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90-37 38

Fuller says Bisagno plan  
has 'refreshing potential'

By Dan Martin

ROANOKE, Va. (BP)--A proposal for a new Southern Baptist coalition "of those committed to a perfect, infallible Bible," has received the support of Charles Fuller, who was chairman of the Southern Baptist Convention Peace Committee.

Fuller, pastor of First Baptist Church of Roanoke, Va., wrote in his church newsletter March 17 that the plan, first proposed in February by John Bisagno, pastor of First Baptist Church of Houston, has "refreshing potential."

Bisagno, calling for "all those who believe in a perfect, infallible Bible to stand up and say so," linked his "historic" new coalition of inerrantists with the announcement he will nominate Morris Chapman, pastor of First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas, for the presidency of the SBC at its annual meeting in New Orleans.

The public announcement of Chapman's candidacy came during the annual pastors' school at First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Fla., where current SBC President Jerry Vines is pastor. Chapman was introduced and endorsed by Adrian Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn., whose election in 1979 signaled the start of the conservative movement.

While Fuller gave support to Bisagno's plan, he stopped short of endorsing Chapman for the presidency.

Two other pastors who in the past have avoided overt involvement in SBC politics -- including another member of the SBC Peace Committee -- publicly announced they support both Bisagno's plan and Chapman's candidacy.

They are Joel Gregory, pastor of Travis Avenue Baptist Church of Fort Worth, Texas, and Peace Committee member Jim Henry, pastor of First Baptist Church of Orlando, Fla.

"I am convinced most Southern Baptists, like myself, are weary of this struggle," Fuller wrote of the 11-year conservative-moderate battle over control of the SBC.

"I have not been part of a political coalition or counter coalition; I am not now, nor do I seek to be. I simply yearn for a widened tent of leadership and fellowship among us, but held in place by the indispensable cords of a perfect Bible and a Great Commission (the command to take the gospel to the whole world)," Fuller wrote.

In speaking of the "tent of leadership," Fuller referred to a comment Chapman made in a statement following announcement of his nomination. "The time has come to enlarge the tent of our beloved SBC to encompass all cooperating Southern Baptists who are dedicated to perpetuating our allegiance to the Bible as the perfect Word from the perfect God," Chapman said then.

Some conservative leaders privately say they have drawn the circle of leadership too tightly, and, in Bisagno's proposal, are agreeing to be more inclusive in the appointments to key convention committees and in nomination of trustees to SBC boards and agencies.

The inclusiveness called for by Bisagno and Chapman, they point out, includes, however, only those who "hold to the inerrancy and infallibility of the Word of God."

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In his statement, Fuller wrote: "His (Bisagno's) proposal has refreshing potential, presenting an alternative to one which has continued to be an ongoing collision course. No tent of togetherness can be broad enough to house all the extremes among us, but surely the cords are long enough to include all who seriously embrace the convictions, the mission and the spirit of the Peace Committee report, overwhelmingly adopted by the convention."

Fuller said he sees in Bisagno's plan the possibility of establishing a real center in the SBC. "During the Peace Committee days (1985-87) I kept feeling a real center would emerge, possibly from within the Peace Committee. It didn't. There have been some efforts to establish a centrist group, but I have not found in those efforts the kind of a center that did not have a periphery," he told Baptist Press.

"As I see it, with each such effort there has been a periphery attached ... which I found I could not truthfully embrace. I do not believe what I view as a neo-orthodox periphery is good for our denomination's future, nor do I believe a periphery of litmus agendas can ever unite us."

The current political coalitions in Southern Baptist life -- the moderates and the conservatives, as they currently are labelled -- "are on a collision course. They are committed to stop what they are convinced are the extremes."

The conservatives are trying to stop liberalism; the moderates are trying to stop fundamentalism, he explained. "Stopping the extremes is what motivates them," he said. "I have been looking for something which I felt had some promise of being a true center. I think that efforts to this point have carried either the litmus agenda (of orthodoxy) or of being such a broad tent that it preserves the neo-orthodox fringe. Neither has a chance of uniting us."

"It would seem, in the minds of some, we should all fit one of two perceived political molds or be categorized as neutral. I am not a neutral. I am not neutral about the Bible, nor am I neutral about world missions. Neither am I neutral about the essentials in Christ-likeness."

"Neutrality implies disinterest, indifference and compromise. I am not neutral. I am a dyed-in-the-wool conservative, an inerrantist, but I refuse to forfeit my independence."

While Fuller declined to endorse Chapman as president, he said he will not be "judgmental" about those who have done so, including Bisagno, Gregory and Henry.

Fuller said Recommendation Six of the Peace Committee report, adopted by messengers to the 1987 annual meeting, requests "all organized political factions to discontinue ... organized political activity ... ."

In declining to endorse Chapman, Fuller said: "I choose to observe that request. I think it (his action) is the spirit of the Peace Committee report as well as the letter. I would not level accusations that people are violating it (with endorsements), but the request is there and I choose to recognize it and honor it."

In his March 1 church newsletter, Gregory noted, "By the deepest conviction of my life and soul, I must endorse this attempt for unity with doctrinal integrity." He added Bisagno's call for a "historic new day" will "bring us to an end to this controversy ... a new coalition to put an end to these painful 11 years."

Gregory later told Baptist Press: "In a sense we are going to have revolution or evolution. Revolution would be to repudiate the party in power; evolution is for the party in power to enlarge the tent -- to use their term -- to include everyone who confesses a perfect Bible."

He said, "Dr. Chapman has promised to enlarge the tent. We will all be witnesses and jury as to what happens. We will know a year from now when the appointments are announced."

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In his church newsletter in early March, Henry told the Orlando congregation: "In deciding for the first time in my ministry to speak out on a presidential election, I am doing so not on the basis of personalities, but of a far greater concern, a principle, the integrity and nature of Scripture.

"Our leader must be one who will affirm the course (of the past 11 years) that will keep us off the reefs of denominational destruction, the spiritual oil spill that has polluted and practically destroyed every mainline denomination, the environmental hazard that has wasted too many lives and evangelical pursuits, the toxic waste of biblical compromise."

Another pastor, Ken Hemphill, of First Baptist Church in Norfolk, Va., like Fuller, endorsed the proposal but stopped short of endorsing the candidate.

"It is my earnest prayer that this would be the year Southern Baptists can put political rhetoric, divisive titles and character assassination behind us. I resonate with John Bisagno's call for peace now without compromise on the integrity of Scripture. I long for an end to the struggle which has burdened all loyal Southern Baptists," Hemphill wrote.

"I support an end to political factions, a move to more inclusive leadership and a more harmonious and evangelical convention," Hemphill added in a statement he prepared for release to the press. The statement did not appear in his church newsletter.

The flurry of endorsements of both Bisagno's "coalition" and Chapman's candidacy grew out of conversations initiated by Gregory and Bisagno, Fuller said.

"Joel (Gregory) called to say John (Bisagno) had a statement he wanted to share with me and some others, and asked if I would listen," Fuller recalled. "Then I was asked if I would be willing to be in on a conference call with several people."

He said Bisagno read a "rough draft" of the statement in the conference call, which included Gregory, Henry, Hemphill, and Charles Carter, pastor of Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Birmingham, Ala., Fuller said.

Fuller and Hemphill endorsed Bisagno's plan but declined to endorse Chapman; Gregory and Henry endorsed the plan and endorsed the candidate; Carter, by mid-March, had issued no statement.

"After he (Bisagno) read the statement, I told him it had a refreshing potential," Fuller said, recalling Bisagno polished the statement and made it public at Vines' pastors' conference.

Fuller also said there was no agreement the participants in the conference call would respond to the statement. "There was an early understanding there was to be no uniformity; everybody who wanted to would respond to it in his own way and his own time," he said.

He also responded to a rumor that the round of endorsements by prominent pastors was part of a political strategy orchestrated to foster the candidacy of Chapman and another win for conservatives in the presidential election in New Orleans.

"I do not believe this is part of an intentional, orchestrated strategy. If I thought I was involved in that, I would feel I had not honored the Peace Committee report. That report is very important to me. My signature and my credibility is wrapped up in that report.

"Some people may think I am living in the past even referring to it, but the convention adopted it, and, to my knowledge, it has not been rescinded.

"I do not want to put myself in the position of violating it because if I violate it, it would suggest that perhaps that report does not have the virtue and credibility we thought," he added.

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Vestal says endorsements  
clear political strategy

ATLANTA (BP)--A new "coalition" of inerrantists and endorsements of its candidate is "very clear political strategy," Daniel Vestal said.

Vestal, pastor of Dunwoody Baptist Church in suburban Atlanta, responded after four pastors endorsed a proposal to create a new coalition around the "perfect, infallible Bible," and two of the four endorsed the conservative candidate for the presidency of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Vestal, who announced in September he will again seek to be elected president of the 14.9-million-member denomination, is expected to challenge conservative candidate Morris Chapman, pastor of First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas, when the convention meets June 12-14 in New Orleans.

Chapman will be nominated by John Bisagno, pastor of First Baptist Church in Houston, who announced his "historic" new coalition "of those committed to a perfect infallible Bible," and ended his non-aligned stance with endorsement of the 11-year campaign to turn the SBC to a more conservative direction.

"Morris Chapman is going to be nominated because the five former presidents (of the SBC) want him to be nominated," said Vestal.

"Southern Baptists don't need a college of cardinals to determine the direction. We particularly don't need a college of cardinals who go on Caribbean cruises and then come back and determine who will have a part in the decision-making process."

Vestal referred to reports four of the five former presidents elected since 1979 went on a Bible conference cruise in January, during which decisions were made regarding the conservative candidate for president in 1990. Reports indicate Adrian Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church, Memphis, Tenn.; Bailey Smith, an Atlanta evangelist; Charles Stanley, pastor of First Baptist Church, Atlanta; and Jerry Vines, current SBC president and pastor of First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Fla., were on the Templeton cruise. Not attending was James T. Draper Jr., pastor of First Baptist Church of Euless, Texas.

Vestal also referred to plans to "enlarge the tent of leadership," in the SBC, a comment made by Chapman following announcement of his nomination. By that, conservative leaders indicate they mean that the circle of leadership has been too narrow and, with Bisagno's new coalition and inclusion of prominent pastors, they will be more inclusive in appointments and nominations.

Four pastors -- two of whom were member of the SBC Peace Committee with Vestal -- have endorsed Bisagno's call for a new coalition.

Two of the four -- Peace Committee member Jim Henry, pastor of First Baptist Church of Orlando, Fla., and Joel Gregory, pastor of Travis Avenue Baptist Church of Fort Worth, Texas -- have endorsed Chapman's candidacy, as well.

Two others -- Peace Committee Chairman Charles Fuller, pastor of First Baptist Church of Roanoke, Va., and Ken Hemphill, pastor of First Baptist Church of Norfolk, Va. -- endorsed Bisagno's plan but declined to endorse Chapman's candidacy.

"What is happening is a very clear political strategy to 'enlarge the tent' of leadership in the central core. The college of cardinals is reaching out to a select group of influential pastors in order to perpetuate the control of the past 11 years by enlisting fresh leadership into it," Vestal said.

"This is part of the problem. The SBC does not need an episcopate, a presbytery, a college of cardinals. We do not need to be a centrally controlled denomination by a centrally controlling group determining who can and who cannot be part of Southern Baptist life."

Vestal said Bisagno has been a close friend and noted: "I cannot speak for John in terms of his motivation; I am sure he is acting out of his own conscience. These men -- Bisagno, Gregory, Fuller and Henry -- are my brothers in the Lord and in the ministry. They know my heart; they know my theological convictions. I think they know my desire for theological integrity in the institutions as well as reconciliation in the convention.

"The phrase they are using now to build their 'new coalition' is the 'perfect Bible'," he said. "The problem is not with the Bible; the problem is with us. We don't understand the Bible perfectly, we don't preach it perfectly, we don't live by it perfectly.

"I know myself to be a flawed, frail human being who is a sinful, selfish sinner. I need the grace of God in Jesus Christ and, praise God, I have experienced it.

"They seem to be extending their hands and their heart only to those who interpret the Bible the way they interpret it and only to those who will confess it the way they express it. That is not a broadening but a narrowing and a creedalizing. It is broadening only in the sense that a few individuals who are key and influential have been invited in.

"I offer my hand and my heart to all who have experienced the grace of God in Jesus Christ."

For himself, Vestal said: "I am not going around looking for endorsements. I am looking for support from all Southern Baptists, not just a few influential pastors.

"I would be naive not to recognize the influence these men have because they are leaders in the denomination. I respect that leadership, but I would like to think Baptist people don't need anybody making decisions for them. People can see what the issue is. It is not the Bible; it is freedom and who is going to be part of the participatory decision-making process.

"I think Baptist people will see beyond this carefully planned strategy and will say they don't want a perpetuation of the control of the past 11 years."

Vestal concluded by noting he does not want to go back before 1979 -- the year the conservative movement emerged -- but wants to "look to the future in a new way. I want authentic decision making and authentic cooperation. You cannot have authentic cooperation without authentic participation."

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HMB trustees OK venture  
with Koreans and Brazilians

By Mark Wingfield

Baptist Press  
3/15/90

ATLANTA (BP)--The Southern Baptist Home Mission Board has agreed to cooperate with the Korean and Brazilian Baptist conventions to approve missionaries in the United States.

Under the agreement, approved in principle by the agency's board of directors during their spring meeting in Atlanta March 12-14, Brazilians and Koreans appointed as foreign missionaries to the United States would become joint missionaries of the SBC Home Mission Board.

Also at that meeting, the board went into executive session for 20 minutes to consider a report from its long range site development committee. In calling for the executive session, board chairman Ralph Smith said the private meeting would be limited to that one subject and that the details of the board's action would be made public within 45 days.

Smith said he did not like calling the board into executive session, but that it was necessary to honor real estate negotiations currently under way. "We will give a full release as quickly as we are able," he said.

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In other action, HMB trustees elected one new staff member, approved the annual audit, altered the procedures for sending information on prospective employees to board members in advance, approved a resolution to the SBC Executive Committee on cooperative funding, re-elected the full slate of officers, and approved an \$810,792 adjustment to the 1990 budget.

The agreements with the Foreign Mission Board of the Korean Baptist Convention and World Mission Board of the Brazilian Baptist Convention were initiated at the request of those national conventions, HMB President Larry Lewis said.

He called the agreement an "unprecedented approach to missions partnership."

Baptist leaders from Korea and Brazil spoke to HMB trustees about their desire to reach their own people who have come to America without the gospel.

Ki Man Park, pastor of Yoido Baptist Church in Seoul and chairman of the Korean Foreign Mission Board, told the group he was the product of Southern Baptist missionaries sent to Korea. In return, "we're going to send our missionaries to North America to reach my own blood and kinsmen for the Lord," he said.

"We are here to offer our concern and interest in winning Korean Americans to the Lord by cooperating with your mission endeavors," added Gen. Seh Jik Park, a member of the Yoido church and chairman of the 1988 Olympic Organizing Committee in Seoul.

"Spiritually, there is a great moving of the Holy Spirit among the people of the Republic of Korea and the United States in relation to the Christian missionary thrust," said Park, who also became a Christian through the efforts of Southern Baptist missionaries.

"We are eternally thankful for the Southern Baptists who so willingly and sacrificially committed their lives for the cause of evangelizing Koreans, both in Korea and the United States."

Because of this contribution from Southern Baptists, Korean Baptists now want to reach out to other countries with the gospel, Park said. "America today needs Christ, and this country is rapidly becoming a mission field. The Korea Baptist Convention would like to share our spiritual blessings with you by cooperating in winning America to the Lord.

"My own church has pledged to send one missionary family to North America each year together with the Home Mission Board to help plant at least one Korean-speaking Baptist church in America."

Bill Ichter, a Southern Baptist missionary to Brazil and associate director of the Brazilian Baptist World Mission Board, also addressed HMB trustees.

"Today there are literally hundreds of thousands of Portuguese-speaking people who have come to your country," Ichter said. "God has given us a sacred mission to reach these people.

"We Brazilian Baptists feel a great responsibility to these people. To us, they represent a challenge as great as the Philistine giant David faced." He said runaway inflation and political turmoil have made sending foreign missionaries from Brazil more difficult.

The 800,000 people who make up the Brazilian Baptist Convention are comparable in size to the small stone that David used to slay the giant, Ichter said. "We lack only the sling to thrust us into the forehead of this giant."

Lewis told HMB trustees he had been in contact with SBC Foreign Mission Board President Keith Parks, who he said approved of the concept of the partnership but was concerned about how it would be implemented.

"We're aware of those concerns and will take them into consideration as we finalize these plans," Lewis said. "What we do will not be counterproductive to the work of Southern Baptists as a whole."

In a telephone interview, Parks said he was concerned that U.S. Baptists could inadvertently encourage Korean and Brazilian pastors to serve in the U.S. rather than in other countries with greater mission needs. Parks agreed that America is a great mission field, but said there are still many other countries with fewer resources for spreading the gospel.

"Anytime any group wants to take the initiative to share the gospel with others, I wouldn't try to interfere with that," he said. "My concern would be if the HMB or anyone else took an initiating role and sought to enlist or recruit people from other nations, or if subsidies were provided that made it cheaper and easier to send missionaries to the U.S. rather than Third World countries."

"If people are going to come here to work, I certainly see value in coordinating that with the HMB. But I think we would distort the process if we made it easier for other groups to send missionaries here than to other countries."

Final negotiations are still under way between the HMB and the Korean and Brazilian conventions. However, terms of the initial documents call for the missionary candidates to be jointly approved by the two national conventions and the HMB, with financial support being shared.

The missionaries would relate to the HMB's language church extension division. Oscar Romo, director of language church extension, said no candidates are ready for approval yet, but the first missionary could be approved sometime this year.

The resolution on the Cooperative Program, adopted unanimously, was presented by Robert Curtis, pastor of Ballwin Baptist Church in Fenton, Mo. It affirms Bold Mission Thrust and calls upon the SBC Executive Committee to "redesign its current method of agency funding to reflect a commitment to financially affirm Bold Mission Thrust goals," especially as they relate to the two mission boards.

Tim Norton, director of purchasing at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, was elected associate director of marketing development.

Last October, trustees asked to receive reference forms for all missionary candidates, chaplains to be endorsed and prospective staff members from their states. At the March meeting, that policy was altered to allow trustees to request not to receive the forms if they do not want to be included in the reference process.

Board chairman Smith, pastor of Hyde Park Baptist Church in Austin, Texas, was elected to a second term, as were the other board officers: Troy Morrison, director of church-minister relations for the Alabama Baptist Convention, first vice chairman; Lawson Schroeder, a lay person from First Baptist Church of Atlanta, second vice chairman; Ann Frazier, a lay person from Roanoke Baptist Church of Roanoke Rapids, N.C., secretary; and Llwlyn Walker, lay person from First Baptist Church of Lubbock, Texas, assistant secretary.

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BP photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press

Lottie Moon gifts to top  
goal, projections show

Baptist Press  
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RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Gifts to the 1989 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions will total about \$81.3 million, meeting the goal for the first time since 1981, according to Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board projections.

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By March 12, the agency had received about \$61.5 million in Lottie Moon gifts, toward a goal of \$81 million. Projections based on actual receipts from Baptist state conventions indicated that by the final tally May 31, the total will amount to about a 3.2 percent increase over 1988 giving.

"I certainly am encouraged the projections at this time indicate we're anticipating meeting our goal for the first time in nine years," said board President R. Keith Parks. But Southern Baptists should note the percentage increase only equals the inflation rate, he cautioned.

"I would have to acknowledge reality and say that while we're grateful for the increase, it still doesn't provide the bold mission funding Southern Baptists need if we're going to take advantage of the great evangelistic opportunities that are opening, such as those in Eastern Europe," Parks added.

The annual Lottie Moon offering is projected to fund almost half of the \$174.9 million foreign mission budget for 1990, encompassing the work of some 3,800 missionaries in 116 nations. Most Southern Baptist churches receive the offering during the Christmas season, but the board keeps its books open for receipts from Baptist state conventions until the end of May.

The board bases its March projection for the offering on a survey of selected state conventions that gave the largest totals the previous year. The survey counts receipts through February. Past projections have come within 1 percentage point.

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Alliance has passed  
easy part, Hastey says

By Dan Martin

Baptist Press  
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ST. LOUIS (BP)--The Southern Baptist Alliance is "past the easy part," in attracting membership, Stan Hastey told the SBA membership March 9 in St. Louis at the organization's fourth national convocation.

"I have a hunch we have already attracted most if not all of the alternative congregations, those willing to identify themselves as a different kind of congregation, where their difference is worn as a badge of honor," SBA Executive Director Hastey said.

He reported 95 congregations are affiliated with the SBA, as well as 2,700 individual members, giving the organization a membership of about 54,000. About two dozen congregations are listed as supporters.

The annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in New Orleans, June 12-14, "has the potential of changing the SBA a great deal," Hastey said. "If Daniel Vestal (the moderate presidential candidate) suffers a huge defeat -- which is entirely possible -- churches may be ready to move on to a new definition.

"A huge defeat for moderates has the potential of making the Alliance an attractive place. It could be similar to San Antonio (where moderates lost the presidency by a narrow margin). After San Antonio, we gained one congregation a week for nine months. After Las Vegas (site of the 1989 convention) we have not gained a half-dozen new congregations."

The Alliance membership figures, "certainly modest when compared to the size of the SBC, are nonetheless significant as a barometer of the discontent among true Baptists disillusioned with the direction our denomination has taken in recent years," Hastey said.

"Yet, I am convinced our actual numbers to date represent but a fraction of those who share that discontent but who for a variety of reasons have chosen thus far not to join us."

The Alliance is strong, he said, but "this organization most likely will not grow significantly beyond its present size unless and until significant new numbers of Southern Baptists are willing to register a strong protest with the new ruling party that business as usual is not acceptable, even at the risk of being accused of disloyalty."

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"Such protest, in turn, is not likely to happen unless and until the ruling party overplays its hand by making martyrs of some of the key leaders at the larger agencies and institutions, many of whom themselves have managed to adapt to the new realities in what I believe to be a false hope that the ruling party is not as demonic as it is," he added.

Southern Baptists seem to have lost their capacity for outrage, Hastey said, and added: "Indeed, the absence of righteous outrage has become a pervasive sickness among Southern Baptists. It has enabled the ruling party to achieve many of its objectives with what has appeared on the surface as a minimal disruption of the denomination at large, as the overwhelming majority of the people simply acquiesce to truly outrageous new policies without a whimper of protest."

Hastey reported that "the need for the SBA has never seemed more apparent than it does today," and said: "That is why every day I am more thankful for the vision of this organization's founders to put in place something other than just another mechanism to take back the convention."

The Alliance, he said, "must be open to receive all those disenchanting Southern Baptists who over time will come to understand the fundamental futility of doing spiritual battle with earthly instruments of war."

The SBA, he said, "must begin asking ourselves some hard questions. Is this movement's destiny to be found within the confines of the SBC? If so, are we willing to assume a prophetic role, including the rejection inherent in the office of prophet? If not, where do we go in fulfillment of what God would have us become?"

Hastey said he has no "hard and fast answers. But I do hold, with every passing day, with every new pronouncement from the cabal of present and former SBC presidents now ruling the convention in the style of mullahs, with every new account of the latest injustice done to another of the Lord's faithful servants, and with every renewal of the same tired call to re-arm and do political battle one more time, the eventual course of the Alliance is being set, our destiny established.

"While I do not presume to know where that course will lead or what that destiny will be, I, for one, have concluded that there is a line beyond which I cannot go to remain in the convention of my birth, my upbringing, my education and my prior career.

"I am not willing to give up being a Roger Williams Baptist to become an Adrian Rogers Baptist. I am not willing to bow down to an idol lately called a 'perfect, inerrant and infallible' Bible rather than worship the one true God revealed in the Bible. I am not willing to put on the yoke of spiritual tyranny for the sake of human institutions."

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HMB experienced positive  
change in 1980s: Lewis

By Mark Wingfield

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ATLANTA (BP)--Despite conflict, the Southern Baptist Convention and its Home Mission Board experienced positive changes in the decade of the 1980s, HMB President Larry Lewis said in his annual report to the agency's board of directors.

"The one word that seems to characterize the Home Mission Board during the 1980s is the word change," he said, citing his election as president in 1987, adoption of new objectives and goals for the agency, a staff reorganization, election of five new vice presidents on the agency's staff and election of new board members.

The SBC's 11-year internal conflict has "sapped our energies and divided our efforts" but also has brought about good, Lewis said: "A reaffirmation of our historic commitment to the authority and authenticity of the Scripture was needed, and that affirmation was made.

"Belief in an inspired, infallible Bible cannot be considered a peripheral doctrine of little concern to Southern Baptists. Baptists feel deeply and strongly about the Word of God and will not allow that historic doctrine of the faith to be eroded.

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"I thank God Southern Baptists have made their position clear, and no one can doubt it. We are people of the book, and we are proud of that."

This affirmation does not mean individuals should be bound by any dogma, catechism or statement of faith, Lewis added. "Every Baptist has not only the right but the responsibility to study the Bible for himself and come to his own conclusions," he said. "We are very jealous of the priesthood of the believer."

"Likewise, I strongly defend the right of every Baptist church to chart its own course and make its own decisions regarding matters of faith and practice."

"However, agencies such as ours, commissioned by Southern Baptists as a whole to serve our denomination and churches, should assume a doctrinal stance in harmony with, and not contrary to, the constituency we serve."

This is the reason the HMB "willingly accepted" the report of the SBC Peace Committee and currently abides by its recommendations in the screening process for hiring staff, appointing missionaries and endorsing chaplains, Lewis said.

A decade of change in the SBC has resulted in trustees taking more active roles, he said. "I, for one, believe Southern Baptists should be grateful that our boards do not give rubber-stamp approval to anything," he noted. "More than ever before in our history, our board is involved in setting policy and requiring accountability. I believe you have not only that right but that responsibility."

Lewis also reviewed major accomplishments of Southern Baptists in the past decade:

-- Baptizing 3.76 million converts. "God has blessed us with a moving of the baptismal waters," he said. "Yet we should have done so much more."

During the 1970s, Southern Baptists baptized 3.9 million people, or 4 percent more than in the 1980s, he said.

Lewis noted that baptisms have been increasing in the past two years and predicted that 1990 would set a new record because of the impact of the denomination's simultaneous "Here's Hope" revivals.

-- Starting an average of 750 new church-type missions each year. At the end of 1980, Southern Baptists reported 42,737 churches and missions, which Lewis said was on target toward the Bold Mission Thrust global missions/evangelism campaign goal of 50,000 congregations by A.D. 2000.

However, he said, the denomination must put an equal emphasis on church growth to "close the back door" through which about 130 churches per year exit. "Every year we lose about a third of the number of new churches that are constituted," he said.

-- Appointing 5,880 home missionaries. Lewis noted that the HMB ended the decade with 3,808 missionaries, the second-largest number ever under appointment at one time.

"I'm proud of our missionaries," he said. "They are our most important resource. I am committed to placing priority on field ministries, on supporting the work of our missionaries on the front lines in the battle to win America for Christ."

-- Ending the decade with 2,132 endorsed chaplains. Because chaplains are paid by the businesses, institutions and government agencies who hire them, they are not only effective, but cost-effective, Lewis said.

"Whenever there is death, illness, grief or pain, they are there, ministering to people in the name of Christ, going to many places around the world where no one else can go," he said.

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-- Doubling the number of mission volunteers from 26,659 in 1980 to 58,202 in 1989. "No other area of home missions work has grown as much during the past decade as the use of volunteers," Lewis said.

He said the 1,230 Mission Service Corps volunteers serving last year alone provided more than 3.4 million hours of work that would have cost the HMB \$18 million in comparable salaries.

-- Gifts of \$251.2 million from Southern Baptists. "God has blessed us with generous financial support," Lewis said.

He explained that during the 1980s, the HMB received \$215.7 million through the SBC Cooperative Program unified budget and \$251.2 million through the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for Home Missions.

Lewis said he hopes the decade of the 1990s will be characterized by the word "Jesus" rather than the word "greed," which characterized the 1980s.

"I believe we are on the verge of a great spiritual awakening in America," he said. "Exciting things are happening. As never before, Southern Baptists are falling on their faces before the Lord."

If spiritual awakening comes, Southern Baptists will have no trouble meeting their Bold Mission Thrust goals in the 1990s, he said. "If spiritual awakening comes, Jesus will be the most important thing in our lives."

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Tensions rise among Eastern European evangelicals, Catholics, Orthodox

By Mike Creswell

Baptist Press  
3/15/90

BUDAPEST, Hungary (BP)--As a measure of freedom returns to religious life in much of Eastern Europe, old tensions between evangelicals and the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches have arisen again, Baptist leaders say.

In many areas of Europe, Baptists and other evangelicals are few, command little public recognition and often are considered to be cults, leading at times to problems with other church groups, especially in countries with state churches which consider all citizens as members.

In the Soviet Union, some Russian Orthodox sources have distributed letters expressing negative sentiments about Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation. The move has created a backlash of ill will against the Russian Orthodox Church, especially among Baptist young people, reported Alexei Bichkov, a vice president of the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the Soviet Union.

"It was the same feeling we felt had disappeared," Bichkov told a group of Eastern European Baptist leaders gathered to discuss future work.

Questioned by Baptists about the new developments, Russian Orthodox leaders replied the negative material was not authorized by them. In the new day of freedom, people can speak out as they like, the leaders said.

Some 50 million members are claimed by the Russian Orthodox Church, compared to about 250,000 Soviet Baptists. Baptists fear a move by some to make the Orthodox Church a national church at the expense of Protestants and evangelicals, Bichkov said. However, "We are happy some very influential people in Orthodoxy stand for us," he added. Baptist leaders have begun discussions at several levels to keep relations with the Orthodox positive.

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Baptist leaders report similar tensions in Poland, Hungary and Romania. Polish Baptists are concerned about increasingly close ties between the new government and the Roman Catholic Church, said Piotr Dajludzionek of the Baptist Union of Poland. The combination of a Catholic political leader, a Polish pope and a population that is 90 percent Catholic makes Baptists nervous about the future, Dajludzionek said.

Although relations among Polish evangelical pastors and some Catholic leaders continue to be good, he said, Catholic priests wield heavy influence in smaller villages where Baptists hope to begin mission work.

Baptists in Hungary also are concerned about the growing strength of the Roman Catholic Church, which has risen in stature as the Communist Party has declined, said Janos Viczian, president of the Baptist Union of Hungary.

In one Hungarian town, a Catholic priest has forbidden citizens to attend a Baptist-sponsored crusade planned for May, Viczian said. Another priest recently refused to allow a Pentecostal pastor to lead devotional services in the chapel of a Budapest hospital, he said.

After years of repression, church groups in Hungary finally won the right to have representatives in Parliament and on a national church council. That interim arrangement ends in March with free elections. The government has promised to let the churches pursue ministry without intervention. More than 50 fledgling political parties are competing for votes, "but the Roman Catholic Church is the strongest force," Viczian said.

Tensions also exist between Baptists and Orthodox leaders in parts of Romania, Baptists report. "The Orthodox priest doesn't like to even look at Baptists. He thinks Baptists are stealing their members," said Cornel Fedor, a Baptist layman from Comanesti.

Many Romanian Orthodox leaders tend to see Baptists as a sect, while many Baptists think Orthodox leaders were too close to the hated Ceausescu dictatorship before it was overthrown.

The Baptists' suspicions are supported by Nicolae Stoicescu, Romania's new minister of religion, who told reporters the Romanian Orthodox Church was under the "direct control and supervision" of Ceausescu's secret police.

Still, Stoicescu said, the Orthodox church managed to advance non-atheistic ideas, and "this is still a Christian country." Stoicescu, a former dissident and professor of medieval history, said he opposes separation of church and state because the church has "a major role to play in rehabilitating the Romanian spirit."

Romanian Baptists have formed an evangelical alliance including Pentecostals, Brethren and others to "counterbalance" the Orthodox Church, said Nicolae Gheorgita, senior minister of Second Baptist Church in Oradea.

One sign of positive Baptist-Orthodox relations in Romania: Orthodox physicians have joined a Christian medical group in which Baptists and other evangelicals participate.

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3 CLC trustees affirm  
Stassen's peacemaking

By Louis Moore

Baptist Press  
3/15/90

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Three trustees of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission met in Birmingham, Ala., with Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Professor Glen Stassen in an effort to resolve questions about recent trustee action involving future speakers at commission seminars and conferences.

Afterward, the three commissions issued an affirmative statement about Stassen and his stand on abortion.

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The meeting between Stassen and commissioners James Wood, of Atlanta, Curt Scarborough of Florissant, Mo., Whitfield of Mobile, Ala., was initiated by the three commissioners themselves.

The commission's 31-member commission voted March 2 to request commission staff to refrain from inviting speakers to seminars and conference who are outspoken on pro-abortion issues. During the discussion, some trustees expressed concern about a statement on abortion signed by Stassen in 1977.

Afterward, Stassen issued a statement expressing concern that his name had been brought up without being invited to discuss the issue with the commission.

Stassen's name surfaced because of his role as a speaker at the commission's annual seminar in Birmingham March 12-14. Stassen spoke March 13 on "How to Apply Transforming initiatives to Family Conflicts that Arise from Addictive Behavior."

Wood said, "The intention of the original motion was not a fine-tooth examination of each prospective speaker, but to express concern of trustees about persons who are actively advocating a position opposite to pro-life."

The three commissioners' statement says:

"What we see in Dr. Stassen is a man whose life is pro-life. His wife and son afford him a unique opportunity to live what many profess. We appreciate his life for God and his calling to work for peace. We hope that his example in this regard will continue to be a blessing to our whole convention.

"We understood Dr. Stassen to say that the document he signed in 1977 is not an accurate reflection of his position today. Many of us have grown in our understanding of the abortion issue in the past decade, and we believe it is important that we look beyond words and see peoples' lives."

In his statement, Stassen said his wife, Dot, "is a nurse who has chosen to work full time at a special school for teenage mothers who have elected not to have an abortion. She helps them nurture and care for their babies, stay in school and plan their vocational futures. Our blind son, David, is extensively handicapped as a result of the German measles Dot got in the first three month of pregnancy. We did not get an abortion. Instead, we have tried to help David cope with the suffering of 14 operations, including heart surgery twice, and struggle against heavy odds to grow into a bright linguist who speaks German without an accent."

The trustees said they intend to communicate their statement and their impressions of the meeting to other commission trustees.

Stassen said, "We need to show respect for persons of diverse and sincere Christian understandings."

In his address, he emphasized that Christians are to "judge not," but are to talk with one another and seek peace.

He said he was pleased with the trustees' clarification that they "did not intend to judge future speakers with a fine-tooth comb."

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Panamanian Baptists  
mount national crusade By R. Albert Mohler Jr. & Mary E. Speidel

Baptist Press  
3/15/90

PANAMA CITY, Panama (BP)--"Operation Just Cause" may have slowed their preparations, but it did not stop Panamanian Baptists from mounting a national evangelistic campaign in the U.S. invasion's aftermath.

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Fourteen Georgia Baptist volunteers joined Panamanians and a dozen Baptist evangelists from Latin America to lead mass crusades and simultaneous revivals in three Panamanian cities Feb. 28-March 11. Final statistics on spiritual decisions are not yet available, but early reports indicate "very good" response, Southern Baptist missionaries said.

Panamanian Baptists had been planning the campaign since 1988. But when U.S. military forces launched their "Operation Just Cause" invasion of Panama Dec. 20, Baptist leaders were not sure how to proceed.

"They decided to go ahead with the campaign," said missionary Larry McCoy of Statesville, N.C., a crusade coordinator. "This says something about the Panamanian people. They're resilient."

The project renewed a Georgia Baptist partnership with Panamanian Baptists that was on hold for about a year because of political tensions in Panama. Baptists from Brazil, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Paraguay and Venezuela joined the Georgians in evangelistic outreach in Panama City, Colon and La Chorrera, where most Panamanians live.

Three Latin American evangelists led the citywide crusades. Other Baptist volunteers preached simultaneous revivals in more than 50 Baptist churches. Eight Hispanic pastors from the Georgia team preached in Spanish-speaking churches.

One unexpected crusade response came through the addition of television coverage, McCoy said. Months before the campaign, Baptist leaders had arranged to use a city stadium for the Panama City crusade. But after the invasion, officials determined the stadium was not safe.

Crusade planners hastily arranged to televise services from Panama City's First Baptist Church, where Brazilian Baptist evangelist Nilson Fanini was the speaker. Panama City's Channel 5, a national station, broadcast the four nights of services, greatly increasing the audience.

The stadium where the crusade was to have been held would have seated about 15,000 people, McCoy said. But the crusade broadcast reached throughout Panama and into Costa Rica, said Keith Morris, a Southern Baptist media volunteer in Panama. Channel 5's director of programming estimated the station's audience is about 22 percent of Panama City area residents and 28 percent of the population in outlying areas of Panama.

In addition, the broadcasts marked the first time Baptists in Panama have televised a local evangelistic crusade, said to Reynaldo Gutierrez, a Panamanian Baptist who works in media.

"I think this was really a blessing in disguise," added McCoy. "It was a great opportunity for us that we may not have had if things hadn't turned around the way they had. It just opened up some doors that maybe wouldn't have been opened otherwise."

Four-year-old Rebecca Cook helped open one of those doors. The daughter of Southern Baptist missionaries Richard and Sharon Cook, Rebecca was watching television with the Cooks' next-door neighbors when the crusade came on the air. She urged the elderly couple to watch it. Later the neighbors, both non-Christians, came outside to talk to Cook about spiritual matters. Cook is from Tulsa, Okla. Mrs. Cook is from Findlay, Ohio.

Morris also opened a door when he gave Channel 5 General Director Manuel Gilberto Ortega a ticket to a businessmen's prayer breakfast where evangelist Fanini spoke. The director already had heard Fanini preach as he directed Channel 5's camera crew. During the breakfast, he responded to Fanini's invitation to accept Christ as savior.

Some camera operators and technicians also expressed interest in the sermons, said Morris.

The crusade had a "tremendous impact" on his congregation and on Panama City, said Julio Leiva, pastor of First Baptist Church. "Many people have responded to the gospel, and many have been reached for the first time through television," he said.

The most pressing challenge after the crusades is to integrate new believers into church life, added Leiva. "The impact has been nationwide," he said, "and now we must reach out to those who have responded."

As Panama focuses on recovery and rebuilding, the evangelistic campaign caught the nation's attention, McCoy said: "We felt like this was a great opportunity for us. It came at the right time."

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BP photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press

China teachers report  
few work status changes By Donald D. Martin & Lounette Templeton

Baptist Press  
3/15/90

HONG KONG (BP)--Southern Baptist teachers in China report working relationships with school officials, co-workers and students have changed little despite recent reports of tightening controls on foreign teachers.

Some press reports have said Chinese government authorities discourage informal contact with foreigners. Officials are said to require that Chinese sign in before each visit to a foreigner's apartment and later write a report about the visit.

A number of Cooperative Services International teachers working in China said they are aware of the recent reports but have not yet seen changes in their working status or in local attitudes toward them.

Cooperative Services International, the Southern Baptist aid organization, sponsors 43 English teachers at colleges and universities in China and hopes to double that number in the next school year.

"In our school there isn't any signing in to see the foreigners. We just pop in for a visit at (Chinese) apartments, and they come and see us," said Timothy Little, a CSI teacher from Kansas City, Mo. Little and his wife, Linda, teach English at Dali Medical College in Xiaguan.

The desire among Chinese to learn English has increased, Little said: "There's a tremendous push to study English now, especially in the lower grades. Everyone is learning English."

Ina Winstead, a CSI teacher at the Shanghai Institute of Mechanical Engineering, said she sees no change in relating to students. However, the school has tightened some of its procedures, she said, including a requirement for more written reports from teachers concerning classes and grading. Mrs. Winstead and her husband, Ron, are from St. Peters, Mo.

Jana Clayton of Longmont, Colo., said she sees a more somber attitude among Chinese students but added that her relationships with students and friends are the same. Clayton now teaches English at Beijing Second Foreign Language Institute after attending the school last year as a CSI-sponsored student of Chinese language.

"I still meet with the same people that I met with last year. We're still friends -- that's all stayed the same," she said.

Charlie Wilson, CSI's educational coordinator in Hong Kong, said the latest reports should not affect CSI teachers.

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"The quality of how we relate and the integrity of our work with each school should help us," he said. "If we're sincere in trying to help China, then hopefully we will earn their respect, but we really have to instill in the teachers that come into this environment a healthy respect for the situation here."

Ken Locke of Arkadelphia, Ark., a teacher at Guangxi University in Nanning, said that because he resists commenting on the current political situation in China, he can speak more freely about his Christian faith.

"We express the point of view that the Chinese must solve China's problems," he said. "Whatever the outcome of the government and whatever the changes might be, there will be a need for educated people. We can help the most by furthering the cause of education."

Church attendance in Shanghai remains strong, Mrs. Winstead also said.

"We haven't been in a church that has less than 1,000 people in a worship service. And most of them have from two to four services every Sunday," she said. The Winsteds have visited eight churches in Shanghai. At least 13 churches meet in Shanghai, and they know of another 11 in the suburbs. Some churches have from 3,000 to 4,000 people of all ages attending, she said. Many Christians also meet in homes in the area.

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California church given additional  
testaments to extend revival spirit

Baptist Press  
3/15/90

NASHVILLE (BP)--A California church that has recorded 1,250 professions of faith in Christ through Scripture distribution is being given an additional 10,000 "Here's Hope" New Testaments to support the revival that has broken out in the church.

Members of True Vine Baptist Church in Oakland have given away 12,000 testaments through door-to-door witnessing since November, said to Pastor Newton Carey Jr. As a result, 1,250 people have prayed to accept Jesus Christ.

The additional New Testaments are being given to the church by the Southern Baptist Sunday School and Home Mission boards.

The influx of new converts and burgeoning spirit of revival have put a strain on the church's finances, Carey said, noting people still need to be reached.

True Vine Church is a predominantly black congregation situated in a poor neighborhood of Oakland. The area of the city is best known for its high drug-related crime rate and for being the site of the double-decker freeway collapse during last fall's World Series earthquake.

The response to the Scripture distribution has been so great that the church has postponed its "Here's Hope" revival from April until September, when a larger meeting hall can be secured to accommodate the crowds. Sunday morning worship services are currently filled to overflowing, the pastor said.

Upon hearing about the revival occurring in Oakland, leaders of the Home Mission Board and the Sunday School Board decided to help by giving the additional New Testaments to the church free of charge.

The testaments, which are marked with a simple presentation of the gospel, were jointly produced by the two agencies for use in the denomination's "Here's Hope. Jesus cares for you." simultaneous revivals. The Sunday School Board has published more than six million of the "Here's Hope" New Testaments this year which are being sold on a cost recovery basis.

"Because the Lord is blessing this church in such a marvelous way, we want them to have additional copies of the New Testaments as an encouragement for churches all across the nation involved in simultaneous revivals," said SSB President Lloyd Elder.

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"We want to be responsive to where the Spirit of God is moving across our nation," added HMB President Larry Lewis. "If the Spirit is working through Scripture distribution in California, lack of finances to purchase New Testaments should not be a hindrance to a church.

"Because the members of True Vine Baptist Church have taken a stand as witnesses, a great revival is beginning in Oakland. We would be accountable to God if we did not step in to make certain this church has every resource it needs to continue this bold witness."

Elder said the emphasis on Scripture distribution is particularly significant as Southern Baptists and the nation observe The International Year of Bible Reading during 1990, an emphasis promoted by the International Bible Reading Association, a non-denominational organization based in Murfreesboro, Tenn.

The year-long emphasis has been supported by a proclamation of President George Bush, a joint resolution of the U.S. Congress and a resolution by messengers to the 1989 Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting. Johnnie Godwin, SSB vice president for general publishing, serves on the advisory council for the emphasis.

"The Sunday School Board has traditionally encouraged individual Bible study through the Sunday school program," Elder said. "Numerous Scripture and devotional guides are provided in all age-group materials to encourage reading the Bible on a regular basis."

The Sunday School Board has given emphasis to its program of Bible publishing in recent years, including support of Southern Baptists' long involvement in Scripture distribution through providing low-cost New Testaments on a cost-recovery basis, Elder added.

"Here's Hope" New Testaments and other materials for use in preparing for simultaneous revivals may be ordered by calling the Here's Hope toll-free number, (800) 346-1990.

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Ministering to the minister:  
responding to pastor's cancer

By Shari Schubert

Baptist Press  
3/15/90

WEST PLAINS, Mo. (BP)--Until about two years ago, the relationship between First Baptist Church, of West Plains, Mo., and its pastor, Cliff Moeller, was largely one of the pastor ministering to the congregation.

But when Moeller was diagnosed with adenocarcinoma, an inoperable cancer, in February 1988, that relationship changed.

The congregation has begun ministering to its pastor, and has been strengthened in the process, said Keith Lowery, a Sunday school teacher, boy's missions trainer director and budget/finance committee member in the church.

When members of the West Plains congregation first learned of Moeller's illness, their reaction was "very hopeful ... 'Let's get it in remission,'" Lowery recalled. The full impact of the situation didn't hit immediately.

The church began a 24-hour prayer vigil for Moeller, asking that God would restore him to health.

"I've just from day one felt most of us are praying for complete healing," said Newt Brill, the congregation's chairman of deacons. But a direct, miraculous healing has not been God's answer. So far, medical treatment has failed to halt the disease.

Moeller is taking treatment at M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, but doctors have given no assurance of success.

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"My promise from the Lord has never been that I would be healed," Moeller said. But he has claimed the promise that God will receive glory in whatever happens to him. And if physical healing in this life is not God's answer, he affirmed, "He'll finally heal me in heaven."

As time passed, reality started setting in for church members, Lowery said. They have had to accept God's decision not to answer their prayers in the way many had hoped. They also have come to grips with the responsibility they have to care for their pastor in a time of need.

Members of the congregation have continued to uphold Moeller and his family in prayer during Wednesday prayer meetings, Sunday morning worship and deacons' meetings.

"The prayer support has just been unending," Moeller said.

While battling cancer, Moeller has continued to serve the congregation to the extent he has been able. "He hasn't tried to avoid his duties as pastor," Brill said. But he has physical limits. The congregation's lay leaders have accepted additional responsibility to fill the gap.

"We have a tendency to think the pastor is going to do it all, or we use the excuse that 'it's his job,'" Lowery admitted. "In reality, it's our job.

"Only when our pastor gets sick and can't do it, or can't do as much, do we realize we've been putting too much responsibility on our pastors for years."

"We have very strong lay leadership in our church," Brill said. Because of that, he added, the church has been able to continue in its ministry even though the current situation is somewhat uncertain.

"We feel like the Lord brought him here," Brill said of Moeller. "Part of our ministry is to take care of him and his wife at this particular time."

Moeller recently was granted a six-month leave of absence with full pay.

Even though that meant accepting an extra financial commitment, Lowery noted the church was "in one accord" in its decision, voting without discussion or dissent to grant the leave.

Church members have responded to needs individually as well as in an organized way, Brill noted. One person in the congregation has split wood for the Moellers. Others have helped with mowing the lawn. Some have given individual love offerings.

Such ministry clearly is a labor of love, members said. "Cliff is a very unusual man," Lowery shared. "He portrays Christ's love more than any pastor I've ever known."

Pointing out that a pastor's extended family often does not live near his field of service, Brill said, "We have to become his family."

Moeller has been open with the congregation in discussing his illness, although he acknowledged, "They want me to share more than probably I have shared of late." He explained, "I see the hurt in their faces, and that just bothers my heart so badly -- for them, not for me."

Bushmen move from church,  
take Christianity with them

TSUMEB, Namibia (BP)--Carlos and Myrtice Owens don't doubt the depth of faith -- and faithfulness -- among their Bushmen friends anymore.

For several years the Southern Baptist missionaries have worked with a small church in Namibia's Caprivi Strip section. The members are all Bushmen, displaced from traditional nomadic life on Africa's Kalahari Desert.

The members always responded enthusiastically when the Owenses, from Henry County, Tenn., and Dunedin, Fla, respectively, came to visit. But since the couple covers an area 1,000 miles wide, they wondered how committed the Bushmen were to their professed Christianity between visits.

Several months ago they found out.

During a November trip to Wayawaya Baptist Church, they discovered many of the members had moved 75 miles away with other Bushmen and were building a new village. The next day the Owenses journeyed to the new area and found their friends clearing land and hurrying to complete grass-and-pole huts.

Immediately the people surrounded the missionaries and asked them to conduct a church service. Mavis, a mother of two, told the Owenses the group already was worshiping every Sunday and Wednesday.

Mavis helped gather about 45 people under leafless trees, everyone sitting on tree trunks in the midday sun, and proudly led a choir of 20 children and young people.

At the conclusion of Carlos Owens' sermon, nine adults made professions of faith in Christ.

"Surely God has been at work in that new village, using the simple faith and message of born-again believers who are faithful in living for Christ," Mrs. Owens said. "We praise God for the faithful followers and their witness in a new village to begin a church even before they had their houses built."

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