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October 28, 1993

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Senate defeats amendment on prisons, passes RFRA

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press 10/28/93

WASHINGTON (BP)--The Religious Freedom Restoration Act, beset by both delays and opposition on several counts during its three-year history, cleared a final barrier to complete congressional victory, then passed overwhelmingly in the U.S. Senate Oct. 27.

Before RFRA passed by a 97-3 vote, the Senate defeated an amendment which would have excluded prisoners from the bill's protections. The bill's supporting coalition, a diverse 68-member group which included the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission and the Baptist Joint Committee, opposed the amendment.

The House of Representatives had passed the bill by a voice vote in May, but action on the Senate floor had been delayed as the prison amendment loomed over RFRA. When the bill finally reached the Senate floor, the amendment was defeated 58-41.

President Bill Clinton has said he will sign the bill.

"All defenders of religious liberty should be delighted at the passage of RFRA," said Richard Land, the Christian Life Commission's executive director. "When President Clinton signs RFRA, we will have substantially rectified the terrible damage done to our First Amendment, religious freedom liberties inflicted by the infamous Smith decision.

"The passage of this bill shows that Americans still cherish and are ready to defend vigorously their constitutional freedom of religion," Land said.

In a written statement, Oliver Thomas, coalition chairman and the BJC's general counsel, expressed gratitude to Sens. Edward Kennedy, D.-Mass., and Orrin Hatch, R.-Utah, for their leadership and to President Clinton for his endorsement.

"But most of all, we can thank the 68 organizations who laid aside their deep political and religious differences to work for a common vision for the common good," said Thomas, whose recently announced resignation from the BJC becomes effective Oct. 31.

"I hope I will never again have to listen to anyone say that groups like the American Civil Liberties Union and People for the American Way don't care about religion," Thomas said.

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The coalition's breadth of representation includes conservative groups, such as Concerned Women for America, National Association of Evangelicals, Traditional Values Coalition and the CLC, and liberal groups, including the National Council of Churches, Americans for Democratic Action, ACLU and PAW.

RFRA was drafted as a legislative response to the 1990 Employment Division v. Smith opinion in which the Supreme Court ruled government no longer has to demonstrate a "compelling interest" before restricting the free exercise of religion.

Since Smith, it had been easier for government to limit individuals' religious expression.

The coalition has cited more than 50 cases where religious liberty had been impacted by the Smith decision. While some have argued the effect would be otherwise, supporters of the legislation have said RFRA only would restore free exercise of religion to its status before Smith. It will require any government to show a policy serves a "compelling interest" and is the "least restrictive means" to fulfilling the government's interest before limiting religious liberty.

While other issues had caused opposition and delay in RFRA's earlier history, the prison issue was the focus of conflict in the final months before the bill reached the Senate floor.

Many state attorneys general and the prison directors in every state had supported an amendment exempting prisons from its application. Sen. Harry Reid, D.-Nev., a cosponsor of the bill, offered the amendment. In debate before the vote, he argued prisoners with frivolous or grotesque free-exercise claims "are going to be able to tie up the courts even more and their cases are going to be even more winnable. Judges will no longer be able to dismiss cases by summary judgment if this standard is not adopted by this amendment."

The coalition and others supporting RFRA contended the amendment was unnecessary because the courts, as they had done before Smith, would apply the "compelling interest" test to enable administrators of prison and other correctional institutions to maintain order while allowing for limited religious freedom for prisoners.

Sen. Dan Coats, R.-Ind., was among those opposing the amendment. He read a portion of a letter from Charles Colson, founder and chairman of Prison Fellowship, in which he described the limitations such an amendment would produce for such ministries. Coats said "under the Reid Amendment, (prison ministries) could be barred simply because of the indifference of a prison official."

On the amendment vote, 37 Democrats and 21 Republicans joined to defeat it.

On final passage, the only senators to oppose RFRA were Robert Byrd, D.-W.Va.; Jesse Helms, R.-N.C., and Harlan Mathews, D.-Tenn.

Christian Life Commission General Counsel Michael Whitehead commended the Senate for both votes.

"It was important that free exercise of religion be restored to high ground in the law," Whitehead said, "but also important that the ground be level for everyone, including prisoners."

The defeat of the Reid amendment "affirmed that our 'first liberty' belongs to all of our citizens, including prisoners" the BJC's Brent Walker said in a prepared statement. "Religion is one of the important influences for rehabilitation of prisoners. It should be encouraged, not discouraged."

Walker recently was promoted from associate general counsel to replace Thomas with the BJC.

While the CLC was in the same coalition with liberal groups on RFRA, it does not represent a "peace treaty in the culture war," Whitehead said.

"The fact that evangelicals and the ACLU shared common ground on the need for RFRA does not mean, of course, that these diverse groups have a common view of religion in public life or a common vision about how the statute will apply in future cases," Whitehead said.

"And you will hear us say, again and again, that groups like the ACLU and People for the American Way have a far different vision for the role of religion in American life than most evangelicals," he said. "We will continue to engage them in the battle for our culture, while agreeing on the legal principle of non-engagement by the government or non-interference in religious free exercise unless there are supremely overriding societal interests."

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Defeat of amendment
helps prison ministries

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
10/28/93

WASHINGTON (BP)--As far as Prison Fellowship is concerned, the significance of including prisoners under the protection of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act extends far beyond the future of the country's best known prison ministry. On Oct. 27, the U.S. Senate defeated an effort to exempt prisons from the application of RFRA before passing the bill 97-3. Senators rejected an amendment removing prisoners from coverage by the bill in a 58-41 vote.

"We're basically ecstatic," said Rick Templeton, national director of Justice Fellowship, the criminal justice policy arm of Prison Fellowship. "This was very important not only to Prison Fellowship but to the country that inmates be included in the RFRA coverage.

"It's been proven over and over again that the way to truly turn around an offender is to change his heart, and this act will definitely go a long way in assuring access to Christians who will be following Jesus' command to visit those in prison."

What would have been the result for Prison Fellowship if the amendment had passed, Templeton was asked.

"We would have been at the total mercy of prison officials as to whether they would allow our programs in prison or not," he said. "Some are very cooperative, and some are not."

Southern Baptists and others in different ministries apparently would have faced the same problem.

Bill Donovan of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board gave an assessment similar to Templeton's.

"If (prison administrators) are simply left to their own judgment about what they should grant and what they shouldn't, they're always going to come down on the side of convenience to the institution," said Donovan, director of institutional chaplaincy for the HMB's chaplaincy division.

Part of the problem, Donovan said, is religion, protected by the free exercise clause, "became an easy way for the inmates to hassle the administration and make demands based on religion."

While prison administrators have legitimate concerns about some inmate claims for religious freedom, "there is a tendency to carry sanctions a little too far," Donovan said.

The passage of RFRA will mean chaplains need to be knowledgeable of various religions' requirements in order to adequately advise prison administrations, he said.

In county jails and federal prisons, there are 272 Southern Baptist chaplains endorsed by the HMB. A 1991 HMB poll found 17 percent of Southern Baptist churches surveyed were involved in a jail or prison ministry.

Although it seemed clear the Senate would pass RFRA, it was uncertain whether its sponsors and the 68-member coalition supporting the bill had enough votes to defeat the amendment.

"We just give all the credit to God, because there were a number of us who didn't think we had the votes as this thing came up," Templeton said. "I can only say God definitely had his hand in this."

Prison Fellowship has 50,000 volunteers who minister to prisoners throughout the United States.

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In a letter shortly before the vote, Charles Colson, founder and chairman of Prison Fellowship, asked each senator to oppose the prison amendment.

While the amendment attempt is "motivated by genuine concerns about prison administration and security, the effect is counter-productive," wrote Colson, who is a member of a Southern Baptist church in northern Virginia. "If enacted, it will not enhance prison security, but it will set back the rehabilitative process.

"We can't allow inmates to be excluded from the kind of programs that will help them adopt a more responsible lifestyle and return to society as productive, law-abiding citizens," Colson said.

Colson cited research which seems to demonstrate the effectiveness of Prison Fellowship's approach. One survey he cited was a 1990 study showing participants in the ministry's programs were nearly 22 percent less likely to be rearrested than those who had not. Among women, 60 percent were less likely to be rearrested.

He also said Prison Fellowship's ability to minister in some places had been hindered since the Supreme Court's 1990 Employment Division v. Smith decision.

In its opinion, the court ruled government no longer had to demonstrate a "compelling interest" before restricting the free exercise of religion. RFRA was drafted in response to the Smith decision.

In Maryland, Colson said, a "no proselytizing" rule had been adopted which, in effect, prevented ministries such as Prison Fellowship from working with inmates. When prisoners entered the facility to begin their term, they had to register for a particular Christian denomination in order to participate in Prison Fellowship seminars.

"We couldn't do anything about that because the prison officials were not required to show a compelling reason," Templeton said.

A portion of Colson's letter was read by Sen. Dan Coats, R.-Ind., in debate minutes before the vote.

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David Winfrey of the Home Mission Board contributed to this article.

**Missionary surgeon in India
denied new medical license**

By Donald D. Martin

Baptist Press
10/28/93

BANGALORE, India (BP)--Southern Baptist missionary Rebekah Naylor has lost her license to practice medicine in India, crippling her practice at Bangalore Baptist Hospital, where she has worked for 20 years.

A medical licensing council in Delhi, India, notified Naylor by letter Oct. 25 that it would not renew her Indian medical license. The decision affects only her Indian medical license. It does not affect her residence visa, which allows her to legally work and live in India.

The committee gave no reason for its decision, which Naylor will seek to have reversed.

Although she cannot perform surgery and other medical procedures, Naylor, a surgeon from Fort Worth, Texas, will remain at the 143-bed Bangalore hospital. She still has a full load of administrative responsibilities as associate medical superintendent. She stopped practicing medicine Sept. 18 when her current license expired.

"It's been hard on the staff and very hard on me," she said in a telephone interview Oct. 26. "It's difficult to be right in the middle of (medical work) and not be able to help."

Naylor, 49, learned of the council's ruling in September, but she could not act or comment on it until she received an official letter, she said.

She believes part of the reason for the license denial stems from Indian nationalism.

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In recent years, India has denied visas to missionaries. In the early 1980s, 18 Southern Baptist missionaries lived in India. Today, Naylor is the only Southern Baptist missionary living in the country of 897 million people. Several Southern Baptists work with Indian Baptists as itinerant missionaries, moving in and out of the country on a short-term basis.

No official process exists for Naylor to appeal. However, in the coming weeks she and other Baptists will contact government officials in Delhi and request that the council reconsider her case.

"The plan is to file an appeal as soon as possible. But our appeal goes back to the same committee. There's no other place to appeal to," she said.

She has also begun contacting supporters in the United States who have contacts in the Indian government -- an approach which helped her cause in a previous struggle to gain her Indian medical license.

In 1991, the medical council also did not grant her a license. But she successfully appealed after enlisting help from a U.S. senator, India's ambassador in Washington and Southern Baptist pastors in Kentucky.

The Foreign Mission Board's Prayer Office also issued a Prayer Alert Oct. 26, asking Southern Baptists to pray for God's intervention in this situation.

"I'm praying for the patience to go through this," Naylor said.

"I hope our witness will be positive to the officials and whoever else we meet in the course of this. And I hope that my own dealings with the situation will be a witness to my colleagues and hospital staff."

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FMB Europe leaders report
new excitement for evangelism

By Marty Croll

Baptist Press
10/28/93

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Poised on the brink of a new era in Europe, Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board leaders report they sense "a new move of God's hand" among the people there.

The Berlin Wall's crash and westernization of the former communist bloc are tumultuous events among more commonplace ones that have given birth to a new excitement for evangelism and brought up cries for help from local Baptists.

Now -- in a region stretching from western Europe's Atlantic shoreline to eastern Russia's Pacific coast -- church growth and baptisms among Baptist groups with whom FMB missionaries work are showing a marked increase, said John Floyd, the board's area director for Europe.

Floyd and regional Vice President Sam James reported their impressions of gains in Europe to the board's trustee committee for the region in October. They had just returned from the annual congress of the European Baptist Federation in Kishinev, Moldova.

James reported increased interest among Baptist leaders in church starting and church growth and discussed church growth studies that missionaries in some countries will undertake. The studies will help them better define their purpose and their role with European Baptists and plan strategies for more effective use of time and money.

"There's a new spirit about church planting among Baptist leaders," he said.

Last year, the number of mission workers assigned to the area took a dip -- partially resulting from backlash after the board ended financial assistance to Ruschlikon Baptist Theological Seminary in Switzerland two years ago.

But today mission workers in the area total 360 -- a 28 percent jump from 1991. That's an increase not only of career missionaries, but also of more mobile, short-term International Service Corps personnel.

The Foreign Mission Board has deployed new personnel throughout the former communist bloc. But others work in such western European countries as Belgium, France, Portugal and Spain -- at the request of Baptist unions there.

In November, Floyd expects United Kingdom Baptists to request 10 more Southern Baptists, the first such invitation since the seminary's funding.

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Floyd said he hopes to have 13 more career missionary family units -- 26 more people -- appointed, trained and ready to go to Europe by next May. Six of the 13 already have been appointed, bringing the year's total of new appointments through October to 20 family units.

In Spain, two couples appointed as support workers for other missionaries there will start churches instead. Other couples in the mission are also excited about new growth, Floyd said. "They're just a bright hope."

Spanish Baptists and missionaries are still riding an evangelistic high from efforts at the Olympic games in Barcelona and an international expo in Seville in 1992. "Baptisms were up in 1993," said missionary Fred Dallas, who directed the Barcelona outreach program. "Most people attribute it to the fact that evangelism was the heartbeat in Barcelona and Seville."

Dallas has arrived in Lillehammer, Norway, to coordinate a similar effort at the 1994 Winter Olympic Games. Invited by local pastor Roald Juliussen, Dallas will form a team of language-gifted, sports-oriented evangelists to lead local Baptists in a special outreach program.

It will last through February, when 140,000 Olympic visitors will overrun the sleepy Norwegian town of 20,000 people. Until the 16 days of Olympic competition, television crews will be Baptists' key target.

"The greatest benefit of all this is that it brings evangelism to the forefront," said Dallas. "It's a model -- people see evangelism in action."

Dallas has invited some U.S. volunteers to join his evangelism team. He isn't alone in use of volunteers. Throughout Europe, missionaries have worked with Baptist unions to style partnerships with 11 Southern Baptist state conventions.

So many volunteers are heading for Europe that Floyd wants on-site coordinators in several countries to plan volunteer logistics. They will supplement missionary Jack Shelby's overall coordination of volunteers in Eastern Europe. James put Shelby in place in 1992.

Southern Baptist volunteers have been busy working in nations formed out of the former Soviet Union. Many were in Russia even during the most recent power struggle between President Boris Yeltsin and communist holdovers that erupted into street war. But local Baptists have been busy, too.

Although unconfirmed, 30,000 baptisms have been reported by Baptist leaders in Russia alone so far this year. In 1992, Russian Baptists reported 10,000; Ukrainian Baptists reported 8,660, Floyd said. In Latvia, baptisms have grown from about 100-150 a year during communism to 700 last year, Floyd said.

As the region continues to fragment politically, Floyd hopes to respond to requests for missionaries in Moldova, a former Soviet republic; Slovakia, formerly part of Czechoslovakia; and Macedonia, formerly part of splintering Yugoslavia.

"Doors are surely open," Floyd said. "If we had more money and more people, we could move faster."

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BSSB unveils new record label,
signs inspirational, gospel artists

Baptist Press
10/28/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--Genevox Music Group, the trade music publishing component of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, has formed a new recording label and signed its first vocal artists, Mark Blankenship, Genevox director, announced.

"Genesis Records" was unveiled by Blankenship before gospel music industry representatives, BSSB employees and trustees as the board's recording label during a music industry announcement event and artists showcase Oct. 26 at the Sunday School Board.

Blankenship said the label Genesis, meaning 'new beginnings,' works well with the name Genevox, which translates 'new voice.'

Blankenship named Amy Roth, singer of contemporary and inspirational music, and Friends IV, a Southern gospel singing group, as two of the four artists Genesis plans to sign this year.

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In another announcement, Blankenship introduced Dan Mann, president of Dan Mann and Associates, a Nashville-based booking agency, as artist and repertoire consultant for Genevox.

During the Oct. 26 announcement, Roth and Friends IV, which includes Terry Blackwood, "Big" John Hall, Larry Orrell and Chuck Sullivan, talked briefly about their music ministries and sang selections from upcoming Genesis releases.

Roth said she views her music as a "ministry to encourage people in the body of Christ." As a former single parent, Roth said she realizes a lot of hopelessness and doubting exist in the world.

"When I was hopeless and doubting, the church reached out to me," said Roth, who desires to provide the same ministry through her music.

"Big" John Hall of Friends IV said members of the group, each of whom had most recently acted solo, decided to join together "to blend our ministry and make one sound to lift the name of Jesus."

Genevox, created by the board in 1986, produces music products for sale through trade outlets to churches and individuals. Print music, under the imprints of Broadman Press, Van Ness Press and McKinney Press, is published by Genevox to meet non-curriculum needs of churches, as well as the leisure interests of individuals. For artist booking information, contact Mann Associates at (615) 327-3607.

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

Missouri Baptists debate social issues,
enter into Belarus, Wyoming Partnerships
By Russell N. Dilday

Baptist Press
10/28/93

JOPLIN, Mo. (BP)--Social and denominational issues dominated business during the 159th annual meeting of the Missouri Baptist Convention Oct. 25-27. Convention messengers, also voted to enter into three-year partnership missions projects with Wyoming Southern Baptists and Baptists in the former Soviet republic of Belarus.

In convention business, messengers approved a \$15.2 million budget and 12 other executive board recommendations with almost no debate. Messengers did debate whether hotels should be used which provide in-room pornographic movies.

On a close ballot vote, messengers approved a recommendation to use the Holiday Inn in Columbia, as the site of the 1996 annual meeting.

Seven proposed resolutions also created debate, although all were adopted with little change from wording recommended by the convention resolutions committee.

Resolutions affirmed "True Love Waits," a Baptist Sunday School Board campaign promoting teenage sexual abstinence; opposition to homosexuality; retaining the mention of "God" in the Girl Scout promise; and support of the SBC.

Messengers approved a resolution entitled "On Maintaining Trust with the Cooperative Program," which affirmed the plan "as the primary means by which the convention provides financial support for its agencies and ministries."

The resolution encouraged MBC agencies and related personnel "to maintain support of the Cooperative Program" and to avoid conflict of interest in any situation "which would compromise support of the Cooperative Program."

Messengers approved a motion opposing new federal health care plans if they "mandate access to and payment for abortions." They also voted to prohibit the Missouri chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State from exhibiting at the annual meeting.

The \$15.2 million 1994 budget is the same as 1993, although the MBC executive board originally had planned to present a \$15.5 million budget. Contribution shortfalls in the second and third quarters of 1993 necessitated the change in an executive board meeting just prior to the annual meeting.

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The budget calls for 64.75 percent of contributions to be distributed to MBC causes, with 35.25 percent to be sent to the Cooperative Program. Both percentages were unchanged from 1993 levels.

Messengers overwhelmingly approved the recommendation to participate in multi-year partnership projects with Belarus and Wyoming. Both partnerships will begin in spring of 1994 and continue through June 1997.

Other recommendations set goals for special mission offerings, approved sites for future annual meetings and reduced the number of trustees at Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar.

Messengers also defeated a proposed constitutional change on annual meeting representation. The proposal called for a church's resident membership to be used in determining the number of annual meeting messengers to which the church was entitled. Currently, total membership is the determining factor.

Opponents to the proposed change argued that smaller churches would be adversely affected because fewer members would be eligible to attend.

T.O. Spicer Jr., director of missions for Spring River Baptist Association in Joplin, was elected convention president with 63 percent of the total vote over Hallsville pastor Ralph Sawyer. Spicer had served as convention first vice president during 1993.

Other officers elected include Paul L. Brooks, pastor of First Baptist Church in Raytown, first vice president; Norman Mohr, bivocational pastor of Maryland Heights Baptist Church, St. Louis, second vice president; and Ann Mary Gilbert, a member of First Baptist Church in Poplar Bluff, secretary.

The convention attracted more than 2,600 people, including 1,795 messengers, to the first annual meeting held in Joplin since 1974.

The 1994 annual meeting will be Oct. 31-Nov. 2 in St. Louis.

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15th Nevada Baptist Convention

adopts record CP budget

By Michael B. McCullough

Baptist Press

10/28/93

RENO, Nev. (BP)--Messengers to the 15th annual meeting of the Nevada Baptist Convention heard repeated calls to minister and serve in Christ's name and spirit. Speakers emphasized the theme "Serve in Christ Spirit," which coincides with the SBC 1993-94 Bold Mission Thrust theme.

The theme was focused and applied most directly to the work of Nevada Baptists when NBC Executive Director David F. Meacham introduced "The Forty Thousand Campaign" to the messengers. The campaign is a strategic plan that calls for 40,000 people in Nevada Baptist churches by the year 2000. Current church membership is more than 26,000. Messengers adopted the plan.

The Oct. 19-20 convention drew 158 messengers and nearly 40 registered visitors, and was hosted by Temple Baptist Church in Sparks.

Key business items also included the adoption of a \$1,794,365 budget for 1994. This represents an increase of 2.4 percent over the 1993 budget. A key item in the budget was the 1994 Cooperative Program goal of \$560,000, up from \$530,000 in 1993. Messengers also voted to increase giving to SBC world missions from 25 percent to 25.5 percent. Nevada Cooperative Program giving for the first nine months in 1993 is up nearly seven percent over the same period in 1992.

Featured preachers included Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary President William Crews and Professor Leroy Gainey.

Messengers re-elected John Randolph as president. Randolph is pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Elko. Kevin White of Fernley and Troy Gourley from Silver Springs, both pastors, were elected first and second vice-presidents, respectively.

Two motions were introduced from the floor. One motion called for funding to assist Nevada ministerial students. The other motion called for providing television and radio public service announcements to all Nevada stations. Both motions were referred to the executive board for action.

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The 1994 NBC annual meeting will be held at Foothills Baptist Church in Las Vegas, Oct. 18-19.

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Block parties catching on
as effective evangelism

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press
10/28/93

ATLANTA (BP)--Block parties, which have long been popular for ethnic celebrations and civic promotion, are gaining recognition among churches as a way to minister and spread the gospel.

"Block parties are catching on because they win souls and go out into the neighborhood," said Newton Carey Jr., who pioneered such evangelistic events six years ago in Oakland, Calif. "God is doing great works with them."

Carey, pastor of True Vine Baptist Church in Oakland, estimated he's been contacted by more than 100 interested churches. The parties also were added to the evangelism outreach before the Southern Baptist Convention's annual meeting.

Last year, three churches in Indianapolis hosted parties before the convention, resulting in 96 professions of faith. This year in Houston, 21 churches hosted parties, with 374 professions of faith.

"Evangelistic block parties are the way to win some areas of our nation to Christ," said Toby Frost, associate director of mass evangelism for the Home Mission Board.

Frost said he often gets requests for more information about block parties when speaking to pastors and others involved in evangelism.

Such parties vary, but many target ethnic or low-income areas. Most include food and music, or some other type of entertainment. Many of the church's workers are trained to witness.

"We give them a good dose of music and Jesus," said John Calvin, pastor of Tower of Praise Revelation Baptist Church in Long Beach, Calif. Calvin said he can point to more than 150 new members in his church as a result of block parties.

"It's hard labor, but it's a blessing," he said, adding the parties create good impressions to visitors even if they don't join the church or become a Christian. "If we can plant, someone else will water and God will give the increase."

Parties often include food baskets and free clothing. "Block parties are our main part of ministry. It draws the people that need to be helped," said Carey. "We're hungry for it. This is a sure method of witnessing."

True Vine's last party was in February, he said. "They had in the neighborhood of 600 people that they fed and gave clothing, and they won 125 of them to Jesus."

Evangelistic block parties started when True Vine was looking to impact the nearby 700-unit Acorn government housing project, said Bill Simms, evangelism consultant for the California Southern Baptist Convention to the San Francisco Bay area.

Block parties are commonly sponsored by social and civic action groups to inform residents about available health and urban development assistance, Simms said.

The church participated in a party already planned, and it was so successful, "we decided why not have one here ourself," said Simms, who helped coordinate parties in Houston before this year's annual Southern Baptist Convention meeting.

Carey credits block parties with turning his church around and cleaning up the surrounding West Oakland neighborhood and public housing communities. "I'm at the best part of my life right now, seeing people saved."

People can now come to the church without being confronted by prostitutes or drug dealers, said his wife Sallie. "But I couldn't tell you that six years ago."

Drug sales were rampant in the Acorn housing project before the church got involved, she said. "Now, we have a ministry going on there every Thursday night."

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The parties are successful because they minister to needs while sharing the gospel, Simms said.

"This is a bridge. People who won't come to church will come here," said Simms. "Because of block parties, we find about people's needs, so we minister seven days a week."

Frost said the parties are particularly effective among ethnics. "For some reason, Anglos go indoors to party, but the outdoor celebration for certain ethnic populations lends itself to block party strategies."

While the parties take hard work and planning, Carey cautions against scheduling a party without including prayer. "The secret is prayer. We never do a block party until we pray."

Frost agreed spiritual matters should receive the same priority as the party's planning "Work on the evangelism strategy as hard as you work on the meal, the clothes distribution and the program."

Anyone interested in learning firsthand about evangelistic block parties can be involved in Cross Over Orlando before the Southern Baptist Convention next June, Frost added.

A booklet about evangelistic block parties is available from True Vine Baptist Church by calling the church at (510) 208-4572.

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(BP) photo (horizontal) mailed 10/25/93 to state Baptist papers by the Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press. Cutlines are in the SBCNet News Room.

**Opponents to Miss. casino
near assembly claim victory** By William H. Perkins Jr.

**Baptist Press
10/28/93**

PASS CHRISTIAN, Miss. (BP)--Neighborhood opponents of a casino site within walking distance of Gulfshore Assembly in Pass Christian, Miss., claimed victory Oct. 25 after the Harrison County Board of Supervisors voted 5-0 not to reconsider an earlier unanimous resolution opposing the site.

Minneapolis-based Spectrum Gaming, Inc., earlier announced plans for a 30,000 square-foot gambling facility in the predominantly residential area known as Henderson Point, which contains Gulfshore Assembly.

Nonnie DeBardeleben, spokesperson for Concerned Citizens to Protect the Isles and Point, which opposed the project, said the supervisors' vote reflected more than just the economic considerations of locating casinos along the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

"There were concerns expressed by supervisors for environmental issues, the neighborhood, traffic, and the proximity of the site to Gulfshore," she said.

Gulfshore Assembly is Mississippi Baptists' multi-million-dollar campground and retreat facility on the shore of St. Louis Bay. Nearly 1,000 people packed Kelly Center auditorium at Gulfshore Oct. 12 for a public hearing on the casino site.

DeBardeleben said her group is gearing up for the next level of hearings at Mississippi Gaming Commission headquarters in Jackson. State law excludes local officials and grants sole casino siting authority to the commission, but DeBardeleben is confident the supervisors' strong reaffirmation of their original stance against the casino will carry a lot of influence with the state gaming commissioners.

"We have notified the Gaming Commission of our opposition and have requested a public hearing before the commission. We'll be ready when it comes up," she said.

Paul G. Jones II, director of the Christian Action Commission for the Mississippi Baptist Convention, applauded the supervisors' decision. Jones spoke on behalf of Mississippi Baptists at the Oct. 12 public meeting and received a standing ovation after condemning the casino site.

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"The supervisors recognized the impact of Gulfshore Assembly, not only on the immediate area but the entire Mississippi Gulf Coast, and acted to protect what supporters recognize as a significant part of the life of Harrison County," Jones said.

The Mississippi Gaming Commission has not yet set a date for taking up the matter.

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CLARIFICATION: In (BP) story titled "Texas Baptists reject defunding of Baylor; elect McBride as president," dated 10/26/93, please substitute the following for the the 15th paragraph:

In 1992, from the church the Baptist General Convention of Texas received \$82,599 for its causes; SBC Cooperative Program causes received \$10,543; and \$47,786 went through the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

CORRECTION: In (BP) story titled "Iowa Baptists vote increase in Cooperative Program giving," dated 10/26/93, please substitute the following paragraph for the second paragraph:

The fellowship, attended by 117 messengers at Immanuel Baptist Church in Cedar Rapids, approved a 1994 Cooperative Program budget of \$364,611 out of a total stat budget of \$1,197,515. The CP budget increased that portion which goes for national and international Southern Baptist ministries to 21 percent, from 1993's 20 percent.

CORRECTION: In (BP) story titled "Cloning of human embryos stirs ethical concerns, debate," dated 10/26/93, please change the word prescientifically in the fifth paragraph to the word presciently.

Thanks,
Baptist Press

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