



-- 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

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92-93

**Growing churches find
sin city is city of grace** By Sarah Zimmerman

LAS VEGAS (BP)--Johnny Nantz voted against having the Southern Baptist Convention in Las Vegas every time he got a chance.

Despite protests from people like Nantz who felt Southern Baptists had no business doing business there, the SBC annual meeting was held in Las Vegas in 1989. The city they were tempted to shun is now the home of rapidly growing Southern Baptist churches.

Although he objected to the convention site, Nantz went to Las Vegas early for the pre-convention soul-winning effort. Then pastor of Memorial Heights Baptist Church in Claremore, Okla., he attended the annual meeting and went home, hoping to never again see the city's flashing lights.

When a friend gave his name to a pulpit committee for a Las Vegas church, Nantz was sure he wasn't interested. Yet the church was persistent, and God showed Nantz and his wife all their reasons for not moving were really excuses.

Six months after the convention, Nantz became pastor of Spring Valley Baptist Church in Las Vegas.

The church has since quadrupled in size, with average worship attendance reaching 400. The church broke its Sunday school attendance record 22 times in two years. Nantz estimates two-thirds of his church's growth is from new Christians.

Experiencing similar growth, West Oakey Baptist Church had an average worship attendance of 975 in May, compared with 240 in 1986.

"Some people stand in awe that there are even Christians in this city," said pastor Michael Rochelle. "But I have never been in a city where people are more open to hearing the gospel."

Green Valley Baptist Church in Henderson on the outskirts of Las Vegas grew from 16 members in January 1986 to 590 members currently. Pastor Frank Lewis said the church now has three Sunday schools and two worship services to accommodate the 400 people who attend each week.

The Las Vegas meeting was the first time Southern Baptists went to a convention city early to participate in door-to-door witnessing. Some of the area churches are still seeing results from that effort.

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A woman who is now a Sunday school teacher at Highland Hills Baptist Church in Henderson, was home on vacation the day Southern Baptist volunteers knocked on her door. She was already a Christian but not involved in a local church.

The woman began attending Highland Hills and eventually pastor John Mark Simmons baptized her husband and their four children.

Another woman was given a "Here's Hope" New Testament during the convention. Two years later she came to Nantz' church asking for someone to explain the book to her. Nantz has since baptized her and her husband.

Stan Clark, national evangelism consultant and Home Mission Board volunteer, said Southwest Baptist Chapel in Las Vegas started as a result of the pre-convention effort. While trying to map the city for volunteers, organizers became aware of a growing area with no church.

A woman who became a Christian as a result of the door-to-door campaign was one of the chapel's first members. Clark said the last time he visited the church, she was surrounded by her neighbors who had become Christians because of her witness.

David Meacham, executive director of the Nevada Baptist Convention, was director of missions for the Southern Nevada Baptist Association when the convention met in Las Vegas. He said the meeting created "a new climate here and an openness to who we are. It identified Southern Baptists with witnessing and evangelism."

Jeff Wagoner, mission ministries director for the Southern Nevada Baptist Association, said one reason churches are growing is that the city is growing. With 800,000 people, Las Vegas is expected to reach 1 million residents by the year 2000, he said.

People come to Las Vegas for construction jobs that accompany such growth and for jobs in the tourist industry. Dry weather and lack of an income tax also attract people to southern Nevada. Naturally some people move to Las Vegas hoping to win a fortune.

"People come here from all over expecting to find the goose who laid the golden egg," Wagoner said. "When it doesn't turn out that way, they turn to the church."

Nantz knows of several people who found their fortunes in Jesus Christ.

A singer at Caesar's Palace and her husband became Christians after Nantz gave her his business card. A cocktail waitress became a Christian and four of her friends came to her baptism because they had never seen a baptism. One of them later became a Christian.

"I'm reminded of Romans 5:20 that says where sin abounds, there did grace abound much more," Nantz said. "This city of sin is also the city of grace."

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

'See you at the pole'
set for Sept. 16

ATLANTA (BP)--This year's "See You at the Pole," a nationwide youth prayer rally at school flag poles, is set for Sept. 16, and Southern Baptist churches will receive participation commitment forms in June.

Last year, 180,000 youth participated in the first national rally which is held before school starts and includes prayer for youth issues, said Dean Finley, Home Mission Board youth evangelism specialist.

See You at the Pole is a student movement to carry out the biblical mandate, based on Joel 2, to do something about crisis in a culture, Finley said.

The crisis, Finley said, includes alcohol and drug abuse, sexuality, suicide and crime. He noted one out of three teen-agers is a heavy drinker, 3.3 million alcoholics in America are teenagers, half of the 1 million teen-age pregnancies in the nation end in abortion, 5,000 teen-agers die each year by suicide and 28 percent of America's serious crimes are committed by people under age 18.

See You at the Pole is not a demonstration, a protest or a patriotic rally, Finley said. It is a united declaration of a Christian's dependence on God as a solution to the crisis facing teen-agers, he said.

In addition to youth meeting at the flag pole, churches are asked to dedicate a "Wailing Wall" for youth during their Wednesday services on Sept. 16. The wailing wall will include pictures of local students as a reminder for youth to pray specifically for their friends.

Also, youth are asked to wear T-shirts with a Christian message on each of the five Wednesdays in September.

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Jay Strack to be nominated
for SBC first vice president

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6/2/92

EULESS, Texas (BP)--Dallas evangelist Jay Strack will be nominated for first vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention, Euleless evangelist Freddie Gage announced June 1.

The election will occur during the convention's annual meeting, June 9-11 in Indianapolis. Only one other SBC vice presidential candidate has emerged, Louisiana evangelist Joe Aulds, but his supporters said it is undecided whether he will be run for first or second vice president.

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Gage, in a formal statement, declared, "Without a doubt, evangelist Strack is second only to Billy Graham among Southern Baptists in bringing men to Jesus. Evangelist Strack is a man of great integrity. Moderates and conservatives recommend Jay Strack's area-wide soul-winning crusades. Jay Strack will bring haling to the Southern Baptist Convention."

Gage said Strack will be nominated by Jack Graham, current president of the Southern Baptist Pastor's Conference and pastor of Prestonwood Baptist Church in Dallas, where Strack is a member.

Strack, a former two-term president of the Conference of Southern Baptist Evangelists, has served on several government anti-drug task forces.

He has authored seven books, including two released by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's Broadman division, "Do the Work of an Evangelist" and "The New Testament Way to Revival." He also was executive editor of "The Transformer," a youth Bible of Thomas Nelson Publishers.

According to a biographical sketch from his evangelistic association, Strack was "converted from a life of broken homes, six step fathers, numerous drug arrests and juvenile detention sentences." He now has spoken in more than 3,800 public schools to an estimated 5 million youth and in hundreds of crusades, rallies and church services in the United States and overseas.

Strack holds master of divinity and doctor of ministry degrees from Luther Rice Seminary in Jacksonville, Fla.

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CORRECTION: In (BP) story titled "Pastor group endorses Ed Young for president" dated 6/1/92, please correct the 11th paragraph to read:

Johnny Hunt, First Baptist of Woodstock, Ga.; Charles Lowery, Hoffmantown Baptist, Albuquerque, N.M.; James Merritt, First Baptist, Snellville, Ga.; Jack Millwood, First Baptist North Mobile, Saraland, Ala.; Ike Reighard, New Hope, Fayetteville, Ga.; Rick Scarborough, First Baptist, Pearland, Texas.

Thanks,
Baptist Press

CORRECTION: In (BP) story titled "Texas Baptist urging SBC to take stand on Freemasonry," dated 5/15/92, please delete the 23rd paragraph. The paragraph incorrectly states Masons sponsor Shriners Hospitals. Shriners and the hospitals they sponsor have no official standing in Masonry.

Thanks,
Baptist Press
