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March 15, 1993

93-46

NASHVILLE -- Tennessee youth brave snow; storm closes countless churches.
NASHVILLE -- Nashville church befriends stranded group from N.C.
ILLINOIS -- Gregory says he's at peace over resigning Dallas pulpit.
WASHINGTON -- BWA Zimbabwe youth conference registration: 'Do it now.'
HOUSTON -- Space center, children's museum part of Houston SBC day camp.
HOUSTON -- Messianic Fellowship to hold national convention in Houston.
MICHIGAN -- 'Church growth guru' has lab to experiment.
TEXAS -- Three chosen as seminary's '93 distinguished alumni.

Tennessee youth brave snow;
storm closes countless churches By Art Toalston

Baptist Press
3/15/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--Despite the looming snowstorm of the century, 15,000 Baptist youth and their leaders braved their way to Nashville for Tennessee Baptists' annual youth evangelism conference.

Down from the usual 30,000 for the two-day event, the conference nevertheless yielded 285 professions of faith in Christ.

Nationally, the 600-mile-wide "Blizzard of '93" killed more than 100 people in 25 states and the District of Columbia, including a 5-year-old Baptist girl, Angela Register, in a mobile home in La Crosse, Fla. She one of more than 25 fatalities from some 50 tornadoes that hit that state. Her parents and brother and sister survived the tornado that lifted their trailer more than 100 feet and flattened it.

Beyond thousands of homes damaged by tornadoes among 21 Florida counties declared disaster areas by President Clinton, at least six Florida Baptist churches also were damaged.

"We have significant numbers of elderly and poor who will need long-term sheltering," said Cecil Seagle, director of Florida Baptists' Brotherhood department. "Unfortunately we have no long-term shelter" in the hardest-hit counties, he said.

"We'll be putting together clean-up crews and construction crews and go into as many areas as we can," Seagle stated.

The storm caused cancellation of countless church services in the eastern United States on Sunday, March 14.

"I don't know of any of our churches that had services (March 14) because it's so bad over here," said Rick Hatley, editor of the West Virginia Southern Baptist newsjournal. Snowfall in the state ranged from 18 inches in the west to 40 inches in the Appalachian region, Hatley said.

In the Birmingham, Ala., area -- where 13 inches of snow fell, more than the city has ever gotten in an entire winter -- a number of churches, including Walkers Chapel Baptist Church of Fulondale, served as shelters for people whose homes were without heat after widespread power outages.

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"I guess the Lord had his hand on our church," said associate pastor David John Peacock, explaining the church somehow didn't lose its electricity. Several church members with four-wheel-drive vehicles traveled through the area, picking up 46 individuals needing warm shelter, including a number elderly and handicapped non-church members. The people stayed at the church Saturday night, March 13, and much of the next day.

In Montgomery, about 100 miles south of Birmingham, where four inches of snow fell, most Baptist churches canceled Sunday services March 14, with First Baptist Church a notable exception. One member of the congregation told a local radio station the church hadn't canceled services in more than 100 years and wasn't going to start now.

On Monday, March 16, the storm's aftermath caused the closing of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board in Atlanta; Woman's Missionary Union in Birmingham and state Baptist convention offices in East Syracuse, N.Y.; Harrisburg, Pa.; and Columbia, Md.

Nashville, on the edge of the storm, received about three inches of snow, but few among Tennessee Baptists' youth evangelism conference crowd were from the eastern part of the state where snowfall reached and exceeded the predicted 12-inch mark.

Among those east Tennesseans who defied the forecast was Michael Brooks, director of missions for the East Tennessee Baptist Association, who brought 11 youth from Swannsylvania Baptist Church.

"I'm glad we came," Brooks said. "The Friday night session was one of the best I have attended in the years of the youth evangelism conference."

The Swannsylvania delegation and others from east Tennessee had to remain in Nashville an extra day or two because Interstates 40 and 24, two major arteries from Nashville eastward, were closed until late afternoon March 15.

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Lonnie Wilkey, Barbara Denman, David Reid and Keith Hinson contributed to this report.

Nashville church befriends
stranded group from N.C.

By Connie Davis

Baptist Press
3/15/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--The "Blizzard of '93" had left them stranded and out of money.

A group of 28 youth and eight adults from First Baptist Church of Saluda, N.C., were caught by snowy weather in Nashville after attending the March 12-13 Tennessee youth evangelism conference.

The group was forced to spend Saturday night in a motel after interstate highways were closed. Sunday morning, they were completely out of money.

The sponsors got a telephone book and started calling Baptist churches.

Phones were not answered at many Nashville-area churches, which canceled morning activities or at least Sunday school. But when they called Belmont Heights Baptist Church, Lloyd Blackwell, minister of education, answered. He hesitated only a few moments before offering the church's help.

Soon Belmont Heights members arrived at the motel to lead the group to the church for morning worship. They joined about 90 members of the church's usual crowd of about 400.

Those members gave \$435 for the group. Volunteers cooked lunch for them while others went home to return with sleeping bags, blankets, pillows, towels and personal items.

The youth were able to enjoy the church's recreation center which includes facilities and equipment for basketball, roller skating, billiards, table hockey. It also has showers and a washing machine. Other members took clothes home to wash for their new friends.

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That evening, church activities were canceled but members led an impromptu retreat for the 28 youth to give the sponsors a break.

Interstate 40 opened to Asheville, N.C., on Monday, March 15, and the group left for home after the church provided breakfast from its benevolence fund.

"We just felt we had to do something," said Blackwell, who led the assistance in the absence of pastor Perry Michel.

He said he was surprised at the generosity of the small crowd of Belmont Heights members whose gifts covered nearly all of the North Carolina group's expenses.

The ministry also was reciprocal, Blackwell added. In the past, the youth at Belmont Heights have been stranded in Memphis by a broken-down bus. Leewood Baptist Church helped them in much the same way, he said.

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Gregory says he's at peace
over resigning Dallas pulpit

By Ferrell Foster

Baptist Press
3/15/93

FAIRVIEW HEIGHTS, Ill. (BP)--Joel Gregory says he has experienced great peace since resigning as pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas and has no malice or bitterness regarding the decision.

Gregory preached three times during the Illinois Evangelism Conference at First Baptist Church in Fairview Heights March 11-12, then spoke to the Illinois Baptist, state convention newsjournal, following the conference.

Since his resignation, Gregory said he has preached "all over the country" in churches and conferences and has served as guest lecturer at schools. He still lives in Dallas and plans to continue his "itinerant ministry" for the foreseeable future.

"I am at great peace doing what I'm doing, in fact a strange peace," he said.

Gregory stressed he has "no malice or bitterness" toward First Baptist in Dallas or senior pastor W.A. Criswell. Rather, he said he has a "sense of sadness" because of the loss of a "great vision and possibility."

"They will go on and I will go on," he added.

Gregory became pastor of the Dallas church in November 1990 and resigned in September 1992. Criswell, who has served the church 48 years, continued as senior pastor.

Two months ago, Criswell, in an interview with the Illinois Baptist newspaper, said he did not understand Gregory's decision to resign. Gregory responded last week, "We mutually do not understand one another.

"I love Dr. Criswell," Gregory continued. "I do not understand why he told me it would be a brief transition.

"I do not understand why he engaged me to come over there for a brief transition" and then changed his mind, Gregory said.

Before Gregory's resignation, Criswell had indicated a desire to stay as senior pastor until his 50th anniversary at the church. Gregory interpreted that as an extension of the transition to four years. "I didn't come for a four-year transition," he said.

The transition "created impossibilities of leading the staff" and "ambiguity in the city," Gregory said.

"I respect his right to reinterpret God's will for his life," Gregory said of Criswell. But Gregory said he also had the right to reinterpret God's will for his life.

What about the future? Gregory is unsure.

"My very philosophy about moves has always been that that's at someone else's initiative," he stated. "Whatever happens to me is going to be at God's initiative."

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BWA Zimbabwe youth conference
 registration: 'Do it now'

By Wendy Ryan

WASHINGTON (BP)--Registration is under way for the 12th Baptist Youth World Conference Aug. 11-15 in Harare, Zimbabwe.

Registration is being handled both by the BWA in suburban Washington, and the BWA's agent for the conference, Wilcox Travel in Asheville, N.C.

"It is very important that everyone planning to attend the conference register with Wilcox as early as possible," said Paul Montacute, BWA's youth director.

A fee of US \$295 will be charged to conference participants from North America, Europe and other parts of the industrialized world.

The fee will help enable many young people from Africa and other developing nations to attend the conference, Montacute said, noting they will pay a reduced fee, which will still be a great sacrifice on their part.

"We really need the help of all leaders and young people planning to come to Harare," Montacute said. "We need them to register and we need them to do it now. It is still not too late to make plans to be in Harare."

The BWA youth department and the Zimbabwean local arrangements committee have a lot of work to do in the next five months. Plans are being made for transportation, accommodations and the program, and all depend so much on the numbers planning to attend.

Also, as part of a practical expression of the conference theme, "Risking All for Christ -- Our Only Hope," young people will be given a number of mission opportunities prior to, during and after the conference.

Wilcox travel has arranged a number of tours to Africa for the conference. Each tour includes the conference fee. Some delegates have made their own travel plans and are just purchasing land packages from Wilcox, which include the conference fee. Those who have made their arrangements themselves still need to register and pay the conference fee.

People making group plans for the conference or seeking further information should call, write or fax:

-- Wilcox Travel, 1705 BB&T Building, Asheville, NC 28801-3407, (704) 254-0746, 1-800-438-5828 or fax (704) 255-8212.

-- BWA Youth Department, 6733 Curran Street, McLean, VA 22101-6005, (703) 790-8980 or fax (703) 893-5160

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Space center, children's museum
 part of Houston SBC day camp

By James Warren

Baptist Press
 3/15/93

HOUSTON (BP)--A number of changes will mark this year's SBC Missions Day Camp for children of messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention June 15-17.

"Children attending this year's day camp will be able to visit two Houston attractions, the NASA Space Center Houston and the Houston Children's Museum," said Tim Seanor, SBC Missions Day Camp coordinator. "We wanted to let the children experience something unique to the SBC host city and both of these attractions have been open less than one year."

Another change is pre-registration, which is being offered for the first time. To pre-register a child, parents should write SBC Missions Day Camp, Brotherhood Commission, 1548 Poplar Ave., Memphis, TN 38104, or call (901) 272-2461. Parents will receive a registration packet. Pre-registration forms must be received by the Brotherhood Commission no later than May 1, 1993.

Parents or guardians of children who attended the 1992 day camp in Indianapolis will receive registration packets automatically.

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This year's day camp also will feature the first usage of two new coed missions education products, "WorldTrek" and "Missions Matchfile," both produced jointly by the Brotherhood Commission and Woman's Missionary Union. The products contain missions education materials that churches may use in a number of settings outside their ongoing Brotherhood and WMU organizations.

Missions Day Camp is for boys and girls who will have completed grades one through six this year and whose parents are attending the annual SBC meeting. It is sponsored by the children and youth division of the Brotherhood Commission, with assistance from Texas Baptist Men and the host Houston-area Union Baptist Association.

Cost for the day camp on Tuesday is \$19 per child, which includes admission to Space Center Houston, plus transportation, accident insurance, lunch, snacks, learning materials and a day camp T-shirt. Cost for Wednesday and Thursday is \$9 per day per child. A T-shirt purchase of \$5 is required for children attending day camp on Wednesday and Thursday only.

Missions Day Camp will be offered during all daytime sessions of the convention, Tuesday 8 a.m.-5 p.m., Wednesday 8 a.m.-12:30 p.m. and Thursday 8 a.m.-12:30 p.m., or earlier if the convention adjourns early.

Children in the seventh grade and older are eligible to serve as assistant counselors for the day camp and should contact Tim Seanor at the Brotherhood Commission by May 1.

Day campers should dress comfortably and are required to wear a day camp wristband, day camp T-shirt, soft-sole recreation shoes and socks. No short shorts are allowed.

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Messianic Fellowship to hold
national convention in Houston

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HOUSTON (BP)--The Southern Baptist Messianic Fellowship national convention will be held Monday, June 14, in Houston, one day before the Southern Baptist Convention's June 15-17 meeting.

The meeting will be from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at the Astrodome. Larry Lewis, president of the Home Mission Board, will be keynote speaker.

Also, the Southern Baptist Messianic Training Conference will be Aug. 9-14 in Atlanta at Oglethorpe University. The conference will focus on how to start messianic congregations and on how to effectively witness to Jewish people.

For more information on either event call Jerry Young, SBMF president, at (305) 583-6144, or Mike Copen, vice president, at (217) 789-4296.

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'Church growth guru'
has lab to experiment

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press
3/15/93

ANN ARBOR, Mich. (BP)--If Packard Road Baptist Church doesn't grow, it won't be for lack of resources.

Armed with detailed neighborhood demographics, a direct-mail campaign and a pastor who edited Church Growth Magazine, the congregation is poised to move beyond being a "nurturing center for transplanted Southern Baptists" to reach the unchurched of Ann Arbor, says pastor Gary Hardin.

Hardin, 45, came here last August from the Baptist Sunday School Board's magazine, where as editor he was encouraged to become the board's "church growth guru."

Loaded with three years of training, interviews and conferences, Hardin now has a laboratory to apply all he learned. In the first six months, attendance has increased by 80 people, he says.

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Church growth is the hot topic of the '90s because so few are doing it, Hardin says. "There is great concern today about the large number of churches that are plateaued and in decline."

Only about 15 percent of all Christian churches in America are growing, Hardin says, a factor he attributes to congregations' comfort level. "In every church are large numbers of people who are godly and who love their church, but they like their church the way it is."

"To grow is to change, and change is painful. So in other words, growth equals pain," he says with the confidence of a conference lecturer. "Now do you know why 85 percent of churches in America are not growing?"

In the late '80s and early '90s, Packard Road Baptist Church focused on itself and not its community during a costly, five-year building program, says church leader Russell Collins.

"It was obvious that the feeling was that we needed to grow. We needed to reach out," says Collins, who served on the search committee that found Hardin. "I don't think there's any doubt that he's a godsend."

A connoisseur of church growth books, tapes and seminars, Hardin says all resources sing from the same hymnal. "There is a body of church growth principles that every resource addresses in one way or another."

The most important themes, he says, are:

- visionary leadership by the pastor.
- a clear understanding of the community.
- a high priority for evangelism and outreach.

Hardin is using those principles to inspire Packard Road Baptist with a vision for tripling its membership in three years through innovative worship, aggressive evangelism and well-orchestrated outreach.

His strategy is a textbook case study in church growth, and his face lights up discussing the church's potential.

"What we have done in the first six months is position ourselves to grow," says Hardin, who adds church committees have worked on everything from prayer and church visits to logos and demographics.

"Eighty-two percent of our draw area are baby boomers, baby busters and their kids," he says. "That means 82 percent of the population of this county is under the age of 46, and it is those groups who prefer a contemporary style of worship."

Members voted in February to have two worship services. The 8:30 a.m. service will offer traditional worship and the 11 a.m. service will be more contemporary, with a five-person ensemble instead of a choir, response cards instead of an altar call and praise choruses instead of hymns.

The new emphasis on growth has caused the predictable discomfort among some members in a changing congregation, Hardin says. "I've had people already say to me, 'All you're interested in is numbers.'"

He responds "God is interested in numbers," recounting the parable of the sheep that was lost from the other 99.

"How did he know one sheep was lost? He counted them didn't he?" he asks. "Numbers represent people."

Hardin is careful, however, to point out that plans to grow a church are useless without God's involvement.

"Church growth is the work of God, however church growth is the work of God through his people."

Three chosen as seminary's
'93 distinguished alumni

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Three graduates of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary have been chosen to receive the school's Distinguished Alumni Award for 1993 and will be recognized June 16 at the Southern Baptist Convention in Houston.

Receiving the award this year are Carolyn Coggin, James Crane and Charles Lee Williamson.

The recipients will be honored during a luncheon following the Wednesday morning session of the SBC. The luncheon will be at the George R. Brown Convention Center, site of the convention.

Tickets may be purchased by sending \$12 to Southwestern's Office of Institutional Advancement, P.O. Box 22000, Fort Worth, TX 76122.

Carolyn Coggin received the master of religious education degree in 1949. She is the wife of James Coggin, pastor emeritus of Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth. Throughout her husband's ministry, she was active with Woman's Missionary Union and as a Sunday school teacher. For nearly 25 years, she conducted conferences for ministers' wives at Southwestern, in the Tarrant Baptist Association and with the Baptist General Convention of Texas. Coggin also led a weekly Bible study in her home for wives of Southwestern students. In 1985, she served as president of the Conference of Ministers' Wives for the SBC.

James Crane received the master of theology degree in 1945. He retired from foreign mission work in 1981 after more than 36 years as a Southern Baptist missionary in Mexico. During his mission service, Crane's ministry included student work, rural evangelism and theological education.

In addition, he served as a guest professor at Southwestern and Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary. A Phi Beta Kappa graduate of the University of Texas-Austin, he is the author of nine Spanish books, three of which have been translated in to Portuguese. He is married to the former Edith Carden.

Charles Lee Williamson earned the bachelor of divinity and doctor of ministry degrees from Southwestern. He retired after 23 years as director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas' State Missions Commission missions division. He also served as director of missions for Southeast Texas, Golden Triangle and Waco Baptist associations in Texas.

While at the BGCT, Williamson pioneered the work of strategy planning through local associations. He served as a trustee of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and was guest professor at the Louisville, Ky., school. He is married to the former Patsy Cypert.

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