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February 16, 1994

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China detains, releases  
3 American Christians

By Erich Bridges

Baptist Press  
2/16/94

**HONG KONG (BP)**--Three American Christians were released by authorities in China Feb. 15 after being held for five days on charges of violating a new law restricting foreign religious work.

Public Security Bureau officers personally escorted American Dennis Balcombe onto a plane leaving China's Henan province that evening bound for Hong Kong, according to press reports. Balcombe is pastor of the Revival Christian Church in Hong Kong.

Two other Americans from the Hong Kong church, identified as Paul "Star" Fergusson of Texas and Daughin Chan of Oklahoma, reportedly traveled on their own to the same airport in Zhengzhou, Henan's capital, and flew back to Hong Kong.

Four other visiting Christians detained and released with them -- two from Indonesia and two from Hong Kong -- also left China.

Seven Chinese Christians also were arrested and three reportedly remained in custody Feb. 15.

News reports said the foreigners participated in an unregistered house church meeting attended by at least 70 local Christians in the city of Fangcheng. One report said they were sleeping in a private home Feb. 10 when police conducted a midnight raid on that home and several others. Another reported 90 Christians, including the foreigners, were sleeping in a building when it was surrounded by police.

Authorities detained the foreigners in a city guesthouse for five days, charging them with violating three articles of Order Number 144, one of two new religion laws in China.

The order, announced Feb. 5, warns that foreigners can preach in China only with government approval and "must not establish religious organizations, organs for managing religious affairs or centers or schools for religious activity. (They) must not recruit religious followers, appoint religious teachers or conduct any other proselytizing activities among the Chinese people."

The second law bans house churches and other congregations not belonging to government-sanctioned church organizations. It also limits activities even in approved churches, including sermons or programs that might damage "social stability."

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Many Southern Baptists live and work in China. Most of them, however, teach English in universities or provide other professional skills and social services.

Balcombe is not a Southern Baptist. When he arrived back in Hong Kong, he charged he and the others were searched, held under guard in unheated quarters, deprived of sleep during days of interrogation and refused permission to call their embassies or families. They were released, he alleged, only after authorities gained enough evidence to charge local Christians. Their possessions and about \$13,000 were confiscated and not returned, he added.

Balcombe reportedly owns a business in China and has related to house churches there for many years. He has had "multiple run-ins with the authorities" in China, including a near-arrest last year, according to one Christian observer in Hong Kong.

His arrest "probably is something the Chinese government would like to have highly publicized, because they want to discourage this kind of thing," the observer said.

"Lots of other Christian agencies and people go in all the time, but they don't do it this blatantly. It does send a warning to all Christian agencies to be careful. It indicates the Chinese government will carry through with these new regulations. The situation for foreigners doing religious work in China will be tighter."

The government and Communist Party remain suspicious of foreign involvement in religion. They have repeatedly expressed alarm about the rapid expansion of Christianity.

Two Christian groups from Taiwan also were expelled recently, according to a Hong Kong newspaper.

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Record participation expected  
in '94 World Changers projects By Steve Barber

Baptist Press  
2/16/94

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--When the first group of World Changers takes saws, hammers and paintbrushes in hand and heads out for a work site March 27, it will mark the fifth year for a way of "doing missions" that started with 135 youth from six Tennessee churches.

This year, more than 6,000 youth, collegians and senior adults are expected to take part in World Changers work projects in 25 different locations across the United States and in Puerto Rico.

"The growth in the World Changers mission option has exceeded our greatest expectations, but I can't say I'm completely surprised," said James D. Williams, president of the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission, sponsor of the annual projects. "I've said for a long time that the missions spirit is very much alive among our Southern Baptist people. This has proven to be a great outlet for it."

World Changers stresses "hands-on" missions involvement by participants through involvement in home construction and renovation work. The week-long projects generally are located in "high need," low-income communities where most are living at or below the poverty level.

Work crews of 10 to 15 members from various churches spend Monday learning basic skills and then work together on building, renovation and repair work the rest of the week.

The number of 1994 project locations is more than double last year's total of 12.

This year, seniors and college-age youth will become World Changers for the first time at four pilot projects. Collegians will gather at New Orleans March 27-April 2. Senior adults will work at Big Lake and Craig, Mo., northwest of Kansas City April 9-16 and April 16-23.

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World Changers senior high projects, for those who have completed the ninth grade, will include Orlando, Fla., June 11-18 (during the Southern Baptist Convention); Shelby County (Memphis), Tenn., June 11-18; Orlando, Fla., June 11-18; Houston, June 11-18; Birmingham, Ala., June 18-25; Tuscaloosa, Ala., June 25-July 2; Poplar, Mont., June 25-July 2; and Danville, Va., June 25-July 2.

Also, Poplar, Mont., July 2-9; Quitman County, Miss., July 2-9; Kansas City, Mo., July 16-23; Anderson County, Tenn., July 9-16 and July 16-23; Savannah, Ga., July 9-16 and July 16-23; Vicksburg, Miss., July 16-23; Juana Diaz, Puerto Rico, July 23-30; Lee County, S.C., July 30-Aug. 6; Shreveport, La., July 30-Aug. 6; and Murphy, N.C., July 30-Aug. 6.

World Changers junior high projects, for those who have completed the seventh or eighth grade, are scheduled for Memphis, Tenn., June 20-25 and Dallas, Aug. 1-6.

Participants pay from \$235 per person for senior high participants to \$150 for seniors and collegiates. The Puerto Rico project (senior high only) is \$335. Transportation costs to the project location are not included.

To register for a project, contact World Changers at the Brotherhood Commission, 1548 Poplar Ave., Memphis, TN 38104, or call (901) 272-2461. Participation forms and balances are due May 1 for June projects, June 1 for July projects and four weeks prior to spring and fall projects.

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Baptist editors hear Lewis  
on CBF, Masons; elect officers      By Martin King

Baptist Press  
2/16/94

KANANASKIS VILLAGE, Alberta, Canada (BP)--Refusal to accept mission funds from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship by the SBC Home Mission Board would be "an insult to individual Baptists who want to support our missionaries," according to HMB President Larry Lewis.

Lewis told members of the Southern Baptist Press Association at their annual meeting Feb. 13-16, however, he was not speaking for HMB directors, some of whom have called for the agency to decline money from the splinter mission agency. "This is my personal opinion."

In addition to hearing Lewis, the state Baptist newspaper editors elected new officers and held sessions designed for professional and spiritual renewal.

"I believe not accepting the funds would also cause even deeper division in the convention and make reconciliation more difficult in the future," Lewis told Baptist Press following the session.

The Home Mission Board received \$453,000 from CBF in 1993, \$135,000 less than the previous year. The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is a group of moderate Southern Baptists critical of the conservative leadership of the SBC.

According to Lewis, a meeting to discuss the matter has been scheduled with officials of the two mission boards and the SBC Executive Committee.

Lewis also appealed to the state editors to help put an end to the Freemasonry controversy.

"When is this issue no longer news?" Lewis asked the editors. "Dr. (Larry) Holly would like to use you to get publicity for the issue and himself. It does irreparable harm for him to continue to have this forum to degrade our directors and our staff on an issue he has had ample opportunity to address," Lewis said. He repeated his call for the convention to move on to other issues.

Holly, a Beaumont, Texas, physician who initiated the issue in SBC life and has been critical of the HMB handling of the Freemasonry investigation, was contacted by Baptist Press for comment.

Holly, in a written statement, said his opposition to the HMB Freemasonry stance, via a 300-plus page book he has written, does not "degrade anyone. It challenges the performance of the HMB in the studying of Freemasonry."

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"I challenge Dr. Lewis to join with me in submitting the HMB Study and 'Report' (to the SBC last year) and my critique of that work to an independent, free-lance journalist who would judge whether my criticisms are right." Holly said the ministry he leads, Mission and Ministry to Men, Inc., "would share the expense of such a project with the HMB. State Baptist newspapers could then publish for everyone to read an objective, independent assessment of this issue."

Holly added, "The news media should remain free to respond in their judgment to what is newsworthy."

After receiving Holly's statement, Baptist Press could not reach Lewis for further comment at the meeting site in Canada.

Lewis, in his opening comments to the editors, also provided an update on the agency's building program, financial status and 1993 statistics, noting church starts in 1993 may have been the highest in 30 years.

"Although we do not have final figures yet, we believe Southern Baptists started more than 1,400 churches in 1993, which is more than any year since the 1950s," Lewis said.

Lewis also appealed to the editors to support efforts of the mission agencies to raise a combined total of \$150 million for the two special missions offerings in 1995.

"During the 150th anniversary of both mission boards, \$150 million is a worthy and challenging goal. Give that as much support as you can," Lewis urged.

During the meeting, representatives of 39-member publications elected Toby Druin, associate editor of the Texas Baptist Standard, president-elect. He is the first associate editor ever elected to the position.

Druin is a native Texan and graduate of Baylor University. He served as associate editor of the North Carolina Biblical Recorder and as the news director of the Home Mission Board prior to joining the Standard staff in 1976.

James Watters, editor of the Northwest Baptist Witness, was affirmed as president for 1994-95. He was president-elect the past year. Missouri Word and Way editor Bob Terry was re-elected secretary-treasurer.

Jack Brymer was recognized for serving as president for two years. Brymer is editor of the Florida Baptist Witness.

William Junker, retired HMB official, was approved to write the history of the press association which has been in existence since at least 1926. Junker will be paid \$1,500.

Professional renewal sessions were led by Dan Lattimore, chairman of the journalism department of Memphis State University. The spiritual renewal sessions were led by Barbara Wyman, professor at the Canadian Baptist Theological Seminary in Cochrane, Alberta.

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Art Toalston contributed to this story.

**E. Europe's Baptists face  
wide range of challenges**

**By Tim Palmer**

**Baptist Press  
2/16/94**

MINSK, Belarus (BP)--One of the things evangelical Christians have to fear in Eastern Europe these days is fear itself. Karl-Heinz Walter, general secretary of the European Baptist Federation, called it a fear of "foreignization."

People who largely were sheltered from the rest of the world for more than 70 years now see MTV rock music videos on their television sets and hear Mormon missionaries knocking on their doors.

"The overwhelming Western influence is frightening the people more and more," Walter explained during the recent annual meeting of the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in Minsk, Belarus. At this time of great opportunity for Christian witness, he warned, perceived threats to national identities could lead to new restrictions on religious rights and human rights.

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Because Eastern Europeans need an expression of faith that is true to their national identities, Walter said, EBF policy is to support the national Baptist churches and not to start its own. Walter said he wrote to the patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, which has been the source of pressure to impose restrictions on other faiths, to insist on a distinction between Baptists and "free-operating evangelicals."

The patriarch's reply included a suggestion that Baptists meet with him toward restoring a relationship between Baptists and Orthodox that is now, in Walter's words, "down to zero."

In addition to continued religious freedom, Walter listed educational opportunities for ministers and a compatible theology as challenges facing Baptist work in Eastern Europe. He pointed out that pastors with minimal education are having doctors and engineers join their congregations.

Baptists have another matter to deal with in Europe, Walter noted -- a "great gap" in mutual traditions in theology. A Baptist in Great Britain is quite different from a Baptist in Kazakhstan, for example. "To bring these together and not to split is one of the real tasks we have to do."

Problems notwithstanding, Baptists are making progress in Europe, especially Eastern Europe. Grigory Komendant, president of the Euro-Asiatic Federation of the Unions of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, said that for a long time Moscow, where he lives, had just one Baptist church. Now it has 17.

Partnerships such as Missouri Baptists have formed with Belarus Baptists are important to Eastern Europe, Komendant said. "First of all they're having the same name -- Baptists. Second, they're having the same theology." The experience American Baptists have in foreign missions and other areas can be helpful, he added.

Komendant said he would like to have three things from American Baptists: The first is prayer; the second is support for the national churches and unions; the third is "more action" in helping churches.

"Baptists sometimes wait too long and talk," he said. In the meantime, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and Hare Krishnas are sending missionaries.

Foreign Mission Board trustee Paul Brooks, pastor of First Baptist Church in Raytown, Mo., said the FMB has been extremely slow in responding to needs behind the former Iron Curtain. He plans to report on his visit to Belarus at the next trustee meeting and urge swifter action.

Brooks pointed out that the FMB, like the EBF, takes the approach of working with the national Baptist unions. He noted it was written of Christ's disciples in Acts 2, "They found favor with all men."

Not all religious groups have found favor in Belarus. Council of Religions chairman Aleksie Zelske gave visitors from Missouri several examples of people who ignored the local authorities when they started to try to win converts.

"They think they come to the jungle," Zelske said.

In the meantime, it was noted, non-believing parents put their children on a long waiting list for Sunday school at Golgotha Baptist Church in Minsk. With Western materialism, decadence and false teachings encroaching fast, parents want to protect their children from the jungle without.

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Researchers: 'Marginal members'  
are plentiful, can be reached

By Mark Baggett

Baptist Press  
2/16/94

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--"I think the best place to worship God is in church, not in private," Harold states, "because that's what the Lord wanted." Still, this 79-year-old "born and raised" Southern Baptist rarely attends.

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"Bitter," "burned out," "boxed-in," "bordered" and "apathetic" -- these are the common labels attached to church members who rarely attend. But a new study finds that most inactive members look like Harold: willing to go to church but kept from it for a variety of personal reasons.

Harold and inactive church members like him account for the largest percentage of marginal church members in the United States, according to an in Review of Religious Research last September by Penny Long Marler of Samford University in Birmingham, Ala., and C. Kirk Hadaway of the United Church of Christ Board for Homeland Ministries. Marler and Hadaway call this group "traditionalists," people who identify themselves as church members but who attend only rarely because of health problems, work or family responsibilities.

Their findings challenge a common perception: that most inactive members have been driven away from church by bad experiences or that inactive members are those who have never had strong ties to the church.

"Frankly, we found very few people who have been characterized as 'burned out,'" said Marler, an assistant professor of religion at Samford who holds a joint appointment in the department of sociology. "Our guess is that if someone cared enough about church to be busy and active at one time, they wouldn't drop out long enough to establish an identity as being 'burned out;' instead, they probably went on to become active in another church."

The implications for the church are dramatic: "Traditionalists like Harold are marginal to the local church primarily because of logistics. If church buildings were more accessible, or if church programming were more creative and flexible, these persons would increase their involvement almost instantly," the article states.

In their study, which involved a survey of more than 2,000 adults in four states (Georgia, Ohio, Arizona, and Connecticut), Marler and Hadaway distinguish marginal church members from the unchurched, who claim no church affiliation at all, and from "mental affiliates," who claim a denominational affiliation but who do not identify themselves as church members and who attend rarely.

"Marginal members," on the other hand, identify themselves as church members, remain on church mailing lists and even give money to the church. But they do not attend regularly, and a large number, 43 percent, feel guilty when they miss church.

Marler and Hadaway identify four marginal member types:

1. Traditionalists. Primarily conservative in terms of politics, traditionalists believe in the Bible and consider themselves to be spiritual persons. "In short," the article says, "they seem like persons who are active in church." Why are they not active? One clue might be that 43 percent list "chronic health problems," and follow-up interviews show that many are elderly, disabled or they work on Sundays or have a spouse who refuses to attend. They remain "on the margins of a church family" because the process of reinvolvement in church is difficult if not impossible.

2. Liberals. These are social and political liberals who do not believe that regular worship attendance is necessary. Although they are not antagonistic to the church and even feel church membership is important, they see worship attendance as optional and do not feel guilty when they miss church. Overall, liberals have a positive image of the church but carry a different set of norms and expectations into their church participation.

3. Lifelong Marginals. These grew up on the periphery of the church and have stayed there. Although they see church as a good thing and sometimes feel guilty about missing services, they belong to a generation of adults "reared in an era where the church was neither supported nor attacked." They are disconnected from the church, believing the church is a valuable institution but not involved enough to be critical of the church.

4. Critics. Critics have lost confidence in the church. They are not necessarily angry because of a bad experience in church; instead, they simply don't feel the church provides any real meaning for their lives. Most critics were once active in the local church, but many now substitute non-traditional forms of religious expression for traditional ones. Despite their skepticism about the church, most critics would go back to church if they could find one that meets their needs.

"There are critics everywhere," Marler said, "in every classification -- conservative, moderate, liberal churches. But a significant proportion of critics come from conservative Protestant backgrounds. They tend to have higher standards of how church ought to be, and they are disgruntled with the pastor or a close friend in the church, typically because they don't practice what they preach" or for similar reasons.

Marler and Hadaway's data suggests churches need to use different strategies to appeal to each category. For instance, the place to reach lifelong marginals may be big events, which they are likely to attend. Critics, on the other hand, are not likely to come back on their own. "Eye-catching, appealing marketing and, of course, low-key, relationship-based outreach may attract critics," the article states. And like the other categories, marginal members often resent being lumped in with the "unsaved" or "unchurched." Marginal members still identify themselves with churches.

The most disturbing aspects of the study may be the potential growth of marginal church members. The authors say many of these members (especially the "liberals") must be reeducated about the value of church.

At the same time, the church also needs to educate itself about the reasons its members don't attend. By dismissing marginals as lifelong marginals or as people who have "broken" from the church and won't come back, the church is missing a chance to reclaim the largest number of inactive members. These are people who might come back if the church were more accommodating.

"People would tell us that nobody from the church ever calls or comes by," Marler said. "In some cases, they are embarrassed about why they don't go to church, for physical or personal reasons."

In the meantime, Marler and Hadaway say the numbers of traditionalists will increase to the point that the church cannot ignore them. "As this nation grays, however, the ranks of these marginal members will swell," the authors say. "Eventually, the financial investment, demands, and sheer numbers of traditionalists will call them to the attention of the churches. Hopefully for churches, that attention will come sooner rather than later."

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'Experiencing God' broadcast  
looks at how God is at work

By Terri Lackey

Baptist Press  
2/16/94

NASHVILLE (BP)--If participants of a nationally broadcast teleconference learned one lesson Feb. 12, it is that a person cannot experience God without changing.

Christians who choose to know God completely can expect changes to occur within their lives, according to Henry Blackaby, coauthor of the Southern Baptist resource, "Experiencing God," which has influenced Christians across denominational lines.

The Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville was sponsor of the seven-hour "Experiencing God" teleconference broadcast live by satellite to about 150 sites and 3,500 participants nationally.

The host panel included Blackaby, who now works with the Home Mission, Foreign Mission and Sunday School boards; Avery Willis, FMB senior vice president; and Roy Edgemon, director of the board's discipleship and family development division, who served as moderator.

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Callers from California to Virginia phoned on the 1-800 number at the host site of Two Rivers Baptist Church in Nashville to ask specific questions or give testimonies of their experiences with God.

At one point callers jammed four phone lines causing an overload that temporarily shut down the system, according to Sam House of the board's discipleship and family leadership department, who said 51 callers made it on air. House said he was forced to turn several callers away.

The questions ranged from whether recent natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods are God's way of getting the attention of Christians to how church leaders can motivate youth to become godly people.

While individuals experience God in unique ways, according to Blackaby, all Christians should recognize seven "realities" of God's workings:

1. God is always at work around you.
2. God pursues a continuing love relationship with you that is real and personal.
3. God invites you to become involved with him and his work.
4. God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances and the church to reveal himself, his purposes and his ways.
5. God's invitation for you to work with him always leads you to a crisis of belief that requires faith and action.
6. You must make major adjustments in your life to join God in what he is doing.
7. You come to know God by experience as you obey him and he accomplishes his work through you.

The words "adjustments" and "crisis" Blackaby refers to in numbers 5 and 6, respectively, are different for each individual, he said. For example, crisis, he said, is not necessarily negative.

"Many people may think of the term crisis in the negative," Blackaby said. "But crisis is not always negative or a big event.

"Crisis means God spoke to you and revealed something about himself. Then you have to choose whether you are going to take the next step.

"Crisis is the point in which you ask yourself, 'Do I believe what God is saying?' It requires a step of faith and some action," Blackaby said.

For example, a caller from the Raytown, Mo., site, revealed her crisis as the accidental death last year of her 7-year-old son. She related how, with the help of "Experiencing God," that crisis has brought her and her husband closer to God.

Sci Hua Kim, who was watching the teleconference live from the Two Rivers site, said, "My crisis of faith became the peace in my heart."

Kim was converted to Christianity from Buddhism in 1977 and became a pastor of a Korean church in Raleigh, N.C. "Then God asked me to resign the Korean church in Raleigh and become a missionary."

Kim said he did not particularly want to make that move. But after he took the "Experiencing God" course at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center in 1990, he said, "God spoke to me in a special, personal and real way. 'Experiencing God' really helped me to know my Lord personally."

He said when he got to know God better, he found peace in what God was asking him to do.

Blackaby said, while God uses many ways to speak to people, "he gets his will known."

"In the Old Testament, he used a burning bush, a donkey, direct contact. But the moment a person knows the Lord has spoken to him, a crisis is created," Blackaby said.

"The crisis suddenly changes their whole careers. That crisis jolts us to say, 'I will never be the same again,' because the crisis requires an adjustment in your lives."

Like the crisis, Blackaby said, adjustments can be major or minor. It could be as big as selling all one's worldly goods and becoming a missionary in Asia. Or it could mean changing careers, jobs or ways of viewing ideologies.

"But by looking at Scripture, we know th people who chose to obey God made adjustments in their lives."

Meanwhile, in answering a caller, Willis said natural disasters are God's way of "waking up" Christians.

"Because of his love, this is his way of moving us closer to him," Willis said. "The truth is, there are hundreds of verses of Scripture that address God and disasters. God has to discipline us. He is not an absentee God."

Blackaby agreed God has a hand in disasters, saying one can find instances of pestilence, floods and disease all through the Bible.

"God's saying, 'Turn back to my Word and see if I do or not' (use disasters as a way of getting the attention of Christians). It is very foolish to see what is happening in our day and what God does in his Word and not make that connection."

Blackaby advised Susan Buckley, who was watching from Edwards Road Baptist Church in Greenville, S.C., to motivate the youth of her church by "modeling your own Christian adult lifestyle" and by not always believing they must be entertained to be happy. Also he suggested she point them to the Bible as well as offer them the youth edition of "Experiencing God."

"God loves teens more than we do. We're always trying to dream up something to attract them when it's already there."

Coordinators announced a similar "Fresh Encounter" teleconference originally scheduled for April 23 has been postponed until the fall.

"Experiencing God" resources, including a leader's guide, video and audiocassettes, may be ordered by calling the BSSB customer service center at 1-800-458-2772.

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Preachers urged 'to sit  
where the people sit'

By Charles Willis & Chip Alford

Baptist Press  
2/16/94

NASHVILLE (BP)--To help people relate to and enjoy sermons, the preacher must learn to love and relate to people, two Southern Baptist pastors told 175 of their peers attending a nationwide preaching conference in Nashville Feb. 14-16.

Frank Pollard, pastor of First Baptist Church of Jackson, Miss., and Dean Register, pastor of Temple Baptist Church in Hattiesburg, Miss., were two of the session leaders for the National Conference on Preaching and Worship at the Baptist Sunday School Board.

Pollard said he believes preachers need to know how they feel about the people they are preaching to in order to help the people relate to their sermons.

"As you share the Word of God, that may be the best thing you do for them. When you are standing before people, you are doing something no one else is going to do for them," he said.

Pollard said he spends a part of each Saturday "sitting where the people sit," to consider what a recent widow will hear when he preaches on Sunday or what needs a specific 15-year-old boy will have.

"The Word of God is relevant; you don't have to make it relevant. But if you are thinking about specific people, you have to remember their needs as you preach.

"Somehow we have to entertain the idea we will preach without notes," he continued. "We will talk with them rather than reading from notes. Can you see Jesus Christ standing on the side of a mountain saying, 'Blessed are the ... uh ...' and then looking down at his notes?"

Pollard urged preachers to look at people in the congregation while preaching and in doing so to say, "I care." To do that, he said he does not memorize sermons. "I learn them," he said.

Humor can play a significant role in relating to persons from the pulpit, he observed.

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"Relating to people by humor is a national thing for us," he said. "Do you know what this nation does when it faces crises? People begin to pray and they tell jokes."

But, he cautioned, "we have to know our limits. Some of us just can't tell stories."

Pollard also said there is "some danger in saying my big goal is to get people to enjoy sermons. We communicate that they are customers, that we are going to sell a product. We don't need to make religious customers out of people who ought to be a congregation. Some of our printed programs look like we are trying to sell, to make religious customers out of stewards of God.

"The way to see worship is not as platform performers and an audience. When worship takes place, the people in the congregation are the performers, God is the audience and the people on the platform are prompters," he said.

"Lead people to understand this is a service of worship, and they are the ones who are speaking to God."

Register reminded pastors "preaching is not merely what we do; it is who we are. What we preach is mightily reinforced or negated by the life we live."

He urged pastors to model love for others, adding: "The atmosphere of our church is so often a reflection of who we are as leaders."

Register discussed the three needs he believes every church member has in common: to be loved, to be valued by others and to express love to others through ministry.

He also suggested five "moves that make a difference" in understanding and loving church members: 1) Ask Jesus to give you a passion for people (Matt. 9:36-38); 2) Realize that love is more devotion than emotion (Luke 6:33-35); 3) Scrutinize your motive when you preach (Jonah 4:2, Prov. 16:2); 4) Prescribe a solution when you point out a problem (Prov. 15:2); 5) Spend time with a mentor who models compassion (Prov. 11:14).

Pollard cautioned against cultivating a congregation of "sermon tasters and music critics who miss the fact that almighty God was there and shared a message."

Pollard reminded conference participants "God understands we are not perfect. The church is the place where we have been loved, accepted and forgiven when we were unlovable, unacceptable and unforgivable, so we should be loving, accepting and forgiving."

Pollard said preaching can be aimed at behavioral change, but "it is the Lord who changes us. It is the Word of the Lord he uses to tell us how to change.

"Believe God can change people," he encouraged preachers. "We are products of our decisions. People are the only creations God didn't finish.

"God gave to us the dignity and the danger of decisions. We finish our own creation by what we decide to do," Pollard said.

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Pastors hear preaching tips  
from 'a person from the pew'

By Chip Alford

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NASHVILLE (BP)--Instead of listening only to messages from their peers, approximately 150 Southern Baptist pastors attending a preaching conference at the Baptist Sunday School Board Feb. 14-16 heard a little advice from "a person from the pew."

F. Clark Sauls, a cardiologist from Hattiesburg, Miss., presented a layman's point of view on a variety of preaching-related topics to participants in the National Conference on Preaching and Worship.

"Laymen choose a preacher to listen to in much the same way they choose a doctor," Sauls, a member of Temple Baptist Church in Hattiesburg, said. "A lot of it is based on personality factors. ... The more real a preacher's personality is, the more readily people will identify with him and, even more importantly, give him credibility."

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People do have a choice in who they listen to, Sauls said. With that in mind, he shared the following practical tips for preachers interested in connecting with their members:

- Be concise.
- Be succinct.
- Be well organized.
- Make sermons practical and applicable to daily life.
- Use humor when appropriate.
- Be dynamic.
- Use language appropriate to your audience.
- Pay attention to technical matters (proper lighting, comfortable temperature, etc.).
- Exude confidence, but not arrogance.
- Enlist people you trust to pray for you.
- Use illustrations that are so out of the ordinary and unusual they will capture the attention of listeners right away or so commonplace everyone can relate to them. And don't draw from one source all the time, he added, pointing out many church members are not interested in illustrations drawn from the sports world.

Sauls said he believes the sermon is "far and away the most important part of the worship service." While music, prayer, praise and other worship elements are important, "they should never detract from the sermon," he said.

He suggested churches "seek a prayerful balance" between the use of traditional hymns and praise choruses, making sure whatever music is used supports the message of the sermon.

He also warned against "showmanship" in worship services, adding: "You can have so much noise going on that (people) might miss hearing the voice they need to hear most."

The National Conference on Preaching and Worship was sponsored by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's church leadership department.

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Weekday seminary carpenter  
builds lives each weekend

By Bob Murdaugh

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FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Ben West knows he isn't the first carpenter to enter the ministry. Like Jesus, West is using his skills to build something eternal.

While West spends his weekdays hammering and sawing for Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, his weekend construction is just as important.

The evidence of West's work can be seen in what he builds for the seminary, and in the bright eyes of children who live in the Southcrest community south of the Fort Worth, Texas, campus.

West's interest in starting a new church in Southcrest grew out of lessons he learned in a church starting class at the seminary in 1990. West and Southwestern student Wirt Davis and their spouses have worked together in the church planting project over the past year.

"Dr. (Daniel) Sanchez's teaching format not only includes classroom study but also community service," West said. "I learned to take church to the people of Southcrest and develop a church model that fits their needs."

The new church, where West is senior pastor, is a mission of nearby Gambrell Street Baptist Church. Regular average attendance at Tuesday night Bible studies is about 40 people, while attendance at Bible study and Sunday morning worship service is near 30. Adults at the church are outnumbered by children.

"Exclusively targeting adults to come to the new church doesn't work. We've had to maintain constant contact to get and keep most of them committed," West said.

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"They (Southcrest adults) have called me 'preacher' from the start, but I've had to earn the right to be their pastor," West said. "We've passed one major milestone -- the Southcrest adults are allowing us to teach their kids."

Before the new church officially began, the Wests and Davises attracted a lot of interest with a Backyard Bible Club attended by 40 Southcrest children.

According to West, two of the "very basic" duties that have sustained many children's interest in Bible study on Sunday mornings are snack time and van transportation. Many of the youngsters don't eat breakfast before they come to church.

~~West said he and his wife, Sherri, thought their duties with the new church would be similar to the "traditional Southern Baptist church start" with which they were formerly involved in Houston. But their efforts in sharing the gospel with the mostly blue-collar, English-speaking population of Southcrest have required more than door-to-door surveys, Backyard Bible Club for young children, establishment of a regular meeting place and use of Southern Baptist Sunday school.~~

"Southern Baptists have become a middle-class denomination, and we have had to step out of the middle-class, educated thinking mode into lower socioeconomics to meet these people where they are," West said. "We've tried to teach them the Bible from Southern Baptist materials, but they won't receive them. So, we've had to rewrite bits and pieces of the curriculum."

Most middle-class children and teen-agers for whom Southern Baptist Sunday school curriculum is designed already know basic Bible truths and how to behave when they come to church, West said. With the Southcrest congregation, he and co-workers have had to start with teaching basic moralities. The reward method has worked well in teaching most of the new church's adults and children because many of them are accustomed to "the negative process of being penalized for breaking rules."

Rather than sitting down and reading the Bible the entire time at church, the Southcrest church's members sometimes do Bible drills or art projects relating to memory verses, West said. The adults and children tend to use their minds the most when they're using their hands.

The Wests and Davises are assisted in the new church by Southwestern students Corby Brizendine, Travis Patterson and John and Sonja Fimple. As Mission Service Corp volunteers, the Wests been aided by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board with training techniques for inner-city church planting, financial support and supplies.

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