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April 4, 1991

91-51

Missionary family returns
to Oklahoma for Bethea burial

N-FMB

MOMBASA, Kenya (BP)--Southern Baptist missionary Ralph Bethea and his four children left Kenya April 3 for the United States, where his murdered wife, Lynda, was to be buried later in the week.

Her body was flown out of Kenya separately after being released by police officials investigating the killing.

She was beaten to death March 27 by robbers on a rural road in Kenya, according to her husband, also badly beaten as he tried to fight off the attackers. Local police initially reported four suspects had been arrested, but national police have since declined to comment on the case.

X-ray examinations of Bethea April 2 confirmed several cracked ribs and revealed a broken wrist. Bethea also is experiencing double vision. A CAT scan showed he sustained a slight concussion from blows to his head. He also suffered hip and shoulder injuries and numerous abrasions.

Funeral services are scheduled for April 5 at First Baptist Church in Tulsa, Okla., with a sunrise burial service in Tulsa tentatively scheduled for April 6. The Bethea family also plans to attend a memorial service later that day at First Baptist Church in Euless, Texas. Additional memorial services are scheduled for April 12 at First Baptist Church in Jackson, Miss., and April 13 at Highview Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky.

Bethea and his children, Ralph III, 17; Joshua, 13; Luke, 12; and Lizette, 9, plan to spend time with his parents in Oklahoma and on a family farm in Mississippi and decide whether or not to return to Kenya.

The family is being accompanied to the United States by Joseph Maisha, pastor of the 4,000-member Ushindi Baptist Church in Mombasa, and Bay Forrest, a Southern Baptist who teaches at Rift Valley Academy in Kenya, where the two older Bethea children attend school.

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RTVC begins FamilyNet
operation April 1

By Madge Hammond

N-CC (Texas) Baptist Press
4/4/91

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--The Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission began operation of FamilyNet, a broadcast television faith and family network April 1. The network previously was owned by Old Time Gospel Hour and Liberty Broadcast Network of Lynchburg, Va. Both entities are a part of the ministry of Jerry Falwell.

The purchase was authorized by RTVC trustees in January.

The purchase will multiply the outreach of commission programming, said RTVC President Jack Johnson. "FamilyNet is accessible to some ten to twelve millions not now being reached by the RTVC's ACTS network," Johnson said. "That means we can more than double the potential for preaching the gospel to the people of America."

A number of RTVC programs began airing on FamilyNet April 1, Johnson said, and others will be added later. He said "COPE," a live call-in counseling program, will be carried on both networks each afternoon. "Sunshine Factory," a children's program produced by RTVC personnel, will be on FamilyNet, along with "The Baptist Hour" and "Invitation to Life," a weekly evangelistic service.

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The \$200,000 cash paid for FamilyNet came from funds reallocated by trustees from the 1990-91 fixed asset budget of the commission. No other cash payments are to be made, and no borrowed funds were required to complete the purchase, Johnson said.

As a part of the purchase, RTVC officials said, the "Old Time Gospel Hour" will be carried daily on both FamilyNet and ACTS. The air time used on the two networks will be charged against a \$3 million program time credit that will be amortized at the regular rates charged other programmers on FamilyNet and ACTS, the officials said. At present rates, they said, the credit would be used completely in less than three years, and if rates are increased in the future, the increases would be passed along to "Old Time Gospel Hour."

The RTVC trustees will consider Restated Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws for FamilyNet at a scheduled meeting April 9, according to Johnson. "We will recommend the elected commissioners also form the board of directors of FamilyNet," Johnson said. "We want it clearly understood that both FamilyNet and ACTS are under the control of trustees elected by and responsible to the Southern Baptist Convention. There will be no outside directors, and no one other than the duly constituted commission trustees and personnel will have any control over the activities of the Radio-TV Commission, ACTS or FamilyNet," Johnson said.

Both networks will carry programs produced by many different church and denominational programmers. "The Radio and Television Commission is committed to the Great Commission," Johnson said. "Our assignment is to proclaim the gospel and we take that mission very seriously," he added. "The purchase of FamilyNet will open a door of opportunity that could enable us to touch as many as 25 percent of the television households in the United States, and that is a challenge we must meet," Johnson concluded.

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OU Sooners pledge careers
to other Big Eight schools

By Sarah Zimmerman

F-HMB

Baptist Press
4/4/91

LINCOLN, Neb. (BP)--In some circles, Brett Yohn, Bob Anderson and Jack Owens would be considered traitors. They are Oklahoma natives and graduates of Oklahoma University, but they pledged their careers to rival Big Eight schools.

A calling greater than their alma mater drove them to establish full-time student ministries on three Big Eight campuses. All three men are still involved in student work.

The trio met as students at OU where their lives were significantly impacted by the Baptist Student Union ministry. After graduation, Yohn worked as a US-2 missionary for the Home Mission Board, Anderson served the Army in Vietnam, and Owens attended Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Yohn and Owens were reunited when Yohn enrolled at Southwestern. As they reminisced about college days, they dreamed of every Big Eight school having a Baptist campus ministry.

The three Big Eight campuses without a full-time student ministry were the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, Kansas State and Iowa State. Yohn and Owens visited the three campuses and found an interest in the ministry, but no funds for the program.

They recruited Anderson, and the trio pledged to raise their own support. Anderson took the post at Kansas State since he had been stationed near the Manhattan, school while he was in the military. Yohn began working at UNL, and Owens moved to Ames, Iowa, to work at Iowa State.

Owens worked in Iowa for 12 years, building a student ministry begun by a local pastor. Owens is now a foreign missionary, working with students in South Korea. The ministry at Iowa State continues to flourish, with 150 of the school's 25,000 students attending weekly campus worship services.

Yohn and Anderson have stayed at their posts for 19 years and developed practically mirror ministries. Without student ministry buildings, work on both campuses focuses on weekly small-group Bible studies. About 80 students attend eight Bible studies on the UNL campus; 120 attend the dormitory Bible studies at Kansas State.

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Of the 25,000 students at UNL, Yohn says only an average of 35 cite Baptist as their religious preference when they enroll. Most students are Roman Catholic or Lutheran.

One UNL student became a Christian last fall. When her parents visited her on campus, they wanted to meet Yohn and other Southern Baptists because they were afraid their daughter had become involved in a cult.

It is not unusual for Yohn to meet students who have been in church all their lives without being challenged to make a personal commitment to Christ. They know about Christ's death and resurrection, Yohn says, but they don't know he died for them.

At Kansas State, most students are Catholic, Lutheran and Methodist. "They "have a strong upbringing, but that does not translate into godly living on campus," Anderson says.

When Anderson arrived in Manhattan, the town of 50,000 people had one Southern Baptist church. It now has two, as Anderson and his wife started a church in their home.

Yohn and his wife also started a church in their home. Lincoln, a city of 200,000, now has four Southern Baptist churches.

Part of Yohn's focus is to get students involved in one of those churches.

"If we cannot help our kids plug into a local church, when they leave they won't be equipped to be laborers in the kingdom," Yohn says.

Anderson agrees: "I'm after kids who will walk with God 20 and 30 years down the road. We try to build convictions in their lives about what the Bible says and about sharing the gospel. This is not just a performance thing while they're here."

"Our vision is to plant an ongoing ministry and mobilize our students," says Yohn. He notes that more than 35 people who were involved in the campus ministry at UNL are now involved in mission careers. He knows of two churches started by alumni who moved to a community without an evangelical church.

Yohn is working on a strategy to ask graduates to move to areas without an evangelical influence. He envisions them as tentmakers, planting churches, developing student ministries -- and possibly rooting for rival football teams.

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Critical needs cited for
bivocational ministers

By Chip Alford
Part one of a four-part series

F-55 B

Baptist Press
4/4/91

NASHVILLE (BP)--The acceptance of bivocational ministry is increasing in the Southern Baptist Convention, but not as quickly as the need for dual-career ministers, according to several SBC officials.

"The image of bivocational ministers is being lifted," said Dale Holloway, program consultant for bivocational ministries at the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. "We're making progress, but it's much too slow."

Holloway contends one reason for the hesitancy of some Southern Baptists to embrace bivocational ministers is a misunderstanding of their background and training.

"Many people still see bivocational pastors as non-professional, eighth-grade dropouts, but that just isn't true," Holloway said. A denominational survey showed 37 percent of the 10,000 Southern Baptist bivocational pastors have 17 years or more of formal education. In addition, 38 percent were employed in secular jobs classified as "professional or managerial."

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Churches led by bivocational pastors also tend to do well in baptism ratios, Sunday school enrollment and attendance, Holloway said. For every 100 church members led by a bivocational pastor, a survey showed 4.3 people were baptized, 77.8 percent were enrolled in Sunday school and 45.6 percent attended regularly. For the same number led by a full-time pastor, 4.1 people were baptized, 76.9 percent were enrolled in Sunday school and 43.3 percent attended regularly.

As education efforts continue, Holloway said acceptance of bivocational ministry is increasing among seminary students, full-time ministers and church members.

A small but increasing number of students at SBC colleges and seminaries are preparing for careers in both the secular and ministerial arenas, according to David Bunch, assistant vice president for church extension at the Home Mission Board.

Conferences on bivocational ministry are being held on the associational, state and convention-wide levels, and an SBC organization for bivocational ministers was formed last December. Convention agencies and institutions, state conventions and local associations are also including bivocational ministry as part of their missions and evangelism strategies.

In addition to bivocational pastors, about 32,000 ministers of music are part time, volunteer or bivocational, as are thousands of ministers of education, youth, children and other church staff members.

Bunch cited several reasons for the slowly growing acceptance of bivocational ministry. Sagging economies and population shifts in some areas have left many Baptist churches unable to pay the salary of a full-time pastor. These churches are finding their needs can be met by bivocational ministers, Bunch said.

Another factor is the feeling among some ministers that bivocational ministry provides greater financial security, Bunch said. Other ministers simply have other job skills they want to keep in use.

The contribution of bivocational ministers is vital to Southern Baptist church planting efforts, Bunch said, especially in newer convention areas.

"We have very heavy usage of bivocational pastors in Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine and Rhode Island," said Tom Moncrief, missions division director for the Baptist Convention of New England. "Our associate director of missions in Rhode Island is attempting to approach church planting with bivocational ministry as his main strategy."

D.G. McCoury, pastoral leadership consultant in the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's church administration department, said: "I've met some guys who start a church as a bivocational pastor, get the church to call someone else as pastor and then go somewhere else and start another church. They really feel that this is their calling."

Despite the needs in newer convention areas, bivocational pastors are concentrated in the South. For example, more than 50 percent of pastors in Alabama are bivocational, according to Holloway.

"We're hoping some bivocational ministers will see this as a challenge," Holloway said. "There is a desperate need for church planters in the East, West and North."

Some Baptists, however, still struggle with the legitimacy of what they see as a "part-time" ministry.

Kent Sanders, associate director of church/minister relations at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, said: "A lot of people still have the wrong idea that bivocational ministry is a second-rate opportunity, when that just isn't true. We're trying to increase awareness and encourage people to be open to bivocational ministry because the need is certainly there."

McCoury believes part of the negative image of bivocational ministry can be attributed to an improper use of terminology.

"My feeling is that we should not use the term 'bivocational minister,'" he said. "I think we should start using the term 'bivocational churches,' because it is really the church that cannot afford a full-time person. What happens in the mind of a lot of people is they hear the term, 'bivocational pastor,' and they immediately associate the idea that this guy is just a part-time preacher who can't handle a full-time church."

Bivocational pastors do face unique problems, such as balancing their secular career and church ministry. They also have less time for ministry-related responsibilities, such as visiting, witnessing and sermon preparation. Still, they bring unique strengths to their ministry as well.

"Bivocational ministry necessitates shared leadership within the church," Holloway said. "Church members are strengthened by becoming involved in ministry themselves."

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Busy life energizes
bivocational pastor

By Charles Willis
Part two of a four-part series

F-55B

Baptist Press
4/4/91

CAPITOL HEIGHTS, Md. (BP)--Rece Tucker preaches with the enthusiasm of a pastor who has had a full night's rest after a week of vacation.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

The fact is, Tucker considers himself full-time pastor to the 72 members of Unity Baptist Church in Capitol Heights, Md., and a part-time sales associate for the nearby AT&T Phone Center.

On a recent Sunday when he stood to bring the morning message, he had completed a week of night-and-day pastoral functions and had worked 27 hours for AT&T. That morning he had brought a car trunk full of materials to the temporary church facility and had helped early arrivals in setting up the worship area.

The "church," a borrowed meeting room normally used for seminars for selling Mary Kay Cosmetics, soon will be replaced with a remodeled, rented space in the same suburban Washington shopping mall.

For now, the Sunday morning routine begins by taking down the portrait of Mary Kay Ash, founder of the cosmetics company, and rearranging the tables and chairs in the all-pink meeting room.

Yet at worship time, Tucker led a two-and-one-half-hour service during which he prayed, sang and preached the gospel with unwavering strength.

"I've never felt better in my life," he declared.

Tucker became a Southern Baptist more than 10 years ago when he became aware of "what Southern Baptists have to offer in the way of education to the membership."

After two years as assistant pastor of Walnut Avenue Southern Baptist Church in Long Beach, Calif., he accepted a call as pastor of Seat Pleasant Baptist Church, Md., in 1982. After a year, he led the church, previously an independent congregation, to affiliate with the Southern Baptist Convention. This year, he became pastor of Unity Baptist Church, continuing his pattern of bivocational ministry.

Tucker doesn't like the term bivocational. He maintains pastors who support themselves in secular work are full-time pastors.

"I still have to do the same things as the pastor who has a full day in the church office," he said. "I may keep different hours, but I make hospital visits and have counseling appointments. I'm still performing the same tasks, and I may have already worked eight hours at the (AT&T) office."

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"I never run out of energy," he continued. "I'm doing what God wants me to do, and He has promised to give me what I need. God sustains me, and I don't get tired."

Family is another facet of Tucker's life that requires his attention. Donzetta, his wife of 24 years, and their nine-year-old son, David, enjoy church activities, and he said they understand his topsy-turvy schedule. Their daughter, DeBajier, is grown and working in another state.

"Church is our life," he maintains, "and we bowl together. Every year we take a trip, planning ahead and putting away a few dollars along. This year we're going to Canada."

Unlike some pastors who work a full week at secular employment, Tucker works a part-time job to supplement his retirement income from the U.S. Coast Guard. After 17 years, he retired in 1990 as a petty officer, first class.

Usually I don't work on Wednesdays. I enjoy Wednesday evenings, being with the church members," he reflected. "We just love to see each other."

Tucker also is moderator of the 65-church Prince Georges Baptist Association.

With life packed full of activity, Tucker said his greatest need is for "time in the broader sense, to take care of things, to go shopping, to go to sporting events.

"Time is the hardest thing about it," he observed. "A bivocational pastor feels he has to do so much himself. Everybody in my church has a job, too. They have families, too. I see the need for things to be done and be done by a certain time. Any pastor called by God wants everything done in good order."

To accomplish more in less time, he uses a pager and a mobile telephone to stay in contact with his congregation.

"It's intentional on my part. If a minister is going to be a true minister, a shepherd of the flock, he has to be accessible," he said. "In a black church, the members don't want to talk to anyone other than the pastor. I'm working to have trained people so I won't have to do everything, but it takes time."

Sermon preparation is done as he studies throughout the week, and he admits occasionally he may discover the sermon he feels God wants him to preach as late as Sunday morning at breakfast.

Working at the phone center provides added opportunities to witness and minister, Tucker said. Senior citizens come in with needs, some persons have noticeable sadness in their eyes and others transact business with noticeable signs of alcohol recently consumed. Some he invites to church, and others he offers encouragement.

"Normally I try to share Christ with people who have chips on their shoulders," he said. "It's more an opportunity to witness than to encourage.

"I show them extra patience and love," he continued. "I have to be prayed up before I go to the phone center, just like I have to when I go to the church."

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(BP) photos mailed to state Baptist newspapers by SSB bureau of Baptist Press

Bivocational ministry
called life-long call

By Linda Lawson F-55B
Part three of a four-part series

Baptist Press
4/4/91

NASHVILLE (BP)--For two Alabama pastors, bivocational ministry -- balancing the demands of a full-time career and a full-time church ministry -- has been a life-long calling.

Raymond McElhaney has been pastor of First Baptist Church of Tanner, Ala., for 22 years while also working as a training supervisor for a Monsanto plant in Decatur. His career as a bivocational pastor has spanned 28 years.

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Charles Jones, an accountant with the U.S. Army Missile Command, has been a bivocational pastor for 34 years. He has been pastor of Midway Baptist Church near Huntsville for almost three years.

"We schedule everything we do around the church," said McElhaney, who has seen his church grow from about 40 active members in 1969 to just over 400 members today.

McElhaney preached his first sermon as a high school senior. At the conclusion of that message, his father made a profession of faith.

"I knew then God had called me to preach," said McElhaney, although three years were to pass before he accepted God's call to be a pastor. "I became convinced the gap God wanted me to stand in was small churches that could not have a pastor any other way" (except bivocational).

"I've always tried to feed the flock and be a pastor," said McElhaney, who tries to spend some time each day on sermon preparation.

In his work at Monsanto, McElhaney teaches a team leadership concept. At church, he uses the gifts and skills of laypeople.

"I feel you can provide the leadership, and God can use it to get a lot of involvement in the whole church," he said.

Perhaps the greatest test for pastor and people came in 1974 when two-thirds of the church building was destroyed by a tornado as members huddled under church pews in the sanctuary, the one part of the building left standing. The church was rebuilt, the sanctuary enlarged, a family life center constructed and additional property purchased.

McElhaney said he and his wife, Clara, also have worked hard to protect Friday nights and Saturdays as family time while rearing three daughters. Saturday nights are spent at home, preparing for Sunday.

Time to visit, attend committee meetings, conduct weddings and funerals and participate in church activities is carved out by making the best use of every spare moment.

Jones said he believes his calling is to become a pastor of churches which cannot afford a full-time pastor, lead them to grow to the point where they can have a full-time pastor and then move on. All but one of his former churches now have full-time pastors.

On an average day, Jones works at the missile command from 6:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. On the way home, he makes hospital visits and spends some time relaxing before evenings which regularly include meetings and other church activities.

"My average day may start at 6 in the morning and end at 9:30 in the evening," said Jones. "However, I don't think that's a lot different from a full-time pastor. I just work at a different place during the day.

"I don't have time for 'preacher blues' on Mondays because I'm occupied with my work" as a systems accountant, he laughed.

Jones said he believes one skill vital for a bivocational pastor is the ability to prepare sermons quickly.

"I often drive down the road rehearsing a sermon," he laughed. "I get strange looks."

He is convinced his ability to weave humor into his messages is a God-given gift. "It demonstrates that I'm happy, and people like to be around happy folks."

Jones, who has seen churches where he has been pastor complete seven building programs, believes "the more you can get the people to do the happier they are and the better off you are."

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Jones and McElhaney were quick to list areas of fulfillment from their busy lives and dual careers.

"The most thrilling thing is the lives I've had some influence on," said Jones, 57. "I'm now at the stage where I'm marrying kids that were saved under my ministry. I love people. I've had the opportunity to work with the finest Christians."

McElhaney, 54, anticipates retirement from Monsanto in 1992. He plans then to devote his full time to the church -- more time for visiting, developing programs and leading the church to continued growth.

"We've always tried to keep God and his work first. Everything else seems to fall into place," said McElhaney.

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

Time to think leads lineman
to bivocational ministry

By Charles Willis
Part four of a four-part series

F-SSB

Baptist Press
4/4/91

SUPERIOR, Wyo. (BP)--The small midwestern town of Ava, Mo., and the endless stretches of telephone poles and cable that used to characterize Jeff Alcorn's life are hundreds of miles away now, but the setting for a life-changing decision will always be engraved in his mind.

Alcorn, a long-time member of Ava's First Southern Baptist Church, had a lot of time to think as he climbed telephone poles, many times to make repairs in sub-zero temperatures. Sometimes his thoughts would turn to what God wanted him to do with his life.

"I had taken a MasterLife course," Alcorn recalled during a drive between his secular job in Rock Springs, Wyo., and the church he now serves as pastor in Superior, Wyo. "I came to feel God had something different for me. And during those times of thinking about God's will for my life, I would conclude if this (work as a lineman) is all there is for me until retirement, my life will be wasted."

As a result, Alcorn began preparation for ministry by taking a seminary extension course, and in the fall of 1985, he and his wife, Wendy, entered Southwest Baptist University at Bolivar, Mo. She earned a degree in religious education and he majored in Christian ministries. Wendy graduated in May 1990, and he will graduate next year.

The first journey from Ava to Superior was a vacation trip, a part of which the Alcorns had agreed they would devote to missions ministry. In the course of their visit to Wyoming, Alcorn was asked to preach twice at Superior Baptist Church.

"I thought, 'Who in the world would move to this place?'" he reflected with a grin.

Admittedly, Superior, population 250, would not qualify as a popular vacation spot, much less a promising place to put down roots. Now almost a ghost town, the former mining site has, over time, been reduced to a post office, a town hall and two bars.

"The congregation, meeting in a building formerly used by a Pentecostal church, had been without a pastor for a couple of weeks. The people were warm, so much so that it offset the barrenness of the countryside."

That warmth eventually led Alcorn to accept a call to lead the 20-member church.

Now a pastor, optical technician, carpenter, student, husband and father of three, Alcorn looks back at the evolution of his life from telephone lineman to pastor and recalls "God told Abraham, 'Get up and go where I tell you to go.' I feel called to be pastor of a church and to ministry first and foremost. You go into the future remembering how God has led you in the past."

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Alcorn supports his family, for the most part, by grinding lenses for an optical company and by doing carpentry work. Wendy provides preschool and after-school care to supplement their income. The church provides a modest salary.

To fulfill all the roles in his life, Alcorn schedules every day, including time with his family to read, watch a rented movie together or to just run errands and window shop.

"I feel badly about having to work a job and not being theirs (the church members') all through the week," he said. "But we see the spiritual needs, and we know if we weren't doing this, we'd miss out on the blessings from the contact with these people.

Believing that much of his ministry is outside the church building, Jeff Alcorn makes ministry a part of his work and his studies.

"We have a love for the people," he declared. "And there is enough work for a pastor here on a daily basis for a long time.

"My prayer every day is that God will lead me into contact with whomever I need to meet."

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

Southwestern Seminary students
called to consider bivocational work

Baptist Press
4/4/91

R-CO
SWBTS

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Changing demographics in the United States are demanding a bivocational approach for reaching the nation for Christ, state and area directors of missions emphasized at a bivocational ministry conference March 25-27 at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Larry Martin, director of missions for the Greater Boston Association, told students it is "impossible to accomplish the Christian task with traditional methods."

The majority of the world's five billion people will not be reached within the walls of a church building, but rather in the marketplace where they are every day, Martin said.

"When we have a Christian perspective, we will realize the importance of the marketplace," he said.

Martin asked the students to consider their calling rather than comfort, because "the two don't always go together. In fact, most of the time they don't go together," he said.

Martin told the students to focus on creativity in ministry rather than conformity. "There is not just one model of bivocational ministry," he said.

The changing population in the United States necessitates the increased use of volunteers in ministry, said Larry Rose, director of missions for the Tarrant Baptist Association in Fort Worth.

"Somehow, the world's come to the United States," Rose said. "There are more Jews in New York City than in Jerusalem."

To reach these groups, "volunteers are a little more cost effective and probably a little more effective (than paid ministers)," he said.

The problem is not a lack of trained people to meet the nation's ministry needs, but rather a failure to bring the people and the needs together, said Dale Holloway, bivocational ministries consultant with the Home Mission Board.

There are two Baptist ministers for every Southern Baptist Convention church with 32,000 ministers not connected to a ministry, Holloway said, and yet 35,000 ministry opportunities not met.

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"The failure is not with God, the failure is in our conception, in our understanding of what ministry is," he said.

"Too many Baptists are too narrow. All they ever know about is Baptist preachers and foreign missionaries," he said.

"Ministry is not preaching," Holloway said. "A minister is a Christian in the world."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Southwestern Seminary

Southwestern students see decisions
for Christ during spring break

Baptist Press
4/4/91

F-00
SWBS

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--More than 1,000 decisions in 31 states and two foreign countries are being reported by students from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary participating in the school's annual spring break revivals.

Those decisions include more than 225 professions of faith in Christ as a result of 120 revivals, a basketball team in Mexico and a group of students witnessing in New Orleans' French Quarter.

One hundred and thirty six students participated this year, the 32nd year of the program, according to Dan Crawford, associate professor of missions and evangelism and director of the Spring Evangelism Practicum at Southwestern.

The results of this year's practicum are lower than last year, when more than 500 professions of faith were reported, Crawford said. However, he added that students reported a higher-than-normal number of reconciliations among church members and family members.

"Maybe our job this year was more in the area of church renewal and restoration than in evangelism and outreach," Crawford said.

Not all the reports from the revivals are in, Crawford said, adding "only God knows the bottom-line results of the practicum."

One "bottom-line" of the practicum was "a lot more serious prayer support" than in the past, Crawford said. The result was a smoother-than-ever practicum, he said. "To my knowledge, we did not have one problem," he said.

For the students leading revivals the field proved to be an effective teacher.

Religious education student Ben Sustar, from Charlotte, N.C., served at the First Baptist Church of Pima, Ariz.

"It was a real surprising experience in going to an area that was predominantly Mormon and to see what kind of opposition the Baptist faith encounters," he said.

In such an environment he "bonded quickly" with the local Christians, Sustar said.

Mark Proberts, a master's of divinity student from Port Arthur, Texas, served in the 30-member South Broadway Baptist Church of Haysville, Kan.

He said his experience taught him a lot about the value of encouragement and servanthood as he ministered to the small congregation searching for a pastor.

"I really learned a lot about serving people," Proberts said.

Another student, Rob Works spent his spring break at the Trinity Baptist Church of Tecumseh, Mich.

"God was just doing some awesome things," said Works, a master's of religious education student from Albuquerque, N.M.

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Works said the first two people he met in Michigan prayed to accept Jesus, "right in the middle of a shopping mall."

By the end of the week, Works said revival attendance was near 150 in a church which averaged 75 on Sundays. He said the week resulted in 32 public decisions with five baptisms on his last Sunday in Michigan.

Southwestern's Spring Evangelism Practicum is designed to provide revival teams for Southern Baptist churches in newer convention areas. According to Crawford, the program is designed to assist small churches with limited financial resources, making it possible for those churches to have at least one revival meeting a year.

The program is underwritten by the Panhandle Baptist Foundation of Amarillo, Texas. The foundation is led by C.J. Humphrey, who serves as president and is assisted by a board of directors.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Southwestern Seminary