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NATIONAL OFFICE  
SBC Executive Committee  
901 Commerce #750  
Nashville, Tennessee 37203  
(615) 244-2355  
Herb Hollinger, Vice President  
Fax (615) 742-8915  
CompuServe ID# 70420.11

**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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**Clinton-Gore Democratic ticket  
first for Southern Baptists**

**By Art Toalston**

**NASHVILLE (BP)**--Bill Clinton's selection of Al Gore makes history with two Southern Baptists atop a presidential ticket.

But the pro-choice views of Clinton and Gore are likely to spark controversy with the fiercely anti-abortion conservative leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Clinton, the 45-year-old Arkansas governor with ample delegates to claim the Democratic National Convention nomination July 15 in New York City, announced his vice presidential running mate selection of Gore July 9. Gore, 44, is Tennessee's junior senator and an unsuccessful Democratic candidate for president in 1988.

Clinton is a member of Immanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock, the city's largest Southern Baptist church. His wife, Hilary, and daughter, Chelsea, 11, are members of Little Rock's First United Methodist Church.

Gore and his wife, Tipper, are members of Mount Vernon Baptist Church in Arlington, Va., outside Washington, where they were baptized in 1980 and their fourth child, Albert III, 10, was baptized in June 1991.

In Tennessee, the Gores attend New Salem Missionary Baptist Church in Carthage, a non-SBC congregation, according to the senator's Nashville office. Gore's father, Albert Sr., is a member of First Baptist Church of Carthage, an SBC congregation. His mother, Pauline, is from a Church of Christ background but often joins her husband at First Baptist there.

Clinton's home church in downtown Little Rock has "led the state for many, many years in total dollars" given to the Cooperative Program, said Jimmy Sheffield, associate executive director of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention. The Cooperative Program is Southern Baptists' multi-million-dollar fund for international, national and state missions and ministry efforts.

Immanuel's 1990-91 CP giving of \$430,144 placed it 13th among SBC churches nationally.

Founded 100 years ago, Immanuel has 2,900 resident members and averages 1,300 in Sunday school. Its ministries include a tutoring program for inner-city children and participation in a crisis closet of food and clothing for the needy.

Gore's home church in northern Virginia, founded in 1928, has 250 members and averages 80 to 100 in Sunday worship. "We're a small church, a local church where Jesus is Lord and we're all family here," said Steve Vornov, Mount Vernon's pastor since August 1991.

Mount Vernon is the closest church to Gore's Arlington, Va., home and the senator and his family usually walk the three to four blocks to attend worship services, Vornov said.

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Gore, author of a new book, "Earth in the Balance," is a contributor to the Spring 1992 issue of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board quarterly, Search, on environmental issues. Mrs. Gore is contributor to a new Sunday School Board youth discipleship training product expected to be released later this year. She helped write one of 12 topics to make up "Trauma Center Plus," a facts worksheet and discussion starter for youth and youth ministers. Her topic, "Media -- Standards to Gauge By," discusses issues bombarding youth through the media.

The abortion issue, meanwhile, confronted Clinton once again when he named Gore to the Democratic ticket.

The National Right to Life Committee issued a news release with legislative director Douglas Johnson complaining: "Clinton apparently dropped his preferred (v.p.) candidates because they support minor limits on abortion, such as a 24-hour waiting period. It is evident that Clinton is captive to the extremist pro-abortion groups."

Indiana Congressman Lee Hamilton and Pennsylvania Sen. Harris Wofford had been leading contenders for the slot until their support for abortion limits caused them to be "eliminated" by Clinton's campaign, the National Right to Life Committee claimed.

The news release targeted Gore's record on the abortion issue, charging, "since becoming a senator and presidential hopeful, he has embraced the entire pro-abortion agenda." As a congressman from 1976 to 1984, however, Gore "voted pro-life 84 percent of the time," according to the Right to Life statement.

Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission Executive Director Richard Land issued a statement about Gore's selection but did not specifically mention the abortion issue. Land could not be reached for additional comment July 10. However, Land has been quoted on the candidacy of independent Ross Perot as saying, "What I hear (among Southern Baptists) is extreme disappointment that Perot is not pro-life."

Land, in his statement on Gore's selection, noted: "The Christian Life Commission has no desire to imply support for, or opposition to, any candidate in the presidential campaign. The commission deals with issues, not candidates or parties. Having said that, I may observe that Gov. Clinton's choice of Sen. Gore as his running mate presents Southern Baptists with the unique phenomenon of a national ticket composed entirely of Southern Baptists -- a prospect that will clearly have significant appeal."

In a nudge of the Bush administration, Land continued, "It should certainly give pause to those, particularly in the Bush campaign, who have been tempted to take Southern Baptist voters for granted. I suspect that many Southern Baptists will require clear differences on substantive values issues to vote against two from their own denomination."

The Southern Baptist Convention, in its annual meetings, has passed five resolutions since 1980 opposing abortion except to save the life of the mother.

"I'm very much pro-life," said Vornov, Gore's pastor at Mount Vernon Baptist Church, "but I'm pastor to every person in the church."

Rex Horne, Clinton's pastor at Immanuel in Little Rock, who came to the church two years ago, said members "have not been overtaken" with the media attention Clinton has received as a presidential candidate nor the charges he has weathered, such as an extra-marital affair. "Our people for 12 years have gone to church will Bill Clinton," Horne said.

The pastor added, "I have not felt any compulsion to defend his stances politically if I find them in opposition to what I believe personally. But I do defend his freedom to worship with us. I had rather him be here in worship hearing a message from God's Word on a regular basis than not having a spiritual home he can return to."

Clinton "has not asked me to make one call or do anything to use the church's influence for his political advantage," Horne said.

"Politics aside, just person to person, he's a likable person, a warm, friendly person (who) knows how to make people feel at ease," the pastor said.

Vornov, Gore's pastor who hails from a Jewish background in New Jersey, said he has "enjoyed having him (in the congregation) very much. He always listens very attentively (to the sermons). I can make eye contact with him. Every preacher wants someone who listens."

One Sunday this year Vornov reflected on the range of people in the congregation, from Gore to several Cambodian members, a deacon from Cameroon in Africa and a woman drained by numerous difficulties in life and how "in the church of Jesus Christ, the prominent and the obscure stand equal before the cross."

According to a June 29 article in The Washington Post, Clinton attended Park Place Baptist Church in Hot Springs, Ark., as a boy but said he became "an uneven churchgoer" as a student at Jesuit-operated Georgetown University in Washington and a Rhodes scholar at Oxford University in England and through his 1976 election as Arkansas attorney general.

But, he told the newspaper, he began feeling a deep need to return to church when he began making decisions affecting millions of people.

At Immanuel Baptist, the pastor, W.O. Vaught, became a father figure for Clinton, whose father died in an auto accident before he was born. Clinton told The Washington Post, "I think he (Vaught) instinctively knew that I needed him, and maybe in ways that I wasn't aware of. He was guiding without being judgmental." Vaught, pastor of the church 38 years until his 1983 retirement, died of bone cancer Christmas Day 1989.

Vaught, from his study of Hebrew wording in the Old Testament, gave Clinton counsel in formulating his views on abortion and capital punishment, both of which he would permit as president.

On abortion, Vaught "thought the most literal meaning of life in the Bible would be to conclude that it began at birth," Clinton told the newspaper. "It didn't mean that (abortion) was right all the time or that it wasn't immoral, but he didn't think you could say it was murder."

In his darkest days on the campaign trail, Clinton told the Post, "I wished so much that I could just go in there and talk to him."

Clinton voiced sadness over the theology-political controversy among Southern Baptists in a July 7 interview with public TV's Bill Moyers.

"As you might imagine, I'm pretty much on the side of the moderates in the fight," Clinton told Moyers. He said the controversy has "affected the lives of pastors I know and families I know and churches that I know."

"And the thing that's always been special about our church at its best was its reasoned tolerance and its understanding of the real wall between church and state," Clinton said. "And all of that is at risk today in the interplay of the forces."

Gore, after graduating from Harvard University in 1969, studied at Vanderbilt University's divinity and law schools.

Walter Harrelson, distinguished professor emeritus of Hebrew Bible who has kept up with Gore since his Vanderbilt studies 20 years ago, said Gore has always had "a little restlessness toward his religion" and been "an unconventional church participant. He's thought a lot about his religion but not always in the form that's come to him."

After his marriage and "as his children came along, he began to change," Harrelson said. "He has always been a devoutly religious person but he became more so."

Harrelson said Gore concentrated on ethics studies and was intent on "searching for fundamental meaning in life." He said Gore is highly opinionated especially when his mind is made up on a subject. "He's not true-blue liberal as those of us who call ourselves true-blue liberal would evaluate him," the professor said. Describing himself as a dove, Harrelson said he has disagreed with Gore amiably over the years about military spending.

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Herb Hollinger, Polly House, Tom Strode, Louis Moore and Terri Lackey contributed to this story.

Pastor shares reflections  
on tragedy at Texas cafeteria

By Linda Lawson

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GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--The credibility a new pastor usually spends months building among church members and people in the community, Jimmy Towers earned in days surrounding the events of Oct. 16, 1991.

But the pastor of First Baptist Church of Killeen, Texas, would not wish on anybody the tragic circumstances he, his congregation and the people of Killeen experienced.

At high noon Wednesday, Oct. 16, George Hennard went on a shooting spree in Luby's cafeteria, killing 23 people. Towers had been pastor of the largest church in town only six weeks.

The next hours and days were filled with ministry -- to family members of the victims, survivors in the restaurant, police and paramedics.

"The paramedics (some of whom were church members) had to go into the carnage and pick up the bodies of their friends," Towers said.

As more than 3,000 media representatives from all over the world descended on the town of 70,000, Towers not only was interviewed countless times, he sought to minister to media personnel.

"I guess I took on the role of self-appointed minister to the media," Towers said. He drank coffee and talked with print, radio and television journalists. It also fell to his lot to negotiate media representation at a prayer vigil two days after the shootings and a memorial service the next day. Both were held at First Baptist Church which has the largest auditorium in town.

This was not the first city-wide crisis for Killeen, which only a year earlier had sent 25,000 soldiers from nearby Fort Hood to Saudi Arabia.

"When people left to go to the desert, there was a sense of possibility they might not come back," Towers said. "When people left to go to Luby's for lunch, not coming back was the last thing on anyone's mind."

The people of Killeen lost their innocence Oct. 16, he said. Assumptions about where they could go and be safe were shattered.

However, 10 months later, Towers said the town has shown resilience and, for most people, life appears to have returned to normal.

"I see very few people go into restaurants and look for tables away from the windows," he said. "There was a lot of that at first."

Luby's reopened five months after the tragedy with the overwhelming support of most townspeople. Towers paid tribute to the San Antonio-based company and its leaders.

Luby's contributed \$100,000 to the survivors' fund and paid its employees the entire five months the cafeteria was closed.

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"Luby's administration had to do a lot of soul-searching. They took time. They did a marvelous job of remodeling so the cafeteria looks completely different. They did the right thing," Towers said.

While those who died that day have not and will not be forgotten, "healing has taken place," Towers said, noting many who were personally involved are still dealing with critical concerns and problems. "Issues have been dealt with as healthfully as possible."

A statewide football championship probably speeded up the healing process, Towers acknowledged.

"The football playoffs were almost a mystic event. In every game, Killeen was the underdog, fell behind and then came back to win," he said.

First Baptist Church will never be the same, believes Towers, who had immediate decisions to make after the shootings about Wednesday night activities. A concert by gospel artist, Dino, was scheduled. Towers' first inclination was to cancel the concert until he learned the theme for the concert and the title of the artist's latest recording was "Peace in the Midst of a Storm."

The concert went on as scheduled. Dino contributed his honorarium to the survivors' fund. He gave free tapes to anyone who would take them to a survivor.

Because no members of First Baptist Church were among the dead, Towers believes the church focused outward, reaching out to people throughout the community, offering encouragement and touching lives.

"Healing began immediately," Towers said.

As he prepared for worship the next Sunday, he wondered and prayed about what to say. Almost immediately, he felt the Lord speak to him, telling him to use as his text, John 14:1, "Let not your heart be troubled."

"How is that possible?" Towers asked himself and God.

"Almost immediately, Jesus spoke to me, 'go on' in the text. It continues, 'You believe in God, believe also in me. If it were not so, I would have told you.'"

Towers had notes on a funeral message preached earlier on that text by Paul Powell, president of the Southern Baptist Annuity Board. The three-point outline urged listeners to believe in the person, believe in the place and believe in the promise.

"That became my message to the people on Sunday morning," he said. In addition to church members, Towers addressed media representatives in the audience, explaining the plan of salvation.

Ten months later while attending the Discipleship Training Leadership Conference at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center, Towers' eyes filled with tears as he reflected on events and considered the response of his congregation.

"First Baptist Church rose to the occasion and did all that was required to put its arms around the hurting community," he said.

From the experience, Towers said he learned anew that "life is terminal. We need to be prepared to live life to the fullest while here but also be prepared for future events. We need to discover what we are trusting in. The things of this world are temporary."

Dennis cites urgent needs  
for prison volunteers

By Linda Lawson

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--MasterLife not only helps convicts serving time cope with the adversities of prison life but equips them to become contributing citizens when they are released, according to three people who have taught the adult discipleship course in prisons.

"The dream is to disciple the men and women in prison and give them a strong understanding of life in Christ," said Don Dennis, an ex-convict who has introduced MasterLife in 21 prisons in the state of Texas since 1989. Six hundred men and 90 women in Texas prisons have completed the 26-week discipleship course produced by the discipleship training department of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

"Then when they come out they will be given an opportunity to minister in places where others can't go," such as inner cities, said Dennis, who also is pastor of Shawnee Baptist Mission in Ennis, Texas. He led a conference on MasterLife in prison during the Discipleship Training Leadership Conference at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center.

In addition to churches in the United States and on mission fields around the world, MasterLife is now being taught in prisons in at least 23 states.

"The door is open to introduce MasterLife in state and federal prisons all over the United States," Dennis said. "The urgent need is for MasterLife graduates who are willing to teach the course in prison."

Bill Paulling, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church in Overland Park, Kan., has been teaching a group of 10 inmates at Leavenworth Federal Prison since May. The chaplain at Leavenworth had earlier served at a Fort Worth, Texas, prison where Dennis had introduced MasterLife. Once at Leavenworth, he contacted the Kansas-Nebraska Convention of Southern Baptists about enlisting a teacher to start a group there.

Paulling said the idea of prison ministry was "born in my heart" when he read an article about Dennis in a magazine published by the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission. When he was asked to lead a group at Leavenworth, his immediate answer was yes.

"I am amazed at the depth of insight of these men. I know God called me to this ministry," Paulling said.

While the outside walls of Leavenworth are intimidating, "when I get in there I sense the presence of God. It overshadows any fear I might have," he said.

C.M. and Jo Ann Howell, Mission Service Corps volunteers in California, have divided their time in the past year between teaching MasterLife at the California Correctional Institution at Tehachapi and serving a church. They will give full time in the next year to prison ministry. C.M. Howell teaches MasterLife while his wife handles office responsibilities.

When Howell completed his first MasterLife group of 12 in June, he had recruited a volunteer to lead a group in another part of the prison. However, 17 inmates in the unit where Howell had worked are waiting for a group to be started when leadership can be found.

The Howells are moving on to Folsom Prison near Sacramento to establish a ministry to include MasterLife and possibly two other Lay Institute for Equipping courses, "Experiencing God" and "Knowing and Doing the Will of God."

"The greatest need right now is for prayer for the Lord to send us more laborers," Dennis reiterated.

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A different approach has been taken by Greer Willis at the Reeves County Law Enforcement Center in Pecos, Texas, which houses prisoners on a short-term basis before their transfer to other institutions.

"We have used the Home Mission Board correspondence course because it follows them where they go," Willis said. Also, the Survival Kit for New Christians which can be completed in a few sessions is being used.

When Dennis talks about MasterLife and prison, he speaks from experience. He served time in numerous prisons in California and Washington for armed robbery and assault. In 1977 he was given a life sentence as a habitual criminal.

During a five-month lockdown following a 1979 riot at Walla Walla State Prison in Washington, Dennis began reading the Bible and "asked God to come into my life." He was baptized in December and released three months later after his life sentence was overturned.

Out of prison, Dennis visited some churches.

"I told them I was just out of prison as an armed robber and wanted to attend their church. We had a failure to communicate," he quipped.

Unable to find a community of Christians, Dennis began drinking again. A desperate call to an employee of Prison Fellowship headed by Charles Colson yielded an invitation to Arlington, Texas, and the promise of help finding employment.

In Arlington, Dennis joined Northside Baptist Church and was introduced to MasterLife by furloughing missionary Bob Davis.

"When I got hold of MasterLife, I learned the disciple's cross. I grabbed hold. I knew that was the key to freedom for me," Dennis said.

Avery Willis, creator of MasterLife and a manager in the SSB discipleship training department, encouraged Dennis to begin efforts at introducing MasterLife in prisons. The Baptist General Convention of Texas contracted with him for a three-year effort.

At first, Dennis acknowledged, he had difficulty "learning how to give the ministry away" to volunteers. Now he pleads for volunteers willing to consider a discipleship ministry in America's prisons.

MasterLife graduates interested in prison ministry or others who would be willing to take MasterLife training or teach other LIFE courses in prisons should contact Dennis at (214) 878-5347 or David Carter, (615) 251-2482 at the Sunday School Board.

A book about Dennis, "Breaking Crime's Vicious Cycle," will be released in April 1993 by the board's Broadman Press.