

# (BP)

**-- BAPTIST PRESS**  
News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE  
SBC Executive Committee  
901 Commerce #750  
Nashville, Tennessee 37203  
(615) 244-2355

February 25, 1991

91-28

Distorted vision prevents  
effective evangelism

By Mark Wingfield

*N-HMB*

CHICAGO (BP)--Southern Baptists must correct a distorted vision that prevents them from effectively evangelizing America's ethnics and the world, Oscar Romo said.

Romo, director of language church extension with the Home Mission Board, addressed Baptist state ethnic leadership, state directors of missions and state church extension leaders during the HMB's annual leadership conference in Chicago.

Romo also called for structural changes within the denomination to include more ethnics in leadership.

"Cultural presbyopia has come to Southern Baptist life," he said, explaining that presbyopia is the medical condition of distorted vision that often afflicts middle-aged adults.

"We are not having a clear vision for evangelizing the most responsive mission field God has brought to our nation."

Southern Baptists, a predominantly Anglo denomination, must realize America will not long be a predominantly Anglo nation, Romo explained.

"America's ethnic groups are fast becoming a larger share of the population. Someday soon, white Americans will be a minority group. Already one out of every four in America defines himself as Hispanic or non-white.

"By 2056 the average U.S. resident will trace his heritage to Africa, Asia, the Hispanic world, the Pacific islands or the Middle East -- almost everywhere except white Europe.

"Once America was a microcosm of Europe," he said, "but today America is a microcosm of the world."

Already, American English is influenced by 636 languages and dialects spoken in the nation, Romo said. "It is imperative that the gospel be proclaimed in the language of the people."

He quoted a language missionary who lamented that too often Christians attempt to share a message of love in a language ethnics don't understand and don't appreciate.

If Southern Baptists intend to spread the gospel worldwide, they first must be effective in evangelizing the world as it comes to America, Romo claimed. "America has become a global mission field from which the gospel will be preached worldwide."

Because of these sociological changes, churches and denominations must change, Romo said. "In the United States, the church is approaching the 21st century with a 19th century institutional structure.

"If Southern Baptists plan to evangelize America, and from there the world, careful consideration needs to be given to updating the infrastructure of the denomination," he declared. "The infrastructure must seek to meet the needs of the people rather than the people the needs of the infrastructure.

"The infrastructure must include all of the people, not just some of the people."

Romo urged the Southern Baptist Convention to create two new vice presidential elected offices -- one for ethnics and one for blacks.

--more--

"Traditionally, Baptist leaders have come primarily from a particular section of the country, been influenced by selected institutions and have been lily white," he said. "With the exception of four instances, all convention officers have been Anglo.

"Ethnics will never learn to be in places of leadership if we don't have opportunities to learn to be leaders."

Romo concluded: "The current trends of unchurched people in America imply that America is becoming a non-Christian nation. Baptists must prayerfully decide whether to evangelize the responsive groups or lose their base for evangelizing the world."

--30--

Don't judge from culture,  
but from Bible, prof says

By Jim Newton

Baptist Press  
2/25/91

CHICAGO (BP)--Scripture, not culture, should guide Anglo congregations in dealing with ethnic missions, a professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School warned Southern Baptists.

Paul Heibert, chairman of the department of world missions and evangelism at the Chicago-area seminary, told state and national Southern Baptist language missions leaders that too many Christians confuse culture and Christianity and proclaim an American cultural religion instead of the gospel.

Differences in culture often cause conflicts between Anglo churches which allow ethnic missions to meet in their church buildings. For example, conflict can arise when the ethnic mission puts more value on fellowship and eating than it does on keeping rigid time schedules or cleaning up the church kitchen, Heibert said.

When facing such conflicts, Christians should ask themselves if they are making judgments based on culture or Scripture, he suggested.

"Culture must not determine the nature of the gospel," Heibert said. "Rather, the gospel must be prophetic and challenge the standards of culture and measure the standards of culture against the standard of God's truth as revealed in the life of Jesus Christ."

He urged Baptists to allow ethnic and language missions to express themselves in forms that might seem "foreign" to Americans.

He cautioned against judging other groups prematurely based on their styles of music, clothing, worship methods, religious symbols, architecture, meeting times, leadership styles and even church polity.

If ethnic groups are not encouraged to worship with music that is indigenous, then the gospel will always sound foreign and western to them, Heibert said.

Most Americans want to relate to "foreigners" on the basis of American culture, which places high value on organized efficiency, adhering to tight time schedules, cleanliness, sharp categories, and balanced accounts, he observed.

This is especially true in scheduling meetings, Heibert said. An American feels he owes an apology if he is 15 minutes late and that it would be rude to be an hour late.

An Arab or a Latin American, however, is often late intentionally because of cultural values that consider it "on time" to arrive an hour later than the scheduled time, Heibert said.

This often requires dialogue with Christians from other cultures, "who challenge our perspectives and help us understand ourselves," he said.

--30--

Without ethnic growth SBC  
would decline, Romo says

By Mark Wingfield

N. Davis

CHICAGO (BP)--Without its ethnic congregations, the Southern Baptist Convention would have declined in number of churches and shown less growth on four other fronts over the past decade, according to Oscar Romo.

Romo, director of language church extension for the SBC Home Mission Board, presented statistics on ethnic and SBC growth at the HMB's annual leadership conference in Chicago.

The data was compiled by Delbert Fann, national ethnic missionary for special projects. Fann, a home missionary for 30 years, used Uniform Church letter statistics and information from ethnic church growth requests as the basis for the study.

While the number of SBC churches increased 5.45 percent between 1980 and 1989, the number of ethnic churches increased 142.86 percent, the study reports. Without that large increase in ethnic congregations, the SBC would have recorded a decline of 2.99 percent in number of churches, the data showed.

In 1980, the SBC had 35,831 churches, including 2,074 ethnic churches. By 1989 that number had increased to 37,785 churches, of which 5,037 were ethnic. The percentage of SBC churches that are ethnic doubled during that period, from 5.79 percent to 13 percent.

The percentage of annual SBC baptisms occurring in ethnic churches also doubled during the decade. In 1980, ethnic baptisms accounted for 3.05 percent of all baptisms in the convention. By 1989, ethnic baptisms accounted for 6.06 percent of annual SBC baptisms.

Overall, SBC baptisms for the period declined 18.30 percent, but ethnic baptisms increased 62.51 percent. In the past three years, the SBC has reversed its decline in annual baptisms, but has not yet achieved the level of the late '70s and early '80s.

Other categories included in the study are total membership, total receipts and total missions gifts.

Ethnic congregations recorded double-digit increases in each of these areas. However, those increases do not impact SBC totals as disproportionately as number of churches and number of baptisms.

Total membership in ethnic churches increased 93.73 percent, while total receipts increased 197.76 percent and total missions gifts increased 170.35 percent.

Asian, Caribbean, European and Middle Eastern congregations are among Southern Baptists' fastest-growing. During the '80s, the number of SBC Asian congregations increased 556 percent to 1,312, Caribbean congregations increased 450 percent to 165, European congregations increased 362.2 percent to 208, and Middle Eastern congregations increased 360 percent to 69.

Hispanic congregations comprise the single largest group of SBC ethnic churches. The number of Hispanic congregations increased 86.6 percent to 2,612.

Romo cautioned the group that some Southern Baptists don't accept the statistics compiled from ethnic reports. "These are your figures, based on information you have given us."

Research done by state ethnic leadership and compiled by the HMB's language division has been used by the U.S. Census Bureau and Immigration and Naturalization Service but isn't good enough for some Southern Baptists, he said.

"There are Baptist brethren who have questioned and continue to question our integrity as to whether there actually are that many ethnics," Romo said. "Because our brother is pale, the ethnic will have to prove his existence."

While this data can be re-documented, such a task would deviate time, energy and creativity which could otherwise be used in evangelism, Romo said.

Attitudinal barriers hinder  
ethnic growth, Romo says

By Mark Wingfield

NHMS

CHICAGO (BP)--Evangelizing America's ethnics will require Southern Baptists to overcome several self-inflicted barriers, the denomination's director of language missions said.

Speaking to the annual gathering of ethnic missions leaders in Chicago, Oscar Romo quoted the cartoon character Pogo to say, "We have seen the enemy, and the enemy is us."

Romo characterized attitudes that have become "specks in our vision," preventing Southern Baptists from evangelizing ethnic America. Such attitudes include:

1. Everybody should speak English, so there's no need for language congregations.
2. New congregations should be planned by the association and not started by ethnics as the opportunity arises.
3. Ethnic missions should be discouraged from organizing into churches because "they" might become more in number than "us" and "outvote us."
4. All missions must have a sponsor, missions may not sponsor other missions, and churches should not be admitted to associations if they don't own property.
5. Ethnic congregations are not a good investment because they cannot become self-supporting quickly enough.
6. If sharing facilities with an Anglo church, ethnics should learn to be "Americans like us."
7. It is acceptable for associations to recognize Anglo churches that deviate doctrinally, but not to recognize ethnic fellowships that organize "by the book."

Romo also cited concerns with other SBC programs he said don't adequately represent ethnics and thereby create barriers to growth.

Too many ethnic pastors don't have retirement benefits or aren't contributing to the plans they enrolled in, he said, reporting that 43 percent have no retirement.

Romo questioned a decision by the SBC Radio and Television Commission to stop producing language programs, despite continued requests for the programs.

Finally, he expressed concern that some Southern Baptists don't trust the research data his division has compiled on ethnic population and churches.

--30--

Ministry can lead to church  
starts, pilot project shows

By Mark Wingfield

NHMS

Baptist Press  
2/25/91

BELL, Calif. (BP)--Starting ministry centers in some communities can lay the groundwork for successful church starting, a pilot project indicates.

The pilot also shows a way to redeem unused space in declining churches, a veteran home missionary says.

Bell Baptist Center began in 1989 in an unused educational building at First Baptist Church in Bell, Calif., a small city in metropolitan Los Angeles. The predominantly Anglo First Baptist Church experienced decline as the community changed from mostly Anglo to mostly Hispanic.

This community was chosen by the Home Mission Board and California Southern Baptist Convention as the site for a pilot to test the possibility of starting ministry centers that could develop into churches.

--more--

Within six months after its doors opened, the Bell Baptist Center gave birth to a Spanish-language congregation, Iglesia Bautista de Bell. Sunday morning attendance now averages more than 60, with about 90 percent of those being new believers baptized into the church.

The Baptist Center and mission church occupy an educational building that hadn't been used in five or six years, says L.G. Chaddick, church and community ministries consultant. As a veteran home missionary in California, Chaddick has seen hundreds of Southern Baptist churches grow and decline with shifting populations.

Chaddick commends First Baptist for its contribution. Because the church was willing to open its building, money that normally would have been required to pay rent was put into hiring a full-time pastor-director.

"I cannot visualize the association, state convention or Home Mission Board having enough resources to get facilities like this," he says. "Many of our churches in the Los Angeles area have space not being used. With this example, I can go to other churches and show them that with cooperative resources, we can do something positive."

Additional cooperative resources have come from short- and long-term volunteers. During the first year alone, five Christian Service Corps volunteers cleaned up the facility and made necessary renovations. Other churches in the association regularly provide volunteers and supplies.

"This gives an idea of what we can do together," says pastor-director Francisco Juarbe, who previously served as a Mission Service Corps volunteer in Puerto Rico. "If we have this kind of cooperation, it will be possible to start new churches."

Terese Carlson, a US-2 missionary from Hereford, Texas, has been a key volunteer in beginning the work, Juarbe says. Carlson, who came to California speaking no Spanish, now teaches children's classes in both Spanish and English and heads the center's English literacy classes.

Half of the current congregation came into the mission through the literacy program. Most other members were introduced to the mission through the center's food pantry, clothing closet or other ministries.

Individuals helped by these ministries now serve as volunteer leaders to keep the ministries going, allowing Juarbe to concentrate on pastoral tasks, such as visiting a list of 300 prospects.

"Members of the church are now taking more responsibility for the center," the pastor says. "We're seeing an empowerment of the community. Because the people received in the beginning, now they want to give."

For example, Olga Hernandez is food ministries director. She and her four children first came to the Baptist Center when they needed help with food in 1989.

"I came and saw the people who love," she says. "I saw it was important to be born again."

Hernandez explains that she came looking for help for her own needs but has now found a way to help others meet their needs.

"Through teaching them English or becoming their friend, we earn the right to invite them to church or to tell them about Jesus," Carlson explains. "Most of the people came first to look for English classes and then heard the gospel."

"I am convinced ministry opened the door to plant a church," Juarbe adds, comparing this church start to his previous experience starting a church in San Francisco.

"In San Francisco we did only evangelism. But it would take more time to have the same number of people we have here. We see faster growth with evangelism through ministry."

Juarbe says he can see the difference the ministry center has made in creating openness to the church in the community. When he first started knocking on doors for evangelistic visitation, people would not let him in because they thought he was a Mormon or Jehovah's Witness, he recalls.

"Now you can knock on almost any door and they will let you in. Most of the people around here know we are here for them.

"Starting a new church using ministry is possible."

--30--

(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press

CORRECTION: In the (BP) release "New England names Martin editor" dated 2/22/91 change the second graph to read as follows:

Martin, a Kentucky native, assumed the editorship on Jan. 1. She has been on The New England Baptist staff since 1987, serving first as editorial/production assistant and then as associate editor.

Thank you,  
Baptist Press

Missionaries begin  
work in Wales

By Mike Creswell

*N-FMS*

Baptist Press  
2/25/91

BRIDGEND, Wales (BP)--Southern Baptist career missionaries have begun working for the first time in Wales, starting in one of the largest housing developments in Europe.

Missionaries Bill and Lucy Pat Curl, appointed last October, are cooperating with Welsh Baptists on ministry in the Brackla housing development. The Curls, who live in Brackla, have visited all the Baptist churches in the area and found a warm welcome.

"We've been treated royally by these people," said Mrs. Curl. She added that many have kidded them about leaving warm Florida for Wales, which is in the throes of one of the harshest winters in years. Curl, of Louisville, Ky., was associate pastor of First Baptist Church in Orlando, Fla., from 1972-90. Mrs. Curl, of Georgetown, Ky., was accompanist and choral director.

Brackla is in the Bridgend area, between the larger cities of Swansea and Cardiff in southern Wales. It is a principal industrial area, boasting Ford and Sony factories along with dozens of smaller industries.

"That was just a bare hillside 10 years ago," said Ian Burley, slowing his car during a tour of Brackla, called a "housing estate" in Wales. Burley, evangelism director for the Baptist Union of Wales, pointed to a hillside dotted with clusters of houses stretching to the horizon. Houses throughout the complex are in all stages of construction; others, already completed, bristle with "For Sale" signs.

Housing units in Bridgend range from stand-alone houses to condominium-type attached units, from basic bungalows for retirees to luxury homes. The housing market slumps in most of Britain, but construction continues here.

Motioning toward yet-unpaved dirt roads slicing through former farmland, Burley said, "You see those fields there? That's the site of a new school." It will be the third for the area. He wondered aloud if Baptists can get permission to use a school as a meeting place. A medical clinic and a small but busy shopping center with a supermarket and pharmacy have been built.

--more--

The mammoth development taking shape at Bridgend is the second-largest private housing development in Europe since World War II, Burley said. It already houses 10,000 residents in about a square mile. To Burley, an energetic and creative man, the situation spells missions with a capital M.

But meeting such a challenge is hard for Welsh Baptists, who have about 70 pastors to serve more than 30,000 members spread among 600 churches. About 7,000 members are in English-language churches. The others are part of some 20 percent of the population who speak the lilting Welsh tongue.

"The fact is that some of our (pastors) are not able to retire because of the needs and the demands, and they just have to keep working on and on," said Burley. In recent years the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board has sent two-year mission workers to help churches in several locations.

Baptists organized their first church in Wales in 1649 and attained their greatest numbers in the last century. But their ranks have fallen in recent decades, reflecting chaotic social and economic upheavals that have swept Wales. Most coal mines, once the economic backbone, have closed. A sharp decline in spiritual life has accompanied the economic decline, as many Welsh have abandoned church ties.

As population centers have shifted, many Baptist churches gradually have closed during recent years. Burley admitted the idea of launching a ministry in the new development took some getting used to for some church leaders.

The economic boom around Bridgend caught Baptists by surprise; they hesitated too long on buying property within the estate borders. Now they may be unable to buy church property there at any price. Bar owners moved faster, Burley noted, pointing out two well-established "public houses."

Circling to one side of the development, Burley pointed across a railroad track to clusters of small factories where many Brackla residents work. One small factory makes shoes, another candy, a third furniture. He believes chaplaincy programs could be started in such industries. Other Brackla residents commute to jobs in Swansea or Cardiff, a half-hour drive away.

Hope Baptist Church in Bridgend, led by pastor David Hughes, is the closest English-speaking Baptist congregation to Brackla. Ruhamah Baptist Church, a Welsh-speaking congregation, also meets in Bridgend. Three other English-speaking churches gather in outlying areas. Visiting area churches during a snowy February has been a real adventure, Curl noted, as many mountain passes have been closed by snowfall.

Hughes and other pastors are "very keen" for ministry support from the new missionaries because local church workers are overwhelmed by needs, Burley confirmed. Although the pastor has had contacts with residents in the new development for weddings, funerals and an occasional crisis, "He has no way of following up," Burley said. "He's absolutely worked to death."

Already Curl has been called on to lead a funeral, which has led to good contacts with an unchurched family.

"At this point we're still surveying, prayerfully trying to get a feel for the needs of the community," Curl said. "Initially, we're looking to minister to needs we find, probably establishing Bible studies and other ministries. New Christians will be directed toward existing churches for now, he said.

"Awesome possibilities are everywhere and countless needs can be met by a ministering church. Christians in the area have a tremendous sense something must be done. We're discovering many godly people who want revival."

Ministry will not primarily be preaching, but rather "person-to-person caring," said Burley, who will help coordinate the Curls' work.

--more--

While statistics may show many residents are church members, Burley dismisses such figures. "A high percentage claim church affiliation, but they're not active anywhere and don't go anywhere," he explained.

Christians need to move quickly in such an environment, he believes. Already, cult groups have sent workers into the area to get a foothold.

"Now I wonder if that farmer will sell us part of his land for a church building," he asked himself as he continued his windshield survey.

--30--

German churches minister  
to U.S. families touched by war

By Debbie Baird Buie

*N-GMB*

Baptist Press  
2/25/91

WIESBADEN, Germany (BP)--Baptist churches in Germany have launched ministries to aid U.S. military families separated by the Persian Gulf war.

Many soldiers deployed to the gulf were living in Germany with their families. Now those families are under pressure while one of the spouses is away for months.

The war has been especially difficult for many women whose husbands are away. They are left to deal with children alone while at the same time coping with life in a foreign country.

As Operation Desert Shield took form late last year, the English-speaking churches of the European Baptist Convention responded with their own operations of ministry and concern. About 60 EBC churches across Europe minister to English-speaking people from around the globe, but in Germany many EBC churches minister to Americans in the military.

Bethel Baptist Church in Frankfurt, where Tom Hill is pastor, launched a program called "Shoulders." As its name implies, the program lends extra support to military personnel living throughout the Frankfurt area who have been affected by the war.

"This is an excellent tool to witness to the whole area," said church member Pam Oswald, explaining that many people not affiliated with the church have become Shoulders affiliates.

A 13-member team maintains contacts in each military housing unit in the Frankfurt area and also has begun reaching outlying installations, she said.

Weekly get-togethers provide fellowship, and the Bethel Woman's Missionary Union sponsors a weekly "Ladies' Night Out" program. The church also sponsors a luncheon once a month.

"We feel it's important that the children get support from a male figure, so we're providing this opportunity for them to have time with men in our church," Oswald explained.

The next phase in Shoulders will be a twice-a-month "Matinees" program on Saturdays that will line up teenagers to spend time with children and assign "big brothers" and "big sisters" to teens who have a parent in the gulf.

Immanuel Baptist Church in Wiesbaden has set up a similar program. Group meetings for spouses left behind are held and include free child care, said Mary Ann Orr, whose husband has not been deployed.

"We counsel each other," she said, adding that the regular meetings have been a steady force for participants since hostilities began. Immanuel also plans to add Saturday events and regular dinners, Orr said.

At Giessen Baptist Church, wives meet two or three times a month for prayer. Ten members of the small church are deployed to the gulf.

"We focus on fellowship and prayer, and our community meets once a month for prayer," said pastor Charlie Clifton. "We're also making a video to send to the guys" in the gulf and conducting a special deacon ministry to military families affected by the war.

--more--

Faith Baptist Church, largest of the EBC churches, has launched an equally large ministry to families in the Kaiserslautern area, where a cluster of U.S. military bases comprise the largest military community in Europe.

Operation Desert Storm led to creation of "Operation Oasis" at Faith, said pastor Jim Tomberlin. The idea, he said, is that families of deployed service members will have an oasis of support at the church.

Faith also has expanded its existing deacon family ministry program, assigning deacons to check on families of deployed military personnel each week. An adopt-a-family program encourages intact families to "adopt" a family with one or more members deployed in the gulf. A cassette tape ministry offers tapes of worship services free to families.

Beryl Tomberlin, the pastor's wife, leads a spouse support group that meets weekly to help participants adjust to life in the absence of a spouse.

Rhein Valley Baptist Church, located near Rhein Main Air Base on the outskirts of Frankfurt, got involved in the USO's work with soldiers and airmen passing through the area en route to the gulf. Not surprisingly, some of the volunteers have spouses now in Saudi Arabia.

About 10 volunteers from the church work at least two shifts each week to make sandwiches for the planeloads of soldiers who have a layover at the base.

Peggi Lopez said participating helps her adjust to her husband's absence -- sometimes. "Sometimes, it's hard," she admitted. Her husband was among the first sent to the gulf.

Lopez' assignment entails just talking to the soldiers. "We can't witness to them unless they bring up the subject," she said. "I keep wondering: do they know the Lord?"

--30--

NOTE TO EDITORS: Debbie Baird Buie, a Southern Baptist writer, and her husband, Gary, who is in the U.S. military, live in Gernsheim, Germany. She is editor of Highlights, newsletter of the European Baptist Convention.

A personal reflection:  
the way war looks from here

By Debbie Baird Buie

F- fmb

Baptist Press  
2/25/91

WIESBADEN, Germany (BP)--In August I received word that elements of my brother's Air Force Reserve unit had been put on active duty and were bound for Saudi Arabia and Operation Desert Shield.

I began some long-distance worrying.

Being in Europe, there was precious little I could do but worry. He and his wife had a baby due in December. With the initial three-month rotation plan, I reasoned, if he were one of the ones to go early at least he'd be home in time for my niece's birth. I turned my worry over to the Lord; it was in his hands.

My brother wasn't "called up."

But as Desert Shield went beyond three months, our families began to inquire how it might affect my Army husband, Gary. In military life, you learn never to say never. Well, he'd received no orders to go ... yet. With many Europe-based units being deployed to Saudi Arabia, I decided to start worrying again. And then I put it back in God's hands.

It was with some stoicism that we in Europe began to realize the good news of the end of the Cold War and a reduction of the military presence here was being replaced by bad news. The bad news was that some of our deactivating units were not deactivating. Some transfers planning to head home were put on hold indefinitely. Retirements were postponed. Many of our friends, neighbors and loved ones would find their green BDU's (battle dress uniforms) replaced by the desert-sand variety.

--more--

The European euphoria brought on by Glasnost and German reunification was lost. War again threatened our soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines. War also threatened our families.

It has been said that no one desires peace more than soldiers under fire. I would add: "and their families." Some of us are strong or discover new strengths in times of trial. Some need the strength of another to help them through.

Military families, especially those overseas, don't have the luxury of being able to visit relatives or even call them frequently for encouragement. If we are lucky, we've known our neighbors for three years at the most. Our church fellowships quickly become our extended families.

Units deployed to what is now Operation Desert Storm leave behind rear detachments and support groups to take care of family members. But there's nothing quite like sharing your burden with a Christian friend. It makes it so much easier to turn it all over to the Lord.

My husband still walks through the front door every evening. And every evening I read his face for some hint of new orders. When the "Desert Storm Bulletins" break into our Armed Forces Network TV shows, my heart stops for an instant.

But in the calm that only Christ gives, I can hear my heart singing a most comforting song: "In the dark of the night have I oft hid my face, while the storms howl above me and there's no hiding place; 'Mid the crash of the thunder, precious Lord, hear my cry; Keep me safe 'til the storm passes by" (from "'Til the Storm Passes By," by Mosie Lister).

--30--

Maryland abortion law  
setback for pro-lifers

By Tom Strode

N-CO  
CC

Baptist Press  
2/25/91

WASHINGTON (BP)--A newly-enacted Maryland abortion law may prove to be a setback not only for pro-life advocates but for religious liberty defenders as well.

The law was passed by the House of Delegates on Feb. 18 in Annapolis and signed the same day by Governor William Schaefer. It was approved by the Senate a week earlier.

The act, in practical terms, allows abortion with few, if any, restrictions. Even the limitations in the law appear to have loopholes permitting such practices as late-term abortions and bypassing parental notification if the physician performing the abortion so chooses.

A "conscience clause," which has been in effect in the state for more than 20 years, is altered by the act to expose physicians, nurses and other health-care workers to civil suits and job discrimination if they decline to recommend an abortion. Hospitals with policies prohibiting referrals could be subject to the loss of accreditation. Under the new law, a health-care professional who did not refer for an abortion could be sued if there were problems later with the mother's health arising from the pregnancy. The clause maintains protections for health-care workers who conscientiously object to performing or participating in abortions, but removes protection for those who refuse to refer women for abortions.

A bill to restore protection formerly in the clause was introduced in the House of Delegates Feb. 22. An aide in the governor's office said Schaefer supported reinstating protection deleted from the "conscience clause" but was uncertain if he would support the House bill.

"Religious liberty groups will be watching closely to see how the state of Maryland protects the First Amendment rights of health-care workers," said Michael Whitehead, general counsel of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

"I am appalled by this disgraceful bill," said Richard D. Land, executive director of the Christian Life Commission. "It is now clearly 'open season' on unborn babies in the state of Maryland.

--more--

"I am particularly disturbed by limitations on the conscience clause. If enforced, it will virtually eliminate pro-life people from the ranks of health-care workers in Maryland. It is a serious violation of the First Amendment freedom of religion and freedom of speech rights of pro-life, health-care workers."

Other aspects of the law, according to the National Right to Life Committee, are:

-- Abortion is allowed without restriction until the unborn child is able to live outside the womb. Abortion after viability is permitted when the "health" or life of the mother is endangered. "Health," under the United States Supreme Court's 1973 ruling legalizing abortion, has been construed to mean nearly any reason offered by the mother.

-- Parental notice is required for a minor, but it may be waived if the physician performing the abortion determines that (1) it is not in the girl's best interest to inform her parents, (2) the girl is mature enough to make the decision or (3) she may be in danger of physical or emotional abuse by her parents.

-- A person performing an abortion is protected from liability if a woman desires to bring suit for damages caused by his failure to provide information about the procedure.

Among the amendments rejected was one that would have prevented abortions on the basis of the sex of the child.

"(The law) promotes the abortionist and his trade above children's rights, women's rights and parents' rights," said Ann Philburn, state legislative assistant for National Right to Life. "It promotes abortion on demand above freedom of conscience. It enshrines abortion advocacy into state law."

The Christian Life and Public Affairs Committee of the Maryland-Delaware Baptist Convention wrote the members of both committees considering the bill expressing opposition to abortion on demand and requesting a parental consent requirement, said Michael Cox, pastor of Georgia Avenue Baptist Church in Wheaton, Md., and chairman of the committee. Members of some Southern Baptist churches lobbied against the bill, he said. The defeat of some pro-life assembly members in last year's elections made it clear that such an abortion bill would be difficult to halt in this session, he added.

--30--

Agee's leukemia  
in remission

Baptist Press  
2/26/91

N-CO  
(OKLA.)

SHAWNEE, Okla. (BP)--Oklahoma Baptist University President Bob R. Agee, diagnosed with hairy-cell leukemia last September, was told by specialists at M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston last week that an experimental treatment program has apparently placed the disease into remission.

Agee underwent a 10-day treatment program last December at the cancer center, which is using an experimental drug called 2-CDA to combat the rare form of leukemia. Doctors using the chemotherapy are reporting success rates of 95 percent or better. Agee returned to M.D. Anderson last week for a follow-up evaluation.

"On Monday, Feb. 11, we received the exciting news that there were no cancer cells evident in the bone marrow and that my blood test revealed that the blood has moved into normal ranges in all categories," Agee said. "Even though there were rare occurrences of atypical cells still present in the bone marrow, they are rare and will likely disappear by the next follow-up evaluation in May. It is the judgment of the doctors at M.D. Anderson that the leukemia is moving toward complete remission if not already in complete remission."

Agee said he feels fortunate to have found an effective treatment program in such a short period of time. After being diagnosed with the leukemia last September, doctors at Baptist Medical Center in Oklahoma City placed the 52-year-old president on an Interferon treatment program. The drug, however, produced severe flu-like side effects, which limited his ability to resume a regular work schedule.

--more--

Agee learned of M.D. Anderson's experimental program through Jerry Baker, a Baptist layman from Muskogee who had been diagnosed with the same disease. Baker told Agee he completed the program last year and was in complete remission. Agee followed up on Baker's suggestion and was admitted to the program last November.

"My family and I are obviously elated over the news," Agee said. "We want to thank all the people from across Oklahoma and throughout the nation for their encouragement and prayer support during these past five months.

"So many things that have occurred have been obvious answers to prayer," he said. "Southern Baptists are a people of great faith who believe in and practice prevailing prayer. What a great blessing it has been to feel the prayers and to know that people were standing with us. It is obvious that God has much more that he wants me to do at OBU."

Since early January, Agee has maintained a regular office schedule and has resumed outside speaking engagements.

--30--

Hall elected president of  
Hardin-Simmons University

Baptist Press  
2/25/91

N-10

ABILENE, Texas (BP)--Edwin L. (Lanny) Hall, president of Wayland Baptist University in Plainview, Texas, since 1989, was named president of Hardin-Simmons University by university trustees Feb. 22.

Hall will succeed Jesse C. Fletcher, president since 1977. Fletcher will become chancellor June 1 and continue as the Connally Professor of Missions.

Hall, recommended to the board by a 16-member presidential search committee, will be the first layman to be president since the late Rupert N. Richardson, who served from 1943-1953.

Both Hall and his wife, the former Carol Jean Bardin, are former HSU students. He attended during the 1967-68 school year and she was a student from 1965-68.

"Carol and I are honored and humbled to be invited to return to Hardin-Simmons University to assume such an important role. Hardin-Simmons University gave us our start. We were introduced to the world of academe here. We were exposed to outstanding teaching and to wonderful Christian professionals," Hall said.

"Hardin-Simmons is a special place and we feel very blessed to return," he added.

Beginning in 1975, Hall entered 11 years of various federal and state government positions. For three years, he worked in Washington on the staff of the United States House of Representatives, including two years as special assistant to the majority leader. He was also a three-term member of the Texas House of Representatives.

A lifelong Southern Baptist, Hall is a deacon and has been active in all phases of church life.

--30--