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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

March 16, 1992

92-48

Georgia executive committee
addresses sexuality, abortion

By R. Albert Mohler Jr.

ATLANTA (BP)--Calling Georgia Baptists to "clear stands on moral issues," the Georgia Baptist Convention executive committee passed two strongly worded resolutions which put the body on record in opposition to homosexuality and abortion.

The first resolution, brought by Rodger Whorton, pastor of Southside Baptist Church in Cedartown, directly addressed two North Carolina churches. The resolution was directed to Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in Raleigh and the Binkley Memorial Baptist Church in Chapel Hill.

Pullen Memorial recently voted to approve a "same-gender" blessing ceremony between two homosexual men, conducted at the church March 15. Binkley Memorial said it is considering granting a ministerial license to an active homosexual.

Addressing the churches, the resolutions stated: "We condemn your actions concerning homosexuality as a grievous sin and abomination against God, the Southern Baptist Convention, and our own Georgia Baptist Convention."

Horton said his resolution was not "an attack on the state of North Carolina or on the autonomy of these two churches but it is an attack on heresy." He warned the body that "this heresy will eat away at the foundation of our beliefs and values until it ultimately destroy us."

The resolution passed without debate and without a dissenting vote.

The second resolution was offered by Pete Sharber, pastor of First Baptist Church in Hazelhurst. The measure called for the executive committee "to affirm a pro-life stance" and to "stand in disagreement ... and decry the efforts of anyone who actively supports or encourages the efforts of an abortion clinic."

The resolution was prompted, Sharber said, by well-publicized efforts to locate an abortion clinic in Macon under the auspices of Atlanta's Feminist Women's Health Center. Sharber's resolution also stated "it appears that a faculty member of Mercer University is actively involved in the pro-abortion movement to locate an abortion clinic in Macon."

He cited an article in the March 8 edition of The Macon Telegraph which said Sidney Watson, associate professor at Mercer University's Walter F. George School of Law, serves as chair of "Middle Georgians for Choice," a group working to bring the Feminist Women's Health Center branch to Macon.

In a letter published in the Telegraph, Watson said "all women, no matter what their economic status, deserve to have complete reproductive information and choices available to them." She added, "The option of abortion is the law of this land, and most of us want it available and safe for all who need it in our area."

The resolution prompted intense debate over the mention of the Mercer professor, who was not named in the measure. Chalmes Holmes, pastor of First Baptist Church in Winder, said he opposed the opening of an abortion clinic in Macon but argued that any mention of an individual on the basis of a newspaper article was inappropriate. He offered an amendment to delete the section of the resolution mentioning Mercer and the professor.

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Sharber argued against the amendment asking, "Who are we afraid of offending?" The abortion issue, he said, "was settled years ago on the floor of the Southern Baptist Convention and the Georgia Baptist Convention, and we as Georgia Baptist leaders need to take a stand."

Mercer President Kirby Godsey said he could not confirm or deny Watson's role as reported in the Telegraph. Godsey told the assembly that "most Baptists would share the pro-life view expressed here but there are Baptists in Georgia who do not share that view."

Furthermore, Godsey said, "It is not illegal for a person to hold this view and to espouse it."

Godsey said he hoped the executive committee would "feel some reluctance in addressing a motion" to a person who had not been contacted by any member of the body.

After extended -- and sometimes vitriolic -- debate the amendment failed by a 48-34 vote. The resolutions then passed by a wide margin.

When reached by the Georgia Baptist newspaper, The Christian Index, professor Watson confirmed she serves as chair of the Macon-based group seeking the "full-service reproductive health care" center's establishment.

Watson is a member of the High Street Unitarian-Universalist Church. She said her group had organized because anti-abortion forces were opposing the center's move to Macon.

"We know that this is a divisive issue," she said, "but we intend to be a voice for choice."

In a statement to The Index, Godsey said, "I both respect the right and will defend the right of Dr. Watson to hold these views and engage in these activities. This is a position I will and must take."

He charged the resolution was "politically motivated" and expressed his disagreement with the action of the executive committee.

Sharber denied any political motivation. "We need to take a stand," he said.

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NOBTS trustees approve
new baccalaureate degree

By Debbie Moore

Baptist Press
3/16/92

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Trustees of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary approved a proposal for a new baccalaureate degree program and elected a new chairman during their annual spring meeting on the New Orleans Seminary campus, March 10-11.

The proposal for a baccalaureate degree program, with bachelor of arts and bachelor of general studies degrees, will be the first of its kind offered by any Southern Baptist seminary and will be available during the coming fall term, beginning Aug. 25, contingent on approval of the curriculum by the seminary's academic affairs committee and faculty this spring.

The seminary currently offers accredited associate's, master's and doctoral degree programs. The seminary has been offering baccalaureate-level work since 1980 for students age 25 and older. This new baccalaureate degree program will fill the void between the associate's- and master's-level degrees.

Also approved are proposals for new master of divinity and doctor of philosophy degree programs with a major in psychology and counseling through the division of pastoral ministries, set to begin in the fall.

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Trustees elected W. Keith Huffman, pastor of First Baptist Church in Ironton, Mo., as chairman, to succeed Charles L. Wood of Wichita, Kan., who served the two-year limit. Reelected were J. Roy McComb of Columbia, Miss., as vice chairman, and C. Glynn Rhinehart of River Ridge, La, as secretary-treasurer.

Trustees affirmed the action of Landrum P. Leavell II, seminary president, in appointing Billy K. Smith as vice president for academic affairs, in light of the retirement of Joe H. Cothen, who held the position since 1982. Smith has been professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at NOBTS since 1981 and chairman of the division of biblical studies since 1988.

Trustees adopted a budget of \$7.45 million, reflecting a 3.2 percent increase for the 1992-93 fiscal year.

Trustees recommended granting George W. Harrison the title professor emeritus in the field of Old Testament and Hebrew. Harrison, who retired this year, taught at NOBTS 31 years.

Trustees also approved two faculty promotions, effective Aug. 1: R. Dennis Cole to associate professor of archaeology and Bob E. Simmons to professor of missions.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: Martha Skelton, associate editor of The Commission magazine, and photographer Charles Ledford recently returned from a coverage trip in Nicaragua.

Nicaragua's Baptists emerge
unified after decade of war

By Martha Skelton

Baptist Press
3/16/92

MANAGUA, Nicaragua (BP)--After years of war, outside intervention and economic decline, Nicaraguans are looking ahead to new opportunities for a better life and -- for some -- a spiritual rebirth.

Baptists in Nicaragua, who in February celebrated the 75th anniversary of their first church, are setting new goals for the future. The Baptist convention has 80 churches and a goal of doubling that number by the year 2000.

Yet like their countrymen, they struggled through more than a decade of strife and civil war between the Sandinista regime -- defeated at the polls in 1990 -- and the contras. The political polarizations of Nicaraguan life found their way into Baptist life. But Nicaraguan Baptists say they have emerged, like other evangelicals, with a unity beyond the experience of the majority Roman Catholic Church.

During the Sandinista years, Roman Catholics divided between the traditional Catholicism of their bishop, who opposed the Sandinistas, and the "popular church," which blends Catholic teaching and "liberation theology" with Sandinista support.

Baptists, in contrast, insisted on liberty of conscience, according to several church leaders.

They recognized that "every member (should) exercise the ... priesthood of all believers, conscious always that he or she was a witness for Christ," said Gustavo Parajon, pastor of Managua's First Baptist Church.

A Christian brother who differed with you never ceased being a brother, added Eugenio Zamora. Zamora is senior pastor of Galilea Baptist Church in Managua, the nation's capital.

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Baptists and other evangelicals supported various sides in the conflict. The Sandinista revolution that overthrew the former Somoza dictatorship in 1979 was widely supported. Some found the Sandinistas' emphasis on helping the poor and disadvantaged paralleled their Christian concerns. Others rejected the movement's Marxist elements and supported an elected non-Sandinista government. Still others supported neither major faction.

Today's government, headed by Violeta Chamorro, was elected in 1990 under the banner of a coalition called "UNO" (National Opposition Union, and Spanish for "one"). It encompasses almost a dozen diverse political groups ranging from rightists to two communist factions. They united mainly in their opposition to the Sandinista government.

Baptists reflected the overall vote in the 1990 election: About 42 percent supported the Sandinistas while 55 percent backed UNO, said Enrique Villagra, a Nicaraguan Supreme Court justice and Baptist layman. "The Baptist community is still a Nicaraguan community," he noted.

For Baptists, tensions peaked in 1986-87, said Tomas Tellez, the convention's executive secretary. Baptist leaders wrote letters to U.S. President Ronald Reagan and Baptists in America asking for an end to American involvement in the civil war and economic blockade. Such actions, coupled with the ongoing dialogue between the convention and Sandinista government, led some Baptists to protest. Some pastors united to oppose the convention getting involved in politics. Others declared that involvement was a valid role for Christians.

Despite their differences, they continued working together in evangelism and social ministries. The experience "taught us that Christ brings unity and maturity, a way of dealing with conflicts," Tellez said.

At his church, Parajon found himself in an interesting situation. One of his members was the only Sandinista-appointed evangelical in Nicaragua's legislature. Another was the only evangelical elected to the legislature from the UNO coalition in 1990. Still another was the only evangelical ever to sit on the Nicaraguan Supreme Court, selected by the UNO government.

"It was a social phenomenon," Parajon explained. "In our church there were people in the Somoza government and people who joined the (Sandinista front) from its inception. In church, we could work together. We are part of the body of Christ and remember that as our identity."

Churches continue to reflect great diversity. Regino Gonzalez, pastor of First Baptist Church in Masaya, criticized the Sandinistas and Nicaraguan Baptists who saw a political component to church life. But he leads people of many political persuasions. "It's easy (to keep unity) when your message is Jesus Christ and his love . . . We have different ideologies and different vocations, but we are one in Christ," he said.

For Nicaraguan evangelicals, the war years brought numerical growth. Until 1979 about 5 percent of Nicaraguans were evangelicals. Today about 30 percent of the country's nearly 4 million people are evangelicals, according to Ignacio Hernandez, national director of the Bible Society of Nicaragua.

The Baptist convention started 33 churches during the war. "Lots of people came to the churches. There were more baptisms. They came because of the fear of war, the insecurity," Gonzalez said.

Evangelicals grew for several reasons, Villagra said. When adversity came -- pastors jailed, churches disrupted or disbanded in war zones -- Christians grew stronger.

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As Nicaraguan Baptists enter the last quarter of their first century, they face many needs and challenges. The convention operates a number of institutional ministries -- schools, a hospital and clinics -- and cooperates in evangelical programs including hunger relief, literacy and job training and agricultural projects. Outside support is necessary, Tellez pointed out, because Nicaraguan Baptists live in a society struggling with an overall unemployment rate of 50 percent.

Church starting and personal evangelism are two major emphases for the next decade, Tellez added. The convention recently began working with an indigenous outreach among the Miskito Indians in northeastern Nicaragua. A Miskito Baptist pastor has started 12 churches in the area since 1988. The churches have organized into the Miskito Baptist Association of Nicaragua and are aligning with the convention.

Southern Baptists have a role in the churches' efforts. Missionaries Jim and Viola Palmer, from Marshall and Fort Worth, Texas, transferred from Honduras to Nicaragua in 1990. They work with churches in preaching, leadership training, evangelism and volunteer projects. Recently missionaries Sam and Margaret Drummond transferred to Nicaragua from El Salvador to work in theological education and church starting. The Drummonds are from Camden, Tenn., and Louisville, Ky.

The convention also has worked with Southern Baptists to begin a new evangelical radio station in Managua. The convention is providing a building and has received an FM frequency from the government. David Daniell, a Southern Baptist media missionary, is assisting. Volunteer engineers from the United States will install equipment and train personnel before the station begins broadcasting later this year, said Palmer, who has spearheaded mission involvement in the project.

As they carry out these plans, Nicaraguan Baptists continue to try to bring the healing of love and faith to their land. Parajon and many other pastors have participated in local and regional peace committees.

"Baptists are heavily involved in the work of reconciliation," he said. "There is a lot of reconciliation to be done. We ask the Spirit to give us wisdom to face this new era."

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

Missions and scholarships
planned at Fellowship meeting

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press
3/16/92

ATLANTA (BP)--Leaders of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship proposed a \$2.5 million missions budget and a \$30,000 scholarship fund for 1993 during the group's coordinating council meeting March 12-14 in Atlanta.

Recently elected coordinator Cecil Sherman told members of the group's coordinating council the fellowship needs 100 churches willing to designate \$1,000 a month towards Fellowship missions projects in Europe.

Recruiting those churches to raise \$1.2 million annually will be his first priority when he officially takes office in April, he said.

European projects, including support for the Baptist Theological Seminary at Ruschlikon, Switzerland, comprise about half of the moderate group's mission budget.

Moderator John Hewett added that missions will be a two-way street with European Baptist Unions, meaning Europe may also send missionaries to America.

"That's the new world order for Christian missions," said Hewett, pastor of First Baptist Church of Asheville, N.C.

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Concerning scholarships, the coordinating council backed a plan to give \$30,000 for the 1992-93 school year.

The money would be distributed as follows:

-- \$15,000 to students at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, Va.

-- \$5,000 to students enrolled in the Southern Baptist curriculum at Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta.

-- \$5,000 to students enrolled in the Southern Baptist curriculum at the theology school at Duke University.

-- And five \$1,000 scholarships to Southern Baptist students involved in entry-level theological education at any other school of theology except those supported by the SBC.

Both the missions and scholarship budgets will go before the general assembly at the Fellowship's annual meeting in Fort Worth, April 30-May 2.

The missions and scholarship budgets are part of a projected budget of \$6.7 million during the 1992-93 fiscal year.

Less than a quarter of that, however, is budgeted to Fellowship programs. About \$5.1 million, or 76 percent, is earmarked for state conventions and SBC programs.

"I think five years from now that 76 percent will have decreased dramatically," said Hewett. "There's a great time lag between the time that we approve a funding plan and money begins to flow."

Hewett said he will work to get more churches giving to the Fellowship's Vision 2000 fund, which designates 65 percent to Fellowship projects.

"This is a permanent organization," he said. "We're not just standing around waiting for something to happen so we can ease back into the SBC."

Jimmy Allen, a member of the Fellowship's global missions group, agreed.

"Up 'til now, so much of it has been just, 'I don't want it to be done that way,'" he said. "Now we've got another way that they want it to be done."

Also at the coordinating council's meeting, leaders discussed the group's future relationship with the Ruschlikon seminary. Allen said a Fellowship representative will attend the school's April board meeting to learn the school's needs. In February, a Fellowship delegation delivered a check for more than \$250,000 to the Swiss seminary.

The coordinating council also announced the Fellowship's 1993 meeting will be May 13-15, in Atlanta's Georgia World Congress Center.

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Collegians stirred to missions
at Golden Gate seminary

By Karen Willoughby

Baptist Press
3/16/92

MILL VALLEY, Calif. (BP)--College students from 21 campuses in five states focused on their responses to a needy, hurting world at the annual mission conference sponsored by Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary.

The conference, held every February, starts students thinking about missions as a lifestyle and possible vocation, faculty chairman Francis DuBose said. Inspirational services, informative small group sessions and intimate prayer times focused participants on their place in world evangelism.

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Conference participants listened intently as Julia Graham painted word pictures of multiple Middle Eastern crises and God's deliverances during her nearly 50 years in missionary service.

"There is nothing in this world more exciting, more thrilling, more rewarding than seeking and finding the will of God," said Graham, 75. "When he calls, go!" And students responded.

"Before I came here, I didn't understand exactly what missions is," said Hani Makai, a pharmacy student at Idaho State University in Pocatello. Makai said what he heard caused him to consider how he could incorporate short-term mission projects into his planned career as a pharmacist.

"Missions is witnessing to others who don't know Jesus, but before I came here I didn't know that much about it," student Amanda Young said. "Now I know that if God calls me to missions, I have to be ready and willing to go."

Idaho student Rhonda Cordray dedicated her life to foreign missions at the conference. "God changed my life here," she said. "I always thought about missions, but I never made a covenant with the Lord about it until this weekend." She said she plans to attend Golden Gate after graduating from the University of Idaho in Moscow.

With a 40 percent international student body, Golden Gate is one of six Southern Baptist Convention seminaries and the only SBC agency in the western United States.

Several international students shared their personal histories.

"I prayed hard before God and begged him to deliver me from my misery," former rice farm laborer Bernice Dexu Xia said during one evening service about her life in mainland China. "I'm really grateful for this opportunity to study God's Word and learn how to serve him. My duty is to make the most of my seminary life as I prepare for my calling."

Frank Ohene Kankam spoke of leaving his wife and five sons in Ghana while preparing at Golden Gate for a pastorate in his homeland. "I stand here a product of the Southern Baptist missions effort," Kankam said. "I always thank God for people who cared enough to leave all this and come to us."

Seminary staffer Yelena Gogolicyn led small group sessions on the former Soviet Union and talked of her immigration. "When you first come to America you're shocked," Gogolicyn said. "I was so depressed. I didn't know English. It is like a big mountain I will never be able to climb.

"Then someone came to me and said that she loved me," Gogolicyn continued. "I told her I didn't speak English and she said that there is no language barrier for love."

Former journeyman to Korea and present seminary student Duane Petty encouraged people in small groups he led to learn how to teach English as a second language so they can be prepared to minister cross-culturally as God opened doors.

DuBose, professor of missions, expected to retire later this spring, was honored for his involvement since 1966 with the annual mission conferences. Golden Gate has a heart for missions, DuBose said, and he challenged conference participants to have one, too.

"These are serious times," DuBose said. "The staggering need is all around us." His word of encouragement? "Christianity works -- among all classes of people."

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Karen Willoughby is a freelance writer living in San Mateo, Calif.

California church grows
with innovative staff

By Walt B. Collins

NOVATO, Calif. (BP)--Southern Baptists are known for innovative approaches to starting churches but what makes Novato Christian Fellowship unique is the staff: a professor, administrator and student from Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif.

Novato Christian Fellowship (NCF) began in September 1989 through the efforts of Ron Hornecker, professor of ministry at Golden Gate, and Mike Thompson, the seminary's vice president for student affairs. The two received assistance from First Baptist Church of Novato and Tiburon Baptist Church.

After a thorough program of advertising and telemarketing to reach community residents, the congregation launched its first service with about 75 people, most of them unchurched. Today, meeting in a high school facility, NCF has roughly 125 in attendance on a weekly basis.

"The intent of NCF is to provide the kind of worship that the baby boomer will hear, understand and feel included in," Hornecker said. "We use a variety of activities ... to make sure that the baby boomer could 'connect' with our worship." Sermons, for example, are 10-20 minutes and the entire service is kept under 50 minutes.

David Tscherne, master of divinity student at Golden Gate, adds to the personal setting by equipping leaders for NCF's many small group Bible studies. The groups not only provide outreach but an additional caring element at NCF.

"I think we probably have the best small group system for a church our size in the whole Bay Area in terms of what's covered, how smoothly they work and the percentage of adults in them. David did all that," observed Thompson, who is also assistant professor of spiritual formation at Golden Gate.

Ordained by NCF last year, Tscherne is co-pastor with Thompson and Hornecker; while Thompson acknowledged it is unusual for a student to interact on a peer level with two professors, he admitted Tscherne is not overwhelmed.

"He does not hesitate to call me into question, or Ron either," Thompson said. "He doesn't hesitate to disagree. That's unusual for somebody who is a student still dealing with two professors."

In addition to Tscherne's responsibility with the small group ministry, he helps Hornecker and Thompson plan the church's overall ministry.

"I don't even think of him as a student anymore. I think of him as a colleague, as a co-pastor, and he thinks of us that way," Thompson said. "I can't imagine us making a decision of any major scope at all without the three of us basically agreeing."

Older than the average seminary student, Tscherne is 41, married with a grown daughter and three grandchildren. Having come from a non-Christian background, Tscherne found himself homeless in the drug culture. Then, in his mid-20s, he was befriended by an employer in Lake Tahoe, Calif., and accepted Christ.

While in Lake Tahoe, Tscherne became involved in the hotel business and soon moved into management. From there he moved to Orlando, Fla., where he and his wife, Becky, joined First Baptist Church in Orlando. Becoming active in the fellowship there, the Tschernes felt God calling them to vocational Christian ministry. With scholarship assistance from the Orlando church, Tscherne began attending Golden Gate.

Through various courses and conferences on church planting and church growth, his interest developed into a vocational goal. Tscherne admits he had not given much thought to church growth before he came to seminary.

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"All of a sudden I am enmeshed in this class and it totally changed my focus," he said. "I saw myself as someone who resonated with the concepts of church growth."

Members of NCF may not realize it just yet but their staff and congregation are part of Southern Baptists' strategy of churches working together to plant churches and reach the world for Jesus Christ.

"With his interest in church growth, David adds a needed dimension to our work," said Hornecker. "He adds great focus and clarity to the church's ministry."

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Walt Collins writes for the public relations office at Golden Gate Seminary. (BP) photo available upon request from the seminary.

RTVC documentary 'Set Free'
wins Silver Angel award

Baptist Press
3/16/92

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--The Radio and Television Commission has received a Silver Angel award for its NBC-TV documentary "Set Free," according to Bob Thornton, vice president of television for the Southern Baptist agency.

"Set Free" joins a list of recent Angel award winners including motion pictures "Chariots of Fire," "Gandhi," "Driving Miss Daisy," "The Little Mermaid" and television series "Highway to Heaven," "Little House on the Prairie," and GM's "Mark of Excellence" presentations.

"Set Free," which NBC aired nationally April 7, 1991, was hosted by Tom Landry, former head coach of the Dallas Cowboys. It featured the efforts of prison chaplains and volunteers to reach inmates with the gospel of Jesus Christ, Thornton said. The documentary, filmed at several Texas prisons and California's San Quentin prison, was produced and directed by RTVC staff producer Rosser McDonald.

The Silver Angel was the 23rd presented to the RTVC for outstanding work in television documentaries and nationally syndicated public service radio programs.

The Angel awards are presented annually for outstanding productions of moral or social impact, said Mary Door, founder and producer of the awards.

"Their purpose is to honor those creative people in motion pictures, television, radio, books, albums and all other forms of the media who are turning out works of excellence that have either high moral or spiritual or social impact and who are struggling to make this a better world," Dorr said.

She founded the Angel awards in 1977, is an author, lecturer and producer of more than 5,000 television programs.

Excellency in Media, parent organization for the Angel awards, traces its roots back nearly 40 years to a small band of men and women in Hollywood concerned with proliferation of depravity and violence on the screen, in some magazines and other forms of media.

RTVC received notification of the award following the recent Angel awards presentation ceremony held in Hollywood.

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Wayland women finish second
in national basketball tourney

JACKSON, Tenn. (BP)--Wayland Baptist University's Flying Queens advanced to the championship game of the NAIA National Women's Basketball Tournament here March 4-10 before losing to Arkansas Tech University, 84-68.

Wayland, located in Plainview, Texas, defeated Christ College-Irvine, Northwestern Oklahoma, fellow Southern Baptist institution Union University and St. Edward's University enroute to the championship game. It is the second time in seven years for WBU to finish second nationally.

The Flying Queens, who were featured in a Jan. 29 story in the New York Times, are the winningest women's team in collegiate history with 1,124 wins against only 250 losses, a winning percentage of .818.

Junior All-Americans Lisa Kolodziejczyk of LaSalle, Texas, and Carol Bailey-Sessums of Levelland, Texas, were both named to the All-Tournament Team.

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CORRECTION:

In a March 11 Baptist Press story, "Missions spirit comes alive in Texas teen," please change the first six words of the first paragraph to read: Recognition as "queen" in the Acteens StudiAct ...

Thanks, Baptist Press
