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January 13, 1989

89-6

'Renewed commitment to 1 purpose'
sets tone for WMU board meeting

By Susan Todd

N-CO
(WMU)

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Sticking to a single purpose -- missions -- was the common thread during the week-long annual executive board meeting of Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union Jan. 6-12.

At least three missions leaders spoke to the group about the importance of cooperation, but they also urged independent thinking and action.

"Threats to the concept of cooperation are rampant in our convention today," said WMU Executive Director Carolyn Weatherford. "'Rampant' is an adjective that modifies 'rampage.' Rampage means 'a course of violent or riotous action or behavior.' Rampant behavior is 'unchecked in growth or spread.'

"Southern Baptists are in their 11th year of unchecked controversy. We must do something about it, not simply because we don't like controversy, but because controversy has drawn our hearts, minds and resources away from our major concern -- missions."

WMU "cannot be all things to all Baptist women, nor to all Baptist entities," Weatherford said. "We must remember what our task is, and perform to the limit of that task."

Wendell Belew, who recently retired from the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board as associate vice president for missions strategy, praised WMU for remaining true to its task while pushing the limits.

"You recognize that men have written most of the history and most of the laws, and you recognize that women forever have lived within the circumference of these impositions," he said. "But still you have managed to break through that."

Belew listed WMU leaders, past and present, and said: "They've all worked within the circumference, the boundaries, but still managed to push the parameters. And that's a part of who you are."

Even though WMU members might each like to say the convention controversy has not affected them, it has, said national WMU President Marjorie J. McCullough.

"The thing that hurts me personally is that I don't know who to trust anymore," she said. "But I'm not willing to give up on the Southern Baptist Convention."

McCullough encouraged the group to keep on having faith in what they are doing to support the convention through the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for Home Missions, through the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for Foreign Missions and through the Cooperative Program unified budget, which funds the work of the convention.

"Our faith is not based on a (SBC) resolution. We have to keep on believing ... and know that no resolution can change our faith," she said.

McCullough also said she knows not everyone in the SBC thinks WMU is wonderful. Other women's groups are springing up within Southern Baptist churches competing for the time and attention of young women.

WMU must do a better job of "selling" itself, she said: "Missions education is not a priority today in our convention. We want it to be. But it isn't."

Four factors will carry WMU successfully into the future, McCullough said:

- WMU leadership must be of substance and quality.
- WMU must offer a meaningful application of missions at home.
- WMU must be unified in purpose.
- And WMU must create an environment conducive to change.

During the meeting, the WMU executive board:

-- Adopted the 1991-92 dated plan, which outlines the activities, curriculum and products for WMU organizations in the churches for that year.

-- Announced a 1987-88 year-end budget excess of \$803,000. Of this amount, \$200,000 was added to the Second Century Fund, WMU's endowment for supporting missions work among women abroad and in the United States, and for supporting missions education among women in seminaries. Another \$50,000 was used to give grants for this year.

The Second Century Fund now totals \$414,000. From interest earned on this amount and from the additional \$50,000 supplement, 13 awards were made totaling \$59,268.

Second Century Fund grant recipients are: Colorado WMU; Wyoming WMU; New England WMU; Ethnic Baptist Women Leadership Conference; Dakota Southern Baptist Fellowship WMU; Michigan WMU; Pennsylvania-South Jersey WMU; new-work area literature; WMU Language Group; Korea WMU; Nigeria WMU; and the women's department of the Baptist World Alliance.

-- Honored Belew upon his retirement from the Home Mission Board for his years of coordinating home missions work with WMU.

-- Adopted the "Missions Growth Plan," a project to enlist all Southern Baptist church members in missions and to increase WMU membership and organizations by the year 2000.

-- Heard a report that WMU magazine prices will increase with the January 1990 issues, due to rising publishing costs and a decline in the subscriptions of four of WMU's 11 magazines. Price increases will range from \$1 to \$1.50 per 12-month subscription.

-- Heard the selections for the 1989 Acteens National Advisory Panel. They are Debbie Aye, Valencia, Calif.; Flory Carrera, Columbia, S.C.; Lori Webb, Lanett, Ala.; Tonia Wheeler, High Point, N.C.; Pat Griffin, Fairfax, Va.; and Michelle Mitchell, Bellevue, Neb.

Advisory panel members serve as pages at the WMU annual meeting and the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting. They also write and speak on behalf of Acteens, the missions organization for girls in grades seven through 12.

The next meeting of the WMU executive board will be June 9-10 in Las Vegas, Nev.

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Preregistration open
for Vegas child care

N-10

Baptist Press
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LAS VEGAS, Nev. (BP)--Child care will be provided for preschool children of messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting June 13-15 in Las Vegas, Nev., announced Convention Manager Tim A. Hedquist.

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The child-care facility will be located in the Las Vegas Convention Center, site of the annual meeting, Hedquist said. It will be open for each session of the meeting: Tuesday, June 13, morning, afternoon and evening; Wednesday, June 14, morning and evening; and Thursday, June 15, morning and afternoon.

A preregistration packet, which includes registration forms and information about costs and policies, is available by writing to Marie Moore, College Park Baptist Church, 2101 E. Owens, Las Vegas, Nev. 89030.

Preregistration is available on a first-come, first-served basis, Hedquist said.

Another child-care option in Las Vegas is available through hotel and professional baby-sitting services, he added.

Information is available by contacting individual hotels or by calling Four Seasons Baby-sitting Service at (702) 794-0256, Hedquist said.

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WMU leaders hear new optimism
about world evangelization

By Susan Todd

N- CO
(WMU)

Baptist Press
1/13/89

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Southern Baptist foreign missions efforts will never be the same, if recent experiences of its top foreign missions executives have any impact, they reported.

The president and executive vice president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board participated in the Global Consultation on World Evangelization by A.D. 2000 and Beyond in Singapore Jan. 5-8.

FMB President R. Keith Parks, and Executive Vice President Bill O'Brien, made their first report of the meeting to executive board members of Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union Jan. 11. For both, it was a meeting unlike either had experienced before, they said.

O'Brien called the gathering of "Great Commission Christians" from all around the world one of "the most dynamic evolutionary processes" of which he has ever been a part.

"It is a new day in the history of world evangelization," O'Brien said.

The meeting was unusual, O'Brien reported, describing it as "a plateau where we can gather together devoid of man-made measurements of righteousness and simply strip the labels off and accept each other as persons re-created in Jesus Christ and who want to be obedient to the Great Commission. And that's where we came out.

"As we all left Singapore to go back to our differing places in 50 nations, there was the quiet assurance in our hearts that God is doing a new thing among us. And we all want to be a part of it.

"If it could happen for 314 (representatives) from 50 nations -- that many organizations, that many confessional backgrounds, that many differing traditions -- could it not happen within one little denomination called Southern Baptists?"

Both Parks and O'Brien praised the unity in purpose of the Christians who gathered in Singapore.

O'Brien told the group the participants agreed to not "further divide the body of Christ by introducing another confessional statement that some can agree with and some cannot."

He reminded WMU leaders that a similar global evangelization plan was attempted but failed around the turn of this century. He described feeling a "chilling impression" when reading the admission of failure by participants in the early movement.

"I've said, 'Lord, don't let us have to say that two or three or four years down the track,'" he reported.

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The global consultation was not a meeting to debate the validity of evangelizing the world, to hear an "array of preachers" or to judge each other's individual evangelization plans, O'Brien said. Nor was the meeting one to replace any group or to dictate a plan to any group, he added.

Rather, the consultation was a meeting of Christians who are committed to "evangelizing the peoples of the earth," he said.

In an interview after the address, Parks said he felt their first stop at WMU to be "very appropriate" because of all WMU does to educate Southern Baptists about missions and to call them to commitment.

It will take the efforts of the entire convention working in new ways if the world is to be evangelized by the year 2000, Parks stressed: "Southern Baptists are going to have to be willing to corporately die to self. So many of us have been so committed to maintaining a Southern Baptist identity and supporting 'our' missionaries that we've lost the commitment ... to reach the whole world for Christ.

"We're going to have to be willing to be prayerfully committed to whoever is with us, whether they happen to be one of our missionaries or not, if we're really going to have a part in reaching the whole world."

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Third World missionaries
multiplying rapidly

By Art Toalston

F F M B

Baptist Press
1/13/89

SINGAPORE (BP)--An American missionary's preaching spurred Edison Queiroz of Brazil to become a Christian years ago.

Queiroz is working for the day when Brazilians themselves are leading most fellow Brazilians -- and others throughout the world -- to faith in Christ.

"For years and years, we were receiving and receiving and receiving and giving nothing" to the cause of evangelism, Queiroz acknowledged. But a new day has dawned, he said, "The church in Latin America is learning to give people to missions and money to missions."

Throughout the Third World, in fact, missions involvement is on the rise. Evidence of that growth abounded at the Global Consultation on World Evangelization by AD 2000 and Beyond, a January meeting in Singapore of 300 Christian leaders from 50 countries. More than half the participants were leaders of Third World mission movements.

About 400 foreign mission agencies are based in Third World countries, according to mission researcher David Barrett. They have sent an estimated 30,000 missionaries outside their countries. The numbers swell considerably when Third World home mission agencies and workers are added.

Queiroz is executive director of the Congress on Missions for Ibero-Americans, a mission movement that emerged from a 1987 conference in Sao Paulo, Brazil, attended by 3,000 Christians from Latin America, Portugal and Spain. The congress is credited widely for sparking a strong interest in missions among Christians in many countries.

For Queiroz, however, missions involvement is nothing new. As pastor of Santo Andre First Baptist Church in the Sao Paulo area, he led the congregation to support 21 missionaries. Among them are four stationed in Hong Kong, one in Yugoslavia and eight among the Indians of the Amazon jungle. Queiroz was pastor of the church for 13 years before assuming his position with the congress last May.

In India, meanwhile, a government policy "has thrown the church into a situation where it has to assume responsibility for the propagation of the gospel," said Ebenezer Sunder Raj, general secretary of the India Missions Association, which encompasses 48 mission organizations in the country of 800 million people.

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That policy, spanning about a decade, has tightened the approval of visas to foreigners wanting to live in India.

"There is a growing feeling," Sunder Raj explained, "that international persons need not work in our country, that we must produce our own scientists, industrialists, academicians and so on. That same psychology applies to preachers and religion teachers."

As many as 20,000 foreign missionaries may have worked in India several decades ago, Sunder Raj said. Today, fewer than 1,000 foreign missionaries, Protestant or Catholic, live in India and "that number is going down and down," he said.

He estimated the number of Indians engaged in cross-cultural missions within India -- those working in territories, cultures or languages different from their own -- to be at least 3,000. Other evangelists working to plant churches in their own cultures number at least 2,000, he said.

The numbers are "healthy and progressing," but Sunder Raj said many of India's mission agencies "are in the initial growing stage (with) a long way to go."

Churches in Malaysia, reported Prince Guneratham, general superintendent of the 160 Assemblies of God congregations there, are supporting 45 missionaries in 15 countries, as well as providing funds to Christian workers in several countries.

"The Assemblies of God in Malaysia began through the Assemblies of God missionaries coming from America," Guneratham recounted. But in 1975, the Malaysian church members decided "we should learn to stand on our own and reach our own nation for Jesus." In 1983, they decided to begin foreign mission work.

Home missions is the primary thrust of more than 750 Nigerian missionaries working with the 2-million-member Evangelical Churches of West Africa, noted Panya Baba, the denomination's president. Government currency restrictions make foreign mission efforts extremely difficult for the churches, he said.

The denomination's missionary society was founded in 1949, but in recent years "many churches are catching the missionary vision, many more than before," Baba said.

The face of missions is changing, said Luis Bush, an Argentine who now heads Partners International, a Christian organization based in San Jose, Calif. Today's missionary "is no longer a white Anglo-Saxon as he was in the year 1900."

Non-Western mission agencies could become the most important trend in missions, he said. By the year 2000, their missionaries may outnumber those from the West. Currently, non-Western agencies are growing five times faster than those in the West, he added.

The number of Third World mission agencies has increased so dramatically in the past 15 years, observed Ralph Winter, that mission researchers are feeling compelled to give them a thorough study. Winter is general director of the U.S. Center for World Mission.

"There's a general awareness that the missionary mandate applies to more than just Western churches," he said.

Third World mission agencies are not an entirely new concept, Winter added. Jamaican Baptists, for example, founded their mission arm in 1842.

Western mission agencies must build trust and move toward a sense of "pure partnership" with Third World agencies, said Paul Yaggy of Overseas Crusades, based in Milpitas, Calif. They must project in word and deed a philosophy that holds, "No matter who I am, I'm an equal part of the body of Christ."

Handicap info ready
for Las Vegas meeting

N-60

LAS VEGAS, Nev. (BP)--Information about facilities and services for handicapped messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting June 13-15 in Las Vegas, Nev., may be ordered from the SBC Executive Committee, announced Convention Manager Tim A. Hedquist.

The information -- for people with mobility, sight or hearing handicaps -- is being prepared by people who are handicapped and have attended previous annual meetings, Hedquist said. These advisers have worked with meeting planners to make convention facilities and activities most accessible to handicapped participants, he said.

The packet contains maps and materials about parking, seating, restrooms and aid stations, he noted.

The Las Vegas Convention Center, site of the annual meeting, should prove very satisfactory for handicapped Southern Baptists, Hedquist said: "This facility is excellent. It basically is a flat floor, and the design is conducive to all our services for the handicapped."

The information packet is available by writing to Handicap Information, c/o SBC Executive Committee, 901 Commerce, Nashville, Tenn. 37203. It also will be available at the information booth in the convention center during the annual meeting.

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Koop not to issue
report on abortion

By Kathy Palen

N- BJC

Baptist Press
1/13/89

WASHINGTON (BP)--Surgeon General C. Everett Koop has informed President Reagan and a group of organizations he will not release a report on the health effects of abortion on women.

In July 1987, Reagan directed Koop, a longtime abortion opponent, to prepare a comprehensive report on the mental and physical effects of abortion. Since then, Koop and his staff consulted with scientific, medical, psychological and public-health experts, as well as 27 organizations with religious, philosophical, social, medical or other professional interests in the abortion issue.

Originally, Koop sent a private letter to the president explaining his reasons for not releasing the report. But after the White House made the letter available to the press, Koop sent an explanation to each of the organizations with which he met, including the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

In a letter to the CLC, Koop wrote: "After considerable soul searching and with subsequent consultation with many of the groups we met with originally, I sent a lengthy and explanatory letter to President Reagan explaining why such a report was not possible and suggesting that if he wanted an answer to the question originally posed, the only way to do it was through a prospective study. ...

"The domestic policy people in the White House said after delivery of the letter that I would be hearing from the president and assured me that the letter would be closely held. Instead, they released it to the press."

Koop said in his letter to Reagan that although some people have concluded in their own minds that the negative health effects of abortion on women are overwhelming enough to force the reversal of Roe v. Wade -- the Supreme Court's landmark decision on abortion -- scientific studies do not provide conclusive data about the health effects of abortion on women.

"I believe that the issue of abortion is so emotionally charged that it is possible that many who might read this letter would not understand it because I have not arrived at conclusions they can accept," Koop wrote Reagan. "But I have concluded in my review of this issue that, at this time, the available scientific evidence about the psychological sequelae (effects) of abortion simply cannot support either the preconceived beliefs of those pro-life or of those pro-choice."

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Koop recommended a prospective study that would extend over a five-year period, costing \$100 million. He said such a study should include the psychological effects of failure to conceive, as well as the physical and mental effects of pregnancy -- planned and unplanned, wanted and unwanted -- whether carried to delivery, miscarried or terminated by abortion.

During his consultations on abortion, Koop met with a group of eight Southern Baptists for a two-hour session in his Washington office Nov. 16, 1987.

The group was comprised of N. Larry Baker, then-executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, Nashville; Howard Cobble, pastor of Severns Valley Baptist Church, Elizabethtown, Ky.; Tom Elkins, chief of the University of Michigan Medical School Women's Hospital's benign gynecology division, Ann Arbor; Jim Henry, pastor of First Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla.

Also Mary Dan Kuhnle, administrator of Sellars Baptist Home and Adoption Center, New Orleans; Robert Parham, associate director of the Christian Life Commission, Nashville; Coy Privette, a state legislator and executive director of the Christian Action League of North Carolina, Raleigh; and Dorothy Sample, president of the North American Baptist Woman's Union and former president of the Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union, Flint, Mich.

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Evangelistic missions
highlights teleconference

By Bill Bangham

N-CO
(B'hood)

Baptist Press
1/13/89

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--For the past eight years, Paul Schlett has shared his faith in countries across the globe. And his company has paid his way.

Schlett, a ceramics engineer for Exxon Corp. whose expertise in oil refining is in demand around the world, sees his evangelistic efforts as a natural extension of his faith in Jesus Christ, he told viewers of the 1989 Baptist Men's Teleconference.

"If I cannot share my faith in some way and be ready to give an account of the hope that's within me, then my job is worth nothing," said Schlett, president of the New York Baptist Men organization.

Sponsored by the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission, the theme for the live telecast was "Missions Involvement through Evangelism." Commission President James H. Smith said Schlett and the three other guests on this year's conference were some of the finest examples of Baptist laymen who have discovered missions involvement through evangelism.

"The Brotherhood Commission is a missions education organization whose objective is to help churches involve men and boys in missions," Smith said. "We believe that the first goal of every missions endeavor is to bring people to know Jesus Christ."

Greg Finch found his commitment to evangelism in a partnership crusade in the Philippines. "I grew up thinking missions was for those other people, particularly foreign missions," he said. But when he saw a request from the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board pairing laymen with pastors in an evangelistic effort, he applied.

"I'd never shared my testimony in public let alone anything else," he said. But not enough pastors applied for the program, and the Kansas City, Kan., native found himself leading a crusade in a city on the island of Mindanao.

Filipino Baptists announced, "The great American evangelist, Greg Finch, has arrived," he said. As many as 5,000 attended the services, and by the end of the crusade, 287 of them had made professions of faith in Christ.

Today Finch is part of Wellspring Volunteer Missions Foundation, a non-profit organization that sends 100 lay people a year from the Kansas-Nebraska Baptist Convention overseas on partnership evangelism and church building projects.

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James McCollough works two jobs and is a Missions Service Corps volunteer helping California Baptists develop Royal Ambassador chapters to teach boys about Christian missions. The Long Beach resident has been in 90 churches during the past two years. Yet he found an evangelistic outreach through hitchhiking.

"The people who stop, I know God touched them to stop," he said. "I weigh 340 pounds. When they stop, I know the Lord has called them. And the purpose is, what is my mission to them now? What would God have me do to them?"

The attraction of the Baptist Men and Royal Ambassador programs for McCollough is "the hands-on involvement, being able to go out and do something for somebody." His prayer is for more men to get involved in telling others about Jesus Christ. "That's what it's all about," he said.

Nelson Sosa discovered that God can use people, no matter what their vocations. When he first came to Miami from Cuba 10 years ago, people would tell him that some day he would become a preacher. But in that time he has composed 62 hymns and has seen people come to Christ through his music.

"The Holy Spirit uses different things -- music, even a smile -- to reach people," he said. "I am preaching through the music. It's a marvelous thing."

A surgeon in Cuba, Sosa works as a medical technologist in Miami. "The Lord can use your life in different ways," he said. He also is director of Hispanic Brotherhood for southern Florida. Through Brotherhood organizations, other Hispanic men are learning to share their faith through their skills and talents, he reported.

"They are starting to feel they can be a witness for Jesus Christ," he said. "They are practicing and learning to share the gospel."

Besides these guests, the teleconference featured video segments on church construction in South Carolina, a lay-led revival in New York's South Bronx and sports evangelism in Kentucky.

Richard McCartney, executive vice president of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission, hosted the 90-minute broadcast. Volunteers from Texas Baptist Men answered more than 100 telephone calls during live call-in segments. The teleconference was carried at 120 Baptist Telecommunication Network sites. Others taped it for later showing. It also was carried on the ACTS network and by public-access broadcast channels in several metropolitan areas.

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BP photo mailed to Baptist state papers from Brotherhood Commission

Church dropouts
may lack nurture

By Terri Lackey

N-SSB

Baptist Press
1/13/89

LAKE YALE, Fla. (BP)--People most likely to drop out of church are those who have "come to faith in later life more by crises than sustained Christian nurture," a professor from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary told participants in a seminar at a national church recreation conference at Lake Yale Baptist Assembly in Florida.

Bruce Powers, professor of Christian education at Southeastern Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., led the Rec Lab seminar on reclaiming dropouts. Three approaches exist to Christian conversion -- the crisis-oriented, developmental and process, he noted.

People who come to faith later in life out of a crisis-laden background "usually have experienced many losses early in life, and they are often responding to the church as something they identify will meet a need," he said.

People who take the developmental approach to Christianity are more likely to be those who have grown up with church in a Christian family, he said. Developmental conversions usually are experienced by children or pre-teens.

The third category of conversion -- process -- often is the route taken by people who have been affiliated with other faiths, religions or even cults, he said.

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"These people spend more time studying the Bible because they have to be sure of the costs," Powers said. "For example, a Muslim embracing Christianity must be sure the change will do him more good than harm."

While developmentals do tend to drop out of church when they are in college and as young adults, Powers said, they usually "come back to church when they begin having children."

The single-adult Christian who experienced a developmental conversion will come back to church when he or she feels a social need or a need to be affiliated with a worthwhile entity, he said.

However, people who come to their faith by the crisis-oriented conversion, Powers said, are the ones who leave the churches when they feel Christianity no longer meets their needs.

"The moment the conversion is not matching their needs, the person lets go and starts looking for other answers," he explained. "These people have developed their religion through feelings."

They have very little knowledge of the gospel "because it doesn't feel good sometimes to study the Scripture," he said.

Pastors, church staff members and church members often can recognize these people and guide them down the right path of Christianity by just listening to them.

Crisis-oriented people must begin their Christian lives just as developmentals did, by receiving nurture and being guided through Scripture, Powers said.

"The key to meeting the needs of these people is to surround them with direct leadership and a few understanding, nurturing peers for a period of orientation and assimilation," he noted.

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Precaution urged
to avoid lawsuits

By Terri Lackey

N-SSB

Baptist Press
1/13/89

LAKE YALE, Fla. (BP)--In a day and age where "everybody sues anybody for everything," church recreation leaders must take extra safety precautions when administering recreation activities in their churches, a university professor said.

Ankle injuries on a basketball court will happen, but situations where injuries might have been prohibited with extra precautions could cost churches money, said Steve Morrow, assistant professor of recreation at Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Mo.

Morrow, who taught a seminar on legal aspects of recreation during Rec Lab at Lake Yale Baptist Assembly near Leesburg, Fla., said recreators would be wise to avoid perceived negligence or carelessness in their ministries.

During the two-day seminar, Morrow gave some practical steps in avoiding a lawsuit.

Recreation ministers should emphasize preventive measures "or act rather than react" as a means of avoiding negligence, he said, noting, "By devising special playing rules, you can take action ahead of time to ward off a situation which might be harmful."

Also, recreation ministers can look at specific aspects of their operation on a regular basis, "checking facilities and areas to be sure that they are safe," he said. Even observing support personnel from "time to time to see if they are carrying out their responsibilities wouldn't hurt," he added.

Enlisting and maintaining a qualified staff is very important, especially when an injury happens, he said.

Staff members should be provided regular training, especially in the areas of first aid and safety measures, he said.

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"There is no way you will get off the hook in a court of law if your staff is not trained, and a serious, potentially avoidable injury occurs," he said.

Recreation ministers should establish a plan to deal with routine matters such as an injured ankle, as well as emergencies such as severe injuries. Recreation ministers should provide skilled supervisory control over people who participate in high-risk activities, such as collision sports, white-water rafting or rappelling, he added.

"It's not enough to have an adult there with your young people while they are taking part in a high-risk activity. You need someone there who can supervise the activity and knows how to do it," he said. "They should also know how to administer first aid if something happens."

Meanwhile, Morrow listed four conditions for a church to be considered liable for an accident.

In the first -- duty or standard of care -- a church must prove it provides reasonable safety in its activities.

"It is reasonable to assume you can prevent some accidents such as an injury from a water puddle on a gym floor, but there are some injuries which just cannot be prevented," Morrow said. "But that can be a subjective area, and that's where a judge comes in."

In the second condition of liability -- breach of duty -- a plaintiff must prove the church committed a breach of duty or was negligent of its duty of creating and maintaining a safe environment, said Morrow.

Under the third condition -- causal relationships between the breach and the duty -- the plaintiff must prove the accident occurred because of the breach of duty or as a result of a lack of a particular safety precaution, Morrow said.

"In other words, the guy who breaks his leg has to prove he did it slipping on the water puddle in the gym and not just under some normal circumstance," he said.

And finally, Morrow said, some type of injury or loss must occur. People cannot sue the church if they only experienced the potential for injury.

"They might have slipped and fallen in the water puddle, but thank goodness they got up and were not hurt," he said.

Avoiding negligence "is really the bottom line" in recreation activities, he added.

"I don't want you to worry about getting sued all the time," he said. "You just have to have an attitude or think about preventing negligence. It's when you're not thinking about it that negligence occurs."