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March 23, 1989

89-47

Vines issues statement  
on Las Vegas witnessing

N-CO

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--Jerry Vines, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, has issued a statement calling for renewed commitment to Christian witnessing and evangelism as Southern Baptists move toward their 1989 annual meeting in Las Vegas, Nev.

Vines, pastor of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Fla., has issued periodic statements since his election to the presidency during the 1988 annual meeting in San Antonio, Texas, "to try to communicate on a personal basis to our Southern Baptist people."

In his statement, Vines said:

"The Southern Baptist Convention expresses the biblical basis of its unity in a most practical way. The convention's work of evangelism and missions places Southern Baptists in the forefront of nationwide and worldwide efforts to propagate the gospel of Jesus Christ. We understand our mandate from the Captain of our salvation.

"This year as president ... has given me an opportunity to re-emphasize the importance of personal commitment to the matter of Christian witnessing. I have been very pleased by the response this emphasis has received from all parts of our denomination. I sense throughout our denominational life a renewed commitment to winning the lost to Jesus Christ.

"The (Southern Baptist) Foreign Mission Board has restated the priority of evangelism in all its missionary programs and procedures. This is not a new direction for foreign missions, but a recommitment to what has been all along its stated direction.

"The (Southern Baptist) Home Mission Board is leading us in a witnessing effort for the convention session in Las Vegas. This effort will enable the messengers to express an evangelistic concern for the beloved people of Las Vegas.

"I commend our Foreign Mission Board and encourage our people to share in the witnessing efforts arranged by the Home Mission Board.

"I renew my personal commitment to evangelism and missions," Vines said. "I encourage every Southern Baptist leader, denominational servant, pastor and layperson to join with me in this renewed commitment."

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Alabama RA gets  
1st national award

By Tim Bearden

N-CO  
(B'hood)

Baptist Press  
3/23/89

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Matt Dunaway, an eighth grader from Oxford, Ala., is the first recipient of a new national award given by the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission.

Dunaway, a member of Greenbrier Road Baptist Church in Anniston, is the first member of the Baptist missions organization for boys to complete requirements for the National Pioneer Award.

"Matt is the first of many young men in Pioneer Royal Ambassadors who will receive this award," predicted Brotherhood President James H. Smith. "He is a Pioneer in the truest sense of the word."

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Dunaway's award cognizes his personal development in missions. It was announced and presented at the Alabama Royal Ambassador Congress in Birmingham, March 17. The presentation was kept secret, although his family, pastor and counselors knew what was to take place.

"It is a privilege to be first," said Dunaway. "I didn't think I would ever have time to finish (the work). I thank God for giving me the opportunity."

Dunaway said his church involvement made the work easier and that it was fun.

According to Jim Knight, pastor at Greenbrier Road, Dunaway is "the finest example of a young Christian I know." Knight states Dunaway, as well as being active in RAs, prays for and witnesses to lost friends, and is active in youth choir and Bible Drill, in which he was state finalist.

Jeff Knight, an RA counselor at the church, said that Dunaway "takes being a Christian seriously, he is Christlike even with his peers at school."

Dunaway, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Steve Dunaway, plays junior high basketball and football. He is in the Beta Club and chorale. And he dreams of becoming a professional basketball player.

Young men like Dunaway will be the backbone of Southern Baptist missions in the near future, Smith predicted: "They are only a few years away from being those missionaries on home and foreign fields upon whom we'll depend, or those mission-minded laymen leading our churches and living out a missionary lifestyle in their communities."

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Husband-wife team named  
Indiana Baptist editors

N-10

Baptist Press  
3/23/89

INDIANAPOLIS (BP)--A husband-wife team from Lancaster, Texas, Gary and Tammi Ledbetter, have been named editors of the Indiana Baptist, newsjournal of the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana, effective April 24.

The selection was announced by SCBI Executive Director Mark Coppenger, who told Baptist Press: "When we began our search (for an editor) it never occurred to me that we would find a couple for this task. As we explored this prospect, we were struck by how wonderfully they were suited for our setting.

"By dividing the budgeted salary of about \$36,000 annually and the work week, we have tailored the position to take advantage of what clearly is a fine opportunity for Indiana Baptists."

The Ledbetters replace David Simpson, who resigned as editor of the state Baptist newspaper in early 1988. However, since Simpson's departure, the editorship has been combined with student work because of restructuring of the state executive staff.

Ledbetter will be executive editor and responsible for the state newspaper, as well as student work. Mrs. Ledbetter will be managing editor, and "likely will work a couple of days a week on the paper," Coppenger said.

Coppenger said the employment of the Ledbetters completes the staff of the state convention, which was caught in controversy over use of missions funds. Executive Director R.V. Haygood, Missions Director Glen Ray, Church Growth and Ministries Director Lew Reynolds and Editor Simpson all resigned.

Coppenger, pastor of First Baptist Church of El Dorado, Ark., was elected to replace Haygood, assuming the post Sept. 1, 1988.

In November 1988, the SCBI executive board restructured the state staff because of budget concerns, eliminating seven positions and transferring one staffer.

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Coppenger, who in addition to his work as executive director also heads the evangelism effort, told Baptist Press all posts now have been filled. James Abernathy, who was evangelism director, is state missions director; Margaret Gillaspie continues as director of Woman's Missionary Union; James Brewer remains director of the Boyce Bible School campus; and Reathell Miller is director of the state Baptist camp.

Gary Bearce, who had been associate pastor for education at Second Baptist Church in Springfield, Mo., replaced Reynolds as Sunday school director March 1.

A retired FBI employee, Bob Juday, has joined the staff as a Mission Service Corps volunteer as Coppenger's assistant. Juday, following his retirement from the FBI, was a missionary associate with the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board in Liberia.

Ledbetter has been minister of youth at First Baptist Church of Lancaster, Texas. Mrs. Ledbetter, Coppenger said, has been "involved in home schooling" of the couple's children, Douglas, 6, and Philip, 3.

Ledbetter is a graduate of Criswell College in Dallas, and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. Prior to going to Lancaster, Ledbetter was minister of youth at Grace Baptist Church in Evansville, Ind.

Mrs. Ledbetter, a journalism graduate of the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, has worked for the Springdale (Ark.) News. She also was editor of Shophar, a publication of the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies in Dallas; was associate editor of the Southern Baptist Advocate, 1984-86; and director of communications and public relations for the James Robison Evangelistic Association, 1978-81.

The Ledbetters were recommended during a telephone call "about something else," Coppenger said. "It just came out of the blue. But we checked it out at every point. We found he had student work experience in Indiana, was theologically astute, a communicator and had a wife with journalistic experience. I think it is God's provision."

Coppenger has been interim editor of the Indiana Baptist since he assumed the executive director's post. In that capacity, he hired James C. Hefley of Hannibal, Mo., to write a column for the newspaper at the rate of \$100 per week.

"I invited him (Hefley) to be my columnist while I was acting editor," Coppenger said. "We have been paying for the column out of the editor's salary. The design was for Jim (Hefley) to fill the gap I could not fill. I am grateful to him for helping me."

Coppenger said of the Ledbetters: "My tenure as editor ends when they begin. Jim has been my columnist, but that relationship will end when I cease being editor. Whether he continues will be a decision the Ledbetters will have to make. They will be editors and will shape the paper as they will."

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MissionsUSA magazine  
adds Bangham to staff

N - HMB

Baptist Press  
3/23/89

ATLANTA (BP)--Bill Bangham, editor of the young men's edition of the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission's World Mission Journal, has been named associate editor of MissionsUSA magazine.

The Annapolis, Md., native will assist Editor Phyllis Thompson in production of the bimonthly color magazine, published by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

He has held his current position for four years. Bangham, who joined the Brotherhood Commission in 1981, previously was associate editor of World Mission Journal for Baptist Men and director of curriculum and training.

Bangham's work has appeared in more than 100 publications and in outlets as diverse as National Public Radio and NBC syndicated programs. He is author and co-author of several books.

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Prior to joining the commission, Bangham was affiliated with George Washington University, the University of Maryland and the Center for Environmental Education and Research, all in the Washington, D.C., area.

For 10 years he was a Brotherhood Commission and Home Mission Board volunteer in church renewal.

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California church finds  
congregation in theater

By Joe Westbury

F- HMB  
Baptist Press  
3/23/89

SAN DIEGO (BP)--The marquee above the cinema heralds "Beaches," the latest Hollywood offering. But the main attraction on Sunday mornings is not Bette Midler.

The individual on stage each Sunday is Sam Williams, who presents the Christian gospel in an upbeat, contemporary setting.

Cinema 21 is Del Cerro Baptist Church's latest venture in reaching San Diego's unchurched population. Area pastors more comfortable with traditional approaches have expressed surprise that Williams's method is working.

Not only has the experiment attracted a steady following of 225 in its first four months, but it is now viewed as the pacesetter ministry for churches of all denominations. Cinema 21 was the first church to meet in a theater in San Diego, and others are now following its lead.

Del Cerro, which takes its name from the east San Diego suburb where it is located, had already established itself as being a progressive church -- even at 30 years of age.

The congregation had started three new churches and helped re-start another: It was known for its ministry with a Cambodian church, Spanish Kid's Club, a crisis pregnancy center, a Christian service center, and ministries in three retirement centers and two nursing homes.

"We had been very successful in getting people to attend services in our sanctuary, but we had run out of space," Williams says. The church already had filled its 350-seat auditorium for two morning services, and a third service seemed the only way to expand.

Then Williams had an idea.

Rather than adding another service, he decided to look elsewhere for a building with a larger auditorium. His first move was to avoid the older churches that had plenty of space but were stereotyped as lacking relevancy.

The church then targeted the sub-culture it wanted to reach. It decided on a 25-45 age group of married and single adults who were established in their careers, owned their residences -- and were unchurched.

"We were looking for people who were settling into life and were beginning to feel something was missing -- individuals who had a sense that they had 'arrived' but discovered they wanted more than what the world was offering," Williams said.

After eliminating hotel conference rooms and other options, Williams decided on a setting well-known to area residents -- the auditorium of a popular movie theater, Cinema 21, in nearby Mission Valley.

He and Phil Hester, a Southern Baptist newcomer to San Diego who had begun a church growth communications agency, began developing a marketing strategy to reach the target group.

The men, both graduates of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, broke new ground when they went after their prospects.

They first chose to advertise on a popular radio station with a light rock music format. Next, they placed ads in the entertainment section -- not the religion section -- of the Saturday newspaper.

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Last, they designed a direct-mail campaign to 10,000 homes in their target group. Even the mailing was unique: a cassette tape featuring Williams' introduction of the church and a brief sermon excerpt that carried practical application.

From the first service, Cinema 21 was a success.

The 100 Del Cerro members who began attending as a core group have since been joined by 125 individuals who were not attending anywhere. As an added bonus, the shift of members from Del Cerro freed up space at the mother church for growth in those services.

Williams works the Cinema 21 service into his already crowded Sunday morning schedule. As soon as the 8:30 a.m. service ends at Del Cerro, he drives 10 minutes to Mission Valley for the 9:45 theater service. Then, he returns to the mother church for the 11 a.m. worship service.

Cinema 21's graded Sunday school classes are taught in rented rooms at a nearby hotel, and Williams teaches an adult Bible study that relates directly to the sermon. Each Sunday, the theater lobby is transformed into a nursery.

A simple reason for the success, Williams says, is Del Cerro's willingness to break with tradition.

Neither Del Cerro nor Cinema 21 uses 'come forward' invitations at the conclusion of a service, he explains. Instead, response cards are distributed, and people receive a personal telephone call or visit by the pastor or a staff member.

"I don't pressure people to join because I don't work on commission," Williams says with a grin. "We never omit the plan of salvation, but we do have a very low-pressure invitation. When we went to the response cards, our baptisms doubled."

The main reason for Cinema 21's success is that it is designed for the person who may never have been in church before, Williams says.

The service is informal. There is no choir, and music is provided by a piano, two synthesizers and an acoustic guitar. Easy-to-follow choruses replace hymns for congregational singing. The music director rarely raises his hands to lead.

The future of Cinema 21 will depend on Del Cerro's ability to continue pioneering creative worship techniques -- techniques which communicate the gospel to the unchurched population, Williams maintains.

"We're open to any new idea that will enable us to reach the unchurched without compromising biblical principles. The only thing we're not willing to do is stop growing," he says.

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