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Gary Jones declines post  
after split Georgia vote

By R. Albert Mohler Jr.

Baptist Press  
9/16/92

ATLANTA (BP)--Stating no "person on God's earth can serve with a 66 percent vote," Southern Baptist Home Mission Board administrator Gary S. Jones "respectfully declined" a call to serve as executive director-treasurer of the Georgia Baptist Convention.

The 69-34 vote came after the GBC executive committee considered Jones' nomination in a grueling one and one-half hour discussion. In remarks after the vote, Jones told the committee the vote did not represent a mandate sufficient for him to accept the position.

Jones, HMB services section vice president, told the committee, "My prayers are with you. My commitment to you has not changed. My commitment is to missions, evangelism and ministry; the difference is I'm going to be doing it at the Home Mission Board."

He also told the committee the process "has been a joy -- and part of it has been interesting."

During the questioning before the vote, several members of the committee pressed Jones on his positions on women in ministry, abortion, inclusiveness and other issues.

Asked first about his view of the Bible, Jones said he affirmed the Baptist Faith and Message statement's description of Scripture as "truth without any mixture of error," though he chose not to use "words which tend to be polemical."

The issue of women in ministry was a topic of discussion with Jones during the Sept. 15 business session and, the night before, in a listening session held for executive committee members. Women served as deacons at Wornall Road Baptist Church in Kansas City during Jones' pastorate there and he had participated in the ordination of two women to the chaplaincy -- a requirement, he stated, of their service as chaplains.

When pressed on the issue Sept. 14, Jones responded that, as executive director-treasurer, he would participate in the ordination of a woman if invited to do so by a Georgia Baptist church. When asked during the Sept. 15 business session if he had changed his mind, Jones responded he "absolutely, categorically" had not.

Jones made inclusion a central theme in his responses to questions. He stated that positions on the ordination of women, abortion and participation in the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of SBC moderates "should not be tests of fellowship" among Georgia Baptist churches. He pledged to work toward the inclusion of diverse elements of Baptist life at all levels of denominational involvement.

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Members of the search committee registered shock and disappointment after the vote and its aftermath. "I'm heart-broken because I feel like hours and hours, miles and miles, prayer after prayer, have gone up in smoke," said executive committee chairman Napp Granade, pastor of Shirley Hills Church in Warner Robbins. Granade said he was not surprised Jones had encountered opposition. "I knew his positions on some volatile issues," he said, "so I anticipated a split vote."

Search committee chairman James M. Ramsey, pastor of First Baptist Church in Albany, said he was "very, very disappointed in the vote. We thought we had found the person who had indicated his ability to work with all persons in Georgia Baptist life." He described the vote and Jones' response as "a landmark major event" in the denomination's history.

"Persons who are issues-oriented have expressed themselves. I'm not sure we could have brought anyone else and had any other vote." Ramsey added: "We are a long way from moving forward together. There is not a desire on the part of some members of the executive committee to work hand-in-hand and heart-to-heart with all Georgia Baptists." Both sides accused the other of bad faith and manipulation.

But the issue of division was brought to the floor even before the vote. "Let me make no bones about it, we are a divided people," asserted Lester Cooper, search committee secretary and pastor of Valley Hill Baptist Church in Riverdale. Identifying himself as the only "fundamentalist" representative on the committee, Cooper affirmed Jones' nomination as a means of moving toward "genuine inclusion which gives all Baptists equal voice," even though Jones "did not answer every question the way I would have wanted it answered." But other conservatives questioned the process that produced the search committee and the Jones' nomination.

Jones also was questioned about his experience in Georgia Baptist work. He responded he "did not come up through the ranks" of Georgia Baptist service, having attended only one session of the Georgia Baptist Convention. His responsibilities at the HMB required him to attend other state conventions as an official representative.

The question session revealed divisions among the executive committee which went far beyond the election of Jones as executive director. A move to end debate midway in the session failed, and discussion was halted only after a sharp exchange between committee members.

A move to reconsider the question after Jones' withdrawal failed when Granade said Jones was not open to reconsideration.

Granade said the current search committee would continue its work. "We start over," he told the executive committee. "I think there is a division (among Georgia Baptists) and it has been there for some time, and we need to face it."

But others questioned the composition of the search committee itself. "It was a very well-known stacked deck," charged Rodger Whorton, pastor of Cedartown's Southside Baptist Church. "The representation was just not there."

Granade, who appointed the committee, defended its composition and work. "I didn't have any consideration other than appointing the very best people who would want God's very best person for us. I asked every person if they had an agenda, and they did not."

The Georgia actions came just one week after the Tennessee Baptist Convention's executive board elected James Porch, pastor of First Baptist Church in Tullahoma, Tenn., as TBC executive director on a 43-35 vote. Porch accepted the position and will succeed D.L. Lowrie, who resigned to become pastor of First Baptist Church in Lubbock, Texas.

Granade indicated the search committee would bring an interim report in November. Griffith will continue as executive director-treasurer until a successor is named.

Home Mission Board directors  
approve \$500,000 in relief funds      By Sarah Zimmerman

ATLANTA (BP)--The executive committee of the Home Mission Board directors authorized up to \$500,000 for relief ministries for victims of this fall's natural disasters.

The \$500,000 is in addition to \$115,000 the board released for relief ministries in August and September.

In their September meeting, executive committee members also received a financial report showing year-to-date income exceeding the budget. Bob Banks, executive vice president, said receipts from the Cooperative Program were the only source of income that did not exceed the budget. The Home Mission Board's Cooperative Program receipts were down \$600,000 from the amount budgeted, Banks said.

The board also approved 20 new missionaries while the chaplains commission endorsed 26 chaplains.

The \$115,000 already spent this year in disaster relief came from a \$50,000 disaster relief fund, \$25,000 from hunger relief funds and \$40,000 from reserve funds. The additional \$500,000 will come from reserve funds, executive committee members were told.

The \$500,000 will be distributed through state Baptist conventions in Florida, Louisiana and Hawaii. The fund also will assist victims of the typhoon which hit Guam, where churches are part of the Hawaii Baptist Convention.

Paul Adkins, retired vice president for ministry who continues to work at the Home Mission Board on a contract basis, is going to Hawaii to help assess the needs there and in Guam. Larry L. Lewis, HMB president, and Larry Martin, vice president for ministry, will travel to Florida to survey the damage and discover ways the Home Mission Board can help.

"We're doing our best to respond," Lewis said. "As tragic as these disasters are, they do become tremendous opportunities for ministry and witness."

Martin, who recently spent a week in Florida, said the devastation cannot be described, yet he saw "the name of Jesus Christ proclaimed."

Martin said he was told 80 percent of the town of Homestead will be bulldozed because it was destroyed beyond repair. He was also told 40 percent of the people will leave the area because the hurricane destroyed their income sources.

In addition to meeting community needs, the Florida Baptist Convention is concerned about the future of the churches that were destroyed or severely damaged by Hurricane Andrew, Martin said.

The devastated economy also will wreck the economic base of the church, Martin said, and state convention staff is concerned about the emotional well being of the church staff members.

The Home Mission Board's disaster relief fund began 25 years ago when Adkins took \$50,000 to Alaska to assist victims of a flood in Fairbanks.

Each year \$50,000 is designated for disaster relief. Adkins said the money comes mostly from Annie Armstrong Easter Offering gifts.

But the fund is depleted every year, said Adkins, who added, "I can't remember a year when we haven't spent more than \$50,000" in disaster relief.

Draper's first year at BSSB  
features constant change

By Linda Lawson

NASHVILLE (BP)--Jimmy Draper has spent his first year as president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board making a personal transition from pastor to chief executive officer.

And he has led the denomination's church programs and publishing board to launch the most complete restructuring undertaken at one time in its 101-year history.

The result of all the changes, along with constant travel and countless speaking engagements since his inauguration in August 1991, has been "enlightening, stimulating, challenging and rewarding."

"There's just no end to the opportunities. It's like a bottomless pit. But that's good news/bad news," Draper said during a recent interview.

"We have to focus in and do some things well. We can't do everything we need to do," he continued.

Draper acknowledged he misses the relationships a pastor enjoys with church members. "We feel almost cut loose from everything that's been a support system for us."

However, he has been stimulated by "the work itself -- getting to know the people, trying to make decisions and set directions. It's been a challenge to retool myself, to begin to think corporately, to think business and ministry and provider rather than consumer."

During his first year, Draper led the board to develop a vision statement and core values. A draft of a set of operating principles -- actions for carrying out the values -- has been distributed to almost 50 managers for feedback and fine-tuning.

A voluntary retirement incentive program has been offered to 191 eligible employees who are making decisions between Sept. 1 and Oct. 15. The retirements are expected to help reduce the number of management positions and simplify processes.

But he believes the most significant development during the year was the work of four employee task forces that proposed changes in structure, meeting customer needs, developing employees for leadership and planning communications strategy.

"The task forces recommended some really creative and innovative changes," he said. Common themes among the four reports included: 1) simplify the organization; 2) increase accountability for results; 3) be service driven; 4) produce quality products; 5) release products in a timely manner; 6) be customer sensitive; and 7) be the best.

One result of the recommendations will be organization of the income-generating segments of the board -- church growth and programs, Baptist Book Stores and trade and retail publishing -- into three independent, strategic operating units. Each of the areas will have the functions it needs to be accountable for results -- product development, marketing and business functions.

Draper believes changes in process will enable the board to move into the 21st century positioned to be "aggressive in every area." He singled out: working from of a sense of urgency of the gospel message; producing top-quality curriculum; generating more income to provide more ministries; becoming more competitive in book publishing; providing relevant, top-quality materials to meet needs; and launching a major direct sales effort to individuals.

"We ought to be one of the major direct sales institutions in the world," he said. "I don't know all that means, but we have a ton of things that are really for individuals."

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He envisions the board giving greater priority to meeting the needs of Southern Baptists and more aggressively pursuing business with churches of other denominations.

"Our work is not relevant unless they (churches and individuals) say it is relevant. It's not valuable unless they say it's valuable," Draper said.

To Southern Baptist moderates who may have questions about whether a Sunday School Board led by Draper, a conservative in the 13-year denominational controversy, will meet their needs, he points to editorial guidelines mandating products produced within the guidelines of the Baptist Faith and Message. He said the board has continued to publish writers from a "broad spectrum" of the denomination.

"They write within a certain framework. The intent is to be accurate with Scripture, to help people understand it. I think we have demonstrated a willingness to be as inclusive as possible with our writers and in developing material. I think we're being fair," he said.

"Our concern is that we be consistent with the Baptist Faith and Message within guidelines that are well defined and have been there for years," Draper continued. "They are good guidelines and we reaffirm our commitment to them."

Draper, who, when in town, often arrives at the office between 5:30 and 6:30 a.m., does not find long hours a drudgery.

"I'm a very lucky person. I've never hated to go to work," he said. "I have the same sense of calling here I had in the pastorate. There's a joy and delight in doing work God calls us to do."

He acknowledged the scope and number of changes have created frustrations and insecurity for employees during a process expected to continue until late 1992 or early 1993.

"I know there's been a lot of uncertainty but change is always uncertain," Draper said. "I would hope employees would come to see me as someone who is fighting to make this an even better place to work. And it's already a good place to work. I want to challenge us to be the best God would have us be."

Within the board, Draper said he seeks to build a climate where there is "more liberty to be creative and innovative, a larger comfort zone for failure and a system that requires less red tape. We need a cohesive, happy spirit, and then we've got to stay in touch with the people."

Looking ahead to when he passes the reins of leadership to someone else, Draper hopes he will have "perpetuated the life of this board as a genuine factor in the Christian world, a formidable factor in the secular world, for good."

"If we can become a major force in the world for helping people understand the Bible," Draper said, "we will have done our job well."

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(BP) photos mailed to state Baptist newspapers by the BSSB bureau of Baptist Press.

From Kazakhstan to Moscow,  
student workers make impact

By Chip Alford

Baptist Press  
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NASHVILLE (BP)--Dale Griffin and a team of 12 Southern Baptist college students acknowledged they were somewhat concerned entering a young men's prison in the former Soviet republic of Kazakhstan this summer.

"To be honest, we were a little fearful," recalled Griffin, director of the Baptist Student Union at the University of New Mexico at Albuquerque. "All of the 300 inmates (ages 14-21) had shaved heads and were wearing dark-colored clothing. And there were no smiles."

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Determined to break through the language and cultural barriers, the student summer workers ministered in the prison three days a week for eight weeks, performing comic skits, playing games with inmates, singing Christian songs, leading Bible studies and sharing their testimonies.

Griffin said he knew the students had broken through when one of the young inmates thanked them "for bringing smiles to our prison."

"We really focused on building relationships, not just giving our spiel and then leaving," he explained. "As a result, I think we left a number of believers behind."

The prison wasn't the students' only tough assignment while working in Alma Ata, the capital city of Kazakhstan. They also ministered to children cancer patients in a local hospital two days a week and performed skits in a park each Saturday.

"There were some very emotional times (at the hospital). I think all of us had a day when it was just too much," Griffin said. "The kids loved it when we were there. There was a lot of laughter but it was always hard to leave."

Griffin said several older children at the hospital accepted Christ as well as a few parents of the patients.

"One of the mothers wouldn't talk to us at all at first. She apparently didn't want us there. But then one day she just wept on one of our student's shoulders. She needed some comfort and she turned to one of our students."

Griffin's group was one of five teams of Southern Baptist college students that worked in Kazakhstan this summer. In all, 65 students and nine BSU directors from across the United States made the trip. Most worked in Pioneer Youth Camps formerly used by the Communist Party to teach young people communist ideals.

Steve Fast, a student at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, worked in one of the camps. His three years of training in Russian proved useful on the trip.

"I took my Russian classes when the United States and the Soviet Union were superpower enemies. I had no idea I would get to use (my language skills) in this way," he said.

Fast said the Kazakh youth were friendly and seemed excited to meet Americans.

"We told them Bible stories, played soccer with them and showed them the 'Jesus' film. On July 4th, we all made American flags," he said.

Members of Fast's team also visited local schools in Alma Ata, distributing 'salvation bracelets' with colored beads to explain different aspects of the gospel message.

Kazakhstan wasn't the only former Soviet republic where student workers made an impact this summer. Three students and a BSU director from the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware traveled to Latvia to work with youth.

John Tarpley, a student at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, said his team worked at a summer youth camp sponsored by Latvian Baptists.

"We led seminars on Baptist distinctives, creative worship and evangelism," he said, adding team members also spent a lot of time at rural churches around the country, leading Bible studies and discipleship training.

"It gave me a new appreciation for missionaries," said Tarpley, whose own parents are Southern Baptist missionaries in west Africa.

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More than 80 students also worked in Russia, the majority in church construction projects. One student team also concentrated on discipleship training for believers in the Moscow area while another team taught English language classes at Moscow's Central Baptist Church.

Shelley McDonald, a student at Texas A&M University in College Station, was one of the three English teachers. She said about 150 people -- including members of Central Baptist, its missions, local Russian Orthodox churches and non-believers -- attended the classes.

"Different students had different reasons for coming. Some needed to learn English because they are working with publications; others at the church wanted to learn because they are working with so many American Christians coming to Moscow to do mission work. We had some who wanted help because they had English computer programs and some just wanted to get away from home," she said.

Six more students arrived in Russia in August and will teach English classes in Moscow and Minsk through December, she said.

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Baptists and Branson: Churches  
see boom as ministry opportunity By Trennis Henderson

Baptist Press  
9/16/92

BRANSON, Mo. (BP)--"I spent my vacation parked on West 76," the bumper sticker declares. Tourist gridlock on Branson's "76 Country Boulevard" is one of the most visible byproducts of the rapid growth that has come to this budding hub of country music.

Branson and the surrounding area have a resident population of about 20,000. During the height of tourist season, the region attracts up to 100,000 visitors per day as more than 4 million people flock to the Missouri Ozarks annually.

The tourism explosion, along with its related benefits and problems, provides Baptists in the Branson area a variety of opportunities and challenges.

One of the most unique ministries in the area is being performed by members of First Baptist Church in Branson. Church members occasionally fan out along Highway 76 and distribute tracts and Bibles to tourists caught in the stalled traffic.

"Everybody will take what you give them and read because they're stuck and just sitting there," pointed out First Baptist pastor Jay Scribner.

Branson's Skyline Baptist Church began a midnight praise and worship service this summer to attract entertainers and others whose jobs generally keep them from attending services held at conventional times.

Although the effort wasn't as successful as pastor Gaylen Bohrer and others had hoped, the services did occasionally attract up to 30 people.

"It's almost frustrating to know what to do," Bohrer acknowledged. "People are very affirming but they just don't show up."

Despite the limited success, the congregation is determined to continue pursuing creative ministry outlets. "There's only really one need and that's the Lord Jesus," Bohrer emphasized, "but there are so many ways of presenting him."

Tri-County Baptist Association, which encompasses 53 churches in southwest Missouri, has launched an ambitious ministry project called Mountain Country Ministries which includes professional counseling services, a full-time chaplain and extensive resort ministries.

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"We needed a name for our people ministries that anybody could identify as a ministry that helps people," explained Tri-County Association director of missions Ervin Benz. "The simple commission of our faith in Jesus Christ causes us to offer the help and service."

Becky Castleberry, Baptist Student Union director at College of the Ozarks in nearby Point Lookout, coordinates the association's resort ministries. This summer, she worked with about 1,200 youth who served on 27 volunteer mission teams from as far away as Florida, New Mexico and Virginia. The teams provided children's day camps and other ministries at more than a dozen campgrounds throughout the summer.

"Our main goal is to minister to the people visiting in our area," Castleberry explained. "We're involved in resort ministries with everything from mom-and-pop campgrounds to major time-share operations. People are glad to see Christians are having an impact in the area."

Acknowledging the challenges of coordinating such a widespread ministry effort, Castleberry added, "About the time I think, 'Why are doing this?' something real neat and real positive happens. We had 45 decisions this summer of people accepting Christ and not all of our reports are in yet."

While other groups minister to tourists and the entertainment industry, Grace Coen and First Baptist Church in Hollister, are focusing primarily on the needs of area residents.

Coen, a longtime member of Park Hill Baptist Church in Kansas City, recently moved to Hollister to serve as a Mission Service Corps volunteer.

"My husband died about four years ago and I turned myself over to God and went to MSC training," Coen said. "I just felt like this is what the Lord wanted me to do and this seemed to be the place to come."

Despite the housing shortage in the area, she was able to locate and purchase a home just two doors down from First Baptist Church of Hollister. As she begins her new ministry venture, she is particularly burdened for other single women living in the area.

"I came down here all alone and didn't know anybody," she shared. "It's the first time in my life I've been alone."

Describing the tremendous ministry needs among single adults, she remarked, "They're coming down here in droves. I've met nine women who have no relatives down here at all and are feeling their way. I'd like to start a Bible study in my home for this group. I hope my home will be a place of refuge for them."

Mearl Laswell, pastor of First Baptist in Hollister, said he enthusiastically endorses Coen's ministry goals. Emphasizing the need for ongoing ministries to singles and senior adults, he added, "There are unlimited opportunities here if we can get the leaders."

Along with the diverse opportunities to minister to residents, tourists and entertainers, Branson's rapid rise to stardom also has produced its share of problems.

"There is a new spirit in Branson of get all you can get while it is here to get -- the business approach," Benz pointed out. "We're going to have to work to hold on to Christian values and ethics."

"I think we're eventually going to be faced with the gambling issue," he continued. "We're going to be a prime target."

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"Branson obviously has changed quite drastically, especially in the last three years with the influx of the Nashville influence," said Scribner, pastor of First Baptist in Branson for 15 years. While the growth "has been positive for the economy and national publicity, it has challenged our values systems. That is requiring us to keep a pretty constant vigil in the type of influence that is becoming more and more prevalent."

As an example, Scribner noted, "We never used to see any billboards advertising liquor. We do now. That may not mean much in other cities but we're talking about family-centered Branson and the unspoken Christian values in the community."

Scribner said he also helped lead an effort to ban male strippers in the city. "I'm not a strange face at city hall," he remarked. "We lost that battle but won the war because they can't come back to the city. ... It pays to take a stand and fight for community values but it's a constant vigil."

Along with the moral concerns are dream-shattering socioeconomic realities.

"We've been dealing all summer with people looking for places to live. There's just not any," Laswell said. "People come here from all over after hearing on national television about all the job opportunities. Some sell everything and come down here with a few hundred dollars, which doesn't last long."

Laswell said some people in the area are "living in tents, sleeping in cars and under bridges."

"A lot of these people are sincerely seeking to better themselves," he said. "The pay is the problem. When you're trying to raise a family on \$6 a hour, with no insurance and no benefits, it doesn't go very far."

Numerous churches and other organizations are seeking to respond, the Hollister pastor affirmed. "But everything we're doing is Band-Aid stuff," he lamented. "We're just helping people survive from day to day and week to week."

The bottom line for most churches in the area is to turn the region's growth-related challenges into productive ministry opportunities.

Along with the traffic jams, housing shortages and threats to family values, "God is bringing people and dropping them in our laps," Bohrer declared. "That's the opportunity we need to see."

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Branson gains national spotlight  
as 'Country Music Show Capital'

By Trennis Henderson

Baptist Press  
9/16/92

BRANSON, Mo. (BP)--Labor Day has come and gone, school is back in session and the tourist season is over in Missouri -- except in the bustling Ozark community of Branson.

When Rheubin Branson established his general store near the banks of the White River more than a century ago, he could never have envisioned what the settlement of Branson would eventually become. Although Branson's official population remains below 3,800 residents, the community currently hosts more than 4 million tourists annually. It has grown to include 30 theaters with a total seating capacity of more than 56,000.

How did the tourism boom occur? Branson's beautiful Ozark setting has attracted visitors for decades. The construction of dams which created Bull Shoals, Taneycomo and Table Rock lakes enhanced the area's natural appeal.

The next boost came in 1960 with the establishment of Silver Dollar City theme park, "Shepherd of the Hills" outdoor pageant and "The Baldknobbers" country music show.

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"When we started Silver Dollar City 33 years ago, we had no money," recalled Peter Herschend, the theme park's co-founder and co-owner. "We were setting ourselves up as the craft capital of America, even though we didn't know it at the time."

Bob Mabe, a member of Skyline Baptist Church in Branson, was a co-founder of the Baldknobbers, serving as master of ceremonies, singing and playing the guitar, banjo, mandolin and fiddle. He later established "Bob-O-Link's Country Hoedown." Mabe retired from the stage in 1986 and currently leases his theater to the Osmond Brothers who host Branson's newest country music show.

Recalling the early days of the Baldknobbers, Mabe noted, "We set a precedent for Branson. Most of the shows patterned themselves after the Baldknobbers show with good gospel music. The way we closed our show, some people said they got more church at our show than they did at some churches.

"I always put Christianity in it because I meant it," Mabe added. "That's what it's all about. I always said, 'When I can't put Christianity in my show, I'll sell out.' Showing your Christianity is to me the utmost. I always want my witness to be there. I don't know how else to put it."

Three years after the Baldknobbers were established, the Presley family opened a music theater in the area. The Presleys moved their theater to Highway 76 in Branson in 1967 and the Baldknobbers relocated to Highway 76 the following year.

Throughout the 1970s and early '80s, Silver Dollar City continued to grow, more family-owned music theaters opened and Branson's popularity gradually increased.

The current growth explosion can be traced to 1983 with the opening of the Roy Clark Celebrity Theater. It was Branson's first country music show linked directly to a nationally-known entertainer. Since then performers including Johnny Cash, Willie Nelson, Mel Tillis and Andy Williams have opened theaters in the Branson area and tourist attendance figures have soared.

Branson also has been featured on "60 Minutes," as well as in The New York Times, Wall Street Journal and People magazine in recent months. Branson is now being touted by chamber of commerce officials as "America's Country Music Show Capital."

"This has been an exciting time for that corner of the state," Herschend affirmed. "The numbers are impressive."

He added, however, "the personality of the area is changing. It is called the entertainment business."

Mabe has seen incredible change since he began his first country music show on an area radio station in 1955. But one constant he has witnessed is the emphasis on family values.

"People say, 'When I come to Branson, I bring my kids. When I go to Vegas, I leave the kids at home,'" Mabe pointed out. "Family values is the bottom line. I think Branson will last a long time if we keep our family values."

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Branson chaplain meets needs  
along '76 Country Boulevard' By Trennis Henderson

Baptist Press  
9/16/92

BRANSON, Mo. (BP)--Jeff Hurst used to don a biblical costume and portray Jesus Christ in a passion play attended by thousands of tourists. Today Hurst has found another unique way to communicate the message of Christ -- as the chaplain to Branson's "76 Country Boulevard."

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A typical day may find Hurst at a prayer meeting in the home of a Branson entertainer, offering informal marriage counseling to an acquaintance in a shopping mall, visiting a motel manager to share a word of encouragement or helping provide food to a homeless family living beneath a bridge.

Hurst's ministry is part of Tri-County Baptist Association's Mountain Country Ministries project which grew out of an associational "think tank" earlier this year. His mission field includes the dozens of music shows and hundreds of motels and businesses that crowd Highway 76.

According to associational director of missions Ervin Benz, "There are such dramatic changes occurring in the Branson community that many social and spiritual needs are resulting." He said the chaplaincy program is designed to "offer support to those dealing with this stress and hurried pace."

"The most important thing is directing folks to Jesus," Hurst emphasized. "That's what chaplaincy is all about. You develop a rapport with the people you want to minister to. They watch you; they see you care and try to meet their needs which opens them to the gospel."

Hurst has lived in the Branson area off and on for 15 years. As a college student at Central Missouri State University in Warrensburg, he spent his summer months as an entertainer at Silver Dollar City theme park and Shepherd of the Hills theater.

He and his wife, Emma, moved to the West Coast where they managed motels and resorts for a few years and then moved to the East Coast where he performed in a passion play and started traveling to churches, dramatically interpreting the gospel of Jesus.

When Hurricane Hugo hit in 1989, the Hursts were left homeless for several weeks. They decided to move back to Missouri where he again got a job at Silver Dollar City.

As Tri-County Association prepared to employ a chaplain, Benz said they were seeking "a sincere man of God, able to communicate with the unique business industry in and around Branson." They found such a man in Hurst and he began his new ministry role in June.

Hurst said his personal qualifications for the position include "my past experience of work that was not in ministry, but work that was related to Branson. I know a lot of the entertainers, I know how to deal with entertainers and I know what type of trials and problems they go through.

"Many people only look at entertainers from the stage side and say, 'What a glamorous life,'" he noted. By contrast, he often sees young working mothers preparing to take the stage after the baby-sitter didn't show up, the car broke down or they didn't get the house cleaned up. "I see them bedraggled. That's the reality of it."

He said the stress, competition and personality conflicts generated in the entertainment business sometimes spill over into the entertainers' home life, creating marital and family problems.

"A lot of being a chaplain is just listening and being there," Hurst remarked. "It's funny how you can sit and listen to a person for two hours about the stress they're under and they say, 'You've been such a great help' when all I did was listen."

Prior to a recent performance by the Blackwood Quartet, Hurst met with the group members in their bus and led a brief devotional.

"You have a mission here because you're presenting the gospel when you're on stage," Hurst reminded the gospel singers. "What it comes down to is keeping the peace in your heart. A lot of things in the entertainment industry steal the peace."

"You can't counterfeit peace," agreed Blackwood tenor Tracy Trent. "You can't reflect it unless you've got it."

After visiting with the Blackwoods, Hurst prepared to visit a homeless father and son who needed assistance and encouragement.

"I've been working quite a bit with the homeless in Branson," Hurst explained. "There's been an increase in homelessness because of the boom. You can find a job within hours of getting in town but there's no housing.

"With the big boom, real estate prices soared, people started jacking up the prices of homes and landlords started selling rental property and putting tenants out on the street," Hurst continued.

He said there currently are as many as 200 homeless families in the Branson area. Even low-income housing being built in the area is far above many families' price range. That produces the need for benevolence work, shelter referrals and counseling.

Hurst's other activities range from leading a weekly worship service to assisting tourists who experience the tragedy of a death or hospitalization while on vacation.

He also is working toward recruiting "a prayer warrior Christian in every theater to use as an open door to minister to other entertainers."

"Branson is a battleground," he pointed out. "There's a real spiritual battle between darkness and light. I'm sure the devil would like to corrupt the family entertainment with gambling and drugs and prostitution.

"The devil doesn't want me to help change people's lives," the Branson chaplain continued. "He doesn't want to see healing take place and people led to Jesus."

But Hurst is determined to win the battle.

"Within the motel and entertainment industry, I want to be able to meet spiritual needs," he insisted. "I have to stay prayed up because there's so much ministry to be done."

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(BP) photo available upon request from Word & Way, Missouri Baptist newsjournal.

Sells releases 'open letter';  
SBU trustees rebuff charges

By Bob Terry

Baptist Press  
9/16/92

BOLIVAR, Mo. (BP)--What began as an apology for his campaign to prevent the election of a new president of Southwest Baptist University became a broadside attack by the recently dismissed chancellor on the school's trustees.

In a document titled, "An Open Letter to the Community," James E. Sells, dismissed as SBU chancellor Aug. 20, began, "I very much regret the hurt and humiliation I have brought to my family, friends, the community and Southwest. ... Clearly my poor judgment and action have hurt many people and I am sorry."

On page six of the seven-page document, Sells wrote, "I do think it is a tragedy 28 of 50 trustees can make such a hard decision (his dismissal) when their own attendance records are so poor, when many are only nominally involved in developing the university, while others are overly involved in managing the school, and when trustees put restraints on themselves and then walk out of the room and violate their own rules."

In the pages in between, Sells:

-- Claimed his firing resulted from the SBC political struggle spilling over into the trustee board of the Bolivar, Mo., school.

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-- Said the action was the result of trustee anger stemming from the firing of SBU President J. Edwin Hewlett in 1990.

-- Accused board chairman Wayne Gott and presidential search committee chairman Walter Rarrick of violating trustee instruction.

-- Expressed concern the search committee was "becoming weary."

-- Explained why he authored anonymous letters attributed to students and faculty as well as passed on false information about the activities of the search committee.

"It is a ruse. That is all it is," declared James Reimer, pastor of Second Baptist Church in Springfield, Mo., and secretary of the board of trustees, after reading the open letter which was published in the Bolivar newspaper. "Jim is trying to place the blame for what happened on anyone else that he can."

Reimer also serves on the SBU trustee executive committee and on the presidential search committee.

On August 20, trustees voted to sever all relationships between Sells and SBU. That decision was reaffirmed and announced to the public on Sept. 3. Trustees charged Sells orchestrated a campaign to prevent the election of Ron Ellis of Kentucky as president of SBU. Specifically, they charged Sells distributed information he knew to be incorrect and he authored anonymous letters attributed to students and faculty.

In his paper, Sells argued the SBC political struggle spilled over into trustee elections at SBU.

"That is just a drum beat Sells used to polarize people," Reimer retorted. "SBC politics did not have one thing to do with" Sells' dismissal.

Board chairman Wayne Gott pointed out the action of the board was by a 31-1 vote. "That is practically unanimous," he said. "The vote does not indicate division among the trustees."

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SBU faculty unanimously  
affirms trustee actions

Baptist Press  
9/16/92

BOLIVAR, Mo. (BP)--In two separate actions, the faculty of Southwest Baptist University commended school trustees for their dismissal of former chancellor James E. Sells and called for the termination of all others "involved in the subversion of the presidential search process."

The Faculty Chamber, SBU's officially recognized faculty organization, voted unanimously to commend the board of trustees for dismissing Sells. Sells has admitted authoring anonymous letters attributed to faculty and students in an attempt to prevent the election of a nominee of the trustee presidential search committee.

The Faculty Chamber further recommended "that employment be terminated for all administrators, staff and/or faculty" involved in the subversion process. Three other SBU employees have acknowledged participation with Sells in the actions. They are Jerald Andrews, senior executive vice president for external affairs; Patty Edwards, director of major events in university advancement; and JoAnn Shaddy, Andrews' secretary.

The Association of Tenured Faculty at SBU also unanimously adopted a statement calling the trustee action against Sells "both right and necessary." The statement continued by declaring, "All those who participated with Sells should be terminated immediately."

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The tenured faculty members said, "It is impossible to work in peace and harmony with those you cannot trust." They also commended trustees "for full disclosure of the circumstances" surrounding Sells' dismissal.

Both organizations adopted their respective statements Sept. 9.

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SBC administrative jargon:

Are terms used correctly? . By Laurie Lattimore

Baptist Press

9/16/92

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (BP)--Boards. Commissions. Committees. Agencies. Entities. Institutions. Auxiliaries.

Welcome to Baptist Vocabulary 101. This administrative jargon is tossed around routinely as though each word had a recognizable and distinct meaning.

Each word does have a distinct meaning, but it is not always recognizable.

Lynn May, executive director/treasurer of the Southern Baptist Historical Commission, explained the purpose of each group and its place in the Southern Baptist Convention organizational framework, citing convention bylaws as a helpful guide.

"I think it is important that we use them correctly," he said. "I am sure everyone does not know the difference."

May said agency is an overarching term to categorize all the boards, commissions and institutions established by the SBC. Each agency conducts specific programs of the convention. Former Baptist Sunday School Board president James Sullivan writes in his book, "Baptist Polity As I See It," the functions of each agency:

COMMISSION -- These groups are designed to pinpoint one area of service.

For example, the Christian Life Commission concentrates on moral and ethical applications and practical implementation of the gospel for public issues. Their work is sometimes controversial because they deal with problems such as abortion, alcoholism, racism and drug addiction.

The Stewardship Commission is another example of a specific service area. It exists primarily to encourage financial stewardship among Southern Baptists.

Other Southern Baptist commissions include the Brotherhood Commission, Education Commission, Historical Commission and Radio and Television Commission.

BOARD -- In some contrast to commissions, boards are set up with specific duties for work in many areas, all related. This is the oldest and largest type structure within the SBC agencies, encompassing foreign and home missions, Sunday School and annuities.

The Baptist Sunday School Board focuses on religious education programs and publications for local churches across the United States to use in Bible teaching, administration, membership training and worship programs.

The Home Mission Board was designed for domestic missions. The board is often an agent of churches to do missions work where those churches cannot go. It also helps small, struggling churches, operates rescue missions and works with state convention missions departments.

INSTITUTION -- Educational and financial are the two kinds of institutions in the SBC. Educational institutions are the six Baptist theological seminaries, which focus on training ministers, missionaries and other church workers. Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo., for instance, is the newest seminary; it was founded in 1957. Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., founded in 1859, is the oldest.

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The financial institution is the Southern Baptist Foundation. It is responsible for managing endowment funds, bequests, reserve funds and other financial matters related to the SBC.

AUXILIARY -- May explained an auxiliary is separate from an agency. The primary focus of an auxiliary is not in the convention, but it is related through cooperative work. Woman's Missionary Union is currently the only SBC auxiliary. He said no SBC funding is channeled directly to auxiliaries.

COMMITTEE -- SBC committees are more difficult to describe because they generally do not have a specific ongoing program. More often committees are formed to examine, evaluate and make recommendations.

Sullivan divides the SBC committees into four groups: standing, special, committees relating to other Baptists and the Executive Committee.

Standing committees meet several times a year, reporting back to the convention their evaluations and recommendations for action. Technically, the Executive Committee is a standing committee because it performs the same functions, but it is often separated since it analyzes, hears appeals and makes suggestions about budgeting and programming.

The two standing committees are Order of Business and Denominational Calendar. The Order of Business Committee plans the agenda for the upcoming national convention. The Denominational Calendar Committee works closely with the Executive Committee to balance activities from all areas of work within the convention.

Special committees of the convention include the Committee on Committees which nominates members to the Committee on Nominations; the Committee on Nominations which nominates Southern Baptists to serve as board members, trustees and commissioners; and the Committee on State Baptist Papers, which protects press liberties for state convention newspapers.

May stressed each of these terms refers to a different function of the SBC and therefore must be used in proper context.

"You just can't use board and agency as the same thing," he said. "It's like using mashed potatoes and oranges as the same."