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August 18, 1989

89-121

Florida Baptists schedule  
special session on abortion

N-CO  
(Fla.)  
By Greg Warner

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--Florida Baptists will join the highly charged abortion debate next month when they hold a rare special session of their state convention.

The session, set for Sept. 8-9 in Orlando, is intended to influence Florida lawmakers to adopt more restrictive abortion legislation during their own special session one month later -- Oct. 10-13.

By an estimated 55 percent majority vote, members of Florida Baptists' State Board of Missions approved the request of state convention president Bill Billingsley of Hollywood to hold the special session. It will be only the third time in the 128-year history of the Florida Baptist State Convention -- and the first time in 22 years -- that a special session has been called.

"I want our society to know that Southern Baptists are not going to stand by quietly while women are having abortions for convenience and economic reasons," Billingsley said in issuing the call. "Human life is more precious than that."

Both of the convention's vice presidents opposed the unusual meeting, but Billingsley, pastor of Sheridan Hills Baptist Church in Hollywood, said the session is "demanded by political circumstance." The regular annual meeting of the Florida Baptist State Convention is scheduled for Nov. 13-15, which he said would be too late to influence state legislators.

Billingsley called for the special session after he and three other prominent Florida Baptists met with Florida Gov. Bob Martinez July 25, the same day Martinez detailed his proposal for an overhaul of the state's abortion legislation.

The governor's plan would parallel legislation enacted in Missouri and upheld recently by the U.S. Supreme Court in the celebrated Webster decision. It would prohibit abortions performed by state employees or in state facilities except in cases of rape, incest or to save the life of the mother; prohibit abortion of fetuses 20 weeks or older if it is determined they can survive outside the womb and if the pregnancy does not threaten the life of the mother; require doctors to inform women considering abortions about the health and development of the fetus; and require abortion clinics to meet stricter medical standards.

One of those who met with the governor was Daytona Beach pastor Bobby Welch, who arranged the 30-minute meeting and initiated the idea of a special session. "If the governor of the state will call, for political and humanitarian reasons, a special session of the state legislature, it is unthinkable to me that Florida Baptists will not reciprocate for spiritual reasons and the sanctity of life," said Welch, pastor of First Church of Daytona Beach.

Martinez, a strong opponent of abortion, has agreed to speak at the special session, which will be held in Downtown Baptist Church in Orlando.

Billingsley said he will ask messengers at the September convention to adopt a "foundational, generic statement" on abortion, one he said could be supported by almost all Florida Baptists.

Plans also call for the convention to train messengers in ways to influence their legislators and offer suggestions for organizing a "caravan" of Baptists to go to the state capital of Tallahassee during the special legislative session.

Messengers also will be asked to approve formation of a 15-member committee that will plan a strategy for the Florida Baptist Convention and Florida Baptist churches to implement homes for unwed mothers, adoption services, foster care services, crisis pregnancy centers, and education in Christian sexuality.

Such a response is critical even if no changes are made in the state's abortion laws, said John Sullivan, Florida Baptists' executive director-treasurer.

"I don't want us to have a special session just to pass another resolution on abortion," Sullivan said. "I want us to define some procedures and strategies for carrying through the decision of the convention."

At Billingsley's request, Sullivan invited Richard Land, executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, to meet with Florida Baptist leaders Aug. 18 to help draft the statement and recommendation to be presented to the special session.

The statement was taken primarily from Land's introduction to the CLC's friend-of-the-court brief submitted to the U.S. Supreme Court during debate of the Webster decision.

The statement acknowledges the reality and right of disagreement among Baptists on abortion, then adds: "Nevertheless, we are far more united in our agreement that legal change is needed than we are divided about some of the difficult circumstances about which disagreement exists."

"We believe human life to be sacred and begins at conception," the statement says. It denounces "casual attitudes about abortion" contained in current laws and insists "the right of human life must be protected by the state."

In order to minimize divisiveness, leaders said, the statement does not deal with which, if any, exceptions to abortion are morally permissible. Nor does it take a specific stand on Gov. Martinez's proposals, adding simply, "We must support legislation that will achieve dramatic saving and nurturing of human life."

Carolyn Anderson of Lakeland, second vice president of the convention, wrote a letter to State Board of Missions members opposing the special session, objecting that a special session would be "divisive" and "political," and that it was not the proper way to deal with the abortion issue.

She was invited to attend the meeting with Land. Afterward she said she could support the outcome. "The issue of having the (special) convention is behind us, therefore we need to work together and be united as much as possible," she said. She described the statement as "palatable" and said it "can have a significant impact on reducing abortions."

"What I'm most excited about are the long-term plans," she added. Through the proposed adoption services and sex education, she said, Florida Baptists can help women keep from "having to make the choice for abortion."

Land, meanwhile, applauded the proactive stance of Florida Baptists in the battle over abortion legislation. He said Florida is a "bellwether" state on the abortion issue not only because Martinez was the first governor to call a special legislative session but because of the state's size, demographic character and ethnic diversity.

He suggested other Baptist state conventions will look for leadership to the role of Florida Baptists play in abortion legislation.

The program for the special session will feature Land and Martinez as keynote speakers Friday night, Sept. 8. Welch and Sullivan will speak Saturday morning, Sept. 9.

The Friday night program also will include a memorial observance for the thousands of unborn babies that have been aborted in America and video testimonies by several physicians explaining why they abstain from performing abortions.

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(This story includes information from Jack Brymer of the Florida Baptist Witness and Barbara Denman of the Florida Baptist Convention.)

CORRECTION: Please make the following addition to the 8/16/89 Baptist Press story titled "Powell declines Annuity Board post:"

In paragraph 3, Martin should have been identified as B.J. Martin of Pasadena, Texas, chairman of the Annuity Board trustees.

Thanks,  
Baptist Press

\$3 million church sale permits expansion  
of Criswell College, First Church, Dallas

By Ken Camp

*N-Texas*

Baptist Press  
8/18/89

DALLAS (BP)--Members of the historic Gaston Avenue Baptist Church in Dallas, voted Aug. 13 to sell their property and facilities to First Baptist Church of Dallas for \$3 million.

The purchase could be the first step in a future expansion of Criswell College and the outreach ministry of First Baptist into the east Dallas area, according to W.A. Criswell, pastor of First Baptist Church.

"They wish to establish a ministry to the area, to relocate the (Criswell) College and the (First Baptist) Academy to these facilities," said Ed Brooks Bowles, pastor of Gaston Avenue Baptist Church.

Although that is the desire of First Baptist, the exact way the Gaston Avenue property will be used is subject to the will of God and "the imponderables of government," according to Criswell.

He pointed out before First Baptist Academy could move to the Gaston Avenue facility, \$1 million would have to be invested in the removal of asbestos to meet government guidelines. The feasibility of such an extensive project is being studied.

Criswell noted that a census conducted several years ago revealed 80,000 unchurched people in the area surrounding Gaston Avenue Baptist Church. The number one priority of First Baptist Church is to bring the gospel to the ethnically diverse, non-Christian population of east Dallas.

"We are going to try to reach those people for the Lord," Criswell said, pointing out that the students in Criswell College, who currently number about 400, will be used in that evangelistic effort.

At this time, it has not been determined whether all of the Criswell College facilities eventually will be moved to the Gaston Avenue site, about two miles east of downtown Dallas, or whether some will remain at the downtown First Baptist location, according to Leo Bradley, vice president of administration at the Criswell College.

Criswell said leaders of First Baptist Church are praying they will be able to secure more property in the area near Gaston Avenue Baptist Church, but that there are not firm plans at this time.

"We hope to build a campus there for all our activities," he said. "This is just the beginning of the program."

Bowles announced the results of the Gaston Avenue Baptist vote at a Wednesday evening business meeting, Aug. 16. Of the 311 ballots received from resident members, either in the Aug. 13 service or by mail, 303 (97.5 percent) favored the sale and 8 (2.5 percent) were opposed.

The sale will be final Jan. 1, 1990. At that time, a portion of the facilities will be turned over to First Baptist for remodeling and refurbishing. Gaston Avenue maintains the option of using the sanctuary and adjoining facilities until Sept. 1, 1990.

Currently, Gaston Avenue is looking at six areas as possibilities for relocation, the most prominent being the Lakewood neighborhood east of the present church site.

The decision to sell the turn-of-the-century, east Dallas landmark church building came after two decades of declining attendance and an extensive study by the congregation's planning committee, Bowles said.

That study included consultation with Charles Lee Williamson, director of the missions division, Baptist General Convention of Texas. Bowles noted Williamson helped the church recognize opportunities for ministry in the ethnically changing neighborhood and to consider the cost of potential community ministries in light of available human and financial resources.

Financial resources had become a problem, as Gaston Avenue struggled to maintain its stately, 120,000-square-foot church facility, Bowles said. Fewer than 300 members attend services in the church's 1,800-seat sanctuary, and their median age is 67.

First Baptist Church will design future Gaston Avenue-based ministries largely on the basis of Williamson's findings and the church's planning committee report, according to Charles McLaughlin, minister of administration at First Baptist.

"We want to learn from what has been done and work in consultation with Gaston Avenue," McLaughlin said.

First Baptist approached Gaston Avenue church officials about three months ago concerning the possible sale. Although sale of the property had been discussed with other entities, including nearby Baylor University Medical Center, First Baptist was the only buyer to approach the church, Bowles said.

"Our people are pleased that another church will be using the facilities to continue a ministry to the east Dallas area," he said.

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Mission volunteers  
robbed in Belize

By Sarah Zimmerman

N-CD  
(OK10)

Baptist Press  
8/18/89

DANGRIGA, Belize (BP)--Eight Southern Baptist mission volunteers to Belize, Central America, were robbed Aug. 7 of about \$500 and two cameras. No one was harmed in the incident which took place 18 miles west of the coastal city of Dangriga.

The four men and four women were one of six teams working in Belize for one week in a mission effort coordinated by Green Acres Baptist Church in Tyler, Texas, and Otis Brady, Southern Baptist foreign missionary based in Belize City.

The group arrived at Light of the Valley Baptist Church Aug. 6 to conduct Vacation Bible School, youth recreation, discipleship training and revival services. The church has been without a pastor for more than a year, so much of the work involved encouragement of the Belizian church leaders.

The group was at the church parsonage -- or manse as it is called in Belize -- when the robbery occurred. About 11:45 p.m. the group joined hands to pray before retiring for the night but was interrupted by a loud bang at the door. Two men wearing masks -- one armed with a knife and the other with a shotgun -- kicked in the door.

Dennis Wiles, pastor of Southside Baptist Church in Tyler, one of Green Acres' mission churches, became spokesman for the group. He said to the robbers, "in the name of Jesus, don't harm us." The man carrying the knife replied that all they wanted was the group's money.

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Team members put their money on the floor. The second man kept the gun on the group while the man with the knife searched other rooms for valuables. As the robbers left, they said they would "come back for your heads" if the crime was reported to the police.

When the men were gone, Wiles said the group huddled on the floor and thanked God for their safety. They sang a chorus before deciding to go for help.

Team members and church leaders decided to report the robbery despite the threat. That night a police officer took statements from each team member. Based on the team's description, the officer suspected one robber was a man who had been arrested earlier and was out of jail on bond.

The officer found two suspects Tuesday morning on a bus headed for Belize City where they could exchange the American money for Belize currency. About \$300 and the two cameras were recovered as evidence in the case.

Tuesday morning the group was given the option of continuing its work at Light of the Valley Baptist Church or going to Belize City to work for the rest of the week. The decision to stay in the valley area was unanimous, Wiles said.

"We felt that God had called us here, and we were not going to let an attack from Satan drive us out," he said. Later Wiles noted that spiritual warfare goes on constantly, and his group was simply the pawns that were used in the battle that night.

Staying in the area was a strong testimony of God's power, Wiles said. The last night of the revival about 100 people filled the church for the service. People stood outside looking through windows to watch the service. Two men made professions of faith in Jesus Christ that night and asked to be baptized.

Police officers asked the team to stay in Belize until Aug. 14 to testify in the suspects' trial. The team had planned to leave the country Aug. 13, but agreed to stay for the trial.

If the team had not stayed, the suspects might have been released because no one would testify against them, and that would not have been fair to the people in the valley area, Wiles said. Also, he said the team felt it was important to testify in the trial for other United States citizens in the country. He did not want to send the message that United States citizens were easy targets for crime because they would leave before a trial.

The trial was set for Aug. 14, but the suspects escaped from prison Aug. 12 while serving on a work crew. The magistrate heard the team's testimonies on Aug. 14 as scheduled and returned the stolen items. However, a verdict or a sentence in the case was not determined in the suspects' absence.

Despite the robbery, all of the team members said they would be willing to return to Belize and to Light of the Valley Baptist Church. This was the fourth trip to Light of the Valley Baptist Church for Martha Edmonds, a homemaker from Whitehouse, Texas, a town on Tyler's outskirts. She said the robbery would not keep her from returning to the area. Another team member, Rowland Baldwin from Tyler, was on his 13th trip to Belize, and he said this would not be his last.

Also in the group were Melissa Killebrew, Charles Hemrick and Sue Young, all of Tyler; and Brian Childres, a student at Texas A&M University in College Station.

Sarah Zimmerman, assistant editor of the Baptist Messenger, newsjournal of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, and a former member of the Tyler church, also participated in the trip.

Child-care proposals  
include tax credits

By Kathy Palen

*N-BJC*

WASHINGTON (BP)--Child-care measures in both the Senate and the House of Representatives contain provisions that would assist families in which one parent stays home to care for the children.

Directed by a child-care resolution passed at the 1988 Southern Baptist Convention, the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission has worked with congressional staffs on the inclusion of such a provision in any federal child-care legislation.

The Senate-approved Act for Better Child Care Services includes a package of tax credits that would benefit both parents who purchase child-care services and those who care for their children at home.

The Senate ABC bill would supplement the existing earned-income tax credit for low-income families with children younger than age 4. The EITC is available to families whether or not they pay child-care providers.

The EITC expansion would provide a maximum credit of \$500 for families with one child and \$750 for those with two or more.

The Senate measure also would make the existing dependent-care tax credit refundable to families who purchase child care and whose incomes are less than \$28,000. By being refundable, the credit would be available to families who owe no income tax. It also would be available in advance through workers' paychecks.

"For more than a year we have stressed the urgency of tax-credit benefits as a key to any child-care legislation," said Larry Braidfoot, CLC general counsel. "The active support of key Southern members helped secure an unexpected victory in the Senate."

On the House side, a package approved by the Ways and Means Committee also features an expanded EITC that would be both refundable and available in advance.

The Ways and Means plan would increase the current credit from 14 percent to 17 percent for low-income families with one child and would provide larger credits for families with additional children. It also would provide a supplemental "young child" credit for families with children 5 or younger.

Child-care legislation -- the Child Development and Education Act -- approved by the House Education and Labor Committee is expected to be referred to Ways and Means. Members there say they plan to substitute their package for a section of the child-care bill that would provide grants and contracts to child-care providers.

"It appears very promising that tax credits will be a key part of whatever shape the final House bill takes," Braidfoot said. "This would mean that, in all likelihood, the only major feature the Senate bill and the House bill will have in common is an emphasis on tax credits."

"Obviously, we are more pleased with the House Ways and Means proposal, which would provide \$14.5 billion in tax credits over a period of four years. Also, we are pleased at its exclusive reliance on the earned-income tax credit, which we think is more equitable than the dependent-care tax credit."

Braidfoot said this is a crucial time for interested Southern Baptists to contact their representatives and urge them to support inclusion of tax credits that benefit parents providing home-based child care in the final bill.

SBC public affairs chairman  
warns against child care bill

By Mark Baggett & Michaelle Chapman

N- (O)  
(Ala.)

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--The pending Act for Better Child Care, which passed the U.S. Senate June 23, "literally handcuffs church-operated day care," a group of Alabama religious leaders said Aug. 17.

Albert Lee Smith, chairman of the Southern Baptist Public Affairs Committee, helped organize news conferences in four Alabama cities to denounce the ABC bill (S. 5), which authorizes \$1.75 billion in grants to the states to subsidize day care.

Smith said the ABC bill and two similar bills pending in the U.S. House of Representatives would nationalize child care under a "new bureaucratic infrastructure." In the process, Smith said, the legislation would discriminate against religious day care and family child care.

"This is a bill that should have unanimity among Southern Baptists," said Smith. "The reason for our trip around the state is that there has been so little publicity. If church members really understand what's at stake, they can change the vote."

The group of seven Alabama ministers and religious leaders, which included Smith and Doug Sager, pastor of Roebuck Park Baptist Church in Birmingham and a member of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, released a statement deploring "any effort by the federal government to intrude into the area of religious day care."

"This constitutes a dangerous infringement of the separation of church and state and literally handcuffs church-operated day care ministries to the federal government," the statement adds. The group urged Congress to pass an alternative bill, the Holloway/Schulze (HR 2008) Toddler Tax Credit Bill, which provides a \$1,000 tax credit to parents, including parents who care for their children at home.

Sager, also president of the Alabama Baptist Convention's Pastors' Conference, said the ABC would forbid religious instruction in any church-sponsored day-care program that utilized federal benefits laid out in the bill.

The bill, passed by the Senate and similar versions under consideration in the U.S. House of Representatives, "will do untold damage and harm to the family, as well as to religious institutions across America. These bills would preclude the choice of religious day-care for many, if not most, parents," Sager said in Birmingham.

In addition to Birmingham, the group held conferences in Montgomery, Huntsville and Mobile.

The Senate-passed version of the ABC bill was a reissued bill that added a tax credit component and sought to eliminate church/state issues raised by the original bill. But Sager called the revisions "cosmetic changes" and told the Birmingham audience of several dozen people to "let your Congressman know that a combination (of the tax credit approach and the grant approach) is unacceptable."

Sager, whose church operates a day-care center, said the bill would discriminate against women who choose to stay home with their children by taxing those women's families to subsidize day-care for two-income families.

"This would be like me cutting my grass myself and then being taxed so my neighbor can hire somebody to cut his," he said.

On July 22, 1989, Smith sent memorandum to members of the PAC outlining his objections to the revised ABC bill. He wrote that the new bill "offers only a minor tax credit for the parent rearing a child at home. The bill's vouchers for religious daycare, if available, would be subject to government control and regulation and probably be declared unconstitutional anyway."

Smith, who served one term in the House, predicted the final day care legislation will come out of Congress in late September.

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(Baggett is writer for the Alabama Baptist, newsjournal of the Alabama Baptist Convention; Chapman is a writer for the Birmingham (Ala.) Post Herald.)

Fired missionary teaches  
at Methodist seminary

N-CO

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--Michael Willett, who was dismissed as a Southern Baptist foreign missionary last year, will teach this fall at a Methodist seminary in Kansas City, Mo.

Willett, 33, was dismissed by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board July 21, 1988, for "doctrinal ambiguity," particularly regarding the deity, miracles and physical resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Willett was in language study in Costa Rica when another missionary in language school voiced concern about Willett's theology.

A year after his firing, Willett says he still is fighting bitterness over the dismissal.

"Bitterness is a poison that can kill someone's spirit," he told Helen Gray, religion editor of the Kansas City Times. "I am committed to not allowing bitterness to capture me."

In the interview, Willett added: "There is some anger and I am working through this. But anger can be constructive. When someone has been hurt deeply as I have been, naturally there would be some anger."

Willett will teach New Testament at St. Paul School of Theology as an adjunct professor with a one-year contract beginning this fall. In the spring, he also will teach a class at Central Baptist Theological Seminary, an American Baptist institution in Kansas City, Kan.

He told the Kansas City newspaper he has no long term plans because "certain opportunities in Southern Baptist life have been robbed from me. Many administrators and professors are supportive and sympathetic, but because of their constituencies, it would be unlikely that they would hire me. ..."

Willett, of Liberty, Mo., earned his doctorate at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., in 1985. He has taught at Southern Seminary; William Jewell College, a Missouri Baptist-related school in Liberty, Mo.; and Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City.

He was appointed by the FMB in 1987 and was to teach in Venezuela.

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Second church hit in Beirut;  
people flee, hide from shelling

N-FMB

Baptist Press  
8/18/89

BEIRUT, Lebanon (BP)--A second Baptist church has been hit by an artillery shell during the fierce shelling which continues to pound Beirut.

Bikfayah Baptist Church, located in a Christian village in the hills east of Beirut, was hit in mid-August during heavy shelling. It is unknown how badly the building was damaged, said Dale Thorne, Cyprus-based director of Southern Baptist work in the Middle East.

Thousands of Beirut citizens continue to evacuate the city during the fighting. Others have hidden for weeks in basement bomb shelters. Lebanese Baptists still in the city reported "unbelievable devastation" as shells exploded at one point "every two seconds."

"We are herded like cattle into basements and shelters," said a Baptist worker by telephone Aug. 18. "We have no gasoline or electricity. Our food is almost completely gone. We are too afraid to go out now and try to get food. Each time there is a lull in the bombing and we think it might be safe to search for food, suddenly new shelling starts with some people out on the streets. Many are killed. ... The fear is so great.

"As Baptists we are trying to be brave and minister to our neighbors and families. It seems the world has forgotten us."

In late July, Mouseitbeh Baptist Church in Beirut was damaged severely when a shell scored a

Korean Baptists  
mark centennial

By Ginny Whitehouse

N-FMB

SEOUL, South Korea (BP)--The world is looking toward Korean Baptists becoming an international missions force, building on the strength gained in evangelizing their own country during the past 100 years. R. Keith Parks told more than 15,000 Korean Baptists packed into the Olympic Gymnasium for their Centennial Celebration.

"There are other groups in the Baptist world reaching out, but as yet there is no model among Asians. I am convinced God brought you to this moment in history to be a model for missions for the whole world," said Parks, president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

"You have enough churches and enough money. ... God has provided everything except the commitment and sacrifice," he added.

Currently nearly a quarter of the 43 million South Koreans claim to be Christians. Throughout the country, Baptist churches number approximately 1,400.

Parks said with "blessings come the responsibility of sharing" with those outside South Korea. The Korea Baptist Convention appointed its first three foreign missionaries this year and gained responsibility for nine others when several of the denomination's mission societies merged. Thus far efforts have centered on Indonesia and Taiwan.

The lineage of Korean Baptists dates to 1889 when Malcolm Fenwick, an independent Canadian missionary, arrived in Seoul and later established the Church of Christ in Korea. That group changed its name to Baptist when formal relationships were established with the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board in 1950.

In recognition of the impact missionaries made, missionary Skip Lloyd, costumed as Fenwick, led the parade of Korean Baptist national leaders that opened the Centennial Celebration. Missionary Don Jones carried a banner to remember John Abernathy, who came as Southern Baptists' first missionary and arrived just before the start of the Korean conflict.

Korean Christians saw many of their leaders martyred during the Japanese colonization of the country before and during World War II, and countless church buildings were destroyed in the Korean conflict.

Korean Presbyterian leader Im Ok praised Baptist efforts in evangelizing the nation. Korean Baptist discipleship literature is so good, Im said, that Presbyterians use it in their churches. While other religious groups have strayed, focusing on different social causes, Korean Baptists maintain their focus on evangelism, he said.

"We have the promise that God will be with us wherever we go," said pastor Chi Duk of Seoul Southwest Baptist Church. "We applaud our history and the tears we had to shed in the past, but we are living today in the day of the gospel."

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Baptist Village in Israel  
to begin major expansion

By Mike Creswell

N-FMB

Baptist Press  
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PETAH TIQVA, Israel (BP)--A \$2 million expansion of the Baptist Village conference and camping center near Tel Aviv, Israel, will begin as soon as local government officials give final design approval.

A \$300,000 expansion of camping facilities will be the first of several construction phases, said Dale Thorne, director of Southern Baptist work in the Middle East. Baptist Village is a 75-acre complex operated by Southern Baptist representatives. It provides facilities for evangelical church-related conferences year-round and a summer camp for young people.

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Berky was a pantomime artist before he was a Christian. A former high school teacher in Canandaigua, N.Y., who had invited him to perform on several occasions "ministered to me very gently.

"Through her living, I decided there was no other decision I could make," he recalled. He became a Southern Baptist after meeting and marrying his wife, Marian, in 1984.

"I married into Southern Baptists," he laughed.

The wedding of mime and ministry came after a 1984 European tour but "not by any design of mine," said Berky. He had been praying for opportunities to share his faith when he was invited by a teacher in Denmark to perform at an evangelistic meeting of the teacher's Eastern religion.

"I thought, 'I don't like the way God answers prayers,'" Berky laughed. But, in addition to his regular repertoire, he performed the story of David slaying the giant, Goliath.

"I told them my faith was the kind that used children to destroy giants," he said. That was the beginning.

In recent years, the balance between secular and Christian performances has been about 50-50. However, in 1989, about 75 percent will be for Christian groups.

"I like working in the secular world. It keeps me honest, so far as my profession is concerned," said Berky.

"Christians aren't very critical of people doing something with a message. In the secular world, if you're not good you're out on your ear."

Describing himself as a "foolosopher," Berky said humor is an important part of his work.

"Laughter helps us build relationships," he said.