



BUREAUS

ATLANTA Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 873-4041
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 511 N. Akard, Dallas, Texas 75201, Telephone (214) 720-0550
NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300
RICHMOND (Foreign) Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

March 27, 1990

90-44

Montoya challenges
1990 SBC nominations

By Dan Martin

N-CO

NASHVILLE (BP)--The report of the 1990 Southern Baptist Convention Committee on Nominations will be challenged by committee member David Montoya of Gravette, Ark.

Montoya is pastor of First Baptist Church in the northwestern Arkansas town. Within hours after the committee adjourned its March 22-23 meeting in Nashville, Montoya said he would present alternates to about half of the nominees at the SBC annual meeting June 12-14 in New Orleans.

"I was told before this meeting that this committee would be inclusive; I discovered that it was not," Montoya told reporters. "I was told the hard-line people would not be appointed this time and that we (the SBC) would be moving back to the center."

"But in this report you will find the hard-liners," he said.

Montoya is one of two Arkansas representatives on the Committee on Nominations, which nominates trustees to the national boards, agencies and institutions of the 14.9-million member SBC.

Each year, the 66-member committee meets in mid-March to deal with about 250 trustee posts; about half of the trustees considered are eligible for nominations to second terms. Thus, each year, under the staggered representation used by the SBC, about 125 new trustees are named.

Under SBC Bylaw 16, the report of the Committee on Nominations is made public at least 45 days in advance of the annual meeting. The bylaw also specifies that anyone who plans to challenge the nominations make the challenges known in advance so messengers may be informed.

The 1990 Committee on Nominations met in closed session at the SBC Building in Nashville. Members voted to keep the procedures and nominations confidential.

The Committee on Nominations has been at the heart of the 11-year theological political controversy in the denomination. Under SBC bylaws, the convention president appoints a Committee on Committees, which nominates members of the Committee on Nominations. The Committee on Nominations, after election by the convention, nominates trustees to be presented at the next annual meeting.

The election of conservative presidents -- who appoint conservatives to the Committee on Committees, who nominate conservatives to the Committee on Nominations, who, in turn, nominate conservatives as trustees -- has been a key strategy in the effort to turn the convention in a more conservative direction.

Montoya said he had been "a soldier in the political machine created by a group of individuals who abused the inerrancy issue for their own advantage," from 1982, when he graduated from Criswell College and became a pastor in Arkansas, until August of 1989.

The leaders of the conservative "political machine," he said, "are men who are using the issue of inerrancy as an opportunistic base ... to gain political power. They do not reward soldiers for their theological homogeneity, but rather for their political loyalty."

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"Because of my involvement in this political machine, which is easily verifiable and well documented, I was placed on the Committee on Nominations with instructions to place key people of the Arkansas network on the (boards)."

In August of 1989, Montoya secretly tape recorded a political strategy meeting of the Arkansas network, in which the election of their candidate for state convention president was discussed, as were other Arkansas and SBC objectives.

Montoya made the recording public and wrote articles for national publications accusing the conservative political machine of changing the inerrancy movement "from one of correction to one of corruption ... from pursuing doctrinal purity to pursuing power politics, focusing not on inerrancy but on personal advancement, prestige, vendettas, power and, of course, money."

He said the inerrancy movement began as an effort to end liberalism in the SBC. "Finding those liberals is like going on a snipe hunt -- you're told they're out there, but no one's ever seen one," he said.

He noted during the news conference a promise by conservatives to "enlarge the tent" of the SBC to be more inclusive in the appointments. "I did not recognize one single person (nominated) who would be recognized as a moderate. I did recognize some very hard-liners," he said.

The March 22-23 meeting of the Committee on Nominations "was a good meeting, but it was definitely their (the conservative political machine's) meeting," Montoya said. "I believe the members were sincere and felt they were doing right. I stood, I opposed, I voted, I abstained because I saw another process taking place.

"At the close of the meeting, I asked that I be allowed to present a minority report. They voted that down. I was the only person in the room that asked for a minority report.

"I am going to present a minority report because I believe there are other, more middle-of-the-road non-political Baptists out there who need to be appointed. I don't believe we are going to get anywhere with this controversy as long as we keep recirculating the same political leaders over and over again.

"There are those who will be angry because I have brought this out. I am sorry, but it needs to be brought out," he said. "There are some who will say my integrity is worthless because I talked with the press, but I say the Bible says, 'Whatsoever you do, don't do it in secret.' They are talking about being inclusive, but they are doing something else."

Montoya mentioned two examples he identified as "hard-liners" being named by the committee: Lee Roberts, a Marietta, Ga., businessman who led a challenge against Mercer University and its president, being named to the SBC Executive Committee, and Robert Tenery, pastor of Burkemont Baptist Church in Morganton, N.C., and editor of a conservative publication, the Southern Baptist Advocate, being named to the SBC Sunday School Board. Tenery served an eight-year term as an SSB trustee and rotated off in 1989.

Montoya said he would begin contacting state executives, denominational leaders and "anybody I can find" to begin assembling his list of alternate nominees. He said he would make them public in conjunction with the release of the report of the Committee on Nominations in late April.

After Montoya's news conference Barrett Duke, pastor of First Baptist Church of Highlands Ranch in suburban Denver, and vice chairman of the committee, also met with the news media.

Duke said Roland Lopez, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in McAllen, Texas, and committee chairman, had become ill and returned home before the committee completed its work.

"At this time, I feel the work of the committee is privileged information and do not feel at liberty to divulge the activities of the committee," he said.

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Duke commented he thinks it "improper" for Montoya "to release any names at this point. But no one of the committee in any way tried to deny David the privilege of saying whatever he wanted to say. I do not think that (discussing the nominations) is what the committee wanted to do, but David is within his rights to divulge that; he is free to do whatever he wants to do.

"But the large majority of the committee -- most of the committee -- is agreed on the work we have done and is satisfied with the work done. We are not talking about a large minority here.

"I feel comfortable with the work of this committee. I think it represents the constituency, and the nominations that come out will show that."

Duke said Montoya's request for a minority report caused "concern on the part of everyone, but there was a difference of opinion, and he has every right to have his opinion."

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Court hears oral arguments
on parental contributions

By Kathy Palen

N-BJC

Baptist Press
3/27/90

WASHINGTON (BP)--An attorney for the Mormon Church asked the nation's highest court to allow parents to deduct money they give to their missionary children as a charitable contribution.

The government's denial of such deductions "reflects a profound lack of understanding of the operation of Mormon missions," said Rex E. Lee of Provo, Utah, during oral arguments before the Supreme Court March 26.

The case involves Harold and Enid Davis, a Mormon couple from Idaho. Following the Mormon Church's instruction, the Davises provided financial support for two of their sons who were selected by the church as missionaries. When the couple attempted to deduct the money as charitable contributions, the U.S. Internal Revenue Service rejected their claim.

Lee argued that parents' direct support of their children's missionary activities meets the federal tax law requirement that, in order to be deductible, contributions must be made "to or for the use of" a charitable organization.

Rejecting the government's argument that such contributions primarily benefit the individual missionaries, Lee said: "Mormon missionaries are the church's mission program. The people they reach are the beneficiaries.

"These missionaries are no more beneficiaries than a nun is a beneficiary of the Catholic school where she teaches or a Red Cross volunteer is a beneficiary of donations to that organization."

But the U.S. Department of Justice, represented by Assistant Attorney General Shirley D. Peterson, argued that Congress has set forth a distinction between public and private charity. The statute in question, she said, requires that an exempt contribution be made to a qualified donee for use at its discretion.

The "definiteness of the beneficiary" is the key to deductibility, Peterson said. If a gift favors a definite beneficiary, she added, it is not deductible.

Peterson told the court she does not think a donation would be deductible even if the donor made it to the church with the stipulation that it be used to support a specific individual.

A decision in the case is expected by June. (89-98, Davis v. U.S.)

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Johnni Johnson Scofield:
giant in a small package

By Robert O'Brien

F-FMB

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Johnni Johnson Scofield gained her first vision of the outside world as a young girl in the 1930s in a small Kentucky town in Appalachia.

She has crossed new horizons ever since, especially during the four decades she spent as a Southern Baptist missions thinker, innovator, communicator and educator.

That journey to knowledge and creative achievement continues as Scofield "officially" retires at age 67 from the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, pursues graduate study and contemplates the next phase of her career. It will include continuing consultation with the board.

The career of the 5-foot-4, 100-pounder has been enigmatic as well as remarkable, according to those who know her best. But many colleagues do not grasp the magnitude of her achievements because of her quiet influence. "Johnni's humility has resulted in more being accomplished with less personal recognition than anyone I know," said Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board President R. Keith Parks.

"Her contribution is neither casual nor coincidental," Parks added. "It's a deliberate focusing of a great spirit, brilliant mind and boundless curiosity on the staggering challenge of 're-missionizing' many Southern Baptists who do not know the denomination was formed to advance missions.

Scofield's response to the challenge, particularly through the denomination's Missions Education Council, resulted in a great advance in missions information, materials, programs and innovations that will influence lives "only God can number," Parks said.

But that's only part of it. Over the years, her creative thinking has played a major role in the development of the board's communications and its global missions strategies for the future, said Bill O'Brien, the board's executive director for public affairs.

"Her visionary flights cause some to forget she could shift into the practical arena," one colleague said of her career, which has included a term as a missionary in Japan and about 36 years of Foreign Mission Board posts, ranging from editorial assistant to vice president for communications. She has written five books and many articles and produced, planned or coordinated many communications materials and missions conferences over the years.

Those who know Scofield struggle to describe her, using terms like Bible scholar, historian, futurist, baseball fan, missiologist, world citizen, teacher, student, motivator and idea planter.

Her visionary but down-to-earth style sprang from the Appalachian mountains of Depression-era Kentucky, where she grew up. Her world view began to expand, sparked by her third-grade geography class, her high school job as a long-distance telephone operator and by the people of First Baptist Church of Ashland, Ky., who encouraged children to think beyond themselves.

Different facets of her personality affect co-workers in different ways. Her loving touch moved one to tears as he described her influence on him. The force of her intellect motivated another -- Parks -- to tell board trustees that he ranks her as the lone member of "class No. 1" on a list of "people in the last half of the 20th century who have impacted Southern Baptist missions education and communication." Parks also credited her "creative genius" with providing him the ideas and inspiration to expand his own global vision.

Some who see her as an enigma puzzle over Parks' words. Is he, they wonder, talking about the same Johnni they have seen for years slipping quietly among them in her standard "uniform" -- beret, blazer, oxford-cloth blouse, skirt and sensible shoes?

"Am I the only one not following this?" a co-worker once exclaimed during a meeting as Scofield's mind raced in another dimension, leaping from "A" to some other point in the alphabet while some wondered what happened to "B."

Even Scofield's leap from Appalachia to world citizen can't match the intuitive leaps she makes as she crystallizes ideas -- ideas fueled by her ability to listen and the amazing assortment of reading in her 425-square-foot apartment, which seems to have only bookcases for walls.

"I just have to be a curious creature," she explained of her voluminous reading, which she summarizes and passes on to Parks and others along with her ideas. "I have time," she added, "because I haven't raised a family." She was married briefly to missions audiovisual pioneer Fon Scofield from 1977 until he died in 1978.

Her curiosity runs from baseball to Kierkegaard, from electronics to missiology, from current events to history, from motorsports to philosophy, from photography to theology, from devotional materials to Kung, from Popular Mechanics to some volume of forgotten lore -- and that's only a sampling.

For years, she has listened to the directions board chief executives Theron Rankin, Baker James Cauthen and Parks have urged Southern Baptists to follow. When Rankin talked of "a new world," Cauthen urged "wider dimensions of the Great Commission" and Parks spoke of "new maps of reality," her mind created scenarios for what their phrases implied.

But her mind soars in a reflective, almost quaint way -- warmed by "a good cup of tea," probably Earl Grey, and energized by daily prayer and Bible study, especially in the Psalms.

Tea and the Bible reflect her style as much as her Appalachian roots. "It would be interesting to cogitate on the remarkable contribution tea has made to civilization," she ruminated, sipping a weak cup of it. "It's humanizing, warm. You 'sip' it. You're not in a hurry." The Bible and prayer, she believes, are as important as food and add balance to life. "Scripture is as much a part of the day as cereal and toast in making you what you should be."

That discipline took root in early days, when her family and church nurtured her -- influencing her faith, direction in life and curiosity about "books and stuff." She still treasures a book of missionary stories her church gave her in 1932 for excellence in a stewardship declamation contest.

"That little church down on the corner knew that if it got its kids involved in this contest, they might go 25 miles away to the association to make a little talk, to do a Bible sword drill. Or they might go to the regional level, 100 miles away, clean down to Mt. Sterling. That was big stuff in those days. Hundreds of churches had that vision for their kids."

She believes strongly that Southern Baptists should remember that today's young people will determine the future of missions as the denomination prepares to move into the 21st century.

"Missionaries of the 21st century are basically at the high school level now," she said. "They're not going to recapture the past. They're going to dream a new dream. The world has changed. Dreamers of new dreams are out there over the horizon. We have a remarkable opportunity to nurture them."

If Southern Baptists don't lose that vision, they might just nurture another Johnni Johnson Scofield or two. Even one would be worth the effort.

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

Southwestern seminary honoring
six distinguished alumni for 1990

N- (C)
(SWBTS)

Baptist Press
3/27/90

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Six graduates of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, will be honored during the school's National Alumni Luncheon June 13 at the Southern Baptist Convention in New Orleans.

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The six, representing a variety of backgrounds and ministries, are being recognized by the seminary's National Alumni Association as Distinguished Alumni.

Receiving the award are Clint Ashley, president of the Canadian Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; Charles Fuller, pastor of First Baptist Church, Roanoke, Va.; Marvin Griffin, pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church, Austin, Texas; Essie Mae (Mrs. T.B.) Maston, Fort Worth; Paul Powell, president of the SBC Annuity Board, Dallas; and Scott Tatum, senior professor of preaching emeritus at Southwestern and former pastor of Broadmoor Baptist Church in Shreveport, La.

Ashley is the founding president of the Canadian seminary in Cochrane, Alberta. He served previously as a Southern Baptist missionary in Brazil and was pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Pullman, Wash.

Fuller, pastor of the Roanoke church since 1961, was chairman of the Southern Baptist Peace Committee. He also has been chairman of the SBC Radio and Television Commission and on several SBC committees.

Griffin became pastor of Ebenezer Baptist in 1969. Active in the SBC, Griffin has served on the boards of the American Christian Television System, Home Mission Board and Christian Life Commission. He also is active with the National Baptist Convention and Missionary Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Maston is the wife of the late T.B. Maston, professor of Christian ethics at Southwestern for more than 40 years. She is a graduate of Carson-Newman College in Jefferson City, Tenn. Mrs. Maston graduated from Southwestern Seminary in 1923 and taught elementary education at the school before becoming a full-time homemaker. She has been a member of Gambrell Street Baptist Church for more than 70 years.

Powell became president of the Annuity Board in January, after being pastor of Green Acres Baptist Church in Tyler, Texas, for 17 years. Powell was president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas from 1985-87 and is currently a trustee of Baylor University, where he is a 1956 graduate.

Tatum retired from the faculty at Southwestern in 1988 after 13 years at the seminary. He joined the faculty following a 24-year tenure as pastor of Broadmoor church. Active in denominational work, Tatum served on the seminary board of trustees for 10 years and on the board of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He has served as a trustee of the Baptist Sunday School Board and Louisiana College and served two terms as president of the Louisiana Baptist Convention.

Tickets to the luncheon may be purchased by sending \$16 and a self-addressed, stamp envelope to Office of Public Affairs, Southwestern Seminary, P.O. Box 22000, Fort Worth, Texas, 76122-0500. Tickets will be sold at the SBC for \$19 each.

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Guidelines offer ministers
6 steps to tax savings

By Trennis Henderson

F-10
(Mo.)

Baptist Press
3/27/90

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (BP)--How much is too much? From an income tax perspective, many ministers may be asking themselves that question as April 15 approaches.

Although the Tax Reform Act of 1986 eliminated numerous deduction options, ministers can gain tax breaks based specifically on how they are paid by their congregations.

While such tips may be too late to reduce this year's tax bill, now is a good time for churches and ministers to start planning how they can be better stewards of both taxable and tax-exempt income for the coming year, tax experts said.

Gene Foster, director of the Missouri Baptist Convention annuity and insurance department, said church leaders must have good working knowledge of applicable tax laws.

"While tax evasion is illegal, avoiding high taxes within the framework of the law is sound money management," Foster pointed out.

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The Southern Baptist Annuity Board recently produced a video presentation titled "Facing the Facts: How to Determine Financial Support for Ministers and Church Staff Members." The 40-minute videotape includes information on how a church can reduce a minister's taxable income without reducing his benefits. The effect is to provide the minister with more after-tax spendable income.

The video script was written by Bob Henry, a regional marketing director for the board. "A minister who receives a lump-sum salary almost certainly is paying more taxes than he's legally required to pay," Henry said. "How a church pays its minister and staff may be almost as important as how much they pay them."

Jim Rich, director of the Missouri Baptist stewardship department, detailed six steps churches can take to reduce the amount of taxes paid by their ministers and staff members. They are:

-- Become informed about applicable tax codes. The first key to tax savings is to be aware of legal requirements and exemptions, Rich said. The Tax Reform Act of 1986 "established the business-related expenses of a minister to be like than of any other employee in any other business," with the exception of a minister's housing allowance, he added.

Although ministers are considered self-employed for Social Security purposes, Rich emphasized, "The Internal Revenue Service has declared without any doubt that ministers are employees of the church" for income-tax purposes. One result of that ruling is that churches are to provide W-2 forms to ministers just as other employers do for their employees, he explained.

With the annual revisions in tax laws, Rich stressed the importance of church leaders staying aware of those changes and how they affect ministers' taxable income. Numerous resources are available to assist churches in that task, he said.

In addition to the Annuity Board's "Facing the Facts" video, printed its resources include the annual "Ministers Tax Guide," "Federal Reporting Requirements for Southern Baptist Churches" and the annual ministers' compensation issue of "The Years Ahead" newsletter. A related resource produced by the Missouri Baptist stewardship and annuity and insurance departments is "More Than Money," a compensation planning guide for pastors and church staff members.

Additional resources Rich recommended include "Church and Clergy Tax Guide" by Richard Hammar and "Income Tax Law for Ministers and Religious Workers" by B.J. Worth.

-- Designate part of the minister's salary as a housing allowance. "This is where there is the greatest tax savings," Rich explained. "If the church doesn't have a parsonage, the church can provide a housing allowance."

"Even a minister who lives in a church-owned parsonage can have a housing allowance. His allowance would be based on utilities (if not paid by the church) and the fair rental value of his furnishings," according to "More Than Money."

For a minister not living in a parsonage, housing expenses include house payments or rent, annual taxes, utilities, insurance on the house and its contents, repairs and maintenance of the house and its furnishings, the purchase of new furniture and appliances and miscellaneous expenses such as lawn care, home cleaning supplies and lightbulbs.

Noting that the allowance can cover any expense related to living in a house, Rich illustrated, "You can deduct soap that you scrub the floor with, but you can't deduct soap that you wash your body with."

Rich cautioned that restrictions involved in claiming a housing allowance as a tax deduction include that it cannot exceed the amount officially designated by the church and it cannot be designated retroactively. The allowance should be based on estimated actual expenses, and the deduction that is claimed cannot exceed actual expenses.

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-- Pay the cost of the minister's deductible protection benefits. Under current tax laws, premiums for health insurance, disability insurance and up to \$50,000 of group-term life insurance are tax-deductible if paid by the church.

According to "More Than Money," if a church is unable to pay those benefits in addition to the minister's salary, "the minister should be allowed to reduce his salary so the church could use the money to pay his insurance premiums."

Churches that pay their ministers lump-sum salaries without providing for such deductions force their ministers to "pay self-employment tax and income tax on money they are using to pay insurance premiums," explained the "Facing the Facts" video. By merely designating part of the minister's income as salary and using another portion to pay his insurance premiums, a church immediately provides him with a reduced tax bill at no cost to the church.

-- Reimburse the minister for actual automobile expenses. "Most pastors find the largest ministry-related expense they have is the cost of using their automobile for church business," noted "More Than Money." "Many churches address this need by giving the minister a set amount each month designated as an 'automobile allowance.' Although the allowance method sounds easy, it is not adequate. The money must still be counted as taxable income, and often is not enough to cover true expenses."

To maximize the tax benefit related to automobile expenses, churches should reimburse the minister on a cents-per-mile basis. The minister keeps a record of business miles that includes the date, destination, purpose of trip and number of miles driven. The IRS, in turn, will allow the church to provide a non-taxable reimbursement up to 26 per business mile driven.

-- Reimburse the minister for actual expenses related to attending conventions and conferences. This deduction works the same way as the automobile reimbursement. As long as the minister is reimbursed for documented actual expenses, covered expenses are fully tax-deductible. If he receives a lump-sum allowance rather than an actual reimbursement, the allowance is considered income and becomes taxable.

-- Reimburse the minister for miscellaneous ministry-related expenses. Once again, the difference between reimbursement and allowance becomes the difference between tax-free and taxable compensation.

Miscellaneous ministry-related expenses for which a church should consider reimbursing its minister include books and professional journals; hospitality expenses for entertaining guests, prospects and church members; church supplies such as stationery, files and record books; and continuing education required by the church or which maintains or improves skills required for current work. Education that is required to meet the minimal education requirements for a position cannot be claimed as a deduction.

Churches that choose to implement these tax-saving steps for their ministers and staff members clearly demonstrate "an attitude of concern," Rich said. "It truly is 'more than money' when a church is willing to go to the effort of providing church actions that are required to set up a proper compensation plan."

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Florida staff participates
in witnessing workshop

By Barbara Denman

N- (O)
(Fla)

Baptist Press
3/27/90

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--They left the building in twos and threes. Some knew where they were headed. Some didn't.

During the past month, all 100 employees at the Florida Baptist Convention Building in Jacksonville participated in a one-day witnessing workshop to become better equipped at sharing their Christian faith.

As a practical part of the seminar, the employees went out into the community to witness and apply what they had learned. And then following the visitation, the groups gathered to share the results of their visits.

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Their results were as varied as the visits. Many of the workers received positive responses but reaped no decisions. A few encountered negative reactions.

Ken Westbrook, director of the pastoral ministries department, and Russ Hughes, an associate director of the Sunday school department, visited a woman who is a member of the Sunday school where Westbrook attends church.

The woman was "unsure about her relationship to the Lord," Westbrook said.

He shared the booklet "Eternal Life" with the young woman, who in turn prayed to become a Christian. Afterwards, she seemed to need some assurances about her new relationship with Christ, he said. When they left, however, she seemed more confident, he added.

Jerry Passmore, director of the convention's evangelism division, and Bo Mitchell, an evangelism consultant who led the seminar, met two men hitchhiking.

After discussing where the hitchhikers were going, Mitchell asked the men if they knew that when they died they would go to heaven. When both men expressed doubt, the two Baptists witnessed to them.

Both men listened to and accepted the plan of Christian salvation. In reflection, Passmore said he thought one of the men in particular was sincere and genuine in his acceptance.

Although results are important, Passmore said, planting the seed and being faithful in what God demands also is important.

Many of the employees brought prospect cards from their local churches, but many of them simply knocked on doors in Jacksonville neighborhoods.

Michael Miller, media production coordinator, and Joe Walker, maintenance assistant, knocked on doors in the nearby San Marco neighborhood.

When they turned away from one door, a Jacksonville policeman pulled his cruiser in front of the sidewalk and yelled at the two men. Instead of answering the officer, Miller pulled out his witnessing tract to share with the policeman.

"When he realized that we were doing something religious instead of casing a home or selling something, his attitude changed," Miller recalled.

One result of the witness training came two days after the seminar. Fran Murray, a secretary in the executive director's office, used the "Eternal Life" booklet to lead her 9-year-old grandson to make a profession of faith in Christ.

Murray plans to use booklet again to witness to a waitress with whom she has developed a casual relationship. She called the seminar a "good refresher course."

The seminar was attended by many of the Florida Baptist missions personnel, Baptist campus ministry directors, employees of Jacksonville Baptist Association and several staff members of nearby churches.

The workshop emphasized the work of the Holy Spirit in preparing hearts, the development of one's personal testimony and the use of the "Eternal Life" tract. It is the same seminars that Mitchell, Passmore and other state convention evangelism equippers teach regularly at Florida Baptist churches.

Employee David Roddy, director of the family life department, stressed the value of the seminar: "It's good to remind the state convention team that evangelism is a priority. We get caught up in the departmental programs and we fail to remind ourselves that deliberate witnessing is a priority."

Arizona pastor fights
influence of New Age

By Karen Willoughy

F-10

SEDONA, Ariz. (BP)--A medicine wheel made of small rocks and dead branches attracts people from all over the world to a hillside less than a mile from First Baptist Church of Sedona, Ariz.

They come to absorb electro-magnetic impulses that they believe will heal them physically, emotionally and spiritually.

"Because I believe it will work, it will work," said a woman who identified herself as She-who-sings, a New Age healer. "What is truth is what's true for you."

People caught up in the New Age movement reject Christianity as a non-truth, said Joe Berna, pastor of First Baptist Church, in Sedona.

"I've made it a priority to study New Age," he said. "A recent CNN news report listed Sedona as one of the three major New Age centers in the world."

Sedona's confluence of deep red rock formations is unique in Arizona, Berna said. New Agers flocking to the mountain town have fashioned their version of native American medicine wheels at several locations.

"Scientific phenomenon says there is some kind of energy in some of the rocks here," he said. "But I'm convinced there is nothing spiritual in it. It's like the copper bracelet some people wear because they think it helps their arthritis."

New Age thought is a blend of Eastern Mysticism, superstition, the occult and American Indian folklore, with a strong emphasis on humanism -- the philosophy that man has the power within himself to change his circumstances, Berna said.

"They believe man has the ability to bring harmony in the world, and that Christianity, with its emphasis on man's need for a savior, is what has caused there to be no peace," he said. "You don't call a New Ager a sinner. He thinks he's God."

Efforts to reach the up to 5,000 New Agers in Sedona with the good news that Jesus Christ paid the price for their sins so far have been less than successful, Berna said.

"I have an evangelist's heart," he said. "This New Age thing angers me and aggravates me. Art, philosophy, beauty and aesthetics are not going to lift up or redeem these people. Only Jesus Christ will."

"There is no possibility for harmony or peace in the world until Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, comes. How could anyone imagine that we could have harmony in the world with man in control?"

Because the New Age movement is touted as a way of thinking and relating to the world rather than as a religion, it is freely accepted on school campuses and has become part of the curriculum, Berna said.

"I can't even pass out flyers at the elementary school about vacation Bible school," he said. "But New Agers are able to pass out their literature on public school property because the administration has decided New Age doesn't sound like religion."

Berna goes to the medicine wheel near First Baptist Church, to talk with the people who come to get energy from the rocky red hillside peppered with forest-green scrub pine.

"I go to share the gospel of Christ with those who will listen," he said. "It's easier to lead an alcoholic to the Lord than a New Ager."

He frequents area restaurants favored by New Agers and often has two- and three-hour one-on-one discussions with them about the claims of Jesus and the New Age counterclaims.

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He is president of the Sedona Association of Evangelical Churches, a pastors' group, and is using that position to rally area Christians to a community-wide awareness of the dangers inherent in the New Age movement.

"They would deny they are satanists," Berna said. "But they see Christianity as evil."

Just as disturbing to Berna are Christians who blend their faith with New Age practices such as self-help motivation, the wearing of rock crystals "just in case they might do some good," meditating at energy vortex areas such as medicine wheels and visualizing a world peace brought about by the efforts of people without God.

Berna compares people who blend New Age thought into their Christian faith with Old Testament Israelites who accepted elements of Baal worship as part of their farming methods. Doing so brought on God's wrath, Berna said.

"A Christian who truly loves the Lord Jesus can't be involved in New Age, because they're diametrically opposed," Berna said. "It is only a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ that redeems total man, not anything that man does for himself."

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Karen Willoughby is a Missions Service Corps volunteer serving as regional reporter in 15 western states.

New Age mix, match
various philosopher

By Karen Willoughby

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Baptist Press
3/27/90

SEDONA, Ariz. (BP)--The baby born blind, the sexually abused child and the physically abused woman all have one thing in common, said a woman in Sedona, Ariz., who identified herself as a New Age healer.

"It's like Jesus said, you reap what you sow," said the woman who uses an Indian name that translated means She-who-sings. "All of these are results of karma from a person's previous life."

Mixing names and notions from different philosophies to arrive at whatever a person wants to believe is the basis of the New Age movement, said Joe Berna, pastor of First Baptist Church of Sedona.

She-who-sings explained why she became part of that movement: "Karma and reincarnation go together. Nothing else explains why a person is born blind."

Karma, according to Webster's dictionary, is a force generated by a person's actions. Reincarnation is a basic tenet of the New Age movement.

She-who-sings, now 46, rejected Christianity along with the excesses she had experienced as a beatnik, hippie and punk rocker when she moved three years ago from Michigan to absorb the energy found in the rock formations in and near Sedona.

"The whole thing about this New Age movement is that you have to be open-minded to everybody's input," She-who-sings said. "It all has some amount of truth. Truth is light. Light is everywhere."

The vibrant brunette with crystals dripping from her ears and rocks hanging on chains around her neck talked for three hours outside a vegetarian restaurant about her fascination with the New Age movement.

"That's what this is all about," she said in one of her abbreviated sentences, 'becoming one with God.

"Divinity is like an ocean of consciousness. We are drops in that ocean. The goal is to balance our karma -- to pay for old karmic debts and not make any new. Then we will become one with God.

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"Religion is a word that's not used here. It has old age connotations. It didn't work."

The New Age movement works because the people involved in it want it to work, she said.

"We believe it will work," she explained. "Because we believe it will work, it will work."

People involved in the New Age movement become like a family to each other, she said. They feel a common bond because before they became part of the New Age movement many of them experienced similar drug and alcohol excesses and the loneliness associated with rebellion.

"Costume parties are a big thing around here," She-who-sings said. "Most people go as mystical creatures like angels or wood nymphs."

"In Sedona, bumper stickers say, 'Magic happens.'"

Because they have found "an" answer, their minds are closed to "the" answer, Pastor Berna said.

"Without Jesus," he said, "they have no real hope."

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Consultant describes
single adult ministry

By Teresa Dickens

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(MO.)

Baptist Press
3/27/90

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (BP)--Single adults are the largest unchurched adult population group in America, demographers report. Statistics indicate more than 50 million single adults, ages 18 to 64, live in the United States. Of all families, one-third are headed by single parents.

Facing these realities, how can Southern Baptists minister to single adults? Tim Cleary, a consultant in the single adult section of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's family ministries department, Southern Baptists must respond by making single adult ministry one of the denomination's priorities in the 1990s.

"We've got to do something to minister to this growing section of our population. The fields are white unto harvest," Cleary said during a Missouri Baptist single adult retreat.

Emphasizing that single adults must take an active role in developing such ministries, he added: "If you want something to happen, you must do something. You must take the leadership role in making single adult ministry a reality in your church."

"Most of you will say, 'But I'm not a leader.' What's your definition of a leader? To me, people who really care, are sensitive and willing to listen make good leaders."

"Ministry begins with a need. It's not the program that makes a ministry; organization can become cold and ineffective. Ministry is the willingness to listen and minister to others. It happens around you and me being willing to meet needs."

Cleary's suggestions on how to start a single adult ministry center around the board's pamphlet "Ten Steps to Beginning and Nurturing a Single Adult Ministry." He also noted that the book "Single Adult Ministry in Your Church," published by Convention Press, provides specific details on starting a ministry.

In the pamphlet, the first two suggestions involve identifying whether a need exists for a ministry to single adults and securing the support of the pastor, church leaders and single adults.

While it is usually a "given" that a need exists, the primary concern is involving the church staff, leaders and single adults already in the church, Cleary said.

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"The most effective single adult ministry is a church-centered ministry," he insisted. "Enlisting the support of your church's staff and other leaders is the first step in making it a church-centered ministry."

The next step is to define single adults. While most define "single" as referring to the young and never-married, a more contemporary understanding of "single" includes never-married, widowed, separated or divorced and unwed parents, he explained.

"Before you can effectively meet needs, you must know what the needs are," Cleary said. "Who you are trying to reach will determine what you do."

One of the most important aspects in starting a single adult ministry is defining the purpose and objective of the ministry, he emphasized. As with any other ministry of a church, a ministry to single adults should focus on leading participants "to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and encouraging them to mature in the faith through the ministries of the church."

"Many view single adult ministries as a dating service or pity party," Cleary acknowledged. "Unfortunately, too many ministries project such an image."

"Single adult ministry must be healthy. It can be a place where new relationships are formed -- maybe even long-lasting ones -- and it certainly should be a place where caring takes place. But to be healthy, it must be a place where healing takes place and individuals are encouraged to move on with their lives."

Defining the ministry's purpose and objective "will start your ministry on the right track," he added. Other steps in starting a single adult ministry include identifying prospects, selecting qualified leaders, securing an adequate and attractive meeting place, promoting and publicizing activities, planning ministry strategies and evaluating/assessing ministry on a periodic basis.

"The key to having a successful ministry is in giving ownership of the ministry to single adults themselves," Cleary pointed out. "Single adults are just that -- adults. They don't need to be 'given to' as much as they need an opportunity to 'give.'"

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NOTE TO EDITORS: Russell Dilday, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, is to undergo triple-bypass heart surgery Wednesday, March 28, at 7:30 a.m., Central time. Doctors determined the surgery was necessary after balloon dilation failed to relieve blockage in Dilday's blood vessels, he said. He has had no symptoms of heart problems, he added, noting, "My overall health is excellent, so there was no undue urgency." The Southwestern Seminary news office plans to release a story on Dilday's surgery and condition Thursday, March 29, and it will be carried in BP.

Thanks,
Baptist Press