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President Bush emphasizes
theme of serving others

N-BK
By Kathy Palen

WASHINGTON (BP)--A few minutes after taking the oath of office as the nation's 41st president, George Bush spoke a prayer as his first presidential act.

Beginning his Jan. 20 inaugural address, Bush prayed: "Heavenly Father, we bow our heads and thank you for your love. Accept our thanks for the peace that yields this day and the shared faith that makes its continuance likely. Make us strong to do your work, willing to heed and hear your will, and write on our hearts these words: 'Use power to help people.' For we are given power not to advance our own purposes, nor to make a great show in the world, nor a name. There is but one just use of power, and it is to serve people. Help us remember, Lord. Amen."

Throughout his 20-minute speech, the newly inaugurated president reiterated that theme of service. He challenged Americans to better their nation and the world through a "new engagement in the lives of others."

Bush, 64, took the presidential oath of office with his left hand placed upon two Bibles -- one used by George Washington during his inauguration 200 years ago and the other belonging to the Bush family. The Bibles were open to Matthew 5, which contains Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

As president, Bush committed himself to celebrating the "quieter, deeper successes that are made not of gold and silk but of better hearts and finer souls." He called upon Americans to unite behind the purpose of making "kinder the face of the nation and gentler the face of the world."

"My friends, we are not the sum of our possessions," Bush said. "They are not the measure of our lives. In our hearts, we know what matters. We cannot hope only to leave our children a bigger car, a bigger bank account. We must hope to give them a sense of what it means to be a loyal friend, a loving parent, a citizen who leaves his home, his neighborhood and town better than he found it."

Acknowledging a national deficit that has left the country with "more will than wallet," Bush encouraged the nation's citizens to practice hands-on activism in helping others.

"We will turn to the only resource we have that in times of need always grows -- the goodness and the courage of the American people," the president said.

"The old ideas are new again because they're not old, they are timeless: duty, sacrifice, commitment and a patriotism that finds its expression in taking part and pitching in."

The president mentioned such domestic problems as homelessness, drugs, poverty and crime. He also reminded the nation of the Americans who are held hostage abroad.

"I do not mistrust the future," Bush concluded. "I do not fear what is ahead. For our problems are large, but our heart is larger. Our challenges are great, but our will is greater. And if our flaws are endless, God's love is truly boundless.

"Some see leadership as high drama and the sound of trumpets calling. And sometimes it is that. But I see history as a book with many pages, and each day we fill a page with acts of hopefulness and meaning.

"The new breeze blows, a page turns, the story unfolds. And so today a chapter begins -- a small and stately story of unity, diversity and generosity -- shared and written together."

Which evangelism methods are best?
Experts say 'Try more of each'

By Greg Warner

F-10
(F12)

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--Southern Baptists may be relying too heavily on less productive methods of evangelism and ignoring more successful ones, evangelism strategists report.

They suggest Baptist churches will need to adopt a more comprehensive approach to evangelism in order to turn their roller-coaster history of baptisms into a steady pattern of growth.

For most of the 1980s, Southern Baptists have watched their "evangelism efficiency" go down: While the number of church members has continued to grow, the number of new converts who were baptized has grown much more slowly. Now, an average of 30 Baptists win one person to faith in Christ in one year -- an "efficiency ratio" of 30:1.

While baptisms last year rose 2.8 percent nationwide, evangelism strategists warn more than a one-year upturn in statistics is needed to make a difference in Southern Baptist evangelism. The change requires new attitudes and innovative approaches.

Churches use a variety of methods to try to reach non-Christians with the gospel -- mass evangelism, one-to-one witnessing, social ministries. But outreach experts say churches tend to pick one strategy to the exclusion of others, adding the imbalance has hurt their efforts.

"A real weakness in a lot of churches is that they stick with mainly one thing, and in most cases it's revivals," said Clyde Billingsley, Florida Baptist evangelism director.

In 1987, the last year for which complete statistics are available, three-fourths of all Southern Baptist churches held revivals. However, only 38 percent of them reported that any baptisms resulted, according to the churches' Uniform Church Letters.

Southern Baptists show no intention of abandoning their tried-and-true commitment to revivalism, however. In fact, most pastors say it is the most effective means of evangelism.

A recent survey by Ronald Johnson of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board showed 62 percent of Baptist pastors think revivals worked well in their churches. Personal evangelism was deemed effective by 46 percent, while ministry-based evangelism was said to work by 44 percent.

Johnson, editor in the HMB's evangelism section, said that revivals were considered more effective in smaller churches, where they are still the dominant form of evangelism. While approval of revivals remained high among larger churches, other methods also were employed successfully. Training members in one-to-one witnessing, for instance, was considered effective by 65 percent of pastors in churches with more than 1,000 members.

Johnson's research provided a profile of Southern Baptist evangelism:

-- Churches with fewer than 150 members, while relying too heavily on mass evangelism, still have the best evangelism efficiency ratio -- one baptism for every 24 resident members. Pastors report that ministry-based evangelism is effective in this size church, presumably because interpersonal relationships are important in small fellowships. Less success is reported with personal evangelism and evangelism efforts led by laity.

-- Churches with 150-499 members report that mass evangelism is the most successful outreach method, followed by ministry-based evangelism and personal evangelism. Like the smallest congregations, one third of these churches depend on revivals for more than half of their baptisms, but almost another third report no baptisms as a result of revivals.

-- Churches with 500-999 members have the worst ratio of evangelism efficiency -- 35:1. They report slightly more success with ministry-based evangelism than personal evangelism, but prefer mass evangelism over all other methods.

-- Churches with 1,000 members or more apparently prefer mass evangelism and personal evangelism, while reporting less success with ministry-based evangelism or lay-led evangelism. These churches are twice as likely to offer witness training for members. Their evangelism efficiency matches the national average of 30:1, but 205 of the largest churches account for a disproportionate 11 percent of baptisms nationwide.

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For a denomination in which 86 percent of the churches have fewer than 500 members, however, what happens in its smaller churches is crucial. Here, Johnson said, the overdependence on revivals can be a hindrance.

"Small churches have not seen evangelism in a broad enough way," Johnson noted. They need to build on their strength -- interpersonal relationships -- by performing a "marriage" between one-on-one witnessing and ministry to personal needs, he said. "They need to take advantage of the sense of community and channel that energy for evangelism."

Johnson, a former pastor, said ministry-based evangelism is an effective method of outreach that often is overlooked. Those churches that use social ministry to spark evangelism report significant success, but many churches have not tried it.

Meeting human needs is one of the more effective ways that missionaries of the Home Mission Board open the door for evangelism. The 327 missions personnel assigned by the HMB to Christian social ministry centers and church-and-community ministries reported 9,606 professions of faith in 1987. That represents about 30 conversions per missionary, which is almost twice as good as language-missions workers, with 15.8 and six times higher than church-extension workers, 5.0.

While churches have been hesitant to adopt ministry-based evangelism, they have incorporated personal witnessing more readily. About one third of Southern Baptist churches report holding a weekly program of outreach visitation. More than half of the churches in Johnson's survey offer Continuing Witness Training, an evangelism-training program, on an ongoing basis.

Supplementing the traditional revival with ministry-based evangelism or regular personal witnessing would be one way for churches to integrate evangelism into the fabric of the church, Johnson said. That, in turn, should make churches more effective in evangelism.

Another advocate of the comprehensive approach is Harry Piland, director of the Sunday school department of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board. He said the lack of comprehensiveness has contributed to recent drops in the number of baptisms in the Southern Baptist Convention.

He suggested a five-step formula to make church evangelism comprehensive:

-- Begin a "planned, aggressive, outreach-visitation program" that identifies evangelism prospects, presents the gospel to them and enrolls them in Bible study.

-- Train teachers to use Sunday school for evangelism, whereby they teach the Bible for the dual purpose of nurturing believers and winning non-Christians.

-- Teach "relational evangelism," which sensitizes church members to witnessing opportunities in everyday life.

-- Begin Outreach Bible Studies, a Sunday School Board program of small short-term study groups designed to present the gospel to prospects who won't come to Sunday school or worship.

-- Use an Outreach Communications Plan, a Sunday School Board program that uses direct mail and telemarketing to reach those who won't otherwise come in contact with the church's witness.

The key to Piland's strategy is to get non-Christians enrolled Bible study. "If you have a lost person sitting in a place of study, and the person teaching the Bible is teaching with a purpose of bringing them to salvation, then you're going to have results," he said.

As proof, he points to studies that show that one out of three non-Christians who enrolls in Sunday school will make a profession of faith within the first year.

For Baptists tempted to brag about SBC evangelism efforts, researcher Orrin Morris of the Home Mission Board reports that one-third, or 37 percent, of all people immersed by Southern Baptists in 1987 were either "rebaptisms," Christians who changed denominations or young children of Southern Baptists. The real impact on the "pagan sector of society," he said, is represented by the remaining two-thirds, or about 215,000 people.

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That means that for every baptism that came from the "pagan sector" in 1987, 450 non-Christians remained unreached, Morris said.

With that challenge facing Southern Baptists, evangelism strategists are calling for an outreach overhaul for Baptist churches. But realize the difficulties.

Getting Baptists to view evangelism comprehensively will "not happen overnight," but slowly, as the benefits are expounded in curriculum and by advocates, Piland said.

Churches will have to pick and choose what strategies to employ, tailoring the suggested programs to their own needs and capabilities, Billingsley said.

But the comprehensive approach will be rewarding, Johnson said. "What we need to rediscover," he said, "is that evangelism has to be done in such a way that it is deliberate and holistic in the life of the church, so that every organization feels that it's their duty."

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Baptists told to give water
to be people at 'well of need'

By Ken Camp

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FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--As Christ offered living water to the Samaritan woman at the well, Baptists must give both physical and spiritual refreshment to people at the "well of human need," participants were told during a church ministries seminar held in conjunction with the Texas Baptist Evangelism Conference in Fort Worth.

Mildred McWhorter, director of three inner-city mission centers in Houston; Erwin McManus, evangelism director for Dallas Baptist Association; and Robert Sowell, Christian social ministries consultant for the Baptist General Convention of Texas, led the seminar on "Sharing Jesus in Community Ministry."

"In witnessing, you have to look for opportunities," McWhorter said. "There are people at the well of human need all around us, waiting for the living water. For the life of me, I cannot see how anybody can go a whole year without winning a soul to Christ. Witnessing ought to be a part of our everyday experience."

To be an effective witness, a Christian must "live Christ," be willing to allow God to use personality in witnessing situations and have a genuine love for people, McWhorter said.

"We must accept people as they are, whether that means a lady walking a poodle with a pink bow on its head or a little boy digging through a trash bin looking for breakfast," she said.

During her 25 years of service in Houston's inner city as a Southern Baptist home missionary, McWhorter said, she has learned many ways to share Jesus both through words and actions.

"The one main thing I do is let people know that God loves them," she said.

She recalled years ago, when an 8-year-old girl visited Baptist Mission Center. Realizing the needs of the girl's family, McWhorter delivered a box containing Christmas gifts, canned goods, clothes and a Bible to their home. Since the girl's father was drunk and unwilling to talk on the day she visited the family, and since they moved away from Houston soon afterward, McWhorter lost touch with the family.

Seventeen years later, while making a home missions presentation in a south Texas church, McWhorter once again met the young woman, who was Woman's Missionary Union president at the church. The woman said that at age 16 when she was at the point of committing suicide, she found the Bible McWhorter had given her eight years before, and in it she found reason to go on living.

Her father, who had become chairman of the church's benevolence committee and president of the Baptist Men's group, approached McWhorter saying, "Thank you for witnessing to us."

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"I was shocked. I thought that I had never witnessed to that man. I never got to share the 'Roman Road' with him or his family," McWhorter said. "But by loving them, meeting their needs and giving them Scripture, through the working of the Spirit of God, they came to know the Lord."

Through a Bible study of Christ's encounter with the woman at the well in John 4:1-26 and through relating his own experiences as pastor at the inner-city Cornerstone Baptist Church in Dallas, McManus discussed principles of lifestyle "as you go" evangelism.

"Jesus broke through walls of prejudice to share words of redemption," he said. "We must be ready to tear down barriers which separate others from Jesus."

In addition to penetrating cultural, traditional, religious and linguistic barriers, Christians must recognize the intrinsic value of people and be creative in making Jesus relevant to "lost" people, he said. Christian witnesses should cultivate a thirst for living water among non-Christians, lead them to confront their sinful condition and then invite them to respond to the call of Jesus to eternal life, he added.

Examining the link between witnessing and Christian social ministry, McManus offered guidelines for sharing the gospel both through one-time encounters and repeated contacts.

"Be there to befriend people," he said. "Develop friendships, not just service relationships. The person with whom you are talking knows whether you are speaking as a professional serving a client or as a friend coming in the name of Christ. What is not possible with a client is possible with a friend."

McManus warned against making the offer of physical assistance contingent upon the acceptance of the gospel message. If either service or friendship is made dependent upon a needy person's decision to accept or reject Christ, false "conversions" may result.

"In witnessing, use persuasion, not manipulation," he said. "One has integrity; the other does not. One is scriptural; the other is not."

"We need to demonstrate honest, unconditional love. Be willing to love people in spite of their decision against Christ."