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92-44

Hunger giving up slightly;
CLC urges more effort

By Louis Moore

NASHVILLE (BP)--In the wake of the slight rise in Southern Baptist hunger giving last year and the increasing hunger demands at home and abroad, particularly in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission is organizing a meeting of denominational agency leaders to plan a new strategy to focus increased attention on the hunger issue.

"We must 'pull out the stops' to see what we can do to increase hunger giving in order to meet expanding needs," said Ben Mitchell, the Christian Life Commission's director of biomedical and life issues.

"We need to develop a new strategy for hunger needs," he said. "Subsequently, I have been in contact with John Cheyne of the SBC Foreign Mission Board, Paul Adkins of the SBC Home Mission Board, Dellanna O'Brien of the Woman's Missionary Union and James Williams of the Brotherhood Commission to discuss such an effort. We are planning a strategy meeting for this spring to discover ways we can more effectively educate, enlist and motivate Southern Baptists to give to global hunger. We desperately need a plan that will carry us through the end of this millennium and beyond.

"The same God who has opened the doors of opportunity for us around the world calls all of us to respond to those opportunities for ministry," he said. "I have little doubt that Southern Baptists will respond sacrificially when they see how critical the need really is."

"Our Lord taught that to those who have been given much shall much be required," Mitchell said. "The doors are open and the walls have tumbled down dramatically, which increases our responsibility to feed the hungry and relieve suffering. The question is, will we respond to the need and fulfill our responsibility?"

Statistics released by both the Southern Baptist Foreign and Home Mission Boards indicate giving to hunger causes in 1991 rose \$48,924, or 0.6 percent, over 1990.

John Cheyne, director of the human needs program at the SBC Foreign Mission Board reported the FMB had received \$6,501,962 for hunger. He said he is "basically pleased with the increase in giving in the context of a recession and an increased rate of unemployment in the nation.

"This demonstrates a consistency of concern for world hunger that is not driven by media exploitation or a single offering." He said the 1985 boost in hunger giving has been attributed to the attention given to the crisis in Ethiopia by network television.

Cheyne said he believes the consistency in giving reflects the fact Southern Baptists have been sensitized to hunger needs through the cooperative efforts of the Christian Life Commission, Foreign Mission Board, and Home Mission Board.

Adkins, Home Mission Board vice president for ministry, also reported a small increase in this year's hunger giving. In 1991 the HMB received \$1,327,334 toward hunger needs as compared to \$1,301,228 in 1990. Requests for assistance far outstrip the ability to respond to the needs, Adkins said.

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"Last year, the requests for domestic hunger funds from our missionaries on the field who handle distribution exceeded \$1.75 million, yet we were only able to give about one-half or two-thirds the amount requested, depending on the circumstances," Adkins said.

"During this time of recession and unemployment in America, it is tragic that the needs are so much greater than Baptists are giving in response to the needs," he said. "Some people may not be aware of the tremendous needs, while others may be suffering from compassion fatigue. Whatever the reason, we need to do so much more," he said. Both the Home Mission Board and the Foreign Mission Board distributed more monies than they received this year. The FMB was able to appropriate \$10.1 million to hunger and relief and the HMB was able to distribute \$1.4 million.

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Opposition to homosexual union
aired by N.C. association, editor

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press
3/10/92

RALEIGH, N.C. (BP)--Opposition is mounting within North Carolina to a Raleigh congregation's vote to sanction a marriage-like ceremony between two homosexuals.

The Raleigh Baptist Association's executive committee, in a closed meeting March 4, passed a resolution urging Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in Raleigh to reconsider its vote to approve a "same-gender" union between one of the church's members and his homosexual partner.

The associational committee noted: "... we make it clear to all concerned that we consider homosexual activity a sin and that any church blessing upon such activity is contrary to the teaching of Scripture." The resolution also declared, "The Bible teaches that homosexuality is a perversion and sinful in God's sight."

However, the committee made no recommendation that Pullen Memorial be disfellowshipped from the association. Rather, it stated, "Southern Baptists believe in the autonomy of the local church and therefore the membership of each church must answer for themselves before God."

R.G. Puckett, editor of the Biblical Recorder, newsjournal of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, wrote in a Feb. 29 editorial that Pullen Memorial and a Chapel Hill congregation considering licensing a homosexual to the gospel ministry "have gone one step too far."

"Local Baptist churches have the right to be wrong and in this case Pullen and (Olin T.) Binkley (Memorial Baptist Church in Chapel Hill) are wrong, dead wrong," Puckett wrote.

But Puckett likewise embraced local church autonomy, noting, "... unless one is a member of the congregation, opinions are all we can have and the congregations should not be intimidated by external forces in making their final decision, whether it be right or wrong."

The church autonomy stances of the associational committee and Puckett, however, stand at variance with proposals being considered by the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee.

The SBC committee, at its Feb. 18 meeting, initiated efforts to change the Southern Baptist Convention's constitution and bylaws to bar any church "affirming, approving or endorsing in any way the active practice of homosexuality," according to one proposal. The committee will meet prior to the SBC's June 9-11 meeting in Indianapolis to formulate any specific proposals to be presented to messengers representing Southern Baptist churches across the country. The committee also adopted a resolution Feb. 18 squarely opposing homosexuality and such congregational actions.

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The Southern Baptist Convention has adopted six resolutions against homosexuality since 1976, the latest during last year's meeting in Atlanta.

The Executive Committee's initiative "could reverse more than 140 years of precedent by adding a church's stand on a social issue, homosexuality, as a requirement for participation in the SBC," according to one state Baptist newsjournal, Word and Way of the Missouri Baptist Convention.

Pullen Memorial's actions will be discussed during a scheduled two-and-a-half-hour March 28 dialogue sponsored by the Raleigh Baptist Association's mutual care commission. The meeting will be open to the pastor and a lay representative of each of the association's 111 churches. "The purpose of the meeting is not to reach an associational position on Pullen and no vote will be taken," the commission's chairman, R. Paul Wilms, wrote. Rather, it will be "a forum for doctrinal dialogue on the issue of homosexuality." Wilms is a lay member of Ephesus Baptist Church in Cary, N.C.

Beyond its SBC ties, Pullen Memorial is affiliated with the American Baptist Convention, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Alliance of Baptists (formerly the Southern Baptist Alliance).

Additional reaction in North Carolina was recorded the day after the March 1 announcement at Pullen of its secret ballot vote affirming, by a 64 percent tally, the same-gender union and, by 94 percent, full church membership for homosexuals.

"For most Baptist churches, to consider blessing a homosexual union is unthinkable," Charles L. McMillan Jr., director of missions of the Raleigh Baptist Association, wrote in an open letter. McMillan wrote he was "dismayed" by Pullen's action. "These comments do not constitute an official response of the association," McMillan wrote, "but are my personal assessment of how area Baptists perceive this issue."

Roy J. Smith, executive director of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, issued a written statement both affirming "the autonomy of the local church and the worth of every individual" but stating, "Although I have no authority as executive director of the state convention to speak for any Baptist except myself, I nevertheless must state my position clearly (that homosexuality) stands clearly outside the teachings of the New Testament."

The Raleigh Baptist Association, Puckett, McMillan and Smith all agreed, however, that ministry should be extended to homosexuals. "Baptist churches have always struggled with how to condemn sin yet love the sinner," McMillan wrote. "That struggle has never been more sharp and painful than it is with this issue."

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Drummond's retirement OK'd with
\$107,250 cash gratitude gift

By Herb Hollinger

Baptist Press
3/10/92

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--Trustees of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary accepted President Lewis A. Drummond's retirement request and voted to give him a \$107,250 cash gift plus other benefits.

In addition, Drummond, 65, will receive the car the seminary has been providing him plus furnishings from the president's residence equal to his \$27,000 contribution when the house was remodeled and enlarged. Those and other actions came during the first day of a March 9-10 regular trustees' meeting on the Wake Forest campus.

Drummond announced his retirement in January following a four-hour closed-door session with the trustees' executive committee on campus. He will leave June 30 but is expected to teach evangelism at another school, possibly Beeson Divinity School at Samford University in Birmingham, Ala.

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A statement issued by the trustees March 9 following a two-hour session without Drummond and then another hour with him complimented the president "for standing for the integrity of the Word of God throughout his four years as president of the school."

"Dr. Drummond has guided the seminary through troubled water. He has shown Christian charity in dealing with detractors and resiliency in pressing forward to bring about a change in the direction of the school," Roger Ellsworth, Illinois pastor and trustee chairman, said in the statement.

"Dr. Drummond has rendered an invaluable service to the seminary and to Southern Baptists. Under his leadership we have seen this institution turn around and a firm foundation laid for the future. Dr. Drummond's zeal for the cause of Christ has touched the hearts of students, trustees and faculty," Ellsworth said.

However, the retirement package approved by the 26 trustees was different than the one sent by the executive committee to all trustees in January.

Omitted from the final package was a seven-month sabbatical leave base salary which would have been added to a gift of one year's base salary of \$72,500. Privately, a trustee said the package would have amounted to a \$122,000 gift which a number of trustees opposed.

Calvin Partain of Gallup, N.M., said trustees agreed the sabbatical salary was not "fitting." Although he voted for the final package, Partain conceded the gratitude gift was "a lot of money. But I'm not sure that I'd go through what he's been through for \$100,000."

Also missing from the original proposal was a portrait of the president "mutually agreed to (by Drummond) with the chairman of the trustees" and the honorary title of chancellor.

Faculty members balked at the chancellor's title, citing in a statement relayed to the trustees, among other things, that it was not in the best interests of shared governance with the faculty or other constituencies of the seminary: that it seemed inappropriate since two previous presidents are still living and have not been given that title; and that a potential conflict of interest if Drummond accepts a position with another seminary or divinity school.

Drummond also will receive retirement benefits usually accorded to an administrator with 10 years' experience: medicare supplement including his wife, Betty; a \$20,000 life insurance policy; health center services; and up to 22 days vacation in base salary on June 30.

Although the package is different than the one he had agreed to in January, Drummond told Baptist Press, "I'm satisfied with it."

"During the last four years I have made a lot of sacrifice and the trustees want to express gratitude and appreciation for all that's transpired," Drummond told journalists who asked him in an informal press conference while the trustees were in executive session if he thought the proposed package was too much.

Drummond reiterated his previous public statements that he was never asked to retire by trustees but said "no comment" when asked if pressure to retire came from the trustees.

He said he hoped to return to his "first love" as a full-time evangelism professor. He has been teaching evangelism for 24 years, he said, even while president of the seminary.

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Drummond said he could not comment on the recent visit by a committee from the Association of Theological Schools. ATS is expected to make a formal announcement by June concerning its February SEBTS visit, he said. The school was put on probation in December by its second accrediting agency, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

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Glenn Hinson to leave
Louisville seminary

Baptist Press
3/10/92

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Glenn Hinson, church history professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, has announced plans to accept a teaching position at the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, Va.

"I can only see a very bleak prospect for the immediate future (of Southern Seminary) under the kind of restrictions that are being imposed" by conservatives now in control of the seminary's trustee board, Hinson told The Courier-Journal in Louisville March 7.

The newspaper quoted John Mitchell, a conservative trustee and Louisville businessman, as saying, "I have always felt (Hinson's) theological position has put him outside the mainstream of Southern Baptist theological perspective. In that Dr. Hinson has been the source of some controversy in our convention, if he has found a place of ministry that is more suitable to him, then I'm happy for him."

Seminary President Roy L. Honeycutt told The Courier-Journal, "I think the loss of Glenn is a substantial one to the institution."

Hinson, 60, long perceived as "liberal" by Southern Baptist conservatives, was thrust anew into controversy last October when Foreign Mission Board trustees learned he was teaching on a short-term assignment at the Baptist Theological Seminary in Ruschlikon, Switzerland. Trustees voted to cut the FMB's \$365,000 1992 allocation to the Swiss seminary and redirect the money to other theological education efforts in Eastern Europe. A number of state conventions, along with churches and individuals, protested the trustee action.

Also, Southern Seminary's academic personnel committee, in closed session Feb. 3, issued a "warning" to Hinson and fellow professor Molly T. Marshall against teaching views that could be "in violation" of the seminary's confessional statement. The warning said teaching such views could place the professors "in jeopardy of dismissal." The views at issue were not listed in a formal statement by the academic personnel committee.

At the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, Hinson will be nominated in April as professor of spirituality and church history to trustees of the new school, founded by Southern Baptist moderates last year. "Glenn Hinson is a world-renowned scholar who will bring to this young school a wealth of experience, wisdom, and most importantly, an attentiveness to matters of the spirit," said Thomas H. Graves, Richmond seminary president. "There is no one better qualified to establish our program in spirituality."

Hinson has been a faculty member at Southern Seminary since 1959. He holds bachelor's and doctorate degrees in divinity from the seminary and a doctor of philosophy degree from Oxford University in England.

According to The Courier-Journal, another church history professor at Southern Seminary, Loyd Allen, has announced plans to accept an offer to become chairman of the religion department at Mississippi College in Clinton, Miss.

The departures of Hinson and Allen will leave the seminary with just one faculty member in its church history department, which had four a year ago, the newspaper reported. Six other Southern Seminary professors also have announced plans to leave, thus bringing the exodus to more than 10 percent of the seminary's 75 full-time faculty members.

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Opponents argue extent
of abortion bill

By Tom Strode

WASHINGTON (BP)--House of Representatives members and witnesses disagreed on the effect of a controversial abortion bill as it took its first step toward what is expected to be an election-year showdown on the divisive social issue.

The Freedom of Choice Act (House of Representatives and Senate Bill 25) will only enact the Supreme Court's Roe v. Wade decision legislatively, supporters of the bill said in a recent hearing. Opponents said the bill will go beyond Roe and prohibit restrictions, such as parental notice for minors, now allowed by the Court.

The Justice Department "strongly opposes" the bill, said Timothy Flanigan, acting assistant attorney general. It "would impose a regime of abortion on demand on states," Flanigan said in testimony before the Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights of the House Judiciary Committee.

A 23-page memorandum outlining the Justice Department's opposition to the Freedom of Choice Act was released shortly before the hearing. Not only would the bill go beyond Roe v. Wade, it would enable Congress to usurp powers normally granted to the states, the memorandum said.

Congress has "ample constitutional credentials" to enact the legislation, Harvard University Law School professor Laurence Tribe told the subcommittee.

After the expected reversal of Roe, the disparity among states concerning abortion restrictions will financially burden states with liberal laws and will cause more third-trimester abortions because of a lack of counseling for women in states with restrictive laws, Tribe said. It is false to say provisions such as parental notice will not be allowed under FOCA, he said.

The American Civil Liberties Union, a supporter of FOCA, disagrees with his assessment, Rep. Henry Hyde, R.-Ill., told Tribe. In a recent document, the ACLU said the bill would prohibit "spousal consent requirements, waiting periods, parental notification and consent, and requirements that all abortions be performed in hospitals."

Hyde also quoted chief sponsor and subcommittee chairman Don Edwards, D.-Calif., who said in 1990 the bill "provides for no exceptions -- no exceptions whatsoever. It is a classic one-sentence statute that says a state may not restrict the right of a woman to terminate a pregnancy -- and that is for any reason."

The quotes were taken out of context, Edwards said at the hearing. FOCA was "written to track" the language of Roe, he said.

"This is abortion with a vengeance," Hyde said.

"I think that it's clear by the people who are supporting it that its intent is to not only codify Roe but to expand it," said Richard D. Land, executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, "and by federal fiat to take away from the people of the various states any opportunity to limit abortion for any reason.

"It must be stopped. I would call on every Southern Baptist who is concerned about this to call his or her congressman and senators immediately," Land said.

A subcommittee vote on the bill is expected soon. The hearing was held March 4.

Supporters of the bill are expected to seek a floor vote in both houses this summer. A Supreme Court decision on a Pennsylvania abortion restriction law is expected by July. Oral arguments in the case are scheduled April 22. Pro-choice forces in Congress hope to pass FOCA and force President George Bush to veto it as the general election campaign begins.

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The bill, which is brief in its language, says a state "may not restrict the right of a woman to choose to terminate a pregnancy -- (1) before fetal viability; or (2) at any time, if such termination is necessary to protect the life or health of the woman." It also says a state "may impose requirements necessary to protect the life or health of women... ."

In the Court's 1973 ruling legalizing abortion, the woman's health was defined as "all factors -- physical, emotional, psychological, familial and the woman's age -- relevant to the well-being of the patient." Such a definition has had the effect of legalizing abortion on demand for any reason throughout all nine months of pregnancy.

Other witnesses in support of the bill were William Peterson, director of obstetrics and gynecology at Washington Hospital Center, who said he has done about 3,000 to 4,000 abortions and about 8,000 deliveries, and Richard Blumenthal, Connecticut's attorney general. Also testifying against FOCA were Douglas Kmiec, professor at University of Notre Dame Law School, and Helen Alvare, director of planning and information of the National Catholic Conference of Bishops.

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New Sellers Home facility
dedicated at Tallulah, La.

By Jim Newton

Baptist Press
3/10/92

TALLULAH, La. (BP)--Louisiana Baptists dedicated a 13,000-square-foot "Happy House" for Sellers Baptist Maternity Home March 7, the same day a baby was born to an unwed mother residing at the home.

Operation of the Sellers Home, located in New Orleans for 58 years, was transferred from the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board to the Louisiana Baptist Children's Home in Monroe, La., on Jan. 1, 1992.

More than 500 people attended the dedication program in Tallulah, a small town of about 12,000 residents in northeast Louisiana about 50 miles east of Monroe and 25 miles west of Vicksburg, Miss.

Many of those attending marvelled at the beautiful facility, a gift to the LBCH from Lynn Seymour of Tallulah. Several commented Southern Baptists could never afford to build a home better-suited for its new purpose.

The home, valued at more than \$2 million, includes eight bedrooms and 6 1/2 baths, a swimming pool and 4.5 acres of land. The facility is designed to take care of 16 residents at one time.

LBCH Executive Director John R. Williams said the gift of the home was an answer to prayer and the timing of the gift was providential.

Williams said Seymour wanted her home to become a "Happy House" for young girls. An adopted child herself, Seymour gave the property debt-free to the LBCH and moved to a much smaller log house a few miles away.

Shortly afterwards, the HMB appointed a special task force to study the future of the Sellers Home, located in a section of New Orleans unsafe for women to walk alone after dark.

Williams said HMB President Larry Lewis contacted him last year about the possibility of transferring responsibility for Sellers Home to the LBCH. Williams said the timing could not have been better.

Since the LBCH assumed responsibility Jan. 1, three young women have been residents in the new location and two babies have been born. A fourth young woman was expected to begin residence at the home the week after the dedication.

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In the dedication message, James Parker, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Monroe, said the new facility should be dedicated to four things:

-- "to the new lives that shall begin within the framework of this institution, to the end that they shall discover God early in life and live for him.

-- "to all those women and their families who will be touched by the loving hands and hearts who serve here.

-- "to the servants who labor here, that theirs will be a labor of love, patience and Christ-centered dedication.

-- "and to the glory of God, our heavenly Father, the first and greatest proponent of pro-life, the giver of all life and righteous judge of every human heart."

Harold Wilcox, HMB director of church and community ministries department who has supervised the Sellers Home operation in the past, said changes in society had prompted changes in the Sellers Home ministry. The dedication marks a new beginning built on the rich heritage of the past, Wilcox said.

During the first 58 years of its operation in New Orleans, a total of 6,539 women utilized the services of Sellers Home. A total of 2,996 babies were born to women helped through the Sellers Home in New Orleans, and 2,355 of these were adopted through the adoption program at Sellers.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press.

Southern Seminary hears input
from African-American pastors

By Pat Cole

Baptist Press
3/10/92

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Southern Baptist Theological Seminary turned a listening ear to 48 African-American ministers who attended a recent African-American Leadership Conference sponsored by the Louisville, Ky., school.

"We thought it was important for Southern Seminary to see how we could best develop skills for African-American ministers and how we could create an environment for African-American ministers to come here and study with profit," said seminary Provost Larry L. McSwain. "We also wanted them to see that Southern Seminary is committed to trying to do the best we are able within the resources we have to effectively train African-Americans."

Southern has developed into a "major training center" for African-American ministers, he said. About 80 African-Americans are enrolled in degree programs at Southern. In addition, more than 100 African-Americans study in non-degree programs through the seminary's Boyce Bible School, a division of the seminary that provides ministerial training for people without college degree.

At the conference, the visiting ministers were divided into small groups to share with seminary officials their ideas about how the seminary could better serve African-American students. The conference was funded through a grant from the Lilly Endowment Inc. in Indianapolis as part of the seminary's ongoing study of quality ministerial leadership.

Conference participants were concerned that the faculty become more sensitive to the "heritage, bibliography and contributions" of African-Americans, said McSwain. The seminary also was reminded of its need to employ more African-Americans at all levels of seminary life, he said:

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"We will have black faculty in the relatively near future in the school of theology. We have black faculty in social work but not theology and we desperately need them there." Currently two African-Americans teach in the seminary's Carver School of Church Social Work.

"Our graduates were saying 'We realize the difficulty the seminary has had in finding African American faculty, but other seminaries are recruiting them and we need to look at their models,'" said T. Vaughn Walker, one of the seminary's African-American professors. The participants, about half of whom were Southern alumni, came from several Baptist denominations and Methodism.

Walker said he is encouraged five African-Americans are enrolled in Southern's Ph.D. program. No African-American has earned a research doctorate at Southern since the seminary's first African-American graduate, Garland K. Offutt, received the Th.D. degree in 1948.

Emmanuel McCall, who last year became the first African-American president of the seminary's national alumni association, said the conference demonstrated to the seminary the diversity of African-American church life. "We're not monolithic," said McCall, pastor of Christian Fellowship Baptist Church in Atlanta. "There is a variety of responses and perspectives."

The seminary's 350 African-American alumni have been largely responsible for the growth in African-American students in recent years, he said. "Most (African-American) graduates from here have done well and have a high profile," said McCall, who has been a visiting professor at Southern for more than 20 years. "We've told people that Southern Seminary is the place to come."

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Lowry compares
preaching to jazz

By Pat Cole

Baptist Press
3/10/92

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Effective preaching can be compared to a lively jazz performance, claimed preaching professor and author Eugene Lowry.

"Jazz is a narrative art form," said Lowry, the William K. McElvaney professor of preaching at St. Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, Mo. "It doesn't just do things. It does things in certain sequences."

Likewise, preaching is not "just that you have something to say," said Lowry. "It has to do with sequence which makes it an event."

Lowry, the author of three books on preaching, delivered the E.Y. Mullins Lectures on Preaching at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. His March lectures were part of the Louisville, Ky., seminary's seventh National Conference on Biblical Preaching.

Good sermons and good jazz music both contain elements of dissonance, he said. Sermons start with conflict, then move to "complication" and finally "turn home" toward the centrality of Christ, said Lowry.

Lowry, an accomplished jazz pianist, demonstrated his comparison between jazz and preaching by performing several jazz selections. Preachers need to learn the jazz musicians' art of striking the unexpected chord, said Lowry: "If you can find a new way to enter a door to what people already know is truth, when you get there, you have an event instead of a report."

The element of surprise can be an effective way to convey the truth of Scripture, he said: "Just when you are about to strike the chord everybody expects you to strike, do it differently."

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In another address, Lowry emphasized preachers must be willing to struggle with the meaning of texts. "Don't start by looking for points," he said. "Look for trouble. In the confusion of trouble, is where the Lord may speak a new word and if we don't hear that word who will?"

Over the past 20 years, narrative style preaching, which emphasizes elements like story, metaphor and imagination, has become increasingly popular, said Lowry. Such an approach to preaching changes the preacher's perspective, he said: "In the more traditional type sermon, the preacher tends to lean toward standing with God as the latest teller. In the newer narrative shape sermon, its more likely the preacher stands with the congregation as the first listener to God."

Preachers must be aware of the weaknesses to which both styles of preaching can fall victim, warned Lowry: "The danger of the conventional sermon is for it to turn into a mere report. The danger of the narrative sermon is to fade off into indecisiveness."

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Also available upon request:

-- Feature by Ron Chaney about a former trucker's ministry at an interstate truck stop in Maryland.

Trucker switched to ministry
after 19 years on the road

By Ron Chaney

Baptist Press
3/10/92

JESSUP, Md., (BP)--If several professional truck drivers wanted to visit your church this Sunday, they couldn't. Your parking lot is too small.

For that reason, and others, Reggie Pelletier takes his ministry to truckers. Pelletier, a former trucker, is the chaplain for "God's Trucking Ministry," based at an Interstate 95 truck stop in Jessup, Md., and sponsored by Howard Baptist Association.

Even if church parking lots could accommodate 18-wheelers, the 6 million truck drivers in the United States would have difficulty getting their spiritual needs met, Pelletier says. The trucking industry operates seven days a week, 24 hours a day. That schedule slams the brakes on getting to a church during ministry hours.

The availability of ministry at all times is critical for truckers, Pelletier says. Truckers are on the road sometimes for an entire month. They get lonely. They miss their families. Needs for counseling arise 24 hours a day. "If the world can build a truck stop that functions 24 hours a day, then the church can build a ministry that provides for truckers 24 hours a day," he says.

"I am here at their convenience. Somebody has to be there. And if it's 2 o'clock in the morning, then I'm there. I'm not going to turn anyone away," says Pelletier, who lives at the truck stop.

Pelletier felt called to start the ministry after driving a truck 19 years.

"By faith, I stepped out of my 18-wheeler in Columbus, Ohio, took my suitcase, a couple hundred dollars and the clothes on my back, and came to Jessup, Md., to begin the incredible journey of building God's Trucking Ministry."

He came to Jessup because it was the place where he came to know Jesus Christ as personal Savior. While stopping at the truck stop, he met a woman who invited him to a Bible study. He accepted Christ after talking with the minister who led the study.

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Pelletier now gives spiritual counsel to truck drivers and leads worship services and Bible studies for them. In 1991 he visited with more than 600 people and 51 made professions of faith.

Pelletier says he named the ministry "God's Trucking Ministry" because God gave it to him and because it is for truckers.

What amazes him most is how God has built the ministry over the past two years, he says. "In two years it has gone from nothing to what it is now." Pelletier has an office and a place to hold worship services at the truck stop. Soon the ministry will have its own 45-foot trailer for chapel services.

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