

# (BP)

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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

### NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee  
901 Commerce #750  
Nashville, Tennessee 37203  
(615) 244-2355  
Herb Hollinger, Vice President  
Fax (615) 742-8919  
CompuServe ID# 70420,17

### BUREAUS

ATLANTA 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 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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Charles Stanley's wife  
seeks legal separation

By Herb Hollinger

Baptist Press  
7/7/93

ATLANTA (BP)--Asking for prayer at the end of the July 4 morning services, Charles Stanley, pastor of First Baptist Church of Atlanta, told the congregation his wife, Anna, had filed for "separate maintenance."

Stanley, one of Southern Baptists' most widely-known radio and television preachers, said he is committed to reconciliation and asked for prayer that "God will heal our marriage."

Senior pastor of the 13,000-member congregation for 23 years, Stanley said to the congregation, "I need you to pray for me and my wife. Many of you have known that we have been having difficulty for some time.

"Last week Anna filed an action against me and it appears that a separation is now unavoidable, which I deeply regret. I am committed to reconciliation. I am asking you to pray that God would heal our marriage," Stanley said.

Stanley, 60, is the speaker on the "In Touch" radio and television program broadcast throughout the U.S. and in every country of the world. He was elected president of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1984 and 1985.

Officials of the 145-year-old historic church said Stanley plans to continue his pastoral and broadcasting responsibilities.

Stanley said he is meeting with a group of men "representing our staff and deacons and they understand where we are at this time. I am continuing to seek the counsel of these men, asking them to pray with me for wisdom and direction."

The Stanleys have been married for 38 years. They have two adult children, Andy and Becky, and three grandchildren.

The announcement by Stanley surprised the congregation, officials said, but members voiced their "complete support for the pastor and his family."

Boyd Wages, chairman of the church's deacons, said, "This congregation deeply loves Dr. and Mrs. Stanley and we will support them fully. We are trusting God that this is only a temporary separation and that the marriage will be reconciled."

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Nolen Rollins, associate pastor of program administration, said, "The church leadership and membership are committed to helping our Pastor and Mrs. Stanley work through this. Ministers' families are not immune to the problems common to all of us. God will see us through this as he has many other difficulties in life."

The impact of the announcement was noted by Stanley in his words to the church.

"Our church has had a great impact upon many other churches across our country. This is an opportunity for us to demonstrate the Godly manner in which a church should respond when the pastor and his family are hurting over the same issues many of its members experience.

"Over the past 23 years I have walked with you through your heartaches and griefs; now, I am asking you to walk with us through ours. I want to ask you to be gracious and sensitive by not discussing this situation unnecessarily, because to do so would cause more hurt and embarrassment for both of us. The most helpful thing you could do is pray," Stanley said.

"God is sovereign and Romans 8:28 is true in this circumstance," Stanley concluded and then asked the membership to gather in small groups to pray.

Stanley previously was a pastor of churches in North Carolina, Ohio and Florida. He is a graduate of the University of Richmond, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Luther Rice Theological Seminary.

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Missionary shot in  
attempted car robbery

By Donald D. Martin

Baptist Press  
7/7/93

BLANTYRE, Malawi (BP)--One Southern Baptist missionary was shot in the leg and another was injured July 4 when the two were assaulted during an attempted car robbery in Lilongwe, Malawi.

Lloyd Farmer, a general evangelist from Crossett, Ark., was working under the hood of a car on the grounds of a mission guest house when two men entered the fenced compound with drawn handguns and demanded the keys to the car.

When Farmer, 37, attempted to give the keys to the gunmen by removing them from the car's ignition switch, both men became excited and began shooting wildly into the air and ground. One shot hit Farmer in his right calf.

Farmer scurried around to the passenger side of the car, fell to the ground in a sitting position and began shouting for help.

Missionary Walter Ford from Lenoir, N.C., heard the commotion and ran from a house on the compound. When Ford first saw what was happening he thought the gunmen were abducting Farmer. He ran up to one of the gunmen and began struggling with him.

The robber aimed his gun at Ford and pulled the trigger, but it didn't fire. He shoved Ford to the ground, injuring his knee.

People from the street began entering the gates of the compound to see what was happening. The growing crowd may have forced the robbers to break off their attack and run from the compound, said missionary Ernest Sibley, who gave details of the incident in a telephone interview with Baptist Press.

After the attackers fled, Farmer was rushed to a hospital. Doctors said July 7 the gunshot wound was free of infection and that he probably would be able to go home July 8.

The bullet chipped one of the bones in Farmer's leg, but it should not impair his ability to walk. However, doctors removed some muscle tissue from the leg, which will slow Farmer's recovery. It may take several months before he regains full use of his leg.

Ford's injuries, although not as serious, may take several weeks to heal. Doctors believe he pulled several ligaments in his knee.

The violent incident has shaken Farmer and Ford as well as other missionaries in Malawi, said Sibley.

"To my mind, this is our first case of violence in Malawi," he said.

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The peaceful atmosphere there may be changing. Malawi is home to thousands of refugees from civil war in Mozambique. Mozambique is now at peace, but it has a shortage of jobs and an abundance of guns.

"Guns have been coming into the country because of the Mozambique situation. There's a bolder sense of doing things like this now," Sibley said.

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Mideast program mails gospel  
to places missionaries can't go By Mike Creswell

Baptist Press  
7/7/93

LARNACA, Cyprus (BP)--A Baptist correspondence program operated from Cyprus continues to cross borders with the gospel throughout the Middle East.

The program received 1,532 responses during 1992. Between 500 and 700 people are taking the five Bible courses that comprise the program, reported Southern Baptist representative Hugh Provost and Lebanese Baptist pastor Samuel Kharrat.

Increased responses have come in recent months from Algeria, perhaps reflecting a widespread Christian revival taking place there, Provost and Kharrat said.

Kharrat works from the program's office in Beirut, Lebanon, while Provost works from Cyprus. The two communicate by mail delivered by boats that ferry between Lebanon and the Mediterranean island. Kharrat also makes periodic visits to Cyprus.

Other high-response locations include Sudan, Syria and Saudi Arabia. Provost and Kharrat even get some responses from Arabic speakers in the United States and other countries outside the Middle East, usually immigrants.

"Our correspondence program goes where missionaries cannot go," said Provost. "It's private and allows people to ask questions they cannot ask in their own countries."

The numbers may seem small, but they represent residents of some of the most closed countries in the world. Often the Baptists correspond with Muslims who are considering accepting Christ as Savior and being disowned by their families for doing so.

Kharrat flipped through a stack of handwritten letters and read aloud:

"I want to know about Christ even though I am a Muslim," wrote a girl in Algeria. "I don't think that will stop me from studying these courses, especially since they are not found in Algeria."

A man from Saudi Arabia wrote, "Your kindness will help me take off the veil from my eyes."

Beyond just sending out lessons, Provost and Kharrat correspond personally with those who send in questions. "I write out the letters by hand to make them more personal," said Kharrat, who often counsels people who ask about marriage, family or Christian beliefs.

"They have no idea who Jesus is or they have ideas about him that are totally false," said Provost. "The program is intended to teach them who Jesus is and then ask them what they're going to do about him."

The men get names of interested people from radio programs or from other evangelical organizations with personal contacts. They also advertise the program, using carefully selected words, in magazines distributed throughout the Middle East. They even write to people who advertise in magazines for pen pals and invite them to study the Bible.

Most lessons used in the program were written by native Arabic speakers living in the area. The material is brief, printed front and back on a single sheet of paper, and contains no artwork both for economic reasons and to avoid offending Muslims.

Only a small percentage of people who begin the course complete it. But the results are still worth the effort in a region where baptisms of new believers are few and far between. Several Baptist leaders from North Africa found Christ through correspondence.

Kharrat held up another letter from Saudi Arabia and read:

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"I am knocking on your door to seek Christian information. I am not asking you for money. I am asking for Christian knowledge. There is an emptiness inside me. Your courses will give me hope and take me out of my hopeless situation."

Kharrat moved that one to the stack of letters to answer first.

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Can movies help win  
Mideast to Christ?

By Mike Creswell

Baptist Press  
7/7/93

LARNACA, Cyprus (BP)--Can movies help reach the Middle East for Christ?

High hopes ride on a new series of Christian films now being shot in the region. Southern Baptists are helping plan and produce the series in cooperation with several other evangelistic Christian groups.

Producers say the three-film series will complement the Campus Crusade film "Jesus," widely used by Baptists and one of the most effective films ever produced for Christian outreach. Christians will use the series in evangelism and church-planting efforts throughout the Middle East.

A survey by the British Broadcasting Corporation showed more than 90 percent of those surveyed in Egypt have a television set. Videocassette players also are common. Even in the more "closed" countries of the Middle East, satellite television makes reception of Christian programming possible.

A rapid rise in illiteracy across the Middle East has increased the importance of telling the gospel message in nonwritten form -- especially highly visual media such as videos and films, video specialists point out.

"God Is Love," the first 90-minute video production in the series, went into distribution recently.

"The response was fantastic," said Pete Dunn, executive director of mass communications in the Middle East for the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board. Dunn and John Dorr, a video specialist also with the board, provided technical help on the production.

"God is Love" opens with an old man in traditional Middle Eastern clothing introducing the Old Testament's story of God's dealing with man. He speaks Egyptian Arabic, which is enough to win the attention of an Egyptian audience.

"I've never seen the love of God portrayed so powerfully," a Coptic Christian priest told Dunn.

Producers will dub the film into other languages for wider use. As a historical film, it's essentially undated and not tied to any particular culture, other than the biblical one it portrays.

The film breaks ground because it's one of the first feature-length Christian productions shot on location in the region with evangelism in mind, Dunn said.

Within a month of its release producers had distributed 2,500 copies of the film in Egypt. It's also widely copied for home use. The film aired on Kurdish public television in the "no-fly" zone of northern Iraq and will run on several television networks in the Middle East with an audience of between 6 million and 7 million people, many of whom have never heard the gospel.

Dunn and Dorr represent Southern Baptists in a consortium of Christian agencies producing films for distribution in the Middle East. Other participants include Far East Broadcasting Company, Middle Eastern Ministries, Christian Broadcasting Network, Arab World Ministries and Middle East Christian Outreach.

Consortium members hope to begin a second film, "The Prodigal Son," which will retell the parable found in Luke 15 in a contemporary setting. Member organizations are working to raise the money needed for the production.

Southern Baptists also will join with Arab World Ministries and Middle East Christian Outreach to prepare a separate television series in Lebanon. The three organizations will join forces with Lebanese Baptists to produce 26 half-hour programs. All three television stations in the country have agreed to carry the series.

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The programs will explore the many problems that have afflicted Lebanon since its civil war ended -- and how God wants those problems solved. It will feature, for example, Christian psychiatrists discussing family life, death and other problems the Lebanese people face.

Producers have done extensive research on conditions within the country, using students at Beirut University's mass media department to gather background material. Lebanese Baptists will fill in as actors and commentators in the series.

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**Rankin promises Warrington  
job at Foreign Mission Board**

**Baptist Press  
7/7/93**

By Robert O'Brien & Marty Groll

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--The new president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board has promised J. Thomas Warrington a job and given him the time he requested to consider his options.

Warrington, 48, had been asked June 23 by new Europe area director John Floyd to step down from his job as associate area director and consider interviewing for another job at the Foreign Mission Board. Floyd said he was looking for someone with "a different match of gifts" to fill the role.

FMB President Jerry Rankin, however, met with Warrington July 1 and apologized to the 13-year employee for "miscommunication related to changes."

Rankin said he supported Floyd's wish to seek another person as his associate in gearing up the board's program for Europe. But he "had no intention to terminate" Warrington from the board as events made it appear, Rankin explained, "merely to transfer him to another position."

"I and other administrators didn't spend enough time making certain everything had been communicated properly," Rankin said. "I take full responsibility and have personally apologized to Tom Warrington and the FMB staff and assured them he is being offered another position."

"We have all learned a painful lesson that time must be taken, especially in such sensitive matters as personnel decisions, to make sure that proper communication occurs. Steps are being taken to make sure this type of incident doesn't happen again."

Warrington confirmed Rankin promised him a job when they met July 1, but said he told the board leader he needs time to make a proper decision.

"I appreciate Jerry's sensitivity," Warrington said. "I think he's authentic and that he's really trying to do what's best for the organization -- and for my family and me. I'm trying to work through some of my own emotional grief and I'm not at the point of decision making regarding my future."

Responding to Warrington's request, Rankin will allow him time to decide what he wants to do. "Tom Warrington is still an employee of the Foreign Mission Board at full pay and benefits," Rankin said. "He is currently on administrative leave to allow time for him to consider options being offered."

"I deeply regret the pain and suffering this has caused Tom and his family," Rankin told FMB staff and Baptist Press. "He is an experienced, valued employee of the highest character and reputation. He has gifts we need in our organization. He has been faithful to the board in difficult times and deserves our respect and appreciation."

Warrington served as associate director of the Europe office during two years of turmoil in which former regional vice president Isam Ballenger and area director Keith Parker took early retirement to protest board trustees' votes to defund the Baptist Theological Seminary in Ruschlikon, Switzerland. Subsequent events brought resignations from a number of missionaries in Europe, including key administrators.

Both Floyd and Sam James, who succeeded Parker and Ballenger, respectively, told Baptist Press Warrington's removal had no connection with the former administration. They praised his efforts to work with missionaries through the difficult period of administrative transition.

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Warrington was associate pastor of churches in Louisiana and Mississippi before missionary appointment in November 1976 to Costa Rica, where he was a general evangelist for six years. He was pastoral counselor and associate director of The Family Life Center in Houston, 1982-83, and director of pastoral care at Holmes Regional Medical Center in Melbourne, Fla., 1983-86. He returned to the mission board in 1986 as a candidate consultant in the personnel selection department and then became associate area director for Europe in 1991.

He received the bachelor of science degree from Belhaven College in Jackson, Miss., and the master of divinity degree from the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He did clinical studies in pastoral care and counseling at Baptist Hospital in Winston-Salem, N.C., and Memorial Hospital Systems in Houston.

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Pilot project demonstrates  
upcoming Here's Hope project

By Sarah Zimmerman

Baptist Press  
7/7/93

ATLANTA (BP)--The pilot project of an evangelism emphasis set for 1995 resulted in "more than we could have hoped for," reported Thad Hamilton, Hom Mission Board director of personal evangelism.

Ten churches in the pilot project recorded 733 professions of faith and 359 baptisms in 60 days.

"Here's Hope. Share Jesus Now" is the theme for churches during the simultaneous effort scheduled for Jan. 9 to March 9, 1995. The message to non-Christians will be "Here's Hope. Jesus Cares For You."

Leaders hope 15 percent of each church's average Sunday school attendance will attempt to share Jesus every day for 60 days, Hamilton said.

This year's pilot project demonstrated that "Here's Hope. Share Jesus Now" will work in every church setting, including rural and urban, Anglo and ethnic, Hamilton said.

In the pilot project, 565 people completed the 60-day commitment to share Jesus. They reported 35,884 witnessing encounters for an average of 63 contacts per participant.

First Baptist Church of Moore, Okla., was the largest church in the pilot project. With an average Sunday school attendance of more than 2,000, it reported 261 professions of faith.

The smallest church, New Heights Baptist Church in Tuttle, Okla., has an average Sunday school attendance of 65, and it reported eight professions of faith.

Accountability is the key to the success of "Here's Hope. Share Jesus Now," said Bob Anderson, pastor of First Baptist Church of Swainsboro, Ga. With an average Sunday school attendance of 350, the church reported 14 professions of faith during the pilot project.

Participants are assigned to teams of five, and captains call team members every day to check on their progress and to offer support and encouragement, Hamilton said.

"I was as skeptical as anybody" about whether people would participate, Anderson said. He hoped 25 people would sign up, he said. Instead, 54 completed the 60-day commitment.

"The misconception in evangelism is that we've got to win people," Anderson said. "What we need to concentrate on is sowing the seed. That takes the pressure off and relaxes the people."

People who were witnessed to during "Here's Hope. Share Jesus Now" continue to make professions of faith at Rose Hill Missionary Baptist Church in Ashland, Ky., said pastor Charles Stewart. Rose Hill and the other missions it sponsors reported 166 professions of faith during the pilot project.

"It has made us so much more alert to soul-winning opportunities," Stewart said. "We've learned to look for opportunities to share. It's unbelievable. It's biblical. It's what we should be doing every day."

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Other churches participating in the pilot project were First Spanish Baptist Church, Hennessey, Okla.; Southwood Baptist Church, Tulsa, Okla.; First Baptist Church of Chickasha, Okla.; Third Eternal Baptist Church in Philadelphia; Canaan Baptist Church in Corona, N.Y.; and Harvard Avenue Baptist Church in Tulsa, Okla.

Modeled after a program of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, the convention-wide 1995 thrust will be coordinated by the Home Mission Board and state evangelism leaders.

Churches are asked to lay the groundwork now for the 1995 project by discipling their members, Hamilton said. In January of 1994, pastors will be asked to commit their churches to the simultaneous effort. Church members will be enlisted and trained in the fall next year. Additional information is currently available from the Home Mission Board evangelism staff at (404) 898-7180.

After the 60 days of personal soul-winning, churches are asked to have a "harvest revival" to encourage more people to make professions of faith, Hamilton said.

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Logo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press.

Campers urged to minister  
as they travel, vacation

By Linda Lawson

Baptist Press  
7/7/93

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Camping and missions may not sound like they go together, but Christian campers committed to witnessing and ministering are finding a wide variety of opportunities in campgrounds, resort areas and at fairs and flea markets throughout the nation.

Lester Evans, director of missions for the Macon Baptist Association of North Carolina and a member of the state and national Campers on Mission organizations, led a conference during Jericho: A Southern Baptist Missions Festival held July 3-9 at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center.

More than 3,000 families are members of Campers on Mission, an organization of Southern Baptists and other Christians, coordinated by the Home Mission Board. Also, chapters have been formed in 21 states.

With more than 20 million Americans involved in camping each year and more than 11,000 campgrounds in the United States, Evans said the potential for ministry is unlimited.

He acknowledged some church leaders are reluctant to become involved in camping ministries out of concern that they will draw people away from attending church. However, he emphasized that ministries should be church based.

"These (campground and resort ministries) grow out of the church. They become an extension, missionary arm of the church to encourage people to share Christ wherever they go," Evans said. He encouraged churches to endorse and commission camping missionaries.

In addition to worship services, Evans said churches or traveling campers may wish to sponsor weekday activities such as puppets or face painting, day camps, chaplain ministries or other activities uniquely suited to the location.

For example, he said Campers on Mission members are serving as hosts and providing activities in national, state and county parks. A North Carolina group sponsored a diaper changing station at a local heritage event.

At festivals, fairs, carnivals, race tracks or flea markets, campers might distribute tracts, provide activities or offer a worship or devotional time for workers.

"These are people we may never see in our churches, but we are reaching them in the marketplace," Evans said.

He said in 1992 his family decided to conduct a 10-week ministry in a nearby campground.

"It was one of the most stretching experiences I've ever had. At the end of 10 weeks, people were asking us to continue into the fall," Evans said.

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Bill Lee, director of the HMB special ministries department with responsibility for Campers on Mission, added campground managers are business people who feel ill-equipped to deal with crises such as a runaways or domestic violence. They appreciate help or being able to turn the problem over to someone else.

"Once you've helped managers with this kind of crisis, they are open to your ministry," Lee said.

He emphasized ministry must begin with approval of management.

"We go through the front door. We don't try to be clandestine. What managers find out is that ministry activities add a benefit to their campground," Lee said.

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Set aside selfish concerns  
for cause of evangelization

By Linda Lawson

Baptist Press  
7/7/93

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--To effectively take the gospel to the ends of the earth will require Southern Baptists to set aside self-centered individual, church and institutional concerns and surrender fully to God's leadership, according to the presidents of three SBC agencies.

James T. Draper Jr. of the Sunday School Board, Larry Lewis of the Home Mission Board and Jerry Rankin, recently elected to head the Foreign Mission Board, spoke during Jericho: A Southern Baptist Missions Festival, July 3-9 at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center.

"In a sense, to be a Christian is to be a world citizen," Draper said in the Sunday morning worship service. "Have you ever considered that God gave you your financial security -- not for retirement -- but to serve in this world as a steward of God's grace?"

He said he dreams of a time when 100,000 Southern Baptists will be "part of the worldwide expression of the stewardship of God's grace" and young people giving two years of their lives in volunteer service will "blitz the world for Christ."

The purpose of the gospel is not to make believers feel good, be happy or wealthy or successful, Draper said. "The purpose God called us to is that the message of the gospel might be communicated to the people here and around the world."

He said Southern Baptists today need a "new kind of individual, one who is not tentative or conditional in relation to Christ, one who has surrendered everything. If that spirit (surrender) can ever recapture us, the world will be flooded with the message of the gospel."

In a conference on what foreign missions is like, Rankin said world missions must be indigenous, focusing on evangelism that results in churches.

"The objective of all you do has to be evangelism, and evangelism has to have the result of churches," he said. "Where a church results, you have a witnessing group of believers that goes beyond the presence of the missionary. It continues to expand and multiply the witness."

Also, he said SBC foreign missions must be incarnational, "giving flesh to God's Word." While career missionaries will continue to be the foundation, he predicted an increase in volunteerism and linking with other SBC agencies to gain maximum impact.

"There's a tremendous interest in being involved in missions around the world," Rankin said. He noted 12,000 Southern Baptists participated in volunteer foreign missions projects in 1992 and perhaps another 12,000 were involved in independent projects or efforts with other groups.

He noted the Radio and Television Commission and the Baptist Sunday School Board have increased interest in international broadcasting and publishing.

"Instead of narrowing our funnel, let's say 'go for it' and mobilize these resources," Rankin said.

Overviewing Southern Baptist home missions, Lewis said: "We are not the agency Southern Baptists employ to do missions or church starting or evangelism for them. We do our most fruitful work when we do it in and through churches."

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Noting about 600 counties in the United States presently have no Southern Baptist witness, Lewis said achievement of the goal of 50,000 churches and church-type missions by the year 2000 is imperative.

"Even then we will have more places that need a church than have a church," he said.

Another major focus in the remaining years of the 1990s must be the 68 percent of Southern Baptist churches that are plateaued or declining in membership. By the year 2000, Lewis said the goal is to have 75 percent of Southern Baptist churches in a growth posture.

"Probably the reason many churches are not growing is that their ministries are only self-directed" rather than meeting the needs of people in their communities, Lewis said. "The government and welfare people are not those God ordained to do ministry."

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Innovative churches offer acceptance, address hopes

By Terri Lackey

Baptist Press  
7/7/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--Churches that think being 'fishers of men' means casting a cane pole into a muddy pond are going to go home hungry, a specialist in contemporary churches said.

"If you want to catch fish, you're going to have to go where they are and you're going to have to use contemporary methods to do it," said Ralph Hodge, contemporary churches leadership specialist in the Baptist Sunday School Board's discipleship and family leadership department.

While his title is new, Hodge has spent the past three years unofficially researching the outreach techniques of contemporary or innovative churches. What he has found is a willingness of those churches to offer quality bait and to clean what they catch.

"Churches that are declining or are not growing want to be fishers of men, but they often want them after they've been cleaned," Hodge said. "The innovative churches say, 'We want you the way you are, and we'll work with you.'"

Hodge has located about 3,000 to 4,000 innovative churches across the nation, but only about 18 of those are what he considers the originals "or mother of all innovative churches."

Most innovative churches are clones, Hodge said. "And most of them are good clones. The innovative churches are doing a good job at reproducing themselves."

While fully classified innovative or contemporary churches adhere to similar principles, Hodge carefully insists any church that is growing "is innovative somewhere within its ministry."

"Many of the most innovative churches are also deeply traditional in some areas."

For example, Hodge describes Eastside Baptist Church in Marietta, Ga., as a "big traditional church that went through a difficult transition to become a big innovative church." Clark Hutchinson is pastor of Eastside.

And Hodge characterizes Second Baptist Church of Houston where SBC President Ed Young is pastor as a "new kind of innovative church. This is a model of a traditional church that has become highly innovative as it has sharpened its focus, without losing the people who built and led the church in its traditional methods."

One characteristic that sets innovative churches apart is that they derive their creativity from attitude, not structure, he said.

"It's more of a focus than a structure or language they use. They focus more sharply on the unchurched."

What Hodge has discovered is innovative churches make their services and ministries comfortable for the person who is unfamiliar with the Sunday morning ritual and who doesn't know what to expect.

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"In everything they do, they keep in mind how it will fly with the guy who has never been to church in his life," he said, adding "This does not mean they bend theologically while adapting sociologically.

"Innovative churches absolutely relate to people where they are -- those people who want to transform rather than conform," Hodge said. "They are more sharply focused on what will help people connect with God. They don't just fulfill expectations and rituals.

"The focus is on the Spirit of God transforming a life rather than conforming a way of doing things", he added.

Hodge calls innovative churches pioneers -- "not managers." They are experiential and "not afraid to fail," he adds.

"The classic manager serves to reduce risks. These leaders include making mistakes as a part of the process."

Hodge's work at researching innovative churches comes at a time when 80 percent of Southern Baptist churches are either declining or plateauing in membership, he said. As he began to get wind of churches that were growing in membership, he wanted to know why.

In his research of these churches, he noticed the similar operational principles of what he calls contemporary churches.

"For one, they focus on the Great Commission. They don't go out to make disciples of those who are already disciples," Hodge said.

In other words, they reach out to people who have never been to church and work on making those people disciples, he said.

"Also, they recognize that people are motivated toward their greatest hope."

For example, Hodge said, if a couple has a 10-year-old son who is causing them problems, and the church offers a specific ministry for parents of 10-year-old boys, then they (family members) are going to go to that church.

"Innovative leaders have helped us develop awareness of the value and technology available for reaching unchurched people. We can know so much about who lives around us with geodemographics," he said.

Another principle of innovative churches is that they try to reduce the discomfort of those who attend, Hodge said.

"No one is going to volunteer to be uncomfortable. The guy who has never been to church in his life is not going to go out of guilt or to please Mama," Hodge said in explaining why most people who attend innovative churches do not go for the high church or traditional church experience.

"People who attend innovative churches seem to prefer studying the Bible in someone's home where they can be comfortable and eat doughnuts as opposed to being ushered into a Sunday school where they may be handicapped because they don't know how to act.

"Research indicates they will go where they can connect with God. People really do desire that connection. Most of them become convinced, however, churches are more interested in ritual and rules," he added.

Creating a sense of family is an important factor in church growth, Hodge said. "Innovative churches are helping us rediscover the principle of biblical fellowship."

"When bonding is easy and quick, churches grow. People are not looking for friendly churches, but for friends."

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A list of several innovative churches provided by Hodge has been posted on SBCNET Newsroom.

**Large staff, diverse ministries  
key to success of megachurches**      **By Terri Lackey**

NASHVILLE (BP)--While megachurches can add innovation to their lists of reasons for growth, that is not their primary claim to success, a megachurches leadership specialist said.

"Nearly every megachurch has some innovative programs, but what they really have going for them is their vast number of quality ministries," said Marlan Seward of the Baptist Sunday School Board's discipleship and family leadership department.

Seward defines megachurches as those with a 2,000 or higher average attendance in Sunday school and 3,000 or more resident members. He presently counts about 40 Southern Baptist megachurches -- 18 of them in Texas and six in Georgia, while "the others are scattered about."

"I predict that by the year 1995 or before we will need to define another level of megachurch," Hodge said. "Although I am using 2,000 average attendance in Sunday school attendance to define present day megachurches, 10 of them are already at 3,300 and above."

Seward said "some (megachurches) are more innovative; some are more traditional, but all are financially able to afford a huge staff, and with that staff they are able to reach more unique needs. That in itself causes them to multiply.

"They all have a number of ministries led by full-time staff people."

Additionally, Seward says megachurches are "fundamentally correct spiritually. They are all Bible-believing Great Commission churches and people are excited to be a member of them."

Seward said if a church is unsure whether it fits into the "mega" category, a list of commonly used terms might help in self-definition.

Those terms include "vision, mission, ministry, evangelism, choice, empowerment and involvement."

"These are common words used by mega church leaders," Seward said. "There are other descriptive words, but these are among the top."

What Seward said he hopes to gain in his newly titled position as megachurch specialist is knowledge of the resource needs of these huge churches and ways to publicize their successes to other Southern Baptist churches.

"They gain information from one another through networking. They don't normally attend trend conferences," Seward said. "They basically resist a number of people clamoring for their time.

"I want to be out there looking for products that we (BSSB) don't have that we need to provide to these churches. And I want to provide other smaller Southern Baptist churches with valuable information these megachurches might have."

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A list of several megachurches provided by Seward has been posted on SBCNET Newsroom.

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