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NATIONAL OFFICE
SBC Executive Committee
901 Commerce #750
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(615) 244-2355
Herb Hollinger, Vice President:
Fax (615) 742-8919
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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92-118

Conference offers growth helps
for churches in all situations

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (BP)--While the upcoming Nationwide Church Growth Conference will offer special interest seminars on more than 100 topics, organizers of the four-day meeting say its most distinctive feature is making available specialized learning tracks for churches in various sizes, situations and settings.

"Typically, persons attending church growth conferences come from growing churches but these conferences are broader in scope," said Bernie Spooner, member of the conference steering committee and director of the Sunday school/discipleship division of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

"They are designed not only to help growing churches continue to grow but also to help persons from declining and plateaued churches move on to growth."

The first Nationwide Church Growth Conference, sponsored by the Baptist Sunday school Board and Southern Baptist Home Mission Board in cooperation with the BGCT, is scheduled Aug. 31-Sept. 3 at the Tarrant County Convention Center in Fort Worth.

Participants attending conferences will be able to choose seminars according to their churches' current growth situation -- growing, declining or plateaued -- and their setting, whether town and country, small city or urban. Within each category, individualized conferences will be offered for churches of various sizes.

"This conference will provide valuable church growth help for a church of any size, situation or setting," said James Semple, chairman of the conference steering committee and director of the Texas Baptist State Missions Commission.

Churches are considered to be growing if they have experienced at least a 10 percent increase in Sunday school attendance the last five year, declining if Sunday school attendance has dropped by at least 10 percent in five years and plateaued if attendance has changed by less than 10 percent.

"Each conference will be led by a practitioner -- a pastor or minister of education -- whose church has been in a situation and setting comparable to that of participants and has experienced growth," said Spooner.

Specific topics of conferences for declining churches include "Get a Vision: Discover God's Plan for Your Church," "Capture the Vision: Lead the Church to Growth," "Open the Locked Doors: Manage Resistance to Growth," "Find the Power: Meet God in Worship," "Tell the Story: Reach the People" and "Just Do It: Take the First Step."

Innovative worship techniques, precise planning and involvement of the laity are keys to growth, said Billy Ray Parmer, pastor of First Baptist Church in Valley Mills, Texas, who will lead conferences for declining churches in the small city category, average Sunday school attendance 301 to 400.

Parmer, whose congregation currently is involved in 40 ongoing ministry projects, said he plans to share strategies for motivating lay people.

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"Training, equipping and involving lay people -- that's where it's at today," Farmer said. "People don't want just to sit and listen. They want to be involved."

Conferences for plateaued churches examine why churches are on the plateau and offer principles and strategies to move off the plateau.

Setting realistic goals for growth and working consistently to achieve them is imperative if plateaued churches want to move ahead, according to conference leader Ron Dyess, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Hughes Springs, Texas.

When Dyess arrived at Calvary Baptist Church two years ago, there were fewer than 20 people in attendance "on a good Sunday," he recalled. Today, the church averages 48 in Sunday school.

"We just had to see where the church had been and where the people wanted to go. Then we set realistic goals and worked consistently to get there," Dyess said.

"Sunday school is the greatest growth tool we have. We organized the Sunday school by age levels for growth."

Growing churches will discuss using evangelism plans, the role of worship, making Sunday school a revitalized force in church growth and mobilizing the laity in basic and alternative structures for church growth.

Sensitive spirits and creative minds, not "cookie-cutter" approaches and "canned" presentations, are needed for church growth, according to Steve Stroope, pastor of Lake Pointe Baptist Church in Rowlett, Texas.

"Society is so segmented, there's not one single model that's going to reach everybody anymore," said Stroope, who will lead a conference for growing, small city churches with average attendance greater than 1,000.

"We don't need to mimic models that have worked elsewhere. We need to learn how to be sensitive to the environment where we are and be creative in developing strategies that will work where we are."

In addition to the size, situation and setting conferences, special interest seminars will be offered on topics ranging from "The Baby Boomer Sunday School" to "Putting Zap in Your Church's Growth."

Registration cost for the Nationwide Church Growth Conference is \$35 for Southern Baptists, except for students who pay only \$5 for conference materials. Cost for non-Southern Baptists is \$75.

To register, send name, address and phone number, along with a check for the appropriate amount to Nationwide Church Growth Conference, P.O. Box 24001, Nashville, TN 37203. For more information, contact (615) 251-2294.

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Building latrines for Mexico's poor
is World Changers' foreign project By Tim Yarbrough

Baptist Press
7/27/92

CIUDAD VICTORIA, Mexico (BP)--For Maria Luisa, a sanitary latrine can mean the difference between life and death.

Like the dozen or so residents of a row of squatter's homes in this section of Ciudad Victoria, Maria sees a latrine built by Southern Baptist youth is a godsend.

"I'm very grateful for this group," the 19-year-old mother of two said of members of a World Changers crew working near her home. "Without them, I wouldn't have this service."

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Maria, whose husband, Teodoro, 24, works odd jobs in crops and construction, is expecting another child in a few months.

"They have risked their lives by coming from so far away to help me," she said. "I'm sure their fathers and mothers are worried about them."

The "Hand Saws" and "Short Cuts" crews working on latrines were part of 55 youth and adults who participated in the first foreign World Changers missions project June 9-18. World Changers, sponsored by the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission, is for high school youth.

Maria Monesterio Barrera, a widow of six months, lives about 50 yards from the Luisa family at the opposite end of a row of homes constructed primarily of scrap wood, cardboard and tin.

Despite her age of more than 70 years, she started her own latrine with a shovel and pick. By the time youth arrived to start work she had dug a hole three feet deep. The importance of a clean latrine is obvious -- her husband died of an infectious disease six months earlier.

In addition to completing 20 latrines for squatters, each family was presented with a New Testament. ~~At a special worship service held on the final day of work, nearly all~~ of the community's adults accepted Christ as their Savior.

"The people are so eager to hear the gospel," said Bracky Bickerstaff, 29, leader of a group of youth from Crabtree Valley Baptist Church in Raleigh, N.C. "I think building latrines opened the door for us to come talk to them about Christ. They saw us being willing to help them and do things for them."

In a remote mountain village more than 50 miles away, another World Changers crew worked to complete 13 latrines. The area, known in Mexico as a "huizachal," or small mountain community, has mostly been forgotten by the government's social service agencies.

It's no wonder. On the first day of work the vehicle carrying members of the "Toe Nails" work crew was unable to make the trip. Crew members had to walk five miles to get to the village.

After a week working in the village, grateful residents slaughtered two "cabritos," or baby goats, and prepared tortillas for a feast, said John Hasteley, Southern Baptist representative to Mexico. "The whole community was involved in the work ... there is a deep sense of community there."

The people so desperately wanted latrines built in their community that when gravel needed for concrete needed did not arrive, they began crushing rock to make gravel, Hasteley said.

The work of World Changers helped improve "some basic health needs" of the people, he said. "We've been concerned here for some time about the outbreak of cholera ... and one reason is the lack of toilet facilities."

Following a distribution of New Testaments to families in the mountain village, the people were interested in starting a weekly Bible study, he said.

As the World Changers crew prepared to leave the community, tears welled in the eyes of several villagers. "'We thought everyone had forgotten us ... then you came,'" Hasteley quoted one as saying.

The language barrier posed little problem with youth who expressed themselves through smiles and hugs.

"Not being able to communicate verbally makes it tough," said Suzanne Patterson, 18, of First Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn. "But it also makes it more satisfying."

Robby Brinley, 18, of Crabtree Valley, said he was impressed by the willingness of the people to help with the work.

"The first day members of our family came and brought us Cokes. It was hard to accept them because we know they don't have much," he said.

John Bailey, 33, minister of youth and recreation at First Baptist in Memphis, said the Mexico project helped his youth see "what the world is really like."

"When you're actually working on families' homes -- actually latrines -- you get a feel for what real missions is about. It puts you in contact with the people," Bailey said. "They'll know better how to pray ... and have a better appreciation for missionary work around the world."

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Tim Yarbrough is editor of World Changers materials at the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission in Memphis, Tenn. (BP) photos available upon request from the Brotherhood Commission.

Centrifuge shapes lives:
Joe and Michelle Hicks

By Linda Lawson

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GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Joe Hicks accepted God's call to ministry while attending Centrifuge youth camp at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center after his junior year in high school.

Now director of the Glorieta Centrifuge camp, Joe is completing his sixth year on a Centrifuge staff.

Joe's wife, Michelle, assistant camp director, is working in Centrifuge for her fifth summer. They met as students at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and married in 1989.

Together, they helped to start the Centrifuge camp in Panama City, Fla. Michelle laughingly calls that camp "our first child, because of all the pain we went through."

The fact that hundreds of youth continue to experience Centrifuge at that location brings a lot of satisfaction.

Seven Centrifuge staffs are working in stationary locations this summer while three staffs travel to different locations each week. More than 40,000 youth and adults will participate in Centrifuge which is sponsored by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's church recreation department.

Now partners in ministry through Centrifuge, Joe and Michelle see the Christian camping program as a major influence in shaping their lives.

Both are 29 and will return to Palm Beach (Fla.) Atlantic College this fall for their second year as campus ministers. Nine months at one location and three months at another makes for a mobile existence but Joe and Michelle remain firmly convinced they are following God's will for their lives.

"We both have personally grown in the Lord so much every year we've worked on staff (at Centrifuge)," Michelle said. "I love teen-agers. When they hit 13, I'll take them."

At a Christian camp like Centrifuge, Joe said, "You have their (youth) attention for a week on the things of God. They are taken from their environment. When that happens, lives can be changed."

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In addition to Bible study, track times, recreation and fellowship, campers participate in daily worship services designed for teens and involving many of them in reading Scripture, singing in the choir and ensembles, praying, presenting dramas, demonstrating sign language and other activities.

Participants in an evening worship service meet at 6 p.m. for a prayer and preparation meeting. More than 100 campers and staffers participated in a recent session.

"The worship services are a turning point," Michelle said. "It helps them understand God and worship in a new way."

Working on a Centrifuge staff leaves little time for privacy or quiet. At least nine hours a day are spent in structured Centrifuge activities and another three in counseling and spending time with youth and their leaders.

As camp administrators, Joe said their focus is not only on the youth but also their adult sponsors. A ratio of one adult for every five youth is required in Centrifuge. They encourage the adults to be not only sponsors but also mentors to their youth.

At Palm Beach Atlantic, Joe and Michelle work for the director of student ministries, Scott Werner, who first hired them for Centrifuge.

They encourage the college students not only to talk about ministry but to do it. During spring break 1992, Joe led a mission tour to Antigua in the Caribbean and Michelle took students to Boston.

This summer, one Palm Beach student is on the Glorieta Centrifuge staff and five others serve with Centrifuge in other locations. Four students from the school are working on the Glorieta conference center summer staff.

"We try to plug our students into summer ministry. Our goal is to help raise a Great Commission generation," Joe said. "Christianity is put in concrete when you understand ministry."

The Hicks' have no idea when they'll be reunited with some of their wedding gifts stored in Fort Worth. That's not their greatest concern. They are satisfied for now to travel light.

"We feel we're where God wants us to be," Joe said. "Centrifuge is a program worth investing yourself in."

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

'Trees for Life' take
root in The Gambia

By Donald D. Martin

Baptist Press
7/27/92

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Southern Baptist missionaries Chris and Karen Austin have lived in The Gambia only eight years but their work has spurred memories only the oldest villagers in the tiny west African country can recall.

The Austins, both from New Orleans, have helped plant thousands of trees through their "Trees For Life" project, a development program supported by the Foreign Mission Board's human needs ministry. The program is moving into its third year.

Some of the project's first trees are beginning to mature into small groves, reminding older Gambians of the once-familiar forests that surrounded their villages. In just two generations, farming and the daily demand for firewood stripped the country of more than half its trees.

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"Some places are now barren and in the dry season it all turns brown," Austin said from his home in New Orleans, where the couple is on furlough. "So when we assist a village in planting and watering trees and then see them growing on the edge of the desert, it's very exciting."

The Trees For Life project establishes fruit and firewood groves, supported by wells that also supply water to vegetable gardens. The tree project has channeled \$89,000 of Southern Baptist aid into the country.

As the project progresses, individual villages take on more responsibility for the management of their groves. So far the Austins have coordinated the planting of 20 groves bordering villages that range in size from 50 people to several hundred.

Fully mature groves will save many village women grueling hours of work searching for firewood each evening. In villages surrounding Farafenni, a city of about 10,000 people where the Austins have lived, some women walk more than six miles into the bush to find wood. They carry it home on their heads.

"When we go into a village where we have a project, they are always excited to show us what they are doing," Mrs. Austin said. "You can tell they are so proud of what they've grown."

The Austins hope to build on that enthusiasm when they return to The Gambia in January. They plan to nationalize the tree project even more. Then they'll have time to live temporarily in area villages where they've gained acceptance through the project. They want to deepen their understanding of the Mandinka language and Islam-dominated culture.

Both missionaries speak Mandinka fluently but most villagers lace their conversations with proverbs and riddles that often leave the Austins befuddled.

"Our thought systems, the way we think, are so different," Mrs. Austin said. "We need to spend more time in villages and just live with the people. It's the only way we can really understand how they look at life."

The Austins hope to use deeper cultural understanding to develop Bible stories they can present to local villagers using "storying" techniques. Storying methods convey biblical knowledge without ever using a written text.

Austin is a public health missionary who holds master's degrees in tropical medicine and public health. But the Trees For Life project is not his main concern in The Gambia, he said.

"I am not there just for public health work; I'm also there to start churches," he said. "As a Southern Baptist missionary, this is my first and foremost goal: to see lost people come to know Jesus as Lord and Savior."

"If I was going to just be a public health worker, I could work for any number of organizations but God called me and Karen to be missionaries. We take that quite seriously."

The Austins realize Christianity has a tenuous existence in the country, where more than 85 percent of the population is Muslim. The couple may see the project's trees flourish before Christianity does.

"It going to take a lot of time to reach people there," Mrs. Austin said.

"Our whole approach now is to find ways of getting as close as we can to people in the villages. That may mean we just sit and talk about anything for long periods of time."

They believe their efforts won't be wasted if they remain as patient as an old man who thanked them for his village's small grove of trees.

"He said when he was young, lions roamed the forest that was once near his home," Austin said. "Of course there are no lions in the The Gambia today. They've all been hunted out and there is no way they could come back. But he thanked us for our tree program and said one day he wanted to see the lions again."

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Baylor musician has seen
life from two extremes

By Linda Lawson

Baptist Press
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GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Hugh Sanders spent the first three years of his life residing in eastern New Mexico in a home dug out of the sand and covered with a roof.

At age 3, he recalled, his mother shot a rattlesnake trying to come into the coolness of the dugout.

Now, Sanders is Ben H. Williams professor of music, director of choral activities and director of the institute for church music studies at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. He also is minister of music at Seventh and James Baptist Church in Waco and recently completed a term as president of the American Choral Directors Association, one of the most prestigious posts in the field of choral music.

Sanders' life between two extremes bears testimony to the willingness of Christians to invest in a person in whom they saw potential.

He and his wife, Rinky, attended the Church Music Leadership Conference at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center, the site of their first date years ago.

"My dad never went to school. He couldn't read or write," said Sanders, who earned bachelor's and master's degrees from Baylor and a Ph.D. in music from the University of Colorado at Boulder.

When Sanders was 3, his father traded his land for a two-room shotgun house and two city lots in Portales, N.M. While their financial situation did not improve, Portales is a college town (Eastern New Mexico University) and his childhood included excellent teachers and friends whose parents were college professors.

"The thought to quit school never crossed my mind," he said.

With his mother, Sanders and his sister regularly walked two miles to services at Calvary Baptist Church. "I've been in church every day of my life," he quipped.

Milestones along the way included:

- enrolling in the classes of some of the best teachers in Portales.
- being cited in children's choir at church as one who sang right.
- being runner-up in the New Mexico youth Bible drill tournament.
- being welcome in the home of the Portales school superintendent who had a son his age.

"They subscribed to Life magazine and the Amarillo (Texas) paper. I was never in their way. I was in the corner reading," he recalled. This family, the Hunts, discussed politics and other issues at the dinner table, something Sanders had never experienced.

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They also bought Community Concerts tickets for him during his junior and senior years. Through their investment in him, he saw some of the finest performing artists of the time.

While Sanders was more interested in sports than music during his high school years, he did play the tenor lead in "H.M.S. Pinafore" his junior year and then joined the choir for his senior year.

Sanders earned a basketball scholarship to Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, Texas, where he met Euell Porter, a professor of music who became his mentor.

When he learned his scholarship would not be renewed his sophomore year, Sanders told Porter he would not be returning to Hardin-Simmons. Porter urged him to come back as a music major and pledged to help him get a music scholarship.

Sanders, who prided himself on being an athlete, had real doubts about the wisdom of a male majoring in music but Porter told him the responsibility would be on him to make of a profession what he wanted it to be.

"I've never been that aggressive to tell a student he ought to major in music," Sanders said.

When Porter accepted a faculty position at Baylor, Sanders went with him.

Three times during Sanders' time at Baylor, he lacked the funds for a down payment for the semester, times when Porter helped him with a loan. "He'd reach in his billfold and hand it to me," Sanders recalled.

He also got his first job as a minister of music in Smithville, Texas, a job that required a weekly round-trip bus ride in which he would arrive back on the Waco campus at 2 a.m. Monday morning, four hours before he had to report for work in the cafeteria.

"The church was an opportunity to become a practitioner of what I learned in class," Sanders said.

Throughout his career while teaching in high school, at West Texas State University in Canyon and at Baylor, Sanders has served as minister of music in churches.

"When you face your church choir on Wednesday night, they couldn't care less how many degrees you have," Sanders said. "They want to know how to sound as good as we can sound for Sunday morning. I've benefitted a great deal from that."

In addition to teaching and directing choirs, Sanders has given priority to seeing that his choirs experienced the discipline of performing before organizations of choral directors.

"I love competition," he said. "I've found this can be healthy in helping students see what their potential is."

Looking back, Sanders said, "I never considered myself an underdog. Working with limitations I had to overcome has been good. God knew how to deal with me.

"I really enjoy my life," he said.

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

Partnership becomes model for
long distance church planting

By Sarah Zimmerman

ATLANTA (BP)--Starting a church across town is one thing. Starting a church across two time zones is another.

In 1988, Westside Baptist Church began meeting in Lake Oswego, Ore., with First Baptist Church of Garland, Texas, as its sponsor. Now the relationship between the two churches and the Northwest Baptist Convention is a model for long distance church planting.

All the principle players attribute the mission's success to God's leadership. They use phrases like "divinely arranged" and "God ordained" to describe the church start.

Another factor is the founding pastor's relationship to the sponsoring church. John Kramp had been associate pastor at the Texas congregation for nine years when he moved to Oregon to begin Westside Baptist Church.

"The key to the whole thing is that God had somebody here to go and do it," said David Francis, minister of education at First Baptist Church of Garland. "Our people wouldn't have made the sacrifice if they hadn't known John. He was one of us."

The sacrifice for First Baptist Church included personnel, finances and time.

When Kramp left, the church did not fill his staff position. Instead Francis assumed most of the responsibilities.

The Texas church voted to give Westside \$50,000 a year for three years. The church later extended the support, giving the mission a total of \$160,000 from its budget, Francis said. Members also contributed \$20,000 to a designated fund for Westside, he said.

The Northwest Baptist Convention and Southern Baptist Home Mission Board also contributed to the church start. The investments resulted in a church which in turn supports missions financially. Last year, Westside gave \$23,000 to missions, Francis said.

Another dividend was that Westside started a mission in nearby Vancouver, Wash. The Lake Oswego church has 120 people who attend regularly and the Vancouver church has more than 200.

The biggest time investment for the Garland congregation was made before the Oregon church met. Working through Sunday school classes, First Baptist Church recruited 500 volunteers to call to Lake Oswego residents. Within a week, they made 43,000 calls at the callers' expense.

People in Oregon were surprised to hear from strangers in Texas. As Francis noted, "There's no disguising a Texas accent." One man who later joined the church testified, "I was looking for a church when a Southern belle called."

Callers told residents that a church was being established in their neighborhood. If the residents were interested, their names were added to the church's mailing list.

Northwest Baptists also made 5,000 phone calls for the new church and their efforts, combined with the calls from Texas, resulted in more than 3,000 people expressing an interest in the new congregation.

After Westside began holding services, Francis said his job was to "hold the ropes" for the Oregon congregation. He and Kramp talked at least weekly to exchange ideas and encouragement.

Starting a church in Oregon was a novel idea, but after the newness wore off, Francis said he worked to maintain zeal for the commitment.

Accountability was another essential element in the partnership. First Baptist Church of Garland established an ad hoc committee to oversee the Oregon church, including monitoring the budget and receiving monthly progress reports.

Cecil Sims, executive director of the Northwest Baptist Convention, noted that Kramp also worked closely with the association and state convention.

Because Kramp helped the church identify with local Baptists from the start, the church immediately looked to the association and state convention for guidance when Kramp resigned, Sims said. Kramp left the Oregon church earlier this year to serve in the adult discipleship program at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

The combination of financial, personnel, time and prayer support made the long distance church sponsorship something Sims said he would repeat without hesitation.

"I know of a dozen areas here where I'd like to find a First Baptist Church of Garland to do it again," he said.

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(BP) Brites

7/27/92

Compiled by Art Toalston

He prayed for a non-sissy God

INDIANAPOLIS (BP)--Jim Morrison ran off every preacher who wanted to visit but as Terry Clapp left years ago, he asked, "Would you let my church pray for you?" Morrison nodded yes; Northside Baptist Church, Mayfield, Ky., began praying. A month later, Clapp returned and Morrison talked with him five hours. Morrison, now a member of Indianapolis' Pleasant Heights Baptist Church, prayed that night: "I don't know who you are but I know you are there. I want you to be a God who's real in my life. I don't want a sissy for a God." God has never deserted him in life's difficulties, Morrison says.

Vacation Bible School not child's play

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--"The mention of Vacation Bible School produces groans from some people, but just thinking of it brings a lump to my throat," says Barbara Denman, a writer for the Florida Baptist Convention who attended VBS as a child and now takes time off from work to help in her church's VBS. "VBS is more than child's play," Denman notes. "It is a week where children grow in the faith and are taught simple values that withstand the test of time. It is a time when even a little child can lead a family to the throne of God."

Aunt Bea helps him share his faith

FRANKLIN, Ind. (BP)--The "hometown celebrity" is just one of many conversation-starters in witnessing. "Hi, I'm Ron Jordan and I'm from Siler City, N.C." Do you know where that is?" Jordan, a Baptist Lay Witnessing Foundation coordinator, often asked in a recent trip to witness alongside Indiana Baptists. "'member Aunt Bea? Well, that's where she was until she died just a while back, and that's where I'm from." Jordan said he is blessed whenever he helps someone turn to Christ "and know that I've done God's will."

Teens cautioned about middle of road

NATCHITOCHEs, La. (BP)--Lukewarmness can be deadly, evangelist Barry St. Clair warned youth at a discipleship camp sponsored by Louisiana Baptists. "If you try to straddle the middle ... you are going to be spiritual roadkill," St. Clair, of Norcross, Ga., said. Teens straddling the middle "set themselves up to be clobbered by Satan, the world and friends of the world who are around you every day."

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Couples must overcome breakneck days

ABILENE, Texas (BP)--Keeping up with "breakneck schedules" is one of the toughest challenges facing husbands and wives today, says Mike Stedham, minister of counseling and family enrichment at First Baptist Church, Abilene, and a columnist for Home Life magazine. "I think we have reached a point where couples have to realize that you can only do so many things well," Stedham says. "They have to deal with the choice between what is good and what is best."

Pastor remembers BSU's value

PARKIN, Ark. (BP)--Discharged from the Navy and saved at a tent revival, John Finn headed to college where, at the Baptist Student Union, its "unconditional love and acceptance made a lasting impression and contribution to me." Finn, now pastor of First Baptist Church, Parkin, Ark., recounted, "BSU taught me the importance of a daily quiet time with God. BSU provided my first public speaking opportunity. A Christian is to be a witness and BSU provided witnessing opportunities. At BSU I learned to pray with my precious wife. Together, we prayed publicly and privately about our future."