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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
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

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Conservative Southern Baptists
Start New Missions Organization

By Marv Knox

N-CO

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--A group of conservative Southern Baptists has created a missions organization designed to start churches.

Chartered by two pastors and a layman, the Genesis Commission will recruit and finance like-minded pastors, who will plant Baptist churches, primarily in foreign countries.

Commission leaders are Bill Darnell, formerly pastor of Kirby Woods Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn., and now executive director of the commission; John Morgan, pastor of Sagemont Baptist Church in Houston; and Randy Best, lay member of Second Baptist Church in Houston.

Also on the board of the new organization, which had its first board meeting in November, is Paige Patterson, president of Criswell Center for Biblical Studies in Dallas which includes Criswell College, a school which offers both undergraduate and graduate degrees and is sponsored by First Baptist Church of Dallas.

Both Darnell and Patterson declined to name other board members. Patterson commented it is "very premature to say very much about it since it is in such an infant stage."

Darnell, who founded the 1,500 member Kirby Woods Church in Memphis about six years ago, said, "About eight months ago I felt led to start an organization to plant churches."

When Darnell took a paid leave of absence from his church last April to begin the ministry, he originally planned to help start churches in "pioneer" areas of the United States, where Southern Baptists are scarce, he told Baptist Press.

But since that time, the concept has grown. "Now we're targeting Mexico for church planting work, using national pastors indigenous to their areas," he explained, noting the Genesis Commission hopes to launch between 20 and 30 new churches in 1987. "We'd like to start thousands of churches (in a variety of countries). But we want 30 next year," he said in late December.

Patterson told Baptist Press: "I think the general disposition of the guys on the board is that while we will have certain specific interest areas, we wouldn't say no to funding anybody who wants to start a church anywhere. I don't really see any limitations as far as where we will work."

Darnell spoke of the source of the Genesis Commission's name as he described its reason for existence: "'Genesis' is an Old Testament term that means beginning, and our goal is to begin churches. 'Commission' refers to the fulfillment of the Great Commission, and we believe the local church is the fulfillment of that. That's why we're committed only to starting local churches; we want to begin works that will last and remain. ... It's the Great Commission; that's our only motive."

The organization will be headquartered in Houston when Darnell moves his family there after the school year ends next summer, he said. But with the charter and bylaws complete, he said, the group expects to begin initial work during the early months of the year.

"We have targeted all the theological schools in Mexico," he said. "We will fly in and visit with the administrative staffs and get some of their best graduates, and we hope to use those guys. We'll help them financially, and we'll have a weaning process so they'll be on their own in four or five years."

All preachers will be Baptists, Darnell said. He noted the "weaning process"—similar to the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's church pastoral aid program, in which a church gets a decreased pastoral supplement each year as its ability to support a minister increases—as well as small staff will enable the commission to support a maximum number of mission pastors.

The commission is expected to hire an assistant to Darnell, who will participate in on-field recruitment and arrangements, and necessary secretarial staff. "We want to try to keep the American staff down so we don't have to spend so many dollars to operate," he explained.

To ensure its stability, the commission has received "a pledge of a certain amount of money to run our organization for 10 years," he said, declining to cite the specific source or sources of the money and its exact amount. He said it is "around" \$2 million, "maybe a little more."

"That amount will run the organization for 10 years, so any other money we raise can go directly to starting churches," he noted. "That money (for starting other churches) will be secured in other ways."

Of the commission's fund-raising and development efforts, he said: "We're going to basically let laymen do that. They know how to raise money. We preachers are going to be the spiritual force behind it. The laymen will raise money, and we'll tap into the nationals and plant churches."

Some observers have warned the new mission effort might conflict with the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, as well as the board's Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for Foreign Missions and the Southern Baptist Convention's Cooperative Program, a unified budgeting process which, among other things, helps finance the board's work in 108 countries.

Darnell denied such an interpretation of the commission's activity: "We're not in competition with the Foreign Mission Board. That's false. We just want to win people to Jesus. We're all Southern Baptists, and we're all excited."

He said "in no way" does he believe there will be competition between the commission and the board: "I think there's so much money in this world we're petty and little when we think this way. If we're winning people to Jesus, that's the bottom line, and I'll stand by that."

"We would love to be in a very cooperative agreement" with Southern Baptist missionaries on foreign fields, he said. "We're not wanting to run ahead of anyone or do something that is counterproductive. If there's a lack of cooperation, it will not be from our end."

"We're thrilled about whatever the Foreign Mission Board does as it relates to sharing the gospel," Darnell added, noting board ministries such as agricultural expertise, medical aid and education will not be taken up by the Genesis Commission. "We feel like God has called us to narrow our charter to starting the churches. That's not a reflection on these other ministries; it does not mean we feel they are wrong."

Patterson said the primary concern of the Genesis Commission "is to win people and establish churches and to do as many as we can. We are committed to establishing Baptist churches ... and urging them to work with existing Baptist groups in the United States and in Mexico. We do not see we are working in an opposite direction at all. We do not see ourselves as competitive (to the Foreign Mission Board) but as having an augmenting role."

The Dallas educator, who has been at the forefront of the effort to turn the SBC into a more conservative direction, said the focus will be to use nationals—"folks coming out of their own culture"—to start the churches. He added he "does not envision the Genesis Commission" as a vehicle to send Criswell College graduates to the mission field.

Patterson, however, expressed concern about the FMB's "restrictive regulations" about the appointment of persons who have graduated from schools other than the six Southern Baptist seminaries. Currently, the FMB requires persons desiring appointment who have not graduated from one of the SBC schools but who have graduate degrees to spend a year at one of the SBC institutions prior to appointment.

"If they (the FMB) persists in the present policy they had better get ready for a proliferation of organizations for appointing and sustaining missionaries because if a man is called to foreign missions and the Foreign Mission Board says no, folks are going to find a way to go. We do not, however, see Genesis as doing that (appointing and supporting missionaries)," Patterson added.

Foreign Mission Board President R. Keith Parks has said he would like to visit with Genesis Commission leaders, and Darnell said he would welcome such a meeting. "We're very open," Darnell said, acknowledging they have had difficulty finding a suitable date for both sides to come together but adding, "That would be an exciting meeting."

Baptist Press attempted to contact Best and Morgan, but both were unavailable for comment during the Christmas/New Year holiday season.

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Leaders Respond To New
Missions Organization

By Marv Knox

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—The Genesis Commission, an organization founded by conservative Southern Baptists to help start new churches, deals "with the very heart of who we are as Southern Baptists," the denomination's foreign missions leader responded.

R. Keith Parks, president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, said he would welcome an opportunity to meet with Genesis Commission leaders and share with them the nature and scope of the board's work.

The commission has been chartered by three Southern Baptists: Randy Best, a layman and member of Second Baptist Church in Houston; Bill Darnell, former pastor of Kirby Woods Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn., and executive director of the new organization; and John Morgan, pastor of Sagemont Baptist Church in Houston. The other known commission board member is Paige Patterson, president of the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies in Dallas.

Some observers have seen the Genesis Commission as potentially in opposition to the Foreign Mission Board in two areas.

First is competition for funds from supporting Southern Baptists. The board receives support from the convention's Cooperative Program unified budget and from the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, taken in Southern Baptist churches. Because the Genesis Commission is avowedly Southern Baptist, observers and some board supporters have said they fear support for the commission will come from potential support for the board.

Darnell told Baptist Press his group is not in competition with the board and he believes Southern Baptists have enough money to support both ministries. "Although no gift would be refused, there is no plan to go to the churches to seek their gifts," Patterson added.

Second is a perceived disparagement of the board's broader ministries—such as agricultural expertise, medical aid and education—by Genesis Commission leaders, who have designed their organization strictly to start churches.

"We're thrilled about whatever the Foreign Mission Board does as it relates to sharing the gospel," Darnell said. He noted the commission's emphasis on church starting is "not a reflection on these other ministries; it does not mean we feel they are wrong."

"I was amazed ... that this would have to be viewed competitively," Patterson said. "We didn't see it that way at all. Randy Best is a new Baptist, and he was totally innocent of wanting to do anything competitive. The genesis of the Genesis Commission actually has nothing to do with being competitive with either (foreign or home mission) board or with the present political conflict within the convention, other than I suppose it is inevitable that anybody involved would have some position on what is going on in the convention."

Both Genesis Commission and Foreign Mission Board leaders said they are attempting to set a date for a meeting between the two groups.

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Parks said he particularly feels a conference between commission leaders and board officials is in order. He explained he wants "them to get a little clearer understanding about what we do. I don't think they fully appreciate the focus we're making on evangelism and the starting of churches."

Southern Baptists' foreign force of more than 3,700 missionaries includes a variety of specialists, such as doctors, business managers and musicians, but the missionary preacher is considered the backbone of the effort, he stressed. All missionaries, regardless of specialty, are expected to practice personal evangelism and to encourage church growth, he added, also noting the board has not started hospitals or schools—about which some observers had seen the Genesis Commission as being critical—for a long time.

Parks pointed out the ratio of baptisms to church members in overseas churches related to the board runs 12 to 1, far better than the 42 to 1 ratio in the Southern Baptist Convention.

In 1985, overseas churches baptized 158,626 people, an average of 435 per day. Membership in those churches surpassed 2 million, and the number of churches increased to 15,635, a gain of almost 6 percent over 1984. Counting chapels and preaching points, which are the churches of the future, the total was almost 33,000.

However, other ministries are vital to such evangelism, Parks insisted. "We feel that training leadership through seminaries and training membership through the production of literature is really supportive of the evangelistic church-starting thrust."

Noting the potential for competition between the board and the commission, he said: "The only support we have comes from Southern Baptists. If they (the Genesis Commission) go to the same Southern Baptists for support, I can't see it as being anything else than direct competition.

"I also feel that since our convention, according to our constitution and our history, has organized around missions, that when someone sets out to form a new mission board, I think they're dealing with the very heart of who we are as Southern Baptists, and I think it is a development we should be very concerned about.

"I think it comes down to the question of whether we are committed to cooperative efforts inclusive of the wide range of Southern Baptist interests, or whether we want to trim back from that stream of Southern Baptist life and focus on restrictive viewpoints."

News of the formation of the Genesis Commission also drew response from Carolyn Weatherford, national executive director of the Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union.

"The foundational commitment of Woman's Missionary Union is to undergird Southern Baptist home and foreign mission endeavors," Weatherford said. "Our whole organization of 1.2 million women and girls is dedicated to supporting mission causes that Southern Baptists undertake cooperatively.

"We always are pleased to see other denominations and other organizations who are eager to win the world for Christ," she added. "However, we will remain unwaveringly committed to supporting only those missions enterprises that have been undertaken in the cooperative manner for which Southern Baptists are so well respected."

Southern Baptist Convention President Adrian Rogers said he had not been aware of the Genesis Commission until news reports of the organization began to circulate just before Christmas. Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, said he had never spoken to Darnell, formerly a fellow pastor in Memphis, about the commission.

"I'm in favor of anybody trying to impact the world for Jesus Christ," Rogers said, noting that "must be the motive of Bill Darnell" and his colleagues.

"At the same time, I am grateful for Southern Baptists' cooperative effort" at conducting mission work across the United States and around the world, he said. He called the Cooperative Program a "remarkable plan for spreading the gospel of Christ."

The Genesis Commission is "not part of a concerted conservative effort in the Southern Baptist Convention that I know of," Rogers told Baptist Press. "I would not want this to be perceived as an anti-denominational effort."

He added: "We always have had ancillary (missions) efforts within the Southern Baptist Convention. We have a history of this." He pointed to previous lay missions efforts by former SBC President Owen Cooper and former foreign missionary "Dub" Jackson.

On a positive note, Rogers said he sees more cohesion by Southern Baptist conservatives around convention causes, "because of our cohesion theologically." He predicted Southern Baptists may be moving into their greatest age of missions endeavors.

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Ruschlikon Leader To Resign
For Pastorate In Alabama

By Art Toalston

N - FMB
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RICHMOND, Va. (BP)—J. Altus Newell, president of the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Ruschlikon, Switzerland, has announced his resignation to become the pastor of a church in Alabama.

Newell's decision came after members of Dawson Memorial Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala., voted unanimously Dec. 21 to call him as their pastor. He will resign as seminary president and as a Southern Baptist missionary March 10.

Prior to his missionary appointment to Switzerland in July 1984, Newell had been pastor of First Baptist Church of Opelika, Ala., for two years and pastor of St. Matthews Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky., from 1975 to 1982.

In a letter to the seminary community in Switzerland, Newell wrote "Ruschlikon has a crucial mission to prepare persons for effective ministry in Europe and in Baptists' world mission." Yet, in a decision that has "not come ... easily or quickly," he has concluded, "my gifts are better suited for the pastorate than for seminary administration."

"I have just really missed being a pastor," Newell said in a telephone interview the day after agreeing to lead the 6,900-member church in Birmingham.

The seminary's six-member executive board will meet Feb. 20-21 and likely will name a search committee for Newell's successor, said Isam Ballenger, one of two executive board members representing the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, which jointly sponsors the seminary with the European Baptist Federation. Ballenger is director of Southern Baptist missions work in Europe and the Middle East.

"We had certainly hoped for a much longer period under Dr. Newell's leadership," said Knud Wumpelmann, general secretary of the European Baptist Federation. "But we wish for him and his family much blessing upon their future work in a great church in the U.S.A."

Ballenger and Wumpelmann, who is chairman of the seminary's executive board, commended Newell in guiding the seminary through a time of financial crisis stemming from the falling value of the U.S. dollar, which equaled an average of 2.55 Swiss francs during 1985 but has since fallen to 1.6 francs.

At the beginning of 1986, a deficit of 180,000 to 200,000 Swiss francs was projected in the seminary's budget, or \$90,000 to \$100,000 in U.S. dollars. By April, the projected shortfall had grown to 240,000 francs. But European Baptists have responded to the crisis by increasing their giving to the seminary by 50 percent, while contributions from supporters in the United States, including a number of churches, have increased 40 percent. And the seminary budget has been trimmed by 80,000 francs.

Thus year-end reports for the seminary likely will be in the black, an upswing "brought about largely through the efforts of Dr. Newell. I think all would agree on that," said Stanley Crabb, director of the European Baptist Press Service and a Southern Baptist missionary in Switzerland.

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Newell said he has been "heartened by many positive developments at Ruschlikon" during his tenure, including the establishment of an Institute of World Mission, Evangelism and Church Growth to provide training for European pastors, lay people and missionaries.

Newell has "built and strengthened significant ties between the seminary and the churches, individuals and unions (of Baptists in each European country)," said Thorwald Lorenzen, a seminary professor and faculty representative to the executive board.

Sixty-five students from six continents are enrolled at the seminary. This year, the number of students from Europe has increased threefold. The seminary has eight faculty members, including four Southern Baptist missionaries.

Newell, 42, a native of Meridian, Miss., and his wife, Diane, a Jackson, Miss., native, have three children, Sarah, 13; Amanda, 10; and Justin, 7.

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Bold Mission Thrust Brings
Increased Ethnic Emphasis

By Frank Wm. White

N-BSSB
Baptist Press
12/30/86

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—A commitment to new goals for increasing black and language Southern Baptist involvement will be crucial in carrying out Bold Mission Thrust, according to the director of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's special ministries department.

Goals for the year 2000 include a combined language and black church membership of 3 million, a five-fold increase from the present membership of about 600,000.

Bill Banks told state convention division directors the Bold Mission Thrust goal of presenting the gospel to the whole world by the year 2000 has caused Southern Baptists to develop a greater concern for reaching blacks and language groups.

"Forty percent of the United States population is black or ethnic. We've got to reach these people if we are serious about reaching even our own nation," he said. Hispanics in the United States now total more than 25 million and will be the largest minority group in the nation by the year 2000. And Vietnamese, Chinese and Filipino immigrants are expected to enter the country in increasing numbers in the next 15 years, he pointed out.

The special ministries department was created in October 1985 to consolidate Sunday School Board programs for black, language and special education ministries. "Since then we have become even more convinced of the need for our work," Banks said.

He outlined additional goals for the year 2000 that include 10,000 language and 5,000 black churches and Sunday schools. That would more than double the present 4,000 language and 850 black churches and Sunday schools.

The goal for Sunday school enrollment of ethnics and blacks is to increase from a 1985-86 total of about 160,800 to more than 1.7 million.

To help implement the goals of greatly increased black and ethnic involvement in the denomination, Banks said, the special ministries department hopes to have 10,000 language special workers and 1,000 black special workers by the year 2000. Currently, there are 150 language and 125 black special workers.

To meet the needs for stepped-up ministry efforts, Banks said, the Sunday School Board is continuing to expand language material publication with priorities established for materials in adult Sunday school, basic church administration, adult church training, Sunday school administration and church music.

Bible Book Series curriculum will be available in Chinese in April 1988, with Life and Work Series curriculum for American Indians planned for October 1988.

New staff positions have been approved for a supervisor and two additional consultants in black church development and editors for Spanish and Chinese materials, he said.

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