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July 23, 1991

91-110

BWA accepts new members,  
says yes to evangelism

By Wendy Ryan

N-CO  
(BWA)

MONTREAL, Canada (BP)--Baptist leaders from around the world said another yes to evangelism; voted for a human rights award; spoke to world events, religious freedom and human rights; voted for aid and relief projects of more than \$2 million; accepted new members; and heard accounts of church growth when the general counsel of the Baptist World Alliance met July 7-14.

At their meeting in Montreal, Canada, the first BWA council meeting of the new quinquennium 1990-1995, members agreed to make evangelism their priority.

The continuing concerns for human rights, religious freedom and justice also were addressed in resolutions of the Council on South Africa, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe and Soviet Union.

BWA voted to accept \$10,000 from human rights activists Carl and Olive Tiller, for a human rights award. The vote was taken two days after Tiller, a former BWA staff member, died from cancer.

"The heart and life of Carl Tiller was dedicated to human rights," said Denton Lotz, BWA general secretary.

Action on behalf of those in need and those who are victims of disaster was taken when over \$2 million of projects were approved as recommended by Baptist World Aid.

The largest monies for disaster relief were allocated for hunger relief with perhaps the greatest share for Bangladesh, whose three member bodies have requested more than \$1 million of aid. New to the hunger relief list is Albania.

BWA accepted three new members and reinstated two other members. New members are the Convencao Batista Nacional Brazil, the Czechoslovakia Baptist Convention of the USA and Canada, and the Hungarian Baptist Union of Romania. The council also approved full reinstatement for the Union of Baptist Churches of Latvia and Baptist Union of Estonia. Those new members add to the council more than 1,000 churches and about 350,000 members.

After reconciliation and healing between the two conventions, Nilson Fanini, president of the Baptist Convention of Brazil, affirmed the decision of the BWA general council to accept the National Baptist body as a new member.

The Czechoslovakian Baptist Convention of the USA and Canada consists of seven congregations and 1,500 members. It brings together Czech congregations and individuals who have settled in the United States and Canada for fellowship and mission in Czechoslovakia.

The third new member is the Hungarian Baptist Union of Romania with 9,000 members, 93 churches and 29 pastors. Nicholae Gheorghita, general secretary of the Baptist Union of Romania, urged the BWA to accept the Hungarian application. This was done, subject to the Hungarian Baptists' completion of the application details to the satisfaction of Karl Heinz Walter, general secretary of the European Baptist Federation.

Finally, the 4,500 member Union of Baptist Churches of Latvia was reinstated to full BWA membership after more than 40 years, as was the 6,000 member Baptist Union of Estonia.

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Lotz commented on the decision to reinstate the unions of Latvia and Estonia: "This is an historic decision. We rejoice that the council corrected the injustice when the unions were forcefully excluded as separate entities. We welcome them back to the BWA as full and independent members. I am pleased that the leadership of the UECB (Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists) in Moscow concurs with this decision."

In other action, the council gave permission for the three-year wait for membership acceptance to be waived for those members who apply for reinstatement.

In his membership report, Reginald Harvey, chairman of the BWA membership committee, said the committee would work to better the membership process.

Any application to which there was no reply for three years would be deleted and the BWA would work for those Baptist bodies who are not a part of it, to become members.

In order to get the most accurate membership statistics, the membership committee will, during the next five years, review each region, where changes have occurred. It may mean some member bodies are removed.

One example of this is the merging of the two German Baptist unions into one. The BWA has lost one member body, but the membership remains the same.

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WMU members urged to get involved with pregnant teens

By Susan Todd Doyle

Baptist Press  
7/23/91

*N-CO (WMU)*

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Teen-age pregnancies in the United States are on the rise, not on the decline, a nursing educator told women attending Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union leadership training July 13-19.

In one-half of those births, the teen-age mother is unmarried.

"Our teens want to know about sex and want to know what good sexual behavior is," said Kay Wilson, assistant professor of nursing at Mississippi College in Clinton, Miss. "We can talk about our mission programs all we want, but if we don't answer their questions (about sex), then we've lost them."

Teen-age pregnancies are not isolated cases among non-churched youth, she said. Churched youth are part of the rising statistics.

"We have all been affected by teen-age pregnancy, whether at school, at church or in our tax dollars," Wilson said, citing recent statistics:

- 1 million teens, or one in 10, become pregnant each year.
- 2,700 teens become pregnant each day.
- 470,000 teens give birth each year.
- 400,000 teens abort a pregnancy each year.
- Of all the births within the United States in a year, 13 percent are to teen-agers.
- Initiation to sex most often begins in the teen-age girl's home.

Most teen-age girls who end up pregnant never intended to be sexually active, Wilson said. But of those who do become pregnant, their reasons can usually be traced to one of six factors:

-- Some desire to be pregnant. "Teens are not future-oriented," she said. "They want things right now. For them, a baby may look like the answer to another problem," Wilson said.

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-- They want someone to love them. Many teens who do not feel the love of parents and family see having a baby as a way to get love. "Girls know that babies love their mothers," she said.

-- They need approval, love or security. "Most teen girls aren't thinking in terms of sexual behavior, but are just looking for someone to care about them," she said.

-- Most teens are aware of birth control but are confused about the use of it. "I'm not advocating sex outside of marriage because the Bible is very clear about it. But if we are going to be realistic, for those who are going to use birth control, we need to make sure they have the correct information," Wilson said. "If we don't, they'll get the wrong information on the street."

-- They see promiscuous sexual behavior without consequences on television and in movies.

-- Teens are bombarded with ads for products which are sexually linked.

"As Christians, we need to be out there on the front to help teach teens good sexual behavior instead of sticking our heads in the sand," she said.

Talking with youth in church groups such as Acteens, the age-level missions organization for girls in grades seven through 12, can provide a good start, she said.

"Teens need to have sex explained to them. They want to know how to realistically respond when they get out on a date," Wilson said.

Wilson suggested Acteens leaders find a youth minister or a local nurse to visit their group to lead the discussion if they don't feel comfortable talking about sex.

Church members also can help teens avoid unwanted pregnancies by helping them to establish goals, she said. For example, jobs help teens stay out of trouble, help build their self-esteem and give them a better grasp of the value of money, she said. "Perhaps there are business professionals in your church who can offer summer jobs to them."

Most of all, Wilson encouraged teen leaders to help their teen-agers look to the future. "Give them a reason not to become pregnant because they have something wonderful planned," she suggested.

However, if faced with a teen pregnancy, Wilson encouraged women in WMU to use the situation as an opportunity for ministry on several levels -- mental, physical, emotional and spiritual.

Physically, teen-age mothers face a higher risk for complications than a woman in her 20s or 30s. Because the mother's body itself is probably not fully developed and ready to handle the birth of a baby, problems such as anemia, prolonged labor, premature labor and urinary tract infections are common.

Babies born to teen-age mothers are also at a higher risk physically. Statistics show teens ages 17 and younger are twice as likely to deliver low-birthweight babies as mothers older than 17.

"These babies are twice as likely to die before their first birthday than babies born to women in their 20s," Wilson said.

The mother's use of drugs and alcohol, inadequate nutritional care, and a lack of prenatal care all contribute to the risk of delivering a low-birthweight baby, she said.

Members of WMU can help combat a national problem by offering childbirth and parenting classes to pregnant teens, she said. "Each of us has something to offer," Wilson said.

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Academic tutoring can be another form of ministry, she suggested. Pregnancy is the major cause of teen dropouts from school, according to statistics. "There are lots of WMU members who are educators," Wilson said. "Get educators involved in a tutoring program for these girls."

Perhaps the most difficult areas for Christians to handle are the emotional and spiritual aspects of teen pregnancies, Wilson said.

Christians tend to get caught up in condemning certain sins more than others, she said, telling the story of a pastor's teen-age daughter who became pregnant. She and the baby's father, the son of a deacon, decided to abort the baby. When they finally shared their secret, the couple said they had been afraid to tell anybody. They had been afraid their church would reject them.

"It makes me shudder to realize that teens can feel such condemnation from the church," Wilson said. "We've got to go into this type of ministry with a non-judgmental mind and with compassion."

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Baptists urged to get serious  
about sharing faith daily

By Karen Benson

F-60  
(WMU)

Baptist Press  
7/23/91

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Southern Baptists have gotten so lax in sharing their faith with non-Christians that daily witnessing is hardly practiced by most church-goers.

That concern, along with challenges to get serious about soul-winning, came from seminar leaders Doyle Pennington and Dell Scoper during the recent Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union week at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center.

"We need to rediscover who we are as God's people," said Pennington, who led a seminar on "Your Marketplace: A Call to Witness." Pennington is on the staffs of both the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission and the Home Mission Board.

"We come in on Sundays, sit in our pews and do all we're supposed to do in church. But we cannot connect over to what we're supposed to do on Monday through Saturday," he said.

"If Sunday became a reporting-in time on what we've done for God during the week, I wonder how that would affect our churches!" he said.

By the year 2000, 80 percent of the world's people will live in 22 major population centers, Pennington said.

For example, 7.4 million people already live in Los Angeles County alone, with between 16 million and 17 million people in the greater L.A. area, he said. "That number is bigger than 42 of our 50 states," Pennington said.

"We do not employ enough missionaries to reach those 22 population centers. If we're going to win the lost in those cities to Christ, we've got to do it ourselves, by reaching those in our own marketplaces," he said.

"I don't think Southern Baptists fully understand that each is called to witness in his or her marketplace," he said.

Pennington defined "marketplace ministry" as "the laos -- or all the people of God, 'ordained' and 'unordained' -- witnessing and ministering in their marketplaces, work places or their dominant spheres of life or involvement."

"It's going to take all Christians exercising their gifts and their calling to win this world for Christ," Pennington said.

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Yet, "concern for the lost is not a focal point" among Southern Baptists, said Scoper, an associational WMU director from Laurel, Miss., who lead a seminar on "How To Share Your Faith in Everyday Living." Today, it takes 43 Southern Baptists to win one person to Christ, she said.

"God has planted you and me exactly where we are for a reason -- and that reason is to share Christ," she said.

But before Christians can meet needs faithfully in the marketplace, "you must first meet Christ regularly," Scoper said.

Using the parable of the sower in Matthew 13, Scoper challenged the audience to be ready to sow the seeds of the Gospel, no matter what condition the "soil" is in.

Just as a gardener wears a hat, Christians need to "make sure we are covered with God's grace," she said. "We need to be willing to get our hands dirty, she added, holding up gardener's gloves.

A trowel symbolizes "being willing to dig into circumstances and cut away some time," she said. A watering can illustrates Christians need to "give the seed just the right amount of water it needs," without "drowning" non-Christians with too much too soon, she said.

Christians need to identify the "reasons we're not witnessing," Scoper said, suggesting fear, uncomfortableness and idolatry among reasons Christians don't witness.

"We are idolaters, right down to the wire," she admonished. "We put families, husband, wife, children -- even our church and our denomination -- before God," she said. "Our focus is not on lost persons. We lack opportunities because we lack focus."

Personal witnessing is simply "sharing Christ with another person and giving that person a chance to confess Christ," Scoper said.

"We have got to start taking this responsibility seriously."

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Things fail; people fall,  
says Christian author

By Karen Benson

F-10  
(WMU)

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RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--The Bible is full of promises and hope for Christians who find themselves experiencing failure, says author Deborah Brunt of Corinth, Miss.

Brunt is author of the book "Things Fail; People Fall: Getting Up And Going On With Life After You've Fallen," just released by New Hope, a publishing arm of Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union. Brunt recently led a seminar based on the book during WMU week at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center.

"To his people who have failed, God offers solid promises of recovery," she said, quoting several Scripture references:

-- "The Lord lifts those who have fallen" (Psalm 145:14 TEV);

-- "If (those who please the Lord) fall, they will not stay down, because the Lord will help them up." (Psalm 37:24 TEV);

-- "No matter how often an honest man falls, he always gets up again." (Proverbs 24:16 TEV); and

-- "When someone falls down, doesn't he get back up?" (Jeremiah 8:4 TEV).

"Notice that in each of these verses, the Bible speaks in terms, not of failing, but of falling!" Brunt said. "Almost always, in God's Word, things fail; people fall."

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After experiencing a "failure," it is all right for a person to take some time to heal, Brunt said. "Most people would never expect someone with a broken leg to do anything but lie still until help comes," she said. "Yet many persons expect those suffering from a broken heart or a broken spirit to recover instantly."

In addition to time, recovering from failure can involve a number of phases, she said.

The Bible offers guidance, she said, for "facing downward in the realization that God's people can fail; glancing backward at the factors that caused the failure; gazing upward at the one who alone can bring recovery; looking inward for new motivation to try again; turning outward to seek help from others and offer help to others; and finally, going forward in the power of God's Spirit."

When Christians fail, "we do not do so by accident," Brunt said. "God's Word promises that his angels watch us constantly to protect us from 'slip-ups.' When we fail, we can know that someone with evil intent tripped us."

That "someone" is real, although not necessarily the "flesh-and-blood persons we may be tempted to blame for our failure," she said. "Our foes are much more formidable," she said. The Apostle Paul described the foes of believers as "the wicked spiritual forces in the heavenly world," Brunt said.

"They keep well-hidden behind outward appearances while delivering knockout blows to unsuspecting believers. Then, when God's people go sprawling, the hosts of hell rejoice."

Yet, God is able to protect Christians from such attacks, she said. "Our God is almighty."

Christians need to be on guard constantly against an "ambush" by the devil and his forces, she said. "Stay alert. If you know someone's out to trip you, you can more readily avoid being tripped."

Too, "watch for trouble signs both within and outside yourself," she advised. "Wake up to areas in which you may be compromising your Christian standards, even a little."

Also, "know when you've been attacked," Brunt said. "Don't dismiss the devil and his demons as biblical myth. When you've fallen before evil spiritual forces, admit it."

Next, "rest in the justice of God," she said. "Over and over, the Bible teaches that those who plot the downfall of others will themselves fall. Rest in God's sure promises. Cling to them. Claim that 'the wicked will fall by his own wickedness.'"

Finally, "purpose to get back up," Brunt said, to help make it clear the "tripper" has not won.

When Christians start to evaluate why they have failed, they inevitably will find the root of the problem is sin, Brunt said.

"Christians expect the ungodly to fail. Sometimes, we even reproach God because we do not see the wicked falling as quickly or decisively as we would like. However, we never expect to fail ourselves -- even when we know we're not exactly toeing the line spiritually.

"We never expect it, but it happens, because even in the lives of God's people, sin begets failure," she said.

When Christians take inventory, they might be surprised to find any number of sins that led to their downfall, she said, citing pride, stubbornness, greed, sins of the tongue, immorality, injustice and quarrels with fellow Christians as examples.

"When you find your nose in the dust, lift your head long enough to confront any sin lurking behind you," she advised. "Allow Jesus' shed blood to erase it."

Christians also need to assess what -- or whom -- they have been leaning on, she said. "Both lack of support and a false support can lead to a fall," Brunt said.

Immeasurable good can come from a failure, Brunt said. "Failure has done several things for me. It sent me seeking the Lord, and it opened my eyes to others facing the hard lessons of failure," she said.

"I still have a few scars and bruises from failures I've experienced," Brunt said. "But I rejoice to know that, in God's eyes, I don't fail -- I fall. In his strength, I can always get up again."

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Ministry of vocational evangelists  
to be introduced through conference By Tammi Ledbetter

Baptist Press  
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INDIANAPOLIS (BP)--Evansville evangelist Steve Hale says he is thrilled to have been given the chance to lead the Conference of Southern Baptist Evangelists as this year's president. But he adds he's even more excited the opportunity came during the year the convention meets in his home state of Indiana.

And he's seizing the moment to guide the conference in making a spiritual impact on the state for years to come.

The group's officers gathered in Indianapolis recently along with SCBI Alvin Reid, evangelism director and Tom McEachin, Home Mission Board mass evangelism department associate director to lay the groundwork for their organization's involvement at the annual meeting next June.

In addition to Hale, other officers include Perry Neal, Montgomery, Ala., vice president; Pat Roper, Greenville, S.C., music director; Larry McFadden, Orlando, Fla., assistant music director; Bob Kendig, Gatlinburg, Tenn., parliamentarian; Jerry Spencer, Dothan, Ala., and Sam Cathey, Oklahoma City, pastor advisors. Ron Pledger, Commerce, Ga., continues as secretary/treasurer. Those present at the recent Indianapolis meeting included Hale, Roper, Kendig, Pledger, Reid and McEachin.

"One of our goals is to introduce our state to the ministry of vocational evangelists," Hale explained. "Most of our churches feel they are not in a position to invite a full-time evangelist" to lead in revival services.

By making themselves available throughout the state during the week prior to the convention, the 700-member fellowship hopes to change that perception.

While Hale will write all of the vocational evangelists seeking their assistance for revivals Wednesday through Sunday and door-to-door outreach on Saturday, Reid will work from within the state encouraging churches to set aside the time for simultaneous revivals.

"This kind of thrust is unusual," Hale admits. And he expects the resulting spiritual impact to be tremendous.

"Getting local churches of the host state to have simultaneous revivals has been a problem in the past because they've got the convention going on that next week," McEachin commented. But by pulling together the evangelists from across the nation and working through the state convention office to draw the interest of local churches, the evangelists are hoping Indiana may change all that.

Hale said he is also hopeful the local churches will respond to an appeal he will make by mail to underwrite the cost of a luncheon on Wednesday afternoon for the wives of vocational evangelists. "Wives are the unsung heroes behind the scenes who receive very little recognition in seeing God's call fulfilled. We want to affirm them," he said.

"I personally feel this would be Indiana's way of saying to the convention and the Conference of Southern Baptist Evangelists that we believe in evangelism and not just lip service. We tangibly express our confidence."

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The state convention has been "a pacesetter in many ways -- in the conservative resurgence of our convention," Hale said. Support of the luncheon is another extension of their commitment to set an evangelistic tone in the ministry of Hoosier Baptists, he said.

Hale's attention now turns to planning the conference meeting for Wednesday afternoon of the convention. Establishing the theme of "Finding Him Faithful ... Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow" will demonstrate God's faithfulness from generation to generation in raising up vocational evangelists, he said.

An "oldtimer whose been around for decades" will represent the "yesterday" portion of the program that begins at 2 p.m. A vocational evangelist who is ministering today will bring a current flavor to the meeting. And "somebody younger and coming up in evangelism" will provide the "forever" aspect.

Music evangelists representing parallel time periods also will be featured.

"For years the evangelism conference was the highlight of our convention as it drew primarily the pastors," Hale said. "But in the last few years the pastor's conference has been upgraded in quality in the opinion of many. Now this conference is complimentary in offering the same quality and format."

The "Afterglow" programs on Tuesday and Wednesday nights showcase musicians. Hale expects 1,000 people to gather for the 9:30 to 11:30 p.m. program in the ballroom of the Indianapolis Hyatt Regency Hotel.

"Many pastors in Indiana probably have been unable to go to the Southern Baptist Convention," Hale said, "because they are bivocational or can't afford the travel."

Hale said he believes as the convention meets in Indianapolis the conference led by vocational evangelists will "afford pastors in the state the opportunity to hear some of the greatest preaching and singing ever."

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To minister, churches must overcome familiarity blindness, professor claims

By Sarah Zimmerman

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CHICAGO (BP)--Churches wanting to address social needs in their communities must first be cured of "familiarity blindness," claims Carl Dudley.

"We've seen needs for so long we no longer are aware of them," said the Presbyterian professor and director of Chicago's Center for Church and Community Ministries.

The cure for familiarity blindness, he said, is providing a way for churches to meet needs.

"Churches can't see what they can't change. You have to empower a congregation to act before it can really face the needs of its community."

Organizational power comes from a program such as a soup kitchen or homeless shelter and a process for getting the job done, Dudley said.

The center Dudley directs is affiliated with McCormick Theological Seminary. In 1986 it was charged with encouraging typical congregations to become involved in social ministries. The result is 32 church-based ministry projects.

Dudley outlined what it takes for churches to become involved in community ministries for 31 students from New Orleans and Southern Baptist theological seminaries. The students were in Chicago to gather first-hand information about ministry in urban settings.

Churches will get involved and be willing to reallocate existing resources for ministries when they see needs as part of their community, Dudley said.

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He encouraged students to determine who lives in their communities and what holds them in place. Churches, he said, need to be aware of the community's power structure, including the churches' allies and community resources.

Yet Dudley said studying the community is never enough. "No statistical information changed anybody's mind" about ministry, he said. Rather, the church must see ministry as part of its identity and responsibility.

Most churches have a history of ministry, Dudley said. Reminding them of that heritage and challenging them to include ministry in their current church program "mobilizes churches to do what they feel they must do."

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Police specialist sees mobile  
home park as mission field

By Sarah Zimmerman

Baptist Press  
7/23/91

F-NMB

BESSEMER CITY, N.C. (BP)--When 40 acres of North Carolina farmland became a mobile home park, some community residents saw a blighted landscape.

Steve Gregory saw a mission field.

After working with a nearby church's bus ministry, Gregory decided to take church services to the park rather than take children from the park to church.

The 200-unit mobile home park is a town within itself, including all the problems of a metropolitan area, the bivocational pastor says.

Unemployment, drug abuse and school dropouts are the norm at the mobile home park, says Gregory who is a specialist for the Gaston (N.C.) County Police Department.

For example, one 12-year-old girl who is in fourth grade has failed every grade and is reading on a second grade level, says Sandy, Gregory's wife.

Gregory recalls visiting a family which had no food and had been without electricity for five months.

He also remembers a 16-year-old who had caused so much trouble that school officials were hesitant to let him return to the classroom. But Gregory says the teen-ager became a Christian and turned his life around.

In the year the Gregorys have worked in the park, they have found teen-agers to be among the most receptive residents. "They have a real hunger," Gregory says. "They're looking for someone to care about them."

The park's ministry is centered around a 14-by-70-foot mobile home on loan from the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina. Gaston Baptist Association rents the lot for the trailer.

About 25 park residents attend Sunday school and worship services in the mobile home park. During the week, the trailer is the site of adult GED classes, tutoring for children, Saturday morning Christian cartoons, teen fellowships and Girls Auxiliary and Royal Ambassador meetings.

The Gregorys' three children all participate in the mobile home park ministry. They help motivate Gregory to be involved in the ministry even though he has a full-time job.

"Nobody else is ministering there," Gregory says, "and the people who live there are just as important as my family."

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