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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  
Marv 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 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

July 20, 1989

89-111

Chinese Christian leaders  
endorse party, state actions

By Erich Bridges

N- FMB

NANJING, China (BP)--Chinese Protestant leaders, in their first public statement since the June government crackdown on student protests, have "resolutely endorsed" the recent decisions of the Communist Party Central Committee.

The statement, dated June 27, was released by the China Christian Council and Chinese Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee.

The Communist Party Central Committee met in late June and purged General Secretary Zhao Ziyang from party leadership, charging him with support of the turmoil created by the student protesters and attempts to split the party. The committee reaffirmed China's economic reforms and opening to the outside world, but called on the nation to "check turmoil thoroughly and quell the counterrevolutionary rebellion."

The committee's decisions echoed the policy set forth in a June 9 speech by top Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping. The speech has been circulated nationwide for study and implementation.

The Protestant leaders applauded the reaffirmation of modernization and called upon Chinese Christians to study Deng's speech "in order to raise the patriotic and socialist consciousness, and together with the broad masses of the people, struggle for the construction of a strong and prosperous motherland."

In May the Christian council issued a statement of strong support for the students' demands and asked the government to enter into a dialogue with the students. But after the June 4 crackdown in Beijing, the Protestant leaders found themselves in a difficult and dangerous position, like other Chinese who voiced support for the students, observers noted.

The Protestants remained silent for more than a month, and their June 27 statement came later than similarly worded statements from Chinese Catholics, Buddhists, Daoists and Muslims.

Protestant leader Bishop Ding Guangxun (K.H. Ting) faced a particularly precarious situation: He not only had personally backed the students' call for reforms, but had signed a petition calling for an emergency meeting of the National People's Congress Standing Committee to consider the crisis. He is a member of the standing committee. He had also become more vocal in recent months in calling on government authorities to uphold laws allowing religious freedom.

The standing committee met in Beijing for eight days ending July 6 and endorsed the Communist Party's decisions and the government crackdown. Signers of the emergency petition were severely criticized. But a number of members, including Bishop Ding, concentrated instead on public outrage over widespread corruption.

"Deng Xiaoping stressed that we must not be softhearted in the fight against corruption, but must take real action," Ding was quoted as saying by the official People's Daily newspaper in Beijing. "I hope our media organs, as well as presenting anti-rebellion propaganda, will propagate that the party and government are strongly opposing corruption. This would satisfy the people and be upheld by them."

According to a Western observer with ties to Chinese Christians, Ding "had to make a difficult decision. He chose to find those emphases in Deng Xiaoping's speech -- reaffirmation of modernization, a prosperous motherland, elimination of corruption -- that he could call on Christians to support. He obviously feels that this approach will be as beneficial as any other possible approach. It's difficult to make black and white decisions when the whole world about you is gray."

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In other Chinese Christian developments:

-- Zhao Fusan, a prominent Christian intellectual and Three-Self leader, has sought political asylum in France.

-- The Amity Foundation, a Chinese Christian-related service organization, announced it will cut back the number of foreign teachers it sponsors at Chinese universities from 85 to about 50. However, Amity Press in Nanjing is continuing to print Bibles without hindrance, according to reports.

-- The foundation denied a report that Chinese police entered the Protestant seminary campus in Nanjing June 2 and beat students who participated in democracy demonstrations. Foundation officials did say, however, that an official from the government Religious Affairs Bureau talked to the students.

-- Some Chinese Christians have reported that conversions to Christianity actually have increased since the crackdown, especially among students. But a June 14 government decree reportedly outlawed foreign radio broadcasts, including Christian broadcasts, and imposed fines for anyone caught listening to them.

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Plan may enlist 7,000 workers  
for training 37,000 churches

By Frank Wm. White

N-SSB

Baptist Press  
7/20/89

NASHVILLE (BP)--A task force has begun work on the Great Commission Operation, a plan for 7,000 workers to provide 37,000 Southern Baptist churches with individualized training to develop evangelistic growth through the Sunday school.

The 34-member task force, established by Harry Piland, director of the Sunday school division of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, will develop the details of the Great Commission Operation, which will be launched in 1991 with training conducted in the churches from 1992 to 1995.

"We want to help every church and mission in the convention experience breakthrough growth. We want a project that can help them do that and a plan to help every church and mission use the project," Piland said.

The Great Commission Operation will be part of Breakthrough, the 1990-95 Sunday school enrollment emphasis, Piland pointed out.

In the initial task force meeting July 17-18 in Nashville, the group envisioned 7,000 workers trained by the Sunday school division. Each trainee would work with about five churches, assisting pastors and church leaders in analyzing their Sunday school programs, conducting one to three days of evaluation and goal-setting and following up quarterly on each church's progress.

Task force members discussed a process that some compared to that of a financial fund-raising campaign more than a single-event training project.

"This is not a training event but a continuing process with planning, training and follow-up actions," Piland said after the two-day task force meeting.

While the trainers will follow a design developed by the task force, the actual project in each church will be customized to the situation of that church, Piland said.

The operation will focus on Sunday school but will cover the total evangelistic outreach of the church, he said.

Church workers at all levels will be involved in the process, but the pastor will be a key element in the success of the project and will be a focal point of the training, Piland said.

"We are going to see a day when Southern Baptist churches are back in the heart of Great Commission work. This can be the beginning of that," Piland told the task force at the end of the work session.

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Piland and the Sunday school division have worked for the past two years to find ways to move Southern Baptist churches from a plateau in enrollment growth. Enrollment increased steadily for six years until 1986 but has remained at just under 8 million for the past two years.

"We are planning for the future. What we are doing is not only for the Breakthrough years but for years ahead. Others before us have laid a foundation for our work. Times have changed, and we need to learn a new path to the same Great Commission destination," Piland said.

While Piland called the project a significant development, he cautioned against promising something that can solve all churches' problems in reaching people.

The Great Commission Operation will be coordinated with state conventions and associations.

"I know we are not going to get in 37,000 churches. I'm realistic," Piland said. "If we go after all of them, we can reach many of them. I don't want to miss any of them."

The task force includes Sunday School Board personnel, state convention Sunday school directors, pastors, associational workers, a seminary professor, ministers of education, other church staff members and lay Sunday school workers.

The task force will meet again in November to finalize plans for the project. Support materials are to be developed in 1990 with a pilot project to be conducted in perhaps 500 churches in 1990-91.

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Northeast ministry school  
adds 3 staff members

By Lee Hollaway

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(SEED)

Baptist Press  
7/20/89

NEW YORK (BP)--A retired seminary professor and a retired pastor and his wife have agreed to serve as Mission Service Corps volunteers assigned to the Northeastern Baptist School of Ministry as the project gears up for the start of classes this fall.

Robert A. Proctor Jr., a retired professor of Christian education at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., will become director of the new Pittsburgh center, announced Doran C. McCarty, coordinator of the Northeastern ministry training project.

Maurice Fain was associate coordinator of the project. Fain recently announced his retirement as pastor of Rockland (N.Y.) Baptist Church. He has taught preaching for several years at Nyack (N.Y.) College and has taught seminary extension classes in New York City.

Fain's assignment will include working with Metropolitan New York Baptist Association's committee on higher education, which has applied to become a center of the Northeastern Baptist School of Ministry.

Carolyn Fain will assist with the library and administrative responsibilities, McCarty said.

All three assignments become effective Aug. 15.

Yates Bingham has directed the project's Boston center, located in Northboro, Mass., since last December. His wife, Ann, also assists with the library and administrative work. The Bingham's also are Mission Service Corps volunteers.

The Northeastern Baptist School of Ministry is a project of the six Southern Baptist Convention seminaries to provide ministry training and theological education in the northeastern United States. Southern Seminary is the lead seminary for the project.

The Northeast Task Team for Theological Education has been instrumental in starting, supporting and developing the Northeastern ministry training project.

The task team is made up of representatives elected by the Baptists conventions of New England, New York, Pennsylvania-South Jersey, Maryland/Delaware and the District of Columbia.

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Teen suicide rate climbing,  
even among church members

By Susan Todd

N- (CO)  
(Wmu)

SAN ANTONIO, Texas (BP)--Suicide is not an issue to be faced only by teen-agers outside church circles, a speaker told a group of girls at the Southern Baptist National Acteens Convention July 14 in San Antonio, Texas. .

"The fact is, there are just as many kids in the church committing suicide as outside the church," said Jerry Pounds, assistant professor of religious education at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. "Ninety percent of the kids in church and outside church have thought about suicide."

Girls attending the convention sponsored by the Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union were told suicide is the second leading cause of teen fatalities. Only death due to car accidents ranks higher. But the rate of suicide is growing, Pounds said.

"In 1984, 5,000 to 6,000 teen-agers took their own lives," Pounds said.

"Probably in 1989, we'll have 6,000 to 7,000 who, without a doubt, will take their own lives." The figures don't even reflect deaths due to causes that cannot be directly labeled suicide, such as car accidents that are intentional, he added.

The increase in female suicides and the methods by which they take their lives will be significant factors to watch in the next few years, Pounds said, predicting girls will surpass boys in successful suicide attempts, even though girls already attempt suicide more often than boys.

"You girls are trying to kill yourselves more than boys are," he said.

He also listed noticeable changes in the methods by which girls take their own lives. Today the three leading methods are firearms, overdose and hanging, he said: "Five years ago, ... you would not have seen this. Girls were not as drastic then."

But suicide is not the root of the problem, he said. "Suicide is a manifestation of a deeper problem."

The pressure to succeed, poor self-esteem, loneliness, depression, family problems and hopelessness are just a few of the reasons why teen-agers commit suicide, Pounds noted.

"Suicide is a learned behavior," he said to dispell the myth that if a person's parent or grandparent committed suicide, that person will also.

Pounds listed other myths concerning suicide:

-- A person who threatens suicide won't really follow through. Pounds pleaded with the girls to take seriously suicide threats.

-- Everyone who commits suicide is insane. Only 3 percent to 15 percent can be considered insane, he said.

-- Talking about suicide might prompt a person to act. "It has been proven that when you talk about suicide, it helps reduce the possibility of a person going through with it," he said.

-- "No one I know is the type to commit suicide."

-- Suicide happens without any warning.

Warning signs will help anyone detect a potential suicide victim, Pounds said. Listing more than 20, he said people should remember that no one sign proves someone to be suicidal. Several must occur at the same time in order to point to thoughts of suicide.

"If you ask me if rock music leads to suicide, I've got to honestly say no," he said. "Rock music does not lead to suicide. But coupled with others, rock music does."

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Pounds told the girls the most important thing they can do for friends who might be considering suicide is be direct.

"Ask them, 'Are you considering killing yourself?'"

But beyond that, show them care, reassure them and get help for them, he said.

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Men find mission field  
in Vacation Bible School

By Frank Wm. White

F-SSB

Baptist Press  
7/19/89

NASHVILLE (BP)--Vacation Bible School is not just kid stuff and it is not only women's work. Men in some Southern Baptist churches have found that Vacation Bible School can be a way for them to be involved in missions and outreach.

Using Vacation Bible School, backyard Bible clubs and mission Vacation Bible Schools, Southern Baptist men as well as women are locating church prospects in their communities and in mission locations.

For the past seven years Dick Castleman has been involved with mission teams from First Baptist Church of Mount Juliet, Tenn., traveling to the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota to conduct backyard Bible clubs and mission Vacation Bible Schools.

This year, in addition to the South Dakota trip, the church is conducting Vacation Bible School for a church in Cincinnati.

Usually about a dozen men, including college students, are part of the VBS team, Castleman said. Everyone on the team teaches in VBS and visits homes during the afternoons and evenings.

The men also take their turn in the kitchen, on clean-up details, drive the buses and anything else that needs to be done, Castleman explained.

One of the men this year plans to do some basic maintenance around the two churches the team will be helping but, "we usually do Bible school and not construction projects," he said.

Getting volunteers for the annual trip that involves a 25-hour bus ride to the mission location usually is not difficult.

"Those with missionary hearts come forward and volunteer," Castleman said. Most return year after year.

Volunteers do not go unprepared. Training is coordinated along with the VBS preparation for their church. Participants are asked to be involved in church visitation to become accustomed to home visits. They are required to memorize a number of soul-winning Scriptures. And regular church involvement is a must, Castleman explained.

Clayton Gray has been involved for the past five years with VBS at LaGuardo Baptist Church in Lebanon, Tenn., and in backyard Bible clubs at mission locations near the church.

But in 1988, Gray was asked to spend a week of vacation from his job as a manufacturing plant supervisor to help work in VBS in Parkdale, Ark.

Gray recalled that before the team went to Parkdale, members of Parkdale Baptist Church predicted there would be little success with VBS there because only three or four children were available.

"By the end of the week, we had 56 in Bible school. Folks just couldn't believe we could find that many kids. We just started beating the bushes and bringing them in," Gray said.

The church in Parkdale had not held VBS for several years and Sunday school attendance had declined to about 15, LaGuardo pastor Bobby Johnson recalled.

"With the prospects we developed from VBS, they now have more than 50 in Sunday school," he said.

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It is not only children that have expanded the Sunday school rolls of the Arkansas church but families who have become involved with the church that offered VBS for their children.

Johnson said he was confident that VBS would work for the Arkansas church because it has worked for his church.

LaGuardo Baptist Church has used survey work to locate prospects and combined church VBS, mission VBS and backyard Bible clubs to boost its own Sunday school enrollment and start four missions.

Gray is now involved in one of the missions of LaGuardo, Hobson Pike Baptist Mission. This summer, he and others will be conducting backyard Bible clubs and VBS there as they follow the parent church's lead of using something that works for finding prospects.

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

Birmingham's Harrell  
takes New Orleans post

N-60

Baptist Press  
7/19/89

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Byron Harrell, president of Baptist Medical Center Princeton in Birmingham, Ala., will become president and chief executive officer for Southern Baptist Health Systems, New Orleans, effective Sept. 1.

Harrell, 38, has been president of the 524-bed Princeton facility since July 1985. Under his leadership, services have expanded to include a one-day surgery and laser center, the Alabama Dialysis Services facility and renovation of much of the hospital's in-patient units. Currently under construction is the center's third professional office building, a 158,000-square-foot facility that will feature Alabama's first medical mall.

Prior to assuming the helm at Princeton, he was executive director of Baptist Medical Center DeKalb in Fort Payne, Ala., and vice president/assistant administrator and administrative assistant at Baptist Medical Center Montclair, Ala.

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