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and Southern Baptist Baptist Sunday School Board. West Virginia Baptists will contribute 25 percent of the gifts from state convention congregations—\$169,771—to the worldwide missions, evangelism and educational causes of the Southern Baptist Convention through the Cooperative Program. The 25 percent is up 1 percent from CP contributions a year ago.

During the meeting, messengers adopted a resolution affirming the sanctity of human life and opposing abortion for any cause except to protect the life of the mother.

Messengers also adopted a resolution on gambling. The resolution said gambling is "immoral and a sin" and put the convention on record expressing strong opposition to any form of gambling.

A third resolution expressed prayerful support for government leaders in the light of many conflicts going on in the world and as they deal with issues affecting the moral condition of the country.

Lawton Searcy, pastor of Highland Baptist Church in Huntington, was elected president of the convention in a close run-off with Odel Clay, pastor of East Williamson Baptist Church of Williamson. Clay was then elected first vice president.

The 1987 convention will be in First Baptist Church of Ceredo, Nov. 6-7.

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Trustee Chairman Urges  
Respect Amid Differences

By Linda Lawson

PICKENS, S.C. (BP)—An atmosphere in which people with diverse opinions can respect and love one another while working out their differences for the welfare of God and the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board is the goal of the pastor now serving as chairman of the 85-member trustee board.

"I would like to see the harmony of a local Baptist church doing the work of the Lord with its diverse people," said Lloyd Batson, pastor of First Baptist Church of Pickens, S.C. "If you do that, you can work out most anything."

Batson, 62, speaks out of long experience as a pastor helping people work out differences for the sake of the church and the kingdom of God.

He has spent almost half his life, a few months more than 30 years, as pastor of the 900-member congregation. He and his wife, Joy, moved to Pickens in 1956 shortly after he had received his doctor of theology degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

After more than 30 years of sermon preparation, writing a weekly column in the church bulletin and serving in many denominational positions including president of the South Carolina convention, Batson says the greatest source of fulfillment in his ministry has been "daily involvement with people."

Picking up a firecracker from his desk, he illustrates his point. Last July he wrote a column about a used firecracker he had picked up on the church parking lot. "The next day I found a sack full of firecrackers on my desk. I have no idea who they came from. This is part of the special exchange between people," he says.

While Batson receives gifts, tangible and intangible, from his people, he also gives many. Wedding ceremonies, for example—he writes an original ceremony as a gift for every couple he marries.

Known popularly as the "Bishop of Pickens County," Batson has given himself to the people of his church and the community at large.

John Roberts, editor of the Baptist Courier, newsjournal of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, says Batson is "friend, counselor, adviser, Christian minister to the entire community. His advice is sought on a wide range of things, from serious personal problems to location of the county's best fishing places."

Batson also has given himself to denominational service.

He has been camp pastor at McCall Royal Ambassador Camp for one week each summer since it opened 27 years ago. He is completing his fourth five-year term as a trustee at nearby Furman University in Greenville, S.C. He has been a trustee of the Sunday School Board since 1977.

His years as a trustee of the board have made him "a bigger fan than I've ever been because I see how multifaceted it is. There is no question in my mind that the Sunday School Board is the most influential institution that exists in Southern Baptist life."

He views denominational service as part of his total ministry.

"I've learned to appreciate the multiplying of the ministry of this church. We have involved ourselves in support of the denomination and I'm a part of it," says Batson. The church has supported the denomination financially, being second in the state in 1985 in per capita giving to the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program.

As a trustee of the Sunday School Board, Batson served on the search committee which in 1983 recommended Lloyd Elder as president. He calls the experience "the single most pleasurable assignment I've ever had in denominational service. There were no vested interests, no candidates, no hidden agendas."

He calls Elder "a man of integrity, eminent good sense, a man of guts."

Batson has become known among trustees for his stories of life in Pickens County, stories he claims are all true and come out of "things just happening. I'm glad the Lord put a sense of humor in me. I can wake up in the night worried, think of something funny and get purged."

A sense of humor, a conviction that differences can be resolved and absolute confidence in the power of God give Batson an optimistic view of the future of Southern Baptists.

"While human hands handle the church, it is divine. The church belongs to God," Batson says. "I feel the same about Southern Baptists. He's got more at stake with us than I've got."

"Southern Baptists not only will survive, they will thrive," he predicts. "It may require readjustments, even confession and renewal."

Batson's long tenure at Pickens may, in part, have been conditioned by his father, who spent 34 years as pastor of Graham Baptist Church in Sumter County, S.C.

He notes he regularly is asked if he is still at Pickens, as though some would have expected him to move on.

"I can't get done here what needs to be done," he reflects. "I've never seen a preacher any happier than me, so I don't see any point in jumping around."

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

Home Missionary Calls For  
More Awareness Of Others

By Karen Benson

Baptist Press  
11/11/86

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)—Southern Baptists need to become more "cosmopolitan" and realize other people have different presumptions that undergird their thinking, a Southern Baptist home missionary insisted.

Speaking to Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union members, George Sheridan called for more understanding of other faiths on the part of Southern Baptists. Sheridan is interfaith witness regional director for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, based in Union, N.J.

"Southern Baptists may not realize the fact of 'foreignness'—that people have different basic questions and different basic answers," he said. For example, Jews are not ignorant about Christianity, he explained. They have chosen not to be Christians, even though they understand what Christianity is all about.

"Frequently, the reason is the pitiful witness of Christians," he said, citing open anti-Semitism expressed by some Christians. If Christians could show a greater understanding about Judaism and could better understand themselves and their attitudes toward others, a deeper sense of "otherness" might develop that could do more to help their Christian witness than anything else, Sheridan said.

Christians should be more knowledgeable of their world and be visible in the world to affect change, he added, noting, "So much of what we say and do has nothing to do with what's going on in the world."

Such isolation from world events is even reflected in prayers heard in the churches, he said. Christians should be in deep prayer for people and needs throughout the world, not simply in their own regions: "We tend to be isolated in the world. We just don't seem to know about what's going on anywhere else."

It is also important to the Christian witness that "we not be boring," Sheridan said. "We need to restore passion in our churches."

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Southern Baptists should know about and care about the recent conflict in the denomination, he said: "The schism in the churches is something we ought to be concerned about. We should tend to the 'corporate witness' and mutually enhance each other."

Those in the denomination "don't realize that Roman Catholics, when they hear the term 'Southern Baptist' have an image of us, too. They think of leaders of the super churches, of Jimmy Carter and Billy Graham and even some people who aren't Southern Baptist like Jimmy Swaggart. These people can personify 'Southern Baptist' in the public mind."

Thus, part of Sheridan's ministry involves helping people of other faiths understand Southern Baptists and the denomination's deep commitment to evangelism and missions, he said, explaining, "I try to get across the ethnic diversity of Southern Baptists, and I work to have Northerners take Southerners and Southern Baptists seriously."

Part of such bridge-building involves conferences between leaders of various faiths, he said. During the recent Baptist-Jewish Symposium on the Jews and the New Testament, Jewish leaders realized the "essentiality of our commitment to evangelism."

In September, high-level representatives of Southern Baptists and the Synagogue Council of America met "to discuss an area in which we have commonality—the American family," he said. A broader purpose was to develop contacts between Baptist and Jewish leaders.

A meeting with Catholic leaders in which Baptists discuss how the Catholic faith is presented to Southern Baptists is one more avenue for better relationship between faith groups.

But there is so much more to be done, and the task will require all Southern Baptists doing their parts to be more understanding and knowledgeable about other peoples, other faiths, Sheridan said.

That may not be easy, he said, but "we have a job to do."

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Church Discovers Growth  
By Giving Away Its Members

By Joe Westbury

Baptist Press  
11/11/86

ATLANTA (BP)—While many Southern Baptist churches are striving to swell their ranks with new members, Briarlake Baptist Church has discovered it grows best by giving members away.

The suburban Atlanta church has learned giving its members to help start new churches has a renewing effect and helps the church grow even stronger. Since it was constituted 27 years ago, the congregation has helped start 30 new Baptist churches across the nation; many have since begun missions of their own.

"I believe the New Testament pattern is that churches should beget churches just like Christians beget Christians," Pastor Hoffman Harris explains.

That kind of attitude led the 3,600-member congregation, which began as a mission itself, to combine its evangelistic ministry with launching new missions whenever possible. It's an adventure of constant renewal and rebirth that Briarlake hopes other churches can experience.

Nelson Tilton, director of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's church starting department, says research shows new churches grow at a faster rate than most established churches. New churches are the denomination's greatest hope for reaching its global evangelization goals by the end of the century, he adds.

Tilton acknowledges most Southern Baptist churches plateau in membership at 10 years of age and 80 percent are not growing at all. "A newly established mission requires nine people to reach another person for Christ, while the figure drops to between 24 and 35 members for our Southern Baptist churches nationwide. The facts are simple. New churches are more effective in reaching lost people," he says.

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The denomination's Bold Mission Thrust goals call for having 50,000 churches by the year 2000. That means the convention's 37,000 congregations must start 13,000 new churches in the remaining 13 years of this century.

"We have our work cut out for us, and we need more key mission churches like Briarlake to serve as models for other congregations," Tilton says.

Harris, who has been Briarlake's only pastor, admits he is not threatened when a new church is formed in his community. To the contrary, he often has given the pastor a list of prospective members from Briarlake's files. He's even encouraged his members to consider the new mission as an opportunity for their talents.

"I'm convinced it never hurt any congregation to give people or money to start a new church," Harris says. "There's no room for jealousy in the kingdom. The stronger these new works can become, the stronger we can be."

Giving his own members to help launch missions is a key ingredient in Harris' method of spreading the gospel. One of Briarlake's boldest ventures took 156 members to help constitute a church in the rapidly growing Stone Mountain area of Atlanta in 1969. That congregation, Smokerise Baptist Church, is now one of the fastest-growing churches in the Southern Baptist Convention.

Although Briarlake was only 10 years old at the time, its members had the vision for the need of a church in the Stone Mountain community and pledged their support to the ministry. Briarlake negotiated for 15 acres of land for the mission only six miles from its doorstep, paid the infant group's expenses for the first year and loaned its assistant pastor until it could get off its feet. Smokerise since has grown into a 2,500-member congregation with a \$1.2 million budget in one of Atlanta's fastest-growing influential neighborhoods.

Two years ago Briarlake again helped a mission purchase 17 acres of land, contributed \$23,000 toward the pastor's salary and gave 10 of its best families to help begin Atkinson Road Baptist Church in fast-growing Gwinnett County. That new congregation has since begun two Bible study groups that have matured into missions of their own, Harris says.

The church always is looking for new ways of becoming involved in church starting. Due to job-related transfers of many of its young members to areas of the nation where Southern Baptist work is still in its infancy, Briarlake has helped those members establish new missions in their communities.

Mission volunteers such as census takers, carpenters, youth choirs and Vacation Bible School and Backyard Bible Club leaders have been drafted to bring the gospel to such pioneer areas of the country.

"The pastor is the key to having a missions-minded church," Harris notes. "I teach and preach missions, encouraging our people to be personally involved. Once people get a taste of missions, they want to do more."

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

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