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Student ministry program reports several gains in 1993

By Chip Alford

Baptist Press
12/21/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--(BP) The Southern Baptist student ministry program reported several gains in fiscal year 1993, including an increase in the total number of students reached, involved in missions and preparing for church vocations.

According to the 1993 Student Ministry Information Report, compiled by the Baptist Sunday School Board's national student ministry, 193,094 students were reached by Southern Baptist campus ministries in 1993, up from last year's total of 191,919. The statistic includes all students who participated in a student-ministry related program or activity during the year.

Involvement in missions also was up, from 26,698 students in 1992 to 27,156 in 1993. This number includes semester and summer missionaries sponsored by state conventions, the Home Mission Board and local Baptist Student Unions, as well as those involved in partnership projects and other mission programs.

Total expenditures for student missions -- which includes contributions to state BSU mission funds, campus-sponsored mission trips and state convention budgets for student missions programs -- was up, from \$2,474,669 in 1992 to \$2,597,674 in 1993.

The report also showed 18,300 students in Southern Baptist student ministry programs are preparing for church-related vocations, up almost 300 students from last year's total.

"We were strongly up in several categories that speak to the future well-being of Southern Baptists," Charles Johnson, director of national student ministry, said. "God is calling students out (for ministry) in unprecedented numbers."

While much of the 1993 report offered good news, decreases were reported in two important categories -- baptisms and conversions. Referencing Uniform Church Letter reports, the report showed the number of college students baptized in Southern Baptist churches decreased from 11,182 in 1992 to 10,411 in 1993. Student conversions reported through student ministry programs fell from 7,372 in 1992 to 6,396 in 1993.

Johnson predicted those numbers would increase in 1994, citing a joint emphasis on student evangelism begun last year by his department and the Home Mission Board. Those efforts already appear to be paying off, he said, with 13,801 students involved in witness training in 1993, up more than 1,500 from last year's total of 12,222. The number of students involved in discipleship training also increased from 16,325 in 1992 to 16,701 in 1993.

"I believe God is already at work on college campuses across America," Johnson said. "What we are trying to do is just align ourselves with what He is already doing."

In other student ministry program categories, the 1993 report showed:

- An increase in the number of campuses with student ministry programs from 954 in 1992 to 1,033 in 1993;
- A decrease in the number of international students involved in student ministry programs from 13,383 in 1992 to 9,901 in 1993;
- An increase in the number of blacks and ethnics involved in student ministry programs, from 16,770 in 1992 to 19,676 in 1993;
- A decrease in the number of churches, Sunday schools or missions students helped start from 198 in 1992 to 156 in 1993;
- An increase in the number of established churches, Sunday Schools or missions students helped strengthen from 3,929 in 1992 to 4088 in 1993;
- An increase in the number of students involved in Bible study groups from 40,076 in 1992 to 40,697 in 1993.
- A decrease in gifts to world hunger from \$88,751 in 1992 to \$81,412 in 1993.

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Mississippi Baptists rally against
lesbian camp in community

By John Zipperer

Baptist Press
12/21/93

CHICAGO (BP)--Baptists in rural Ovett, Miss., are unhappy with media portrayals of them. Local and national newspapers, magazines, and even the "Oprah Winfrey" television program have described them as narrow-minded haters trying to drive two lesbians from their community. The Ovett Baptists are crying foul and are seeking to get their story heard.

The events that brought Ovett national attention started in July 1993 when Brenda and Wanda Henson bought 120 acres in Ovett and began clearing the land. Townspeople became alarmed when they saw the Oct. 11 issue of the Grapevine, the Henson's newsletter, in which the women announced plans for Camp Sister Spirit, which they described as "being created from Lesbian Vision."

"We're talking about a very rural, very church-and-family oriented type of community," says John S. Allen, pastor of First Baptist Church in nearby Richton and a leader of local opposition to the retreat. "We're talking about an activist group coming in here to change this community."

Brenda Henson has written that Sister Spirit is a charitable organization committed to addressing social issues, ranging from hunger to "homophobia, ableism, fat oppression" and class conflict.

Paul Walley, a member of Allen's church active in the opposition to Sister Spirit, says the women are misguided. "They claim they're going to feed the hungry and take care of homeless people. They're out at a very rural setting; there are no homeless (or) hungry people out there.

"And they say they want to help adult education," Walley continues. "Well, eight miles down the road, we have free adult literacy training, and we have more teachers volunteered than we have people signed up to take the course. They say they are offering these services, but they are certainly about as far removed from where these services are needed as you can get. Ovett is a community of about 200 people. There is no population base there."

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Sister Spirit's founders claim they are being harassed because the town is intolerant of their homosexuality. Media interest in their case blossomed when a dead dog was found draped over their mailbox in early November, and the Hensons say they have received threatening phone calls.

When the producers of the "Oprah Winfrey" show heard about the controversy, they invited the Hensons and their critics to Chicago in mid-December to tape an episode of her program. The Hensons faced off with Allen, Walley, and another First Baptist Church member, James Hendry, who lives near Camp Sister Spirit.

The program, which will air in syndication Dec. 21, began with a description of the Hensons as two privacy-seeking lesbians persecuted by conservative Christians. Though the hour-long exchange became heated at times -- including Wanda Henson's claim that a Christian "slavemaster" attitude oppresses lesbians -- Allen feels his side was able to make its case.

"I felt like we were able to establish our positions and hold our ground," Allen says. "I felt like (Sister Spirit) exposed themselves as being actively involved in the implementation of the gay agenda."

Walley agrees. "I think the taping was excellent because the Hensons exposed or brought out their positions to a greater degree than has ever been done."

Allen explained to host Oprah Winfrey that he opposes the women's activities because homosexuality is condemned by the Bible, and he therefore fears for the souls of vulnerable Ovett residents and of the lesbians in the camp.

The Bible-based argument was met with skepticism from the studio audience, which included gay and lesbian activists as well as a busload of Ovett residents. Allen feels the audience was stacked against him, with critics of Sister Spirit shunned by Winfrey. "We had Chicago-area Christians and pastors there who constantly sought an opportunity to speak. They were seated ... outside of the span of the camera, and they were never recognized. They were absolutely shut out of the debate."

Walley takes in stride the many anti-Christian comments made on the show. "If I am characterized by the fact that my opposition to them stems from my biblical morality, then I'm thrilled. I'm the fourth generation of my family to reside here. This camp is about eight or ten miles north of us. There is a biblical moral standard in our community. We don't all reach it, but these people -- the whole focus of their organization is opposed to that."

"The fact is," says Allen, "they are trying to change our community. Their plans for our community are radical." He notes that one of the Hensons told Oprah Winfrey that her homosexuality was the central part of her life. "We don't want educators -- heterosexual or homosexual -- for whom the focus of their lives is their sexual activity. Regardless of your orientation, that is a life with a perverted focus and not a healthy one for the people you will be working with.

"We intend to keep using the opportunities that are presented to us to try to give our perception of what's going on," Allen says. "And if there are avenues of legal redress, we are going to investigate, but we don't know what can be done."

For now, things remain uneasy in Ovett. Sister Spirit has asked U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno to investigate harassment of the camp's owners. Allen says anonymous threatening phone calls have been received by anti-camp activists, too, and he says he would welcome an investigation.

The harassment claims "distract from the real issue, and the real issue is them coming into this community," he says. "Their plans for this community are clearly revealed on ("Oprah") to be very activist: to impact this community in a way that is diametrically opposed to what this community has always been."

Russian receives doctorate
from Southwestern Seminary

By Susan Simko

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--When communism released its grip on Russia's churches, believers there were finally allowed to tell their neighbors about Jesus Christ. Russian pastors could plan evangelistic campaigns and new congregations could be started.

But there was a problem. After more than 70 years of isolation, most Russian Christians didn't know how to get started.

That crisis led Sergei Nicolaev, senior pastor of the Temple of the Gospel Church in St. Petersburg, to pursue a doctor of ministry degree at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he researched how the first-century church spread the gospel. Nicolaev graduated in Dec. 17 as the first Russian Baptist to earn a doctorate from the seminary.

"What I was studying in the different spheres of the pastoral ministry -- anthropology, church growth, missions -- it gave me valuable knowledge on how to do the things much easier and more effectively," Nicolaev said. "Here is the New Testament model, which you just have to understand, realize and just put into the ground and it works."

Nicolaev planted the model in Russian soil. Every three months during his studies at Southwestern, he flew home to lead seminars for Russian church leaders, teaching them the New Testament evangelism tactics he was learning at Southwestern.

"The goal was to train this group of people to see new possibilities in the light of the New Testament similarities," Nicolaev said. "We tried to crystalize our own Russian model for evangelization using biblical resources and the experience of Western Christianity, especially Southern Baptists."

Then the Russian leaders fanned out through their cities to apply the new tactics. The result: 30 new Russian churches in one year.

"Those churches are not just started, they are dynamically growing, and it is because we just tried to open up the pastors and leaders to some very basics of the New Testament church -- the involvement of laypeople in ministry, education and discipleship,"

Nicolaev said. "When people realize it, they are crazy for the Lord."

Nicolaev found more than useful theories at Southwestern. He found faculty members who nurtured him, he said. He counts Earl Martin, former professor of missions and world religions, as one of his closest friends and encouragers.

Associate Dean Jimmie Nelson also helped Nicolaev. During one class, Nelson lectured about family priority in the midst of ministry. Nicolaev recognized himself and other Russian pastors in Nelson's words.

"In Russia during all those years, ministry for the ministers was the No. 1 priority," Nicolaev said. "We never knew what tomorrow held. Will I be arrested and sent to Siberia or will a coup take over the government? The ministry took 98 percent of ourselves."

Neglected family relationships crumbled, and Russian pastors were too afraid to acknowledge it, Nicolaev said. But Nelson's lecture forced Nicolaev to face the problem in his own family, and he began to make his four sons a priority.

"I found the only way to win the boys was to leave the pastoral robes at the church. If they don't see me as their friend, they won't see me as their minister," he said.

He challenged his sons to basketball games at Southwestern's Recreation/Aerobics Center, dunked them in the swimming pool and studied the Bible with them. Now, for the first time, Nicolaev can call his sons "good friends," he said.

Then, Nicolaev went home to Russia and confronted pastors in his seminar with the problem and the solution, just like he did with other concepts he learned at Southwestern.

"I'm very glad that Southwestern Seminary and Southern Baptists allowed the Russian Baptists to have theological training -- to have a doctorate," Nicolaev said. "I think this is what church is about, to help each other."

Watching from the balcony of Travis Avenue Baptist Church during commencement was Nicolaev's mother, Tamara Nicolaev, who flew from St. Petersburg to attend graduation.

Nicolaev said his mother, grandmother and about 100 other women have taken part in a secret prayer meeting each Friday since 1951.

"They prayed for their children, for the church and for a return to freedom," he said.

Nicolaev plans to return to the Temple of the Gospel Church where he is building a theological graduate institution, a Bible school and college for laity. About 300 people are already enrolled.

Nicolaev said a revival is beginning to occur in Russia along with the new freedoms.

"When I started the Temple of the Gospel Church three years ago, we had 29 people," he said. "Now we have 1,700."

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BP photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Southwestern Seminary.

Jury rules in favor of Baptists
in lawsuit from 1990 explosion By Ferrell Foster

Baptist Press
12/21/93

JOLIET, Ill. (BP)--A Will County jury returned a verdict in favor of Illinois Baptist State Association Dec. 14 in a lawsuit that arose out of a 1990 explosion at the IBSA disaster relief unit set up in tornado-damaged Crest Hill.

Scott Sharp, a propane company employee who was refilling the relief unit's tank and was burned in the explosion, alleged in his suit against IBSA that agents of the association were guilty of "willfull and wanton misconduct."

The jury's decision, in effect, indicated Sharp was more responsible for the explosion than were Baptist volunteers working at the site. Therefore, Sharp was awarded no compensation for damages.

During the trial, Sharp's attorney introduced evidence indicating the plaintiff suffered second degree burns over 35 percent of his body as a result of the explosion. He was hospitalized about 30 days and continued treatment at home and out-patient therapy for about a year.

Although Sharp did not seek a specific amount of damages in his suit, his attorney, Thomas Naughton, suggested to the jury a figure of \$943,347. That figure included specific amounts of \$149,700 in medical expenses and \$42,647 in lost wages. It included "subjective" amounts of \$350,000 for "disability and dismemberment" and \$400,000 for "pain and suffering."

Sharp's attorney, in his closing arguments, made three basic allegations. First, that Baptist volunteers demonstrated "utter indifference" to Sharp's safety by not telling him about stoves that were operating near the propane tank and by not turning off the stoves. Second, that the stoves were at least partially concealed inside a tent and that wind barriers on the stoves concealed the flame. Third, that a pressure relief valve on the tank released propane vapor prematurely, thus fueling the explosion.

IBSA's attorney, Pete Panno, alleged in his closing arguments that Sharp overfilled the propane tank and thus "created the condition" that started the fire. Sharp did not know if the tank was full or empty when he began filling it, Panno said. Sharp also had a Baptist volunteer watching a gauge on another tank that was not part of the propane system. Sharp "showed a conscious disregard for his own safety," Panno stated.

Panno said Sharp "didn't even follow the first basic safety features" his job required, and that was to make sure possible ignition sources were extinguished.

The trial began with jury selection on Dec. 6 and lasted six days. The six woman, six man jury took about two hours to reach its verdict.

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Panno's law firm, Hinshaw and Culbertson, was retained by Preferred Risk Insurance Co., which provided IBSA's liability insurance at the time of the Aug. 30, 1990 accident.

Sharp's attorney has 30 days in which to file a post-trial motion for appeal.

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Giving to foreign missions one penny,
one dollar at a time becomes a habit

Baptist Press
12/21/93

By Orville Scott

DALLAS (BP)--In the depths of the Great Depression, Nobie McGill, who was president of Woman's Missionary Union at First Baptist Church, Lewisville, Texas set a goal to give a dollar for foreign missions through the Lottie Moon Christmas offering.

She was raising two children and didn't have money for stamps to mail letters. But, somehow, throughout the year, she put back a penny at a time until, by Christmas, she had saved 99 cents.

"It was the happiest money I ever gave to anything," recalls McGill, 88, a retired Texas WMU employee who lives at Buckner Baptist Inn, Dallas.

History repeated itself in 1983 when McGill was so moved by a message by Minette Drumwright, director of International Prayer Strategy, Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, that she thought, "Oh I wish I could give \$1,000 in a year for the Lottie Moon Offering."

She prayed, "Lord, let me give it," and began to put her pennies, quarters and dollars together until by offering time she had \$1,000 for foreign missions, over and above her tithe.

For several years she was able to give \$1,000 a year. Then she progressed to give \$2,000, then \$3,000, then \$4,000 and finally \$5,000 for foreign missions in a single year.

"I can't do many things," said McGill. "I can't preach or sing, but I can get money together, and the Lord has really blessed me. "I could have lived better, but I got joy out of giving."

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Duduit to lead public relations
program at Southern Seminary

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12/21/93

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Michael Duduit has been named director of public relations at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

In the newly-created post, Duduit will supervise the seminary's news and publications programs. He previously served Southern Seminary as director of communications from 1984-87. While a student in the 1970s, he worked as news director. He also currently serves as adjunct professor of Christian preaching.

Since 1987, Duduit has been director of development and church relations at Samford University in Birmingham, Ala. This summer, he moved to Louisville to assume major responsibilities as executive director of the American Academy of Ministry, an interdenominational professional association for ministers, and as editor of Preaching magazine, an interdenominational publication for ministers. He will continue to serve in those roles in addition to his new responsibilities with the seminary.

A graduate of Stetson University and Southern Seminary, Duduit earned the Ph.D. from Florida State University. He is immediate past president of the Baptist Public Relations Association, and currently serves that national organization as Awards Chairman.

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Duduit is editor of the "Handbook of Contemporary Preaching," recently published by Broadman & Holman, and serves as editor of the "Abingdon Preaching Annual," a resource book for ministers.

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Ministers must develop habits
for leadership, seminarians hear By Bob Murdaugh

Baptist Press
12/21/93

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's fall graduates were reminded during commencement ceremonies Dec. 17 of seven habits they must cultivate to be effective leaders into the third millennium.

Reginald M. McDonough, executive director of the Baptist General Association of Virginia, paraphrased the book "7 Habits of Highly Effective People" in challenging the 275 graduates to nurture ministerial vision, inner balance, love for Christ's church, strategic direction, priestly intervention, networking, and renewal of mind and heart. He said these seven elements of effectiveness assume a foundation of seminary education.

In a church setting, shared vision has lasting power, McDonough said, adding that a leader with a "lone ranger" view of vision is under pressure to live up to others' expectations.

"They not only feel responsible for their own actions, but for the behavior of all those they seek to lead," McDonough said. "All too often, I find myself picking up the pieces of lone rangers who have crashed and burned.

"I can say to you without fear of contradiction that effective ministry cannot be achieved without inner balance based on a growing relationship to Christ," he said. "Unfortunately, it is too easy to become a professional religionist and lose our spiritual sensitivity."

McDonough said the two most common complaints he hears from laypersons about their ministers are that they don't know how to work with people and they have quit studying and are no longer feeding church members.

The conflict between churches and their ministers has reached staggering levels, McDonough said.

"I feel that some of the problem stems from a lost sense of awe about Christ's church," he said. "Could it be that we are perceiving the church to be just a building, a club, or a gathering of a certain social group? As you become leaders of the churches, I implore you to love Christ's Church and to see her as the primary focus of your ministry."

While time and money become increasingly scarce, ministers must learn to think and act strategically, McDonough said.

"Business as usual will not get it done," he said. "The issue is how to do the right thing at the right time at the right cost to achieve maximum results."

In the world of technological change "that is racing like a runaway train," God has given ministers the privilege of teaching love, hope and peace, McDonough said. "Who else but the people of God can offer a cup of water to a world of searching, hurting people?"

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Agee stresses need
for biblical integrity

Baptist Press
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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Southern Baptists must renew their collective commitment to be "a people of biblical integrity" if they are to make an impact on the world, a Baptist university president told December graduates at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

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Bob R. Agee, president of Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee, said, "It is time to stop arguing about how to describe the Bible and make a fresh commitment of ourselves to understand it properly and apply it diligently to every area and every facet of our lives." Agee addressed the 172nd commencement at the Louisville, Ky., seminary. A total of 170 graduates received degrees at the Dec. 17 service.

Agee noted that problems such as "greed, materialism, self centeredness and an irresponsible treatment of the environment" pose tremendous challenges for future Christian leaders.

"If there is not a spiritual awakening in this land, a fresh willingness to allow the laws of God to become a significant force in shaping the (country's) standards of ethics, morality and decency ..., this nation as we know it will not last past our grandchildren's lifetime," said Agee.

Agee stressed to members of the graduating class that their task is to "build foundations for reconstruction" of a better society and more effective churches.

"As the mantle of leadership is passed from my generation to yours, it is my prayer that you will feel deeply the call of God to make a difference in the church and in your world," emphasized Agee.

This graduating class was the first at Southern to receive diplomas from seminary President R. Albert Mohler Jr., who assumed office Aug. 1. At Mohler's invitation, the new president's predecessor, Roy L. Honeycutt, stood by Mohler on the platform and offered a congratulatory handshake to each graduate. Honeycutt will become seminary chancellor Jan. 1.

In a separate ceremony, 23 people received diplomas or certificates from Southern's Boyce Bible School. Boyce, founded in 1974, is a division of Southern Seminary that provides ministerial training for people who do not have college degrees.

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NOBTS December
graduation

By Debbie Moore

Baptist Press
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NEW ORLEANS (BP)--"The basic question that faces graduates on an occasion like this is 'What next?'" said Landrum P. Leavell II, seminary president, to 111 candidates for graduation during the 76th annual commencement exercises at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Posing three questions, Leavell said the answers to those questions could determine the graduates' future usefulness in ministry.

"Is mine a religion of convenience?" was the first question Leavell asked.

"Have you already determined how far you'll go and no farther? Have you already told God what you will do and what you won't do, where you won't go, where you don't want to serve?"

"I can tell you on the basis of personal experience that's not a good thing to do," said Leavell, who has spent 26 years ministering in the one area he told God he did not want to be sent to after graduation from seminary.

"If those thoughts have crossed your mind, then yours is a religion of convenience. Any time you say 'I'm not going to do that,' you have stepped out of the will of God because God might want you to do exactly what you have listed as one of your don'ts."

"There are other lines we draw for ourselves, and I want to tell you, it won't work," he said.

"If you're thinking in terms of a 40-hour week, with a large salary and enviable perks, and the ability to hire a huge church staff to do all the work, then you're not ready to graduate from here."

"Is mine a religion or a relationship?" was the second question Leavell asked.

"That may be the most important question you'll ever face. ... If your relationship with God is not personal, then all you have is a religion and that's what Jesus condemned the most roundly."

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"Are you closer to the Lord now than before you began seminary?" he asked. "If not, why not? ... And if you aren't growing closer to the Lord now, when do you think you're going to start?"

"You might be able to say without fear, without backing down, 'I'm a Baptist!'

"So what!" he said. "Show me someone who got to heaven by claiming to be a Baptist. There's only one way: through a close, personal relationship with Christ."

"Am I taking responsibility for my choices?" was the third question Leavell posed.

"Are you always pointing in someone else's direction, blaming someone else? Take responsibility for what you've done," he said.

"If you are doing what's right in the sight of God, you have nothing to fear. ... You may be entirely out of your comfort zone, but if you're in the will of God, all else pales into insignificance."

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Golden Gate Seminary December
graduation represents 11 states

Baptist Press
12/21/93

MILL VALLEY, Calif. (BP)--The call of God is personal for everyone who knows Jesus Christ, Southern Baptists' international mission leader told graduates of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary.

"The call of God is personal whenever you become aware that there are people around you who don't know Jesus Christ," said Jerry Rankin, president of the Foreign Mission Board, during Dec. 17 commencement ceremonies at the seminary's Mill Valley, Calif., campus. "Lift up Jesus in a bold, positive witness."

The 62 graduates represented 11 states and seven foreign countries. Among those receiving degrees were seven students from the first graduating class of the seminary's deaf Ethnic Leadership Development center. Golden Gate Seminary is one of six Southern Baptist Convention seminaries and the only SBC agency in the western United States.

Besides being personal, "the call of God is purposeful -- to make Jesus Christ known to others," Rankin said. "When God called me to Himself it became my call to make Him known."

The former missionary to Indonesia told the graduates that response to God's call is not optional.

"When you make excuses or place restrictions on the call of God you invoke the anger of God, not his pleasure," said Rankin, citing Exodus 4:14. "The only response to God's call is submission and surrender.

"He doesn't call us to a place but to himself," he concluded. "When you respond to that call it doesn't matter where you go as long as you go with his leadership ... when God goes with you it is enough."

Delivering his charge to the graduates, seminary president William O. Crews encouraged the graduates to keep the focus of their ministries on pleasing God: "You're going to want to please a lot of people in your life -- family, peers, the people you serve. But please the Lord and everything else will fall into its proper place. Learn that lesson early."

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