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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

**NATIONAL OFFICE**  
SBC Executive Committee  
901 Commerce #750  
Nashville, Tennessee 37203  
(615) 244-2355  
Herb Hollinger, Vice President  
Fax (615) 742-8919  
CompuServe ID# 70420,17

**BUREAUS**

**ATLANTA** Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 898-7522  
**DALLAS** Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 333 N. Washington, Dallas, Texas 75246-1798, Telephone (214) 828-5232  
**NASHVILLE** Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300  
**RICHMOND** Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va., 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151  
**WASHINGTON** Tom Strode, Chief, 400 North Capitol St., #594, Washington, D.C. 20001, Telephone (202) 638-3223

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IOWA -- Iowa Baptists elect layman, hike CP giving by 1 percent.  
TENNESSEE -- Tim Seanor selected national RA director.  
MISSOURI -- Barna: Stats say plenty to America's churches.  
MISSOURI -- Researcher: Growing churches share 21 characteristics.  
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Iowa Baptists elect layman,  
hike CP giving by 1 percent By Dennis M. Hansen & Art Toalston

Baptist Press  
10/19/92

WEST DES MOINES, Iowa (BP)--Iowa Baptists have elected their first layman president and increased their giving to Southern Baptists' Cooperative Program by 1 percent.

David Newcom, a member of Waterloo's Trinity Baptist Church and a manager at John Deere Engineering, was elected president of the Iowa Southern Baptist Fellowship by one vote over Ed Gregory, pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church in Cedar Rapids, during the fellowship's annual meeting, Oct. 16-17 at Ashworth Road Baptist Church in West Des Moines.

After Newcom's election, Gregory was unanimously elected vice president.

More than 90 messengers representing Iowa's 79 Southern Baptist churches and missions approved a 1993 budget of \$1,092,567, up \$11,720 over the budget adopted for 1992.

Messengers also approved a 1 percent increase -- to 20 percent -- in Iowa's giving to the Cooperative Program, Southern Baptists' shared fund for national and international missions and ministry.

"Cooperative Program receipts have increased significantly this year," O. Wendell Jones, Iowa Baptists' executive director-treasurer, said in his address. "We are within reach of the budget again if every church continues to be consistent."

A \$50,378 goal was approved for the upcoming Lottie Moon Offering for Foreign Missions and \$35,687 for the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for Home Missions.

Messengers approved a resolution "that we remind our people that during an election year God sets up kings and pulls down kingdoms" and "that God is committed to affect the world through a healthy praying church not this political process of a nation."

Jones, also in his address, reported progress in pastoral service in Iowa. "A large number of churches have had pastors throughout the year," he said. "There are, at present, only six churches without pastors. The tenure of our pastors has increased from three to four years. This is very significant for the health of the local church and the (Iowa) Fellowship."

But, Jones noted, "The serious need in our state is for a positive attitude toward starting new work. There are yet more than 52 counties unentered."

A key goal of Iowa Baptists' longstanding partnership with Missouri Baptists and a new partnership with Arkansas Baptists, he said, will be "to enter at least one new county in each association in each year."

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Morris Chapman, president-treasurer of the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee, addressed the fellowship on the need for spiritual awakening in Iowa and across the nation.

Mark Elliott, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church in Fort Dodge, was elected recording secretary. Current recording secretary Eugene Linn fulfilled his duties despite suffering a heart attack earlier in the year.

The 1993 meeting of the Iowa Southern Baptist Fellowship will be Oct. 22-23 at Immanuel Baptist Church in Cedar Rapids.

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Tim Seanor selected  
national RA director

By Julie Rybolt Wilkerson

Baptist Press  
10/19/92

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--The Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission has named Timothy Craig Seanor, 36, as national Royal Ambassador director. He succeeds Karl Bozeman, who retired May 31.

Seanor will be responsible for promoting and directing the Royal Ambassador program nationally which serves 231,227 boys in grades one through nine and their leaders.

Seanor has been editor of RA's Lad magazine the past three years and a member of Brotherhood's staff 11 years.

Involved in Royal Ambassadors since he was 8 years old, Seanor comes to his post with the enthusiasm of firsthand experience. "Royal Ambassadors are vitally important in keeping Southern Baptist missions alive," Seanor said.

He said he hopes to encourage participation through greater awareness of the RA program, a stronger emphasis on evangelism and the call to missions and a renewed emphasis on prayer and giving to Southern Baptist missions efforts.

When Seanor was 17 and the Tennessee state Royal Ambassador president, he was featured in the December 1973 issue of Probe magazine.

In 1974, he won the Royal Ambassador National Award after completing 750 hours of missions service, which earned him a partial scholarship to Union University, where he received a bachelor's degree in art. Seanor also holds a master of religious education degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

As Lad magazine editor, Seanor was the recipient of the 1986 Baptist Public Relations Association's Albert McClellan Award for significant achievement in publications and BPRA's 1988 Wilmer C. Fields Award for publications and print media.

Seanor and his wife, Tammy, have two children, Zachariah, 5, and Sarah, 2. They are members of Temple Baptist Church in Memphis where he is a deacon and RA director.

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Wilkerson is a communications assistant for the SBC Brotherhood Commission.

Barna: Stats say plenty  
to America's churches

By Russ Dilday

Baptist Press  
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JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (BP)--Church growth analyst George Barna said he believes studying demographics today is the way for churches to understand the trends of tomorrow.

"Demographic statistics tell us trends that are reshaping our country," he told participants at the Missouri church growth conference in Jefferson City. "And what do trends have to do with your ministry?"

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"We (churches) are anywhere between 40 or 50 years behind," he answered. "We are always chasing trends when we need to set them."

Barna, president of Barna Research Group in Glendale, Calif., quoted statistics supporting trend changes in America's population, education, age and gender groups, and wealth distribution. But he elicited the most response from participants when discussing Americans' attitudes toward families, values and religion.

"The traditional family, with the father working outside of the home, the mother working at home and two children under age 18 is a small minority today," he said. "That's only 3 percent of families."

"We are moving to smaller families. There has been a fourfold increase in single parents in the last 20 years," he said. "Much of this is due to divorce, but births outside of marriage has doubled. This year alone, 40 percent of children born will be to unwed mothers under the age of 30."

According to Barna, family time together also is decreasing, and it's not limited to unchurched families. "The average churchgoing mother spends 50 minutes of meaningful time a week with her children," he said. "The average churchgoing father spends 15 minutes." He said in many areas, gangs have become surrogate families to children whose parents do not spend time with them.

Speaking of American societal values, Barna said, "We are the most self-deceived nation in the world. We proclaim one view and live another."

"Our findings say we see people as a means to an end and we seek happiness, love, comfort, security and influence but don't know where to look," he commented.

Barna said research indicates the American view differs from the Christian view in its beliefs about truth. "The Christian view says absolute truth exists and the Bible communicates truth. Most Americans, though, say all truth is relative and the Bible is insightful but not absolute."

"What implications do these findings have for churches?" he asked. "It means that most evangelism lacks a viable foundation, that Americans see Bible-based teaching as suggestive rather than life-changing and that sin is relative," he answered.

According to Barna, 69 percent of Americans view themselves as "religious," but he gave alarming statistics about how the country's religious culture thinks.

"Approximately 47 percent of churchgoers and non-churchgoers see Christianity as relevant to life today," he said. "But only 23 percent see churches as relevant to life today."

"Just as alarming, 59 percent agree Satan is just a symbol of evil and two-thirds believe it doesn't matter what god you pray to. It all goes up to the same place."

"It appears from our findings that America's religion of choice is syncretism," he explained, "taking beliefs from other religions and belief systems and putting them together to form your own."

He admitted to painting a dismal picture. "My job is to bring you bad news," he quipped, "but there are things you can do for ministry based on these statistics."

"First," he said, "stand on God's law. Don't give up because of societal beliefs. Provide working models for others to see and provide support systems for those who need them. Aggressively pursue kids," he continued. "Give them meaningful values."

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Barna was met with applause from participants for his final point. "Also, get involved in changing public policy. Religion should be protected from politics, but not politics from religion."

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Dilday is news and information coordinator for the Missouri Baptist Convention.

Researcher: growing churches  
share 21 characteristics

By Russ Dilday

Baptist Press  
10/19/92

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (BP)--The key ingredient to growing churches is the vision of the pastor, said church growth expert and research analyst George Barna.

Barna is president of the Barna Research Group of Glendale, Calif., a research company which specializes in studies of Christian ministries. He is author of 10 books, including "The Frog in the Kettle" and "User Friendly Churches."

In relating the findings of the Barna Group, he also said, "growing churches all share common characteristics."

He relayed his research findings to nearly 400 participants at the Missouri Church Growth Conference at the Capitol Plaza Hotel in Jefferson City, sponsored by the Missouri Baptist Convention's church growth unit.

Speaking to the audience of pastors, church staff and members and state denominational leaders, he said the company identified 21 characteristics common to growing churches.

Borrowing from computer terminology, he explained the shared characteristics make churches "user friendly" to members and visitors.

According to Barna, "user-friendly churches have a vision which each member can articulate" through a vision statement.

"A vision statement articulates a church's vision," Barna said. "It should be a simple, short (20-25 words), specific statement outlining the church's ministry.

"Although every church should have a vision statement which each member knows, our findings show less than 2 percent of pastors have one."

Pastors are crucial to church growth, he noted. "We found these user-friendly churches were led by strong pastors," he said. "He is a team-builder, committed to team ministry, not a domineering person." Barna said the findings showed pastors of growing churches all share a "special blend of characteristics."

"These pastors are aggressive and energetic, both authentic and humble," he said. "They are strategic thinkers, with a balance between emotion and intellect. They believe ministry is a partnership and they can see the big picture." He said all of the pastors studied did not consider their church to be a stop on the way to other churches. "They believed this would be their last church."

"The pastors of these churches were always involved in a non-pulpit ministry," he said. He added typical pastors from a growing church practiced delegation "but (they) always maintain a symbolic presence. They let other church members know they are aware of the ministries they (the members) are involved in."

Barna said the role of the laity in ministry also is crucial to growing churches. "In user-friendly churches, the laity are evangelists," he said. "The clergy is in a role of cheerleader or equipper. The pastor wants the people to have success in ministry by going out and doing ministry.

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"The best growth tool is word-of-mouth communication and all follow-up is done personally by the laity in these churches," he explained. "It doesn't make sense for people who came to church because of their relationship with someone to get a (follow-up) letter from someone they don't know."

Barna emphasized throughout the conference a focus on people, especially the laity, youth and visitors, was basic to the churches he analyzed. "It's people, not programs, that make a growing church," he said. "These churches care about people and realize programs are expendable." He said user-friendly churches judge a program's existence on one criterion: "How many people's lives have been changed by this program?"

Barna said the growing congregations focus on youth ministry because "it's practical. We spend more money on adults, yet 75 percent of Christians come to know the Lord by age 18." He said growing churches' youth programs resemble "organized chaos. Let kids be kids," he said. "Sure, teach the Bible, but let them work out their characters, too." He categorized youth as young children through age 18.

He said youth ministries should feature broad participation from adult church members. "Each adult should have a responsibility. If not active participation, then prayer support." He added the churches' youth ministers were unique. "We found each was on an equal status with other staff members."

Barna said research indicated growing churches also were visitor-sensitive churches. "Remember that visitors want to be anonymous and they want quality, convenience and comfort when they visit your church."

Although people are a large priority, Barna highlighted many ministry areas growing churches prioritized including prayer and evangelism.

"Prayer is a significant part of ministry. Prayer should be significant and consistent, taught and modeled by the membership and (be) high profile." He explained high profile, saying, "Many churches have prayer ministry members who don't fit anywhere else. If you believe prayer is important in fighting the battle, put your best people on the front lines."

About evangelism, Barna said growing churches are "neo-evangelistic. Growing churches reject unsuccessful evangelistic methods" such as telemarketing and door-to-door contacts. "To effectively witness, their members build relationships with people they know." He said growing churches "use events to reach people."

He spotlighted other less-tangible characteristics of growing churches during the conference, linked with congregational attitudes.

"These churches have a sense of urgency," he said. "They want to get the job done today because they know there may not be a tomorrow." He also said they shared "a sense of passion. In America, people lack passion. We have to have it to do ministry."

"User-friendly churches are always learning, adaptive and critical but not skeptical," he commented. "They also are confrontational, addressing problems directly and using biblical standards as a guide."

He said an attitude most prevalent among the researched churches was commitment to personal growth. "Each of these churches had congregations committed to ministry as a lifestyle," he said. "Many people say 'I can't minister,' but a church won't be whole until the people learn to minister individually."

He explained to the standing-room-only conference the research was collected from "churches from 12 denominations located across the country with attendances ranging from 250 to 4,000."

Barna said the growing churches researched by the company "had at least a 10 percent growth numerically and had shown evidence of spiritual growth." He added spiritual growth was just as important to the research findings as numerical growth. "Qualitative growth will lead to quantitative growth but not the reverse," he commented.

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CORRECTION: In (BP) story titled "New book portrays Elvis as interested in religion," dated 10/1/92, please correct the final paragraph's second sentence to read, "He later attended Criswell Bible College in Dallas and graduated from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas." Also, a photo of Stanley is available upon request from the central office of Baptist Press in Nashville.

Thanks,  
Baptist Press

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