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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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Vouchers, homosexual rights
 falter in Nov. 2 elections

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
 11/3/93

WASHINGTON (BP)--California voters overwhelmingly defeated an attempt to establish the country's first unrestricted school voucher system in the Nov. 2 election.

In other voting, the homosexual rights movement suffered setbacks in three cities. Voters in Cincinnati and Lewiston, Maine, voted to repeal homosexual rights protections, while the electorate in Portsmouth, N.H., rejected such an ordinance.

"The homosexual political agenda has been masquerading as a civil rights issue for too long, but the American voter has not been fooled," said Michael Whitehead, general counsel of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

"Homosexuals should -- and already do -- enjoy equal protection of their civil rights, because civil rights laws are neutral with respect to one's sexual conduct.

"It is not homophobia or hatred to oppose the expansion of laws against employers and landlords, which will only result in more lawsuits," Whitehead said. "Common sense and common values tell us that the great need of America right now is not more lawsuits to try to make a moral wrong seem like a civil right."

In California, opponents of Proposition 174, the school voucher initiative, won 70 percent to 30 percent. The proposition would have allowed parents to send their children to any public school or to accept a \$2,600 voucher for tuition at any private school, including a religious one.

Voucher opponents, led by the California Teachers Association, outspent proponents 10-1, according to a Cox News Service report. The CTA, the state teachers union, contributed \$12.3 million of the \$16 million spent to defeat Proposition 174, Cox reported.

School-choice advocates have said they plan to continue their campaign in California and several other states.

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The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs board recently approved a statement reaffirming its opposition to parental choice plans. The Christian Life Commission, the Southern Baptist Convention's religious liberty agency, has not taken a public policy position on educational choice, citing a lack of consensus among Southern Baptists on the issue.

In Cincinnati, citizens voted by a 68-to-32 percent margin to remove homosexual rights protection from the city's human rights ordinance.

The same percentage held forth in Lewiston as voters repealed a homosexual rights ordinance enacted in January.

Portsmouth citizens rejected the concept of homosexual rights in a non-binding vote. Election officials had not tabulated the final results when contacted by Baptist Press, but Associated Press reported the total was 59 percent to 41 percent.

The Portsmouth City Council had rejected a homosexual rights ordinance earlier but placed it on the ballot in the form of a non-binding resolution, AP reported.

Voters in Maine and New York City approved term limitations for some elected officials.

In a race of interest to many conservative evangelicals as well as opponents of their renewed political efforts, home-schooling and religious-liberty lawyer Michael Farris lost his bid to become Virginia's lieutenant governor. Farris, president of the Home School Legal Defense Association and an author of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, lost to Democratic incumbent Don Beyer 54 percent to 46 percent.

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Lewis Martin dies in Atlanta;
was founder of world missions

Baptist Press
11/3/93

ATLANTA (BP)--Lewis W. Martin, retired Home Mission Board official who founded the Southern Baptist schools of missions which later became world missions conferences, died Oct. 28 in an Atlanta area hospital. He was 94.

World missions conferences are hosted by Baptist associations and feature home, foreign and local missionary speakers.

Martin, a native of Waddy, Ky., was a graduate of Georgetown (Ky.) College and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. Georgetown College awarded him a doctorate in 1949 and an alumni achievement award in 1982.

Martin was pastor of First Baptist Church of Hazard, Ky., five years before being appointed a missionary evangelist in the Appalachian Mountains area of Jeff and Hindman, Ky.

In 1943, Martin moved to Atlanta to work as the Home Mission Board's secretary of the schools of missions department and later as secretary of the missionary education department. He retired in 1965 and continued to serve as interim pastor of churches in Georgia. One year during his retirement he was pastor of Pukalani Baptist Church in Maui, Hawaii.

Funeral services for Martin were Oct. 30 at First Baptist Church of Decatur, Ga. Survivors include his wife, the former Estelle Snyder, a native of Jellico, Tenn., and four children.

The family asks that memorial gifts be designated for the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for Home Missions.

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Church takes its message
to homeward-bound drivers

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press
11/3/93

FAYETTEVILLE, Ga. (BP)--Members of Starr's Mill Baptist Church walk into traffic to minister to those at their doorsteps.

Once a month, pastor Kendall Hicks and members of the 106-year-old church take refreshments to motorists lined in front of the church at the end of their work day.

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"We just wanted to do something to raise the awareness that there is a church in the area and that we're concerned about people," said Hicks.

The church driveway sits about 100 yards from a stop sign at the end of Georgia Highway 74 in Fayetteville, Ga. Hundreds of cars pass the church after work, and as many as two dozen cars line up at the intersection.

"The afternoon traffic has to stop at the stop sign, giving us a captive audience for about 10 seconds per car," Hicks said.

One Tuesday afternoon in October, Hicks and two members handed out 500 bags of candy with an Eternal Life tract in less than an hour. Other months, members handed out soft drinks with a Bible verse bookmark. "We feel like we're modeling Jesus' basic pattern of ministry. He would meet a physical need and then meet a spiritual need," Hicks said.

Members hatched the idea while brainstorming ways to attract the growing number of people driving by. Some motorists were initially suspicious, said volunteer Ris Cowan. When church members handed out cans of Cokes, he said, one driver asked, "What's in it?"

"People aren't used to getting something truly free," Cowan said.

Others offered donations, but workers refused.

"We're trying to keep that message that there are no strings attached," Cowan said. "We don't want people to think all we want is their money."

In addition to boosting awareness, Hicks said he hopes the effort will break down preconceptions residents may have about church members and lead to church growth.

"A lot of smaller churches think you have to be large to be active, but the truth is you've got to be active to get large."

Already, Hicks said he has been recognized while visiting prospects as the guy who was giving out Cokes. "Right now, it's a Coke or a bag of candy. The next thing we hope to share is the gospel."

With winter on the way, Hicks said members are working on an alternative to an ice-cold soft drink. "We haven't figured out the logistics of doing coffee yet."

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(BP) photo (horizontal) of Kendall Hicks handing a bag of candy to a motorist mailed to state Baptist newspapers 11/2/93. Cutlines available in SBCNet Newsroom.

'Baptist' not household name
in Mormon-dominated Utah, Idaho By Mark Wingfield

Baptist Press
11/3/93

SALT LAKE CITY (BP)--Imagine being a Southern Baptist in a region where evangelical Christians represent about 3 percent of the population.

Imagine living in a culture dominated in nearly every way by a religion you consider anti-Christian.

Imagine your family living in the territory of the Utah-Idaho Southern Baptist Convention.

Few Southern Baptists who have grown up in the South can comprehend the challenge facing Southern Baptists in Utah and Idaho, says Clyde Billingsley, executive director of the two-state convention.

It is a challenge that impacts every area of life -- politics, education, shopping, neighborhoods and religion.

The population of every county in Utah is predominantly Mormon. The same is true for most of southern Idaho, and Mormonism still is a powerful presence throughout northern Idaho as well.

About 72 percent of Utah's population identifies with the Mormon church, according to statistics reported in "Churches and Church Membership in the United States 1990." And 90 percent of those who claim a religious affiliation are Mormons.

In Idaho, 27 percent of the population is Mormon, and 53 percent of all who claim a religious faith identify themselves as Mormons.

Less than 1 percent of Utah residents are Southern Baptists; less than 2 percent in Idaho.

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Being a religious minority is one thing, Baptists in the region explain, but having to endure the strong influence of Mormonism makes things even more difficult.

Southern Baptists generally consider the Mormon church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, to be a religious sect that is not Christian in doctrine. Mormon doctrine also teaches that non-Mormon churches are "Satan's hirelings."

Mormons also oppose Southern Baptists because they are among the most evangelical Christian witnesses in Mormon territory, Billingsley explains.

In past generations, Southern Baptists in Utah and Idaho have experienced intense persecution from Mormons, Baptist pastors report. That is changing some, but pressure remains, especially in the rural areas, they say.

While metropolitan Salt Lake City has become more diverse due to people moving in from other regions, the rural areas of Utah and Idaho remain as much as 95-99 percent Mormon, Billingsley says.

That makes starting and growing churches in those areas especially difficult.

But Baptists have recorded a number of success stories.

Warren Osburn and his wife, Peggy, moved to Wellington, Utah, in 1983 to start a Southern Baptist church in a town with no evangelical witness. In seven years, they built a congregation of about 100 people before moving to serve a struggling church in Salt Lake City.

Mrs. Osburn still remembers asking for help in a department store one day and having every clerk walk away from her because she was a Baptist pastor's wife.

"Things have been changing in the last few years, though," Osburn says. "Mormons are trying to take on the image of Christianity."

Billingsley says he thinks this is due in part to the Southern Baptist Convention's decision to hold its 1988 annual meeting in Salt Lake City. Mormon officials -- especially in Salt Lake City -- are preparing to make the most favorable impression possible for Baptist visitors, he believes.

Even in some more remote areas, tensions are lighter between Baptists and Mormons.

"The LDS churches give us very few problems," says Royce Shoemate, pastor of First Baptist Church of Vernal, Utah. Vernal is a town of about 12,000 people located on the extreme eastern edge of the state.

First Baptist, which averages slightly more than 100 in attendance, is the largest and strongest Baptist church in the eastern part of the state.

Even though blatant persecution is not so obvious, the influence of the Mormon church still poses a threat to Christianity, Shoemate says.

"The greatest danger is for Christians who move here from other places and do not stay close to the church. Their children end up dating and marrying LDS people.

"Some people moving here see Mormons as another Christian religion. The terms and language they use sound very Christian. But what they mean is very different."

Baptist churches must hold up the truth of Scripture against the teachings of the Mormon church, Shoemate and other Baptist pastors in the area say.

Even though the pressure is easing some, difficulties still remain. Billingsley recounts the story of a Baptist minister's son who just last year was harassed by a Mormon teacher -- apparently because the son had said he intended to be a Baptist preacher himself.

Not surprisingly, the area has attracted Baptist leaders who thrive on facing a challenge.

Mike Gray moved to Salt Lake City from New Mexico 10 years ago to become pastor of Southeast Baptist Church. He had been moved by an evangelist's sermon that "the battle determines the blessing."

"If you don't get involved in great battles, you're not going to get great blessings," Gray explains. "It's exciting to be outside the Bible Belt, because God has to work up here."

Doug Robinson, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church of Soda Springs, Idaho, made one request of a recent visitor: "Please don't go back and say it's hard work up here."

In comparison to God's ability to work, being a Baptist in Utah or Idaho is not hard, he says. "God's still God here as much as anywh re else."

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(BP) photos for this story and the following Utah-Idaho stories available upon request from the Western Recorder, Kentucky Baptists' newsjournal.

Pastor's prayer letter
helps build Idaho church

By Mark Wingfield

Baptist Press
11/3/93

SODA SPRINGS, Idaho (BP)--After more than 30 years of waiting, prayer built a building for First Southern Baptist Church of Soda Springs, Idaho.

Prayer -- and lots of volunteer labor from Baptists in Kentucky and several other states, said pastor Doug Robinson.

Soda Springs is a community of 3,600 people -- 95 percent Mormons -- nestled in a valley of southeastern Idaho along the old Oregon Trail. Southern Baptists started a church there in 1958 and the work has been slow and small ever since.

But things have been on an upward spiral since Robinson began a concerted prayer effort several years ago.

Every month he sends prayer calendars to about 240 people across the United States. The calendars list one prayer need for each day of the month as well as a brief report of what has happened at the church in the previous month.

The prayers those friends offer every day make an obvious difference, Robinson said. On the few months he has missed sending the calendar, "we could sure tell it."

"This little piece of paper is the answer to missions in Utah and Idaho," he said, holding a copy of the prayer calendar in his hand. "If every pastor in a hard place would gather up enough names and money to mail a prayer calendar, ... God would hear."

Robinson came to Soda Springs four years ago, with financial assistance from the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. The church had had about four groundbreaking, he learned, but never had built. They continued to meet in a small house.

Attendance then averaged eight or nine, "12 on a good Sunday," Robinson recalled.

Today, more than 50 people gather each week in a tidy-looking white building first occupied last December.

The entire story is an answer to prayer, Robinson explained.

The congregation voted to build the building during a potluck luncheon one Sunday. The impromptu suggestion came as a total surprise to Robinson, in part because there was only \$16,000 in the building fund.

But before the luncheon was over, one member offered to give another \$10,000 and the congregation had voted to name Robinson construction supervisor.

In time, volunteer teams were lined up but the church still needed architectural plans for the building. That summer Robinson hosted two high school boys as summer workers. As it turned out, one of them was a skilled draftsman who devoted most of his time to drawing plans for the new building.

Soon afterward, a group of Kentucky volunteers framed the two-story building and other volunteers helped throughout the construction process.

God multiplied the \$26,000 the church had in its building fund, Robinson said. "There's more than \$30,000 in this building. Don't ask me where it came from. It just came."

And prayer has continued to make a difference in the church, Robinson said. He made a point to pray each morning this summer with Kentucky volunteers who had come to lead Vacation Bible School. On the morning of the evangelistic appeal by the pastor, one of the Kentuckians suggested they pray for the decision time.

The "only glitch" in this year's VBS then happened -- 20 children responded to the gospel message, more than the pastor ever had imagined. with help from the Kentuckians, all the children were counseled and the event was a big success.

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Since moving into the new building, the congregation has continued to grow, the pastor said. "Since last May, there have been about four young couples come looking for us. They've come in the door with Bibles and notebooks in hand."

Those couples have filled strategic roles and given the church a boost, Robinson reported. For example, the church had been praying for music leadership, and then a couple arrived from Louisiana to fill that need.

"There hasn't been much movement in the community," Robinson said, "but God is bringing people in. These are exciting times."

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Salt Lake City church
awaiting second miracle

By Mark Wingfield

Baptist Press
11/3/93

SALT LAKE CITY (BP)--God already has worked one miracle at First Baptist Church of West Valley City, Utah.

But pastor Warren Osburn says he believes another miracle can happen soon -- especially with help from some Baptist volunteers.

The church -- located on the western edge of Salt Lake City -- had considered disbanding before Osburn arrived as pastor in 1990. After a series of difficulties, the congregation had dwindled to a few families, with an average attendance of 35 in Sunday school.

Clyde Billingsley, executive director of the Utah-Idaho Southern Baptist Convention, preached a revival at the church immediately before Osburn arrived. That set the stage for a turn-around, Osburn believes.

The church added 56 new members in the first four months of Osburn's pastorate. And 40 of those additions were new Christians who were baptized.

Three years later, First Baptist has grown to an average of 100 people in Sunday school and more than 150 in worship. The annual budget of \$40,000 has increased to \$170,000.

The church that nearly died has led its association in number of baptisms the past two years.

That's the first miracle.

The second miracle is under construction -- but running behind schedule.

With the rapid growth, it became obvious the church would have to build. The existing sanctuary is small -- more like a chapel than a church.

So plans were made and construction started in August 1992 on a 9,000-square-foot addition that includes a 500-seat sanctuary and office space. The plans were drawn so work could be done almost entirely by volunteer labor -- saving about half of the \$700,000 it would have cost to contract the job.

Church volunteers have given thousands of hours to the project, and some volunteer groups from other states also have helped. But problems have arisen here and there, Osburn explained, causing the project to fall far behind schedule.

Now the building that was supposed to be an answer to a growth problem is causing a problem itself, he said. Some members are getting discouraged, and the lack of space is causing attendance to dip.

The outside of the building is complete, but the inside has little more than studs placed and sheetrock hung. Plumbing, electrical, painting and other finishing work still must be done.

But Osburn is confident God will provide. He's seen it happen before.

He was a salesman and bus driver in Texas before becoming a Christian in 1978 at age 37. Drinking problems had plagued him but God turned his life around and called him to full-time ministry.

Eventually, a classmate from Criswell College in Dallas convinced Osburn and his family to help start a new Baptist church in Wellington, Utah. The Osburn family arrived in the small eastern Utah town in October 1983 with \$2 between them.

Twenty-three people showed up the first Sunday, in a town that never had known an evangelical church before, he recalled. By the time he left as pastor seven years later, the congregation had grown to about 100 in worship attendance.

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Based on what God has done in the past, Osburn knows even brighter days lie ahead for his current congregation.

Members of the congregation have developed a love for people, he said. "Everybody who has joined the church would comment on that. They said, 'We came back because the people were so friendly.'"

Osburn credits people who stood by the church in hard times, and ones who have come to help in recent years, as essential. "The people deserve the credit for the growth," he said.

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**Buildings make a difference
to Baptists in Utah, Idaho**

**Baptist Press
11/3/93**

SALT LAKE CITY (BP)--"If you build it, they will come" is more than a line from a well-known movie for Southern Baptists in Utah and Idaho. It is an essential fact of church survival.

This is one area where having an attractive building is much more than a luxury, yet remains a luxury many churches cannot afford.

The reason: Buildings give authenticity to Baptists, who are a minority group not well-understood in a land engulfed by Mormonism.

Every community in Utah and Idaho boasts beautiful brick-and-stone houses of worship owned by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints -- the Mormons. These "ward houses," as Mormons call them, are more conveniently located than convenience stores.

Mormons have built well-appointed ward houses in every neighborhood of every town, meaning there are multiple buildings even in small towns and hundreds of buildings in the largest towns.

"In a Mormon area, every ward house is beautifully kept," explained pastor Mike Gray of Southeast Baptist Church in Salt Lake City.

Southeast built a new sanctuary three years ago as part of an ongoing effort to upgrade its facilities. "This is part of the image we've had to project that something good is happening here."

"Buildings do things out here I never saw buildings do before," said Clyde Billingsley, executive director of the Utah-Idaho Southern Baptist Convention. "Every time we build a building, there will be an increase. People will come who never came before.

"The concept that the building doesn't help build the church isn't true out here."

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**Church starting becomes
habit for Idaho Baptists**

By Mark Wingfield

**Baptist Press
11/3/93**

BOISE, Idaho (BP)--Starting new churches is becoming a habit for Baptists in southwestern Idaho.

Baptists remain a minority in this region of the United States but the number of Baptists and Baptist churches is on the rise.

The opportunities are so great that churches barely constituted turn right around and sponsor other new works.

"The opportunity is so positive we have to do some things we don't normally do to reach the people while we can," explained Gail Graves, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Boise, Idaho.

Graves started Trinity as a mission in a day care center two years ago. The congregation constituted as a church little more than six months ago but already is sponsoring three other congregations -- and has plans to sponsor two others.

Trinity now meets in a mobile chapel constructed with help from Kentucky and Texas volunteers.

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One of the new missions Trinity sponsors is in Columbia Village, a planned community to eventually include 6,000 homes. Graves is pastor of that mission as well as pastor at Trinity.

After surveying residents of the 1,000 homes already built in Columbia Village, he discovered 100 families who expressed interest in the new church.

A Vacation Bible School held there this summer attracted 88 children and resulted in 23 professions of faith in Jesus Christ.

Graves baptized nine people in a city park on the first day the new congregation met. Fifty-eight people attended the first service.

The mission now averages about 30 in attendance, half the number attending the mother church. Trinity Baptist averages 60 people in attendance and baptized 27 new believers in the past year.

In addition to Columbia Village, Trinity Baptist is sponsoring Centennial Baptist Church and Indian Lakes Baptist Church in Boise.

"It is amazing," explained Clyde Billingsley, executive director of the Utah-Idaho Southern Baptist Convention. "God has done a wonderful thing."

Billingsley and Graves credit much of the church-starting fervor in Treasure Valley and Magic Valley Baptist associations to director of missions James Brandon.

"The Lord has used brother James to bring harmony on that issue," Graves explained. "We've got agreement on starting new churches."

But such was not always the case, Billingsley added. However, he is delighted that Brandon has been able to demonstrate the importance of starting new congregations. Baptists will be stronger there because of it, he said.

Likewise, he cites Graves and his wife, Joyce, as an example of what a difference one committed couple can make. Graves was a successful businessman in Lubbock, Texas, before he and his wife came to Idaho as missions volunteers in 1978.

Once in Idaho, they heard God's call to vocational ministry, returned to Texas to seminary and then came back to plant new churches in Idaho.

"There are churches all over our pioneer areas where one strong family could make the difference," Graves said. "We wanted to be one of those families."

So far the Graveses have helped start eight churches in Idaho. He has a goal of seeing one Southern Baptist church established for every 5,000 residents of the state.

It is an area, he believes, where "nine out of 10 people likely need Jesus."

Another mother to numerous new churches is First Southern Baptist Church in Gooding, Idaho.

One of the most recent new starts helped by the Gooding church is Valley Baptist Church in Hagerman.

Unlike most Baptist churches in Utah and Idaho, Valley Baptist began with a building before a congregation was formed.

Three Christian couples who live in the area had not been able to find an evangelical church in which they were happy. So when a former Mormon church building was put up for sale, they bought it.

Gene Mildrin, Dwight Osborne and Hayden Claiborne put up \$105,000 to buy the spacious building and some furnishings. They went to the pastor of the Gooding church and offered to give Baptists the building if they would provide a pastor.

That's where Ed Wolfe comes in. A retired director of associational missions from Alaska, Wolfe and his wife, Helen, agreed to come help the new congregation. They arrived July 8.

The church now has about 12 families and 30 members -- and some basic needs. "We need a volunteer to come teach some of our members to play the piano -- or to stay and play themselves," Mrs. Wolfe said.

**'Sloshing' fuels largest church
among Utah-Idaho's Baptists**

By Mark Wingfield

SALT LAKE CITY (BP)--Pastor Mike Gray believes the "sloshing concept" has helped grow Southeast Baptist Church in Salt Lake City into the largest congregation in the Utah-Idaho Southern Baptist Convention.

Like most churches in this two-state convention, Southeast has a turbulent past. In its 29-year history, the congregation nearly died once and later suffered a painful split.

Gray arrived 10 years ago -- just five months after the split -- in what he calls a "devastating time." The church was averaging 150 in attendance then -- still large in comparison to most Christian churches in the region.

But in 10 years' time, the church has mushroomed to an average attendance of 450 in worship.

Gray credits the congregation with this growth because of their commitment to what he calls "sloshing," based on the biblical promise that "out of you shall flow rivers of blessing."

The concept simply encourages all members to "slosh" the joy of their Christian faith -- to let it overflow on those they come in contact with. The miracle of this lifestyle is that "at the end of the day, you find your cup full instead of empty," Gray explained.

Further, it motivates Christians to realize they're not just takers but also givers, he said.

"The key is our people," the pastor confessed. "It's their church."

Member Joe Rouviere confirmed this from his experience.

"I was completely turned off on church when I came here," he said. "But these people loved me and made me want to get involved."

Beyond "sloshing," Southeast doesn't have any other gimmicks for growth, Gray said. "We build on basic, sound principles of how to do church."

Southeast is a young congregation in membership with a high percentage of children and youth. The worship is friendly and upbeat, including celebrative singing and sermons full of practical applications.

Less than half the members come from Southern Baptist backgrounds and about 15 percent come from Mormon backgrounds, Gray said.

However, the transfer growth Southeast has experienced with Baptists moving to Salt Lake City from the South helps provide an essential leadership base, he admitted. This is an advantage for a church in an urban area that a church in a rural area may not have.

The church built a new sanctuary three years ago and now is poised for further growth, Gray stated.

And he says he believes his family's decision to step into a difficult situation 10 years ago has been blessed by God. "If you don't get involved in great battles, you're not going to get great blessings."

For this reason, it is exciting to be a Christian so far from the Bible Belt, Gray said. "God has to work up here."

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**770-mile round trip is part
of lawyer's ministry training**

By James Watters

**Baptist Press
11/3/93**

POST FALLS, Idaho (BP)--Paul Kroeger, an Idaho lawyer who has answered the call for Christian service, used to catch a quick lunch with his wife and four kids following morning worship on Sunday.

After an intense 385-mile, three-state journey to the Portland, Ore., Northwest Campus of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, he checked in with the Cyril Nevilles, members of Portland's Lincoln Street Baptist Church, who gave him a room for the two nights each week he was in town.

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After two gruelling days of theological studies for two semesters, he began the second leg of his 770-mile round trip as soon as the last class ended about 5 p.m. on Tuesday. In good weather he could count on being back with his sleeping family in Post Falls shortly after midnight.

Wednesday morning it was back to the law practice, because there are clients to serve and mouths to feed.

Such a schedule might make a lesser person give up on religion, but Kroeger worked hard to keep up his commitments to Post Falls Baptist Church. Wednesday evenings were for the boys' Royal Ambassador group he led and on Sunday mornings he took his turn preaching in the children's church service. The only concession he made to his seminary studies was to drop out of choir, as the rehearsals were on Monday evenings when he was in Portland.

Kroeger, currently taking a semester off from seminary, was called in July as pastor of First Baptist Church in Pinehurst, Idaho, only an 84-mile round-trip trek.

But once things take shape in his new pastorate, Kroeger says he plans to return to the Northwest Campus and the long commute.

"God has called me to preach, so I feel that I need to get prepared," the ex-Marine says without complaint.

An extraordinary experience leading to his conversion a few years ago seems to drive this modern-day Paul. Born and raised in Minnesota, Kroeger says he had been active in Baptist churches since 1979. "I thought I was saved at that time but came to question my salvation from several years back.

"On Christmas Eve 1991, I was awakened with a full realization that I was not a Christian. I had a strong feeling of wanting to do whatever was necessary to change that condition."

The following Sunday morning Kroeger showed up at Post Falls Baptist Church. "I gave my heart to God that day. I also accepted God's call to serve him, and after counsel with my pastor, Bill Hohenstreet, and a course of Bible readings suggested by the pastor, seeking confirmation of my experiences out of the Word, I accepted God's call to preach."

Kroeger had learned about the Northwest Campus and planned to move his family to Portland. "But things did not work out with my law practice to allow that move last fall. Being an attorney with nine years in general practice does require some consideration."

A 1981 juris doctorate graduate of the University of Idaho, Kroeger knows the discipline of hard work and disciplined study. "I enjoyed law school but I enjoy theological studies more. This study is easier for me on the whole, but the writing responsibilities are much greater now. In one year at Golden Gate, I have done much more writing than I did the entire time at law school."

Kroeger admits if it were his choice, he would probably choose to become a chaplain in the Navy or Marine Corps. But he doesn't worry about what God has in the future, he says, and has a growing feeling God is calling him to be a church pastor.

"I have a burden for going back to Minnesota for ministry, but all these plans are in the Lord's hands," he says. "My task is to keep up with my studies so that I can graduate from the seminary in December of '95 or the spring of '96."

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(BP) photo to be available from the central office of Baptist Press in Nashville.

Dakota Baptists pray
for visiting speakers

By Harriett Hickey

Baptist Press
11/3/93

SOUIX FALLS, S.D. (BP)--A time of special prayer kindled a sense of revival during the 10th annual meeting of the Dakota Southern Baptist Fellowship, Oct. 21-23 at First Southern Baptist Church in Souix Falls, S.D.

Dakota messengers gathered around each denominational worker on hand to address the meeting to voice prayer for their respective ministries.

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As one Southern Baptist worker put it, "In the entire time of my service, I have never had a group pray especially for me."

Among those receiving special prayer were Roy Edgemon, discipleship and family ministry division director at the Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville; dramatist Freddie Neal of North Augusta, Ga.; and Dean Doster, regional coordinator for the Home Mission Board's planning section.

Messenger registration reached 128, representing the two-state fellowship's 8,700 Baptists in 89 churches and missions.

An overall budget of \$874,754 was approved, including a Cooperative Program budget of \$184,100, with the latter setting 15 percent, up 0.5 percent over last year, for Southern Baptist Convention national and international ministries.

Doster, commenting on the Cooperative Program, noted, "Baptist is the denomination. Cooperative Program is the method of doing missions that unites Baptist churches together. Baptist churches cooperating together make up the Southern Baptist Convention."

Messengers elected as president Durward "Dude" Garrett, pastor of Temple Baptist Church in Fargo, N.D., and re-elected Bill Martin, pastor of First Baptist Church in Wolsey, S.D., vice president. Carrie Jones of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Brookings, S.D., was elected recording secretary.

The 1994 meeting of the Dakota Southern Baptist Fellowship will be Oct. 20-21 at North Hill Baptist Church in Minot, N.D.

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**Siler named associate director
of Brotherhood's World Changers**

By Julie Rybolt Wilkerson

**Baptist Press
11/3/93**

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--George L. Siler, 35, has been named associate director of World Changers, the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission's coeducational missions option for youth, collegiates and senior adults.

Siler brings to the newly created position experience as a minister with youth and a background in recreation.

He received his master of religious education degree in 1983 from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and his bachelor's degree in recreation and park administration in 1980 from Memphis State University in Memphis, Tenn.

Siler has been minister with youth at First Baptist Church in Tuscaloosa, Ala., since 1988, and at Severns Valley Baptist Church in Elizabethtown, Ky., from 1983-88.

During the summers of 1980-82, he was camp director for Centrifuge, a program sponsored by the church recreation department of the Baptist Sunday School Board.

"We are excited about George Siler coming to the Brotherhood Commission," said Andy Morris, World Changers director. "He brings with him creativity and World Changers experience on several levels. A proven youth minister, George's presence will only enhance World Changers' place in youth ministry among Southern Baptists."

World Changers is a week-long missions experience for youth through senior adults. Participants repair houses for low-income families as they minister to the families and their communities.

Siler and wife, Betty, have two children, Weston, 7, and Jonathan, 4. Siler's work at the Brotherhood Commission began Nov. 1.

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**New BSSB department formed
in church growth group**

NASHVILLE (BP)--A new department in the Baptist Sunday School Board's church growth group, the church leadership department, will be formed effective Nov. 15, according to Gene Mims, the group's vice president.

The department will be directed by Joe Stacker, currently director of the growth leadership department in the church growth-Sunday school division. It will include assignments that were part of the church administration department prior to its merger with the Sunday school division in 1992, Mims said.

He said the church leadership department, along with the church music ministries department and the Genevox music group, will be part of a new division which has not yet been given a name.

Stacker said the church leadership department will continue to work closely with the church growth-Sunday school division on growth issues. Its new location in the BSSB organization will better enable coordination of "worship planning and an even stronger relationship to pastors," he said.

Stacker named a department management team including Bruce Grubbs, manager of the pastor development section; Brooks Faulkner, manager of the staff development section; Liz Gibson, manager of the resources development section; Saundra Shead, administrative assistant; and Cheryl Brown, project data coordinator.

Church growth-Sunday school division director Harry Piland affirmed the change and said work with the church leadership department will continue to be characterized by "mutual cooperation." He said the formation of the new department likely will result in a name change and some organizational changes for the division he leads.

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