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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee
801 Commerce #750
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(615) 244-2355
Alvin C. Shackelford, 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, 511 N. Akard, Dallas, Texas 75201, Telephone (214) 720-0550
NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300
RICHMOND (Foreign) Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON Stan L. Hasty, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

March 15, 1986

88-43

Mission Trip Ends
In Tragedy For BSUers

N-10
(Texas Std.)

DALLAS (BP)--Two Baylor University representatives on their way home from a spring break mission trip were killed March 12 when their automobile was hit head-on about 40 miles north of Harlingen in Texas' Rio Grande Valley.

Killed were Sharla Jayne Smelley, 23, missions coordinator for the Baylor Baptist Student Union, who was driving, and Mike Lowery, 22, of Cypress, Texas, a graduate student in Baylor's master of business administration program.

The driver of the other vehicle, Joshua Lynn Martinez, 24, of Denton, also was killed.

Two other Baylor students were severely injured. Bobby Olsen, 20, of Euless, Texas, had head injuries and underwent surgery at Valley Baptist Medical Center in Harlingen. Adrian Farris, 20, of Beaumont, Texas, had a broken shoulder.

The collision occurred about 10:30 a.m. on U.S. Highway 77 in Kenedy County. According to Department of Public Safety reports, a 1986 GMC pickup truck driven by Martinez was southbound, passing vehicles by driving on the shoulder of the highway.

When the truck attempted to come back on the road, it swerved into the northbound lane, striking the automobile carrying the Baylor students. The truck then became airborne and struck another vehicle. Martinez was killed instantly.

Tom Ruane, associate in the Texas Baptist Division of Student Work, said he understood Lowery was killed instantly and that Smelley died aboard a Care-Flite helicopter en route to the medical center in Harlingen.

The Baylor students were part of an 18-car caravan returning more than 70 Baylor students from a week-long trip to South Texas, said George Louterback, BSU director at Baylor. Smelley, a Texas A&M graduate who joined the BSU staff last August, had arranged the trip.

The students had spent their spring break in various mission projects at seven different locations in the Rio Grande Valley.

Smelley and Lowery, both singers, had performed together during the trip at the First Baptist Church of San Benito, Louterback said.

"Mike had told me recently he was seriously considering becoming a full-time missionary," Louterback said. "He spoke fluent Spanish and loved mission work."

"We are in total shock here. It's just a shame. These kids had committed their spring break to doing God's work, not playing on the beach. Up to the wreck, it had been one of the best mission trips we had ever had."

Although hundreds of Texas Baptist students were involved in spring break ministries this year and thousands have been over the years, Ruane said the accident was believed to be the first fatal mishap involving BSU ministries.

Ruane praised the work of the chaplains and staff of Valley Baptist Medical Center for their assistance following the accident. "It was tough," he said, "but without them it would have been even more difficult."

Missionaries Help
Rio Flood Victims

N- FMB

RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil (BP)--Water rose to the headlights of his van as Southern Baptist missionary Bill Moseley drove around a flooded Brazilian city helping disaster victims.

More than 70 Brazilians died and 11,000 were left homeless by flooding Feb. 19-21 in Rio de Janeiro. Deaths occurred when mudslides caused buildings to collapse. Damage was caused by the second flood in a month.

Moseley, a native of St. Petersburg, Fla., and his 20-year-old son, Billy, placed mattresses in the van and carried two loads of injured Brazilians to a hospital. They came upon a collapsed section of street and helped a group of men fill the hole with cobblestones.

They and Southern Baptist missionary Roberta Hampton, from Piedmont, Okla., told the pastor of a Baptist church in one of the damaged areas they could offer financial help because of funds available from the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board. Women from the church were trying to cook meals for 200 people over an old stove and a campfire.

The Moseleys helped firemen warn residents in hillside homes of impending mudslides and found an elderly woman unable to walk. They strapped her in a chair and carried her to safety down a slippery pathway in hard rain.

Later they came upon a small hospital that had to be evacuated and transported patients to another hospital. Hampton shared the message of Christ and revealed the "love of the Lord and our motivation for wanting to help," Moseley said.

Heavy rains earlier in the month had flooded houses to a depth of four feet in one section of Rio. The first family Moseley aided after that flood was a woman named Vera, her husband and five children. The woman later became a believer for Christ and began attending the Baptist church in the area, children in tow.

Missionaries aided about 100 families through Southern Baptist hunger funds after the first flood. One man "literally beamed with joy" when he saw the New Testament included with the food gifts, Moseley said. He told Moseley he owned a Bible and loved to read it, but it had gotten soaked in the flooding.

"In spite of the misery, tragedy, mud and heartache," Moseley said, his efforts to help the flood victims will go down as "one of the greatest (times) I've ever had in Brazil to serve the Lord."

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Miller Urges Preachers
To Become Storytellers

By Pat Cole

N- (CO)
(SBTS)

Baptist Press
3/15/88

LOUISVILLE, Ky (BP)--Preachers can motivate their hearers by incorporating the ancient tradition of storytelling in their sermons, Nebraska pastor and author Calvin Miller told students at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

"Stories are life changers," said Miller. "They produce and their product is real."

Miller, pastor of Westside Baptist Church in Omaha, Neb., and the author of 19 books, delivered the E.Y. Mullins Lectures on Preaching at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary March 8-11. Miller's lectures coincided with the third annual National Conference on Biblical Preaching sponsored by the seminary's National Center for Biblical Preaching.

Miller called sermons an art form, stressing stories "work within the sermon to change, produce and create life."

Storytelling is no stranger to Christianity, he added, noting the biblical emphasis on stories has led observers to call Christianity the great literary religion.

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"Much of the (Christian) doctrine is enshrined in story," he said. "It is a religion in which story has a special sanctity."

The Bible is a "well-told story that makes us realize the kind of truth that it really is," he added. The significance of this story is "in its strong interaction with our own story."

People become enthralled with Scripture because "the biblical story is so germane to our life narratives," he said.

During his lectures, Miller contrasted "precept preachers" with "storytelling preachers."

Precept preachers, he said, often spend extensive time in word studies, teach doctrinal concepts with the aid of an overhead projector and encourage their congregation to take voluminous notes.

A drawback of precept preaching is that it often becomes "one-dimensional and leaves no room for other art forms," he said. Precept preaching has a tendency to be dull, he said, but added precept sermons "can be punctuated with interest."

"How I wish these oral exegetes (who preach precept sermons) would not study the word (Bible) as though the word was victim, but (would instead study it as though) the Word (Christ) has been made flesh and the flesh has been preached and dwelt among us," Miller explained.

Storytelling preaching does not neglect doctrine, he said: "I've yet to be convinced that story obliterates precepts. In Scripture, story and precepts come scrambled together. Take the decalogue (Ten Commandments) ... ten marvelous precepts that come packaged in narration."

Preachers need to be familiar with various types of literature, he said, adding evangelicals typically have not been "interested in literature as a whole." He also said preachers should be perceptive about the world around them.

"Storytellers are artists, and preachers who have much to do with it (storytelling) must become artists themselves," he said. "Artists see and feel the world around them. Artists cannot walk through the world without feeling it rub against them. And in the rubbing of the world is where the storytelling is born."

Preachers are divine raconteurs who tell the gospel story by telling "loads and loads" of other stories, he said: "These stories will get at truth, motivate, produce life and drive out the demons of boredom as they do. And the world will learn of God and will cheer that we have held its attention while it learned."

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Southwestern Honors
6 Distinguished Alumni

N- (O
(SWBT))

Baptist Press
3/15/88

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Six men who have contributed to Southern Baptist life will be honored as 1988 Distinguished Alumni of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary June 15.

Award winners are Presnall Wood, Don Orr, James Leitch, Buckner Fanning, Howard E. Butt and Tal Bonham. They will be guests of honor at Southwestern's annual alumni reunion during the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in San Antonio, Texas.

Wood is editor of the Baptist Standard, weekly newsjournal for Baptists in Texas. He is a former pastor of Texas Baptist churches who has held volunteer denominational positions ranging from associational moderator to chairman of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's trustees.

Orr is a retired missionary to Colombia. He and his wife, Violet, were the first music missionaries appointed by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, ministering 34 years in the same country.

Leitch retired last year as director of Southwestern's physical plant, where he has been influential among hundreds of students working under his supervision for the past 34 years.

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Fanning is pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in San Antonio, where he has ministered for 29 years. In addition to leading his church's local ministries, Fanning has preached across the United States and in 29 foreign countries. He also is known for his use of "spot" advertising on local and national cable television.

Butt is president of the H.E. Butt Foundation and vice chairman of the board of the H.E. Butt Grocery Co. in Kerrville, Texas. He is a lay preacher and chairman of the board of Christian Men Inc., a national organization that promotes lay renewal.

Bonham is executive director-treasurer of the State Convention of Baptists in Ohio. He previously was director of evangelism for the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma and pastor of several churches. He is a Christian humorist and has published eight books of "clean jokes."

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Controversy, Conviction Shaped
Southwestern, Pinson Says

By Elizabeth Watson

N-10
(SWBTS) Baptist Press
3/15/88

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's heritage was made possible by unity in the midst of conflict, William Pinson said March 10 in Founders Day ceremonies marking the seminary's 80th year.

Pinson, executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, who taught on Southwestern's faculty from 1963-75, said Southwestern's course was set by Texas Baptists in the 1800s who took risks, launched visionary programs, evangelized the lost and established churches. But even these efforts were the subject of controversy at the time.

"The Carrolls, Truett and Scarboroughs of a previous era were not immune to controversy but rather understood the necessity of standing by their convictions in the face of tremendous pressure," Pinson said.

Southwestern traces its roots to the pro-missions, pro-education, pro-organization group of Baptists in Texas, he said. "The heritage of Southwestern comes to us drenched with the blood, sweat and tears of those Baptists who dared not only to dream but to pay the price to clothe those dreams in institutional garments."

Cooperation of individuals and churches has helped Southwestern prosper despite the wars, depressions, debt, social crises, theological conflict and denominational turmoil that have oppressed the seminary, Pinson said. He cited the "mosaic" heritage of the seminary's founders, made up of the practices and insights of several Baptist groups.

"Out of tremendous diversity came a unity made strong in part because of the diversity," Pinson said. "These Texas Baptist giants came from different backgrounds. They were persons of various physical appearances and temperaments. They did not agree on everything but they worked together on the main thing. Highly individualistic, they nevertheless knew how to labor together in unselfish cooperation.

"Each had special interests and projects, but none hesitated to turn from these to help with the larger causes of the denomination," he said.

Southwestern's founders shared a conviction that evangelism, missions and education are inseparable and that organizations beyond local churches must be established by cooperating Baptists to carry out God's mandate, he said.

"They acted on that conviction and passed the dream along with its institutional expression on to us," Pinson said. "That is why we are able to be here -- and that is why we must also pass it on.

"Others dreamed and built. Ours is to keep the dream alive and to see that the institution stimulates rather than stifles that dream," he said.

"Ours may be the more difficult, demanding task."

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Pastors Need To Be Men
Of Integrity, Sims Says

By Joe Westbury

N-ITMB

PORTLAND, Ore. (BP)--In a day of fallen evangelists, Southern Baptist pastors need to remember the Ten Commandments apply to them as well as to the men and women in the pew, a state executive director said.

Cecil Sims, executive director of the Northwest Baptist Convention, told about 40 mission pastors attending a church growth conference in Portland, Ore., they need to guard their integrity as never before as they minister in the name of Christ.

The seminar was sponsored by the church extension division of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and the Northwest Baptist Convention.

Sims reminded the pastors God has called them to be men of integrity: "Never doubt the reality that every time you meet a new family, there will come a time in their lives when they will ask themselves if they can trust you and if you are true to your word. Only when you live a life of moral purity, dignity and integrity will your ministry ring true with credibility."

Although the admonition applies to all pastors across the nation, Sims said, it is especially true in the Pacific Northwest where Southern Baptists are "virtually a non-entity."

Sims, who has ministered in the area for 34 years, including the past eight years as the convention's executive director, said moral impurity remains a threat wherever the gospel is preached. "Everytime we have a 'falling star' -- a pastor who stumbles -- we have to re-establish our credibility," he maintained.

Sims noted that in his first two years as executive director, the convention -- composed of the states of Washington, Oregon and the panhandle of Idaho -- "we were losing a pastor a month to a variety of personal and family problems."

The only contact most people in the area have with preachers is through television, and such ministers are not always the best role models, Sims said. Southern Baptists are working to overcome the tarnished image projected by television evangelists as they seek to begin new churches and missions in the Pacific Northwest, he added.

David Palmer, church extension director for the convention, reported that the continual slide in baptisms for the convention would be worse if new missions had not been started.

Baptisms of new Christians have declined for the years 1981 through 1986, from a high of 4,506 to 3,147.

The five-year period parallels the national Southern Baptist Convention drop in baptisms even to the one-year exception of 1986, attributed to the national simultaneous revivals, Palmer said. Also reflecting last year's record low for baptisms across the denomination, the Northwest Convention reported a 15-year low, only 2,800.

Palmer credited mission churches that have been started in the past 12 years, which produced 27 percent of last year's baptisms, with preventing any further slide. "Without those baptisms we would have been down an additional 30 percent for last year alone," he added.

"In the next 12 years, if we are to reach our Bold Mission Thrust (evangelism emphasis) goal, we are going to have to begin a lot of new missions just to keep even with our current baptisms," he said.

The contribution of the new missions underscores the need for church starting in the Pacific Northwest, speakers agreed. Last year the convention reported 15 new church-type missions to bring the total number of churches and missions to 380.

The convention has set a goal of each congregation starting another congregation every four years. "'One More Every Four' is our theme, which would result in a thousand congregations by A.D. 2000," Palmer said.

Evangelism director Adrian Hall said churches are hoping to involve greater numbers of their laity in telling people about Christ.

The denomination-wide emphasis on the Year of the Laity, which will result in a greater number of lay renewal weekends scheduled for this year, will further equip Pacific Northwest Baptists to share the gospel in their communities, he said.

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Lindsey Finds Jewish Roots
By Digging Into The Gospels

By Art Toalston

F-FMB

Baptist Press
3/15/88

JERUSALEM (BP)--He has been an unorthodox scholar, one who also has exhibited pastoral and visionary gifts.

Robert Lindsey and his wife, Margaret, went to Jerusalem in 1945, three years before the state of Israel was established. For most of his career, he led Narkis Street Baptist Church, which has been assailed by Jewish radicals and stirred by the Holy Spirit.

He discovered, in doing a Hebrew translation of the Gospel of Mark, that the New Testament is far more reliable -- and far more Jewish -- than most scholars think. Co-workers wanted him to devote more time to scholarly pursuits, but they realized he enjoyed sharing his knowledge with people more than preserving it in books. "He taught me more about Jesus, I think, than almost any other person," one colleague discloses.

Various Baptist ministries have evolved from his dreams, including Baptist Village near Tel Aviv, the largest Christian conference center in Israel, and Dugith bookstore and publishing house in Tel Aviv, one of only two outlets for Christian books in Israel's largest city. "For many, many years, he was the guiding light out here," one Baptist representative says.

Lindsey "has made a great many friends, both Christian and Jewish," an Israeli magazine writer noted in 1985. "Jerusalemites ... know him as a man of action and initiative, deeply dedicated to a religious calling. He has become a veritable 'institution' on the local scene, exercising influence out of proportion to the number of people who hear him preach his weekly sermons." One colleague calls Lindsey "the pastor for the Christian community in the country."

The Norman, Okla., native retired last fall, but Israel hasn't seen the last of him. He plans to divide his time between a small house in Moore, Okla., and one near the Sea of Galilee.

He is finishing a book titled "Jesus: How To Understand Him." Part of the book will be autobiographical, dealing with Lindsey's biblical research, much of it a cooperative venture with a longtime comparative religions professor at Jerusalem's Hebrew University, David Flusser. A dozen other scholars have joined Lindsey and Flusser in ongoing study of Christianity's Jewishness through an organization named the Jerusalem School for the Study of the Synoptic Gospels.

Lindsey traces the "marvelous, well-preserved" gospel accounts back to the earliest first century Hebrew writings about Jesus.

Amplifying his point, Lindsey focuses on the first three gospels. He disagrees with the majority of scholars who say Mark preceded those by Luke and Matthew. Lindsey also disagrees when these scholars say Mark was taken by Luke and meshed with other first century sources.

Luke was the earliest, Lindsey contends, noting it translates far more easily into Hebrew than Mark's. Lindsey believes Mark is a condensation of Luke's.

He links Luke's gospel with an early Hebrew text telling of Christ's life and quoting his teachings. He points out one of the early church fathers cited a Hebrew text penned by Matthew, one of Jesus' 12 disciples.

Lindsey theorizes the Hebrew text was translated into Greek. Then, in its Greek form, it was reworked from a chronological account into topical segments before it got to Luke. He believes Luke had a second source, a Greek text seeking to reconstruct the chronology.

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He is among various scholars who believe Hebrew was "more the language of the time among Jews than is usually thought." Greek was the world's premier language, and many Jews spoke it, but Lindsey says it was not the mother tongue of Jews in Palestine.

Mark, in later condensing Luke, drafted Greek phrases from the Book of Acts and some of the Apostle Paul's epistles, and Lindsey says this accounts for the difficulty in translating the gospel back to Hebrew.

Matthew's gospel, Lindsey says, is a subsequent meshing of Mark with the topic-oriented Greek text Luke used.

In short, Lindsey sees his conclusions as yielding "a better picture of Jesus, and a much more conservative one," than schools of thought that say the three gospels came under an array of influences in the first and second centuries and lost much of their reliability.

"We are in touch with the original teaching from Jesus," he says. One colleague says Lindsey's thinking is ahead of its time, that it "will finally be accepted in another generation."

When the New Testament is in harmony with its Hebrew roots, Lindsey says, key concepts often are clarified and strengthened. When Jesus said the kingdom of God is "at hand" or "near," he says, "it can only mean the kingdom of God is 'here' when you put it back into Hebrew." Or, when Jesus told a paralytic that his sins were forgiven, he used an expression from Jewish Scriptures that only God had used.

To people who wonder why Jesus didn't say more about being the messiah, Lindsey points out, Jesus gave "many, many indications ... within a Jewish culture in a very sophisticated way, in a way that was easily understood back then but may not be easily understood by us." When Jesus quoted Isaiah 61, for example, and said the Spirit of the Lord was upon him, Lindsey explains, the Hebrew meaning was that the Lord had "made him messiah."

Narkis Street Baptist Church sought to be "as open as possible about what God was doing" in restoring the Jewishness of Christianity and in various renewal movements of the 1970s, he says. For years, both English and Hebrew had been used, but guitars and modern choruses, many with Jewish melodies, began to enliven the worship. "We'd been pretty traditional up to that point," he admits. Attendance soared from several dozen to more than 200.

"I sometimes say we prayed for fire, and we got it, but not the kind we prayed for," Lindsey says, referring to the 1982 arson that gutted the church building, a fire generally attributed to Jewish radicals. The church has waited more than five years for a permit to build a new auditorium. In worship services under a structure with a plywood roof and sheet metal walls, attendance has climbed above 300.

For most of his 42 years in Israel, Lindsey saw little inclination among Jews for faith in Christ. Only in the past several years has "a real indigenous movement" blossomed, encompassing some 3,000 believers in 30 congregations.

Zionism, meanwhile, has struggled to maintain "zeal to build the state of Israel," he says. And four out of five Jews have "very little interest in the synagogue." Orthodox Judaism is "far removed from the secular mind of Israelis today." Worldwide, assimilation into non-Jewish lifestyles has taken a heavy toll. Jews numbered 13 million a decade or so ago, Lindsey says. Today, their number is down to 9 million and expected to drop to 6 million by the year 2000.

A movement of Jews toward Christ, one allowing believers to retain their Jewish identity, could help stem the decline, he believes.

But Christians will have to convince Jews the doors to faith are open. "People who called themselves Christians," Lindsey reminds, "have been among the persecutors -- the main ones -- of the Jewish people in the past 1,000 years." Many Jewish people see the Holocaust, in which 6 million Jews were killed by Hitler's Nazi regime, as "the end result of the so-called 'Christian' culture of Europe."

"You cannot witness until you're accepted, until people feel that you love them," Lindsey says, adding, "No Christian witness has any right to be anti-Jewish." Christianity's "formative period was totally in a Jewish context. All of the early Christians were Jews."

Witnessing to a Jew is "witnessing to your own family, as it were."

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

Church Planting Continues
As Southern Baptist Priority

By Bill Bangham

N-CO
(B'hood)

Baptist Press
3/15/88

ATLANTA (BP)--While 1987 saw the smallest increase in churches in nine years among Southern Baptists, church planting still is a priority, according to David Benham, associate director of church extension for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

The increase of 170 churches during the year represented a 0.5 percent gain over 1986, to a new total of 37,286.

But low numbers aside, church planting has never been a fad among Baptists. It always has been, and will continue to be, a priority. By the year 2000, the Home Mission Board projects 50,000 Southern Baptist churches across the United States.

For Benham, the reasons Southern Baptists come down hard on the side of church planting are simple. First, "evangelism and ministry are local church enterprises," he said. "To increase the amount of effective evangelism means more churches."

Second, "new churches add new people more effectively than older churches," he continued. "If we add a new church, they will add new members more quickly than an older church. They have more reasons, and are more anxious, to do so. That's a normal pattern," he said.

It's all part of what Benham contended is a life cycle churches go through.

"They grow to a certain point, then reach a plateau," he said. "Even cities go through this." He points to his own city, Atlanta, as an example.

"There are neighborhoods in Atlanta where schools are closing," said Benham. "They were once young communities with lots of children. But they've changed. Now they're elderly communities that no longer have children."

Many churches find themselves in similar situations.

"They may have children or grandchildren who no longer live in the area, are driving back in to worship there," he said. "But the church has already plateaued."

It's a situation that will continue for awhile but won't last forever. "Churches are needed where those descendants are," said Benham. "People will eventually go to a church convenient to them."

And while major metropolitan areas will continue to have special-interest churches to which people will travel long distances -- like Atlanta's First Baptist Church, an older, large, traditional, downtown congregation; and nearby Decatur's Oakhurst Baptist Church, noted for its activism in world hunger, and peace and justice issues -- "the neighborhood church is still where Southern Baptists worship and where we need to be," said Benham.

For Benham, how Southern Baptists view church planting is important. For some, church planting is something that takes place outside traditional Southern Baptist territory, in what once were called pioneer areas.

"We no longer talk about pioneer areas," said Benham. "We talk about frontiers." And while many of those frontiers are still in New England, the far west, the northcentral and northwestern states, many also are in traditional territory -- in places like Florida, Georgia and Texas.

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"When we talk about planting new churches," said Benham, "we're talking about unchurched or under-churched areas, wherever they are."

And Southern Baptists are falling behind in those efforts, he added.

In the late 1800s, one church existed per 4,000 population. Today, only one church exists per 6,200. "We have not kept up with our growing population," said Benham.

One reason is that in recent years more people are emigrating to the United States who do not have a Christian background. But that's not the only reason. "In our older churches, we're not reaching outside the faith community," he said.

For Benham, it is within a new church community -- with its zeal for members and the excitement of growing something new -- where "reaching outside" often takes place.

In looking to the future, Benham hopes Southern Baptists also will look to the past. "The greatest advances (in church planting) in Southern Baptist history occurred in the latter part of the 19th century and the early part of this century when we had lay ministers establishing new churches," he said.

"They were planted by the farmer-preacher, the preacher-blacksmith. It wasn't until later that we began to depend on the professional. If we're going to touch the areas we need to touch today, it will be through lay people."

People who are willing to make a commitment and nurture a new church into existence, he said, share in the excitement of watching it grow.

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Gifted, Talented Need
Challenges From Church

By Frank Wm. White

N-SSB

Baptist Press
3/15/88

NASHVILLE (BP)--Gifted and talented children who have the potential to contribute the most to the future of Southern Baptists may drop out of Sunday school and church because of boredom if their abilities are not tapped.

The creative minds of gifted children are a challenge to church workers, said Jerry Aldridge, a Baptist layman and associate professor of childhood education at the University of Alabama-Birmingham.

Aldridge led sessions in the first conference on teaching and ministering to gifted and talented people sponsored by the special education section of the Sunday School Board's special ministries department.

If not channeled into good and useful activities, gifted and talented people may find destructive and wrong areas to which to apply their talents, Aldridge said, noting prison populations include a higher percentage of gifted people than the general population.

Aldridge classified gifted and talented individuals into six categories of general ability, specific aptitude, creative and productive thinking, leadership, visual and performing arts, and psychomotor ability.

Even when classified into categories, gifted and talented people are not a homogeneous group and consequently cannot be as easily identified as many people assume, Aldridge said.

"Most people look at the bright, cooperative girl sitting on the front row answering all the questions and quoting all the memory verses and say she must be gifted," Aldridge said. "Actually she probably is just bright. The boy in the back throwing spitballs may be gifted and is probably bored."

"As church people, we have a responsibility to tap talents that have not been tapped elsewhere. These people need to know that their talent is a gift of God, and they can use it to glorify God."

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Gifted children are less likely to become bored if they are allowed to become involved through creative, child-centered teaching styles, he said: "Actually, child-centered teaching works best with all children, but it is essential with gifted children because they won't accept less. They will leave -- mentally at first and physically when they can."

Gifted people will ask difficult questions and will not accept glossed-over answers. "They can be intimidating at times, especially for a teacher who may be uncertain anyway," Aldridge said.

"It's significant that we start losing children at about the time we get away from projects and activities and begin to lecture," he added.

In a panel discussion, Sara Ezell, a 16-year-old gifted high school student, confirmed Sunday school was more enjoyable for her when she was younger because there was more participation and involvement.

Another panelist, Joe Richardson, personnel counselor at the Sunday School Board and the parent of two gifted teenagers, said Sunday school meets the needs of his two children less as they get older.

Ezell said she learned to read on her own and was bored in school by the first grade. By junior high school she found the gifted label uncomfortable because she was singled out.

"I don't want to be separated. I want to be with everybody else," Ezell said.

Gene Nabi, special education consultant in the special ministries department, said the Sunday School Board tries to encourage a mainstream philosophy for most special education people including the gifted.

Gifted and talented people are one of seven focus groups for Special Education Leadership Magazine to be introduced in October as the special education section broadens its focus.

The focus addresses an increased interest by parents, teachers and church staff members who are looking for help, Nabi said.

"If we don't capture the imaginations of these children, we risk losing some of the best minds who could be theologians and leaders for our convention," said Bill Banks, director of the special ministries department.

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