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NATIONAL OFFICE
SBC Executive Committee
901 Commerce #750
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(615) 244-2355

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) 828-5100
NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300
RICHMOND (Foreign) Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va., 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

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Hunger giving leaps
\$1 million in 1992

By Louis Moore

Baptist Press
6/10/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptist giving to fight world hunger leaped a whopping \$1 million, or 12 percent, during 1992 and Baptist leaders foresee the possibility of another giant step this year.

Like a hard rain in the middle of a long dry spell, the increase broke a pattern of decline and stagnation in Southern Baptist Convention hunger giving since 1984. The \$8.84 million giving during 1992 is the highest since 1988 and the fifth-highest year since the SBC began its hunger collection in 1974

The increase was not uniform but instead reflected variances on a state-by-state basis. For instance, giving to world hunger causes in the Northwest Baptist Convention shot up 689 percent, while in Virginia the increase was 3.4 percent. Mississippi fell back 5.7 percent and Texas declined 6.4 percent. The worst drop of the 10 states that fell was in Iowa, down 54.4 percent.

States showing large increases were Alaska, 20 percent; Arizona, 32.1 percent; Arkansas, 43.3 percent; California, 11.38 percent; the Dakotas, 38.2 percent; Indiana, 31.8 percent; Kansas-Nebraska, 10.6 percent; Kentucky, 14.5 percent; Minnesota-Wisconsin, 33.9 percent; Nevada, 84 percent; New Mexico, 18.5 percent; New York, 40.5 percent; Ohio, 19.8 percent; Oklahoma, 10.6 percent; Pennsylvania, 15.9 percent; Tennessee, 160.2 percent; Utah-Idaho, 12.9 percent; West Virginia, 59.3 percent; Wyoming, 97 percent; and Canada and other countries, 117.8 percent.

The upturn prompted words of praise and caution from convention leaders who work in the area of world hunger.

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"1992's gifts demonstrate Southern Baptists' continuing response to human need," said C. Ben Mitchell, Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission specialist on life issues. "Compassion, sacrificial and significant giving characterizes a people with a heart for God. God's grace has been poured out on Southern Baptists in extraordinary ways historically, and especially in recent days. To whom much has been given, much shall be required."

Mitchell warned, however, that such a huge increase carries with it several dangers for the future.

"First, the upsurge in giving could lull us into complacency," he said. "Second, a new tax-and-spend economy could take away discretionary income that should go for hunger and relief. Third, an increase in government programs could take away our sense of urgency. Southern Baptists must resist each of those temptations."

Bob Nash of the SBC's Foreign Mission Board said during the first four months of 1993 hunger giving has increased another 17.2 percent.

"In the context of the declining economy in our country, the 17.2 increase is phenomenal," he said. "This indicates the continuing strong emphasis of the Foreign Mission Board and our Southern Baptist constituency in these worldwide concerns."

He said the increase is allowing the board to fund special projects it otherwise could not afford.

"World Hunger Funds have served as a tool for opening the Commonwealth of Independent States to the gospel," said Nash.

"Approximately \$892,000 was released for projects in that area in recent months. This has been a highlight in our human needs and community development ministry.

"Personnel have continued to minister in Somalia through humanitarian aid projects and in spiritual ministry," he said. "Southern Baptists have shared \$1.34 million in behalf of these devastated and hurting people.

"In the former country of Yugoslavia, now divided into Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia, \$522,000 in world hunger funds have been spent for humanitarian projects," he said.

Larry Martin, vice president for ministry of the SBC's Home Mission Board, said, "We are certainly thankful for Southern Baptist gifts for hunger relief. These funds are used carefully at the local level to literally save lives. However, hunger needs continue to multiply. Field requests for hunger funds exceed available resources. May Southern Baptists continue in awareness, prayer and generous giving to hunger relief."

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**Iranian policy makes conversion
t Christ more life-threatening**

By Mike Creswell

**Baptist Press
6/10/93**

BRUSSELS, Belgium (BP)--Muslims in Iran who openly declare Christianity are more likely to be executed following a change in government policy there.

Under a new policy, converts to Christianity are being charged with "apostasy" or "blaspheming the Prophet Muhammad," reported Iranian Christians living outside Iran. Under Islamic law, called "sharia," a judge is required to issue a death sentence for these offenses.

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Christians inside the country fear the policy change will make evangelistic outreach even more difficult. Executions for general offenses such as drug trafficking are common in Iran, according to press reports, but executions of Christians have not been routinely carried out by the government. Apostasy, however, is seen as a serious offense.

For example, apostasy was the charge levied against the writer Salman Rushdie for his book, "The Satanic Verses," which Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini deemed blasphemous against Islam. Khomeini issued a highly publicized "fatwa," or decree, in February 1989 calling for Rushdie's death. The writer, a British citizen, has been forced to live in hiding since then.

Muslims who become Christians in Iran at times have faced intense persecution, prison sentences or executions by government leaders who see themselves as agents of Allah. Mehdi Dibaj, a Christian evangelist who helped translate the New Testament into Farsi, has been imprisoned for eight years, for example. He spent two of the eight years in solitary confinement in a 3-by-3-foot cell with no light.

Recently, Iranian Christians said, a church member was ordered to appear in court and report on his pastor's sermons. When he refused he was accused of the crime of "apostasy," or abandoning Islam, and condemned to death.

A noose was placed around the man's neck and his family was marched in before him. Officials told him to repudiate Christianity and be loyal to Islam or they would hang his family after him. He broke under the pressure and said he would give up Christianity.

In recent years some Muslims have converted at times without government reprisals, Christian leaders in Iran have said. Reports on continued Christian growth in Iran continue to filter out of the country. But evangelism in Iran remains a dangerous business.

Earlier, converts often were charged with "spying" for the West. Converts also have faced heavy non-governmental pressure from families or neighbors, especially in rural areas.

Islam is the state religion of Iran, but the country officially recognizes Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism. Although Christian workers say Iran treats the Christian community less oppressively than some other Muslim states, Iran's record is hardly commendable.

The Iranian government grew increasingly restrictive on Christian activities after the 1979 Islamic revolution led by Ayatollah Khomeini that reorganized Iran as an Islamic state. The government closed the Iranian Bible Society in 1990 and confiscated its files, for example. The importation of Persian-language Bibles, New Testaments or Scripture portions was forbidden.

Christians, mostly ethnic Armenian and Assyrian groups, make up about 1 percent of Iran's 54 million people. Evangelicals make up a small percentage of the general Christian population. About half of these live in Tehran, the capital. Most are Presbyterian, Anglican and members of the Assemblies of God, an indigenous group not connected with an outside denomination. There are no known Baptists in Iran.

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The most widely publicized execution of an Iranian Christian in recent years was the hanging of Hossein Soodmand, an Assemblies of God pastor, on Dec. 3, 1990. Some Iranian Christians living outside the country later said the Tehran government had tried to intervene in the execution carried out by local officials. Several observers say persecution of Christians has caused some Iranian Muslims to question Islam, another reason the government sometimes tries to temper its zeal in attacking Christians.

Christian workers in Europe are trying to organize a special fund to help families of Christians in Iran victimized by government-backed violence. Some groups reportedly devote a big percentage of their funds to aid the widows and children of such people.

At times the Iranian government has taken a more tolerant stance. In 1991 teams of Southern Baptist volunteers were allowed to enter Iran to set up an emergency food program for some 1,500 Kurdish refugees in a camp near Iraq's border with southwestern Iraq.

Harsher anti-conversion policy may be related to a power struggle between radical Muslims represented by the Shiites of Iran and more moderate Sunni Muslims who predominate in the Middle East and North Africa.

Moderate Muslim governments are stepping up measures against efforts by radical Muslims to take control of governments in several areas, including Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt and some Persian Gulf states. In May, for example, Egypt cut direct-dial telephone service to Iraq, Iran, Sudan and Pakistan.

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**Militant Muslims threaten
new Christians in Algeria** By Mike Creswell

**Baptist Press
6/10/93**

ALGIERS, Algeria (BP)--Christian workers are watching developments in Algeria closely as militant Muslims step up their efforts to take over the country.

For now, the number of Christian believers and Christian groups continue to grow throughout the North African country as increasing numbers of Algerians turn to Christ. But Christian workers fear the Christian movement, still in its infancy, may be slowed or stopped if militant Muslims come to power and set up an Iran-style government.

Hundreds of Algerians have accepted Christ as Savior in recent years and small clusters of believers have been organizing throughout the country. Christian workers who follow events in the country from outside estimate the total number of Christians is probably only a few thousand at this point. But in a solidly Muslim country such as Algeria, they consider the movement a startling and promising development.

Most of the growth has come among the Berbers, a people group spread across North Africa. Almost all Berbers are Muslims and they are considered to be one of the most closed groups to the gospel in the world. Many of the decisions for Christ are occurring in smaller towns outside the capital of Algiers.

A smaller but significant number of conversions is occurring among Arabs, observers report.

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But the fledgling Christian movement is taking place within an increasingly tense political and religious climate. In early 1992 Algerian military forces took control of the country and canceled elections, fearing militant Muslims would gain control of the government. Hundreds of militants were jailed.

Since then the Islamic militants have organized a guerrilla arm and have begun launching attacks against the government. Some battles have lasted for days. Government forces have blown up apartment buildings in Algiers in an effort to attack the rebels. Political leaders across the region worry that a takeover by militant Muslims could destabilize countries across North Africa and send hundreds of thousands of Algerians fleeing to Europe.

Conditions in the Berber area of the country have been much quieter, without the nightly curfews in effect in Algiers. And Christian workers in the country report tighter conditions are not stopping their evangelism efforts.

But they fear a militant Muslim takeover could jeopardize one of the most promising Christian movements in the region in decades.

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**Texas board affirms
state, national WMU**

By Orville Scott

**Baptist Press
6/10/93**

DALLAS (BP)--The Woman's Missionary Unions of Texas and the Southern Baptist Convention were reaffirmed for their missions support in a resolution adopted at the quarterly meeting of the Texas Baptist Executive Board June 8.

Also, the 193-member board, which handles business of the 2.5-million-member Baptist General Convention of Texas between annual convention sessions, adopted resolutions commending two of its institutions for their Christian ministries during the Branch Davidian tragedy in Waco, Texas, this spring.

In the WMU resolution, presented by Ron Gunter, pastor of First Baptist Church in Henrietta, Texas, the board expressed appreciation for the "close and cordial relationship with WMU" and "the firm resolve of WMU to call out Baptists everywhere to deeper and more effective missions commitments."

It noted that both Texas and national Woman's Missionary Unions for more than a century have "effectively challenged Baptists to fulfill the Great Commission" while helping to raise more than \$2 billion for mission causes.

Also, it affirmed WMU for catalyzing missions education and awareness in churches nationwide through development of excellent training organizations and materials and for being instrumental in the recognition of God's call to missions in the lives of thousands of missionaries.

The board commended Hillcrest Baptist Hospital in Waco and Baptist Children's Homes in San Antonio, for outstanding ministries to victims of the tragedy at the Branch Davidian compound.

BGCT Executive Director William M. Pinson Jr. presented plaques to Richard Scott, president of the hospital, and Kevin Dinnin, president of the children's home. The Baptist hospital provided medical care to 16 agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms who were wounded in the Feb. 28 shootout with members of the Branch Davidians.

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The children's home set up an emergency child care facility at an undisclosed location in Waco to care for 12 of the children who were released to their care in the early stages of the 51-day standoff. Also, the institution was prepared to care for the 17 children who remained in the compound and perished with 67 adults in the April 17 inferno.

Scott said he was thrilled over letters of appreciation by ATF agents and their families for the caring ministry of the hospital's staff. But he was equally gratified when an injured Davidian survivor, who was brought to the hospital, wrote that she too felt their love and ministry.

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**Court refuses to hear appeal
on student-led graduation prayer**

**Baptist Pr ss
6/10/93**

By Tom Strode

WASHINGTON (BP)--The Supreme Court may have done little to clear up confusion about prayer at public school graduations when it recently refused to accept a Texas commencement prayer case. In announcing June 7 it would not grant a hearing to Jones v. Clear Creek Independent School District, the court let stand a lower court ruling upholding the legality of a student-led prayer at the graduation exercises of a high school near Houston.

The court's refusal to hear the case followed by nearly a year its Lee v. Weisman decision, which found a clergy-led, government-controlled prayer at a junior high graduation in Rhode Island unconstitutional.

The Supreme Court's refusal to accept a case is not considered an affirmation of a lower court ruling. Church-state specialists were divided in their response. "The Jones case upheld student-initiated, student-directed prayer at a commencement," said Michael Whitehead, general counsel of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission. "Clearly, if the Supreme Court believed that the Fifth Circuit decision was so obviously wrong on its face, the court could have reversed outright or at least granted the appeal."

Said Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State: "It would be a serious mistake to read too much into the high court's action on this case. ... (The) Jones case applies only in Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi."

Oliver Thomas, general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee, called the court's action "a bit unfortunate, because the Jones case creates a great deal of confusion in the field, and I fear some school boards may be misdirected as a result. The bottom line is that instead of reducing the amount of litigation, I think the (court's action) may increase it." The Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, which has jurisdiction in Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi, twice affirmed a district court ruling which found the graduation prayers at Clear Lake High School were constitutional. The Fifth Circuit ruled the same way both before the Lee v. Weisman opinion and after the Supreme Court remanded the case to the court of appeals for consideration in light of Lee.

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The Fifth Circuit-approved prayers, unlike those in Lee, were held at the discretion of the graduating class, were prepared and delivered by a student volunteer and were said at a graduation ceremony off campus. The Clear Creek guidelines also said prayers must be nonsectarian and nonproselytizing.

In the wake of the Lee and Jones decisions in 1992, school boards were hit with conflicting messages. The American Center for Law and Justice, affiliated with televangelist Pat Robertson, informed school superintendents throughout the country that student-led prayers at graduations were legal. The American Civil Liberties Union threatened to sue school districts which allowed such prayers.

"Our contention all along has been that prayer and religious speech can be included at public high school graduation ceremonies as long as (they are) student-initiated and student-led," ACLU chief counsel Jay Sekulow said in a written statement. "Today's development reinforces that. A student's right to free speech does not end when he or she steps up to the graduation podium."

A comment from the ACLU was not available before deadline for Baptist Press.

In a 14-page analysis revised in January, the Christian Life Commission's Whitehead said student-initiated prayers at graduations might be permissible under Lee. This spring, Baptist Joint Committee spokesmen warned there would still be problems because graduations are school-sponsored events.

"The message to public school officials is clear: Don't let the ACLU give you prayer-a-phobia," Whitehead said. "The state does not sponsor or endorse every word said by every private citizen at a school-sponsored meeting."

"Speech, including religious speech, by private persons is protected by the free speech clause, even at school-related events. When the state accommodates such religious speech, it does not violate the establishment clause or church-state separation."

The BJC's Thomas said, "We still maintain that the best solution to the graduation prayer debate is a church-sponsored baccalaureate service" announced at the school and attended by students voluntarily.

"We have never felt that the Jones decision was a victory for religion," Thomas said. "Authentic prayer is always sectarian."

CLC Executive Director Richard Land called the court's refusal of the Jones case a "hopeful sign that the Supreme Court is beginning to protect free exercise rights even when they involve high school students."

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Lemon test takes more hits;
'useful monster,' Scalia says By Tom Strode

Baptist Pr ss
6/10/93

WASHINGTON (BP)--The oft-maligned Lemon test, the 22-year-old guideline on church-state separation, took more hits amid the Supreme Court's latest decision on religious liberty.

Justices Antonin Scalia and Anthony Kennedy both attacked the court's opinion for its use of the Lemon test to decide Lamb's Chapel v. Center Moriches School District in favor of an evangelical church which had sought to rent public school space to show a film series on the family produced by James Dobson's Focus on the Family organization.

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Scalia, who was joined by Clarence Thomas in his concurring opinion, and Kennedy agreed with the other justices in the unanimous decision that the school district had violated the church's free-speech rights by denying use of school facilities, since it allowed non-religious groups to use the same facilities. They did not concur when Byron White, joined by five other justices, invoked the Lemon test, even though he said the church's use of public school facilities was not an unconstitutional establishment of religion.

Kennedy called the invocation of Lemon "unsettling and unnecessary," while Scalia, in typical fashion, used biting humor to communicate his disdain for the test.

"Like some ghoul in a late-night horror movie that repeatedly sits up in its grave and shuffles abroad, after being repeatedly killed and buried, Lemon stalks our Establishment Clause jurisprudence once again, frightening the little children and school attorneys of Center Moriches Union Free School District," Scalia wrote.

"Its most recent burial, only last Term, was, to be sure, not fully six-feet under: our decision in Lee v. Weisman ... conspicuously avoided using the supposed 'test' but also declined the invitation to repudiate it.

"Over the years, however, no fewer than five of the currently sitting Justices have, in their own opinions, personally driven pencils through the creature's heart ... and a sixth has joined an opinion doing so," Scalia said.

In addition to Scalia and Kennedy, Chief Justice William Rehnquist, Sandra Day O'Connor and White have criticized Lemon in past opinions. Thomas joined Scalia's dissent in Lee v. Weisman.

The Lemon test, which was presented in the 1971 Lemon v. Kurtzman decision, requires a government action pass a three-part standard. It must have a secular purpose, not primarily advance or inhibit religion and not foster excessive entanglement with religion.

"The secret of the Lemon test's survival, I think, is that it is so easy to kill," Scalia wrote. "It is there to scare us (and our audience) when we wish it to do so, but we can command it to return to the tomb at will.

"When we wish to strike down a practice it forbids, we invoke it ... when we wish to uphold a practice it forbids, we ignore it entirely. ... Sometimes, we take a middle course, calling its three prongs 'no more than helpful signposts.'

"Such a docile and useful monster is worth keeping around, at least in a somnolent state; one never knows when one might need him," Scalia said.

In a footnote in the court's opinion, White responded: "While we are somewhat diverted by Justice Scalia's evening at the cinema ... we return to the reality that there is a proper way to inter an established decision and Lemon, however frightening it might be to some, has not been overruled."

The Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission and some other religious liberty organizations have asked the Supreme Court to revise its test for deciding establishment clause cases. The CLC has criticized Lemon for requiring secular purposes and permitting only secular results.

In its friend-of-the-court brief in Lee v. Weisman, the CLC suggested replacement of Lemon with a test allowing accommodation of graduation prayers controlled by the person delivering them. It also rejected nonsectarian prayers. In another church-state case this year, the CLC signed onto a brief again asking the court to revise Lemon.

Other religious liberty organizations, including the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, defend Lemon as an appropriate establishment clause test.

In last year's Lee v. Weisman decision, Kennedy wrote the majority opinion, which struck down a school-directed, clergy-led prayer at a junior high graduation. The court said the prayer was coercive but did not invoke the Lemon test.

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**Locks hold as missionaries
wait out Angolan looters**

By Craig Bird

**Baptist Press
6/10/93**

LUANDA, Angola (BP)--Veteran Southern Baptist missionaries Curtis and Betty Dixon spent five hours on the floor June 7 while bandits tried to shoot the locks off their home in Angola and looted the house next door.

The Dixons, of Stroud, Okla., awakened around midnight when the bandits began firing. Four bullets penetrated the front door of the house and the interior walls, exiting through the kitchen door. But the locks held. The houses are prefabricated aluminum structures.

The missionary couple spent the remainder of the night on the floor of their bedroom listening to the gang looting an adjacent mission residence. That house was not occupied since fellow missionaries Don and Carol Minshew are on temporary assignment in Kenya.

Unable to shoot their way in, the gang discovered a wall in the Minshew house that had been damaged by a hand grenade Dec. 31 and pried the hole open enough to get inside. Then they passed items like the television, electric transformers, clothes and jewelry out the opening and over the wall of the mission compound. They fled around 5 a.m.

Two attempted robberies of the compound also occurred the week before. The first time an effort to shoot the lock off the compound gate failed. The next time a gang climbed over the wall but was unable to get into the houses. The Dixons were home on both occasions.

The Dixons now have moved across Luanda, Angola's capital, to stay with Assembly of God missionary friends.

The rekindling of the 30-year-old Angolan civil war immediately after multi-party elections has left Luanda in chaos and Southern Baptist mission work in disarray. Missionaries have little hope stability will return soon. The Dixons, who have evacuated the country several times before, intend to remain if at all possible.

Missionary Mark Hatfield, currently living in Zimbabwe, planned to fly into Luanda June 12 to assess the situation. The last word he had was that the house where he and his wife, Susan, lived in Huambo had not been damaged or looted. But what has happened in the intervening months is unknown.

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The Minshews are planning to transfer to Namibia while missionaries John and Wanne Dina are considering working in Mozambique -- like Angola, a former Portuguese colony. Bob and Susan Evans, the fifth missionary couple assigned to Angola, are in language study in Portugal and also are looking at other mission service options.

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**High School Baptist Young Men
name national Speak Out winner**

**Baptist Press
6/10/93**

By Steve Barber

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--David Lambert of Alcoa, Tenn., has been selected as the winner of the 1993 Jerry Clower National High School Baptist Young Men Missions Speak Out.

The annual competition is sponsored by the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission. Lambert, who will be a senior at William Blount High School in Alcoa, won the award in competition with finalists representing five SBC state conventions. Lambert's original speech, titled "Encountering God Through Bible Study," was videotaped and sent to Memphis for judging at the Brotherhood Commission. The speeches must reflect the entrants' involvement in the agency's High School Baptist Young Men program for grades 9-12.

As the national winner, Lambert will receive an expense-paid trip to the Southern Baptist Convention in Houston, where he will deliver his winning speech during the annual Brotherhood Breakfast on Wednesday, June 16. He also will receive a college scholarship award provided by the Brotherhood Commission's Board of Trustees. Lambert is a member of Oak Street Baptist Church in Alcoa and its High School Baptist Young Men's unit. He is the son of William and Linda Lambert.

This year marks the 10th annual Speak Out award, and Lambert brings the total of Tennessee winners to three. The others were John Tarwater of Sevierville in 1988 and John Highsmith of Nashville in 1992. The program was created in 1983 to provide young men an opportunity to speak publicly for missions.

Christian comedian Jerry Clower has allowed his name to be used in connection with the national contest.

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