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**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 *Martin King, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 898-7522*
- DALLAS *Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 333 N. Washington, Dallas, Texas 75246-1798, Telephone (214) 828-5232*
- 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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More than a nativity scene  
is church's gift to community

By Valerie Hancock

Baptist Press  
12/9/93

LEXINGTON, S.C. (BP)--Visitors expecting to see the typical live nativity scene at Lake Murray Baptist Church in Lexington, S.C., may be in for a surprise. Instead of Mary, Joseph, a shepherd or two and a doll neatly wrapped in a small blanket, the passersby will see and hear the life of Jesus from birth to resurrection.

For the second year in a row, members of the small country church have replaced the typical live nativity scene with a presentation of "This Man Called Jesus." A cast of more than 130 characters perform the musical drama for two weekends during the month of December.

Last year more than 70 people had life-changing experiences during the program. About 60 people dedicated their lives to Christ and eight made rededication after seeing the presentation.

Joan Bedenbaugh, who with her husband, Mike, directs "This Man Called Jesus," said people didn't expect to be affected by the presentation.

"Last year people came to see a nativity scene with live animals and neat costumes, but they saw the life of Jesus and how he died for the sins of the world. They may have come to be entertained, but left convicted and transformed," Bedenbaugh said.

The Bedenbaughs, laypeople from among the church body using their gifts and talents in the production, give God all the credit for its success.

"It has been unbelievable how fully God has blessed this production," she said. "After the professions of faith were made last year, I knew the whole thing could've never come together without his blessing."

An elaborate production in every sense of the word, "This Man Called Jesus" includes several scenes of Jesus' life including his birth and teachings as well as his crucifixion and the resurrection. Two of the scenes take place outdoors and the rest inside the church. Spectators move from scene to scene as a group and at the end are given opportunity to respond to what they have seen and heard during the presentation. Counselors are available to pray with people who have questions or want to make a commitment to Christ.

The church's pastor, George Koon, said it was so moving to him personally he felt an enormous amount of conviction.

"The impact of the drama is so real and powerful it is unbelievable," Koon said. "It gave me such an awareness of how God had raised the drama up as a mission for the church body. This is home missions in the finest sense."

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The church commissions each participant in the production and encourages each one to be in constant prayer during the drama for the people attending.

This year the church is expecting more than 5,000 people from throughout the area to attend the drama in Lexington, which is about 10 minutes from Columbia.

Bedenbaugh said much of the program involves music as well as visual acting. "I think being able to see and hear the story truly touches people."

Doris McGuffin was one who attended last year because seeing a live nativity scene seemed interesting. During the drama she accepted Jesus as Savior.

"My life has been totally changed since Jesus has been in my life," she said.

McGuffin said it is hard to put into words the feelings she experienced at the drama last year. The entire drama was very moving, she said, but once she saw the crucifixion scene she knew in her heart that it was more than a story -- it was a real event and Jesus was a real person.

"When I realized how much he loved me and cared for me, and that he was willing to die for me, the reality of it all was overwhelming," McGuffin added. "He is alive -- he's living in my heart and life."

McGuffin's husband, Jim, also accepted Christ at the drama. She said their lives are more fulfilled than she ever expected them to be and the void she had felt in her life is now filled.

The McGuffins now are members at Lake Murray and she is a counselor at this year's program.

"I was worried at first that I wouldn't know what to say to the people who had questions, but I have such a heart for the lost now," she said. "I've been there and I felt God wanted me to do this."

Julia Walker, a single parent from West Columbia, said she attended the production last year with her sons as a family outing for the holidays.

At the end of the program her sons Tray, 7, and Nicholas, 9, accepted Christ.

"It was definitely an answer to my prayers," Walker said. "The program was so lifelike -- it made my sons realize that they wanted Jesus in their lives."

Walker said it is hard to express how touched she was by the drama. "I've never seen anything like it."

Bedenbaugh said many people who attended last year had expressed how professional the drama was. She said God has blessed Lake Murray with dedicated people who have serving hearts.

"We started making plans for this year in September. Everyone was so excited to begin working on the sets, costumes and music they couldn't wait."

Koon agreed. "God has brought together such a body of spiritual giftedness to compliment each other spiritually, musically and technically."

The production is done solely by members of the church. In addition to the characters there are many people who participate behind the scenes as staging directors, prop managers, parking attendants and children's workers.

The drama was scheduled Dec. 10-12 and 17-19. Each evening the cast gives about six performances as each tour group moves through the grounds.

"This is our Christmas present to the community. What better gift than the story of Jesus?" Bedenbaugh said.

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Valerie Hancock is lifestyles editor of Mt. Vernon (Ill.) Register-News and a 1992 journalism graduate and BSU president at Eastern Illinois University in Charleston.

FMB sets appointment record,  
OKs spiritual nurture plan

By Robert O'Brien

Baptist Press  
12/9/93

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board trustees backed a plan to intensify spiritual nurture of missionaries and heard reports of a record year in appointment of mission personnel at their Dec. 6-8 meeting.

They also elected four veteran board administrators to new vice presidencies, honored missions researcher and strategist David Barrett and dug into their own pockets to contribute to missions.

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Moved by a report from Kenya about sacrificial giving by missionaries to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions, trustees responded to a challenge issued at their October meeting to give sacrificially themselves.

Fifty-five trustees pledged to contribute \$88,500 to the annual offering through their churches, according to trustee chairman John Jackson. The other 35 trustees had not reported pledges as of Dec. 8, he said.

A record annual total of 495 mission workers culminated with the appointment of 32 missionaries at the December meeting. That total -- 223 career and associate missionaries and 272 two-year personnel -- exceeds 1985's record of 429. The 1985 total included 304 career and associate missionaries, still a record in that category, and 125 two-year personnel.

The spiritual nurture of those who serve missions must not be neglected amidst the worldwide effort to deploy workers and implement strategies, FMB President Jerry Rankin told trustees in his report.

Rankin said the Foreign Mission Board will ask Henry Blackaby of Atlanta to help intensify its focus on prayer and spiritual renewal in a joint effort with two other Southern Baptist agencies -- the Home Mission Board and the Baptist Sunday School Board. Blackaby currently directs the Home Mission Board's office of prayer and spiritual awakening.

A joint agreement by the three agencies calls for Blackaby to broaden the scope of his ministry by developing a global response to prayer and spiritual awakening. While continuing his role at the Home Mission Board, he will serve as special consultant to the presidents of the Foreign Mission Board and Sunday School Board.

Blackaby, a 58-year-old Canadian, has conducted spiritual emphases all over the world and authored widely used discipleship materials, "Experiencing God" and "Fresh Encounter."

David Barrett, world-renowned in Christian missions as a researcher and strategist, received a plaque honoring his nine years under contract with the board as consultant to its World Evangelization Research Center.

Executive Vice President Don Kammerdiener cited Barrett as noted researcher, strategist, thinker, scholar and missionary spokesman who championed people in "World A" -- that portion of the globe with little or no access to the Christian message.

Barrett's work and influence brought the board into closer relationships with other evangelical Christians, which will continue, and spurred it into serious involvement in World A, Kammerdiener said. The board now has 497 missionaries -- nearly 13 percent of its total mission force -- targeting World A.

Barrett's FMB contract ends Dec. 31. He will operate the Global Evangelization Movement (GEM) research office in Richmond and serve a variety of Christian mission groups, including the Foreign Mission Board. The board will rent him space at a reduced rate in a separate office building it owns.

New missionaries appointed include the board's first deaf career missionary. Yvette Aarons, 34, a Jamaican-born Southern Baptist from Brooklyn, N.Y., will work among the deaf in Trinidad, where she has been a volunteer through the board's International Service Corps for three years.

In the same meeting, trustees named a father and son to different posts. They elected Bill Bullington as vice president for overseas services and appointed his son and daughter-in-law as career missionaries.

Kirk Bullington, a music missionary who grew up with his parents in West Africa, and his wife Karen, a physician from Arkadelphia, Ark., will serve in the Dominican Republic.

The elder Bullington is one of four former FMB regional vice presidents assigned to new posts after a reorganization that ended the board's Global Strategy Group of top administrators and the role of regional vice presidents.

Bill Bullington, former vice president for Africa, will work under Avery Willis, new senior vice president for overseas operations, as a liaison with 10 overseas area directors to meet field needs. Bullington, a missionary and administrator for 27 years, will oversee missions research, evangelism and church growth, human needs, overseas media services, the board's Jenkins Research Library, missionary health and family services and missionary information analysis.

The board also elected three others with more than 30 years' service each to work under Willis.

Sam James, former vice president for Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, was elected vice president for creative leadership development. He will lead in developing church growth strategies overseas, evaluating FMB training programs for overseas personnel and evaluating board involvement in leadership training of Christians overseas.

Bill Wakefield, former vice president for Asia and the Pacific, was named vice president for international outreach. In cooperation with others already involved in international ministries, he will develop strategies to relate and minister to international people moving to and from the United States.

Lewis Myers, former vice president for Cooperative Services International, will become vice president for World A strategies. He will develop strategies to keep board staff, missionaries and Southern Baptists focused on the challenge to reach World A.

In other action, trustees accepted an invitation from the Southern Baptist Pastors' Conference to hold a missionary appointment service during its meeting in Orlando, Fla., next June in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention. The trustees voted to meet in Orlando June 10-12 and conduct the appointment service during the June 12 evening session of the Pastors' Conference.

Rankin said the invitation from the Pastors' Conference was one of a number of signs he sees that Southern Baptists "are entering a new era of partnership in which the resources, programs and activities of Southern Baptists can be focused on our overseas task."

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A synopsis of FMB trustee actions is available on SBCNet News Room.

Gas station/pool hall added  
to church's Sunday school

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press  
12/9/93

JACKSONVILLE, Ark. (BP)--When the owner of a gas station and pool hall asked Second Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Ark., to pick up area children for Sunday school, the church offered to take Sunday school to the kids.

The middle-income congregation now holds two Sunday school classes outside the church building, attracting low-income children and parents they could not otherwise reach, said Dale Sykes, minister of education.

"It's allowed us to reach people that would never come to our church," Sykes said. "They aren't interested in our church, but they are interested in our God."

The project began in April, with members going to the Shamrock gas station and pool hall each Sunday and setting plywood and tablecloths over the pool tables for makeshift classrooms.

"We probably have the only Sunday school (site) that sells ketchup and condoms," Sykes said. "We have a juke box, and you come out smelling like cigarettes."

While the location may be unorthodox, Sykes said it is less intimidating to residents who might be uncomfortable at a traditional church service. The second site was added in September at the Hallelujah Trailer Court.

The classes have a combined average of 40 people each week, accounting for more than 10 percent of Second Baptist's Sunday school attendance, he said. Both are in low-income communities and reach mostly children 12 years old or younger, he said.

"Our church is not a rich church, but we don't know poor people," said Sykes, who came to the congregation in 1988. "This has allowed us the opportunity to do ministry and not just throw money at it."

Members have held several events for the two classes, including a fall festival and Thanksgiving dinner. In December, the church will sponsor birthday parties for Jesus with gifts for the children and a Christmas play.

"Their basic need, when you get right down to it, is exactly the same as ours. It's the need for God," he said. "We can meet some physical needs and then get to the basic need that we both have."

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The classes have opened other members' eyes to area needs and offered ministry opportunities to members who might not otherwise be involved, he added.

Plans have begun for a third class, Sykes said. "I hope we can do it all over town. I hope Second Baptist Church meets on every square block in the city."

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EDITORS' NOTE: In the ninth paragraph, the second sentence should be changed if used after Christmas to: "In December, the church sponsored birthday parties for Jesus with gifts for the children and a Christmas play."

Supreme Court refuses to review  
Scouts' rejection of agnostics

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press  
12/9/93

WASHINGTON (BP)--The Boy Scouts of America, for now, will be able to continue to exclude applicants who refuse to acknowledge a duty to God, as a result of a recent U.S. Supreme Court action.

The Supreme Court refused to grant a hearing to a case in which a boy, Mark Welsh, had sought membership in a Boy Scouts program but was rejected because he refused to pledge to "love God." His father, Elliot Welsh, also would not agree to Scouting's Declaration of Religious Principle. Both father and son are agnostics.

The Welshes sued the Boys Scouts on the grounds the rejection violated the Civil Rights Act. A district court in Illinois ruled in favor of the Boys Scouts, declaring the organization is not a place of public accommodation. The Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed the lower court's decision and also said the BSA is a private club exempt from the Civil Rights Act.

Welsh v. Boy Scouts of America was not the total victory the Boy Scouts would have liked. Not only did the Welshes ask the Supreme Court to accept the case, but the BSA did as well. The Boys Scouts' brief asked the court to review the case in order to affirm the organization's right to "limit membership to those who share (its) values and beliefs."

In a variety of courts, the Boy Scouts have been sued not only for excluding agnostics and atheists but for prohibiting girls from membership and homosexuals from leadership. The litigation in a number of locations has diverted funds and energy from the BSA and undermined its effectiveness, the brief said.

The court's action "preserves the principle of freedom of association," said Michael Whitehead, general counsel of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

The BSA "was founded to promote character and convictions, not just cookouts," Whitehead said. "People who share the values of the group are welcome to join the group, but people who disagree with these fundamentals do not have the right to join a group and try to change its fundamentals."

Mark Welsh was 7 years old when the case began in 1990. He refused to agree with the Tiger Cub Promise, which begins, "I promise to love God." Tiger Cubs is the Boy Scout program for boys 6 to 7 years old. Cub Scouts is for boys 8 to 10. Boy Scouts is open to boys 11 to 18.

The Boy Scout Oath, which has been unchanged since 1911, is: "On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law, to help people at all times, to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight."

The Supreme Court announced its rejection of the case Dec. 6.

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C. Anne Davis recognized  
by Christian social workers

Baptist Press  
12/9/93

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--C. Anne Davis, Woman's Missionary Union professor of church social work at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, has received the Award for Distinguished Christian Service in Social Work from the North American Association of Christians in Social Work.

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Davis, a faculty member at the Louisville, Ky., school since 1970, became the founding dean of the seminary's Carver School of Church Social Work in 1984. She served in that role until this year when she stepped down to devote more time to teaching.

Under Davis' leadership, the Carver School was accredited by the Council on Social Work Education, making Southern Seminary the nation's only seminary that offers a fully accredited master of social work degree.

A native of Baskerville, Va., Davis earned the B.A. degree from the University of Richmond, the M.A. degree from the Carver School of Missions (now part of Southern Seminary) and the M.S.S.W. and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Louisville.

The North American Association of Christians in Social Work is composed of 1,200 members in the United States and Canada who serve in both secular and church-related social work settings.

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Mark Coppenger to appear  
on 'Bertice Berry Show'

Baptist Press  
12/9/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--Mark Coppenger, vice president for convention relations for the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, was among guests in a recent taping of "The Bertice Berry Show" discussing the topic "Are You Going to Heaven or Hell?"

The program is set to air Dec. 16. "The Bertice Berry Show" is nationally syndicated and reaches about 140 markets, with program times varying for each station.

Among other guests on the show were Bishop J.P. Bellamy of Christ Temple Church of the Apostolic Church in Chicago; Orthodox Jewish Rabbi Yeickel Eckstein of Chicago; and Rob Sherman, national spokesman for American Atheists.

The program followed a flap sparked by a Birmingham, Ala., newspaper article over the Baptist state convention and Home Mission Board counts of "saved" and "lost" Alabamians.

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Tennessee Baptists debate CP,  
adult homes, committees' makeup By Wm. Fletcher Allen

Baptist Press  
12/9/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--When the Tennessee Baptist Convention met at Two Rivers Church Nov. 16-17, messenger registration was below 1,500 for the first time since 1983.

The 1,457 registered messengers elected Ray Newcomb, pastor of First Baptist Church in Millington, as president; approved an amended \$27.5 million Cooperative Program budget and acted on recommendations from a special study committee on election processes for convention committees. Convention messengers approved resolutions affirming the Cooperative Program and opposing a state lottery. An effort to amend the CP resolution by curtailing any cooperation with other groups such as the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship was hotly debated before it was defeated.

Three of the special committee's proposals were referred to the convention's constitution and bylaws committee and two were deleted. A total of \$30,000 was added to the Tennessee Baptist Adult Homes allocation by messenger action, redistributed within the \$27.5 million.

The \$30,000 addition was proposed by Roy Graves, pastor of First Baptist Church in McKenzie and outgoing president of the TBAH board's executive committee. The \$30,000 had been requested by TBAH to help operate homes for developmentally disabled adults in Lebanon and Caryville. Deeds to the debt-free homes had been turned over to TBAH this year.

According to Graves, the convention in its 1988 meeting had voted to fund such homes if they were given debt-free to the institution.

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After lengthy and impassioned debate, messengers voted by a close vote to reappropriate \$30,000 from within the 1993-94 budget. The budget committee did so between Tuesday sessions, taking a percentage from TBC budget entities, adding the \$30,000 to TBAH.

A motion by Howard Olive, pastor of Monte Vista Church in Maryville, later during the convention asked for an executive board study of the 1988 TBC action on TBAH homes. There was no discussion and it passed unanimously.

The major portion of convention discussion centered on the proposed 1993-94 Cooperative Program budget and the report of the special study committee. The \$27,580,533 proposal from the executive board was discussed at length during the two-day meeting. The Southern Baptist Convention portion of the CP budget remains at 37.5 percent with 62.5 percent for the TBC. The expanded annuity program for Tennessee Baptist ministerial staff is continued as a preferred item, allocated before the SBC-TBC percentages.

The stage apparently had been set for a much larger attendance because of anticipation of the special study committee report. The spacious facilities of Two Rivers Church, with more than ample parking, also seemed an attraction to potential messengers.

Fred Steelman, special study committee chairman and pastor of Red Bank Baptist Church in Chattanooga, read the six recommendations and stressed the committee's diligence and thorough approach to the study.

"We have labored long and had input from eight regional meetings," he said. In seconding the committee's motion, Lloyd Bardowell, pastor of First Baptist Church, Rivergate, in Hendersonville, and committee member, said, "Trust is needed, and if we adopt this report, I see wonderful times ahead."

James Robertson, pastor of Sharon Baptist Church in Knoxville, moved to amend the committee report, to refer most of it to the committee on constitution and bylaws, and to strike two recommendations.

His amendment was passed by ballot vote, 413-328.

The main item stricken from consideration was a recommendation to allow the annually elected convention president and two vice presidents to be voting members of the committees on committees and boards.

The referrals included a recommendation that members of the committees on committees and boards "must be off a four-year period before being eligible to serve on either of these committees" and members of the same two committees "must be off one year before serving on any other committee or board. Recommendation 2, referred also, would recommend "that the interim period between service on the executive board be increased from one to three years." The third referred recommendation would rule that "when a member of any committee or board completes a term of service he/she must be off for one year before serving on any other board or committee."

Newcomb won the presidency over two other pastors, Raymond Boston of First Baptist Church in Dyersburg and Hoyt Wilson of First Baptist Church in Lexington. There were no laypersons nominated.

Newcomb defeated Boston in a runoff, 416-311. In other elections, Frank Samuels, pastor of Southland Baptist Church in Memphis, was chosen first vice president, and Doug Baker, pastor of Parran's Chapel Baptist Church in Bolivar, second vice president.

The 1994 meeting will be Nov. 15-16 at Bellevue Baptist Church in suburban Memphis.

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