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901 Commerce #75
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(615) 244-235

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91-24

Respond to spiritual hunger,
Chapman urges Southern Baptists

By Robert H. Dilday

N-CC

NASHVILLE (BP)--The Southern Baptist Convention must respond to America's spiritual hunger in these "days of urgency," Southern Baptist Convention President Morris H. Chapman has urged.

"America needs to be awakened spiritually..." said Chapman in an address to members of the SBC Executive Committee Feb. 18. "People are hungry to hear a word from God. We must seize the hour.

"I am praying for spiritual awakening to come to Southern Baptists and through Southern Baptists to America."

Chapman, pastor of First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas, said the war in the Persian Gulf has evoked spiritual questions from many Americans. "We can wait no longer to go forth," he warned, and predicted the present "days of urgency" would become "days of expectancy and harvest" if Southern Baptists "bear the precious seed (of the word of God) to every friend, relative, neighbor."

"There is power in the word of God," he said: "Power to overcome the world, power to break down all barriers, power to crack hearts of cement."

Chapman encouraged Executive Committee members to pray for the "Call to Prayer for Spiritual Awakening," scheduled for the Wednesday evening session of the SBC annual meeting, June 4-6 in Atlanta. Organizers hope the two-and-a-half-hour period of prayer and confession will spark spiritual renewal among Southern Baptists.

"Can you imagine thousands of messengers returning home on fire for God?" Chapman asked.

The president also urged prayer for a "swift" end to the war in the Middle East, "a safe and speedy return of loved ones and a genuine and lasting peace."

"Until that moment comes let us uphold the president of these United States in prayer asking God's divine guidance," he pled. "Let us pledge unwavering support for U.S. and allied troops serving in Operation Desert Storm. ..."

"I am glad that Southern Baptists have a strong sense of patriotism. I am proud to be an American. ... At the same while let us be reminded and even so remind all the peoples of the world that 'if the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.'"

Chapman, who was elected president of the denomination in 1989 and re-elected in 1990, said his "spirit has soared" as he has come in contact with a variety of Southern Baptists, whom he called "some of the greatest saints on earth."

"My life has been enriched, my faith has been enhanced and my confidence in the steadfast resolve of Southern Baptists to bring glory and honor to the name of Jesus has been greatly strengthened," he said.

"If we exalt Christ, preach the word, bring the lost to Jesus and comfort the broken hearted, eyes have not seen nor ears heard what God will do through his people called Southern Baptists."

Spiritual awakening committee
promises historic session

By Robert H. Dilday

N-10

NASHVILLE (BP)--A committee hoping to spark spiritual awakening among Southern Baptists unveiled tentative plans Feb. 18 for "the most important meeting" in the denomination's history.

The 10-member spiritual awakening committee, named by Southern Baptist Convention President Morris H. Chapman, will coordinate a two-and-a-half-hour period of prayer and confession on Wednesday evening of the SBC's annual meeting, June 4-6 in Atlanta. The Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, originally slated to present its report at that time, relinquished the time slot late last year.

"We believe this could be a very special changing time, not only in the life of Southern Baptists but ... to other people as well," said James B. Henry, the committee's chairman. Henry, pastor of First Baptist Church of Orlando, Fla., spoke to a gathering of committee members, convention prayer leaders, state convention presidents and executive directors, and state paper editors just prior to the February meeting of the SBC Executive Committee.

The prayer session, to be called "A Fresh Encounter with God," could be "the most important meeting Southern Baptists have ever had," said Henry.

He said the prayer session will feature "lots of scripture reading" preceded by trumpet blasts, which will signal participants to stand. He noted such practices frequently are recorded in the Old Testament.

In addition, he said, the session will allow time for individual and corporate prayer, confession of sins, testimonies and "praise" music.

Individual prayer and confession would be followed by prayer in pairs and then in groups of four, said Avery Willis, manager of adult discipleship training for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board and designated as a prayer leader by the board. Among the suggested sins to confess will be not loving God completely, not loving one's brother as Christ does and "loving the world instead of the lost of the world."

Southern Baptists will be encouraged to contribute lists of personal sins which will be categorized within those three suggested areas, Henry said. Several will be chosen as representative examples and corporately confessed. The lists then will be nailed to a large cross in the center of the meeting hall, as a symbol of Christ's redemption from those sins.

Lists may be sent to committee member Jonya Davis, First Baptist Church, P.O. Box 36, Russellville, Ark. 72801.

Sacrifice will be another theme, Willis said, as participants are asked to give to God anything -- their bodies, financial resources, time -- they have been withholding. Prayer and confession will be followed by celebratory congregational singing and a responsive reading expressing Southern Baptists' "renewal of our covenant" with God, he added.

In preparation for the prayer session, the committee will distribute numerous articles through Baptist Press, the denomination's news service, and directly to state Baptist newspapers. Also, churches will be asked to pray for the event both on May 19, Pentecost Sunday, and on the Wednesday night itself, when most Southern Baptist churches hold regularly scheduled prayer meetings. Presidents of the six Southern Baptist seminaries also will be requested to schedule prayer for the endeavor during chapel services and faculty meetings; all pre-convention events, such as the meetings of the Southern Baptist Pastors' Conference and the Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union, will be asked for prayer; and other denominations are being urged to pray for the SBC.

"We're asking God to break through in a dynamic way ...," said Henry. "The result will be revival, renewal and spiritual awakening that will spill over and touch not only Southern Baptists but other Christians."

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Chapman, pastor of First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas, appointed the spiritual awakening committee in the fall of 1990 to provide heightened awareness to renewal within the convention. In addition to Henry and Davis, committee members include Lewis A. Drummond, C.B. Hogue, J.C. Mitchell, Jeannie Seaborn, Glenn Sheppard, Danny Watters, Wallace A.C. Williams and Fred H. Wolfe.

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Stateside chaplains serve
on casualty assistance teams

By Sarah Zimmerman

N-NMB

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ATLANTA (BP)--As military leaders debate the beginnings of a ground war in the Persian Gulf, stateside chaplains prepare for the worst.

Army chaplains who remain in the United States serve on casualty assistance teams. The chaplains go with one or two officers to notify the next of kin of a soldier's death.

"In World War II people were notified with a telegram. In Korea it was a telephone call. In Vietnam it was a personal visit," said Pat Davis, retired Southern Baptist Army chaplain. Davis says the personal visit also will be used to tell people of a family member's death during this war.

Davis, 68, retired from the Army 16 years ago but has been asked to return to active duty as part of a casualty assistance team if casualties begin to multiply. Davis was also director of military chaplaincy for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board for 14 years.

Davis, who now lives in an Atlanta suburb, served on a casualty assistance team during the Vietnam conflict. "Each situation is different, anything could go wrong, anything could take place," he said.

Though he is the bearer of bad tidings, Davis said people "usually put their arms around you, they embrace you. I've not come across anyone who took it out on the chaplain.

"It's comforting that a person who is identified as a man of God will visit them."

At least one survivors' assistance officer makes the visit with the chaplain. His job is to help the family with arrangements to receive the body and plan the funeral. The officer also helps family members work through the military paperwork of financial aid and benefits.

The entire visit can last from 60 to 90 minutes, Davis said. During the visit he asks the family if he can notify a local pastor to continue the counseling process. Chaplains typically cannot make follow-up visits to the family because of their heavy workload, Davis said.

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Templeton foundation names Samford
among top 108 character-building schools

N-CO

Baptist Press
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BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--For the third consecutive year, the John Templeton Foundation has named Samford University to its national Honor Roll of Character-Building Universities and Colleges, a list of 108 schools in 30 states.

Samford was the only Alabama school named to the 1991 Honor Roll, which is based on balloting of more than 2,900 educational leaders across the United States. The Honor Roll salutes schools "for their efforts to combine strong academic programs with an emphasis on the development of moral character among its students," said the foundation.

Samford is ranked with such institutions as Duke, Wake Forest, Brigham Young and Furman universities and Davidson, Swarthmore, Millsaps, Rhodes and Wheaton colleges.

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"We are honored to represent Alabama in this national recognition, especially in light of the critical need for character development among future leaders of our world," said Samford President Thomas E. Cortis. "No evaluation of our work could please us more than to be singled out for combining rigorous intellectual preparation with moral and spiritual nurture."

Five Alabama colleges -- Judson, Mobile, Birmingham-Southern, Stillman and Oakwood -- were among 49 schools granted Honorable Mention on the Templeton list.

Samford also is included on the Templeton Foundation's listing of the 100 top Free Enterprise Institutions, cited for emphasizing "personal initiative and self-reliance among their students."

Earlier this year, Samford was recognized as one of America's top regional universities in U.S. News & World Report's 1991 edition of "America's Best Colleges." Samford ranked 29th among the nation's 561 regional universities. Alabama's largest private educational institution and Birmingham's oldest college or university, Samford celebrates its sesquicentennial during 1991-92.

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Witnessing during Mardi Gras
yields positive responses

By Breena Kent Paine

F-20
NOBTS

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NEW ORLEANS (BP)--"I've been with the Moonies, the Mormons, the Jehovah's Witnesses, but you guys have something different. I want what you have," a doctor from Venezuela told a graduate of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Emerson Wiles, pastor of First Baptist Church of Fayetteville, Tenn., had brought a team from his church to New Orleans to share Christ during Mardi Gras festivities through the ministry of Vieux Carre Baptist Church. He and 73 other Christians from across the nation joined together in passing out nearly 13,000 gospel tracts and leading at least 30 people to Christ during the annual holiday.

Then there was Russ. He came to New Orleans to get drunk and forget about his problems. Someone handed him a tract the Sunday before "Fat Tuesday" (Feb. 12); and that night, alone in his hotel room, Russ read about Christ's love.

Finding a phone number on the back of the tract, he called Vieux Carre's pastor, Roy Humphrey, and made an appointment to see him on Monday. The NOBTS alumnus whose church is one block off Bourbon Street waited, but Russ never showed up.

On Monday night, one of Fayetteville's laymen, David Harrison, was sharing Christ on the French Quarter streets when a man approached him.

"I've got a question for you about my relationship with my girlfriend," said the man, who proceeded to tell Harrison of the fight that had prompted his "escape" to New Orleans, from Wichita, Kan. Harrison listened, but directed the conversation to the man's relationship with God instead. There in the midst of the crowds in the streets, the man asked Jesus into his heart.

"I don't understand why someone would have to drive 900 miles to find Jesus when he is right there wherever you are. ... By the way, do you know Roy Humphrey? My name's Russ and I was supposed to have a meeting with him today," he said.

"The Lord promises that when the word is faithfully given out, it will not return void," said Finis Beauchamp, an alumnus of New Orleans Seminary and pastor of First Baptist Church in Port Allen, La. Beauchamp has been sharing the gospel during Mardi Gras since his seminary days.

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Although many people do not seem responsive to the gospel while "partying," he commented, many of them inadvertently will stuff a given tract in their pocket. "Now (after Mardi Gras) is the time when the Holy Spirit can work on their hearts," he said, as they are recovering from their hangovers or feeling guilty for "sinning some great sin."

"This is really the time we need to be praying -- now, this week."

Witnessing in the French Quarter during Mardi Gras is "not the easiest place in the world to share Christ," said Beauchamp, who while witnessing below a balcony two years ago, was "doused with alcohol." Others he has been with have had beads thrown at their heads; and one man with horns on his hat even yelled, "I rebuke you in the name of Satan!"

"Witnessing during Mardi Gras has to be innovative," said Beauchamp, who along with teams from Louisiana, Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, Georgia, Nebraska, Illinois, Missouri, and Arkansas, passed out gospel tracts with catchy titles. "Free Drinks" tells how someone may receive "living water"; and "Just Do It" and "How to Get to Heaven from New Orleans" give steps for accepting Christ.

One of the Christians who walked the streets with others this week was LaVern Kramer, an 86-year-old layman from Lincoln, Neb., who has been witnessing in the French Quarter during Mardi Gras for 37 years.

On Monday, one man grabbed Kramer by the arm and said, "You may not remember me, but eight years ago, you prayed for me. I've been looking for you ever since."

Later, Kramer was kneeling on a street corner, praying with three men who had just accepted Christ, when someone yelled out, "Hey, Kramer! I see you're still on your knees. You may not remember me, but ten years ago, in St. Louis, Mo., you led me to the Lord."

"Some people are hurting and looking for things to heal that hurt; others couldn't care less," Wiles said. "It's really no different from my community and yours as far as response to the gospel."

"The drunk is drunk. The homosexual is going to the same hell as the doctor and lawyer if they don't know Jesus," he continued. "Witnessing here during Mardi Gras just makes us bolder to witness in our own communities when we return home. ... Nothing takes the place of good old on-the-job training." --30--

CORRECTION: Paragraph 12 of (BP) story, "1990 Vacation Bible Schools result in prospects, professions," released 2/15/91 should read: "In another area, VBS helped sustain mission efforts worldwide as participants gave \$1.14 million to the Cooperative Program in 1990, a decrease of \$4,437 from 1989 contributions."

Thanks,
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