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April 4, 1990

90-48

Churches report changes
after solemn assemblies

By Mark Wingfield

F-4MB

ATLANTA (BP)--Southern Baptist churches that have responded to a call for "solemn assembly" are reporting extraordinary results, which they attribute to prayer and repentance.

During the National Prayer Teleconference Sept. 17, six prayer leaders from Southern Baptist Convention agencies issued a "Call to Solemn Assembly and Prayer." Solemn assembly is an Old Testament concept of spiritual renewal based upon prayer and repentance.

Henry Blackaby of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, one of the six prayer leaders who issued the call, said what has happened since is extraordinary.

"At this point I can say that God is definitely expressing the greatest movement I've ever known," Blackaby said. "There is a profound moving of God."

Blackaby said he has seen "an increasing number of leaders who are absolutely aware of that moving and adjusting their lives to what God is doing."

The response is forming "a crescendo from top to bottom" within churches, associations and state conventions, he explained. "God is moving out there in the hearts of common people."

That does not mean that every problem within the SBC and its churches will be solved overnight, Blackaby said. But response to the call to solemn assembly is further evidence of an emerging spiritual awakening in the nation, he added.

At least 10 state conventions already have had or are planning to have solemn assemblies, Blackaby said. Dozens of associations and churches have answered the call to prayer.

When asked to explain the results of their solemn assemblies, pastors, associational directors of missions and state leaders sometimes faced a dilemma. "I feel it in my spirit, and I know it is happening, but I have difficulty explaining it," one director of missions said.

Others have seen more tangible results -- sometimes immediately and sometimes after months of anticipation.

Last fall, James Pool, pastor of First Baptist Church in Cameron, Texas, felt led of God to bring Christians in his community together for prayer. The town of 6,000 people had experienced several difficulties: the closing of its only hospital, layoffs by one of its main employers, lack of funding for public schools and lack of rain for the area's agricultural industry.

"We had not had any good rain for a couple of years. The tanks were all dry. Our farmers were getting pretty desperate," he said.

That first citywide meeting led to a subsequent citywide solemn assembly, which was attended by ministers from six churches and 250 people from various faiths. Meeting at the school cafeteria, the people prayed and confessed sin.

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The day after the first meeting, the town received a one-quarter inch of rain, Pool said. Also, one of the town's two convenience stores suddenly removed pornographic literature from its shelves.

After the second meeting, the rain intensified and has been falling periodically ever since, he said: "Our tanks are full now for the first time in several years. There's even been runoff. Our farmers are rejoicing.

"Since the solemn assembly we've had people coming into our church asking how to be saved. A couple of weeks ago, we had a lady come in that our people had been witnessing to for years. People we've been praying for just all the sudden appear in our services now."

More than 600 miles away, Calvary Baptist Church in Roswell, N.M., also has seen tangible results since holding a solemn assembly. Pastor Kirby Kennedy led his church into a time of prayer and repentance after hearing Blackaby speak at the state evangelism conference.

The assembly began with the church's three staff members testifying to God's work in their lives and asking forgiveness of the congregation for wrongs committed.

"All across the sanctuary, people were sobbing as they were touched by God's spirit," Kennedy wrote in a recent issue of the Baptist New Mexican, newsjournal of the Baptist Convention of New Mexico. "Soon the entire front of the sanctuary was filled with people on their knees, sobbing and crying out to God in repentance.

"The aisles were filled with people going to one another asking for forgiveness and also forgiving. Never before have I seen an entire church body cleansed in one service, but to my knowledge that is what happened."

Since that time, the church has increased its average Sunday school attendance by 50, the pastor said. "We have seen people saved, needs being met, the needy being helped and many more people involved in prayer, visitation and ministry."

Associational director of missions Ken Robinson said the events at Calvary Church illustrate what is happening across Pecos Valley Baptist Association.

When he received the call to prayer from the SBC prayer leaders, Robinson approached each church with the idea. The churches have not stopped with solemn assemblies, however. They have continued praying at special times daily or weekly. One church meets at 5:30 a.m. for prayer.

Nearly three years ago, Robinson helped 12 retired pastors in the association get together for a weekly prayer time that he now believes was a catalyst in the association's renewal. "I knew them to be men of prayer, so I took the challenge to them," he explained. "I felt if we were going to do anything of lasting value, it would start with prayer.

"The Lord is doing something in our churches now. There's a spirit of optimism, of the awareness of the presence of the Lord wherever you go."

Tim Logerquist, director of missions for California's Gold Coast Baptist Association, also led his association to start pastor prayer groups that led to a solemn assembly in January.

"We have seen some unbelievable answers to prayer," Logerquist said. "One church that was ready to split turned around into revival and reconciliation. They're running stronger now and having decisions every Sunday."

Another church facing difficulties in a building program received a large financial gift "out of the blue," he said. "They're in a spirit of revival."

During the first of April, all 26 churches and missions in the association participated in an effort labeled "20 Days of Prayer," in which each church committed to spend 24 hours praying for the other churches and for spiritual awakening.

Logerquist said he was excited that every church had agreed to participate in this one venture, which will culminate in a Spring Celebration for Spiritual Awakening. "I've never seen anything like this," he said.

Churches studying Old Testament
to understand solemn assembly

By Mark Wingfield

F- HMB

Baptist Press
4/4/90

ATLANTA (BP)--Seven months ago, the term "solemn assembly" was about as foreign to most Southern Baptists as the name of the most obscure Old Testament character.

It's still not a household word. But since six prayer leaders from Southern Baptist Convention agencies issued a "Call to Solemn Assembly" last September, hundreds of pastors and laypeople have begun searching out Old Testament references to solemn assembly.

The result has been periods of unprecedented prayer and repentance in some churches, associations and state conventions, said Henry Blackaby of the SBC Home Mission Board.

In the Old Testament Samuel called a solemn assembly when the Israelites were worshipping idols and living in judgment for mishandling the Ark of the Covenant. Josiah called a solemn assembly after the Book of the Law was rediscovered in the temple. In all, at least a dozen references to solemn assemblies are in the Old Testament, Blackaby said.

The term has been rediscovered by Southern Baptists since the six SBC prayer leaders declared the Old Testament concept has validity for the modern church.

"We believe God has called all of us to stand before him face to face to give an account of our leadership," the prayer leaders said in September. "We urge all leaders to call a solemn assembly of the people they lead."

Since September, some churches, associations, state conventions and agencies have answered the call to prayer. Each has conducted its solemn assembly in a different way, depending upon the circumstances and needs.

"None of this is being orchestrated," Blackaby said. "It's not a program. We have refused to give an outline as to what should be done in a solemn assembly."

In Texas, the program for last November's Baptist Men organization conference was set aside and replaced by a solemn assembly. Brotherhood director Bob Dixon enlisted guidance from Blackaby and T.W. Hunt and Avery Willis of the Southern Baptist Convention Sunday School Board and others familiar with prayer and spiritual awakening.

In the Maryland/Delaware convention, Executive Director Ken Lyle called for a convention-wide solemn assembly March 31. About 200 people participated in the three-hour event that included Scripture reading, spontaneous prayer and singing of hymns and choruses.

Employees of the Sunday School Board held a week of prayer in March that culminated in a solemn assembly.

Trustees of the SBC Foreign Mission Board met in a four-hour solemn assembly before their February board meeting. The event included prayer and confession of sin.

First Baptist Church in Cameron, Texas, hosted a city-wide solemn assembly that was attended by about 250 people of various faiths. Six ministers presented six areas of sin, which the people prayed about and confessed. Public prayers were limited to one minute each to allow everyone an opportunity to pray.

Wherever they are held, solemn assemblies appear to revolve around a concept rather than a predetermined agenda. "I'm just amazed at how God's spirit is giving testimony to this principle," said Douglas Beggs, prayer leader for the SBC Brotherhood Commission. "You don't dictate to people how to do these kind of things."

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Prayer leaders offered a summary of ideas about solemn assemblies:

-- Solemn assemblies should be called by anyone who is a leader. For example, they could be called by leaders of families, church groups, churches, associations or state conventions.

-- Solemn assemblies are precursors to spiritual awakening. They are a means of God's people identifying and confessing their sin and praying for redirection.

-- Solemn assemblies are different from any existing SBC program and focus on individual participation rather than the customary program of listening to preaching and teaching.

-- The purpose of a solemn assembly is for God's people to humble themselves, fast, pray, repent, hear Scripture, worship and make new covenants with God.

-- Solemn assemblies may last anywhere from two hours to two days.

-- Solemn assemblies should be called as quickly as possible because of the urgency of the need for spiritual awakening.

The six SBC prayer leaders are Blackaby of the Home Mission Board, Hunt and Willis of the Sunday School Board, Beggs of the Brotherhood Commission, Minette Drumwright of the Foreign Mission Board and Barbara Elder of Woman's Missionary Union.

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Live SBC telecast
offered on BTN

N-SSB

Baptist Press
4/4/90

NASHVILLE (BP)--For the sixth consecutive year, live gavel-to-gavel coverage of the 1990 Southern Baptist Convention in New Orleans, June 12-14, will be televised on the Baptist Telecommunication Network.

"The Churches: Edified ... Multiplied" is the theme for this year's meeting, to be held in the Louisiana Superdome. BTN coverage will be produced by BTN and SBC NewScene, the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's video news service.

The SBC telecast will begin at 8:15 a.m., Central Daylight Time, June 12. The first day's activities include the SBC President's Address, several Southern Baptist Convention agency reports, including the Home Mission Board, and sessions on business and resolutions.

Other highlights include the Sunday School Board's 50-minute centennial report on Wednesday morning, June 13, and the Wednesday evening Foreign Mission Board missionary commissioning service.

The signal from BTN will be unscrambled to allow churches and individuals who are not BTN subscribers to view the sessions. The BTN signal is transmitted on Spacenet 1 satellite, channel 21.

Richard T. McCartney, executive vice president of the SBC Radio and Television Commission in Fort Worth, Texas, and Gomer Lesch, anchor for SBC NewScene, will be hosts.

As part of the coverage, five-minute news updates will be provided at the beginning of each morning and evening session.

Churches have been encouraged to publicize the convention telecast and urge church members to participate to learn more about the denomination's annual meeting.

The June 12-14 telecast from the Superdome marks the beginning of the eighth year of operation for BTN, the denomination's teaching and training network. BTN has more than 1,600 subscribers.

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BTN New Orleans convention meeting logo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by SSB bureau of Baptist Press

'Inherit the Blessing' to be
theme for ministers' wives

N-CD

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--"Inherit the Blessing" will be the theme for the 1990 Southern Baptist Convention Ministers' Wives Luncheon June 12 at 12:15 p.m. in the ballroom of the Hyatt Regency Hotel in New Orleans.

The luncheon will be held in conjunction with the SBC annual meeting in the Louisiana Superdome June 12-14.

Shirley Dobson, wife of preacher, author and lecturer James Dobson, will be the featured speaker for the luncheon, announced Lynda Estep of Columbia, S.C., president of the SBC Conference of Ministers' Wives.

"Shirley Dobson will give her personal testimony," Estep said. "She will talk about the people in her life -- such as her husband and Sunday school teachers -- who have been a blessing.

"We want to focus on remembering the people who have been a blessing in our lives. Because of them, we have a blessing to inherit."

All participants in the luncheon will receive a free copy of "Don't Miss the Blessing," a new book written by Joanne Leavell, wife of Landrum P. Leavell II, president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Luncheon planners expect about 800 participants, said Estep, whose husband, Wendell, is pastor of First Baptist Church of Columbia, S.C.

Tickets sold before June 1 will cost \$16. They will cost \$18 when bought at the SBC Conference of Ministers' Wives booth in the Superdome.

To order tickets, send a check for \$16 per ticket and a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Janet Wicker, First Baptist Church, 2201 Broadway, Lubbock, Texas 79401.

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Southern Baptist students
share Christ during break

By Frank Wm. White

F-SSB

Baptist Press
4/4/90

HILTON HEAD ISLAND, S.C. (BP)--College students flocked to the beaches of Florida, Texas and South Carolina with a purpose during spring break.

For most, the purpose was getting a tan, partying and unwinding from winter drudgery. But for groups of Southern Baptist college students, the purpose was showing that having fun does not have to involve beer-drinking and carousing and could include sharing their Christian faith.

During two spring break weeks in March at Hilton Head Island, S.C., three weeks at Clearwater and Daytona beaches in Florida and three weeks at Padre Island, Texas, Southern Baptist college students from Baptist Student Unions and church college ministries recorded at least 450 professions of faith and other decisions for Christ through Beach Reach ministries.

An additional Beach Reach project is planned at Newport Beach, Calif., in April.

The 162 students participating in Beach Reach at Hilton Head contacted an estimated 6,000 people through a coffee house, volleyball games, puppet ministry on the beach and shopping mall musical performances, said Marsha Butler, a US-2 missionary responsible for resort ministries at First Baptist Church of Hilton Head.

The students represented BSUs and church student ministries from Alabama, Kentucky, Georgia, South Carolina, Mississippi and Virginia.

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The ministry was a chance for Baptist students to show others Christians can have fun. "There was a lot of relational lifestyle evangelism through pick-up football and volleyball games," Butler said.

Students also faced some tough opposition and difficult situations, they reported.

Two students and a campus director at Hilton Head led to Christ a girl who apparently had been heavily involved in drugs and occult worship for several years.

At South Padre Island, Charles Arnold, pastor of Island Baptist Church, found an opportunity to witness to an intoxicated student who hit him from behind, loosening some of his teeth.

Also at Padre Island, beer-drinking students destroyed sand sculptures of Christ while in the sand nearby, others created the Satanic symbol of a skeletal ram's head. One young girl performed a lewd dance in front of a sand sculpture of Christ.

Students from the sunburn aid tent took the girl inside and told her about the love of Christ. She and her boyfriend both accepted Christ that afternoon.

Working with Island Baptist Church at South Padre Island were 143 students from 26 Texas campuses and volunteers from Texas Baptist churches. Another 70 Texas and Oklahoma BSU volunteers worked at North Padre Island.

In Florida, 128 students from 15 campuses in Oklahoma, Illinois, Mississippi, Arkansas, Florida, Ohio, Missouri and Alabama witnessed, operated a sunburn unit and conducted an opinion survey.

The survey included questions on a variety of issues and served as a way to start a presentation of a tract prepared especially for Beach Reach, said Tammy Davis, director of special mission ministries for the Florida Baptist Convention.

The 2,000 responses to the survey will be compiled for use later, Davis said.

Here's Hope New Testaments and other materials were given out on the beaches. Follow-up letters will be sent to people who made decisions or expressed interest in additional information. Also, information about interested students will be sent to state student ministry directors for follow-up by campus ministers, Davis said.

The Beach Reach experience had an impact on campuses after students returned to school, said Gene Parr, campus minister at Morehead State University in Morehead, Ky.

One student who accepted Christ following her participation in Beach Reach in 1989 returned from Beach Reach this year and won her roommate to Christ.

"The students have a great answer to questions about what they did during spring break," Parr said. "It gives them an opportunity to share Christ on campus."

The BSU also has experienced a boost, Parr said, noting, "Beach Reach was a revival experience and now we are seeing the afterglow." Attendance at a Tuesday evening BSU Bible study was the highest ever after spring break. Students were excited about what had happened, he said.

Students from California campus ministries will conduct Beach Reach at Newport Beach in Southern California during Easter week, the first week public beaches are open there and the primary week for college spring breaks, said Randy Deering, an area campus ministry director for Southern California.

Possibly 30 students from throughout the state will participate in sand sculpture, surveys and tract distribution, volleyball games and a sunburn aid station, Deering said.

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"Beach Reach is one way students can be involved in evangelism and sharing Christ away from campus," said Brad Gray, consultant for evangelism in the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's student ministry department.

More than 26,000 students were involved in mission projects last year that placed them in key roles for evangelism away from campus. Beach Reach is only one aspect of that involvement, he said.

Students also are involved in evangelism through local churches and on their campuses, he added. Mission projects such as Beach Reach give students additional experiences that help strengthen their ability to witness on campus, he said.

Beach Reach ministries are coordinated by local churches or state missions departments, said Bill Lee, director of resort and leisure mission ministries at the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

The Home Mission Board's special mission ministries department supports the program and provides training when requested, but the local coordinators plan the events and enlist campus groups to participate, Lee said.

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Also contributing to this story were Orville Scott and Ken Camp.
Photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by SSB bureau of Baptist Press

Sensitivity urged for
cross-cultural ministry

By Frank Wm. White

N-SSB

Baptist Press
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NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptists have an opportunity to reach a larger portion of the nation's population if they will be sensitive to cultural distinctives, according to a former Hong Kong pastor and cross-cultural counseling specialist.

The challenge of an expanding ethnic population will require new churches with cultural distinctives to reach different culture groups, said Benjamin Wat, a counselor in Los Angeles and student at Fuller Theological Seminary.

Wat spoke to a language ministry workers' conference at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board about cross-cultural distinctives.

The need for Southern Baptists to reach cultural groups becomes more urgent as Asian and Hispanic populations increase, Wat said.

In the next decade, the Asian population of the United States is expected to increase 48 percent, and the number of Hispanics in the United States is expected to increase 46 percent. By the end of the 1990s, one-fourth of all Americans will be Black, Hispanic or Asian.

"It's hard to generalize the needs of cultural groups. Churches need to be sensitive to different cultural needs. We need an awareness and respect for cultures," he said.

Often people try to help and actually hurt others because they do not understand cultural backgrounds, he said.

"It's easy to hurt by doing the wrong thing when you are trying to help others. You need to make sure what you are trying to do is considered helpful," he explained.

For example, a common generalization is that all Hispanics or all Asians have the same cultural backgrounds. That is not true, Wat cautioned.

Even American-born Chinese have a different cultural background from Chinese immigrants. "They aren't comfortable in the same church environment," Wat explained.

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Churches with different cultural bases can reach people from that particular cultural background and will know how to meet their needs much more effectively than a church trying to minister outside its cultural background, Wat said.

Wat encourages churches to be sensitive to reaching out to their own culture groups and learning about the needs of other culture groups.

By learning about other cultural groups, churches can know how best to meet their needs and can help establish ministries and missions that will meet the needs of those people, Wat said.

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Adult children of alcoholics
need help of churches: counselor

By Louis Moore

N-CO
(CLC)

Baptist Press
4/4/90

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Alcoholism has left its indelible mark on more Southern Baptist ministers and missionaries than often is realized, said Sara Hines Martin, a former Southern Baptist missionary who now specializes in counseling adult children of alcoholics.

From research as well as observation, she has concluded that many Southern Baptist ministers and missionaries grew up in homes where either a parent, grandparent or great-grandparent was an alcoholic.

Alcoholism can impact families through several generations, she said.

In a speech at the recent annual seminar of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, Martin identified herself as an adult child of an alcoholic and said, "Many of us came from dysfunctional families in which alcohol was abused."

Noting the tendency of children of alcoholics to become alcoholics themselves, Martin said, "Two of my brothers became alcoholics, and it could have happened to me, too."

Martin currently is a counselor in private practice in Marietta, Ga., and teaches seminars nationwide on adult children of alcoholics. She is the author of two books published by Broadman Press, "Healing of Adult Children of Alcoholics" and "Shame on You."

Children of alcoholics who escape alcoholism themselves are not free from the serious side-effects of alcoholism, she said. Such people are impacted significantly by the events in their families, even if they don't partake of alcoholic beverages themselves.

"Shame is the predominant emotion in the alcoholic family," she said. "Toxic shame makes a person feel shame for who he is as a person. This is different from feeling shame for some action. Toxic shame deals with one's personhood and cannot be changed."

Without help to deal with their shame and other conflicting emotions that result from growing up in dysfunctional families, children of alcoholics often encounter difficulties with their spouses, children and other relationships in life, she said.

Many Southern Baptists who are children of alcoholics avoid alcoholism themselves but because of their backgrounds become addicted to work, she said.

She defined workaholism as a tendency to bury oneself in one's work in such a way that it becomes a substitute, as does alcohol, for normal relationships and emotions in life.

Martin treats adult children of alcoholics through the family systems approach to therapy. This approach focuses on relationships within a family and emphasizes how certain patterns are characteristic of dysfunctional families. Therapy then is designed to change unhealthy family patterns.

She identified one characteristic of dysfunctional families -- the tendency of one child in a dysfunctional family to take on the "hero" role -- which she said accounts for the high number of children of alcoholics in the ministry.

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"Many who are the hero child in their families go into the ministry," she said.

Adult children of alcoholics must understand their family backgrounds in order to function better as adults and as Christians, she said.

Martin suggested eight ways churches and individual Christians can minister to alcoholics and their families:

-- Offer education within the local church on all kinds of addictions.

-- Provide space for addiction groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon to meet.

"What many Southern Baptists may not know is that churches can provide meeting space in their buildings and request that the AA meeting be for non-smokers," she said.

-- On Sundays and Wednesday nights and on a regular basis offer general prayers for addicts.

-- Encourage pastors and other church members to attend groups for recovering alcoholics in order to learn more about addictions and to have contact with addicts and people who have addicts in their families.

-- Encourage pastors and church members to look at their own addictions, such as those to food, work, power and anger, and do something about them.

"The only vice acceptable for a Southern Baptist pastor is that of overeating," Martin said.

-- Learn about family systems and about how to help dysfunctional families change their patterns of behavior.

-- Work to bring about healthier families in general.

-- Let go of judgmental attitudes by remembering the words of Jesus, "Judge not that ye be not judged."

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Sunday school described as
important for singles ministry

By Terri Lackey

SSB

Baptist Press
4/4/90

NASHVILLE (BP)--Well-organized Sunday school classes for single adults coupled with interesting through-the-week activities can lead to stable and long-lasting single adult programs, three leaders in the field agreed.

"We need to give singles something that speaks to their social, spiritual, emotional and intellectual needs during the week," said Ann Gardner, single adult consultant in the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's family ministry department. "That could include weeknight support groups, Bible study, volleyball games or covered-dish dinners."

How to organize single adult Sunday school classes was the popular call-in question during the 90-minute Baptist Telecommunication Network teleconference Sunday, April 1. The teleconference, "Building an Effective Single Adult Ministry," was sponsored jointly by the board's Sunday school division and family ministry department.

The panelists included Ruth Ann Hill, consultant in college and single adult work in the Sunday school youth-adult department; Jim Ballard, minister to single adults at Hickory Grove Baptist Church in Charlotte, N.C.; and Gardner.

In response to a caller's question about whether to group single adults by age or single status in Sunday school, Hill said, "I feel a person has as much in common with their own age group as they do with people in the same circumstances."

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Gardner said church leaders "should just find out from the single adults whether they want to go into their age-group or the single-adult group. Try it both ways and see what works."

Meanwhile, Ballard said if the church single adult membership is large enough, leaders should try to organize by different circumstances and ages.

"For example, I would separate never-married singles and singles again," said Ballard, whose church includes 1,300 single adults in its membership. He said he would also group single parents separately from those who do not have children.

"In addition, I find that if you don't at least separate by age groups, you find members slipping from one class to another," he noted.

Motivating people to become interested in serving in single adult leadership positions, attracting single men who will remain committed to the program, and outreach or ingathering methods for single adults were questions addressed during the teleconference.

Hill said motivating people into assuming leadership roles takes "a lot of prayer and giving people small responsibilities, affirming them as they complete the task and then working up from there. It also helps to let the new leader know on the front end what is expected of him."

Using strong Christian men in leadership roles is one way to attract and keep single men in a program, Gardner said.

"That might help the men say, 'It's OK to be involved in church,'" she said.

At the conclusion of the teleconference, Gardner introduced the 1990-91 single adult theme, "Every Single Won," which will be launched during Labor Day conferences this fall.

"Every Single Won" is an evangelism effort to train and equip 100,000 single adults to share their faith with 1 million non-churched single adults during 1990-91. The effort is jointly sponsored by the family ministry department and the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's evangelism section.