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Navajo hopes for greater understanding of racism

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press
8/14/92

ARLINGTON, Texas (BP)--Growing up on a Navajo Indian reservation, Russell Begaye remembers first-hand the effects of racist policies against native Americans in his school.

"I grew up under this system where our mouths were washed out with soap any time we spoke our native language," said Begaye, assistant director for the Home Mission Board's language church extension division.

Begaye, a full-blooded Navajo Indian, was appointed in May as one of three Southern Baptists on the Baptist World Alliance's new commission on racism.

The commission was formed after the April riots in Los Angeles and other cities. It is charged with exploring the origins of racism, biblical answers to racism and solutions for local Baptist churches to combat racism.

Although American Indians are no longer forbidden from speaking in their own language in classrooms, Begaye said the mindset behind such policies remains.

"Just because we passed a law that eliminated the two bathrooms and the drinking fountains doesn't mean the feelings have stopped," he said. "The signs aren't there. The policies have changed but the attitude is still there."

Attitudes have been passed from generation to generation, he said, and more interaction between ethnic groups is necessary before people will appreciate other cultures.

Even the common concept of Columbus discovering America represents a view Begaye contends is ripe with racism.

"When you use the words 'discovery of America,' you're automatically classifying Indians as a non-person," he said. "You are saying that when Columbus came there were no people here. There were either savages or beasts."

Begaye, a graduate of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, said he hopes the commission will consider more than just traditional Anglo racism against blacks and other ethnic groups.

"There's racism at various levels. Not just color of the skin but economic, education, social status," he said. "The most vicious racism sometimes occurs among your own groups."

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Institutional racism lso is a threat as some groups and state governments have tried to get U.S. treaties dealing with American Indian rights to land, water and mineral rights abolished, Begaye said.

"That type of racism towards American Indians will increase," he said. "We will see more and more organizations wanting to remove the special status of American Indians in the United States."

The biblical answer to racism, he said, is as simple as Jesus' commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself." He points to his own life as an example of God's love conquering man's hate.

For two years in college, Begaye was a member of the American Indian Movement, a group he now calls "radical" that participated in college and courthouse sit-ins across California in the interest of Indian rights.

"The more I got involved, the greater my bitterness became," said Begaye, who now lives in Arlington, Texas.

The hatred was gone, however, after he rededicated his life to Christ, he said. "The Lord just took that away.

"The ability to deal with racism, I think, comes from the Lord," he said. "Today I have no bitterness, no resentment, no animosity towards any race. And I believe it's because, as the Bible says, the love of God fills your heart so much that you begin to love people with the love of Christ."

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(BP) photo available upon request from the Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press.

Differing views voiced on
church growth in the '90s

By Chip Alford

Baptist Press
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GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Is a program-based church ministry still an effective way to reach the unchurched or are Southern Baptists using a 1950s methodology to reach a 1990s world?

Pastors, deacons and other church leaders attending seminars at the Aug. 8-14 Bible-Preaching-Administration Conference in Glorieta, N.M., got "yes" answers to both questions.

In a "Growing Churches the Southern Baptist Way" seminar, D.G. McCoury, a part-time consultant for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, said he believes programs have been getting a bad rap lately.

"Southern Baptists have a proven history of the advantages of assigning church mission tasks to programs," McCoury said. "Don't be anti-programs; programs help lift your church up."

He believes the hindrance to church growth lies not in church programs themselves but in how they are carried out.

"Our programs need to be vital, flexible, alive and changing according to the needs of the time," McCoury said.

James White, a former Sunday School Board consultant and current pastor of Mecklenburg Community Church in Charlotte, N.C., said in a seminar, "Future Trends: Understanding This Generation," many Southern Baptist churches are operating from a 1950s mindset.

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"And what year is it? It's 1992!" White said. He pointed out 70 percent of SBC churches are plateaued and declining, adding, "Don't tell me to do what we've always done because what we've always done isn't working."

A "methodological shift" in American churches is taking place, White said, from the use of Sunday schools to home cell groups, from a "program-based design" for ministry to a "gift-driven" ministry structure, from a clergy-led ministry and lay-led administration to a lay-led ministry and a clergy-led administration and from traditional to contemporary worship services in music and preaching style.

White insists he is not "anti-Sunday school," adding the traditional Sunday morning Bible classes still work well in some areas. However, he believes much of Southern Baptist programming and worship formats don't appeal to today's unchurched and need to be changed, or at the very least, re-evaluated in light of today's culture.

"When you change the methodology you don't necessarily harm the theology of the church. You don't have to ... and you're not supposed to" compromise the gospel, he said.

McCoury agrees knowing the demographics and topology of the community a church is serving is important for growth but he cautions against market analysis "to the nth degree."

That kind of analysis, McCoury said, can lead to "faddism in worship, music and preaching; a disregard of essential doctrine; and disdain toward denominational commitment."

Drawing from "The Southern Baptist Church Growth Plan," which he co-authored, McCoury cited in his seminar several other factors which influence church growth, including:

- Prayer. Healthy churches build the right kind of spiritual environment, and it starts with prayer and the use of spiritual gifts.

- Fellowship. Growing churches create a type of environment that receives people effectively and assimilates them into the church family.

- Attitude. Members of growing churches have an understanding of true biblical evangelism and it permeates everything they do.

- Intention. A major reason churches are not growing is a lack of intentionality, or apathy.

- Evangelism. Many churches are not growing because they have interpreted the Great Commission as "y'all come," not "you go," McCoury said. "Churches must reach out in the community in any way they can to make contact with people."

Despite differences in their approach, McCoury and White agreed whatever changes in ministry structure are made to help a church grow shouldn't be made hastily.

While pastors of plateaued or declining churches need to become "change agents" to experience church growth, they should "be careful not to gamble too much as a risk-taker," McCoury said.

Many pastors "get themselves in trouble as change agents because they begin (their pastorate) by saying, 'We're going to change.'"

A better approach, he said, would be to lead a plateaued or declining church in a "transition" to growth, building off the church's history and past successes.

Admitting some of his ideas are "radical" to some Southern Baptists, White urged attendees in his seminar against "going home and starting a revolution that you don't know how to ride out or don't have the patience to ride out."

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"Don't overestimate what you can do in one year, but don't underestimate what you can do in 10," White said.

The Bible-Preaching-Administration Conference is sponsored by the Sunday School Board's church administration department.

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Kentucky is top state
in 1992 SBC attendance

Baptist Press
8/14/92

NASHVILLE (BP)--Kentucky, Tennessee, Georgia, North Carolina and Texas were the top five states in number of messengers who attended the Southern Baptist Convention's June meeting in Indianapolis, according to figures released by registration secretary Lee Porter.

Kentucky churches sent 1,631 messengers to the convention, for 9.08 percent of the total 17,956 messengers who attended the annual SBC meeting.

Tennessee's 1,533 messengers were 8.54 percent of the overall total; Georgia, 1,529 messengers, 8.52 percent; North Carolina, 1,507, 8.39 percent; and Texas, 1,287, 7.17 percent.

Also in the top 10 states were South Carolina, 1,176 messengers; Alabama, 1,131; Florida, 879; Indiana, 858; and Mississippi, 817.

Other states' messenger totals were Missouri, 798; Ohio, 734; Illinois, 731; Virginia, 691; Louisiana, 585; Arkansas, 503; Oklahoma, 486; California, 182; Maryland, 151; Michigan, 115; West Virginia, 84; New Mexico, 62; Arizona, 60; Kansas, 60; Iowa, 39.

Pennsylvania, 38; Colorado, 37; New York, 33; Alaska, 23; Nevada, 19; New Jersey, 18; Wisconsin, 15; Minnesota, 15; Hawaii, 14; Wyoming, 14; Massachusetts, 13; Connecticut, 12; Oregon, 11; Utah, 11; Washington, 10; Nebraska, 10; North Dakota, 6; Montana, 5; Delaware, 4; South Dakota, 4; Idaho, 3; Maine, 2; New Hampshire, 2; Rhode Island, 2; Vermont, 0.

Other totals were Puerto Rico, 4; District of Columbia, 2.

Porter, longtime SBC registration secretary, is associate pastor for administration and adult education at St. Andrew Baptist Church in Panama City, Fla.

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CLC asks court to accept
religious liberty case

By Tom Strobe

Baptist Press
8/14/92

WASHINGTON (BP)--The religious freedom of a hearing-impaired parochial school student is violated unless he is provided with a government-funded interpreter like other deaf children in public and nonreligious private schools, according to a friend-of-the-court brief filed by seven groups including the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

The CLC joined the Christian Legal Society and five other groups in asking the Supreme Court to accept the case in its next term, which begins in October.

The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in May a school district would be guilty of establishing religion if it paid for an interpreter for James Zobrest, a student at a Catholic high school in Arizona. The court also said the free-exercise-of-religion rights of the student and his parents were violated, but the government's interest in preventing an establishment of religion overrode their religious liberty.

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"In other words, the Establishment Clause means the opposite of the Free Exercise Clause, and the Establishment Clause predominates where there is conflict," the brief says of the Ninth Circuit's opinion. "When a court finds a direct conflict between the clauses, ... that is a strong warning that one of the clauses has been misinterpreted.

"Neither of the components of the Religion Clause is a trump card. Instead, the interests on both sides must be weighed with a view toward minimizing governmental impact on private religious choices."

Because the parents' choice of the Catholic school was a private one, there is no violation of the separation of church and state, the brief argues. Even if the Supreme Court decides "such even-handed aid advances religion," its advancement would be minimal and would be overridden by the free-exercise rights of the student and his parents, the brief says.

The CLC and others included in the brief "do not advocate indirect aid to religious schools," said Michael Whitehead, CLC general counsel. "The brief advocates equal access by tax-paying parents to public school services which are religiously neutral. Providing a sign interpreter is as religiously neutral as providing a hearing aid.

"If public school boards decide to pay for sign language interpreters for hearing-impaired students in public and private schools, there should be no discrimination against tax-paying parents who choose to use the interpreter's service at a religious school.

"Such services can be provided to parents and students in such a way that it cannot be fairly criticized as 'parochial,' " Whitehead said. "G.I. bill and Pell grants are examples of public aid to students which may be used at a school of the student's choice, even a religious school, without violating the Establishment Clause.

"In this case, the parents and their child receive the benefit of the public service and control the choice of where to use it, not the private school. No public money goes to the religious school to promote religious indoctrination," Whitehead said.

The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs chose not to sign onto the brief. One of the reasons was, as BJC General Counsel Oliver Thomas described it, the brief's argument that free exercise of religion requires the government to fund such a service.

"The Free Exercise Clause has never been interpreted to require government to finance people's religious choices," Thomas said.

Such a service probably was not a violation of the Establishment Clause, however, but a "permissible accommodation," he agreed.

The BJC might file its own brief on behalf of the student from a different perspective if the case is accepted by the Supreme Court, Thomas said.

The free-exercise rights of James Zobrest and his parents, Larry and Sandra Zobrest, are violated even under the weaker standard espoused in the 1990 Employment Division v. Smith decision, the brief contends. In Smith, the Supreme Court ruled government was no longer required to show it had a "compelling interest" in most cases before restricting religious liberty

Others joining the CLC and CLS on the brief in Zobrest v. Catalina Foothills School District were the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the First Liberty Institute, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the National Association of Evangelicals and the National Council of Churches.

Houston music man stays
in step with the tune

By Matthew Brady

HOUSTON (BP)--To hear Gerald Ray talk about music ministry, it's difficult to believe he once dodged that call on his life.

Yet Ray, minister of music at First Baptist Church in Houston, said he spent the better part of his years at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, doing just that.

A native of Austin, Ray demonstrated musical ability at an early age. By the time he entered junior high he was the organist for his church, Hyde Park Baptist. But making a career of music didn't appeal to him. Ray said one day he walked down to the University of Texas music school and saw all these "Bachs and Beethovens" sitting around composing music.

"It just seemed awfully far from what I wanted to do and be," he said.

Instead, he earned his bachelor of arts degree in history and government at the University of Texas. In 1954 he moved to Fort Worth to pursue training in student work at Southwestern and to serve as minister of music and youth at Sagamore Hill Baptist Church. He earned his masters in religious education in 1957 and almost finished his master of divinity before switching to the music school. This summer Southwestern recognized Ray with the school's distinguished alumni award.

"It was obviously God's calling for me," he said. "When I finally got into music, it was like a birthday party every day. I was in God's will."

Perhaps more difficult than his move to music was his move from Sagamore Hill to First Baptist in Houston in 1970. Ray described it as a "scary situation" for him and his wife, Trevelyn. Sagamore Hill was her home church and his first position as minister of music. First Baptist was a small, downtown church running about 600 in Sunday school -- half of Sagamore Hill's attendance at the time. Pastor John Bisagno had arrived just a few months before.

"To leave (Sagamore Hill) was just awesome. It was terrifying, sad," he said. "But I knew God had spoken. It was a very strong experience of his leadership."

Since that time Ray has seen the Houston church move to a new location and grow to a weekly average of 5,000 in Sunday school. His choir now boasts 420 members.

And as the church has grown, so has Ray's ministry, extending out to the community and the world. First Baptist's choir regularly performs for Houston civic events, including the Texas bicentennial celebration, presidential receptions for both Ronald Reagan and George Bush and the opening of Houston's Galleria. This summer the choir will perform at the Republican National Convention in Houston.

In addition to community events and Sunday church performances, Ray leads First Baptist's annual Christmas pageant which draws more than 50,000 people to 13 performances.

Promoting excellence is one of the most enjoyable and challenging aspects of his job, Ray said.

"I want always to do something to the best of my ability and the church's ability," he said. That commitment to excellence pays off in stability.

Staying current with music is important "but at the same time we cannot forget the thousands of people who are traditionalists," he said.

"They will open their hearts to change but you don't have to blast them out of their seats. Always be folding in new ideas and change," he said.

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Of trends in Christian music, Ray said, "I think it's my job as a minister of music to monitor that, to make sure the entire church is fed with a little bit of everything."

But he said he is pleased with some of the words in the newer music.

"It's much more contemporary and direct, rather than poetic and archaic. It's a very nice feeling to be able to sing straight to the people," he said.

Looking back on his 40 years in music ministry, Ray said he feels like God did not call him to great success.

"But he has given me that, in that we have stayed faithful, relevant, fresh and creative," he said.

"I can't figure out why on earth I was named a distinguished alumnus. I'm just a staff member. But maybe there is value in sticking it out, going to the end of your career."

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

**SSB's Robert Turner
announces retirement**

**Baptist Press
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NASHVILLE (BP)--Robert M. Turner, assistant vice president for church programs and services and director of the church services division at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, has announced his retirement, effective Sept. 1.

Turner, 61, a 34-year employee of the board, has overseen the work of Glorieta (N.M.) and Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist conference centers and the church media library, church architecture, church recreation and CPS art departments. He also directed budget planning and provided financial guidance for the office of church programs and services.

"I regret that the board will lose the expertise and valuable contributions of Bob Turner," Sunday School Board President James T. Draper Jr. said. "I wish him well as he retires after a long and distinguished career."

Turner said he was "especially grateful for the opportunity to provide leadership to the conference center program and for the tremendous benefit Ridgecrest (N.C.) and Glorieta (N.M.) conference centers have been and will continue to be to Southern Baptists for leadership training, fellowship and personal growth. I continue to be excited for the work and ministry of the Sunday School Board."

In addition to his present position, which he assumed in 1989, Turner has directed the conference center division and managed the accounting and control and systems departments. He also served as manager of organization and methods, internal auditor and budget analyst at the board.

A certified public accountant, he is a graduate of the Bowling Green (Ky.) College of Commerce (now Western Kentucky State University). He and his wife, Mary Frances, are the parents of one son.

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(BP) photo available upon request from the SSB bureau of Baptist Press.

**Southern Baptist chaplain
finds joy in kidding around**

By Lydia Murphy

**Baptist Press
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GAINESVILLE, Texas (BP)--John Stutz doesn't consider himself a comedian and neither does his audience. Still, he keeps telling corny jokes, knowing the best he can hope for is a chorus of boos. But the jokes, as bad as they are, make Stutz and his listeners happy.

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The goal, Stutz says, is to give his audience at the Gainesville, Texas, State School something they haven't had -- a childhood.

"These kids have not had a childhood. It's not uncommon for 14-year olds here to already have two children. The church misses out if it doesn't realize that children need to know Jesus Christ," said Stutz, a graduate of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Missing out on childhood means missing out on laughter which can defuse a lot of frustration and anger that results in hostility, Stutz said.

"I went to a chaplaincy conference at Southwestern and came back deeply convicted I needed to tell more jokes. The kids may boo, but they love it and want more.

"They didn't know you could tell clean jokes. They had only heard dirty ones all their lives," Stutz said.

Along with humor, Stutz applies ample doses of care and compassion for the troubled teens at the facility, which is part of the Texas State Youth Commission.

Stutz, director of chaplaincy services at the Gainesville school, works with an average daily occupancy of 327 young offenders whose median age is 15.2 years old.

"It's one of the most intense work situations you can have. It's like you're in a war zone and you have to expect the unexpected.

"This is the end of the line for the youth before adult prison. We jokingly say they have to work real hard to get here," Stutz said.

For many of the youth, that "hard work" came as members of gangs. Stutz attributes increases in violent crimes and a younger average age of inmates to gang involvement.

To counter those influences, he relies on lessons learned through the chaplaincy track of the master of divinity degree he earned from Southwestern in 1985.

"My clinical experience helped me understand who I am, who the people are and what my ministry is to them," Stutz said.

"I used to have an answer for everything but I've been in the ministry 16 years and I've learned that intelligence is not knowing everything but knowing where to go to find answers."

Stutz admits his greatest preparation for this ministry was his own troubled adolescence.

"I can relate to troubled young people. I was a maverick and wanted to do my own thing. I just never got caught," he said.

While reaching out to teens, he also is helping others learn to relate to them.

Chad Maxey, a Southwestern student and 12-year army veteran, and Ed and Nancy Catlin, Texas Mission Service Corps volunteers, have joined Stutz's ministry.

"I was getting frustrated when I was not able to get churches involved but then I realized that you don't get churches involved, you get individuals," Stutz said.

And while volunteers can help with the camping program or chapel services, Stutz says there are still things churches can do to participate.

"The after-care network is the biggest help. We can only get them started in the Christian life here and then we may lose them when they leave. If a church is not ready to take care of them when they get out, then they fall back," Stutz said.

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Most of his ministry has been supported and funded by churches. Even the chapel was built by donated money and volunteer labor rather than state funds.

"It's possible here to affect change because youth have the ability to change more than others," Maxey said. "It's easier to change a youth than a man who is 30."

Stutz admits an initial aversion to minister at Gainesville.

"I was reluctant to come here. My knees shook when I first came out here. I never expected to find blessings in a place where people feel worthless.

"But my attitude was like that of a lot of Christians. We have asked that these people be locked up, put away from us and don't ask us to love them," Stutz said.

Stutz said he found several Southwestern graduates working as teachers and counselors at the facility.

"What amazes me is that people respond when God calls them to this ministry and they remain faithful and keep coming in spite of tremendous heartache."

Maxey, the Southwestern student, had not considered jail ministry until he noticed the position posted at Southwestern.

And while the two chaplains' work is limited to Gainesville for now, their vision is to expand the program.

"We would like to have interns do about a year's work at the (Gainesville) school who could then move on to other facilities," Stutz said.

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