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92-16

**Southern Baptists venture
into church prayer effort**

By Terri Lackey

NASHVILLE (BP)--What could a new church in Rhode Island, a small church in central Kentucky and an innovative church in Southern California have in common?

Fervent belief in prayer and a role in the Watchmen National Prayer Alert.

Every Monday, pastor Al Von Seeberg of Greenmeadow Baptist Church in North Kingstown, R.I., transfers the prayer watch to Wiley Drake, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church in Buena Park, Calif., who in turn calls Fran Wright, prayer coordinator at Immanuel Baptist Church in Danville, Ky.

Telephone lines and prayer concerns link the churches. The time zones in which they live may be different but their ideas about prayer are not.

"We believe in prayer, yes ma'am," Wright said. "We've got to get together to fight Satan, now."

Drake, whose participation in the prayer effort is an extension of his church's continuing commitment to prayer, said, "We've seen so many miracles as a result of prayer." First Southern members have prayed every day at 9 a.m. for the past four years.

These churches are among about 1,200 presently registered to participate in the national prayer effort among Southern Baptists. The goal is to bring spiritual awakening to the nation and the world. All have agreed to pray at least one hour a week during 1992.

The prayer alert is an organized effort coordinated by the discipleship training department of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board. It emerged from a call by SBC President Morris Chapman for Southern Baptist churches to become more involved in the nation's spiritual well-being.

Church members pray during the hour assigned them, said Mary Betts, prayer alert coordinator. Following their hour of prayer, the church "transfers the watch" or calls the church designated to pray through the next hour.

Betts expects to have a Watchmen National Prayer Alert membership roll of 2,500 churches by the end of February. With the need to have churches praying at every hour of the day and night, every church cannot have a so-called "convenient" time.

"I don't like having to tell someone their hour is 1 a.m. I realize that is a very difficult hour, but I give them some suggestions," Betts said. "The main thing is that the contact person be committed to praying during that hour."

She said the idea of transferring the prayer watch from one congregation to another helps unite churches in the prayer effort.

"It also brings the different churches closer together as they share prayer concerns with one another," she added. For example, at the request of Drake, the tiny Rhode Island church of 45 is praying for a family in the California church.

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"I feel like we have a bond," Von Seeberg said. "I feel like we can help each other share the Lord's blessings."

Von Seeberg is also asking the churches on his "watch" to pray for his one-year-old congregation which is \$3,000 in debt.

"I am bivocational but at this time I am looking for a second job," said Von Seeberg, who is presently living with his family in the church building. "New England is a small convention, and the churches here need the help of larger, more established churches," he said.

Drake said he has no doubt prayer can take care of the practical as well as the spiritual concerns of his church. "We have seen a lot of changes in our church since we have been praying together for four years," he said. "Just in a very practical sense, we have had four mortgages against the church totally forgiven and now we are debt free.

"We have also seen dozens of marriages healed. Prayer really draws us together and makes the church a family," he added.

The three churches, as well as other members of the prayer network, offer during their hour each week a similar four-point prayer outlined in Watchmen National Prayer Alert guidelines.

"Each week," Drake said, "we pray to remove obstacles hindering revival and for the restoration of broken churches, families and lives.

"We pray for a renewed commitment by God's people to spreading the gospel," Drake said, "and we ask the Lord for power to resist the devil."

Churches interested in becoming participants in the prayer ministry should write to Watchmen National Prayer Alert, MSN 151, 127 Ninth Ave. N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, or call Mary Betts, (615) 251-5037. Churches can fax their registration or prayer concerns to (615) 251-5058. An informational video tape and brochure are available.

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Seminary professor claims
Ruschlikon charges validated

By Herb Hollinger

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WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--Questions raised by Foreign Mission Board trustees about Ruschlikon seminary professors' beliefs in the virgin birth of Jesus Christ have validity, according to a Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary professor.

R. Philip Roberts, associate professor of evangelism and church growth at the Wake Forest, N.C., seminary, furnished copies to Baptist Press of letters written by Ruschlikon professors "to demonstrate that this material exists." Roberts referred to recent press accounts about California FMB trustee Ron Wilson who said in a letter to the board's chairman he was concerned about the seminary's teaching on the virgin birth.

Ruschlikon officials, however, say the matter was settled long ago and the virgin birth is both believed and taught at the Swiss seminary.

According to Roberts, letters written by senior Ruschlikon faculty members, concerning a German Baptist seminary professor who was relieved of his position in 1985 because of his teachings on the virgin birth, "reveal to all Baptists the nature of Ruschlikon's response."

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A position paper on the firing of Hamburg seminary president and professor Eduard Schutz, written Oct. 22, 1985, and signed by Ruschlikon's Thorwald Lorenzen, professor of systematic theology and ethics, Hans H. Mallau, Old Testament and Hebrew professor, and Gunter Wagner, New Testament professor, argues for Schutz' position about the virgin birth.

Schutz was charged with downplaying the significance of the virgin birth, according to the paper.

"Since 25 out of 27 books of the New Testament arrive at their christological statements without referring to the virgin birth, then it follows therefrom that a confession of the virgin birth is after all not denied (or challenged) when one deduces on the basis of scripture that it (the virgin birth) contributes nothing to a right understanding of Christ. Its theological meaning (significance) must be sought at a less central place in Christian teaching," the professors argue in the paper.

"With reference to the scripture, one argues in a way that would reject even the Apostle Paul himself as seminary director in Hamburg; because he does not teach the virgin birth -- like all New Testament authors except for Matthew and Luke -- he is no example for the sheep. What a shame! Paul and John could caution (instruct) beginning and veteran preachers of the fact that for them birth from the Spirit and Sonship of God are not dependent on a declaration of virgin birth."

In response, Jo Ann Hopper, wife of Ruschlikon President John David Hopper, said, "We believe in the virgin birth and we teach it at Ruschlikon. Dr. Wiard Popkes, chairman of our board, responded to the erroneous charge about the three professors in his recent open letter."

Popkes' letter, sent Jan. 14 to European and Southern Baptists in response to the Jan. 3 open letter from Foreign Mission Board trustee chairman Bill Hancock, said: "the matter was settled long ago with leaders of the German Baptist Union; in addition, the three professors wrote a letter of clarification to Dr. Isam Ballenger." Ballenger has announced early retirement from his post as FMB vice president for Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, in protest of actions and missions philosophies of FMB trustees.

The three professors, in that letter, said they thought the matter had been put to rest in 1988 when a team of FMB trustees and staff visited Ruschlikon.

"Our statement relating to Dr. Eduard Schutz was formulated in response to the false charges that Dr. Schutz had denied the truth of the doctrine of the virgin birth. If further clarification is needed, we would like to emphasize that the virgin birth belongs to the doctrines in the New Testament which affirm that Jesus Christ is truly God and truly human. Neither in our statement written in 1985, nor in our teaching activities have we ever denied the truth of the infancy narratives in the gospels of Matthew and Luke," the letter reads.

Another document Roberts furnished Baptist Press was an open letter from one of the Ruschlikon professors to Manfred Otto, German Baptist Union executive secretary. It protested the German Union's firing of Schutz as president of the Hamburg seminary.

According to the Oct. 29, 1985, letter from Hans H. Mallau, Old Testament professor, the Ruschlikon faculty is "is in possession of sufficient international information which prohibits us from looking at the events which led to the disciplinary action of Brother Schutz isolated from international developments."

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"A worldwide organization of power-hungry zealots, with unequivocal political goals, is pushing in all churches and is attempting everywhere by means of simplistic theological arguments, which lend themselves to very effective marketing, to discredit and expel the established representatives of ecclesiastical education and to replace them with less qualified and thus more manipulated people. Any means to accomplish that is justified, and financial pressure is among the preferred reprisals. We fear that the federation leadership, without being aware of it, already sits on such an organized movement and thus is headed toward further disciplinary action."

Mallau cited a "wave of fundamentalism" as behind the German federation's call for the professor's dismissal.

"The masses always seek, as water, the easiest, least resistant way downhill. Fundamentalism has been for a long time, even in our federation, capable of achieving majority status if no closed front of well-respected and trustworthy brethren is set against it and especially against its misused movement."

Ballenger said the three teachers explained their position to German Baptist leaders, who had been upset, and reconciled the issue with them.

"Another factor," Ballenger said, "was that they got caught up in defending a friend and colleague whom they thought was being unfairly treated and unfairly accused of denying the virgin birth. Also, there were complications other than theology involved in Dr. Schutz's dismissal."

"These are issues for Europeans to deal with, not Southern Baptists," Ballenger said. "The Ruschlikon seminary has a board of trustees from many Baptist unions of Europe and they are capable of handling the situation."

Roberts also cited a press release from the Frankfurter (German) Rundschau magazine, dated Dec. 23, 1985, which discussed the firing of the German professor.

"This past fall the leader of the Hamburg Theological Seminary of the Baptist federation, with approximately 70,000 members, had to take a forced leave of absence. The reason: Eduard Schutz had expressed what is common theological knowledge for many Christians today, i.e., the tradition according to which Jesus Christ was born of a virgin plays only a minor role in the New Testament. 'The evidence of the virgin birth,' the theologian explained in conversation, 'ekes out a very narrow marginal existence, which is not at all to be compared with the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.'"

According to the article, many members of the 620 Baptist congregations threatened to withhold financial support from the (German) federation or even to pull out of the federation if measures weren't taken against Schutz.

"In the meantime, three colleagues of the suspended theologian have hurried to his aid," the magazine editors wrote. "Thus many share the view of Ruschlikon professor Mallau that the wave of fundamentalism which for years has split the 13-million member strong Southern Baptist Convention in the USA is spilling over to German Baptists. Fundamentalism -- originally an American specialty (idiosyncrasy) -- maintains that the Bible is free of error and that criticism of biblical texts is the work of the devil. But theologians can't enter into such an uncritical belief if they want to be taken seriously as scholars."

Two of the Ruschlikon professors have announced retirement dates. Wagner is scheduled to retire in 1993 and Mallau in 1994.

Although Phil Roberts is still on the faculty of SEBTS, he is taking a leave of absence in 1992 to serve as full-time dean at the Oradea Christian University Seminary in Oradea, Romania. Roberts also will become director of SEBTS' Center for Great Commission Studies in January 1993 but will maintain an active relationship with the school in Oradea, according to a Jan. 14 SEBTS news release.

Roberts said Steve Hardy, chairman of the FMB's European regional committee, acquired and supplied the translations of the German text.

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Bush at NRB meeting
defends traditional values

By Tom Strode

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WASHINGTON (BP)--President George Bush, speaking to the same convention at which he defended the war in the Persian Gulf as justified one year before, told the National Religious Broadcasters they need to fight to preserve traditional values.

In a 20-minute speech Jan. 27, the day before he delivered his State of the Union address, President Bush mentioned the following values "which sustain America":

- The sanctity of life.
- Self-reliance central to work.
- Decency.
- The family.
- Opposition to drugs and crime.
- Belief in prayer.

He compared the battle for these values to the struggle the year before in the Mideast where "we fought for good versus evil -- it was that clear to me -- right versus wrong, dignity against oppression."

"Just as our forces fought to defend all of what is best about America, we need you to help instill the traditional values that make life and liberty worth defending," the president said.

He defined decency as the "moral courage to say what is right and condemn what is wrong."

"And we need a nation closer to the Waltons than the Simpsons," he said.

The family is the "foundation of our strength," the president said. "I do not want one single action that I take as president to weaken the American family."

He also voiced support for school prayer. "In Sunday school, children learn that God is everywhere but in public school they find that he's absent from class," the president said. "And I continue to believe, as do the overwhelming majority of Americans, in the right to nondenominational voluntary school prayer."

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God's power greater than robbers'
bullet to seminary student

By Scott Collins

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FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--In one motion, the robber shoved a handgun to the back of Scott Crenshaw's head and fired twice. A third shot, this one to Crenshaw's back, came seconds later.

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It was just what Crenshaw asked for.

"I told them I was a Christian and if I were to die, I would go straight to heaven," the 28-year-old student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary said. "I just kept looking at them. I looked at them straight in the eye and said, 'You'll have to shoot me in the back.'"

That's when Crenshaw turned his back on the two robbers and one of the men fired the gun. "All of a sudden I felt this unreal peace that told me I was not going to die," he said.

The next thing he remembers is the crack of the pistol. Grabbing the back of his head as he fell forward, Crenshaw was confused. He wasn't dead.

"I figured if they were going to kill me I wouldn't even hear the gun go off. I would just see Jesus," he said.

"But they shot me in the back of the head and I knew I wasn't dead. There was blood on my head but I only felt two huge bumps."

Those bumps were the extent of Crenshaw's injuries. The gun was loaded with blanks.

The robbers sped away in Crenshaw's car, leaving him on the street. Crenshaw ran to a nearby house and banged on the door. Inside, two other seminary students were studying for a test. They let Crenshaw in to call Fort Worth police.

"I went outside to wait for the police and I was not angry, mad or bitter," Crenshaw said. "I can honestly say there was an incredible peace that came over me and I actually started praying for their (robbers') salvation. I actually started crying for their salvation, that God would use what I said to them to minister to them."

It was that opportunity for personal evangelism that led Crenshaw to give the two men a ride from the convenience store where he met them. He had gone to the store to buy ice cream for his wife, who is pregnant with the couple's third child.

While in the store Crenshaw noticed the two men he described as "clean-cut." When they asked for a ride, Crenshaw saw an opportunity to share his faith in Jesus Christ.

After driving about three miles they asked Crenshaw to pull over so they could get out. That's when the men "flung open the car doors and one of the guys got right in my face with a revolver."

When the robbers demanded his money Crenshaw laughed and told them he was a seminary student and had no money. They ordered him to lie face down on the car seat and the next thing Crenshaw remembers is the sound of the gun.

While Crenshaw admits he has mixed emotions about his brush with death, one emotion remains. "Anytime I think about the incident, I start praying for those guys."

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

CORRECTION: In (BP) story titled "Jack Lowndes retires from GBC; elected Lord's Day Alliance head," please delete the second paragraph and replace it with this new paragraph:

According to its 1888 charter, the Lord's Day Alliance is an organization whose sole purpose is maintaining the Lord's Day as a day of rest, worship, Christian education and spiritual renewal.

Thanks,
Baptist Press
