



**BAPTIST PRESS**  
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**NATIONAL OFFICE**  
 SBC Executive Committee  
 901 Commerce #750  
 Nashville, Tennessee 37203  
 (615) 244-2355  
 Alvin C. Shackelford, Director  
 Dan Martin, News Editor  
 Marv Knox, Feature Editor

**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

July 10, 1990

90-89

Two Baptist properties  
 under dispute in Israel

By Mike Creswell

*N-JMB*

JERUSALEM, Israel (BP)--Baptists are disputing with two city governments that have laid claim to parts of two strategic Baptist properties in Israel.

Negotiations with government offices have grown more tense in recent weeks following publication of articles in two major Hebrew-language newspapers which express strong criticism of Baptists.

The disputes center on the seizure of land occupied by Jerusalem House, a Baptist ministry center near the Mandelbaum Gate in the historic center of Jerusalem and of land at Baptist Village, a retreat and conference center near Tel Aviv. The two actions apparently are unrelated.

About 20 percent of Jerusalem House's land will become part of a four-lane road, and a portion of the Baptist Village land will become part of a trash processing center.

Jerusalem House is on the border of Eastern Jerusalem, which is Arab, and Western Jerusalem, which is Jewish. Nearby Mandelbaum Gate was used as a main passageway between the two sectors from 1948 to 1967. Included in Jerusalem House are offices for Southern Baptist representatives and meeting rooms used for Vacation Bible Schools, student ministry and other activities.

The city wants a new road behind the Jerusalem House building. Much of the property taken would be from a lot behind the building used for children's ministry, picnics and other functions. It includes a 100-year-old house once occupied by Horatio Spafford, author of the song, "It Is Well with My Soul."

Baptists are resigned to losing the property for the new road, which is a major project affecting many landowners in the area. But they object to the city taking the property without compensation. The Jerusalem House land with buildings has been valued at \$2.2 million, partly because of its strategic location near the historic gate; loss of 20 percent of the land would involve a sizable financial loss, said Southern Baptist representative John Anthony.

Another objection is that several years ago, unknown to Baptists, the city rezoned part of the property for commercial use, making it liable to steep annual taxes. The front part of the property, containing Jerusalem House, remains tax-exempt, in keeping with its religious, non-commercial nature.

Articles have appeared in two leading Hebrew-language newspapers in Jerusalem which contained anti-Christian statements highly critical of Baptists. The articles accused Baptists of trying to evade taxes and alleged they are planning to construct a large, elaborate structure on the property, much as Mormons from America have done on the Mount of Olives near Jerusalem.

Southern Baptist representatives have informed the city government that such charges are unfounded, that they have no plans at present for further developments. Baptists say the city has agreed to publish a response from Baptists to the earlier charges.

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Southern Baptist representative Tom Hocutt said the zoning dispute is frustrating especially in light of why Southern Baptists located there. In the late 1960s Baptists had bought a piece of property in the Jewish part of Jerusalem for development but sold it after strong objections from a nearby training school for rabbis. Southern Baptists sold the property to the training school, then bought the present Jerusalem House location in 1968.

Hocutt said he and others are working with Naomi Tisdeale, the city's liaison for the Christian community, to get the property zoning changed. No final decision has been reached yet.

In a second case, the city of Petah Tiqva, near Tel Aviv, has begun condemnation proceedings to take 1.25 acres of property belonging to Baptist Village for use in constructing a regional trash processing center. Plans call for trash to be trucked in to the center from throughout a wide region, compacted in large compacting machines, then carried elsewhere for disposal.

Southern Baptist representatives fear the facility will spoil the village's quiet, rural nature with odors, loose trash and noise from machinery.

"The prevailing winds are from the west, so we're likely to get the smell of the facility," Hocutt said. A trash compacting plant and dozens of garbage trucks are hardly appropriate near a facility used for conferences, retreats and recreation, he added.

More than 2,000 persons use Baptist Village annually, making it one of the key ministry centers for Baptists and other Christian groups in Israel. It is considered one of the most significant ministry operations for Baptists throughout the Middle East. A \$2 million expansion of the village will begin as soon as final legal clearances are obtained from Petah Tiqva authorities.

Baptists have offered the city another piece of land, across a highway and further from the village complex, to accommodate the trash facility, but officials rejected it. Some Southern Baptist representatives say insistence on having the facility so close to the village indicates anti-Christian sentiment.

Hocutt said no apparent connection exists between seizure of property at Baptist Village and Jerusalem House, noting that two different municipalities are involved. Representative John Anthony is exploring whether such property seizures violate treaty agreements between the United States and Israel.

Baptists are mounting a legal challenge to the Baptist Village condemnation proceedings because the city began the process two years ago but precluded village objections by never informing the village about what they were doing. The law sets forth notification requirements in such condemnation proceedings.

Recently, the Israeli attorney general's office told city officials that Baptists have a strong case on resisting the taking of their property, but it is uncertain when a final decision will be reached. City officials have indicated unofficially that even if they lose the current case, they will simply start another condemnation procedure, this time giving proper notice.

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Courageous dreams yield  
unlikely miracles

By Jim Lowry

F-55B

Baptist Press  
7/10/90

NASHVILLE (BP)--The message from Rob Bryant's heart is a combination of courageous dreams realized through unlikely miracles.

"We should never quit in the face of diversity," is not just a platitude for Bryant, who was paralyzed from the waist down in an oil-rig accident in 1982.

Since the accident and during his recovery, Bryant decided to give God the glory for the miraculous physical feats he has been able to achieve.

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First, he walked out of the therapy center, using crutches. Doctors told him no other paraplegic had ever achieved that as far as they knew. Actually, he does not walk, but propels himself on crutches. He has no feeling in his legs.

After walking 2-3 miles almost every day in his neighborhood for exercise, he decided to shoot for a record.

He started out in Fort Worth, Texas, on July 2, 1984, to walk to Dallas, a distance of 24 miles. The Miracle Walk, as he calls it, took three days in the raging Texas heat, but he refused to give up. Up to that day, he had never walked more than three and one-half miles.

After walks of eight, nine and seven miles, Bryant crossed the finish line at 2 p.m. in Keist Park in Dallas. It was about 100 degrees.

"God showed me that if I would take care of his business, he would take care of mine," Bryant said in a Broadman book he wrote about his life leading up to and including the Miracle Walk.

"Lord, Lift Me Up," the title of his book, also was his prayer during his three-day, 24-mile walk. He set a record in the process.

Not one to rest on his laurels, Bryant began looking for another physical challenge. Then he discovered the RowCycle, a three-wheel machine that is rowed for power and steered by shifting the body weight.

Bryant, a member of South Cliff Baptist Church in Fort Worth, set out April 2, 1990, from Los Angeles, to row across America. No one has ever traveled such distances in a RowCycle.

He averages 40 miles per day and is scheduled to arrive at the White House on July 29. He has asked to meet with the president of the United States to give attention to the plight of paralyzed persons. On his trip, he speaks nearly every day in small churches and on Air Force bases, carrying his message of hope in Jesus Christ.

Another miracle for which Bryant expresses gratitude is that his employer, DynCorp, Inc., gave him a six-months leave of absence with full pay to attempt his 3,400-mile continental crossing.

"Sometimes, we don't go from dreams to miracles because we don't do our part," Bryant said on a stopover in Nashville at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board. "It is very important that we concentrate on things we can do well, because we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us."

Physical strength has been tested to the limit for Bryant, who rows between 15,000 and 20,000 times every day. It takes 60 pounds of pressure to move on flat ground and 90-100 pounds to go up an incline. Steep hills require even more pressure. He will row 92 days on his trip.

Bryant's wife, Wanice, and their two sons, Jason and Jonathan, joined him in Nashville for the final month and 900 miles of the trip.

"What I do is concentrate on the next stroke, not the 40 miles I have to cover that day," Bryant said. "That's a good way to deal with your spiritual life and sin, too. You deal with the next thing -- and just worry about the next stroke."

And yes, the constant aching and muscle pain is worth it, Bryant said, because "I've encouraged a lot of Americans in their lives. I've seen their hurt and pain and encouraged them.

"Then I've seen a little victory in their eyes and many have been saved or made commitments," he concluded. "The Lord does that."

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BP photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers SSB bureau of Baptist Press

Missionaries to Kenya  
dodge violent gangs

By Craig Bird

N-SMB

NAIROBI, Kenya (BP)--A Southern Baptist missionary family, a volunteer couple and the married daughter of a Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board administrator were harassed by roving gangs during flare-ups of violence in Kenya July 9.

None of them were harmed in the confrontations, and the city seemed to be back to normal on July 10.

Six other missionary families arrived home safely after driving to or through Nairobi from a major, four-week evangelistic campaign, the Kenya Coastal Crusade, which has not been affected by the political situation in the east African nation.

At the half-way mark of the crusade in Mombasa and other coastal cities, reports indicate 20,800 persons have made "commitments for Christ" and 24 new churches have been started, including one among the deaf.

The political unrest began July 7 when thousands of Kenyans gathered in Nairobi for a rally to support multi-party democracy. The crowd clashed with police. Cars were stoned and overturned, and 10 people reportedly were admitted to Kenyatta National Hospital. Five people were treated for gunshot wounds.

One of Kenya's three daily newspapers reported three people were killed on July 8 and at least another five on July 9, as rioting continued.

Tensions increased after the U.S. Embassy issued a statement calling for the release of multi-party proponents who have been detained by the Kenyan government. According to news reports, a prominent Kenyan lawyer, Gibson Kamau Kuria, an advocate for introducing a multi-party system in Kenya, took refuge at the embassy to avoid arrest. Kuria, 43, won the Robert F. Kennedy human rights award in 1988.

The U.S. Embassy later advised American citizens to stay off the streets. On July 9 most stores in Nairobi closed early, and public transport ceased operating, stranding tens of thousands of workers.

Rocks smashed the windshield and a side window of a car driven by missionary Gary Bradley of Abilene, Texas, just north of Nairobi. Bradley's wife, Kathi, also of Abilene, and their two small children were in the car. The Bradleys recently completed Swahili language school in Kenya and are in the process of moving to their assignment in Tanzania.

Bob and Yvonne Walls, long-term volunteers from Conroe, Texas, drove the same route at 3 p.m., unaware of what had happened to the Bradleys. Walls saw a crowd around an overturned truck but thought they were curiosity seekers.

The Walls were about 100 yards from the wreck when the crowd turned toward them. When he saw the rocks in their hands, he accelerated and drove away. A rock shattered the windshield on Mrs. Walls' side.

Mona Entwistle, daughter of James Houser, Foreign Mission Board associate administrator for Eastern Africa, was stopped by 10 young men carrying large rocks in the same area. The men took her car keys, purse and some candy she had bought for her children and after taking all her cash they returned her wallet and allowed her to drive off unharmed.

Mrs. Entwistle teaches at a school run by the African Inland Mission in Kijabe, Kenya.

Nairobi-based missionaries returning from Mombasa reported no problems in getting home, but one couple in Limuru passed by three burning pieces of road-working equipment and another was "chased by hoodlums" in the town of Karatina, between Nairobi and their home in Nyeri. By the time they arrived home, Nyeri was quiet but there was ample evidence of prior trouble, they said.

One Southern Baptist missionary stopped at the U.S. Embassy to check on the situation. While there he heard shooting in the nearby industrial area of Kenya's capital, he said.

Crusade ne 0,814 Christians,  
24 churches at halfway point

By Craig Bird

N-FMS

MOMBASA, Kenya (BP)--During the first half of the Kenya Coastal Crusade, 27 Southern Baptist missionaries and 256 American volunteers reported 20,814 "commitments for Christ" and organized 24 churches -- including one for the deaf.

"No matter what the future holds we can say, because of these two weeks, at least one time in our lives we saw what God can really do," said Ralph Bethea, a Southern Baptist church developer in Mombasa, during a July 8 wrap-up rally for the first group of volunteers.

A second team arrived July 9 for the final two weeks of what has been called one of Southern Baptists' largest volunteer evangelistic projects. Neither an isolated rock-throwing incident at a preaching site nor unrelated political unrest in the east Africa nation has affected the crusade.

Also at the rally volunteers gave approximately \$1,500 and pledged \$8,500 over the next four months to fund a follow-up push to ground the new converts in the Christian faith.

"We've had a lot of victories, but we've created a lot of problems, too -- more than 20,000 of them," James T. Draper told the volunteers. Draper, who spearheaded the Kenya Coastal Crusade, is pastor of First Baptist Church in Euless, Texas, and a former SBC president.

"One of the valid criticisms of evangelistic efforts like this and a reason some folks react with less than enthusiasm is the lack of follow-up," Draper explained. "We have conserved some of the gains -- there are 24 new Baptist churches in Kenya. But there's an obvious need to help these new Christians to mature as believers after they pray the sinner's prayer."

To address that issue Billie Hanks, a well-known discipleship seminar leader and evangelist in the United States, met with Kenya missionaries to develop a follow-up strategy and field test it.

"We think for about 50 cents a person we can finance a program of training and discipleship that includes two small tract booklets, 12 lessons of the Bible Way correspondence study and a 14-week series of Bible studies led by Kenyan Christians," Hanks explained.

"That's a bargain -- but the Baptist Mission of Kenya doesn't have \$10,000 lying around to pay for it," said Hanks, who developed the follow-up Bible studies. "All of its budget is already committed, plus, as you have seen these past two weeks, every missionary Southern Baptists have in this country is working beyond capacity.

"So we'd like to ask you to pay for it. If every volunteer could pay \$40, spread out over four months if you like, then the Kenya mission can advance the funds and be reimbursed." The suggestion was accepted by acclamation.

Part of the money will make it possible for Kenyan pastors who served as translators for the volunteer teams to go into the areas where they worked and contact the new Christians personally. Pastors will distribute the tracts and Bible Way application forms and lead Bible studies in rural areas.

The tracts, in Swahili or English, are: "Beginning With Christ" and "Beginning Your Life of Fellowship." Bible Way is a Southern Baptist correspondence program which originated in Zambia but now has hundreds of thousands of students around the world.

In Mombasa, names and addresses of all those who made decisions were entered in a computer. They will receive the tracts and Bible Way application through the mail and an invitation to the Bible studies in their neighborhood. Pastors in neighborhoods also will receive computer printouts of the names for personal follow-up.

The volunteers were also challenged to look upon their African experiences as a starting point.

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"We're leading these missionaries beyond belief," said Bob Clemons, a Foreign Mission Board trustee and evangelist from Austin, Texas. "I can't help but believe there are people here tonight that God wants to call out as career missionaries."

Bethea asked the volunteers, even as they rejoiced in those who had prayed to receive Jesus, to think of the 3 billion people in the world who "do not know the name of Jesus."

"We are more concerned sometimes about the kind of car we drive than those 3 billion souls on their way to hell unless you and I do something about it," Bethea said. "But just think if just 10 percent of the 14 million people who call themselves Southern Baptist would commit themselves to going somewhere every two years to do evangelism for two weeks, we'd have 1.4 million people involved in winning this world for Christ!

"That would be an army unlike anything this world has ever seen. Not rich. Not really poor. Just ordinary folks dreaming a great dream for a great God. There are a thousand things trying to tear us apart as Southern Baptists today. Isn't it time for a great-hearted people to grab hold of a big vision and come together?"

Volunteers worked in five separate geographic areas of Kenya, four along the coast and one 100 miles inland.

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Southern Baptists bound  
by worship traditions

By Charles Willis

Baptist Press  
7/10/90

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Southern Baptists may be bound in a hum-drum worship pattern out of traditions they have not analyzed, a church music educator said during Church Music Leadership Conference at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center.

"Many of the rules we follow in our worship have been established through tradition," observed Jeri Graham, artist-in-residence at Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee. "We've come by these elements from a pretty rich history, but we've forgotten why they were selected in the first place. Without planning it or expecting it, Southern Baptists have become very ritualistic -- tradition bound."

Graham said almost without exception, the forms of worship used in Southern Baptist churches Sunday after Sunday include a call to worship; invocation, pastoral, offertory, and benediction prayers; announcements; Scripture reading by the pastor, responsively or in unison by the congregation; the offering; congregational singing of three hymns; special music by the choir or a soloist; a children's sermon; the pastor's sermon; and an invitation. These are sandwiched between musical preludes and postludes.

Variations, she said, may include observance of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

"I don't begin to suggest you drop any of them," Graham said. "We're not looking at change for change sake."

But Graham said she believes changes in worship form "freshen thinking. We provide the atmosphere for people to meet God.

"We need serious goals of worship in mind when we go to the auditorium," she continued, "and all the leaders in a service need to know what the goals are."

Worship planners need to ask how the service can be planned to communicate the essence of the worship goals.

She said she is concerned some worship planners hesitate to change any of the order of worship because the congregation may find change uncomfortable.

"'Comfortable' is a deadly word," Graham said. "Many of us are people pleasers. We want to be sure people are happy. It's not that we want to make people unhappy. But we have to be uncomfortable enough to move. We need to be reasonably comfortable but stimulated to think for the sake of our purpose -- to meet God.

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Graham said exchanging worship ideas with other ministers of c is one way to find ways to break the stagnation that causes worshipers' minds to wander during a predictable service.

She also advocates talking to people in the congregation to see what they would like.

"Dare to be original," she challenged worship planners. "Read books, look at other church's bulletins, borrow and adapt ideas."

Graham said she believes tradition for the sake of tradition "has had a dulling effect on us, making worship a comfortable habit.

"We are engaged in the most important task in the world when we gather people together to worship," she declared. "How can we be so lazy about it?"

Church Music Leadership Conference was sponsored by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's church music department.

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Home Bible studies  
encourage outreach

By Sarah Zimmerman

N-NMB

Baptist Press  
7/10/90

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--A Virginia church planter offers only one word of caution about starting a mission at home: Don't assume people have any biblical knowledge.

Meeting in a home, whether it is a ranch house or apartment, is non-threatening to a person who is not familiar with a church setting, said Carol O'Dillon. People who attend may not know the books of the Bible or popular Bible characters.

A home Bible study could lay the foundation for a new church, channel people to existing churches or continue as a neighborhood Bible study, O'Dillon said during a conference at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Conference Center.

"The ultimate goal is for people to have eternal life as described in John 17:3 -- that they may know God," O'Dillon said. The goal is not to learn "just facts about the Bible but to know God and let him be their life-changing force."

During the conference O'Dillon, formerly a church planter in the Atlanta area, listed several "do's" of home Bible studies. They include:

- Invite people from all denominations.
- Call on people to read the Bible or pray only if they have previously agreed.
- Love participants and pray for them.
- Be a positive model.
- Visit and call participants persistently.
- Ask opinion questions rather than questions about Bible knowledge.
- Set ground rules such as disagree without being disagreeable, avoid denominational discussions and promise to keep confidentiality.

Prospects for home Bible studies can be found through door-to-door surveys, activities for children such as backyard Bible clubs and block parties. However, O'Dillon said the most effective enlistment tool is a personal invitation to unchurched friends.

O'Dillon recommended Outreach Bible Study material from the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board as the initial curriculum. The eight-week course is designed for people without a church background. Equipping center modules from the Sunday School Board are also good resources she said.

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Providing for children is another essential element in home B studies. O'Dillon said Bible study should be available for children, so parents cannot use their children as an excuse to not attend.

The conference was part of "Jericho: A Missions Festival" sponsored by the Home Mission Board, Foreign Mission Board, Brotherhood Commission, Woman's Missionary Union and Sunday School Board.

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Conference urges Baptists  
to do, support missions

By Sarah Zimmerman

Baptist Press  
7/10/90

N-HMB

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--The challenge to do mission work and support mission work was the unavoidable message to 2,129 Southern Baptists attending "Jericho: A Missions Festival."

The program at Ridgecrest (N.C) Baptist Conference Center included commissioning of 62 home missionaries and resulted in 62 public decisions. The conference was a joint effort of the Foreign Mission Board, Home Mission Board, Woman's Missionary Union, Brotherhood Commission and Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Larry Lewis, Home Mission Board president, urged the 62 new missionaries to live God's will as they serve in six types of ministries in 20 states. He said God's will is made known as Christians submit themselves to Christ's lordship and are transformed by his power.

The 62 decisions included two professions of faith, eight for home missions service, 13 for foreign missions service, 13 for either home or foreign missions and 26 other decisions such as rededications or commitment to volunteer missions.

Keith Parks, Foreign Mission Board president, began the week by urging Southern Baptists to tear down dividing walls and give sacrificially to missions. Participants responded by giving \$5,771 to the Cooperative Program, the largest Sunday offering received at Ridgecrest this year.

Throughout the week, Jericho participants attended conferences with topics ranging from how to witness to members of cults to how to sponsor a mission. Computer games, drama presentations and Bible studies underscored the necessity of individual and cooperative missions.

Mission support through prayer was an integral part of the program. Missionaries led small-group prayer sessions before each evening program. Prayer vigils were held from 11 p.m. to 6 a.m. two nights -- once to pray for the nation and once to pray for the world.

Tuesday evening, Bob Logans, pastor of First Baptist Church, Chesterfield, Mo., said praying for missions is necessary but not enough. The Great Commission, he noted, says, "Go ye therefore, not sit ye and pray for."

Visible reminders of world missions were 70 black flags representing the thousands of nations and people groups which have limited access to a Christian witness. The black flags were displayed with flags of countries and states where Southern Baptists have mission work.

During the final session, Esther Burroughs, assistant director of the Home Mission Board field staff and evangelism development division, asked participants to bring a black flag to the altar as a commitment to pray for limited access countries and people groups.

"What a beautiful moment," Bill O'Brien, worship leader and Foreign Mission Board executive director of public affairs, said when all of the black flags were laid at the altar.

"There are no black flags. Could this be a prophetic moment?"

O'Brien's final reminder was that "God probably cannot do a work in people who have never heard until he does a work in us."

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HMB president outlines  
plan to increase baptisms

By Sarah Zimmerman

N-HMB

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--It is possible, Larry Lewis claims, for every Southern Baptist church to baptize at least 120 people a year.

Lewis, president of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, outlined a plan to accomplish that objective during the annual home missions conference at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center. Conference registration reached 2,352 the second day of the meeting.

Lewis said most churches have at least 10 groups or programs which could lead one person to Christ each month. At that rate, the church would see 120 people a year make professions of faith in Jesus Christ.

One such group is pastors. Lewis said pastors need to be model soul winners because "the sheep won't go where the shepherd does not lead."

He said he does not believe that the average Southern Baptist pastor is a soul winner because "we are winning so few." He noted that last year almost 8,000 Southern Baptist churches reported no baptisms, and the average Southern Baptist church baptized seven people.

The church's staff must also be soul winners, Lewis said. Whether their job is music minister or education director, Lewis said the staff should have a burden for the lost.

Soul-winning should be a requirement for deacons, Lewis said. "A street cleaner who is a soul winner is better qualified to lead in the church's business than the bank vice president who is not a soul winner," Lewis said. "We have gotten caught up in the idolatry of talent."

Sunday school workers should understand that "reaching and teaching are dual responsibilities," Lewis said. "Sunday school teachers do not teach the Bible. Put a Bible in that chair and try to teach it. You teach people."

"Break out ministries" are what Lewis calls programs such as food pantries, job placement and literacy training. "The best way to win somebody to God is ministering to his needs," Lewis said. Churches should ask people in their communities, "where do you hurt and how can we help?"

Bus ministries, visitation teams and youth and recreation programs must be centered around evangelism, Lewis said. "Our family life centers are great and wonderful, but are they winning people to God?"

Churches where he has served as pastor have had "fishermen's clubs" where members meet to pray for and visit lost prospects.

Starting mission churches is the final soul-winning method Lewis mentioned. "There are two ways for churches to grow: expansion and extension. Church extension is the most fruitful," he said.

One Home Mission Board Bold Mission Thrust Goal is to have 50,000 churches and church-type missions by the year 2000. In 1989, there were 43,694 such churches and missions.

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Church planter  
assigns seats

By Sarah Zimmerman

F-HMB

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RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--A California church planter resorted to assigning seats when church members became possessive with their pews.

Blake Withers and his wife, Laurie, were two of 62 Southern Baptist home missionaries commissioned July 5 at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center.

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While sharing his testimony, Withers told about meeting a church prospect in a grocery store. The man and his wife visited Withers' church in Cucomongo, Calif., the next Sunday. But the visitors left when a church member announced that they were in the member's seats.

Withers did not have the prospects' phone number, but he saw them the next week at the same grocery store. Being unfamiliar with church services, they explained that the member's comments made them think seats were assigned in the worship center. They left when they could not find a seating chart.

Withers got the couple's phone number and promised to call. A few days later Withers called to announce that four seats were available on the second row. He asked the man, "Could you use the other two?"

The prospects came on Sunday and brought two friends. All four people are now Christians and active church members, Withers said.

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Jordanian Baptists operating  
conference center near hospital

By Mike Creswell

Baptist Press  
7/10/90

*N-4MB*

AJLOUN, Jordan (BP)--A new conference center established near a former Baptist hospital is expected to play a key role in evangelism within Jordan.

Jordanian Baptists will hold two weeks of conferences for Bible study and family enrichment this year, but other evangelical church groups in Jordan also will use the center, eventually keeping it in use much of the year, said Charles Browning, administrator of the new conference center program.

The aging 30-bed hospital facility, operated by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board for more than 30 years, was sold to the Jordanian government in 1987 for \$1.5 million. Maintaining the hospital had become prohibitively expensive. The government, however, has kept it in operation.

Buildings on adjoining land that remained in Baptist hands were used to develop the conference center. They include a three-story facility formerly used as a nurses' dorm, worship center and kitchen.

Extensive renovations, such as new plumbing and electrical wiring, have been required on the buildings, which were constructed in the 1940s and 1950s, Browning said. That work was financed by \$150,000 from the hospital sale. Once completed the facility will house about 250 persons.

The site is considered ideal for conferences and retreats. Situated in the rocky, hilly area that predominates around Ajloun, the center has a good view of Qalaat al Rabad, an Arab castle built in the 12th century, located on a 4,068-foot mountain across the valley.

Summer conferences have long been one of the best evangelistic tools Jordanian Baptists have, said Graydon Hardister, a Southern Baptist representative in the country. "Many of the conversions this year will take place in connection with conferences there. Jordanian Baptists have been holding summer conferences since the 1950s," he said.

In early years, Hardister said, Baptists used tents for summer conferences, but were forced to stop that practice because of dangers posed by commando raids during times of political unrest.

Jordanian Baptists have had a healthy growth rate of about 10 percent annually. Their net growth has been somewhat less, though, because so many Jordanians continue to leave the country. Jordan is predominantly Sunni Muslim, but about 7 percent of the population is called Christian, mostly Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic. Baptists number between 400 and 500 amid a total population in Jordan of 4.2 million.

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Funds from sale of the hospital also will help construct Baptist church buildings in Jordan for years to come, Hardister said. A loan fund totaling \$400,000 will be administered by a board comprised of Southern Baptist representatives and Jordanian Baptists.

The Amman Baptist School received a \$250,000 loan from the fund for construction of a new three-story classroom addition, to be repaid in 10 years. Baptists will use the other \$150,000 for new church buildings or improvements to existing church buildings and pastoriums. Already the Baptist church in Ajloun has renovated its sanctuary with a loan from the fund.