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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE
SBC Executive Committee
901 Commerce #750
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(615) 244-2355
Alvin C. Shackelford, Director
Dan Martin, News Editor
Mary 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

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N-FMB

Haitians fighting despair,
says Baptist missionary

By Eric Miller

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (BP)--Soldiers were firing guns a mile away, but Southern Baptist missionary Virgil Suttles said he's convinced he's where God wants him to be.

The violence on Haiti, a Caribbean island nation, does not bother Suttles as much as the lack of hope, he said in an April 6 telephone interview.

Haitians have seen their presidency change hands four times, sometimes with bloodshed, since November 1987. That is when Suttles and his wife, Patsy, and children, Paul, 13, and Kelli, 8, arrived in the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. They are from Elberton, Ga.

Haitian army officers tried unsuccessfully to overthrow their government again in early April. More than 30 soldiers and several civilians were reported killed during the fighting.

Schools and businesses were shut down as tension mounted and a state of emergency was declared. Nearly everybody "stayed put" in homes, except for soldiers who occasionally rode around and fired guns into the air, Suttles said.

The latest unrest came as Haitian Baptists were starting to feel more positive about life, Suttles said. He has been working with Haitians "to try to build up some hope in their minds." But violence "just fans the fire of fatalism -- the ruling mindset of this country," he said.

"That's life in Haiti," say Haitians when unrest occurs. But Suttles is urging Haitians, especially fellow Baptists, to "become more God-centered and less man-centered, and to realize God is a loving God and not just a God who is far removed. We're not all down here like puppets on a string."

Poverty is another major contributor to despair, but young Baptist leaders realize "all the money in the world" is not the answer, Suttles said. They are starting to believe the answer is to develop "a perspective of reality and life itself that is directed by the Holy Spirit, and not by man."

The Suttleses and Southern Baptist missionaries Mark and Peggy Rutledge have seen the Baptist Convention of Haiti progress over the past two years as it established a program of church growth and long-range planning. As part of the growth program, Suttles is visiting the 600 Baptist churches to encourage more unity among them.

The Suttles children enjoy being out of school and don't mind the sound of gunfire, Mrs. Suttles said. In fact, Paul told his mother: "This is really exciting. We're living history."

The family, however, was disturbed to wake up April 2 and find that thieves had entered their home through barred windows and crept into their bedrooms as they slept. They stole appliances and car keys, but not the car.

"We don't feel like we're in any danger," Suttles, 41, said of the military violence. "As long as we stay home and abide by curfew laws, we do not feel afraid."

"I'm enjoying the work here. I prepared for several years to come and serve here. God has really worked to hone me and shape me by all the things that have transpired. He has made me appreciate who I am and what he has given us in the past and what I have now."

'Centrist Coalition' field
candidate for SBC president

By Mark Wingfield

N-HMB

ATLANTA (BP)--A group of Southern Baptist "centrists" said April 7 they plan to announce their candidate for SBC president in time for a whirlwind tour of key states before the denomination's annual meeting in Las Vegas, Nev., June 13-15.

Leaders of Baptists Committed to the Southern Baptist Convention were in Atlanta to form the organization's first state chapter. They held an informational meeting for about 100 ministers and laypeople and hosted a news conference afterward.

"There will be a candidate nominated in Las Vegas who will represent the viewpoint of trying to bring the convention together in harmony and peace, where everyone is included," said Winfred Moore, pastor of First Baptist Church of Amarillo, Texas, and keynote speaker at the meeting.

"There are some names being considered. Nobody is yet ready to be announced. Whenever it's announced, he's going to have to be a busy fellow. But I promise you that can be done.

"My hope is that within the next 10 days an announcement will be made."

Moore, twice an unsuccessful candidate for SBC president, is chairman of Baptists Committed. The group bills itself as a place for people who are committed to remain in the denomination despite dissatisfaction with current elected leadership.

"We're not trying to elect any group to control this convention, but to return it to the people," he said.

Moore will not be a candidate for SBC president this year, he said, but he urged the group to get out the vote for the "centrist" candidate.

"We're down to the place, as much as I dislike it, where the only thing that really counts is the number of people in the house when the vote is taken. And it's a sad commentary," he said.

Leadership of Baptists Committed has no plans to leave the convention for other denominations or to become independent, Moore said.

He fielded a question about recent comments by Richard Jackson, pastor of North Phoenix Baptist Church in Phoenix, Ariz., and the "moderate" candidate in last year's presidential election. Jackson, who appeared with Baptists Committed leadership in a Feb. 20 news conference in Nashville, later told reporters he would consider leading his church out of the convention.

"I think Richard Jackson is expressing the frustration he feels," Moore said. "That is not where I am.

"I am committed to the Southern Baptist Convention. I plan to stay committed. I'm not going to allow anybody to run me out. I'm going to stay, and I'm going to support our cooperative effort."

Moore described himself as a "militant centrist" who believes the convention "is worth committing everything that you have to."

Several pastors questioned Moore about how Baptists Committed differed from other attempts to unseat current SBC leadership. "What's to keep the 'centrist' movement from being identified as the 'moderate' movement?" one pastor asked.

Moore said Baptists Committed is different than any "moderate" groups, including the Southern Baptist Alliance. "The difference is the tack we're taking, the route we're on," he said.

"We are committed to helping turn this convention back to its historic principles, and to do it in the election of a president first of all, and then to change the rules so that nobody in any camp anywhere ever again will be able to control the appointive process in this convention."

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Joining Moore at the news conference were Georgia pastors David Sapp of First Baptist Church in Chamblee; John L. Taylor of First Baptist Church in Gainesville; Peter Rhea Jones of First Baptist Church in Decatur; Floyd Roebuck of First Baptist Church in Rome; and Monroe Swilley, pastor emeritus at Second Ponce de Leon Baptist Church in Atlanta.

Each pastor gave a brief statement about his support for Baptists Committed. Most referred to a family history with the Southern Baptist Convention and a desire for that tradition to continue.

The meeting was organized by Bill Scarbrough, pastor of National Heights Baptist Church in Fayetteville. Planners had no formal invitation list, he said, adding, "I simply got on the phone and called people I knew and asked them to call people they knew."

Baptists Committed Field Coordinator David Currie said a Texas chapter of the group will be organized April 13 and that other chapters are to be formed soon in Louisiana, Oklahoma, Tennessee and South Carolina.

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Circuit-riding preacher
coming around again

By Mark Wingfield

F- HMB

Baptist Press
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ATLANTA (BP)--The circuit-riding preacher is coming around again.

As Southern Baptists seek to start more churches in all areas of the United States, some missions leaders are promoting the circuit rider as a concept whose time has come again.

During the days of westward expansion, Southern Baptists and others employed circuit riders to supplying leadership for multiple churches with limited resources. One pastor served several small churches, making his rounds on horseback between the various locations.

"Field of churches" is the new name for a circuit-rider's region, said Tom Sykes, associate director of the new church development department at the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. Sykes has studied the concept as a way to help reach Southern Baptists' Bold Mission Thrust evangelism/missions campaign goal of 50,000 churches and missions by A.D. 2000.

"This is a viable strategy to increase the number of church starts, to help more pastors live on a livable salary and to help more churches enjoy the benefits of a pastor spending all his time in ministry," Sykes said.

In a field-of-churches situation, one pastor serves two or three churches in adjacent communities. Meeting times are varied at each location to allow for travel. Each congregation contributes to the pastor's salary.

This might be seen as a variation on bivocationalism, where a pastor serves a church and works another job, Sykes said. A field-of-churches pastor also has two jobs, but both are church related.

"If a pastor's second vocation is a second church rather than another profession, his ministry could be twice as productive," he said. "Neither church would be hindered by his ministry to the other. The added blessing for the pastor is that he can devote his total energies to a larger ministry of several congregations."

Randy Barnett is a field-of-churches pastor in Wyoming. He serves a church in Alcova and missions in Bates Hole and Bessmer Bend.

"This has given me a lot of freedom as a pastor," said Barnett, who began his ministry in Alcova as a bivocational pastor. "It has allowed me to triple my area of work and still be able to do it financially and time wise."

Barnett still works summers for the irrigation district, but now has enough church support to carry his family through the winter. "I haven't really increased my workload, I've just increased the time I have to do it," he said.

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The field-of-churches concept is suited ideally to the sparsely populated ranching communities of Wyoming, Barnett said: "Our church field is a vast territory with very few people in it. We have to reach 40 miles in three directions to meet our people."

Barnett would travel 1,000 miles to visit all 52 church members in one trip, Barnett said. "You don't go make 20-minute visits here," he added. "They expect you to stay all day."

"Up here, 25 miles apart is like across the street in the South," added Don Beall, director of missions for three Baptist associations in neighboring South Dakota. He also believes the field-of-churches concept works well in his state.

"Economically, this concept is good stewardship," Beall explained. "In some places, we have small churches limited on their missions giving because the biggest part of their income is used to support a pastor. This concept will free more money for missions, increase lay involvement and help us start more churches."

"The mainline denominations are leaving sparsely populated communities of small-town America. If we don't develop some strategy like this, these towns will have no ministry."

The field-of-churches concept does not replace the need for bivocational pastors, but it is a strategy to use along with bivocationalism, said Larry Wartsbaugh. Before becoming an associational director of missions in Iowa, Wartsbaugh minister to a field of churches in Illinois.

"There are times when bivocational really is best," he said. "Sometimes jobs are readily available. But here in the Midwest, a lot of the problem we have is for pastors to find other jobs. Even if a person is willing to be bivocational, he may not be able to find a job that uses his qualifications."

Wartsbaugh also said a field of churches might appeal to seminary graduates who feel called to full-time ministry but cannot find full-time positions.

Pioneer areas must use both bivocationalism and field of churches to be effective, Beall added, noting pioneer areas do not have the surplus of preachers the South has.

Although a field of churches will not fit every situation, Sykes listed five settings where the concept is most likely to help: declining rural communities; transitional communities, especially those with multiple language groups that could use a bilingual pastor; new work areas where two churches could be started at the same time; small communities located in densely populated areas of the East; and inner cities where churches are dying out.

For the field-of-churches concept to catch on, Southern Baptists must change their attitude about success in ministry, Sykes said: "God does call pastors to small churches. Success is being where God wants us and doing what he wants us to do at a particular time in our lives."

Sykes has written a new manual on the field-of-churches concept. It is being produced by the Home Mission Board.

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Seminary professors examine
doctrines of heaven, hell

By Trennis Henderson

F- (0)
(No.)

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4/10/89

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (BP)--It's been a long time since you heard a fire-and-brimstone sermon. The same goes for the pearly gates and the streets of gold.

Emphasis on heaven and hell has declined because mainstream Protestant ministers "simply don't believe in the afterlife themselves, either the biblical view or any view," said Douglas Stuart, an evangelical theologian at Gordon-Conwell Seminary in South Hamilton, Mass.

Stuart was among several theologians quoted in the March 27 issue of Newsweek magazine on the subjects of heaven and hell.

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While a recent Newsweek poll found that 94 percent of Americans believe God exists and 77 percent believe in a heaven, the article added, "Today, hell is theology's H-word, a subject too trite for serious scholarship."

While such statements may accurately reflect the views held in some religious circles today, several Southern Baptist theologians note Baptists as a whole continue to affirm the realities of heaven and hell.

Pollster George Gallup Jr., who conducted the Newsweek poll, told Word & Way, Missouri Baptists' weekly newsjournal, the Newsweek article overstated the case concerning ministers' rejection of a belief in heaven and hell. Noting that the poll's results among evangelical Christians provided an entirely different perspective, he said affirmation of heaven and hell among evangelical pastors is even more widespread than among church members.

Questioning people who claim that a belief in heaven and hell violates one's intellectual integrity, Larry McSwain, theology school dean at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., insisted: "You can't have intellectual integrity and not believe in heaven and hell. The evidence for hell is so overpowering when one examines the inhumanity to human beings which has been perpetrated in this century alone. The idea of overwhelming sin without punishment is intellectually absurd.

"Likewise, if there be no afterlife and no promise of heaven, to quote Scripture, 'our faith is in vain.'

"Neither heaven nor hell can be proven scientifically, but both are logically required, given the nature of human experience."

William Tolar, McSwain's counterpart at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, pointed out, "If a questionnaire were sent out to Baptist pastors and Baptist people, I think they would affirm overwhelmingly the reality of both heaven and hell."

Tolar, who teaches biblical background courses at Southwestern, emphasized that intellectual integrity among Christians "includes a serious regard for the text of the New Testament." Noting that teachings about both heaven and hell are "imbedded in the biblical text and cannot be taken out of the text," he added, "Both of those doctrines have to be taken very seriously."

Vernon Davis, dean of the faculty at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo., agreed that the doctrines of heaven and hell are "clearly grounded in Scripture and in the history of the church as a whole, and especially within our Baptist heritage." While "the teaching concerning the two destinies is found in all the classic doctrine statements," he affirmed that Southern Baptists may place more emphasis on those beliefs than most mainline denominations.

Despite the strong biblical emphasis on the realities of both heaven and hell, the professors agreed that many people find the doctrine of hell particularly difficult to accept.

Davis noted the reality of heaven is easier for many people to believe because "they simply want to believe in heaven." By contrast, he added, "there are many reasons for them to resist a belief in hell.

"They do not like to think about the implications of this for friends and loved ones who are not believers.

"They simply do not want to take as seriously as the New Testament does the reality of individuals' responsibility for their use of their freedom in this life."

Tolar explained that another reason some people reject a belief in hell is because of their concept of God as love. "They tend to define and isolate God as love as if love excluded justice," he said. "But the Bible teaches that God is just, as sure as it teaches that he is love. The Bible teaches that God's love is a just love that would not preclude such a place as hell."

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Each of the Southern Baptist theologians voiced similar views about the definitions of heaven and hell.

They agreed the greatest horror of hell is eternal separation from God, while the greatest blessing of heaven is spending eternity in God's presence.

Quoting the Apostle Paul's assertion that "to live is Christ and to die is gain," Robert Culpepper noted, that "heaven is where Christ is."

Culpepper, professor of theology at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., said the most significant aspect of heaven for him is the opportunity "to be with the Lord." Conversely, he described hell as alienation, separation and anguish.

Davis emphasized: "Heaven is the state of believers in the presence of God after death. Hell is the destiny of persons apart from Christ; a place of separation and punishment.

"The basic truth about heaven is that it is where salvation is fulfilled and where Christ is present clearly with his people. The primary thing about hell is that it is the experience of existence apart from God or any redemptive influence."

Focusing on the range of interpretations among Southern Baptists, Tolar explained: "Many Baptists, both pastors and people, would see the golden streets and pearly gates as more symbolic and figurative, whereas you would find another spectrum of Southern Baptists espousing literalism where there would have to be real gold and real pearls.

"The same is true of hell. I know fire may simply symbolize torment, while others would insist it is a literal fire that you literally feel."

Noting the difference between popular thought and theological examination, Davis added: "A person in the pew might really be convinced that if you don't believe in literal streets of gold, you don't believe in heaven as the Bible teaches it, whereas in a seminary setting, you try to go behind any of the descriptions and symbols to see what the theological reality is. The idea of beauty and the experience of the continuing presence of Christ -- these would be seen as the basic theological concepts of heaven.

"The difference is not whether it's affirmed one place and denied the other. It's a matter of the attempt to understand it as opposed to simply celebrate it."

"The majority of Southern Baptists would tend to fall along a fairly traditional interpretation of the reality of heaven as the promise of eternal life with the Father beyond this life," McSwain said.

Concerning hell, he added, "There would probably be more diversity of opinion on the nature of hell, but the majority of Southern Baptists would see hell as a place of punishment, with separation from the presence of God in the world to come, in an eternal, everlasting sense."

Each of the professors voiced concern about a decreasing emphasis on the doctrines of heaven and hell in many churches.

One reason for the decline may be due to an increased focus on helping congregations deal with day-to-day concerns, Tolar said. Noting that many church members "need help to survive a given week," he said the bulk of many ministers' sermons seek "to help people cope and live with the weekly pressures."

While doctrinal sermons comprise only one of several types of needed sermons, Tolar emphasized, "a pronounced and prolonged neglect of the biblical doctrines" will have a negative impact on local congregations. Culpepper remarked that another reason for a decreased emphasis on heaven and hell is simply that "many people are too immersed in the affairs of this life to give much concern to the affairs of the other life."

Acknowledging "more emphasis upon the present experience of salvation in Christ," Culpepper added, "We probably do not put as much emphasis on the negative aspect, that is to try to scare people out of hell, as we have in former days."

Tolar affirmed, "My reason for believing in heaven and hell is because of biblical revelation and my view of Scripture and its inspiration."

Regardless of one's interpretations of the scriptural accounts of heaven and hell, McSwain insisted: "One ultimately has to make a leap of faith. ... Once the faith response has been made, it's difficult to be a person of faith and deny these realities. ... I can't prove that there's a heaven; I can't prove that there's a hell, but I can affirm both.

"If you looked at all the pews across Southern Baptist life, I think you would find very high levels of commitment to belief in heaven and hell," he related.

Describing those beliefs, he added, "I don't think human language can improve on the Bible's description of heaven nor could human language improve on the horrors of living apart from God as one finds in the Bible's description of hell."

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'Be senders,' missionaries
exhort other Christians

By Breena Kent Paine

F- (CO
(NOBT)

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NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Not every Christian is called to be a foreign missionary, but "they can be senders," said missionaries Gerald and Vicki Davis.

From Oklahoma City, the Davises recently completed their first term as missionaries in the Philippines, a country comprised of about 7,000 islands and 80 language groups.

The Davises' call to missions began in 1980. She was a schoolteacher, and he was a junior-college teacher in Oklahoma when he accompanied a group of Southern Baptists conducting crusade services in the Philippines.

During one of the crusades, the group was short of preachers, so Davis was sent to an island to preach. "That week, over 700 people were saved," he said. At the end of the crusade, he felt strongly God's call for him to be a church planter in the Philippines.

His commitment to missions was challenged by offers from several well-paying secular positions. But he turned them down because he felt God telling him: "You have your music; you'll always use that. I want you to plant churches."

With preparation for the mission field in mind, the Davises moved to New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, where he received his master of divinity degree in 1984.

The thought of being a missionary's wife scared Mrs. Davis at first. "I had the misconception that all ministers' wives were quiet, refined and dignified," she said. However, during her time at New Orleans Seminary and her term on the mission field, she learned that God can use many different personalities.

While her husband was in seminary, she became involved with the Student Wives Fellowship, where she formed strong friendships and helped develop yearly student wives' programs.

While at New Orleans Seminary, "God taught me never to lose my joy" of being a Christian, she said. "When you lose your joy, you lose your ministry because you want to do nothing.

"Sometimes we limit how we share the gospel." She has found God often opens doors to share Christ through such avenues as hospitality, caring and giving.

For example, a door was opened when she made friends with a Filipino bakery owner. During the busy holiday seasons, "at least three days a week I would have a hot meal on her table for when she walked in" after work. The woman responded to Mrs. Davis' hospitality, which opened a door to share Christ through caring.

"She wanted to have children, but couldn't; I'm an adopted child and was able to help her overcome her fears (of adopting a child)," Mrs. Davis said. "Because she walked through the open doors, I've seen many fruits of that relationship," she added.

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A Filipino man who makes furniture had heard the gospel many times from Christians who were in and out of his shop for 25 years. "I met him and decided just to be his friend," Davis said. After a couple of years, the man accepted Christ.

As Davis sees it, missions is "planting yourself in a place and cultivating" relationships and sharing God's love.

God used yet another circumstance in the Davises' lives to open a door for ministry when her grandmother visited them in the Philippines and decided to stay. "She was a tremendous witness," he said, "because the Filipinos respect elderly people so much."

"She proved you're never too young or too old to proclaim the name of Christ," Mrs. Davis added.

In a country of 7,000 islands, the Davises feel "the intimidation of just a few workers and so many fields to be harvested."

"We see Filipinos who, to claim the name of Jesus, lose their family, their inheritance and their home," Mrs. Davis said.

Still other areas are very open to Christianity, but they also are open to other religions, Davis warned, and many islands are yet unreached by the gospel of Christ.

The Davises hope to "challenge the churches to be senders, to look at their local body of Christ and see who is called among them."

Church members should pray to be "encouragers," people who challenge others to go by teaching Sunday school or leading mission programs, Mrs. Davis noted. "Even if you can't go, you can be a sender," she said.

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Billy Graham studying evangelism
at Southwestern Baptist Seminary?

By Chip Alford

F-10
(SWBTS)

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FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--The best place to catch a glimpse of evangelist Billy Graham might be Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Billy Graham is taking time out from his busy schedule of crusades, Bible conferences and seminars to pursue a master of divinity degree at Southwestern Seminary.

OK, so it's not the Billy Graham, the famous evangelist who has traveled the world, preached to millions, and written dozens of Christian books. But is it Billy Graham, and this Texas native has a successful ministry in his own right.

Wrather Merle Graham, 35, was born in Fort Worth. His parents had promised to name him in honor of his two grandfathers. But because of his small size, the names just didn't seem to fit. So his parents took the first letters of his two names -- WM -- which stand for William and shortened that to "Billy."

"It was just a coincidence, though. I wasn't named after Billy Graham the evangelist," said Graham, who happily shares his name with one of the world's most famous Christian leaders.

Having the same name as a famous person has been humorous at times, Graham said, but it also has provided opportunities in his own ministry.

"In personal evangelism, you're always looking for a catch word -- something to open up an opportunity to communicate the gospel," he explained. "Well, when I sit down on a plane and say to a fellow passenger, 'Hello, I'm Billy Graham,' you'd better believe that opens up an opportunity."

Born with muscular dystrophy, Graham is confined to a wheelchair and is legally blind. But that hasn't prevented him from being actively involved in ministry.

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Although he made a profession of faith in Christ at age 8 and dedicated his life to the ministry at 17, Graham said he never really accepted Christ until he was 25.

"I finally understood that salvation was a gift; it wasn't anything we deserved or could earn. It was something God wanted to give to those who repented of their sin and received him by faith," he said.

Admitting that he had begun an evangelistic ministry before accepting Christ was a difficult task for Graham: "I had already experienced so many accolades from the religious community that I was embarrassed to let anybody know that I didn't have what I was offering everyone else. And I discovered very rapidly that when people who are physically handicapped begin to do normal Christian activities, the Christian community has a tendency to elevate them very quickly."

Graham accepted Christ at a revival meeting at his home church, First Baptist of Euless, Texas. "That night is the first time in my life I really felt free," he said. "I was freed from the shackles of religious tradition. I was free to be the man God called me to be."

Today, Graham and his wife, Kathy, keep busy with their own ministry -- Logia Evangelistic Association, named after the Greek word for the sayings of Christ. They travel across the United States conducting revival meetings, Bible conferences, youth crusades and other seminars.

"The greatest emphasis of our ministry is to help the body of Christ to see its potential and its responsibility to God to participate in the ministry of evangelism," he said.

In his "spare time" Graham also does some clinical teaching for Evangelism Explosion, teaches a singles Sunday school class at First Baptist of Euless and takes about two classes per semester at Southwestern Seminary. He also is vice president of the newly-formed Vocational Evangelists' Club at the seminary.

"God has chosen in his providence and sovereignty to limit my physical abilities, but one thing he has given me is a mind," Graham said, explaining his decision to enter seminary. "I think it's my responsibility to develop it to its fullest potential."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Southwestern Seminary

New Orleans students
minister in Mexico

By Breena Kent Paine

N- (O)
(NOBTS)

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NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Eleven people from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary spent the week before Easter preaching, teaching and healing in Juarez, Mexico.

Their mission was to work in a clinic adjacent to Iglesia Bautista de Peniel, or Baptist Church of Peniel, to minister in a children's home run by the church's pastor and to lead revival services for the community.

The mission team's housing was in El Paso, Texas; but members crossed the border to Juarez every day, an eye-opening experience for those who had never been to a Third World country.

"After only two days, we were very close as a group. We had shared in seeing Juarez together and were equally shocked and burdened by what we saw," said Todd Allen, Student Body Association president from Jackson, Miss.

"It was heartbreaking watching old (Mexican) men pushing their crates around," said Benny Jones, seminary director of student affairs and church-minister relations. "They would go across the border (to El Paso) and gather cardboard boxes to take back with them. They were using the boxes to build their homes."

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The contrast of the homes, manicured lawns, and high-rises of El Paso was striking against the poverty-stricken homes and the dry, dusty streets of Juarez, participants said. On the first evening, "we drove to an overlook on the side of a hill at night," Allen said. "We prayed with our eyes open as we looked at El Paso and Juarez. We prayed for the city (of Juarez), and we prayed ... that we would be able to encourage the church and win people to Christ. "And that happened," Allen said.

During revival services that week, seven people made professions of faith in Christ, and about 30 people rededicated their lives to Christ, Jones said.

During the week, the group took the pastor's family with them to interpret and went from house to house, passing out written testimonies and tracts, and inviting the people to revival services.

"Afterwards, the people from those homes climbed up the dirt hill, walked across the sewers, and went to the meager church building. From there, they could see El Paso. They knew the differences of El Paso and Juarez," Allen said. "Even so, they sang so beautifully from their hearts.

"I thought, 'Jesus has to be alive because they don't have any other reason to sing except for Jesus Christ.'"

Joe Trull, associate professor of Christian ethics, agreed: "Here these people are living below poverty level. It takes all their money just to put food on the table. They have so little, and yet they have so much more joy and happiness than we have with all our (material) things. They proved to us that to know Christ is real joy; joy comes from within."

One unique way of reaching people for Christ was through the medical clinic. Throughout the week, George Faile, a doctor, and student from Rome, Ga., and Sherrie Bumstead, a nurse and student from Beaumont, Texas, saw about 20 patients ranging in ages from one month to 66 years.

"Usually, the people we saw in the clinic ended up at the church that night" for revival services, Bumstead said.

Bumstead, who helped Faile by interviewing patients and taking vital signs, said the trip reconfirmed her call to missions: "I was feeling a need to see a need, and this renewed the desire and burden. I was there to minister, but I was being ministered to.

"Even though the language was a huge barrier, we could still worship with them. Even though I couldn't understand what they said in Spanish, I could feel the Spirit of the Lord in the worship services."

Bumstead had attempted to share her thoughts with the pastor's wife many times, but finally, in exasperation, she told the woman's son who could speak some English, "I wish I could talk more with your mom." His answer was, "There are some things that don't have to be said."

As the group left, Jones approached the pastor and said, "We came down here wanting to give you something, but you've given us more than we've given you."

The Seminary's Student Body Association hopes to plan a similar same trip again next, mainly because "it gives our students an opportunity to see what missions is like," said Jones. Their hopes for the future is to help build extra rooms for the children's home, dig ditches to get city water to the children's home and hold revival services.

"If even one person out of that group goes into missions, then the trip will have been worth it, (for that one person) will touch thousands of lives in the future, Jones said.

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(BP) photos available upon request from New Orleans Seminary