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Cultural Values About Aging
Conflict With Christian Views

By Terri Lackey

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Old is a four-letter word in an American culture that devalues the elderly, a speaker told participants in a senior adult consultants' workshop at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center.

Dan McGee, professor of religion and director of graduate studies at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, said Christians have an ethical responsibility to overlook the "deeply denigrating view" society has of the elderly and instead view older persons through the eyes of God.

The workshop was sponsored by the senior adult section of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's family ministry department.

American culture as a whole devalues the elderly for many reasons, including their work and consumer status, society's value of power, a bias toward the future rather than the past and the fear of death, McGee said.

"One reason we devalue the old in our society is because of our work ethic," he explained. "A person's productive capacity is a major quality by which we measure and value people.

"Work is a human activity by which we gain status," he noted. Because many senior adults are no longer contributing to the work force, society views them as no longer useful.

A consumer ethic that emphasizes buying more and better things also leads to a devaluing of the elderly, McGee said.

"The house you live in, the car you drive, the vacations you take all let us see how important you are by how much you are spending," he said. When a person's ability to consume declines, his or her status declines.

"We also devalue the elderly because of our bent toward the future. There is no future in being old, because that is the end of life," he said.

In addition, he said, society's value of power causes Americans to devalue the elderly today: "Ours is a culture of conquest. Our ideal human model is a linebacker with a broken nose. Our ideal human is marked by virility and dominance."

Finally, McGee said, society devalues the elderly because "of our fear of death."

"Our anxiety about death is so compelling, we spend great resources to deny the reality of death," he said, referring to the purchase of products which make a person look or feel younger.

But the current concept of the elderly is deeply embedded but does not have to remain, he insisted.

Christians have a responsibility to change that concept by basing their values about human life on the fact that everyone is made in God's image, McGee said.

"Any value system which bases its estimate of human life on usefulness is violating the very heart of Christian tradition," he said.

The Christian faith, besides valuing human life because all are made in the image of God, also values diversity of human capacities and life experiences, McGee said. "Our differences become that which draws us to each other, that which becomes our unity," he said.

The elderly offer the valuable commodity of experiences, while the young offer the virility of youth. Young and old are gifts from God to each other, he said.

"The Christian faith also teaches us to value the unique contributions the elderly have to make to our lives," McGee said.

Older people can teach others how to accept life's limitations, how to appreciate and value the present and how to take change in stride, he said, adding he believes the day is soon coming when senior adults will accept their status and be proud of it.

"Old people who pretend not to be old are just buying into the philosophy that it's bad to be old," McGee said. "Soon there will be a clear cry of 'old is beautiful.'"

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Southern Baptists To Buy,
Transport Maize In Malawi

By Judy Garner

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BALAKA, Malawi (BP)--Southern Baptists will spend more than a half million dollars this year in Malawi to help keep people fed.

About \$219,000 will buy enough maize in nearby Zimbabwe to feed nearly 11,000 Malawians for seven months. An additional \$300,000 will pay for transporting this and other maize inside the southern African nation.

Missionaries in Malawi received a letter dated Dec. 17 from the office of the Secretary to the Treasury of Malawi expressing "the heartfelt gratitude of the Malawi government for the genuine concern you have shown during this country's hour of need."

"You have expressed a true spirit of Christianity which has left a deep impression upon us," the letter added.

Usually Malawi is able to produce enough food to eat and export. But during the past year the country has suffered from the combined effects of destructive insects in the north, drought in some areas and too much rain in others, and more than 300,000 displaced Mozambicans who have fled fighting in their own country.

Southern Baptist missionaries and Malawian Baptist pastors have worked together to train Baptists there to witness for Christ as they work with government officials to distribute maize to Malawians. For the most part international donors such as the United Nations and the International Red Cross are caring for the Mozambicans.

An agricultural country, Malawi has very little industry. Many of the people are hard working subsistence farmers with little cash income. Even in a good year they produce barely enough food to eat between harvests.

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(Judy Garner is the Southern Baptist missionary press representative for Malawi.)

Community Ministry Is
Key To Church Growth

By Sherri Brown

Baptist Press
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HONOLULU (BP)--Entering into community ministry is a key to effective church growth, claimed two speakers at a models of metropolitan ministry conference.

Don Aderhold, pastor of Columbia Drive Baptist Church in Decatur, Ga., for 38 years, led his church from an apparent impending death by helping it reach out to its changing community.

At the beginning of Aderhold's ministry -- during the 1940s and '50s -- Columbia Drive Church in suburban Atlanta was one of the fastest-growing churches in Georgia.

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"We were people all alike: young, recently married, with young babies," Aderhold explained. "In fact, we averaged 450 in Sunday school; 115 of them were in the nursery."

The church enjoyed years of growth, until the early '60s. "The young couples were moving up and out of the area. As they moved out, black couples began to move in," Aderhold recalled.

Over the next three and one-half years, the church lost more than 1,000 members.

Struggling through depression and frustration brought on by the changing community, Aderhold devised a "permeation principle: a smaller body permeating the life of a larger body producing positive change."

To determine positive change, Aderhold looked at three areas: the needs of the congregation, the needs of the community and the resources available to meet those needs.

During the next 20 years, part of fulfilling the permeation principle included building a gymnasium for local use and sponsoring more than 1,000 refugees.

Aderhold pointed out five rules for someone who leads a church through change, "Be scriptural, positive, simple, flexible and patient."

Ray Bakke, professor at Northern Baptist Theological Seminary in Lombard, Ill., encouraged the 100 Honolulu pastors attending the Home Mission Board mega-focus city emphasis conference to enter their communities to discover the needs for ministry.

When Bakke moved to inner-city Chicago 23 years ago to be pastor of a struggling public aid church, he discovered the value of educating himself in the community.

"Every week I spent one day visiting local people. The first year it was pastors, the second year public officials and the third year business owners. I asked each of them one question: 'What have you learned from living and working in this community?'" Bakke said.

"They introduced me to the good, the bad, the powerful, the poor, the drug dealers, the social workers."

Bakke encouraged the pastors to build bridges to non-Christians in their communities: "You must go to their world first. Eventually that will allow them to cross the bridge to Jesus Christ."

The seminar, sponsored by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and the six Southern Baptist seminaries, was held in conjunction with the Home Mission Board mega-focus city emphasis, training and working with Southern Baptists in the 44 U.S. cities with populations of more than 1 million people.

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Church Consultant Lists
Keys To Effective Churches

By Sherri Brown

Baptist Press
1/21/88

HONOLULU (BP)--Looking to the future allows churches to be effective, a church consultant told pastors during a models for metropolitan ministry conference, sponsored by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and the six Southern Baptist seminaries.

"The church that looks to the past does not see God. God has moved to the present and the future," said Kennon Callahan of Dallas, author of "Twelve Keys to an Effective Church."

"The church should first claim its strengths, therefore claiming its gifts from God. Then they are in the strongest position to tackle their weaknesses," Callahan explained.

The worst questions to ask in a church are "What are your problems, needs, concerns and weaknesses?" he reported.

"These are assassins of hope. Do better what you do best, then work on your weaknesses," he said.

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Two key points he encouraged churches to consider are where the church is heading and what kind of future it is building.

"Consider four areas when looking to the future: family, community, world and church, in that order," Callahan explained.

"The effective church shares a mission appropriate to its size," he added.

Callahan spoke to almost 100 Honolulu pastors preparing for the 1990 Home Mission Board mega focus city emphasis.

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Brazil Mission Project Takes
Extra Effort From Students

By Frank Wm. White

Baptist Press
1/21/88

BRASILIA, Brazil (BP)--From Minnesota and Hawaii, Puerto Rico and Alaska they came -- 143 Southern Baptist students from 27 states -- each with an individual story about how they became participants in the Global Student Missions Encounter.

They joined 110 Brazilian Baptist university students who likewise came from across their nation after personal sacrifices and individual struggles to be part of the historic venture.

The students participated in the Global Student Missions Encounter -- Brazil-U.S.A., Jan. 1-12, working side-by-side in 26 locations throughout Brazil.

From delayed wedding plans to citizenship dilemmas, the students overcame obstacles to participate in the project sponsored by two Brazilian Baptist agencies and the Southern Baptist Sunday School and Foreign Mission boards.

For Angela Suh, the project was part of an odyssey that began when her father, then vice president of the Korean Baptist Convention and pastor of a church in Seoul, visited the United States and decided to stay and begin a Korean Baptist church in Milwaukee, Wis.

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte student arrived in Brasilia with a passport indicating her new United States citizenship. However, she had been a U.S. citizen only since Nov. 20. She had received her passport Dec. 12, barely meeting the project deadline.

Meanwhile, Joselin Braga Albino in Cachoeiras do Macacu, Brazil, was juggling wedding plans to participate. Her wedding was scheduled for Jan. 30, scarcely two weeks after the end of the project.

To the amazement of her future mother-in-law, Albino completed most of the typical last-minute wedding details before the mission/evangelism project began.

"I would have changed my wedding plans rather than drop out of the project," she said. "I always wanted to be part of something like this. I was afraid this would be my only chance, and I knew that the Lord wanted me to participate."

At age 30, Tom Angel was older than most of the students in the project. The student from the University of Central Arkansas in Conway is a deacon, has worked as youth director, choir director and sings in the choir at First Baptist Church of Yellville, Ark.

After 10 years as a brakeman/conductor for the Union Pacific Railroad, he wanted to change careers because he felt the railroad life did not allow time for family, church or other activities.

He plans to be a counselor at a high school or elementary school because he believes God can use him in such a role. "I was excited about coming to Brazil. This has made me more aware of the need to share Christ wherever I am," he said.

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Valdir Noll is a college student with a drive to share Christ no matter where he is. Noll planned the schedule for the student team at Igreja Baptista Premira, or First Baptist Church, in Santa Maria where he is a member while he is attending the Federal University of Santa Maria as an electrical engineering major.

He attributes his drive for sharing the gospel to his own experience. He had opportunities to hear the message of Christ when he was nine and again at age 15. As a 15-year-old boy, he slipped from his house to attend the final service of a revival where he had resolved he would publicly accept Christ.

Noll's Catholic family rejected him as he knew they would. But he insisted on maintaining contact with them so he could be a witness.

"I use my experiences to tell others how God helped me. God helped me with my family and with the war of nerves during the entrance exams for college," he said.

When the project team left Santa Maria, Noll was joined by Doug McLemore, a student at Tarleton State University in Stephenville, Texas. He had been at another project site but will spend the next semester as a missionary in Santa Maria.

McLemore is delaying his education in his junior year as a history major to find more of what God has in store for him.

"I don't know if this will be the beginning of a long-term call to missions. There is a real possibility of that," he said.

McLemore had been fighting a call to Christian service since he was a senior in high school: "Last summer during student week at Glorieta (Baptist Conference Center in New Mexico), I realized God was calling me." Through this project, I've learned a lot more how to step out on faith. God has made me aware there is no problem that he cannot overcome."

In June, McLemore will return to school to resume his education as others already have done after the two-week project.

The students -- Brazilian and American -- are returning to school with new experiences they gained after taking the time and making the sacrifices to participate in the Global Student Missions Encounter.

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

Church Renewal
Rings Clear Call

By Jim Burton

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LOS ANGELES (BP)--For 23 years, John Lipford worked for Pacific Bell in southern California, making sure people received their calls. In October 1985, the microwave radio systems design engineer received a special call himself.

It came without the aid of an operator and table-top phone but was as clear and true as any message delivered by fiberoptic cable.

Lipford and his wife, Martha, sensed God's calling to take early retirement when he was 47 and devote the rest of their lives to religious education in small churches that could not afford a full-time salaried staff person. In addition, they would continue as coordinators in church renewal, a program emphasis of the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission and Home Mission Board, which was responsible for bringing them to this point in life.

An effort to reduce overhead at Pacific Bell created a situation where employees were given incentives to retire early. The Lipfords had looked forward to retirement at age 55, hoping to begin work with small churches then. But, as Lipford notes, "The Lord knew differently than we thought."

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The early retirement opportunity coincided with his church, First Baptist Church of Arleta, Calif., determining its need for a full-time minister of education. After interviewing with several other churches, Lipford decided God wanted him to serve in Arleta.

Lipford's discovery of his giftedness for ministry began in 1972 through church renewal. "This whole thing is an outgrowth of renewal and was the beginning of searching and discovering gifts," he said, "and applying it in ministry to see these areas of giftedness grow."

The Lipfords were involved in the first lay renewal weekend in California. Since then, they have coordinated renewal weekends throughout California and Arizona. In addition, they have been consultants in several western states.

According to Lipford, church renewal has had an impact in California: "The churches that I am familiar with have seen the renewed emphasis on the laity being involved in ministry. Not just within the program ministries of the church like Sunday school, church training, Woman's Missionary Union and Brotherhood ... lay involvement in redemptive ministries in the world, in the marketplace, where they work, where they go to school, the people they are associated with day by day.

"That has resulted in increased souls won for the kingdom, which is the ultimate goal of anything we are doing."

Lipford, who recently was ordained, lives with the confidence he is where God has called him to be. But he knows to never get comfortable. There is always the possibility that God will have another task.

"I know we are on the journey that he wants me to be on at this point in time," said Lipford.

And whatever the next step is in Lipford's spiritual journey, he will answer the call.

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(BP) photos available upon request from the Brotherhood Commission