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Surgeon General seeks voluntary ban  
of alcohol ads aimed at teenagers

By Tom Strode

WASHINGTON (BP)--The Bush administration has not pressured Surgeon General Antonia Novello to soften her campaign against youth-oriented alcohol advertising, she said after a recent congressional hearing.

In a news conference Nov. 4, Novello called for the elimination of "irresponsible ads" appealing to youth but asked the alcohol industry to pull them voluntarily. Fourteen executives from the alcohol industry had agreed to meet with her Dec. 11, Novello said. Her request for voluntary compliance by the industry was insufficient, some opponents of the ads said. They also criticized the White House.

The administration has not interfered nor has it asked her only to request voluntary action, Novello said after a hearing Nov. 15.

"It's the way that I do business," she said, "one step at a time . . . . I cannot block (the alcohol executives) with negativism until I meet with them . . . ."

Her recent reports and recommendations on youth drinking have produced a "flood of calls and letters" from the administration, Congress, the alcohol industry and parents in support of her efforts, Novello said.

" . . . the information that is out there has been so broad and so common sense that everyone is looking for me to be able to make a difference," she said.

In the hearing, Novello told the House of Representatives Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families, "We are losing the war on underage drinking because we are allowing mixed messages to go on and on."

Although persons under 21 are being warned of the serious health risks in drinking alcohol, Novello said, such a message "directly conflicts with the enticing drum beat of ads that say, 'Drink me, and you will be cool. Drink me, and you will be glamorous, or drink me, and you will have fun!'"

One of the things she learned during a cross-country, "fact-finding mission" in September 1990 was "how pervasive underage drinking is and how it is truly the mainstream drug used that plagues our communities and our families," Novello said.

Her research showed high school seniors reported they took their first drink at a party while seventh graders said they first drank alcohol at home, Novello said.

Three reports by the Department of Health and Human Services were released from June to November and showed, Novello told the committee:

-- A minimum of 8 million teenagers drink alcohol every week and nearly half a million go on a weekly binge, which is five drinks in a row (The average binge-drinker is 16, white, male and in the 10th grade, she said.);

-- Junior and senior high students drink 35 percent of all wine coolers sold annually in the country (31 million gallons) and 1.1 billion cans of beer;

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-- Two of three teenagers cannot discern alcoholic from non-alcoholic beverages because of their similarity on store shelves;

-- More than 5.5 million teenagers do not know the minimum legal age for buying alcohol;

-- The federal 21-year-old minimum drinking law generally is a myth because of loopholes and lax enforcement;

-- Two-thirds of teenagers who drink can walk into a store and buy alcohol;

-- Alcohol advertising, which has no effective regulations or standards, uses glamorous lifestyles, sex, sports figures and risky activities to appeal to youth.

In response to a question, Novello said she had not looked closely at bills in Congress requiring health and safety warning messages in all broadcast and print alcohol advertising. The idea they would address the problem of teenage drinking "pleases me tremendously," she said.

"We continue to be pleased with the surgeon general's efforts to bring public attention to bear on misleading alcohol advertising directed at youth," said James A. Smith, director of government relations for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission. "However, we do not share Dr. Novello's optimism that the industry will voluntarily stop promoting its product to one of its most profitable markets."

The CLC is in a coalition supporting the warning-messages legislation, The Alcoholic Beverage Advertisement Act (S. 664) and The Sensible Advertising and Family Education Act (H.R. 1443).

One of her responses to the reports was to appoint a task force to present recommendations for better content labeling on alcoholic beverages, Novello said.

The states are the "key actors" in implementing laws against underage drinking, she said. Examples of fighting drinking by minors, Novello said, are: 27 states delay, suspend or revoke a youth's driver's license for illegal possession of alcohol, and 23 states allow civil lawsuits against persons who provide alcohol for minors.

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Lebanese Baptist students  
score high in national tests

By Jerree T. White

Baptist Press  
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BEIRUT, Lebanon (BP)--Beirut Baptist School students scored impressively in national testing of junior and high school students in Lebanon this fall -- despite a bitter civil war that often has closed the school.

The Baptist school's students surpassed every other school in the country on test results in 12th-grade mathematics and advanced science. Every one of the students passed the math test, compared to the national average of 31 percent. Ninety-five percent of the students passed the advanced-level science test, compared to 35 percent nationally.

The percentages of Beirut Baptist students passing other tests were somewhat lower, but they still outscored national averages.

The annual tests are a closely-watched event each fall among high school students in Lebanon. Newspapers throughout the country publish test results. Although 90 percent of the students at Beirut Baptist School are Muslims, they attend the school and take its required training in basic Christian beliefs because of its high academic standards.

About 1,000 students attend Beirut Baptist School, a fully self-supporting institution which includes elementary to post-high school grade levels.

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Southern Baptist workers previously taught in and administered the school, but Americans had to leave Lebanon in 1987 amid the civil war ravaging the country. Southern Baptist personnel assigned to Lebanon still support Baptist ministry in Lebanon from Cyprus, an island nation in the Mediterranean.

A measure of peace returned to war-weary Lebanon early this year when the central Lebanese government, with the backing of the Syrian army, regained control of most of the country from warring militias.

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White, a Southern Baptist worker living in Cyprus, works with Lebanese Baptists.

Nigeria explosion victims  
overwhelm Baptist hospital

By Donald D. Martin

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OGBOMOSHO, Nigeria (BP)--Burn victims from an exploding kerosene storage tank have overwhelmed the Baptist Medical Center in Ogbomosho, Nigeria.

"The situation at the hospital is critical," said missionary Don Reece, executive secretary for the Southern Baptist mission in Nigeria. Although the explosion happened Nov. 9, all hospitals in Ogbomosho remain full with patients recovering from the blast that killed as many as 200 people.

The lethal explosion took such a heavy toll because of an earlier, unrelated fire that had drawn onlookers to the area. As a large crowd watched firemen put out the last flames of the fire, sparks from a repaired fuel pump ignited a filling station's above-ground kerosene tank. Seconds later the tank exploded, blanketing the area with sheets of flaming kerosene.

Homes several hundred yards away were damaged by the explosion. One family of eight, including six children, were caught in the rain of fire and died in their home.

Some local Baptists were killed and others injured in the explosion. S. Ola Fadeji, general secretary of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, has attended several funerals of church members caught in the explosion, Reece said.

Burn victims began flooding into the Baptist hospital soon after the explosion. The hospital is within a mile of the filling station. Less than an hour after the blast, the hospital was packed and had to turn new burn victims away, sending them to other hospitals in the city. The hospital, with a missionary staff of seven, is low on some supplies for burn patients, as are most medical facilities in the city, Reece said.

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African Baptists help  
those who once helped them

By Craig Bird

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KIGALI, Rwanda (BP)--African financial aid is helping European Christians start a church in Denmark -- and giving a new twist to an old saying.

"When a rabbit is old it is nursed by those it nursed when it was young," says an oft-quoted proverb in the tiny, landlocked African country of Rwanda. It typically refers to grown children taking care of aging parents.

But these days, reports Southern Baptist missionary Larry Randolph, the phrase is appropriate to an unlikely pairing of Baptists in Rwanda and Denmark.

Last July Eleazar Ziherambere visited Denmark as executive director of the Baptist Union of Rwanda. (Danish missionaries began Baptist work in Rwanda in 1928. The union invited Southern Baptists to join them in 1977.)

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While there he learned that Esbjerg, Denmark's fifth-largest city, had been targeted as the priority location for a new Baptist church. He also discovered the effort had financial problems.

So he returned to Rwanda with a challenge for the annual convention of the Baptist union: help the Danes do in Esbjerg what they have been doing in Rwanda for more than 60 years.

Delegates voted to support the project with prayer and contributions. A special offering was taken in Rwandan Baptist churches in September and another will be collected next March. Ziherambere has written to all union churches, encouraging the members to give money or crops and livestock to be sold and added to the cash donations sent to Denmark.

"Can Baptists in a small, war-plagued, poor African nation help Baptists in a rich European nation finance a church-planting effort in Europe?" Randolph asked.

"Why not? The challenge is helping Rwandan Baptists recognize they have a part to play in world missions support.

"Besides, it's the 'rabbitly' thing to do!"

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Radio-mail-missionary team  
births Zambian church

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KABWE, Zambia (BP)--The two young men banging on the gate were strangers to Rick Kuter -- but not any stranger than how they came to his gate in the first place, or what would happen because of their visit.

The visitors, Abraham and Facsoni, did not speak English. Kuter, a first-term Southern Baptist missionary from Hartsville, S.C., was fresh out of language school and not very fluent in their Bemba language. But eventually the purpose of their visit became clear.

Months before, another missionary gave Kuter the addresses of people in a village in the Kabwe area who had responded to Baptist radio broadcasts and wanted to start a church. Kuter wrote and invited the villagers to visit him.

They did. Abraham and Facsoni had walked for six hours to take Kuter up on his offer to help start a church. So the three men piled into the missionary's pickup and drove -- via dirt roads and even some footpaths -- to the village.

En route, Abraham declared he had listened faithfully to the Baptist broadcasts. What's more, he had enrolled in the Bible Way correspondence course and completed all five courses offered in Bemba. Proof was hanging on the walls of his mud hut when Kuter went inside: five Bible Way certificates.

As Kuter visited with Abraham, people continued to crowd into the house, greet him and go out again. Finally the missionary was told, "There are people outside that want you to speak to them from the Bible." Kuter went outside and found 15 people seated on the ground or leaning against the hut.

When he "began to share with them how Jesus Christ had come into the world to save all people" and asked if anyone wanted to receive Christ as their "Savior and chief," three people responded.

Since then Abraham and other Baptists from Kabwe have led at least 75 others from the village to faith in Christ, Kuter reported, and Lukali Baptist Church has been organized. And the Baptists are starting a church in a neighboring village.

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United Methodists 'reach out and touch'  
Southern Baptists' answering machine

By Charles Willis

NASHVILLE (BP)--A wrong number combined with a twist of irony has caused a degree of embarrassment to a division of the United Methodist Publishing House and some inconvenience to a Southern Baptist Sunday School Board employee.

When two digits were transposed in a telephone listing in the United Methodist Program Calendar, just released for 1992, the result turned out to be the home telephone number for Morlee Maynard, coordinator of research, program design and planning in the board's family ministry department, and her husband, Ken, a former board employee.

Calls for the United Methodist Church School Publications editorial offices at the denomination's publishing house, just blocks away from the Sunday School Board in downtown Nashville, have begun to come to the Maynards' home.

"We started getting these Methodists' messages on our answering machine," a news release from the publishing house quoted Morlee Maynard. "Some people were even recording curriculum orders, but since we routinely erased messages, they may be in for a wait."

When the Maynards finally received a call personally, they were able to backtrack to Church School Publications to report the problem. According to the news release, a correction is planned for insertion in future calendar shipments and CSP is "searching for other ways of notifying users of the calendar."

The Maynards hope the word gets out before the next ordering period comes in late December and early January.

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Illinois pastor prepares  
both sermons and briefs

By Ferrell Foster

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DUNDEE, Ill. (BP)--Lawyer John Larry Phillips prepared his arguments for a legal case as he sat at a large wooden table cluttered with papers and surrounded by shelves of books. The legal brief had three points.

For Sundays, he prepares sermons -- three points and a poem.

Phillips, 48, is both a lawyer and a pastor.

He spends about 40 hours every week at the law office of Donald R. Brewer in Dundee, Ill., northwest of Chicago. Much of the rest of his time is spent being pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Woodstock, further to the northwest.

"It's kind of like two full-time jobs," Phillips said. "Probably most bivocational pastors will tell you that."

The Georgia native who grew up in Tennessee doesn't fit the traditional mold of a pastor or of a lawyer. "But I love doing both of them," he said.

"I love the law, and I love the Lord," Phillips said. "I still feel like a layman who God has called to preach."

Phillips was 37 years old and practicing law in Tennessee when God called him to preach. He closed his law office, sold his house, and moved his wife and three kids to seminary in 1979.

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In 1983, he was called as pastor of First Baptist Church in Olympia Fields, Ill., near Chicago, and stayed there until 1986. That year, he thought God was calling him to a church back in Tennessee, near the Phillips' extended family.

"I knew the first Sunday morning I stood up in the church that I was in the wrong place," he says now. "I was homesick for Chicagoland."

"I just love this area for some reason," Phillips said. "I don't know what it is. You grab for straws."

As a child he collected Chicago White Sox baseball cards. But, he said, "There's no logical reason" why he feels drawn to the area -- even though he likes the climate and the people.

"I just like the dynamics of all this big city and the people and things going on," he added.

In 1988, Phillips was called as full-time pastor at Calvary Baptist Church in Woodstock, a growing community in a growing county.

The church treated him well financially, but for various reasons the church felt monetary strains. Also, Phillips was feeling some personal pressures. He felt he had been "kind of overkilling" as a pastor.

So, to help the church financially and himself emotionally, Phillips took the Illinois Bar Exam and became a practicing lawyer again in November 1990.

Since then his weekly schedule has been packed. Monday through Friday he works at the law office, but each day he carries with him four manilla folders of study materials -- one each for his two Sunday sermons, Wednesday message and Sunday School lesson. He studies before he goes to the office and whenever he can during the day. "I saturate myself."

On Saturday, he pulls together his thoughts into organized sermons and lessons for presentation. He also works on Sunday afternoon.

The family joke is that "my day off is Sunday night from eight o'clock to midnight." Then the cycle starts over.

"I've probably not been fair to my family," Phillips admits. "But the Lord seemed to be blessing so much." He and his wife, Cindy, have three children, LaRae, 20; Ben, 17; and Jayne, 14.

Phillips said he probably is a workaholic. He prides himself on being prepared -- for sermons, lessons and legal cases. "I may go overboard. It's almost an obsession with me ... to be as prepared as I can be."

Phillips said, however, he is beginning to feel some fatigue from the schedule he has maintained.

"What the Lord's equipped me to do is teach and preach and give some leadership," he said. "I feel content with who I am and trying to focus on that which God has equipped me to do."

Teaching is a big part of Phillips' ministry, and that teaching emphasizes the importance of the Bible.

"I began my ministry with a real conviction that what people want to hear is what God's word has to say," he said. "What I've always longed to do is communicate the word."

He said he doesn't "worship the Bible," but he loves God's word because he loves the Lord.

As a lawyer, Phillips deals with laws that are always changing. As a pastor, he preaches God's word, which is "true and right and real" and never changing.

Phillips described Calvary Church as a traditional church emphasizing worship, discipleship and fellowship. "I believe there's a place here for a traditional kind of approach," he added.

Since 1988, Sunday school attendance at Calvary has risen from 40 to nearly 60.

But Phillips is not one to keep up with numbers a great deal. What he has noticed is spiritual growth in those who attend. "It's been interesting to see the progress," he said.

As an adult, Phillips has sat in the pew and stood on the podium. He has worked in the secular world and preached from the pulpit. He doesn't feel like a typical lawyer or a typical pastor.

What he is sure about is that God has called him to preach and teach God's word.

So he wears the hats of the lawyer and the pastor, and on his wall hangs the motto of his mentor in the law, W.A. Richardson, "Let me live in a house by the side of the road, and be a friend of man."