

**(BP)**

**-- BAPTIST PRESS**  
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 30, 1992

92-55

Editor: Autonomy must not nix  
firm stand on homosexual issue

By Art Toalston

ATLANTA (BP)--The issue of homosexuality points up "a pathetic and dangerous misconception concerning the autonomy of the local church" among Southern Baptists, according to the editor of Georgia Baptists' state newspaper.

R. Albert Mohler, in a March 26 editorial, said local church autonomy is "only half of the truth. . . . The local church is autonomous, but so is the Baptist association, state convention and the Southern Baptist Convention.

"The SBC has every right -- and a clear responsibility -- to guard its own integrity in matters of faith and practice."

Mohler's editorial took aim at actions by two North Carolina churches sympathetic to homosexuality: a vote by Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in Raleigh permitting a marriage-like ceremony for two homosexual men and an upcoming vote by Binkley Memorial Baptist Church in Chapel Hill on ordaining a homosexual male to the gospel ministry.

Local churches are autonomous, Mohler acknowledged, but some Baptists wrongly interpret it "to mean that the local church cannot do anything which would invoke disciplinary action."

"The history of (Baptist) associational life in America is replete with references to churches excluded on the basis of doctrine and practices outside tolerable bounds of diversity," Mohler noted.

Mohler recounted in 1749, for example, the Philadelphia (Pa.) Baptist Association adopted an essay stating "a defection in doctrine or practice in any church" is grounds for exclusion and censure by the association -- "to the end that (the church) may be ashamed, and that all churches may . . . bear testimony against such defection." A church discipline statement adopted in 1773 by the Charleston (S.C.) Baptist Association said the body has "a natural and unalienable right" to withdraw fellowship from churches that "obstinately persist in holding corrupt principles or indulging vicious practices . . . ."

"In recent decades," Mohler wrote, "associations have taken action on matters including baptism, the ordination of women and charismatic worship, but . . . . Sadly, few associations take this responsibility with the seriousness it demands."

Founders of the SBC in 1845 saw no need for a creed or confession "because associations exercised strict discipline while respecting church autonomy. But that situation no longer applies. The responsibility to guard the integrity of fellowship now falls upon each general Baptist body."

Mohler added, "... the times demand that Baptists rediscover New Testament models of church discipline and apply the best of the Baptist heritage to the doctrinal and ethical challenges which confront this denomination."

EDITORS' NOTE: The following three stories address today's environmental issues and related actions Christians can take.

Churches can bring about change  
in the environmental crisis

By Susan Todd Doyle

NASHVILLE (BP)--Churches are going to have to do more than just observe "Earth Day" April 23 if they truly want to make a difference in the environmental crisis, according to a Southern Baptist ethicist.

They must be willing to embrace a new "environmental" ethic.

"Too many Christians have studied the Bible for too many years without ever learning about the message of earth-keeping," said Robert Parham, director of the Baptist Center for Ethics. "We have simply missed it. Or perhaps we have heard it but chosen to ignore it. Our failure mandates a return to the Bible with open eyes for the ancient word about a modern-day problem."

Parham describes today's environmental crisis in detail in his recently released book, "Loving Neighbors Across Time: A Christian Guide to Protecting the Earth," published by New Hope press.

The issue of earth-keeping, Parham said, is evident in Scripture. "The Bible speaks about guarding the garden, letting the land rest, preserving fruit trees, protecting hens, knowing that the creation belongs to the Creator, celebrating the beauty of God's created order, and recognizing that human sinfulness causes the earth's suffering," he said. "These and other broad themes flow through the Scriptures."

The church's task, he said, is to not only identify these themes and teach them but to lead the Christian community to apply them.

All too often, churches are not willing to recognize problems caused by social issues, much less to act on them, he said.

"Unfortunately, the discipline of Christian ethics frequently ends where concrete action ought to begin," Parham said.

The environmental issue is one issue in which the "Christian community has been largely silent," he said. But it is one issue in which the Christian community should be involved, he asserts.

Examples of the environmental crisis reviewed in Parham's book include:

-- The nation's garbage glut has filled the nation's landfills. More than 66 percent of landfills have been closed since 1970. A significant portion of those remaining will be closed in the next several years.

-- The average American family of three tosses away 87.5 pounds of trash every week.

-- Compared to other nations, the United States stands as "king" of the garbage mountain. Individually, Americans generate more garbage than citizens of every other nation.

-- Scientific evidence points toward a global warming trend. Six of the warmest years in recorded history have occurred during recent years: 1981, 1983, 1987, 1988, 1989 and 1990.

-- In 1987 America's industries released 2.7 billion pounds of airborne toxic chemicals, including 235 million pounds of carcinogens, known cancer-causing agents.

--more--

-- Only an estimated 1.7 million species have been scientifically cataloged. As many as 30 million life-forms may be in existence but undiscovered and uncataloged. Some scientists believe the world's unbridled drive toward economic development will destroy 100 species every day in the years ahead.

-- A football-size field of rain forest is cleared every second. Scientists estimate that between 50 and 80 percent of all species live in these moist forests which cover only 7 percent of the earth's surface and cluster around the equator. Each year millions of acres are cleared, imperiling both animals and plants.

-- Earth's food supply is placed at risk by herbicides, antibiotics and growth hormones. Other animal drugs compound the problem. Many of these animal drugs -- some say as many as 90 percent -- have not been approved as safe. The real effect of long-term exposure to chemicals in the food chain remains unknown.

"We cannot all address every issue," Parham said. "But we can target some issues and take some initiatives. We can vote for green referendums and for individuals committed to a healthier planet. We can read books on environmental issues. We can join environmental groups. We can exercise our consumer power. We can fire the conscience of family members, neighbors and fellow church members about the biblical mandate of earth-keeping."

The local church holds potential for wielding great power to initiate change in the environmental arena, Parham said. "Compared to the power of the electronic media to mold consumer demands or the power of legislatures to raise and to appropriate funds, the church does appear insignificant," he said. "Much of the church's power is indirect." The church has more opportunity to communicate with a larger audience than almost any other social institution in the country, he said.

Parham suggested three things which churches can do to make a difference in the environment: Re-think the issue, reform community life using its purchasing power and influence in the marketplace, and tackle public policy regarding the environment.

"Reformed congregations act as yeast in dough," he said. "Their influence spreads slowly, changing society as it moves."

Parham's book, "Loving Neighbors Across Time: A Christian Guide to Protecting the Earth," is available from Baptist Book Stores for \$6.95.

--30--

(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by WMU.

Broadman book designed  
as environmental 'primer'

By Chip Alford

Baptist Press  
3/30/92

NASHVILLE (BP)--That environmental issues will remain a point of public discussion throughout the 1990s is a foregone conclusion.

The question, a Southern Baptist leader says, is whether evangelicals will take part in the debate.

At a time when almost everyone seems to be offering opinions on environmental concerns ranging from recycling to saving the Amazon rain forest, "the only ones who seem to be excluded from the debate are evangelical Christians, and too often it is a self-exclusion," said Richard Land, executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

Offended by what they see as a "New Age" philosophy of earth worship touted by many secular environmental groups, Land said some Christians are "overreacting" by turning a deaf ear to environmental concerns altogether.

--more--

"We need to remember that the earth is the Lord's. It isn't ours to do with as we please," Land explained. "He has called us to be good stewards of his creation."

The challenge for leaders in the SBC and other evangelical denominations, Land said, is providing church members with "an informed biblical response" to environmental concerns.

With that goal in mind, the CLC devoted its 1991 annual conference to ecological themes under the title, "Christians and the Environment: Finding a Biblical Balance Between Idolatry and Irresponsibility." The papers presented at the conference, along with some new materials, are being published in book form by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's Broadman Press. "The Earth is the Lord's: Christians and the Environment," compiled by Land and Louis Moore, CLC director of media and products, is scheduled for release in August.

"We wanted to provide a primer for what will clearly be an ongoing debate," Land said of the book. One of the unique features of the publication, he added, is that the articles included are, with one exception, written by pastors, theologians and denominational leaders, not scientists or representatives from environmental agencies.

"We got some criticism for that but we also got some thank-you letters from scientists who said they were glad to hear from the realm of religion and ethics on these issues," Land said.

"Scientists are critically important in diagnosing the problem technically and in prescribing scientific remedies but they cannot answer the theological, moral and ethical questions so critical to the environmental debate," he continued.

In addition to Land and Moore, contributors to the Broadman book include SBC President Morris Chapman; Millard Erickson, vice president and dean at Bethel Seminary in St. Paul, Minn.; Russ Bush III, vice president for academic affairs and provost at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.; Gary Leazer, director of the interfaith witness department at the Home Mission Board; David Dockery, general editor of Broadman's New American Commentary and recently elected dean of theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

Other contributing writers include William Pinson, executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas; Jack Graham, pastor of Prestonwood Baptist Church in Dallas; Robert Naylor, president emeritus of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas; Rick Irvin, associate professor of the Louisiana State University Institute for Environmental Studies and Research; and Lamar Cooper Sr., CLC director of denominational relations.

Articles focus on a variety of themes from the biblical theology and ethics of ecology to how a local church can begin a recycling program. Dockery, who was not a speaker at the CLC conference, included four sermon samples on the environment in his article, "The Environment, Ethics and Exposition."

Acknowledging Southern Baptists are "only just beginning to dig into this issue," Moore said he is hopeful the book will stimulate both discussion and action in local churches. "Our whole purpose is to get the message to the grass roots," he said.

--30--

(BP) photo of Land available upon request from the Christian Life Commission.

Several avenues exist for  
pro-environment involvement

By Chip Alford

Baptist Press  
3/30/92

NASHVILLE (BP)--Christians interested in becoming involved in pro-environment activities have several avenues of participation available.

--more--

"Christian participation in pro-environment activities involves a two-step process," said Ray Higgins, assistant professor of Christian ethics at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. "The first step is to help Christians realize pro-environment attitudes and actions are both a divine expectation and a biblical mandate. The second step is to point Christians toward pro-environment organizations which educate and involve their members in activities that enhance our earthly home's life-support system."

Higgins made the comments in the article "A Review of Environmental Groups," which appears in the Spring 1992 edition of Search, a professional journal published by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board. Higgins outlines in the article four categories of environmental organizations that offer opportunities for involvement: Southern Baptist-sponsored groups, other Christian organizations, pluralistic organizations and governmental organizations.

Southern Baptists have involved themselves in environmental issues as a denominational people through their own ethics agencies, Higgins said. The Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission includes environmental concerns as part of its ethical issues portfolio. The commission has published pamphlets, included articles in its magazine, Light, and addressed ecology-related topics at its annual national seminar.

Baptist state convention ethics agencies, such as the Christian Action Commission of the Mississippi Baptist Convention, the Council on Christian Life and Public Affairs of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina and the Christian Life Commission of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, also address environmental issues, Higgins said.

The North Carolina council has initiated a multiyear effort called "Earth-stewards." Through publications, videos and conferences, the state's Baptists will be encouraged to become conscious of their role as stewards of God's creation and educated in ways to implement their responsibility. The other state ethics agencies are developing similar emphases.

A second avenue for involvement through Southern Baptist channels is the local church, Higgins said. For example, Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas established an 11-person environmental stewardship committee in 1990. The committee studied the impact of church policies and practices on the environment, surveyed church members about their environmental concerns and practices and sponsored a community environmental fair.

As part of the fair, the church collected more than 10,000 pounds of newspaper and 283 pounds of aluminum for recycling, netting \$250 for its "Wilshire Hunger Offering." The committee also installed three recycling igloos for glass and aluminum at the church and continues to educate church members about recycling and other environmental concerns through monthly bulletin inserts and a central bulletin board.

Another Southern Baptist church initiated a community and statewide pro-environment coalition, Higgins said. VISION was founded in 1988 by Bob Albritton, pastor of University Baptist Church in Montevallo, Ala. The ecumenical, eco-justice organization publishes a quarterly newsletter, The Perspective, holds an annual conference and works on environmental issues of concern to the citizens of Montevallo and Alabama.

A variety of environmental organizations linking themselves with Christianity exist outside the SBC, Higgins said. Some of the more well known include:

-- Au Sable Institute of Environmental Studies. Founded in 1979, it is an institution of higher education licensed by Michigan's Department of Education. The institute offers courses and training in environmental issues used by some 80 Christian colleges. Located on a 130-acre site in Mancelona, Mich., participants can explore and experience the environment as well as study about it.

--more--

-- North America Conference on Christianity and Ecology (NACCE). Founded in 1984, NACCE is an ecumenical, international organization which publishes a quarterly magazine, Firmament: The Quarterly of Christian Ecology. Two well known Christian leaders in the environment movement, Calvin DeWitt and Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, are on the organization's board.

-- Christian Nature Federation. Based in Fullerton, Calif., this organization articulates a distinctive Christian philosophy on environmental issues, offering members an opportunity "to gain new appreciation of God's handiwork" from a perspective "not tainted by humanistic, naturalistic and neopagan bias (i.e. the New Age movement)."

-- Floresta. This group, whose name means "greenery," is designed "to reach people with the good news of God's salvation in Jesus Christ by focusing on the problem of deforestation in developing countries." Its primary goal is to find solutions to poverty and starvation in the Third World caused partially by deforestation. The group publishes a newsletter, The Sower.

Many environmental organizations have a non-religious philosophy and a broad-based membership, Higgins recounted. Some of these groups are well known, such as the Sierra Club, the National Wildlife Federation, the Audubon Society, Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth (FOE). Governmental agencies also address environmental concerns, such as the Environmental Protection Agency, with headquarters in Washington, D.C., and regional offices across the United States. Each state also has an agency concerned with various conservation issues including fish and wildlife, environmental protection, parks and recreation, forests and water resources.

Because of the number and complexity of organizations addressing environmental concerns, Higgins said Christians who want to become involved should write to a variety of organizations and evaluate the materials they receive. In evaluating the material, Higgins said several factors should be considered, including the religious or non-religious nature of the group, the group's philosophy and purpose, sources of funding, methodology or strategy used to achieve the organization's goals and environmental concerns the organization addresses.

While some Southern Baptists may only feel comfortable being involved in Christian organizations, others may choose pluralistic groups. Whatever their decision, Higgins said two "extreme responses" should be avoided.

"On the one hand, one should not become involved with just any environmental organization. Some groups' values and points of view may differ in significant ways from a Christian's perspective."

"On the other hand, one should not avoid involvement with significant organizations because of minor philosophical or methodological differences. Personal observation seems to indicate that, whatever the ethical issue is, the stronger a Christian's convictions about and involvement in the issue, the more likely a Christian will join with a variety of organizations in order to achieve the common goal."

--30--

The entire Spring 1992 edition of Search focuses on environmental concerns. Titles of other articles include "A Global Overview of Environmental Concerns"; "Creation, Dominion, Redemption and the Environment"; "A Theology for Ecology: The Old Testament"; "Root Causes of the Earth's Endangerment"; "Southern Baptists and the Environment"; "Worship and the Environment"; and "The Church and the Environmental Crisis."

SBC Stewardship Commission reduces  
'92 budget, elects Moody chairman

By Bob Matthews

Baptist Press  
3/30/92

NASHVILLE (BP)--Trustees of the Southern Baptist Stewardship Commission approved a slightly reduced budget for 1992-93 and elected a new chairman at their annual meeting here.

--more--

The commission will operate on a \$2,377,583 budget in 1992-93, a 4.79 percent decrease from the current budget.

Roy Moody, state stewardship secretary for the Kansas-Nebraska state convention, was elected executive committee chairman to succeed Radford, Va., pastor Joe Burton who has served the past two years. Moody has been vice chairman since 1990.

Other new officers are Samuel Hodges III, District of Columbia architect, vice chairman, and Burton, Mich. pastor Levi Parish, secretary.

Honored at a banquet upon their impending retirement later this year were Sarah Gather, secretary in endowment and capital giving promotion; Harry G. Bonner, executive vice president, and Leon B. Patterson, executive vice president of endowment and capital giving promotion.

In his report to trustees, A. Rudy Fagan, president-treasurer, said the Cooperative Program is being interpreted and defined differently across the Southern Baptist Convention. Stewardship Commission staff members are involved in a series of Cooperative Program issues dialogues being conducted across the SBC. Goal of the series, which was launched by the SBC Executive Committee in February in Nashville, includes CP promotion, any problems related to the CP and how leadership may be more unified in CP promotion.

The second in the series will be held May 18-19 in the Dallas-Fort Worth area for persons invited from six south-central state conventions. Future dialogues will be in Atlanta, Chicago, Las Vegas and Washington, D.C.

The trustees voted to continue operation of the Cooperative Program Information Hot Line, a 800-number toll-free service, the rest of 1992 or as long as the staff considers it beneficial to Southern Baptists. The hot line gives church members opportunity to ask questions and make comments about the Cooperative Program to Nashville staffers. The number, (800) 722-9407, is available 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. CST.

The 28-member commission also voted to affirm the commission staff for "its commitment, integrity and expertise during the present environment."

--30--

Summer's a match for kids,  
churches and families

By Marv Knox

Baptist Press  
3/30/92

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Children can have a happy, productive summer if their parents and churches work together, according to an informal survey of veteran ministers to children.

Teamwork, commitment and preparation are key ingredients for a successful summer ministry to youngsters, they said.

Here's a summary of the advice given by seven experts on children's ministry: Children's ministry leaders and parents should sit down early in the year and brainstorm about summer events and activities that could serve families with children.

Then the church could publish a brochure describing the plans and providing dates for the activities, so parents can plan family and business functions to accommodate the children's participation.

Some traditional church activities -- such as Vacation Bible School, backyard Bible clubs, day camps and day care -- already provide ministry to children.

Churches also can modify those programs to meet the specific needs of families in their communities.

--more--

For example, curriculum for Vacation Bible School and day camps can be combined to strengthen the crafts/activity emphasis of day camp by adding the Bible/missions focus of VBS -- and provide an all-day program.

A downtown church might want to modify its VBS program to meet all day, one day per week, all summer long. Then children could ride in to work with mom or dad; spend the day learning about missions, studying the Bible and participating in recreation and crafts; and then ride home after work.

Taking a different track, a church might want to focus on a specific subdivision or apartment complex to provide Bible school and/or day camp for children in that neighborhood.

And churches also can incorporate children's emphases into existing structures -- such as a focus on children in worship, with youngsters providing music or drama, following up worship with a fellowship highlighting children's activities or interests.

Missions also provides numerous opportunities for kids during summer. Last year, a church renovated the home of an elderly couple and children worked with their parents to paint, garden and do other chores. Churches in communities where Habitat for Humanity builds homes for the poor can sign families up to do the work.

Ministries to residents of senior citizens' facilities also can be performed by children and their parents, and work in Christian social ministry centers is a good family project.

Many churches sponsor clean-up days, environmental awareness days and special projects for labor-intensive tasks that need to be done around the church building.

And don't forget, summer is a great time for boys and girls to work on their missions action awards for Girls in Action and Royal Ambassadors.

The children's ministers encouraged churches to help families with their vacations as well. Sunday school department directors can prepare kits for children as they leave on vacation -- complete with lesson materials, puzzles and other information about the lessons they miss.

A large summer travel map could add interest for children. They can send back postcards from their travels, which are mounted on the map in the appropriate locations.

One church prepares a family travel booklet, featuring in-car games and the words and music to sing-along songs.

Another creates a travel grab bag with paper, crayons, markers, scissors, games, worksheets and Bible story materials. It also provides discussion-starter questions, like "What would you do if a stranger tells you he's supposed to take you to your mother?" or "Where would you go if a fire breaks out in our house?"

A display of worship bulletins brought back by members who visit churches on their trips can stimulate children's interest in attending church, even when they're far from home.

Beyond all the Bible-, missions- and learning-oriented activities, the children's ministers urged churches to help children and their families have fun in the summer. Among their ideas:

-- Sponsor a family game night in the fellowship hall following a churchwide pot-luck dinner.

-- Rent or borrow a local gym for a night of family-oriented activities.

--more--

-- Hold a hobby show with space for members of all ages to display their hobbies and give demonstrations.

-- Conduct an environmental fair using recycled material to create crafts or works of art.

-- Pig-out together on watermelon, ice cream, cakes or pies.

-- Sponsor a reading program or story time.

-- Set out on a field trip -- to water parks, miniature golf courses, bowling alleys, landmarks, industries, parks, zoos, museums.

-- Designate one day a week as crafts day at church.

-- Provide children's workshops -- in art, drama, music, puppetry, nature.

-- Urge families to pack a basket of food and meet somewhere for lunch.

-- Set aside one day a week as movie day at church and show films for children or families.

-- Put on a pet show and invite a veterinarian or kennel operator to teach obedience skills or how to groom pets.

-- Conduct a bicycle rodeo in your parking lot.

-- Hold a Bible olympics with various Bible knowledge games.

-- Use your imagination and offer plenty of chances for children and their families to have fun together at church all summer long.

--30--

Women make missions go,  
Carolyn Crumpler says

By Mark Wingfield

Baptist Press  
3/30/92

ERLANGER, Ky. (BP)--Women remain the key to missions ministries in urban areas and Woman's Missionary Union can be effective there, Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler said.

Crumpler, former executive director of Woman's Missionary Union, led a small group session during a Metro Ministry Conference at Erlanger Baptist Church in northern Kentucky.

"If the challenge of the urban setting is going to be met, it is going to be met by missionary women," she said.

Concerned women can help churches fulfill their mission, Crumpler insisted. She admonished churches to "teach missions in a way that's going to capture the attention of women and girls today."

National WMU structures have been changing and continue to change to meet modern needs, Crumpler explained, but many churches haven't caught on.

"We don't do WMU the way we used to do WMU," she said. "If we do, we won't be effective in urban areas."

Many churches still haven't implemented major changes WMU set forth 20 years ago to focus on changing lifestyles, Crumpler said. These changes brought a lot of flexibility to WMU programs but "unfortunately most of us didn't flex."

--more--

She encouraged women to instigate mission action projects in their churches and communities. To start, she suggested conducting a mission tour to discover needs Baptist women could meet.

Four steps in beginning a mission action plan, she said, are: Discover the makeup of the community, pick out the "glaring needs," compare the needs to the resources within the church and then decide what projects can be done and when.

Planning for a project is essential, Crumpler said, but "the important thing is to do it."

-- 30 --

Tennessee BSU team recovering  
following accident in Mississippi      By Lonnie Wilkey

Baptist Press  
3/30/92

LAUREL, Miss. (BP)--Ten members of a Baptist Student Union team from Maryville College in Tennessee are recovering from injuries sustained in an automobile accident March 22 in Laurel, Miss. -- and grateful for the ministry of a Presbyterian church in the city.

The BSU team was returning from a spring mission project in New Orleans, La., when the van they were in left the road during a rainstorm and struck a tree. A "jaws of life" apparatus was used to free the nine students and BSU director Marsha Butler, who was driving the van, from the wreckage. The van was totaled.

Butler said the students suffered broken bones and some internal injuries but "everything is mendable." Butler sustained broken bones in her arm, wrist and elbow. As of March 27, all of the students had been released from the hospital. One student, Marjorie Dietz, was scheduled to be released March 30 or 31.

Butler said the accident occurred near the hospital in Laurel. A Baptist chaplain arrived at the scene and prayed with the students.

A passerby saw the name of the college on the van and identified it as a Presbyterian school. She was evidently on her way to church and reported it to leaders at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Laurel. Within 15 minutes, Johnny Patterson, the church's associate pastor, and one of the elders who was a doctor arrived at the emergency room.

Patterson told the Baptist and Reflector they assessed the needs and began a plan of ministry. Church members stayed in the rooms with the injured students and brought various toiletry items and other necessities to the students.

"Church members were unconditional in their Christian love to us," Butler said. "They ministered to us more than we could ever have imagined possible."

Butler said it would be a missions project that would not be forgotten. "We were able to minister in New Orleans and we were ministered to in Laurel," she said.

-30-

Also available upon request:

-- Feature by Lonnie Wilkey on the transformation of a Tennessee Baptist church near Fort Campell Army Base.

-- Feature by Mark Wingfield on a New England Baptist leader's comments on great churches during a conference in Kentucky.

-- Feature by Melanie Childers on a Kentucky woman's reunion with her five brothers and sisters after 40 years of separation by adoption.

-- Feature by Connie Bull on a Louisville church's youth midnight skating party -- with an AIDS awareness focus.