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January 13, 1994

94-7

- BELGIUM -- Iranian man sentenced to death for converting to Christianity.
- ALABAMA -- Put God's mission ahead of human strategies, Rankin urges Baptists.
- ALABAMA -- HMB's Lewis challenges WMU to re-double efforts.
- ALABAMA -- WMU executive board renames adult women's organizations.
- HONG KONG -- Mongolian court overturns part of law limiting Christians.
- HOUSTON -- Love, Bible, innovation advocated at conference; photo.
- HOUSTON -- Pastors of 'innovative' churches seek to soften 'old wine skin;' photo.
- HOUSTON -- Pastor cites 10 reasons why churches plateau.
- KENTUCKY -- Southern Seminary will teach D.Min. classes in Korean.

Iran's persecuted Christians
no longer keeping silent

Baptist Press
1/13/94

BRUSSELS, Belgium (BP)--An Iranian man has been sentenced to death for becoming a Christian.

Mehdi Dibaj, 59, was scheduled to be executed Jan. 12 -- or at any time after that date -- for "apostasy," or turning from Islam, by an Islamic court in the northeastern city of Sari, Iran.

Dibaj has been in a prison in Sari since 1983. He has been repeatedly tortured, and he spent two of those years in solitary confinement in an unlighted 3-by-3-foot cell.

In a pivotal trial Dec. 3 Dibaj was given a chance to renounce his Christian faith or face death. But he refused and answered instead with a strong affirmation of his faith in Christ.

Three times since that trial the original death sentence has been referred to Iran's Supreme Court after Dibaj wrote letters of protest. Each time the court has affirmed the original sentence. Dibaj refused to write a fourth appeal.

"Since he is not ready to write a protesting letter to the Supreme Court, his execution is most probable," a Christian leader inside Iran wrote.

Dibaj said in a published statement that if his case were referred to the higher court for a fourth time, the judgment would remain the same and it would only stretch out his prison sentence. He accepts the court verdict, he said, "with joy and peace."

According to his printed statements and to those who know him, Dibaj is prepared to die.

"When they gave me the verdict, my heart was filled with joy because I see my name goes to be listed among the names of the people who were martyred for their faith in Jesus Christ," he wrote. "This is for the test of our faith to show how far we are ready to follow Him."

In a brief part of the statement intended as his will, Dibaj asked the court to "expedite the process of carrying out the sentence." He also asked for communion to be served by two church leaders, asked that a cross remain around his neck and that his body be given to a medical school.

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"I donate my belongings to the church and give my children in to the hands of God who is able to keep them safe so that they grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ," he wrote.

Christian workers familiar with the case have appealed for world prayer support. They also are seeking to focus world attention on increased abuses of religious liberty in Iran.

Dibaj is described as an evangelist not affiliated with any one group. But he has been most visibly supported by the Assemblies of God in Iran, an indigenous group with fraternal ties to the Assemblies of God in other parts of the world.

The sentence comes amid reports of increased persecution and violence by the government against evangelical Christians inside Iran.

Government leaders publicly insist Iran has freedom of religion and no one suffers for his beliefs. But church leaders in Iran have begun to document and publicize the widespread abuse they suffer, hoping international attention will help them. They have sent statements from Dibaj and a translation of his court record to churches outside Iran, for example. The church leaders have appealed to the United Nations and others for help.

According to the released documents, Dibaj's case file number is 1690/69 K7. The verdict prescribing the death sentence is number 1766/72, issued by Branch Number 7 of the Punitive Court of Sari.

Dibaj was declared innocent of the charge of cursing the prophet Mohammed. But in finding him guilty of apostasy, the court reasoned that Dibaj was born Muslim because his mother and father were Muslim. At age 12 Dibaj observed some of Islam's religious duties, the court record noted, but from age 12 to 19 "he did not have faith in any religion, but was non-religious." At age 19, however, he chose "the religion of Christianity."

The court cited three passages from Islamic law as support for its ruling. One states that a person who is "born a Muslim" but chooses a non-Islamic religion or discards Islam "should be given the opportunity to repent or be killed."

A 1993 change in Iranian law makes the death penalty automatic for anyone accused of apostasy -- that is, converting to any non-Muslim religion.

But Dibaj criticized the way the Islamic court reached its final decision. The court used five different legal traditions "each of which contradicts the other," he wrote, instead of applying the law.

Assemblies of God leaders in Iran recently voted to speak out against the persecution they have suffered, reaching the conclusion their policy of "let us keep silent and see what will happen next" is wrong.

"We have nothing else to lose. We have been tolerant all these years and kept silent. Nothing has changed," one leader wrote. "Our Iranian Muslims are quite aggressive. Maybe we have to be aggressive too."

Iranian believers react sharply to claims by government leaders that churches are free. On Oct. 17, they point out, the country's parliament passed a law requiring the religious affiliation of all Iranians to be marked on government identity cards required for any business transaction. Last May the government ordered non-Muslim shopkeepers to post signs on their shops announcing their religious affiliations.

In June the government ordered all Christian churches to sign statements declaring they would not evangelize Muslims. Not all the churches cooperated.

In Kermanshah members of an Assyrian Pentecostal group have been beaten and hanged upside down for many hours at a time. One member's arm was broken. Meetings have been stopped and the pastor forbidden to leave the country.

In October the government closed an Assembly of God church in Gorgan, a city in northeastern Iran. Five Muslim converts who are church members were beaten for hours and forced to deny their faith in Christ. They also were forced to be videotaped "confessing" they were deceived by Christians to convert.

In Mashad, Mohammed Sepehr, also a Muslim convert who is pastor of a church, has been taken into custody by police weekly for questioning and repeatedly beaten. Sepehr replaced Hosein Soodmand, an evangelical pastor who was hanged in December 1990. Other members of the church also have been questioned and beaten.

Last June police stormed an Assembly of God congregation worshipping in a garden in the city of Isfahan. Police scaled the walls of the garden, surrounded the group and demanded to see the identity cards of all worshipers. The group's pastor was questioned and pressured to sign a statement affirming he would not allow Muslims to enter his church. He refused, explaining it wouldn't do for an Iranian to turn away a visitor.

Two days later Islamic guards on motorcycles surrounded the church and kept out anyone with a Muslim background. Fifteen Muslim converts who had attended the church have not been allowed to worship since then. In Isfahan and Shiraz, Muslim converts of Anglican congregations also have been interrogated, threatened and prevented from attending services.

Despite such problems, some church groups have been pressured by the government to write letters to the United Nations saying they have full freedoms inside Iran. But Iranian Christians are anxious to show persecution is happening -- and Dibaj is being executed for nothing more than leaving Islam, as court records show.

"As you pray for Dibaj, please don't forget to pray for the salvation of 60 million Iranians for whom Christ laid down His life on the cross," wrote one Christian leader outside Iran.

"No nation has been won to Christ without witness that accompanies sacrifice. Iranian Christians are ready to die for their Lord because they believe it is in the plan and purpose of God to bring many Iranians to Christ by the proclamation of the gospel."

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Put God's mission ahead of human strategies, Rankin urges Baptists

By Robert O'Brien

Baptist Press
1/13/94

TALLADEGA, Ala. (BP)--Southern Baptists may achieve their Bold Mission Thrust goals if they focus on what God is doing in the world, rather than on their own strategies, methods and plans.

Jerry Rankin brought that challenge in his first report as new Foreign Mission Board president to the Woman's Missionary Union executive board.

He and his wife Bobbye, who spent 23 years on the mission field before his election last June as FMB president, cited dramatic breakthroughs which have opened formerly closed countries to missionaries and resulted in escalating evangelism and church growth.

"God is on mission" in the world the Rankins said in separate addresses to WMU leaders at Shocco Springs Baptist Assembly. That mission, they said, will be accomplished despite obstacles which seem to stand in the way.

"The question and responsibility you and I face are not whether or not God's purpose will be accomplished," Rankin said, "but whether or not we will be part of it."

The Rankins and two other FMB staffers, Senior Vice President Avery Willis and International Prayer Strategy Director Minette Drumwright, cited the power of prayer as a factor behind God's breakthrough in world events.

"When we have 15 million Southern Baptists -- mobilized to pray -- we have the kind of strategy that will break down the strongholds and the fortresses that Satan has raised in opposition to the people of God," Rankin said. "They cannot stand against that kind of prayer force and strategy."

Bobbye Rankin thanked the 105-year-old WMU for the love, support and prayer it has generated for missionaries over the years.

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The Rankins addressed WMU leaders as the leaders were continuing a yearlong task of streamlining WMU programs for more simplicity, flexibility and relevance in today's world.

Rankin praised a WMU decision at the meeting to change the name of its adult organizations ("Baptist Women" and "Baptist Young Women") to "Women on Mission" to reflect its purpose and provide flexibility for change.

"That name reflects the reality that God is on mission to bring the world to himself," he said after the WMU vote. "We're more and more sensitive (in foreign missions) to the fact that we must bring our plans, methods and strategies into consistency with what God is doing.

"The fact that WMU chose the name 'Women on Mission' shows it has that perspective. It's providential WMU should come up with that at a time of emerging awareness of God's mission in the world."

Rankin said the Foreign Mission Board's 1993 statistics now being compiled will show increases in evangelism and church growth which signal it could still meet goals of the Bold Mission Thrust effort to reach the world for Christ in this century.

He also pointed to signs he sees that indicate growing interest among Southern Baptists in missionary appointment and financial support of missions.

"We may see Bold Mission Thrust met in the last two years (of the century)," he said. "The key is to be obedient to what God is doing and know that he will fulfill his purpose.

"And if he wants to use Southern Baptists, Bold Mission Thrust will become a reality," he said.

"It may very well be that we get to the year 2000 and find that Bold Mission Thrust goals were an insult to God -- because he is capable of so much more."

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HMB's Lewis challenges
WMU to re-double efforts

By Martin King

Baptist Press
1/13/94

TALLADEGA, Ala. (BP)--Projected income shortfalls at the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board require renewed efforts by Woman's Missionary Union and all Southern Baptists, according to Larry Lewis, HMB president.

Acknowledging the vital role WMU plays in promoting home missions support, Lewis encouraged WMU executive board members "to re-double your efforts in supporting the 1994 Season of Home Missions as well as the Cooperative Program."

During a home missions update, Lewis challenged his audience to lead their churches to increase CP giving at least 1 percent a year to at least ten percent. "I think 10 percent ought to be the floor and not the ceiling for this vital lifeline of missions support," Lewis said.

Lewis explained that although the 1993 Annie Armstrong Easter offering receipts were 3 percent less than the 1992 offering, prudent budgeting enabled the agency to meet all of its missions obligations for 1993.

"However, projected shortfalls in income for 1994 and 1995 may force us to do some downsizing and re-prioritizing," he said. Lewis has announced a temporary freeze on filling staff positions at the HMB's Atlanta offices until an internal study is completed this spring.

Lewis encouraged WMU leadership to support a joint request from himself and Jerry Rankin, Foreign Mission Board president, to set a combined 1995 special missions offering goal of \$150 million.

"I can think of no more fitting celebration of our 150th anniversary than to give \$50 million to home missions and \$100 million to foreign missions," Lewis said. Both the home and foreign mission agencies were started with founding of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845.

The WMU executive board voted to set the 1995 Annie Armstrong Offering goal at \$50 million and is scheduled to consider the 1995 Lottie Moon Offering goal this summer.

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Lewis also reported the HMB ended 1993 with 4,882 missions personnel, a slight increase over 1992, and "very close to Bold Mission Thrust goal of 5,000 missionaries by the year 2,000."

He predicted that year-end statistics also will reveal another record number of Southern Baptists volunteered for mission service last year.

After providing WMU executive board members with an update on the HMB's building program, Lewis invited them to hold their 1996 meeting at the new facility north of Atlanta. "It is most appropriate that WMU receive the first invitation to our new national office building," he said.

Other HMB staff reported on the multi-agency Mississippi River Ministry project, transnational missions with the Foreign Mission Board, and provided updated plans for the 1996 Here's Hope national evangelism project.

Bob Banks, HMB executive vice president for operations, provided the board members with a brief history of the close relationship of the two agencies along with a list of ~~114~~ ongoing HMB-WMU partnership projects. During a question and answer session, WMU leaders requested the document be shared with directors of the HMB.

107

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EDITORS' NOTE: Please substitute the following story for the one of the same title in (BP) dated 1/12/94.

WMU executive board renames
adult women's organizations

By Robert O'Brien

Baptist Press
1/13/94

TALLADEGA, Ala. (BP)--The Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union executive board voted at its Jan. 8-13 meeting to rename its adult organizations and to publish a new magazine to succeed its current "Royal Service" and "Contempo" magazines.

The name change of the adult organizations -- from "Baptist Women" and "Baptist Young Women" to "Women on Mission" -- represented business left over after last year's action when WMU adopted a new "Church WMU Base Design."

The base design, which defines WMU tasks and what WMU organizations will be in the local church, streamlines WMU programs for more simplicity, flexibility and relevance in today's world, according to WMU Executive Director Dellanna W. O'Brien.

The new adult organization name -- "Women on Mission" -- fits that pattern, WMU leaders explained.

Effective October 1995, when all base design changes take place, Women on Mission will encompass both the former Baptist Women and Baptist Young Women age-level organizations.

WMU leaders stress that missions education for Baptist young women will continue. Women of all ages may configure Women on Mission groups flexibly, retaining the "Baptist" designation if they wish, and customizing groups on the basis of such factors as age, task, common interest or needs.

At the same time the executive board voted to discontinue "Royal Service," which has served older women for nearly 80 years, and "Contempo," the magazine of the current Baptist Young Women's organization.

In its place, WMU will publish "Missions Mosaic" for members and "Missions Mosaic Executive" for leaders, beginning in October 1995.

Other age-level publications in the Mission Friends, Girls in Action (GA) and Acteens organizations will remain the same, with two exceptions. "GA World," a new magazine, will be published for GAs in grades 5-6, and "Discovery," current magazine for GAs in grades 1-6, will encompass grades 1-4.

The decision on a new name for the adult organization drew discussion over two days of deliberations among state WMU presidents, who make up the executive board, and state WMU directors and their staffs.

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Board members, drawing on grassroots feedback from women in their states, came mainly opposed to "Women Aware," a name proposed following the WMU annual meeting in June. Brainstorming sessions discarded "Women Aware" and produced three top choices -- "Women on Mission," "Women in Missions" and "World Net" (with variations).

"Women on Mission," recommended by Lynn McMasters, WMU director for Nevada Baptists, collected 50 of 71 votes cast on the three choices. "Women in Missions" received 13 votes.

Although differences of opinion existed in the beginning, the board embraced the final decision, noting "Women on Mission" signifies their purpose in the world.

The same reaction came from President Jerry Rankin, who made his first report to the WMU executive board as new president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

"That name reflects the reality that God is on Mission to bring the world to himself," Rankin said. "We're more and more sensitive to the fact that we must bring our plans, methods and strategies into consistency with what God is doing.

"The fact WMU chose the name 'Women on Mission' shows it has that perspective. It's providential WMU should come up with that in a time of emerging awareness of God's mission in the world."

O'Brien said the changes will raise many questions as they move toward implementation in 1995 and that WMU will provide extensive training and transitional information to leadership and church members.

"We're excited about the possibilities for the future even as we face the difficulties of transition," O'Brien said. "The results will be worth the struggle of learning new ways.

"The changes will allow women and girls to focus more on missions and less on organizational structure as we seek to be on mission for God in the world," O'Brien said.

"Methods will change but missions will continue to be the heart of all we do, allowing us to change missions education approaches with changing times," she said.

"But we do recognize that many are satisfied with the present program and feel it's effective for them. The new organization, which emphasizes simplicity and flexibility, will allow them to continue."

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Mongolian court overturns
part of law limiting Christians By Erich Bridges

Baptist Press
1/13/94

HONG KONG (BP)--The Mongolian Constitutional Court has overturned parts of a new law that would severely restrict Christian activities in Mongolia, according to Christians present at the Jan. 10 court hearing.

In its written decision issued Jan. 12, the court ruled several sections of the law unconstitutional -- including restrictions barring Christian work outside church buildings and foreigners spreading their faith -- because they violate basic human rights.

Reportedly retained, however, are provisions giving Buddhism a chief place in Mongolian religious life, forbidding Christian worship in state-owned buildings and giving the government control of the number of clergy.

"Christians, according to the presiding judge, should have the same rights as any other religion in Mongolia (although) Buddhism should still be considered the preeminent religion in Mongolia and recognized as such," reported one Christian observer in the country.

"Foreigners are free to practice their beliefs and may even be involved in religious activity. To what degree we may evangelize is still not clear."

The court decision returns the law to the Mongolian Parliament, which passed it, for review and affirmation or rejection.

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"There is still the possibility th (parliament) will reject the decision or make other changes. The law would then again be referred to another constitutional court," the observer said. "At least we now may legally have worship services on Sunday."

The original law would have taken effect Feb. 1 in the formerly hard-line communist nation. Surrounded by Russia and China, Mongolia has begun opening up to the West. Cautious movement toward democracy and an open economy also has begun, and a new constitution adopted in 1992 guarantees freedom of religion. But a parade of outside Christian agencies marching into Mongolia has drawn the ire of some powerful forces in the nation.

The religion law alarmed the fledgling Mongolian Christian community, estimated at up to 2,000 members, which began barely three years ago with less than 10 known believers. The Mongolian people were the focus of 1993's Day of Prayer and Fasting for World Evangelization in May. Many Southern Baptist churches participate in the annual prayer campaign.

Southern Baptists provide medical aid, humanitarian assistance and English teaching in Mongolia through the aid organization Cooperative Services International. CSI workers also are helping Mongolians develop a family practice medical program through the Advanced Training Institute.

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Love, Bible, innovation
advocated at conference

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press
1/13/94

HOUSTON (BP)--Whatever non-traditional techniques they use, innovative churches must still be driven by love and based on the Bible to be effective, speakers told more than 1,000 people attending a conference on innovative church leadership.

"What drives us to innovate is love," said Bill Hybels, pastor of Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago. "Lost people matter to God, therefore they matter to us."

Pastors, church planters and church leaders from at least 32 states attended the conference, sponsored by the Home Mission Board and 10 pastors.

The event promoted contemporary worship styles and creative methods to reach an increasingly secular society. Topics ranged from "Reaching Baby Boomers" and "Making Evangelism Work in the 1990s" to "Strategic Prayer" and "Avoiding Innovation Disasters."

Like many innovative churches, Willow Creek targets the unchurched, using drama and contemporary praise choruses instead of hymns to help present the message during its weekend services.

The church's burden for reaching lost people fuels its non-traditional approach, Hybels said. "I think the best churches that are being built these days are churches that church leaders are building for their (lost) friends."

But such churches must be based on sound biblical doctrine, said Tom Wolf, professor of missions at Golden Gate Theological Baptist Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif.

"Get accustomed to the culture and everything else but ... when people come they must hear the Word of God," said Wolf, former pastor of The Church on Brady in east Los Angeles.

Pastors discredit the name of Jesus when they innovate simply to oppose an institution or group, he said. "The reason they want to innovate is because they're really rebellious in their spirit."

The conference drew church planters and pastors from traditional churches looking for techniques to be more effective reaching lost people, said Bill Price.

"More than 50 percent of the people that I've talked to have come from a traditional setting where they don't see the things they've been doing working," said Price, pastor of New Song Community Church in Mobile, Ala.

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Wolf cautioned traditional church pastors against trying to radically change their church when the congregation does not have the same vision as the pastor.

"It's like trying to fix your motor at 60 mph on the fr away," he said. "Some of us have tire marks down our backs."

Some pastors of innovative churches said the conference afforded them an opportunity to experience affirmation and acceptance they did not get from their regional association.

"My DOM (associational director of missions) would not even allow a mission start in the association because it would not have Baptist in its name," said one Texas pastor.

Some Southern Baptists have accepted African American churches and their different method of worship but not contemporary Anglo churches, said Charles Chaney, vice president of church extension for the Home Mission Board.

"It's important for me to say you can have diverse methods and still be full-blooded Southern Baptists," he said.

Jim Herrington, director of missions for Houston's Union Baptist Association, agreed. "Every church ought to be innovating," he said. "If they don't -- traditional or contemporary -- they're going to die."

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(BP) photo (vertical) of a guitarist playing during the conference mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press. Cutlines available on SBCNet.

EDITORS' NOTE: Registration for the Leading the Innovative Church conference totalled 1,014, but organizers said they think more attended plenary sessions.

Some people who pre-registered for the conference did not stop at the registration table. Information was not available about them for the following state-by-state break-downs, which total only 823, organizers said.

Editors can localize stories on the conference by adding a sentence similar to this one: "At least (number) people from (state) attended the conference, Jan. 3-5, in Houston."

Alabama 13, Arizona 4, Arkansas 39, California 48, Colorado 16, Georgia 41, Florida 13, Illinois 4 Indiana 4.

Iowa 15, Kansas 5, Kentucky 12, Louisiana 28, Maryland 4, Massachusetts 2, Minnesota 2, Mississippi 25.

Missouri 27, New Jersey 4, New Mexico 7, New York 1, North Carolina 10, Ohio 4, Oklahoma 25, Oregon 4.

South Carolina 2, Tennessee 17, Texas 403, Virginia 34, Washington 5, Wisconsin 1, Wyoming 2.

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Pastors of 'innovative' churches
seek to soften 'old wine skin' By David Winfrey

Baptist Press
1/13/94

HOUSTON (BP)--Tom Wolf said he never intended The Church on Brady to be innovative, just effective.

"Our goal has been to be faithful to the gospel and to see people come to Christ. Those are traditional values, right?" asked Wolf, who for 25 years was pastor of the ethnically-mixed congregation sixnutes east of downtown Los Angeles.

Wolf and others shared their views on non-traditional church techniques during the "Leading the Innovative Church" conference Jan. 3-5.

More than 1,000 pastors, church planters and church leaders attended the conference, sponsored by the Home Mission Board and 10 pastors.

Erwin McManus rejected the suspicions of some Christians who say contemporary-style churches are leaving conservative theology or the basics of being Southern Baptist.

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"Most people I hear criticizing us the most are the ones who have never sat down and talked to us," said McManus, who followed Wolf as senior pastor at The Church on Brady. "We want to be oil to help make soft an old wineskin," h said.

About 500 people attend The Church on Brady each Sunday. Sixty percent of the congregation is Hispanic, 20 percent is Asian and 20 percent Anglo, Wolf said.

Reaching this diverse group with little Southern Baptist background required non-traditional techniques, he said. "We may have Bach and rap in the same Sunday worship service, and our people will applaud both with gusto."

Wolf contended all The Church on Brady does is what any church should do: preach the gospel with the fewest barriers to those it is trying to reach.

The church is considered innovative, he said, because the culture of the target audience is so different from that of traditional Southern Baptist churches in the deep South.

"Spiritual innovation is mandated by the gospel, which says this gospel must go to the ends of the earth and it must go in understandable terms," he said.

Jim Herrington, director of Houston's Union Baptist Association, said innovative pastors have a strong desire to be embraced by the denomination. "In my association, the perception among those congregations is that acceptance is equivalent with compliance."

Bill Price, pastor of New Song Community Church in Mobile, Ala., said the effectiveness of some innovative churches is beginning to gain credibility for those churches.

"As the movement is growing we're gaining more acceptance because what we're doing is working," he said. "You can be innovative if your church is baptizing a lot of people and you have good growth."

New Song meets in a former department store in downtown Mobile, using contemporary Christian music and praise-oriented worship.

Located near a new convention center, the church will begin opening next month on Fridays as J.C.'s Place, a smoke-free, alcohol-free night spot with Christian contemporary music and waiters trained in non-confrontational evangelism.

"We're going to get people that we think wouldn't go to any other church," Price said.

Many pastors of contemporary-style churches are quick to affirm the role of traditional churches.

"No individual, no church, no group of churches can do what needs to be done in this world alone," said Sam Williams, pastor of Bay Marin Community Church in San Rafael, Calif.

"There are still enough people who can be reached in traditional churches that (contemporary churches) will never reach," he told pastors attending the conference. "We need to affirm every traditional church that cares about the lost and is reaching out to them."

Nevertheless, Wolf told pastors they should not be afraid of being different, noting 74 percent of Southern Baptist Churches are not growing.

"That means about 74 percent of the people cannot help you," he said.

"They're either struggling as much as you are or they're going to give you wrong advice."

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(BP) photo of Tom Wolf mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press. Outlines available on SBCNet.

**Pastor cites 10 reasons
why churches plateau**

By David Winfrey

HOUSTON (BP)--Jerry Sheveland said he has learned to not kill sacred cows. "I just don't feed them."

The pastor of College Avenue Baptist Church in San Diego says he doesn't waste energy and conflict on programs or issues that are not useful to the church. Instead, he said he makes sure the congregation stays focused on members' shared vision.

"The issue of vision is that the church is full of competing visions of what a church is to become," Sheveland said during the "Leading the Innovative Church" conference Jan. 3-5.

The lack of a shared vision was one of 10 reasons Sheveland listed for why churches plateau.

Vision, as well as external factors and leadership are among the elements that influence church growth, said Sheveland, whose church is a member of the Baptist General Conference.

Other reasons churches plateau, said Sheveland, include:

-- The congregation does not want to grow. "Churches must be willing to pay the emotional price of change in order to grow," he said.

-- The necessary resources for growth are not provided in advance. Such conditions are temporary if members want to grow, he said. "If your church is convinced of its need to reach the community, you'll find the way."

-- The leadership style of the pastor or support staff no longer matches the growth stage of the church. A leader who is a director for a small church may have difficulty if his church grows to the size where he needs to be a delegator, Sheveland said.

"It is possible to be your own successor if you are willing to change leadership styles."

-- The sociological make-up of the congregation no longer matches the make-up of the community. "That's the first question I ask," Sheveland said. "Would the people who live next door come in and say, 'I would be comfortable here'?"

Communities in transition may require target ministries to reach different homogeneous groups, he said. "You do what it takes to reach the target groups that you can reach instead of the people who used to live there."

-- External factors, such as financial recession or a declining population, may prohibit growth.

-- The congregation fails to restructure its ministry for the next phase of growth. "The larger you grow, the more you centralize decision making and decentralize the ministry."

-- The congregation fails to increase the quality and quantity of its ministry events. "The best way to start new growth is to start new ministries with your best quality leaders."

-- The church lacks important ingredients for conversion growth. Such ingredients include a high-profile prayer ministry, effective outreach strategies and multiple points for people to enter the church and become involved.

-- Internal crises or sheer self-centeredness may focus the church's energies inward.

"As pro-actively as you can, still hammer at the mission of the church over and over," he said. "It is not just making a nice comfortable place for second and third generation Christians."

**Southern Seminary will
teach D.Min. classes in Korean**

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Southern Baptist Theological Seminary will become the first Southern Baptist seminary to teach doctoral courses in a language other than English.

In July, the Louisville, Ky., school will begin offering doctor of ministry courses taught in Korean, said Kwan Lee, the seminary's coordinator of Korean language D.Min. studies. The program, he noted, will address the unique ministry issues facing the Korean-American community.

"This program is consistent with our commitment to the global mission of the church and to preparing people to minister effectively in any context," said David S. Dockery, vice president for academic administration at Southern. "There is a great need in the Korean-American community for both beginning and ongoing theological education."

Courses will be taught by Korean-American adjunct professors who hold earned doctorates and regular Southern Seminary professors who will teach with the help of an interpreter, said Dockery, adding Koreans compose the largest ethnic group enrolled in Southern's doctoral programs.

At the master's degree level, Southern already has about 25 students enrolled in courses taught in Korean. Students can take more than half of their course requirements for the master of divinity degree in Korean.

For further information, contact Lee toll free at (800) 626-5525, ext. 713. In Kentucky, call (502) 897-4011, ext. 713.

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