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87-12

Survey Respondents Support  
Greater Evangelism Emphasis

By Linda Lawson

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Stepped-up efforts at winning lost persons to Jesus Christ should be the number one priority of Southern Baptist churches, according to a recent survey in which evangelism led by 10 percentage points over all other concerns needing greater emphasis.

In the study conducted for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, NFO Research Inc. of Toledo, Ohio, sent a mail survey to about 1,500 Southern Baptists 18 years of age and older. A total of 1,072 responded to the four-page questionnaire.

Asked to rank a list of 13 items according to the emphasis needed in Southern Baptist churches -- ranging from greatly increased to greatly decreased emphasis -- 57 percent of those responding called for greatly increased emphasis on winning the world to Christ.

In other areas rated high in the need for greatly increased emphasis, strengthening marriage was cited by 47 percent; reclaiming inactive members, 44 percent; training in Christian parenthood, 43 percent; and worship, 40 percent.

In designing the survey questionnaire, generic rather than denominational terms were used to avoid SBC-related bias in the responses, according to Cliff Tharp, planning research specialist in the board's research services department.

He said survey results "provide the largest, most solid picture of a national sample of Southern Baptists known to be available in recent years."

With a desire expressed for more emphasis on evangelism, 40 percent of the respondents said they had talked with an unsaved person about becoming a Christian during the last 12 months while 11 percent said they had led someone to make a commitment to Christ.

In another area, from a list of 23 moral or economic problems, respondents said drug use (51 percent) and child abuse (50 percent) concern them most.

Other issues which rated among the top ten were: divorce rate, 30 percent; abortion and drinking of alcoholic beverages, 28 percent each; terrorism and parental neglect of children, 27 percent each; homosexuality, 26 percent; immorality in sexual relationships, 25 percent; and hunger/poverty, 23 percent.

Issues receiving the lowest responses were: capital punishment, 2 percent; women's rights/opportunities, 4 percent; spouse abuse, 6 percent; and racial discrimination and nuclear disarmament, 7 percent each.

From a list of four possible theories of inspiration of the Bible, respondents divided equally (38 percent each) on two of the theories.

"God inspired writers in such a way that even though they used their own words, they were so completely enlightened, guided and empowered that the whole of what they wrote was without any error," was the choice of one group of 38 percent of respondents.

Also chosen by 38 percent was the statement, "God worked in the lives and minds of writers to give them inspired ideas so that what they wrote expresses the revealed truth of God in words drawn from the writers' own backgrounds and experiences."

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The inspiration theory chosen by only three percent of respondents said, "The writers were inspired in the same manner in which all the great poets and writers have been." A fourth theory, the so-called dictation theory "God gave the Scriptures word for word," was chosen by 17 percent.

From a list of statements about which respondents could express agreement or disagreement, 67 percent stated varying degrees of support for prohibiting federal funding of abortions. A total of 61 percent expressed varying degrees of disagreement with the idea that "a woman's life is fulfilled only if she can provide a happy home for her family."

Also, a total of 78 percent said they agree the federal government should encourage prayers in public schools.

Among the respondents, 48 percent indicated they were not church leaders. Of the remaining 52 percent, 19 percent rated themselves somewhat involved as a leader; 13 percent, moderately involved; and 14 percent, very involved.

Of the respondents, 34 percent have attended church more than once a week during the past six months. The largest group, 17 percent, attend a church of 300-499 members. And 62 percent are involved in church to about the same degree as one year ago.

The largest group of respondents (20 percent) are in professional or technical occupations while 15 percent are retired and 14 percent, homemakers. A total of 55 percent described themselves as middle class and 44 percent said they are "somewhat conservative."

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Court Rejects Challenge To  
Religious Groups In Airport

By Stan Haste

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1/29/87

WASHINGTON (BP)—The Supreme Court has refused to review two lower rulings that San Francisco officials were wrong when they refused to rent space to a religious group at the city's international airport.

In a one-line order handed down Jan. 27, the high court let stand the lower panels' holding that the presence of religious groups in a public forum such as an airport does not violate the First Amendment's ban on an establishment of religion. On the contrary, the lower courts held, to deny such presence to a particular class of tenants amounts to a denial of the equal protection of the law guaranteed in the 14th Amendment to the Constitution.

The case against the San Francisco airport authority — the official body that controls the West Coast city's international airport — was brought by the Christian Science Church after the authority refused during the years 1981-84 to continue leasing space to the religious body for a Christian Science reading room. The reading room had been a tenant at the airport since 1956. (85-918, City and County of San Francisco v. Christian Science Reading Room)

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Smith Joins Foreign Board  
Personnel Selection Staff

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RICHMOND, Va. (BP)—Pam Smith, a former journeyman and Southern Baptist Home Mission Board church planter, has joined the denomination's Foreign Mission Board as an associate director of the personnel selection department.

Smith, 27, who joined the staff in Richmond, Va., in January, works with two other associate directors, William Kruschwitz and Wendy Norvelle. The three associate director positions were established to allow Louis Cobbs, department director, more time to visit seminary campuses and state Baptist offices to help recruit more missionary and journeyman candidates. Previously, Kruschwitz was the only associate director, while Norvelle was manager of auxiliary personnel in the department.

Smith will oversee the application process of the journeyman program, help enlist and evaluate career and associate candidates, and visit seminary campuses, churches and camps to speak to Southern Baptists about missions needs and appointment qualifications.

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Her experience includes work as a summer missionary for the South Carolina Baptist Convention, a journeyman to Ajloun, Jordan, a public schoolteacher in Easley, S.C., and a Home Misson Board church planter in Iowa.

She and her church planter partner faced opposition when they tried to start a backyard Bible club for children in a small town that had only one church, which about half of the town residents were attending.

The pastor met with church leaders and told Smith that if she and her partner remained in that town, he would "publicly denounce" them. If the two women persisted, they would "be met with open hostility," he warned. A Baptist church had been bombed in that town more than 30 years previously, and the front porch was blown off, the pastor told them.

Stunned, Smith and her partner moved to a nearby town and were met with openness. Going door to door, the two women were told by residents they were an answer to prayer. They started a Bible study that folded a year after they left. But the two women left a foundation for someone else to build upon, Smith said.

Smith has a bachelor's degree in English from Mars Hill (N.C.) College and a master of divinity degree in evangelism and missions from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

She is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Olen E. Smith of Ridgecrest, N.C.

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

Youth Ministry  
Enters New Era

By Jim Lowry

Baptist Press  
1/29/87

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--A new era in Southern Baptist youth ministry may be emerging, based on the results of a survey that reveal typical youth ministers are older, better educated and stay longer than their predecessors 10 years ago.

A dramatic difference is apparent, says Richard Ross, youth ministry consultant in the church administration department at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

"Churches are becoming more and more aware of the complex issues facing teens and families of teens," Ross explains. "And they are seeing value in someone coordinating a comprehensive and balanced ministry to teens and parents of teens."

The survey, in which questionnaires were sent to 868 paid and volunteer youth ministry coordinators, showed the average age of youth ministers now is 32.9 years, which Ross says is higher than in the past.

"We are just moving out of an era when most staff members who worked with youth did so only as a stepping stone to some other vocation," Ross notes. "New trends in the number of years served as a youth minister point to longer ministry efforts."

Among full-time youth ministry coordinators, the survey reports an average of 3.2 years at their present church. Even higher was the average of 3.9 years in the present church for full-time youth ministers who serve in some combination position, such as minister of youth and music, education or recreation.

More than 31 percent of full-time youth ministers have served as a youth minister for more than four years, the survey shows. About half of the youth ministers in combination positions have served more than four years.

"This is a radical difference from an average tenure of 18 months found in a survey a decade ago," Ross says. "Many youth ministers feel it takes two years to build a foundation for a significant ministry in a church."

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Information related to longer tenure and older average age among youth ministry coordinators led Ross and the church administration department to plan a series of three advanced youth ministry seminars in March and April of this year for persons who have been in youth ministry for five or more years.

The survey, conducted by the research services department at the board, was sent to churches with 300 or more members, Ross reports. A total of 371 usable questionnaires were returned.

Among full-time ministers of youth, 33 percent reported they hoped to stay in youth ministry for 16 or more years, which Ross says is significant because it points to the longer-term commitment of persons in youth ministry.

The most significant new trend in the field is the expansion of the scope of youth ministry to include parents of teenagers, he adds. This likely is tied to the higher average age of youth ministry coordinators.

"Older, more experienced youth ministers tend to do more in the area of ministry to parents of youth because they are nearer in age to the parents," he continues. At the same time, "I think it is as possible for youth ministers to build significant relationships with teenagers during the middle years of life as it is when they (ministers) are in the younger 20s.

Ross estimates about 10,000 persons serve as youth ministry coordinators in Southern Baptist churches. Of that total, 32 percent are full-time combination positions; 12 percent, or about 1,000, are full-time ministers of youth; 7 percent are part-time combination positions; 14 percent are part-time paid ministers of youth; and 35 percent are volunteers.

The education level of people who work in full-time youth or combination positions is 17.6 and 17.9 years, respectively, according to the survey. Persons in the part-time youth and combination positions report education levels of more than 16 years. Of the total number of youth ministry coordinators, about 27 percent are female.

"Youth ministers are discovering that ministries that make a difference in people's lives often are related to staying in one church over a period of years," Ross asserts, based on his contact with some 3,000 ministers of youth in the two and one-half years he has been youth ministry consultant at the board.

"Churches also are supporting the trend toward longer tenure by upgrading salaries and making it possible for youth ministers to meet financial obligations, becoming part of the community and ministering in the church for a number of years," he says.

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AU Plans Project To Improve  
Religious Freedom Education

By Kathy Palen

Baptist Press  
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WASHINGTON (BP)—A project designed to improve education about religious freedom has been announced by the Americans United Research Foundation.

In conjunction with the 200th anniversaries of the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights, Americans United plans to work with schools, churches and communities throughout the nation to improve religious freedom education.

Plans for the five-year campaign include:

— Sponsorship of regional and national workshops to train teachers in new approaches to teaching about religious freedom. The first national workshop is scheduled for June 1987 in Fairfax, Va., and regional workshops are to be held in Georgia, Ohio, California and Colorado.

— Distribution of a teacher's guide, "Religious Freedom in America," and other resources to teachers and community groups.

— Development of new curriculum materials for use in schools, churches, colleges and seminaries.

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— Creation of an audio-visual library of religious liberty resources for use by churches and schools.

The project demonstrates "a major commitment to educate Americans about the history and meaning of religious freedom in the United States," said Jimmy R. Allen, foundation president. He pointed to mounting evidence that religious freedom is not being taught adequately in the nation's schools, churches and universities.

"Lack of education about this vital dimension of our heritage has contributed to the fact that many Americans do not fully understand or accept the First Amendment principles of 'no establishment' and 'free exercise,'" said Allen, who also is president of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission. "Consequently, our country faces a rising tide of religious intolerance and a serious erosion of support for the separation of religion and government."

Americans United Research Foundation, headquartered in Silver Spring, Md., sponsors research and education about freedom of religion.

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'Woman Of The Year'  
In China Is Christian

Baptist Press  
1/29/87

BEIJING, China (BP)—Xiu Rui-Juan, a Christian and a world-known scientist and physician, has been named "Woman of the Year" for the last three years by the government of China.

Xiu, a specialist in microcirculation systems, has received wide notice for her research into diabetes and heart disease. Chinese radio, television and periodicals present her as an example for everyone in the country.

The honors reflect an amazing turnaround for the 50-year-old Xiu, vice president of the Chinese Academy of Medical Science in Beijing and head of its Microcirculation Research Center. In the hall where she now lectures students, Xiu was once forced to endure ridicule and abuse.

During the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, radicals in China persecuted religious people, intellectuals and the well-educated, among many others. Xiu fitted into all three categories.

Foreign ties of any sort also were considered highly suspect at the time. Xiu and her family had been close to the Swedish Baptist missionaries who formerly worked in Zhucheng, where she grew up. Xiu still calls missionary Matilda Persson her "second mother." Persson ran an orphanage and worked as a midwife in Zhucheng from the early years of the century until 1947.

Like many professionals, Xiu was separated from her family and banished to the countryside for several years during the Cultural Revolution. She worked as a farm laborer and later -- when her training as a physician was discovered -- as a poorly equipped rural "barefoot doctor." Her father suffered severe persecution. Her husband died during the era.

When the Cultural Revolution ended and China began its struggle to modernize, Xiu and other highly trained victims of the purge were "rehabilitated" and asked to join the march toward progress. She rejoined her family and rose to her current post at the medical academy, which represents 18 research institutes throughout China. She also became a member of the advisory committee of the national People's Congress.

"I never denied my faith or my background, a fact that has caused me many difficult moments and suffering," she said. "Now the difficult times are over, and we thank God for freedom and for our country's openness to the world."

Xiu remains thankful to Matilda Persson, who died in retirement in Sweden after leaving China. "She came to be my ideal," the scientist said. "Whenever I have been in a difficult situation I have thought of her, prayed, and received strength.

"Now I can freely talk about Matilda and everything she meant to me, and I can also freely witness to my faith which has carried me through the years. I thank God for Matilda."

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