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SBC 'mortally wounded,'
Alliance listeners told

By Dan Martin

N-CO

NASHVILLE (BP)--"The Southern Baptist Convention is wounded and just may be mortally wounded," Randall Lolley told some 900 participants at a "listening session" of the Southern Baptist Alliance in Nashville.

Lolley, former president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., who is now pastor of First Baptist Church of Raleigh, N.C., presided at the opening session of the three-day meeting of the Alliance, a group of "moderate" Baptists which was formed in 1987.

The SBA, comprised of some 50 churches and 25,000 members, called the "dialogue meeting" following the defeat of moderate presidential candidate Richard Jackson of Phoenix, Ariz., at the 1988 annual meeting of the SBC in San Antonio, Texas. Theme of the meeting is "Where Do We Go From Here?".

The meeting features five plenary sessions, a general small group discussion, larger discussion groups on six specific areas -- finances, literature, missions, placement, theological education and women in the church -- and three meetings of the SBA board.

Opening night had the theme, "Where is the SBC?" which Lolley termed a "diagnostic meeting."

"The SBC as we have known it for 143 years is gone with the wind," Lolley said. "It has been wounded in a wind which has never before been known in our free church tradition. Even if the current controversy would end tonight, it would take years for the spirit of distrust, the spirit of coercion to be repaired," he said.

Lolley told participants at Woodmont Baptist Church: "It is important for us in this conference to face the facts. If we do not face the facts we will not come out with our directions charted."

In addition to Lolley, others who participated in the opening night program were Winfred Moore, pastor of First Baptist Church of Amarillo, Texas, and moderate presidential candidate in 1985 and 1986; Kirby Godsey, president of Mercer University in Macon, Ga.; Alan Neely, interim executive director of SBA and former professor of missions at Southeastern seminary; and Clyde Fant, dean of the chapel and professor of Christian studies at Stetson University in DeLand, Fla.

Godsey told the crowd Southern Baptists "are in eclipse. In the midst of these dreadful and frightening shadows of denominational eclipse we huddle together to find reassurance and light enough to sustain us."

"We are Baptists in a denomination that has stopped being Baptist," he said, asserting he is "going to continue being Baptist with whatever power and understanding I possess."

"But," he added, "before we can change the way things are, we must face the way things are. We have lost. We can be depressed by it, angered by it, troubled by it, paralyzed by it, resentful about it, but let those feelings not mask our willingness to face the reality that we have been defeated."

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Many Baptists "have been preoccupied with our pain, crippled by our loss, unbelieving of the devastation, infuriated by the unconscious and conscious dismantling of a century of labors, bitter because our network of support for missions and education is crumbling before us," he said as he recited a litany of what he called watching "people we love and enterprises we built being mistreated and ripped from their roots."

"We watch, we stare, we gaze at the actions which illuminate that we are victims of denominational holocaust," he said as he reminded participants they need to be clear about "one thing: God is not a Southern Baptist. Being Southern Baptist is not the ultimate good. We should not confuse God's kingdom or even God's call with our own fragile and now fractured denominational system."

"It is time for us to move beyond what I call 'denominolatry,'" he said. "We have been wandering in the wilderness of confusion and self pity and longing to go back where we were 10 years ago. We cannot go back. We have our eyes on an idol and when we want to do that we become mendicants at the altar of a shabby and faulty denominationalism."

Godsey told listeners to "face up to where we are" and charged that now caring is displaced by conformity; missions by manipulation; education by indoctrination; proclamation by propaganda; worship by religious entertainment.

In addition to urging his "abused, battered and abandoned" listeners "move beyond the worship of our denomination," Godsey also suggested the SBA "endorse and undergird more than one focus" without "thinking we are working at contrary purposes."

He also encouraged his listeners to continue "worship and proclamation. Our course for the future should not be the child of controversy but the child of faith. Our ultimate challenge is not to win the war of a feuding denomination, but to worship and proclaim the reality of God's presence in our world and God's unrelenting love. Our calling is not to save a denomination; it is to live and proclaim the gospel."

"Worship and proclamation," he said, "will provide the light to live beyond the eclipse."

Neely told participants what the Alliance "is and is not" saying it "is a coalition of individuals and churches dedicated to the preservation of historic Baptist principles, freedoms and traditions and to the continuance of our ministries and mission within the SBC."

It is not, he said "a group of anarchists who overtly or covertly desire to divide or further destroy the SBC. This (division) may happen. But the fact is, rather than splitting the SBC, the Alliance has allowed many to remain within the convention with a sense of integrity and a sense of hope."

He added it is not a political action group, nor is it a single issue group.

In its covenant, Neely said, the SBA set forth a "declaration of Baptist principles which we believed and believe even more strongly today have been abandoned or distorted beyond recognition by those who control the SBC."

In the covenant, he added, in addition to saying "yes" to Baptist principles, the SBA was "saying no and deliberately rejecting" other notions, such as what he called "the heresy of 'biblical inerrancy'... hierarchical, connectional and authoritarian ecclesiology ... narrow, sectarian bigoted exclusiveness."

"We were saying no to the arrogance of professed Baptist preachers who dismiss the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer as a misunderstood and misapplied liberal excess in favor of the 'fundamentalists'' brand of authority that sanctifies ecclesiastical; despots, and tyranny by the pastor," Neely said.

He noted the covenant also said "no" to "theological indoctrination that masks as theological education, which elevates the Bible to the level of a fetish rather than reverencing the Scriptures as a channel of divine revelation."

The covenant, he said, also rejects a "medieval, obscurantist, dogmatic system of theology and biblical interpretation that functions as if Copernicus, Isaac Newton, Albert Einstein, H.E. Dana, E.Y. Mullins and W.T Conner had never lived."

The covenant, Neely claimed, also says "no" to the "distortion of the mission of Jesus Christ to a narrow view of evangelism and 'church planting.'"

"Evangelism is the calling by God to all peoples to repentance and faith, but evangelism also is the calling by God of all peoples to reconciliation and hope, to social and economic justice. Thus in some places whether people have potable water ... and decent, safe housing is as much a part of our mission as is preaching the gospel. In fact, in some cases, providing potable water and suitable housing is preaching the gospel," Neely said.

Neely, who recently became Luce Professor of Christian Missions at Princeton University, mentioned a comment made by current SBC President Jerry Vines, pastor of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Fla., during a news conference following his election in San Antonio.

"He professed bewilderment moderates in the SBC felt disenfranchised and said we are not disenfranchised because we can still vote," Neely said. "This is very interesting. Citizens in the Soviet Union under Stalin could vote. Paraguayans under Gen. Alfredo Stroessner have been able to vote for 25 years.

"And, soon, Gen. Augusto Pinochet will graciously and generously allow the citizens of Chile to vote. There is only one problem. Their votes don't make any difference. The dictators remain in power while their tyranny is legitimized by an election.

"Brother and sister fellow Baptists, the time has come to do more than vote. And what that may be may well be determined in the next 72 hours," he said.

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'Retirement' -- full-time job
for foreign mission volunteers

By Trennis Henderson

F- CO
(MO.)

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SHELBYNA, Mo. (BP)--Eight-hour workdays, five days a week, on call around-the-clock, thousands of miles from children and grandchildren -- that's how Wesley and Mary Lea Russell decided to spend their first two years of retirement.

Russell, a long-time dentist in Shelbyna, Mo., retired in June 1986. The following month, he and his wife began a two-year assignment as Southern Baptist foreign mission volunteers in the African nation of Benin.

Russell served in a "modern, nice, new dental clinic" built in the city of Bohicon in 1983. He generally treated 10 to 12 patients a day -- sometimes as many as 28 -- and performed extractions and surgical procedures and provided crowns and bridges.

Before he arrived in Bohicon, Russell said, the clinic had been closed for nearly a year because no dentist was there to staff it. While the clinic was closed, "people came every single day to see if there was a dentist," he said, adding many people even began to "curse the white man's God" because they thought he was unable to provide a dentist.

When Russell reopened the clinic, he had to earn the people's trust and respect. They first assumed he would soon return to the United States, leaving the clinic unmanned.

But Russell was determined to make his two-year assignment a positive, fruitful experience. The Missouri dentist said the Bohicon clinic was the "only really modern dental clinic in the country when we went there."

Many patients -- including Americans and Europeans living in that region of Africa -- came from neighboring countries to receive dental attention from Russell.

He had three African assistants -- Emile Avadja, Phillippe Chingoudou and Cosme Glaglanon -- who worked with him in the clinic. Mrs. Russell "assisted just any way I could," she said.

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"Very, very few (of the patients) had ever been to a dentist in their life. Many were very terrified," she explained. "I would hold someone's hand who was scared to death or hold a baby while a mother was having her teeth worked on."

A typical workday included two four-hour shifts, one from 8 a.m. until noon and then another from 3 to 7 p.m. Prior to each shift, one of the dental assistants would lead a devotional in the tribal Fon dialect.

"In order to use the facilities of the clinic, they had to hear the devotional," Russell said of his patients. Patients who failed to arrive in time for the morning devotional had to wait until the afternoon shift so they could hear a devotional and then receive dental care.

Another ministry project at the clinic involved making Bibles and New Testaments available at minimal costs. Patients even had the opportunity to receive a free Bible if they memorized 4 Bible verses or a free New Testament for memorizing 20 verses.

The Russells also were active participants at Bohicon Baptist Church. But their primary ministry involved dentistry.

"I'd like to think the clinic provides a way of reaching people who the missionaries would never reach without the clinic," Russell explained. "The clinic was built to reach people. You have the opportunity to show people that Christians care about them."

Russell acknowledged Benin is "a difficult area to Christianize," primarily because it is the birthplace of the voodoo religion. Human sacrifices, witch doctors and pagan rituals are all part of the heritage of various African tribes in Benin.

Russell recounted Chingoudou was reprimanded for failing to bring a chicken for a sacrifice during a funeral in his village. Avadja went before the tribal leaders to testify Chingoudou was unable to provide such a sacrifice because he was a Christian and did not believe in such practices.

Many of the people find becoming a Christian difficult "because in some cases they're completely ostracized from their families and their communities," Russell explained.

In the face of such challenges, Russell said, he and his wife "tried to live a good example of Christian lives. ... They're watching you all the time. You're not going to fool somebody for two years."

Another barrier to the Russells' work was language. In many of the tribal dialects, Mrs. Russell noted, "one sound can mean 10 different things, depending on the inflection you put on it."

Fortunately Avadja, a gifted linguist, could speak fluent English and French, Benin's official language, as well as five or six tribal dialects.

In addition to using Avadja as a translator, Mrs. Russell added, "Even though you don't speak their language, they know when you are trying to help them."

The main reason the Russells decided to become foreign mission volunteers was because "the Lord had been awfully good to us in material and physical ways. ... I thought if the (Southern Baptist) Foreign Mission Board had a need for a dentist, I would be glad to go," he said.

During his two years in Benin, Russell took only four vacation days during regular workdays. When career missionaries encouraged him to take more time off, Russell would respond, "Work is what I came over for, and that's what I'm going to do."

"We knew our time there was limited and we wanted to stay busy," Mrs. Russell explained.

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Another practice Russell maintained during his time in Africa was never to leave the clinic each day until he had treated the last patient. With many of the Africans walking or riding bicycles several miles to receive dental care and then waiting patiently at the clinic for several hours, Russell said the least he could do was to put in a little overtime to respond to their needs.

Russell expressed concern that the Foreign Mission Board often has difficulty finding Southern Baptist laypeople willing to volunteer for long-term assignments. Acknowledging the hardship many younger dentists would face by being away from their practices, Russell lamented the lack of "enough older dentists like myself who are interested."

Before he served in Benin, Russell admitted he "always had a feeling that we spent too much money on foreign missions. But I found out those people over there have not had the opportunity to hear about Christ. ... Now I have a good feeling about foreign missions. I think the money is well spent."

Russell emphasized that the two years he and his wife gave to the people of Benin "was a wonderful experience for us -- no regrets."

Illustrating that leaving Benin "was a very emotional parting," Russell shared a note he received from Avadja as they were preparing to leave. Avadja, who Russell said had become like a son to him, wrote to the couple: "Forever, the time you have just spent in Benin will for us bear lots of fruit. God bless you, giving to you and your family health and success."

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Centrifuge contributions
provide Olympics ministry

By Terri Lackey

N-55B
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NASHVILLE (BP)--Centrifuge touched the lives of nearly 29,000 young people this summer, and by the end of the Olympic games in Seoul, Korea, in October, it will have touched thousands more.

The \$95,000 in missions contributions collected at the 101 weeks of summer Centrifuge youth camps will fund travel and living expenses of 15 foreign missionaries who are going to Seoul, Korea, for three weeks during the Olympics to lend a helping hand to tourists, according to Joe Palmer, coordinator of special services in the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's church recreation department.

The missionaries, from Spain, France, Germany, Chile, Macao, Cyprus, Taiwan and Japan, will help staff the Baptist Visitor Center which will be open 12 hours a day during the Olympic games, he said.

The missionaries will be interpreters and assist in giving directions to the 240,000 expected visitors. At the same time missionaries provide tourists with maps of the games areas, they will pass out evangelistic tracts, Palmer said.

The money collected from the Centrifuge camps, sponsored by the SSB church recreation department, also will help pay for the evangelistic brochures printed in 28 languages, he said.

When church recreation department officials discovered the Foreign Mission Board was not going to be able to fund the missionaries' travel and living expenses as originally hoped, they decided to designate the mission offerings collected during the summer to the project, Palmer said.

"Since the Olympics was the theme for Centrifuge 1988, the idea fit perfectly," Palmer said.

Centrifuge celebrated its tenth anniversary this year, and since 1984, contributions made by campers have been going to fund special missions projects of the foreign and home mission boards, Palmer said.

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Last year, almost \$64,000 was given to the HMB to distribute among Baptist facilities which provide teen crisis ministries.

Meanwhile, the church recreation department reported a total Centrifuge attendance this summer of 29,189 where 3,709 decisions were made. Of those decisions, 588 accepted Christ, 2,571 rededicated their lives and 311 chose to go into a full-time church vocation. There were 239 miscellaneous decisions.

Stationary camps were held at Glorieta (N.M.) and Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist conference centers; Mobile College, Mobile, Ala.; North Greenville College, Tigerville, S.C.; East Texas Baptist University, Marshall, Texas; and Union University, Jackson, Tenn. Traveling camps were held on the West and East Coasts and the Pacific Northwest area.

Special Centrifuge teams went to Korea, Switzerland and Japan this summer.

Don Mattingly, manager of the program services section of the church recreation department, said recreation, Bible study, special-interest seminars, worship experiences, quiet time, fellowship and affirmation are the elements which make up the Centrifuge concept.

Mattingly has spent 10 years building the Centrifuge foundation and watching it steadily grow. In 1979, 7,507 young people attended one of the two first Centrifuge camps held at Ridgecrest and Glorieta.

By 1982, the number of campers had doubled to 14,089, and by this summer, the total had doubled again, Mattingly said.

Total attendance for 1988 Crosspoint camps, offered by the church recreation department for students in grades four through eight, was 1,332. The number of total decisions at the eleven camps held at college and associational locations was 257.