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February 27, 1990

90-28

Conservatives map strategy
for SBC presidential vote

By Dan Martin & Bob Terry

N-CO
(6A)

ATLANTA (BP)--More than 250 conservatives from 21 states mapped strategy in Atlanta Feb. 22 for the election of Morris Chapman as next president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Chapman, pastor of First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas, recently announced his willingness to be nominated. John Bisagno, pastor of First Baptist Church of Houston, said he plans to nominate his fellow Texan as the conservative standard bearer.

The 256 conservative pastors and laypeople were invited to the meeting by Charles Stanley, pastor of First Baptist Church of Atlanta and former president of the SBC.

Another former SBC president, Adrian Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn., presided over the gathering, and current SBC President Jerry Vines, pastor of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, gave greetings to participants over a telephone hookup.

"The meeting was to reaffirm our goals and directions," said Fred Powell, senior associate pastor of the Atlanta church and the organizer of the gathering.

"We wanted to assess the situation as to where we are and what we can expect in New Orleans," site of the 1990 annual meeting of the SBC, Rogers told Baptist Press.

"There were three basic things we feel we need to do," he added. "First, we need to refocus the issue on the Word of God. The central issue is the Bible. It is not a matter of separation of church and state, the priesthood of the believer, women ministers or anything else, as important as they might be.

"The issue is ... the theological issue, and the heart of the theological issue is Holy Scripture. We need to keep the focus on that, because there are those who are trying to shift the issue.

"The second thing is the duplicity of the moderates (who are) crying out against political maneuvering and who are doing more and at greater expense than has ever been done."

He quoted a statement made by moderate candidate Daniel Vestal, pastor of Dunwoody Baptist Church in suburban Atlanta, that politics is "immoral," and said: "There is talk of exorbitant amounts of money being spent ... with flying around, whistle stops, organizations with paid full-time workers.

"I don't say they don't have the right to spend their money; the point is they are doing the very thing they decry so much. They can't have it both ways."

The third point of the meeting, Rogers said, "was that we talked about Morris Chapman, and that he is indeed the one we felt was surfaced after prayer and discussion. Fred Wolfe was there and very much encouraged support for Morris as the candidate."

"Little rumors have been floating that Fred (Wolfe) was bypassed for Morris (Chapman). The moderates would like to believe there is division in our camp, but assurance was given there is none."

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Wolfe, pastor of Cottage Hill Baptist Church in Mobile, Ala., at first surfaced as the conservative candidate, but withdrew a few days before his candidacy officially was to be announced.

Wolfe told Baptist Press he "spoke a word on behalf of Morris. He is God's man ... and I think he will be the man to lead us."

The meeting, according to Wolfe, was "very positive. It did not deal in personalities. It was not a bash Dan Vestal meeting; it was an informative meeting for people involved in the conservative movement."

Powell said the meeting "wasn't so much a pep rally for Morris (Chapman) as to keep our act straight, to keep on target."

Chapman was called a "thoroughbred conservative" by Rogers, who urged participants to "get behind God's man." He predicted several prominent Southern Baptists from the "broad middle" will unite behind Chapman's candidacy.

"Some who have heretofore been in the middle of the road, but who have had conservative beliefs, have made it known they are going to support Morris Chapman. Not the least of these is John Bisagno," Rogers said, predicting a "great number of people," similar to Bisagno "will do the same thing."

He declined to list possible supporters because "we felt it would be better for them to surface their own names."

Rogers told the gathering, "I believe we will see in New Orleans the greatest victory ever seen" (for the conservatives), and added that another conservative victory -- to go with 11 years of electing conservative presidents -- will mean an end to the SBC conflict.

However, he added, "Conservatives realize they cannot take anything for granted and will do everything they can to have every messenger possible present in New Orleans."

James Hefley, a freelance writer from Hannibal, Mo., told the Word and Way, newsjournal of the Missouri Baptist Convention, Stanley announced to the gathering he will nominate Richard Lee, pastor of Rehoboth Baptist Church in suburban Atlanta for vice president. Hefley said several other names were discussed but no candidate agreed on.

Hefley also said conservative leaders expressed concerned about the announcement of Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler as moderate candidate for first vice president. He said fear was expressed she would attempt to establish a precinct type organization in each state through Woman's Missionary Union since she is the former executive director of the WMU SBC.

Leaders pledged to monitor WMU to make sure it is not used for political purposes, Hefley said.

In addition to Stanley, Rogers, Wolfe and Vines, the gathering also was addressed by Paul Pressler, a Houston appeals court judge and vice chairman of the Southern Baptist Executive Committee.

"The judge reported on the recent (Feb. 19-20) meeting of the Executive Committee and the actions taken regarding the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs," Rogers said.

During the meeting, the Executive Committee voted to shift the program assignment for religious liberty to the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission and to cut the budget allocation to the BJCPA from \$391,000 per year to \$50,000.

Also announced during the meeting, the Memphis pastor said, was establishment of a new publication, The Southern Baptist Communicator.

Powell, who will be editor of the publication as "a moonlighting thing," said the first issue has been mailed to the churches of the SBC. He said funding for the new publication is being provided by "an individual who feels that something should be done." He declined to name the "individual" without permission from the person.

The publication will have issues in April, May and June, Powell said, adding no decision has been made concerning its continuation past the 1990 annual meeting. "It will depend on what the need is," he added.

He added The Southern Baptist Communicator is not in competition with another conservative publication, the Southern Baptist Advocate, published by Robert M. Tenery of Morganton, N.C.

"I definitely applaud the work Bob Tenery has done, and this is in no way competitive. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John tell the story from different perspectives," he said.

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P&G threatens suit
over 'satanic' rumor

By Marv Knox

N-CO

Baptist Press
2/27/90

CINCINNATI (BP)--The Procter & Gamble Company has threatened to sue perpetrators of a "completely ridiculous and false" rumor about its trademark.

A rumor that the company's trademark is a satanic symbol and that the Cincinnati-based company is linked to satanism and devil worship has surfaced again, said Kelly L. Gillespie, the company's public relations director.

The trademark features a circle enclosing a crescent man-in-the-moon looking on 13 stars.

"The completely ridiculous and false story about our moon and stars trademark has been resurfacing in some areas," Gillespie wrote to religious leaders across the country. "It is the same lie that was spread in 1981-82 and again in 1984-85. Some have also erroneously claimed that the president of Procter & Gamble appeared on a talk show to discuss the company's connection with satanism.

"There is absolutely no truth in any of this. ... The president of P&G has never appeared on any talk show to discuss satanism. Further, our moon and stars trademark is more than 100 years old and represents only P&G."

Gillespie added: "Nothing is more important to us than the integrity of our business and the quality of our products. We filed lawsuits in 1982 and 1985 against a number of people who were intentionally spreading this lie, and will do so again if necessary."

Procter and Gamble released letters written in 1982 by several religious leaders who affirmed the company's denial of the rumors.

"Southern Baptists have always and do now stand for openness and integrity," wrote James T. Draper Jr., pastor of First Baptist Church of Euless, Texas, and president of the Southern Baptist Convention at the time. "We are a people who believe in and rely on truth.

"The rumors about the Procter & Gamble Company that have been circulating are not based on truth. This kind of reckless accusation on the part of alleged Christians is damaging to the cause of Christ as well as the business of an excellent company. ...

"All Christians should join hands to stop the vicious accusations concerning this company. I implore all our Christian community in this land to stand up and put an end to these unfounded and untrue rumors."

Similar statements were issued by evangelist Billy Graham; Jerry Falwell, then leader of Moral Majority; Catholic Archbishop Joseph L. Bernardin; and Donald E. Wildmon, executive director of the National Federation for Decency.

Producers of "60 Minutes," "Donahue" and "The Merv Griffin Show" also wrote denials that any executive of Procter & Gamble had appeared on their television shows.

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'Jesus of Montreal'
labeled offensive

By Louis Moore

N- (O)
(CLC)

NEW YORK (BP)--Another controversial film about the life of Christ will debut in the United States this spring amid predictions that many Christians will find it theologically offensive and in bad taste.

The film, "Jesus of Montreal," is one of five finalists among Oscar nominees in the "Best Foreign Film" category. In 1989 the movie won the Ecumenical Jury Award at the Cannes Film Festival in Canada.

The film currently is being shown in Canada, England and parts of Europe but is to be shown in the United States primarily in art theaters starting after mid-March. James M. Wall, editor of The Christian Century magazine, speculated that the film's distributors have kept it out of the United States until now because of the controversy surrounding another film, "The Last Temptation of Christ." Due to its portrayal of Jesus, "The Last Temptation" provoked protests and pickets and is considered a box-office failure.

About 50 church leaders from a number of U.S. denominations, including two from the Southern Baptist Convention, were invited to the first U.S. showing of "Jesus of Montreal" at the Canadian consulate in New York Feb. 22.

"The (profane) language and pornographic material in this film will make it hard for someone to say to Aunt Florence, 'You should see this film,'" said Wall.

Richard Land, executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, said the film's theology will be offensive to almost all Southern Baptists.

The film omits Jesus' divine nature and dwells on artistic and symbolic portrayals of biblical accounts of Jesus' humanity, he said.

"The film reflects the 20th-century's persistent assault on Jesus' deity," he added. "Perhaps both the most offensive and saddest scene in the movie occurs when doctors transplant various organs from the dead Jesus-figure's body to other people in a pathetic attempt to use technology for a counterfeit or substitute resurrection."

The film is set in Montreal, Canada. The plot revolves around a passion play performed each year by a Roman Catholic church there. The priest in charge turns to a group of actors and actresses, most of whom are involved in roles in pornographic movies, to beef up the passion play.

As the story unfolds, the actor chosen to portray Jesus adopts Jesus' identity both off and on the stage. The story of the actor's life off stage soon begins to mirror the life of Christ through an emphasis on symbolic renditions of biblical accounts of Jesus' life.

For instance, the Mary Magdalene figure washes the Jesus figure's back in the bathtub as the film's way of retelling the story of the woman who anointed Jesus' feet with precious oil. In another scene, Jesus' descent into hell after his death on the cross is depicted by the Jesus figure wandering around in Montreal's subway, which is haunted by uncaring, oblivious people.

After the showing in New York Feb. 22, the film received a wide-ranging variety of reviews.

Harold E. Hatt, professor of theology and vice president at the Christian Church's (Disciples of Christ) Philips Graduate Seminary in Enid, Okla., said the film is a "marvelous reconstruction of the ancient story in modern idiom."

Tom F. Driver, the Paul J. Tillich professor of theology and culture at Union Theological Seminary in New York, said the film is "a cut above most of your Hollywood versions" of the life of Christ.

Secular film critic and author Molly Haskell said: "I didn't sense any religious feeling in this film. The film is pleasurable, entertaining, witty but not meaningful."

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Land said the film is technically and artistically a "better film" than "The Last Temptation" but is not something Southern Baptists will enjoy or appreciate.

"It would be impossible to come to any accurate understanding of the orthodox Jesus of history and faith from viewing either film," he said.

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Christian doctrine of creation
requires God as creator, speakers say By Terri Lackey

N-SSB

Baptist Press
2/27/90

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (BP)--Southern Baptists have the right to differing views about the creation of the world as long as those views specify God as creator, five Southern Baptist leaders agreed.

"As long as you say, 'God did it,' I can fellowship with you. I may not agree with the details," said Herschel Hobbs, pastor emeritus of First Baptist Church of Oklahoma City during the National Conference on the Doctrine of Creation held Feb. 19-21 at Immanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock, Ark. "But when you say, 'God's not involved,' then we don't have much to talk about."

Hobbs was one of several speakers at the conference on the 1990 Baptist Doctrine Study theme, the doctrine of creation, attended by more than 650 people and sponsored by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's discipleship training department.

Other speakers included Daniel Vestal, pastor of Dunwoody Baptist Church in suburban Atlanta and author of the 1990 doctrine study textbook; James T. Draper Jr., pastor of First Baptist Church of Euless, Texas; Bill Stephens, curriculum development coordinator for the discipleship training department; and Richard Land, executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

Speakers agreed Christians cannot accept the theory of naturalistic evolution, the belief that the world came into being purely from natural processes.

"The premise and theory of evolution, which is sacrosanct in our society, is a contrived attempt to explore reality apart from God," said Draper. "This belief is anti-God, anti-biblical and anti-creation," said Draper who holds the belief of scientific or recent creationists that the universe was created no more than 10,000 years ago in six literal days.

Stephens said Southern Baptists who accept various theories about how God created the world must quit fighting among themselves and unite against the evolution theory.

"We can debate, yes, but we need to lock our arms in Christian love and fight naturalistic evolution," he said. "Don't call your Christian brothers bad names. Tell them why you think they are wrong, but say, 'I love you anyway.'"

Vestal said he believes Southern Baptists are united in their belief that God created the universe. "Our unity is in Christ, and our common commitment is in Christ," he said.

Meanwhile, speakers agreed a study of the doctrine of creation should lead Christians to responsible stewardship in a variety of areas such as racial equality, human dignity and ecology.

Land called on Southern Baptists to develop a theology of ecology.

"It will take 40 years or two generations to restore the world from the catastrophe man has wrought upon nature," said Land. "We live in a world of finite rather than infinite resources.

"The earth is here for our use. God has given us dominion. We must not idolize creation, but we must not be irresponsible to creation."

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Among Southern Baptists, one of the most difficult points of interpretation is the meaning of the Hebrew term "yom," or day, as used in the book of Genesis, speakers said.

Some Southern Baptist scholars, including Draper, hold to a literal 24-hour period for day, while others, including Vestal and Hobbs, interpret day as a longer period of time.

Vestal and Hobbs are progressive creationists, believing the world is as old as scientists claim. They believe God created the lowest life forms out of nothing and allowed each to evolve within its kind. This cycle continued until the earth was ready for humans when God stepped in and created Adam and Eve.

In addition to scientific creation and progressive creation, other creationist beliefs include the gap theory, the revelation-day theory and theistic evolution.

Gap theorists hold to a literal 24-hour day but also accept the ancient geology of the earth. They believe a gap exists between the first two verses of the book of Genesis. Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," refers to a universe that existed previously but which was destroyed by God because of sin, in the opinion of gap theorists.

Verse 2 -- "And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." -- begins with God re-creating the universe, gap theorists say.

Revelation-day theorists hold that the six days of the first chapter of Genesis are 24-hour days in which God revealed he had created the universe.

A fourth view, theistic evolution, holds that God used evolution to create life forms. Theistic evolution is less accepted among evangelical Christians.

"There is no conflict between teachings of science and Scripture when properly interpreted," Vestal said. "It is not necessary to sacrifice the integrity of either discipline (science or the Bible).

"The Bible is not primarily a book of science, and science by its very nature is not like the study of theology. But all truth is of God."

Draper said Southern Baptists who interpret creation within the realms of the Scripture "are playing in the same ball park."

"If we stay within the parameters of biblical authority, biblical faith and biblical revelation, then we can have all kinds of diversity," said Draper. "The trouble in the Southern Baptist Convention is we don't know where those parameters are, so we don't know if we are playing in the same ball park or not."

Vestal said Christians should study the doctrine of creation to gain insights into God, his work and the work he wants Christians to accomplish.

"Doctrine not connected to practice must not be called Christian doctrine," he said.

The 1990 Baptist Doctrine Study will be observed April 16-20 in many Southern Baptist churches.

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Hardin-Simmons gets donation
for business school building

N-CO
(Texas)

Baptist Press
2/27/90

ABILENE, Texas (BP)--Hardin-Simmons University has received a check for almost \$2 million to help construct a building for its business school.

Charles B. Johnson of San Mateo, Calif., gave the Texas Baptist school a check for \$1,975,000 to help finance construction of the Albert W. and Mary E. Johnson Building for the HSU School of Business.

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Charles Johnson is a son and executor of the estate of the late Rupert H. Johnson, the son of Albert and Mary Johnson. Rupert Johnson pledged \$2,250,000 for the business building before his death.

HSU President Jesse C. Fletcher said the contribution was the largest check ever to arrive at his office on the Hardin-Simmons campus in Abilene.

The Johnson Building is expected to be completed in late summer and ready for occupancy this fall, he added.

The Johnson contribution brings gifts and pledges for HSU's \$15 million Centennial Campaign to \$11,985,000. The campaign is to continue through 1991, the school's 100th anniversary.

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Retired editor Owen
dies in Nashville

N- (O)
(W)Baptist Press
2/27/90

NASHVILLE (BP)--Richard N. Owen, former longtime editor of the Baptist and Reflector, newsjournal of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, died Feb. 26 in Nashville.

Owen was editor of the Tennessee paper from 1950 to 1968, when he retired. He was 91.

Previously, he was pastor of churches in Milan, Elizabethton, Paris and Clarksville, Tenn.

He was a native of Covington, Tenn., and was a graduate of the University of Tennessee at Knoxville and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

He is survived by a son, Richard N. Owen Jr. of Nashville, and a sister, Elizabeth O. Sims of Richland, Ga.

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New Orleans congregations
give students experience

By Breena Kent Paine

F- (O)
(NDBTS)Baptist Press
2/27/90

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--A low murmur of simultaneous island-French voices rumbled through the dimly lit room, surging and falling with the passion of the praying Christians who knelt on the cold, tile floor, their dark heads hidden by folded arms on metal chairs lined up like pews.

Then a woman in a bright, flower-print dress and a white straw hat began playing the piano; and slowly the people rose, one by one, to sing praises to the God who had given them a roof over their heads and food to eat.

The six-year-old Haitian mission is one of three ethnic ministries of Central Baptist Church, a small congregation of 100 active members in the heart of New Orleans. Although the four congregations -- including a Spanish-speaking mission and a low-income black ministry called Faith in Action -- regularly meet in separate areas of Central Baptist's facilities, each holds an "open door" policy.

"Those missions are providing for the cultural needs of the community," said Karen Stoneking, wife of a student at from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary who teaches Bible study and discipleship training at Central Baptist. The congregations also come together for joint worship services, with combined choirs, for special events throughout the year; and they share meals together with their various ethnic foods.

"It's an opportunity to do church in the way it should be done, with all racial and linguistic barriers broken down," said Sam Hamilton, pastor of Central Baptist and a recent graduate of New Orleans Seminary.

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The Haitian mission has been the French-speaking Haitians' "tie with each other and with their homeland," Hamilton explained. Services, led by Haitian Pastor Gabriel Wilcinot, are held several times a week, with an emphasis on unity and prayer. Many people who attend still have parents, brothers and children in Haiti, and they pray for their family members to have enough food to eat in the poverty-stricken island.

Central Baptist's Spanish-speaking mission has been in existence for 20 years and is led by Pastor Vicente Maldonado from Honduras. The A. Jack Glazes, former missionaries to Argentina, often conduct services for the mission, teach English as a second language and do "whatever else is needed."

Faith in Action, ministering to low-income blacks in government housing projects across New Orleans, began using Central Baptist's facilities in recent years. Having grown up in the housing projects himself, Pastor Marshall Truehill, a doctor of ministry student at New Orleans Seminary, feels "working in the projects, we can make an impact on the whole city, because the housing projects are the seed bed of most of the society illnesses of New Orleans."

"To be a member of the church or one of the missions does not mean you cannot cross the boundaries of the others," said Glaze, who coordinates the three missions in program scheduling and use of facilities. By its "open-door" policy, Central Baptist "insists that any black that wishes to worship in the mother church is just as welcome as any white who wants to worship with the Faith in Action church," and so on.

This "joy of worshipping together freely" is shown through the "lack of color-consciousness on the part of the group, and yet acceptance of cultures," continued Glaze, professor of missions at New Orleans Seminary.

"I think Central Baptist Church is a wonderful example of what a New Testament Church should be," said Kathy Shafto, a theology student at the seminary, from Kilbourne, La., who teaches the Girls-in-Action mission program at Central Baptist. "I think its open-door policy is exactly what Jesus taught, that we should love all people."

"I think it's a great picture of cooperation," added Shafto's husband, Jay, a recent graduate of New Orleans Seminary from Hingham, Mass. "It's a great opportunity for seminary students to see almost an ideal situation of diversity, especially folks who interested in overseas work or inner-city work."

Even though the mother church is small, "God seems to bless us and help us get by and even grow in some trying times," said Hamilton, a native of Middletown, Ohio. The success of the church's ministry, he feels, is because of the many seminary families who volunteer their help.

Central Baptist itself has a diversely ethnic congregation. The community children especially have been attracted to the church because they are looking for stability and love, Mrs. Stoneking said. Coming from lower-income and broken homes, "the kids want attention. They want someone to care about them."

Central Baptist's goal is to equip young Christians from the community to carry on the work of the church. Seminary students are helping to reach this goal by teaching classes in doctrine and discipleship.

"You don't have to go overseas to find hard work with little pay," Glaze said. "You can do that right here."

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Westbury returns to Union
as public relations director

N-HMB

Baptist Press
2/27/90

JACKSON, Tenn. (BP)--Joe Westbury, associate director of news and information for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, has been named director of public relations at Union University in Jackson, Tenn.

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Westbury, who has been a news writer for the Atlanta-based missions agency for the past four years, will return to the Tennessee Baptist college March 1.

A Union graduate, he formerly was director of public relations for the school from 1976 to 1983.

The Orlando, Fla., native began his career as a news reporter and religion editor for The Jackson Sun before joining the Union staff. He later was associate editor and the editor of World Mission Journal for the Southern Baptist Commission in Memphis, Tenn.

During his years at the Home Mission Board he also was associate editor of MissionsUSA magazine.

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Sharing faith in Christ
adventure for Mitchell

By Jennifer Dean

F - (O)
(FIA.)

Baptist Press
2/27/90

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--Bo Mitchell has done it all.

He barely survived a typhoon in the Pacific during World War II; exposed political scandal as a radio journalist; crisscrossed the country as the play-by-play announcer for the Florida State University football network; became a millionaire through investments in radio stations and oil wells.

Yet, for Mitchell, none of it matters.

"The real adventure in life in introducing someone to Jesus Christ," said Mitchell, a Winter Haven, Fla., native. "Nothing compares to seeing the Holy Spirit work and someone take that step out of the darkness into the light."

For 19 years, Mitchell lived the life of a good church-going Christian: active in a Southern Baptist church, teaching Sunday school, serving as a deacon and on committees. Still, he never felt comfortable sharing his faith. Even when one of his business partners was dying, Mitchell could not find the right words.

"Words came, but they failed to accomplish what I hoped for," he said. "I groped. In his gracious way, he assured me all was well. But I was troubled. Why couldn't I talk about Christ in a meaningful way? Here was a man approaching his greatest hour of need, and I was no real help."

After his partner's death, Mitchell said, "It was no longer enough to attend worship services or deacons' meetings or the other things busy church people attend. Surely there was more."

Mitchell attended a Lay Evangelism School. After three nights of classes, participants were sent into the community to tell people about Christ. After knocking on three doors and finding no one at home, Mitchell was ready to quit, but his partner had other ideas. They visited a couple who had been members of their Sunday school class.

When the husband came to the door, Mitchell explained why they were there, and shared his two-minute testimony, ending with, "Has anything like that ever happened to you?"

When the husband replied negatively, "Shock came over me," Mitchell said. "He had been a member of our class for two years. I didn't have the spiritual sensitivity to suspect he was lost."

Mitchell pulled out a witnessing booklet and read it word for word, his hand trembling. The man accepted Christ. "I couldn't believe what has happened. It was so easy ... no fighting or coercing," Mitchell recalled.

Changes were just beginning for Mitchell. During a trip to Cali, Colombia, with 17 other laymen and one pastor, Mitchell observed men committed to sharing the gospel and saw 243 people make professions of faith in Christ. He also caught a glimpse of what God wanted him to become.

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"The key was that those men had decided long before that nothing in life is more important than Jesus. They were just living that decision," he reported.

On his way home, he prayed: "Lord, I don't want to waste the rest of my life chasing after money and fame. I want to be more like these men and most of all, more like you."

Mitchell's first priority was to become a lay evangelism teacher. At leadership training in Graceville, Fla., he saw the miracles of Cali repeated. People came to Christ as laypeople shared their testimonies.

As his priorities changed, he lost interest in his career in radio broadcasting. He surprised his wife with the news that God was calling him into full-time evangelism.

He sold his radio station. Oil and gas leases he owned became productive. He had what looked like income for a decade or more when Jim Ponder, former director of evangelism for the Florida Baptist Convention, asked Mitchell to teach lay evangelism schools across the state. Mitchell and his wife became Southern Baptist Mission Service Corps volunteers.

In 1979, he helped develop Continuing Witness Training, the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's lay witnessing program. In 1980, Mitchell, still a volunteer, became a national Continuing Witness Training leader, traveling the nation to help pastors and laypeople learn to witness.

But as his spiritual life became richer, Mitchell became financially poorer. Investment income that seemed certain a few years earlier dried up. In 1985, faced with huge personal debt, Mitchell sold his home and liquidated most of his assets. "I was in a state of shock," he recalled.

Depressed, he turned down the Home Mission Board assignments. "I literally ran from the world," he noted. But as he prayed, he said, God spoke to him. He remembered those whose lives he had touched: people who had found faith in Jesus Christ and dedicated pastors and laypeople.

He decided to allow his personal needs to become God's responsibility, he said. His faith was not in his bank account, but in God. Since that moment, said Mitchell, "we have not had one need that God has not supplied. And I know we never will."

In the past year, Mitchell has written a book of his experiences, "You Can Take It With You," published by Broadman Press.

He now is one of Florida Baptists' regional evangelism equippers, traveling throughout the state teaching people how to share their Christian faith.

Personal witnessing has become his life, he said. He finds non-Christians seated next to him on airplanes, standing next to him in lines, taking his money at cash registers.

Evangelism includes follow-up, he stressed. When he leads people to faith in Christ, he makes sure they are contacted by a local church and enrolled in a discipleship program.

Seeing the spiritual growth in people he has led to faith in Christ confirms his call, he said.

"It's a matter of racking up statistics," he explained. "Making sure that commitment takes root and gets nourished -- that's what's important. The point is people. Every person I introduce to Jesus is important, and I make sure every one of them has the chance to grow."

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Jennifer Dean is a freelance writer in Atlanta.

'Get a grip,' counselor
tells seminary students

By Breena Kent Paine

N-10
(NOBTS)

Baptist Press
2/27/90

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Christian ministers need to "get a grip," Joe Richardson told students and faculty at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary during the Tharp Lecture Series.

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Speaking on the series' general subject, "The Preacher from the Layman's Viewpoint," Richardson, a personnel counselor for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board advised ministers to get a grip on themselves, their families and the world.

Using statistics, Richardson illustrated the kind of world ministers serve today.

"By 1990, 50 percent of all children will experience the divorce of their parents," said Richardson. "Cases of child abuse continue to rise. Thirteen children die each day in the United States in child abuse incidents; 24 percent involve teenagers.

"Approximately 25 percent of all girls will be sexually abused by age 18; 10 percent of all boys. However, a United Methodist study suggests the figures may be worse -- one in three girls and one in seven boys.

"Family abuse occurs in up to 60 percent of U.S. families. One million cases of child abuse occur annually. From 2,000 to 5,000 children die from abuse every year. That is, a child dies from abuse on the average of one every two to four hours.

"One out of every five girls and one out of every three boys 15 years old have begun to experience sex. One girl in 10 is a mother before she is 18; over 75 percent are unintentional. Government agencies spent \$16 billion in welfare related to teen pregnancies. About 600,000 teens have babies annually; 450,000 have abortions.

"Americans consume up to 60 percent of the entire world's illegal drugs, spending more on drugs than on food. Sixty percent of high school seniors have tried an illicit drug before graduation; 25 percent are daily smokers. One in 20 drinks every day; over 37 percent report drinking five or more drinks in a row at least once in the last two weeks.

"A teenager is murdered every eight minutes. Over 7,000 adolescents will kill themselves this year. A teenager attempts suicide once every 78 seconds; one succeeds every 90 minutes.

"We've got to look at the world just the way it is. We are to determine what can be done -- what must be done -- in the face of this reality."

To be able to minister effectively in such a world, ministers must be able to get a grip on themselves, Richardson said. This includes learning how to relax, exercise and eat right, he noted.

In addition, pastors today are too busy and are neglecting their families because they say "yes" to many things they are responsible to say "no" to, he said. This adds to the stress factor that makes them less effective as ministers.

"When you go to a church, the temptation will be to spend countless hours with that church," Richardson explained. "And one of these days, you will wake up and realize that you do not know that woman that lives with you. And she is too nice, too kind, to say: 'Come home. We need you.'"

To get a grip on their families, husbands need to sacrifice for their wives, spending more quality time with their families, without television, he said.

Ministers should also pray for their spouses daily and protect them from taking on too many duties at church and becoming worn out, he said. They should not purposefully hurt their spouses; and if they do, they should apologize, he continued. They should act in such a way as to "earn the respect" from their spouses.

"We must remember we're fathers and husbands first, ... and pastors second," he said. "Don't forget to keep your wife warm."

To get a grip on the world, ministers need to have a concern for the world; to be competent by being organized and taking advantage of opportunities to learn; and to survey the resources, being available to do what is needed to win the world to Christ, he noted.