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April 3, 1990

90-47

Baptist strengths revealed
in national research project

By Jim Lowry

N-SSB

ST. LOUIS (BP)--Southern Baptist ratings in faith, loyalty and congregational life point to the effectiveness of the denomination's Christian education efforts, according to the National Study of Protestant Congregations released March 24.

The Southern Baptist Convention was one of six denominations participating in a study conducted during three and one-half years. It included surveys of more than 11,000 adults and youth in 561 congregations. The findings were presented and discussed by 400 representatives of the six denominations during a four-day conference in St. Louis.

For the purposes of the study, Southern Baptists were not identified as a mainline denomination, because the term was defined by the Lilly Endowment that funded the project to include the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), United Church of Christ and United Methodist Church. Representatives of all six denominations in the project participated equally.

Peter Benson, president of Search Institute in Minneapolis and director of the project, said Southern Baptists were invited to participate in the research project after a meeting in which representatives from the five mainline denominations agreed that a study about Christian education should include Southern Baptists because of the good organization and strong traditions already in practice.

Three areas in which Southern Baptists fared particularly well in comparison to five mainline denominations were faith maturity, congregational involvement and faith types.

Faith maturity was based on eight core dimensions determined by consultation with scholars, executives and clergy in each of the denominations. The two overall themes of faith maturity were a person's relationship to God, or vertical faith, and service to others, or horizontal faith. Integrated faith is held by people who combine both aspects of faith.

Benson said, "Southern Baptists did stand apart," in the area of faith maturity, with 45 percent of Southern Baptist adults saying they practice an integrated faith, Benson said.

This compared to 31 percent of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), 24 percent for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 34 percent for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 29 percent for the United Church of Christ and 34 percent for the United Methodist Church.

Racial and ethnic minorities in the survey outranked Caucasians by 57 percent to 31 percent in the number of church members reporting an integrated faith. Older women reported 49 percent with integrated faith. Nationally, only minorities in all denominations ranked high in the integrated category.

One particular problem discovered in the research was men in their 40s, who reported 50 percent undeveloped faith and only 8 percent integrated, Benson said.

An area of special interest for all denominational groups was called the "At-Risk Index" for youth. Ten indicators that could affect a young person's well-being were included in a survey of youth to see how often they "depart from desirable behavior."

The indicators included depression, suicide, alcohol use, binge drinking, marijuana and cocaine use, aggression, theft, school and sexual intercourse.

As early as grades seven and eight, youth reporting at least one or more at-risk indicators ranged from 62 to 74 percent, with Southern Baptist youth at 64 percent.

Youth reporting three or more at-risk indicators ranged 9 percent to 54 percent for youth in grades 11 and 12. Southern Baptist youth reported in the three-or-more-risk category at 11 percent for grades 7 and 8; 26 percent in grades 9 and 10; and 19 percent in grades 11 and 12.

The survey of youth in the five mainline denominations revealed significant percentages of youth who have in the past 12 months considered suicide, cheated on a test at school, used alcohol, hit or beat up someone or had sexual intercourse, Benson said.

In the area of faith and loyalty to the denomination and the congregation, Benson said Southern Baptists were highest in their opinion of the quality of worship; highest in believing their churches encourage a thinking, or questioning, climate; and almost equal to mainline denominations in service orientation.

Denominational and congregational loyalty increases in nearly every category as church members get older, he added.

Involvement in Christian education for the five mainline denominations was similar in a declining rate related to age. Southern Baptists, on the other hand, start lower than other denominations and stay fairly level through the adult years, which makes involvement by Southern Baptist adults 21 percent higher than adults in mainline denominations.

For the mainline denominations, involvement in Christian education was 60 percent for children, 52 percent for younger youth, 35 percent for older youth and 28 percent for adults. Southern Baptists reported 48 percent for children, followed by 52 percent for younger youth and 49 percent for older youth and adults.

In response to findings of the project, Benson told conference participants that "some stereotypes of Christian education need to be changed" if strategies for improvement are to be successful.

Three stereotypes should be addressed, he said. They are: that Christian education is for children; that good teaching is where the teacher talks and the students listen; and that Christian education should be divorced from the rest of congregational life.

Age segregation, which is common in churches, should be addressed to allow the spiritual maturity of older church members more influence on younger church members, he added.

The six denominations represent 34.9 million members. The largest two denominations are Southern Baptists, with 14.9 million members, and United Methodists, with 9.1 million.

The National Study of Protestant Congregations was funded by the Lilly Endowment in Indianapolis. Southern Baptist representatives on the advisory committee of the project were Kirk Hadaway and Martin Bradley, both of the corporate planning and research department of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board. Bruce Powers, professor of Christian education at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., was a consultant on the project.

The 22 representatives of the Southern Baptist Convention attending the conference also spent several hours in denominational planning to compare results with other denominations and look at ways the data can be used to improve Christian education in local churches.

Baptists address concerns
raised in research project

By Jim Lowry

N-SSB

ST. LOUIS (BP)--Disturbing realities and denominational strengths in Christian education were faced by Southern Baptist representatives who heard results of the National Study of Protestant Congregations released March 24 in St. Louis.

Twenty-two representatives from eight Southern Baptist agencies and two churches participated in denominational planning sessions to discuss problems, identify strengths and assess potential action plans to integrate improvements into existing Christian education efforts. Four hundred representatives of the six denominations attended the four-day meeting.

The goal of the denominational planners was to develop a vision for Southern Baptists that can affect change within existing plans, not as a new beginning.

Ernest Mosley, executive vice president of the Southern Baptist Executive Committee, said Southern Baptists need to "focus attention on better integrating education and evangelism."

"The Southern Baptist Convention is doing a lot of things well, but some urgent improvements are needed," Mosley continued. "For one thing, we need to back up our verbalized commitments to human need with responses in communities."

One of the most disturbing realities, planners said, was youth who face what the research project called "At-Risk Indicators," a list of 10 ethical and moral issues youth face daily. These include depression, suicide, alcohol use, binge drinking, marijuana and cocaine use, aggression, theft, school and sexual intercourse.

Another concern to be faced within the denomination is to give increased visibility to ethnic and racial minorities, women and older church members, groups that in the research consistently showed the highest rankings for levels of faith.

The lack of participation of these groups in worship services and on the boards of agencies of the denomination needs to be addressed to take advantage of the faith maturity that can be shared with other church members, the denominational representatives agreed.

Southern Baptist participants agreed that some of the most disturbing, or serious, realities to be faced in the upcoming years by the denomination include failure of church members to deal with social issues, low involvement in church activities by adults, low family involvement in spiritual activities, low exposure to Christian education for pastors, lack of intergenerational activities in churches and the at-risk activities facing youth.

Overall strengths in the denomination that should be used as a basis for building Christian education include the adult-education program, focus on the Bible, organization of Christian education, levels of faith maturity, lay-leader training, evangelistic emphasis and affirmation of small churches.

In comparison to the five mainline denominations which also participated in the project, Southern Baptists rated highest in several categories, including congregational involvement, integrated faith, warm and caring climate and worship ratings.

Southern Baptists were not included as a mainline denomination for the purposes of the project because of how the term was defined by the sponsoring organization, Lilly Endowment. Other denominations included were the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), United Church of Christ and United Methodist Church.

Peter Benson, president of Search Institute in Minneapolis and director of the research project, said Southern Baptists were invited to participate in the research project after a meeting of representatives of the five mainline denominations agreed that a study about Christian education should include Southern Baptists because of the good organization and strong traditions already in practice.

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Participants in the Southern Baptist denominational sessions warned against self-congratulations, however, because even the highest ratings were in the 40-50 percent range for items such as faith maturity, denominational and congregational loyalty and involvement in church activities by age and gender.

Also, the sample in the National Study of Protestant Congregations, 68 congregations, was smallest for Southern Baptists. Benson said he considered the data reliable even though the Southern Baptist results might be biased slightly against small churches.

The low response rate from Southern Baptist churches, 45 percent compared to a high of 68 percent for the Christian Church, accounted for the smaller Southern Baptist sample, Benson added.

In the overall project, 11,122 people from 561 congregations participated. Personal interviews were conducted in 52 churches.

The Southern Baptist churches selected for site visits were Siloam Church in Ninety Six, S.C.; Mount Zion Church in Norman Park, Ga.; Liberty Church in Chelsea, Ala.; Central Church in Melbourne, Fla.; Immanuel Church in San Jose, Calif.; and First Chinese Church in Los Angeles.

The six denominations represent a total of 34.9 million members. The largest two denominations are Southern Baptists, with 14.9 million members, and United Methodists, with 9.1 million.

Southern Baptist representatives on the advisory council of the National Study of Protestant Congregations were Kirk Hadaway and Martin Bradley, both of the corporate planning and research department of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board. Bruce Powers, professor of Christian education at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., was a seminary consultant on the project.

Southern Baptist agencies represented at the meeting were the Sunday School Board, Southeastern Seminary, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and the Executive Committee. Also present were staff members from the Baptist General Convention of Texas and two local churches.

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State conventions increase
funds for Baptist schools

By Tim Fields

N-CO
(Ed. Comm.)

Baptist Press
4/3/90

NASHVILLE (BP)--The 18 Baptist state conventions sponsor 64 Southern Baptist schools and colleges increased their total giving to the schools by \$2.2 million in 1988-89, an increase of 3.4 percent over the previous year, according to figures compiled by the Southern Baptist Education Commission.

The universities, colleges, Bible schools and academies received \$66.1 million in support from state conventions in 1988-89. The amount includes nearly \$60.7 million in operating funds, \$4.8 million in capital needs funds and \$597,520 in additional endowment.

In addition to funds provided by the 18 state conventions to schools they sponsor, another \$28.5 million was provided by the Southern Baptist Convention to fund six seminaries and American Baptist College in Nashville. The college is funded jointly by Southern Baptists and The National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.

The combined contribution of \$94.6 million from state conventions and the Southern Baptist Convention to the 71 Southern Baptist schools represents an increase of \$3.5 million from 1987-88.

Arthur L. Walker Jr., executive director of the Education Commission, said the increase in giving is an indication of the strong commitment of Southern Baptists for their educational institutions.

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"The educational emphasis of these schools is consistent with the mission concerns of Southern Baptists. Students enrolled in the colleges and schools are seeking new directions for their life," Walker pointed out. "This provides an openness to the Christian worldview which is basic to the purpose of these institutions.

"The ongoing support by Southern Baptists for their educational institutions is paying dividends. Enrollment of students in college credit courses at the 52 Southern Baptist junior and senior colleges now stands at more than 109,000. Enrollment has increased every year since 1981, for a net increase of 19 percent."

In addition to direct funding by Baptist state conventions and the Southern Baptist Convention, the 71 educational institutions received \$71.2 million in other gifts and grants for operations in 1988-89.

Combined endowment funds of the educational institutions in 1988-89 exceeded \$1.56 billion, and property was valued at \$1.79 billion, bringing total assets to more than \$3.35 billion.

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NBC to air Easter special
about Southern Baptists

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(RTVC)

Baptist Press
4/3/90

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--NBC News will present an Easter special about Southern Baptist work Sunday, April 15.

Television viewers should consult their local TV listings to see if and when stations in their areas will carry the program.

NBC is producing the program in consultation with the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission and in conjunction with NBC's relationship with the Interfaith Broadcasting Commission. The interfaith commission is made up of the Radio and Television Commission, the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, National Council of Churches and United States Catholic Conference.

This year's Easter program -- about Southern Baptists -- will feature a worship service at North Phoenix (Ariz.) Baptist Church, including music by the minister of music, John Shillington, and the 200-voice sanctuary choir and orchestra, with a message by Pastor Richard Jackson.

Four stories about Southern Baptist work across the United States will be interwoven into the presentation.

One segment will focus on a visit with a Romanian refugee family that has settled in Jefferson City, Mo. They were able to come to the United States due to the efforts of Missouri Baptist Woman's Missionary Union Director Alberta Gilpin, a member of Concord Baptist Church in Jefferson City.

Another segment will highlight a Baptist Student Union group from Howard Payne University in Brownwood, Texas, and a Portland, Ore., BSU group representing various campuses and their work during spring break in helping build a house for a needy family in Seattle through Habitat for Humanity.

Also to be spotlighted is a ministry of the Texas Baptist Men organization, in which about 250 retired Baptist couples build four churches and one camp building in Texas every month from January through October, conducting revival meetings at the churches. Scenes for the Easter special were shot at Midway Road Baptist Church in north Dallas, where 27 couples participated in the project.

The fourth story is in Washington, where Marilyn Nelson Prickett, Christian social ministries director for the District of Columbia Baptist Convention heads a volunteer program at Johanning Baptist Center. Providing services for an economically depressed community, the center offers recreation programs for children and youth, substance-abuse programs, activities for senior citizens, crisis ministries and other services.

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Don't expect quick revival,
West Europe Baptists tell East

By Mike Creswell

N-FMB

RUSCHLIKON, Switzerland (BP)--Western European Baptists have cautioned that Christians in the East should not necessarily expect spiritual revival to follow political freedom.

Economic matters will dominate European public consciousness in the next five or six years as Western Europe moves towards greater economic unity in 1992 and Eastern Europe rebuilds crippled economies, warned Karl-Heinz Walter, general secretary of the European Baptist Federation.

"I have no simple answers to this. How do we react with the gospel to these things?" he asked.

Hoped-for revival did not come in Spain when political freedom expanded a decade ago, added Southern Baptist missionary Dennis Hale, missions director for Spanish Baptists.

"Instead of people turning to religious freedom, people turned to political activity that would help get them jobs and put food on the table," Hale said.

The comments came during a meeting of evangelism and missions leaders from 17 Baptist unions in Eastern and Western Europe in late March at the Baptist Theological Seminary's Institute for Missions and Evangelism in Ruschlikon, Switzerland.

It marked the first time Baptist evangelism and missions leaders from East and West have met since the political changes in Eastern Europe. Participants from the East included leaders from the Soviet Union, East Germany, Poland, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Romania and Hungary.

Participants decided against trying to develop a unified strategy for evangelizing the continent, citing major cultural and ministry differences throughout the two regions. But in a final communique they stated, "The urgency of the task and rapidly changing events in Europe demand that in spite of the diversity of European Baptists, evangelism must retain a high priority on the agenda of every (Baptist) union."

Personal evangelism by individual Baptists offers the greatest promise for church growth on the continent, leaders agreed.

"The first reformation was when Luther put the Bible into the hands of lay people. The second will be when ministry is put in the hands of lay people," said Romanian Baptist pastor Paul Negrut.

"Baptists have been in Spain 150 years and have 7,000 members," said Hale. "Jehovah's Witnesses have been in Spain 20 years and have more than 300,000 members in thousands of congregations." The difference, he explained, is that the Witnesses, despite their doctrinal errors, prosper because of their mobilized lay membership.

The Eastern European Baptists also talked of ministry amid repression.

Negrut, a minister of the 2,500-member Second Baptist Church in Oradea, Romania, told of being harassed by deposed communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu's secret police. He was threatened with death if he persisted in a Bible training program for laymen, begun in 1978 with help from Southern Baptist missionary Earl Martin. The "School of the Prophets" program continued, however, and will be expanded this year.

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Sellers Home to host
reunion during SBC

N-FMB

Baptist Press
4/3/90

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Sellers Baptist Home in New Orleans will host a reunion for its adoptive parents and children during the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting June 13.

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Mary Dan Kuhnle, director of the maternity home and adoption center, said the reunion is planned for children and parents who have been brought together through the service but is open to all Southern Baptists attending the convention. Since 1948, Sellers Home has placed 2,500 children with adoptive parents.

"We hope our adoptive parents and adoptees will come back and bring us snapshots for our scrapbook and help us update our addresses," Kuhnle said.

The event also could be an opportunity to educate pastors about the ministry of Sellers Home, she said. Sellers is an agency of the SBC Home Mission Board, offering maternity home services and counseling for Southern Baptists nationwide.

The reunion will take place 1-4 p.m. Wednesday, June 13, during the free afternoon of the convention program. The home is located about two miles from the Superdome and is accessible by taxi.

Kuhnle has issued an appeal for adoptees and adoptive parents to write the home with their current addresses so some invitations may be mailed in advance. Mail should be addressed to Sellers Baptist Home, 2010 Peniston St., New Orleans, La. 70115.

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CORRECTION: Please change the fifth paragraph of the 3/30/90 Baptist Press story titled "House approves child-care bill" to read:

-- Expand the Earned Income Tax Credit to help low-income families obtain child care. The bill would increase the amount of the EITC -- which is available only to working families with children -- and adjust the credit for family size.

Thanks,
Baptist Press

Marriage enrichment includes
maintenance, psychologists say

By Terri Lackey

F-SSB

Baptist Press
4/3/90

NASHVILLE (BP)--Marriages deserve regular tune ups as a means of preventive maintenance to control breakdowns of communications and displeasure with overall performance, two Southern Baptist psychologists agreed.

"Maintenance prevention through marriage enrichment retreats or workshops is very important and should be experienced as much as possible," said Ron Mumbower, a counselor and family minister at First Baptist Church of Jackson, Miss.

Mumbower said he believes just as firmly in premarital checkups as post-ceremonial maintenance.

"If you are going to get married in this church, you go through at least five hours of engaged couple enrichment where we discuss families, personalities, communication techniques, sexuality and financing, among other things," Mumbower said.

"And after you are married, you go to a newlywed Sunday school class for a year where you learn some of the same things, but more in-depth."

Paul Sorrels, director of the Family Psychology Center at Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, Texas, said churches are excellent institutions through which to provide proper marriage maintenance.

"Churches are very natural places to hold marriage enrichment programs," Sorrels said. "Church is the only institution I know of where couples go on a regular, ongoing basis.

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"Consequently, churches provide an excellent support group for married couples, as well as friendships that will help guide distressed couples through difficult times."

"For This Cause -- The Priorities of Marriage" is the focus of Christian Home Emphasis 1990, which will be observed in many Southern Baptist churches between Mother's Day in May and Father's Day in June. The adult study book by the same title as the emphasis theme was written by Reuben Herring, former editor of Home Life magazine. Resources also are available for use with youth and children.

Strong marriages encourage strong families, said Jimmy Hester, consultant in the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's family ministry department, which sponsors Christian Home Emphasis.

Mumbower said the first five years and the 25th year of marriage can be the most troubled times.

The first five years is the normal adjustment period, Mumbower said, whereas in the 25th year couples begin seeing changes that cause stress, such as children becoming teens or leaving the nest, aging parents or retirement.

Sorrels said problems begin occurring in marriages when couples "begin paying more attention to their differences and magnifying those rather than looking at what made them attractive to each other in the first place."

"Through marriage enrichment, churches can help couples be aware of the strengths of their marriages rather than focusing on the problems," he added.

Mumbower said the inability to resolve conflict also can result in unhappy marriages and unhappy families.

"Families have not been taught how to resolve conflict; therefore, there is a lot of conflict in homes which has never been resolved," he said. When children do not see their parents resolve conflict, they don't learn how to resolve it, he added.

Sorrels said some early warning signs of troubled marriages include:

- Sexual dissatisfaction by one or both partners.
- Inability to communicate about important issues, such as sex, parents and job.
- Feeling angry or hurt a lot of the time.
- Remaining upset with each other for several hours.
- Repetitive angry exchanges.
- Feeling trapped, bored, guilty or tired of marriage.
- Desire to run away more than just once in awhile.
- One or more family members suffering stress-related difficulties, such as asthma, ulcer, behavioral or grade problems in school, difficulty sustaining social relationships, bed wetting of older children or excessive fighting.

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BP photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by SS3 bureau of Baptist Press

Philpot overcomes grief,
finds new way to serve

By Robin Martin

F - FMB

Baptist Press
4/3/90

MEXICO CITY (BP)--Jurhee Philpot confided to a single missionary in 1985 that she didn't feel she could endure life on the mission field alone.

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One month later, Jim Philpot, her husband of 24 years and chairman of Southern Baptist workers in Mexico, was murdered. While he was driving near his home, another vehicle sideswiped his car Oct. 11, 1985. When Philpot pulled to the roadside, a passenger in the other car fired several gunshots into his window, killing him and injuring a Mexican passenger.

A Mexican man eventually was arrested, convicted and imprisoned for the crime, but his motive remains unclear.

Philpot's violent death shocked friends and family. "This type of thing just doesn't happen to modern-day missionaries," said Mrs. Philpot, a native of Childress, Texas. They had worked in Mexico since 1967, when they were sent there as Southern Baptist representatives and he was assigned as an agricultural consultant. Their three daughters grew up there. Mexico City was home.

Suddenly, besides dealing with shock and grief, Mrs. Philpot confronted questions about her own life and work that she had never anticipated. When she and her youngest daughter, 13-year-old Jill, left Mexico after Philpot's death, Jill asked her mother to promise they would return. Mrs. Philpot's hesitant answer was, "Jill, if that's the Lord's will, we'll be back."

On furlough in Shreveport, La., she began investigating options for continuing her work in Mexico. Much of her ministry had been to support her husband in his work. But she could not return to Mexico without a specific job assignment of her own. While seeking a new niche, she sensed a deep spiritual assurance that she should return to the field.

"Jim's name was still on prayer calendars and people who knew about our case were praying for me. The Lord gave me a very, very clear call to come back to the people here," she recounted. By July 1986, she had returned with Jill to Mexico -- to take on a new role in promoting church growth and evangelism and to confront life on the mission field without her husband.

Challenges loomed before her. When she first returned to Mexico City, the Mexican government required that she appear in court to read a written statement about her husband's death in the presence of the man who later was sentenced to 25 years in prison for the crime.

"It was hard. It wasn't impossible. It was just dreadfully hard," she recalled.

Because she and Jill continued to live in the same apartment the family had shared before Philpot's death, nearly every day she drove past the place where he had been shot. "I had to come to grips with that -- that it was just part of life, and not make it a shrine," she said. "A lot of times now it doesn't come to my mind, but those first few months it was there."

One particularly difficult evening came during her first Christmas in Mexico after returning. Following a Christmas party, her daughter visited some friends and Mrs. Philpot drove home alone.

She passed the spot where her husband died and confronted her emotions again. "I came on home and just hollered and shouted and cried, and then went on," she said.

"The hardest part was not having my friend to talk to."

Throughout her grieving period, she received support from fellow Baptist workers. But her main source of strength was prayer. "I had to spend about two hours with the Lord every day -- especially in the beginning -- to know for sure where I was going and what I was supposed to do and then to gather the strength and go on and do it," she said.

While overcoming loneliness and grief, Mrs. Philpot also dealt with the transition from wife to single adult. "I felt very called to be Jim's wife," she explained. "I felt very called as a helpmate and partner. I felt it was very much my responsibility to support him wholeheartedly and not try to be a flower over in another flower pot." After his death, she had to learn to function more independently.

"The Lord gives you strength when he calls you, and he knew who I was even before I came down here as Jim's wife," she said. "Even though I didn't recognize my independence because I sought to be a helpmate and a dependent kind of person, I was very strong and independent at times."

She also realized her previous involvement in music and education at Horeb Baptist Church in Mexico City had prepared her for her new work with churches.

Mrs. Philpot spends most of her time aiding and encouraging churches in the sprawling metropolitan Mexico City area. She speaks, offers church-growth evaluation, organizes conferences on leadership or how women can promote church growth, and performs other services. She describes her work as telling churches "We're here; you're not in the struggle of growth by yourself."

The more she works, the more confidence she gains. Carlos Amaro, a Mexican Baptist leader, called her dynamic. She has been totally accepted as a co-worker and part of the team," he said.

"She has become more aggressive in the good sense," observed another colleague, Southern Baptist representative Barbara Simms. "She's going out after the job. She's made a niche for herself. If you had told me years ago that she'd take a job she would have to design herself and make a go of it, I'd have said, 'She'll never make it.' But she has."

Confirmation she made the right decision in returning comes frequently, especially in expressions of appreciation from Mexican church members.

"People have said to me that they never expected me to come back," Mrs. Philpot reported. "A young man recently said, 'Sister, I just want you to know that I'm still amazed at the fact that you are here, or that you ever came back, but I praise the Lord for your influence on these people.' Those are the reassurances the Lord gives me."

She still feels anger at times about her husband's death. "It was just a senseless death. At times I get mad that I'm by myself and some stupid guy didn't even finish stealing the car if that was the purpose," she admitted. Her daughters also struggled to understand why their father died. "But with time your question mark diminishes. It becomes smaller, and you start seeing a lot of the good the Lord does in our lives."

Looking back over her years in Mexico, Mrs. Philpot said she is thankful people don't know what obstacles the future holds: "If we knew, we would try and prepare for it, but I don't think that's what life is all about -- that's not what the Lord wants from us. Our victories are in the Lord. If we're not close to him, then we don't even recognize that they are victories. Our defeats come when we allow ourselves to feel defeated.

"And joy ... joy is there. Look at any situation and find the positive even in the negative. I praise the Lord that he has given me the joy of life and the joy of living. I'm glad I didn't know what it all was going to be about in 1968, but I'm thankful that I'm where I am today."

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Judy Garrett, press representative for Southern Baptist workers in Mexico, contributed to this story by Robin Martin, a writer in Richmond, Va., and former Southern Baptist teacher in China.

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

Ministers finding 'Field of
Dreams' in North Dallas suburbs

By Pam Alewine

F- (CO)
(SWBTS)

Baptist Press
4/3/90

VALLEY RANCH, Texas (BP)--Turf. Hitting. Games. All are words that could be associated with football.

But when Paul Basden and Bruce Prindle use the terms, they're not talking about the Dallas Cowboys, who make their home in this North Dallas suburb.

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What they are talking about is hitting the turf in their community of baby boomers and yuppies and challenging people with something more serious than a game.

Basden, who earned two degrees from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in nearby Fort Worth, is pastor of Valley Ranch Baptist Church. He believes the church is a "mirror of the area in terms of demographics." That mirror reflects a congregation of businessmen, accountants, lawyers, bankers and teachers -- 85 percent of whom are 34 or younger.

The mirror also includes a Dallas Cowboys cheerleader and one of the team's quarterbacks.

A mission of Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas, the Valley Ranch church has swelled to more than 300 since its founding four years ago. And it keeps growing.

But Basden and Prindle, the associate pastor, said the success is due in part to their discovery that typical means of reaching people for Christ, such as door-knocking and home visitation, do not work in Valley Ranch.

The ministers noticed quickly that what free time Valley Ranch residents have, they spend in recreational activities such as biking, running, golf or at health spas. Their response has been to organize recreational activities such as a golf tournament.

"I want to be a church for the '90s that communicates the gospel in a way that contemporary North Dallasites will respond," Basden said.

To accomplish that goal, Basden and Prindle broaden church services beyond the norm to include contemporary dramas, which tie into Basden's sermons, nearly every Sunday. Those sermons are designed to be timely and speak to issues baby boomers face daily.

Last spring the church hosted a revival, calling it "Spring Break," a title to which recent college graduates could relate. Along with a preacher, the revival included seminars on subjects such as co-dependency, stress and time management, communication in marriage and single parenting.

As part of the overall ministry of the church, Basden and Prindle attempt to take away the negative stigma people in Valley Ranch have about church.

"I had no idea what to do, so I started reading books on church planting and church growth," said Basden. From prayer, reading, brainstorming and watching what other growing churches were doing, he led the church to start meeting in homes for Bible studies.

As the stigmas have been overcome, the church, which began with nothing more than some used 1956 "Baptist Hymnals," has grown progressively. It has moved from a day care center, to a high school and now to the current store-front space in an office complex.

"I've learned that a church should be indigenous to its culture, even right here in America. I always thought that was just overseas," said Basden, who at one time was preparing for foreign missions.

And while Basden estimates less than 20 percent of Valley Ranch's residents attend church, he and Prindle remain optimistic their strategy of "networking" and reaching the people where they are will continue to pay off.

"Most of our congregation is extremely open to trying anything to communicate God's love to people," Prindle said.

What the ministers have learned is that if the nice cars, jobs and credit cards are taken away, the needs of people in affluent Valley Ranch are the same as any congregation.

"The toys are different, but the games are the same," Prindle said.

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