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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
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 511 N. Akard, Dallas, Texas 75201
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

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HMB employees construct home
for needy Atlanta family

By Joe Westbury

F HMB

ATLANTA (BP)--With eyes on the sky and on the tools in their hands, Southern Baptist Home Mission Board employees joined ranks in late September to build a house for a needy Atlanta family.

Although the possibility of rain from Hurricane Hugo threatened to dampen the worker's efforts, the storm came ashore in South Carolina, giving the Atlanta workers the dry weekend they needed to complete the structure.

For many, like John Reeves from customer service, the project marked the first time they had raised a paintbrush or crawled on a roof for a needy family. But employees agreed they would do it again at the drop of a hammer.

Reeves was typical of nearly 100 board employees who donated a day or two during the week of Sept. 16-23 to construct the home for the Ron and Kimberly Smith family. On two days that week, Reeves installed siding, window sills and painted the exterior a stylish gray.

"I wanted to be a part of the project because I knew we would be helping someone who couldn't afford a house, and because it would be a way of putting my faith in action," Reeves, a member of the Baptist Men fellowship at First Baptist Church in College Park, Ga., explained.

"I was a little sore after it was over, but it gave me a good feeling deep inside."

Christy Hansen, a secretary in the special ministries department, never had done construction work before she volunteered for the project. But she said she felt right at home laying insulation in the attic of the three-bedroom house.

"It was fun crawling around in the attic without falling through," she said as she evaluated her experience. In addition to the attic work, she was recruited to help install, and later caulk, the exterior siding.

Hansen said her day of working without a salary produced double benefits for herself and her husband, Mark, who joined her in the project.

"I found it was rewarding to not only give financially but to give of yourself to help someone else," she added.

Patches Roe, who directs the board's credit union and was the project treasurer, reported employees had pledged the \$15,000 needed for construction but actually raised \$17,000. Although expenses are yet to be deducted, Roe said, the account may have a small overage that could be used to help the family.

No Home Mission Board funds were expended on the project. The seven planning committees met during lunch and before and after work. Employees who helped build the house used vacation leave.

An average of 22 board employees worked on the project daily, using their vacation time and personal finances to help the needy family. The venture was coordinated by Habitat for Humanity, which matched the volunteers' financial contributions.

Habitat is a non-profit Christian organization dedicated to providing affordable housing for the poor. The Georgia-based group selected the family to receive the house, which will repay the cost through a 20-25 year interest-free mortgage.

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The house was constructed in a low-income neighborhood southeast of Atlanta known as Cabbagetown. The former mill community will be the site of seven Habitat houses, with the board's home the first to be completed.

The house will be a model for others yet to be completed and will be occupied by the Smith family in early December, said Jane Bishop, executive secretary of the board's missions ministry division and member of the project's steering committee.

Board employees not only worked to construct the house but conducted a series of backyard Bible schools and community ministries through Immanuel Baptist Church, a Southern Baptist congregation in the neighborhood.

The donation of personal finances as well as vacation time helped bring the board closer together as a family, said Don Hammonds, director of the board's volunteer division.

"Working together like this can't help but lift morale and create a closer bond of family between board employees," said Hammonds, who was co-chairman of the construction committee.

Hansen, a native of Fairfield, Ohio, agreed: "The day I worked, I met people I knew only by their faces but not their names. It's going to help how I relate to them in the future.

"I wish I could have worked the entire week. I'd like to see us build another house."

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

Missouri Baptist AIDS Task Force
seeks to 'help remove myths'

By Trennis Henderson

N-CD
(Mo.)

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JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (BP)--The numbers continue to climb: Throughout the United States, more than 100,000 people have been diagnosed with AIDS.

No segment of society has failed to be impacted by AIDS, said Rod Oglesby, chairman of the Missouri Baptist Convention's AIDS Ministry Task Force.

Concerning the role of Missouri Baptist churches in responding to the AIDS crisis, Oglesby added: "The question is not whether or not churches have to react to it. The question is when they will have to react to it."

Oglesby, senior vice president for financial affairs at Southwest Baptist University, in Bolivar, Mo., is leading the 15-member statewide task force approved in December 1987 by the convention's executive board. The task force was charged with the responsibility "to research, develop and initiate a statewide approach to education concerning AIDS and ministry with persons with AIDS and their families."

The group's first response, following nearly a year of research, was to create a convention statement on AIDS. Beginning with a brief history of AIDS, the statement notes: "Persons infected with AIDS face isolation, loneliness, abandonment, and physical, spiritual and emotional pain. The progressive nature of the disease ultimately requires their concession of defeat and the accompanying loss of dignity and friends."

The statement acknowledges: that "Some have reacted with hysteria from a fear of contracting the disease. Some have reacted with apathy, feeling that AIDS is someone else's problem. Still others have reacted with disdain toward the person who has contracted the disease, feeling that they have received God's judgment by associating the disease with a specific lifestyle (homosexual, IV drug abusers).

"How should we as Christians and Missouri Baptists respond to this very real societal problem? Our response must be based upon the example of Christ.

"The Bible is very clear about homosexuality (I Corinthians 6:9-10 and Leviticus 18:22; 20:13) and promiscuity (I Corinthians 6:15, 18). But what about the hemophiliac who received contaminated blood or the newborn baby who is infected by an unknowing AIDS-carrying mother?

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"Jesus never told us why leprosy, blindness and paralysis were part of the world," the task force statement acknowledged. "When he was confronted with the question of who caused the disease, he spoke about the works of God and the responsibility of each of those who choose to follow him to do the works of God. Would Jesus turn his back on the persons with AIDS and their families? No, he would be with them.

"Our churches and our people must respond with the love of Christ. We are called by God to be compassionate, to love those who need our love, to help the helpless and to comfort those who mourn."

Task force member Don Anders, an associate director of the convention's missions department, noted: "The main reason that we as Missouri Baptists should be involved in this is that where people are hurting, we should be there. Particularly in situations where people are dying, we need to be there to comfort and give some sense of hope."

One of the primary goals of the task force is to "provide good, factual information on preventing AIDS; AIDS is a preventable disease through monogamous relationships in marriage, absence of premarital sex and what we see as the Christian lifestyle," Anders said.

"The issue surrounding AIDS is mainly a lifestyle issue. The disease cannot be passed by sneezing or casual contact. It is a disease that is passed blood to blood because blood is the host of the virus. The major ways of contracting the disease are through sexual contact, use of IV drug needles and mother to unborn child."

In an effort to "help remove the myths about AIDS," Anders said, the task force has scheduled 12 regional seminars to be held throughout Missouri in June and July of 1990. The AIDS Ministry Seminars will be led by task force member Darrell Ellsworth, bivocational pastor of Jewel Baptist Church in St. Louis.

A task force survey mailed earlier this year to Missouri Baptist pastors, directors of missions and chaplains found that videotapes, pastoral workshops and pamphlets would be most helpful in communicating to local churches about AIDS ministry.

Among the survey's 546 respondents, 22.2 percent indicated they were aware of someone in their community who has been affected by AIDS. That total included 51 respondents, 9.3 percent, who said AIDS has affected families in their local churches.

Concerning AIDS ministry in the local church, 45.8 percent said such efforts would be hampered by "lack of understanding about AIDS and its consequences" within their congregation. An additional 41.6 percent said they were unsure whether such a lack of understanding would have an impact on their congregation's response. That left 12.6 percent who felt their congregations' ministries would not be hampered by a lack of understanding of the AIDS issue. The survey also found that 3.8 percent currently are in churches which provide a ministry to people affected by AIDS.

Concerning their personal understanding of AIDS, 35 percent of the Missouri Baptist ministers who responded said they feel they have an adequate understanding of AIDS; 26.2 percent said that understanding was sufficient for them to become involved in AIDS ministry; and 18.5 percent said they had sufficient information to lead their congregations in an expanded AIDS ministry.

The task force is committed to helping Missouri Baptists "prepare for ministry though an understanding of the disease," Oglesby said. "One key goal is seeing that people are knowledgeable enough to reduce the fear that is there. We hope to provide enough educational material to give our Baptist leadership a good firm basis for leading their churches and communities in understanding what is going on out there."

Ellsworth said next summer's regional seminars will provide an overview he describes as "AIDS 101." The seminars will address the history of AIDS, methods of transmissions, myths vs. facts, medical research and medications, prevention, psychological facets, social problems, legal issues and local ministry.

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"Our primary interest is to provide as much positive, accurate information as possible for the benefit of our pastors," Ellsworth emphasized. "Rather than being in a reactive posture, we would like to help our pastors and churches be in a proactive position. We want to help our pastors be prepared when AIDS hits their communities."

Noting Missouri Baptist efforts to address the AIDS crisis do not include condoning homosexuality, Ellsworth added: "AIDS is not a homosexual disease; it is a people disease. The people with AIDS are a group of people who hurt physically, spiritually and emotionally."

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Southwestern students warned
about occult, Mormonism

By Chip Alford

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(SWBTS)

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FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--A young couple uses their horoscope to plan daily activities.

A teenage boy obsessed with the role playing game "Dungeons and Dragons" begins having difficulty distinguishing fantasy from reality.

A teenage girl participates in satanic rituals and later attempts suicide.

Does the Bible speak to these issues, and can Christians effectively witness and minister to people in these situations? The answer is "yes," according to Gary Leazer, director of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's interfaith witness department.

Leazer, along with Jimmy Furr, a regional interfaith director based in Nashville, were on the campus of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, Sept. 22-23 to give seminary students an overview of the occult and Mormonism and teach students how to tell people involved in both sects about faith in Christ.

The occult, Leazer said, is "an umbrella term referring to teachings or rituals practiced in secret or to the invisible spirit world." The occult phenomenon includes practices such as astrology, spiritualism, fortune-telling, magic, witchcraft and satanism.

In the last five years, Leazer said, the number of requests his department receives for information about the occult has mushroomed.

"Before 1985, it was very seldom that we'd get more than one call per year on the occult," he said, "but now the occult and the New Age Movement are the top two areas that we get requests about."

Leazer detailed several reasons for the occult's resurging popularity: "One reason is the simple fascination with the unknown and the mysterious. And at the same time, there is a tendency in so much of our culture to be turned off by traditional Christian religion or traditional religion of any kind."

The breakdown of the family unit, drugs and heavy-metal music with lyrics that glorify violence, sex and satanism, are other important factors, Leazer said, adding that the promise of popularity and control over others also is a strong drawing card for the occult.

"I don't think those things in themselves cause a person to become involved in the occult, but if a person is very lonely or has very low self-esteem, these things increase their potential to become involved," he said. "I am convinced that almost all of the people that get involved in the occult, especially teenagers, get involved not because they have accepted it, but because they think it is the answer to some need that they have."

Teenagers especially are vulnerable to satanism, the occult's darkest side, Leazer said. Many succumb to peer pressure to try the "in" thing, he said, while others become involved to rebel against or get the attention of their parents.

Leazer described three types of Satanism. "Religious satanists," he said, worship Satan as a symbol of man's carnal nature. The best known example is Anton LaVey, founder of the Church of Satan and author of "The Satanic Bible."

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"Self-styled satanists" often are teenagers who read books, watch movies or listen to records and see sex, violence, drug use and satanism as marketable commodities. They may not actually believe in or worship Satan, although some police investigators and social workers express concern about the drug use and violence often associated with this type of satanism.

"Satanic cults" are involved in criminal activities such as drug trafficking, kidnapping, pornography, and animal and human ritual murders.

In ministering to someone involved in the occult or telling such a person about Christ, Leazer said, believers should realize progress may require a long period of Christian counseling. The first step to overcoming occult involvement is seeking to bring the non-Christian to faith in Jesus Christ, he said.

"In-depth communication between parents and their children also needs to be emphasized," Leazer said.

While the popularity of satanism and other occultic practices is growing, the fastest growing cult in the United States is Mormonism, Furr said.

The wholesome Mormon lifestyle and appealing television advertisements fail to tell the whole story about Mormon beliefs, he said: "What they say sounds good. They have a lot of easy answers to hard questions. But in actuality, Mormonism is a type of universalism. According to them, ultimately, everybody will be saved."

The Mormon terminology also is deceptive, Furr added: "They use the same terms we do, but they mean different things. For example, for them salvation is the keeping of a lot of different things, such as being married in the temple, tithing and not drinking coffee or tea. It's all based on works, where we teach that salvation is based on the grace God has extended to us and the faith that he has given to us to accept that grace."

Converting a Mormon to Christianity is very difficult, he noted: "Mormons have usually been indoctrinated from early childhood. The chances of sitting down with a Mormon on one occasion and leading them to Christ are very slim unless there has been some background work already done by someone else."

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Youth ministry keeps
seminary prof young

By Chip Alford

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(SUBST)

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FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Each time Phil Briggs steps on to the speaker's platform at a youth conference or seminar, he enters a new dimension -- the fun dimension.

"I don't think you can reach teenagers unless you reach them through the fun dimension," said Briggs, professor of youth education and recreation at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. A positive, upbeat youth educator knows the value of recreation, games and music in presenting the gospel to teenagers, Briggs believes.

"Our ministry to youth has to be developmentally based as well as theologically and biblically based," he said.

Briggs knows how to have fun himself. His background in and love for recreation led officials at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board to invite him and his wife, Jennette, to write a book on the topic. The result was "Recreation Xtras: A Prescription for Family Fun."

Briggs, father of three children with families of their own, described the book as "a resource book on family recreation -- what to do and how to do it, at church, at home, on the road, while camping. We didn't have to do a tremendous amount of research for the project. We lived it."

While Briggs' primary task remains teaching youth education and recreation classes at the seminary, he also travels the country to lead conferences, seminars and workshops for teenagers and their parents.

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Briggs often works as half of a Christian entertainment team with Kansas City, Mo., homemaker/entertainer Rosemary Hoover, his ministry partner of 23 years. The duo has presented their mix of humor, songs, lectures and sermons to teenagers.

"Parenting is a lot like wallpapering," Briggs said. "When you know how to do it, you're through. It's really hard for parents to turn their kids loose."

Briggs was born in Ponca City, Okla., the youngest of nine children. His father was a deacon in First Baptist Church and his mother was Woman's Missionary Union president.

"Church was basically extension of our home," he recalled. "We grew up in church, and my father would take me to sessions of the Southern Baptist Convention when I was a young boy and teenager."

His father was largely responsible for his interest in youth ministry, Briggs said: "He had a deep conviction for what the church should do for young people. His favorite expression was, 'The church of tomorrow is the youth of today.'"

Although he never had a firm call to preach, Briggs said he experienced "a very deep sense of calling to the ministry" at age 14. His calling to the classroom came the summer after his freshman year at Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, Texas.

Briggs graduated from Hardin-Simmons in 1955 with a degree in religious education and Bible and later earned master's and doctor's degrees in religious education from Southwestern. He held a variety of church staff positions in Texas and Arkansas between 1952 and 1963, including education, music, youth and administration. He later taught religious education and music at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo., before coming to Southwestern in 1971. He also has been interim pastor and church administrator at a number of Missouri and Texas churches and campus minister of the Baptist Student Union at the University of Missouri.

And at 56, his enthusiasm for youth ministry is unwaivering.

"I have a feeling that there are some people who can do youth ministry for a longer period of time," he said. "You just have to have the psychological edge and love young people and relate to them."

Teaching students at Southwestern has been a special blessing, Briggs said, because he has been able to develop relationships with hundreds of students who in turn will develop hundreds of relationships with teenagers.

"The greatest joy that I get is seeing my students go somewhere and do good youth work," he said. "I happen to be one of many who have touched their lives, and I get a lot of strokes out of that."

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