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## - - BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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February 18, 1994

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Baptists ask that ban  
on Lebanon work be lifted

By Marty Groll

Baptist Press  
2/18/94

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Southern Baptists are asking U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher to lift a ban that ousted all Americans -- including 22 Foreign Mission Board missionaries -- from Lebanon seven years ago.

The ban came as murders, kidnappings, bombings and plane hijackings became frighteningly commonplace and threatened the lives of Americans more than U.S. diplomatic officials were willing to allow.

Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board President Jerry Rankin asked in a letter to Christopher that the travel ban be lifted -- at least for those who want to perform religious, charitable or humanitarian services.

Baptists' voice joins those of Arab Americans, many of whom want into Lebanon to share in profits from rebuilding as the country finds a measure of stability under Syrian occupation.

Last year, on Christopher's recommendation, President Bill Clinton extended the travel ban for a seventh year. Clinton's decision whether to allow the ban to expire or stretch into an eighth year is expected soon.

The "overriding factors" in Clinton's decision must be concern for the security and safety of Americans, according to a State Department official quoted in news reports. A recent car bombing and the assassination of a diplomat in the shattered capital of Beirut suggest security problems persist, the official added.

In his letter, Rankin told Christopher: "...We would like to convey to you our continuing concern for the people of Lebanon and for those who wish to serve the citizens there."

"Due to the present situation in Lebanon and the pressing needs of the Lebanese people, we urge you to remove the restriction on travel to Lebanon," Rankin said. "If you remain convinced that the restriction cannot be lifted for everyone, we request that you permit persons to enter Lebanon who will be engaged in religious, charitable or humanitarian services."

Since the ban was first imposed Southern Baptist missionaries have repeatedly been denied permission to live and work in Lebanon. Until they left in 1987, they had maintained a presence in the country since 1948.

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL  
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES  
Historical Commission, SBC  
Nashville, Tennessee

California feeding units  
top 1 million meals served

By Steve Barber

LOS ANGELES (BP)--Southern Baptist mobile feeding units have topped 1 million in total meals provided to earthquake victims in the Los Angeles area since Jan. 17.

The two California-based units remain in operation. One is located at Van Nuys airport, the other at First Baptist Church in Fillmore. Both were opened less than 24 hours after the main shock and have operated continuously since then.

The California relief operation resulted in the third-highest total meal count in the history of Southern Baptist disaster relief ministry. The highest count was 2.7 million meals served after Hurricane Andrew struck Florida and Louisiana in 1992. Second-highest was 1.6 million served last summer to victims of flooding in the Midwest.

To date, the effort has involved more than 350 volunteers from 14 states, including many from the Midwest who "returned the favor" to those who came to their aid last year.

At the peak of the operation, disaster relief units from Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Oklahoma and Texas joined those from California in the Los Angeles area.

"This episode really reflected the depth of the Southern Baptist capacity to respond. We had units ready and willing to take part from as far east as the Carolinas," said Jim Burton of the Brotherhood Commission, who served as national off-site coordinator for the response.

California was a real logistical challenge, Burton added, given the distance of the states with mobile feeding units from the west coast.

"It's a long ride from Mississippi to Los Angeles in a tractor trailer," he said.

The California response also marked a first in that five units from different states were up and operating in one place.

"This allowed the different state units to learn methods of operation from one another and build relationships with those from other states," Burton said. "In the future, we may well have volunteers from different states working on any one unit, so this was a good preview of that."

The involvement also previewed what could happen along the New Madrid fault line along the Mississippi River, which Burton said poses a "greater threat and a greater challenge."

"We wanted to get as many volunteers from as many states as possible out there (in California)," he said. "We wanted them to feel the ground shake, to know what it was like."

The disaster units are owned by state Southern Baptist conventions and operated primarily by volunteers.

Disaster relief is an outgrowth of the Brotherhood Commission's emphasis on mission action. The Memphis-based Southern Baptist Convention agency coordinates multi-state disaster response including feeding, child care and cleanup on behalf of all Southern Baptists.

Contributions designated for disaster relief may be sent to the Brotherhood Commission at 1548 Poplar Ave., Memphis, TN 38104.

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House bill threatens  
home, private schools

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press  
2/18/94

WASHINGTON (BP)--Nearly all home-schooling parents may lose the freedom to teach their children if an education bill pending in Congress becomes law, the country's leading home school attorney has warned.

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The House of Representatives is scheduled to vote Feb. 24 on reauthorization legislation which may be interpreted to require home school parents, as well as private school teachers, to be certified by the state.

Such a requirement would be "an effective ban on home education for more than 99 percent of all home schoolers," said Home School Legal Defense Association President Michael Farris in a Feb. 15 written analysis.

The language also could cripple many religious schools.

"We look at it as a blatant power-grab," said Gary Deedrick, administrative assistant for the American Association of Christian Schools. "We have not minded the government having some say-so in our physical plant," but when it tries to dictate on personnel matters, the government has "crossed a line which we feel like government has no business" crossing, he said.

Probably less than one percent of the teachers in about 1,000 AACS schools are state certified, Deedrick said from his office in Kansas City, Mo.

An amendment by Rep. George Miller, D.-Calif., to The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, H.R. 6, mandates each state seeking federal funds must provide assurance it "will require each local educational agency within the state to certify that each full time teacher in schools under the jurisdiction of the agency is certified to teach in the subject area to which he or she is assigned." The requirement will take effect after July 1, 1998.

The measure defines school as a "nonprofit day or residential school" which provides education. The word "nonprofit" is not included in the definition in current law, Farris wrote.

The addition of "nonprofit" clarifies the "intent of this law is to add all forms of private education to the federal definition of school," Farris wrote.

In the Education and Labor Committee, Rep. Dick Arme, R.-Texas, offered an amendment exempting private, religious and home schools, but it failed on a party-line vote. All Democrats on the committee opposed Arme's amendment.

Opponents of the Miller language are expected to introduce on the House floor an amendment which would protect private, religious and home schools.

Defeating the entire bill is a "long, long shot," Farris said. It also will be difficult to pass the amendment, he said.

Miller "has nothing against home schools," according to a prepared statement from his office.

He "does not believe that his amendment affects home schools or private schools ... (and) sees no reason to change it," the statement said. "If another House member chooses to offer an amendment on the floor to change it, Mr. Miller will review it and make a decision on his vote at that time."

If such is the case, an aide to Arme said, it is difficult to understand why Miller opposed Arme's amendment in the committee.

While his organization could challenge in court the law's application to home and private schools, "in light of the rejection of the Arme amendment and the definitions of 'school' we believe that it is essential" to pass an amendment specifically exempting such schools, Farris wrote in a memorandum accompanying his analysis.

Most of the teachers in AACS were trained in Christian colleges and with a Christian philosophy, Deedrick said. While AACS offers its own certification program, most of its teachers have not sought state certification, he said.

Many of the AACS teachers have not taken college courses necessary for state certification, and many of the courses are steeped in anti-biblical philosophies, he said.

Michael Whitehead, general counsel of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, said, "The education crisis in America is not in private or home schools. Let Caesar put his own house in order before he tries to improve private and home schools.

"The new law will impose new, unnecessary burdens which some parents and Christian teachers cannot meet without great expense. The government seems to measure success with r d tape," Whitehead said.

Phone calls to Miller's Washington office were not being accepted Feb. 17 or 18 because of the "volume of calls concerning H.R. 6 and its impact on home schooling," a recorded message said.

While the number of home schoolers in the country is uncertain, a staff member with Farris' organization said estimates about four years ago placed the number of home-school students at around 475,000.

Other concerns expressed about the bill by pro-family organizations include:

- The encouragement, and possibly requirement, of Outcome-based Education, which critics say promotes values antithetical to Christians;
- The failure to prohibit school-based clinics from performing or promoting abortions or from passing out contraceptives, with no allowance for parental notification in such cases;
- The exclusion of a provision allowing parents to remove their children from subjects they determine may be harmful.

A Senate-House conference committee will determine the fate of protection for home, religious and other private schools in another piece of education legislation. An amendment introduced by Sen. Conrad Burns, R.-Mont., to the Clinton administration's "Goals 2000" bill exempts such schools from federal government mandates on "curricular framework, instructional material, examination, assessment or system of assessments." It passed in the Senate but was not considered in the House.

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Education Commission's new exec  
sees role of healing, assistance By Tim Fields

Baptist Press  
2/18/94

NASHVILLE (BP)--Six months after Stephen P. Carleton took a leap of faith to head two Southern Baptist agencies rumored for extinction, he voices determination to improve existing programs and accomplish new visions for the commissions and the 71 schools they serve.

After 26 years as professor and then academic dean and executive vice president of California Baptist College, Carleton, with his wife, Louise, left southern California for the challenge of directing the Southern Baptist Education Commission and, by virtue of that office, also the Southern Baptist Commission on the American Baptist Theological Seminary.

The seminary commission and the National Baptist Convention help fund and oversee the operation of American Baptist College in Nashville, the only accredited Bible college in America with a predominantly African American student body.

Carleton said members of the Education Commission were forthright from the outset that these two commissions and other small agencies of the Southern Baptist Convention might not survive the economic downsizing which was already happening at some SBC entities.

"When the search committee approached me, the SBC Executive Committee was set to deal with a motion from the convention in Houston urging them to set up a special committee to review all the program statements and structures of every SBC entity," Carleton recalled. "The (SBC) committee was to determine if the convention is adequately organized to face the needs of the churches in the 21st century."

The search committee also was frank about their desire for Carleton and the Education Commission to repair and/or strengthen long-term relationships and ties with the 53 Southern Baptist-related colleges and universities, six seminaries, four Bible colleges and eight academies.

And in Carleton's unanimous election at the annual meeting in Riversid, Calif., in late June, members of the Education Commission called on their new director to help bring healing to fractured or damaged relationships between several Southern Baptist universities and their state conventions stemming from lengthy controversies.

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Commission Chairman Jerry Henry, pastor of Elkdale Baptist Church in Selma, Ala., defined the problem as one of mistrust. "There is suspicion among the Southern Baptist leadership of the academic community, and there is suspicion of the Southern Baptist leadership among the academic community. We stand in the middle," he told Carleton and commission members.

Henry said the distancing issue "provides an opportunity for us to do something that will justify our existence."

Carleton said his decision to head an agency in Nashville met with varied reactions from his friends; many thought he was plain crazy.

"After only a few weeks on the job I found that many of the rumors of the commission's demise were just that -- talk and rumors. But I didn't know that when the search committee approached me," Carleton said.

"I came to Nashville because I am convinced that Christian education in the form of schools, colleges and seminaries is one of the most important monuments Southern Baptists have built over the past 150 years," he explained.

"I feel strongly that some of the antipathy between academic institutions and the denomination is destructive to both, and I very much want to be a part of any healing process that is possible.

"The convention goals of evangelism, ministry and church growth projected into the next century cannot be achieved without these academic institutions committed to the integration of personal faith and academic discipline and the training of church and denominational workers, missionaries and lay people in all professions."

As a graduate of Oklahoma Baptist University and Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, Carleton is a product of the work supported by the Education Commission.

"When I completed graduate degrees at the University of Chicago, I found that my Southern Baptist education had given me the solid foundation and tools I needed to compete in a major secular university setting.

"Throughout my 26 years of service at California Baptist College, the Education Commission proved its value over and over again," Carleton said.

"Through their administration of three loan funds, I and several other faculty members were able to complete our doctorates and pay back the loan through service to the college."

Since 1967 more than 680 people from Southern Baptist-related schools have received financial assistance in completing terminal degrees or pursuing research. Nearly \$872,000 in loans has been canceled through teaching or administrative service to the schools.

"Of just as much help were the annual meetings and staff development workshops planned by the Education Commission staff and advisors from the schools as well as The Southern Baptist Educator magazine and the placement registry which helps locate faculty and staff for the schools," Carleton said.

As Carleton dreams new visions for the future of the commission, he said he intends to strengthen the combined influence of the schools on such issues as state and federal legislation, the application of government regulations and accreditation.

"Nowhere else do the Southern Baptist educational institutions at all levels have a common point of communication and cohesion. They participate in a variety of accrediting groups, specialized organizations and local or state relationships. But the Education Commission is the one agency of the Southern Baptist Convention which supports and promotes the total cause of Christian-based instruction at every level," he noted.

The executive director represents the interests of all these institutions in the increasingly complex world of governmental regulations at both the state and federal level.

"Many of the presidents of our schools provide significant leadership in associations, accrediting agencies and national forums. In addition, it is important for Southern Baptists that at least one voice be heard which represents education efforts at every level and in institutions of varying size and diversity."

Carleton already has found counterparts from most of the mainline Christian denominations, some of whom have far fewer institutions than do Southern Baptists.

"The Baptist colleges are more involved than ever in reaching out to the world," Carleton said. "Calls for emphases on diversity and global village awareness come at a time when 42 of our Baptist colleges and universities work together in the Cooperative Services International Educational Consortium with programs in several places in China, the republics of the former Soviet Union and some countries of Latin America.

"The coordination of these efforts with the Foreign Mission Board has given several leaders an exciting sense of what the colleges and universities can do in unevangelized 'World A' regions in particular and in many other developing nations of the globe. The Education Commission has interest in supporting and expanding these and other efforts that directly relate to the goals set by the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention.

"At the same time on the home front, increasing numbers of local Southern Baptist churches are founding Christian schools at the elementary and secondary levels. Some of these are cooperative efforts with other churches; some are part of the ministry of large urban mega-churches.

"Much of the sense of mission of these schools fits the historical pattern of secondary schools which have been part of the Association of Southern Baptist Colleges and Schools for years. The Education Commission members feel there is an increased need for recognition and involvement with this rapidly growing element of Southern Baptist life," Carleton said.

Carleton's chance to prove the importance of the Education Commission and set the stage into the next century will happen soon, as he and other agency executives respond to a request received the first week of February from the seven-member study committee under the SBC Executive Committee.

The request from Mark Brister, chairman of the Southern Baptist Program and Structure Committee, asks for a five-point written evaluation of each agency's program statement. The evaluation asks for a delineation of any changes in program statement which the agency would oppose, a list of any overlapping of statements among agencies, a vision statement for the 21st century and new ideas for SBC programs and structures for the next hundred years.

As Carleton sets the course for the future of the Education Commission, he said he faces each new day "with a concern for educational institutions in 16 states and for faculty, staff and students who on any given day are scattered around the globe, living lives of faith in cultures desperately in need of the good news of Jesus Christ."

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**WMU enlists language consultants,  
creates ethnic advisory council** By Susan Doyle

**Baptist Press**  
2/18/94

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union has expanded its language work with the addition of 10 volunteer consultants and the creation of the National WMU Ethnic Advisory Council.

The 10 volunteer consultants will serve on the advisory council and represent five language groups -- Haitian, Chinese, Korean, Hispanic and deaf. This is the first time WMU has had national volunteer WMU ethnic consultants.

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Council members will work with the national WMU language staff to determine and prioritize the needs of language groups, give input into WMU language materials and products, promote missions education through field servicing and help identify translators and writers.

The council members are recognized leaders in their respective language groups and are Southern Baptists active in missions education.

The development of the council is being funded by the Second Century Fund, an endowment begun by WMU in its centennial year. Annual grants given from the fund help to promote the work of women in missions around the world.

The council includes Sheri Moran, Seymour, Tenn.; Angela Kim, Houston; Kate Leong, Sugarland, Texas; Sue Hill, Arlington, Texas; Martha Chun, Hollis Hills, N.Y.; Sylvia Chan, Stockton, Calif.; Yolanda Calderon, Riverside, Calif.; Zully Maldonado, New York City; Nathalie Balzora, Jacksonville, Fla.; and Marilyn Delinois, North Lauderdale, Fla.

Council members are available to lead missions education training for their respective language groups. For more information, write: Language Specialist, WMU, P.O. Box 830010, Birmingham, AL 35283-0010.

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Anti-gambling forces  
buoyed by new research

By Connie Davis

Baptist Press  
2/18/94

NASHVILLE (BP)--Participants in the first International Conference on Gambling Feb. 11-12 in Nashville didn't have to be persuaded against gambling.

Instead, they learned of mounting research which further strengthens their position.

Michigan's Attorney General Frank J. Kelley told participants of the state's slide into gambling which began when it legalized lottery gambling. Casino gambling in Detroit has been defeated three times, but it prospers in the state on Indian reservations. Now non-Indian businessmen are trying to designate land in downtown Detroit as a reservation, Kelley said, so they can prey on "poor and desperate people."

The issue of gambling and its impact on Michigan has been the most troubling of his 33-year term, Kelley said.

The 26 participants from 10 states also heard the results of national research which confirms Kelley's view. John Kindt, commerce and legal policy professor at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana, reported gambling is the "black hole" of any economy, sucking money out of the local economy.

Citing field research, Kindt said legalized gambling activities "are directly and indirectly subsidized by the taxpayers."

"For every dollar the legalized gambling interests indicate is being contributed in taxes, it really costs the taxpayers at least three dollars -- and a more reasonable number is seven dollars."

For every job created by gambling activities, the rest of the economy will probably lose two jobs, Kindt said. It is true in Alton, Ill., which has riverboat casino gambling, he said. Local merchants report drive-by business is only 10-20 percent of what they predicted it would be. The city's unemployment rate rose from 7 percent to 9.2 percent.

In Chicago, Kindt continued, "field research indicated that 2 to 2.75 jobs would be lost if a land-based casino were built and that is why Gov. Edgar vetoed the proposal."

Because of costs associated with gambling, which have mounted in South Dakota since it legalized casino gambling in 1989, Kindt said, legislators have proposed a 50 percent tax rate on gambling activities. The state had the second highest number of bankruptcies in 1992, he added.

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Why are states accepting such odds? Kelley said its because of the declining revenue states receive from the federal government. When faced with the choice of leading a statewide campaign to raise taxes or "raising revenue from people who gleefully look forward to spending it," gambling has "some immediate appeal," Kelley said. "But if we have learned one lesson from our current economic and governmental crisis, it clearly is that we must consider the future consequences of our immediate actions."

The industrial base of business has been "eaten away by business practices that maximized immediate profits, while disregarding improvements in technology and plant facilities," Kelley said. One of those practices is gambling, he noted.

More importantly, America's work ethic is being eroded by gambling interests, Kelley said.

Kindt noted socio-economic costs of legalized gambling include those related to pathological gamblers -- a recognized addiction pursuant to the American Psychiatric Association. "Each newly created pathological gambler costs society \$52,000 per year," he said. Because of increased gambling activity, he estimates an increase of \$80 million in socio-economic costs to the nation.

Increased crime is expensive, Kelley reported. Atlantic City reports an increase in larceny per capita of 476 percent in nine years. The incidence of all crime combined increased by 138 percent, he added, according to the FBI.

Atlantic City and Las Vegas have been infiltrated by organized crime because of the gambling industry there, Kelley said. Hawaii has set a better example by declining to legalize gambling, he said, crediting the influence of missionaries.

Citizens also should consider the fact that most often the legalization of gambling isn't reversed, Kindt said. Bucking the odds, Iowa repealed video lottery last year, he noted.

Both Kelley and Kindt deferred from holding a moralistic position on gambling.

Kindt explained the socio-economic facts form his opinion.

Kelley termed his position one of common sense.

But he quoted Richard Whately, an English logician, who said, "All gaming, since it implies a desire to profit at the expense of others, involves a breach of the tenth commandment."

The conference was an outgrowth of the American Council on Alcohol Problems, which includes organizations which deal with moral and ethical issues from 36 states.

The group organized the National Coalition Against Legalized Gambling. Southern Baptist Dan Ireland, executive director of Alabama Citizens Action Program in Birmingham, was elected president.

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EDITORS' NOTE: The following three stories on church growth can be used as a series or separately.

He says traditional churches  
need church growth attention

By Pat Cole

Baptist Press  
2/18/94

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--The church growth movement will focus more attention on helping "traditional" churches reach people for Christ, predicted church growth expert Thom Rainer.

Rainer, newly named dean of the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, said the "contemporary church" or "model church" has dominated most church growth literature. Contemporary churches, he explained, frequently follow the model of newer mega-churches like Willow Creek Community Church in suburban Chicago or Saddleback Community Church in Southern California. They tend to emphasize ministries rather than programs, task teams rather than committees and many are identified by their "seeker sensitive," upbeat worship services.

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Rainer, however, stressed more than 90 percent of churches are traditional, program-oriented churches. "The aching question out there is, what is going to happen to these 90-96 percent of churches?" Rainer asked. "How will they be renewed? I think the church growth movement will have a role in that."

Rainer, Southern Seminary President R. Albert Mohler Jr. and Southern professors Mark Terry and John Dever recently taught a doctor of ministry seminar on church growth at the Louisville, Ky., school.

Lengthy pastorates, a definitive long-term strategy and a willingness to move incrementally are essential elements in growing a traditional church, Rainer said. "We must begin to see ministry as people-based rather than program-based. We need to have an outward focus, looking beyond structure, unleashing the church to discover spiritual gifts. The vision then must be defined and ministry growth becomes a natural process that will define the organizational structure."

Pastors and other church leaders should nurture a climate of openness while discussing church growth plans, Rainer said. "You must allow for lengthy discussion, both formal and informal. Sometimes what is said at the coffee shop on Thursday morning is as important as what's said at the business meeting Wednesday night."

Dependence on God and patience also are important, Rainer noted. "In the 21st century, tenacity may be the key to whether or not churches turn around."

Rainer, author of four books on church growth and/or evangelism, addresses methods for growth in traditional churches in a forthcoming book, "Eating the Elephant: Leading a Traditional Church to Growth," by Broadman & Holman.

In addition to an emphasis on traditional church growth, Rainer sees the church growth movement also placing an increased premium on theological issues and prayer.

The movement is beginning to state its theology more explicitly, Rainer observed. "This is healthy because without theological anchoring the methodology can go nowhere. That is not to say that the church growth movement is non-theological. The movement has not always explicitly stated its theology."

Prayer for spiritual awakening, Rainer said, will become a "major ministry" of churches intent on growth. "Prayer will not be an ancillary ministry, but it will be a major thrust of local church ministry."

Southern Baptists potentially can lead the way in finding creative ways to enable traditional churches to grow, Rainer said. "We have enough innovators and astute men and women in our denomination that I can see Southern Baptists have the opportunity to be in the forefront. I think the Graham school can play an important part in that."

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Church growth strategies must not  
compromise gospel, Mohler says

By Pat Cole

Baptist Press  
2/18/94

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--While marketing methods can be useful tools to help grow churches, such strategies must not compromise the central message of the gospel, emphasized the president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

"There is a danger of marketing the gospel to remove its offensiveness to modern society and thereby committing the heresy of reducing the gospel while at the same time claiming to represent the gospel," said R. Albert Mohler Jr. "On the other hand, many of the marketing methodologies that have been developed out of the church growth movement can foster genuine and sustainable growth in churches, when those churches are well-grounded theologically, motivated biblically and concerned to see the church grow not just as an organization but as the body of Christ."

Mohler, who has written and spoken frequently on church growth, was part of a team of professors who taught a doctor of ministry course recently on church growth at the Louisville, Ky., seminary.

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Marketing research can provide vital information about the concerns of unchurched persons and their social circumstances, said Mohler. "What marketing cannot do for the authentic church is to establish the content of the message. Programs can be marketed. Products can be marketed. Jesus can't be marketed."

Churches should be unapologetic in their quest for numerical growth because numbers represent people in need of Christ, Mohler noted. "The primary impetus in church growth, however, is not numerical increase but faithfulness in bringing persons to faith in Jesus Christ."

Mohler insisted the proper understanding of church growth also includes growth in discipleship, godliness, service, ministry and maturity. "It is multi-dimensional growth. It grows out of a biblical understanding of the nature and mission of the church."

Yet sometimes churches concentrate on increasing attendance at the expense of maintaining a genuine gospel witness, Mohler said. For example, he said a consistent emphasis on "preaching to felt needs" can fail to confront people with the ultimate truths of the Christian faith. "Many persons may feel that their most urgent need is how to raise their kids, overcome their depression, deal with marital problems or manage their finances," Mohler said. "But their deepest need, which far transcends these other needs, is peace with God through Jesus Christ."

Thom Rainer, recently appointed dean of Southern's Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth, said an exclusive focus on felt need preaching is shortsighted. "I think churches with long-lasting growth will be on the cutting edge of methodology, but will have solid biblical preaching and teaching in all areas of the church. Felt needs are important because Jesus was very much in tune with felt needs, but he never compromised the cost of discipleship. It's a balance."

In recent years, "seeker services" have become an effective means of introducing non-Christians to the church, but Mohler cautioned such services, which typically stress felt need sermons and minimize theological content, are only a first step in leading persons to Christ.

"If people remain seekers and never become those who are found in Christ Jesus, they never really become part of the life of the church," Mohler said, adding the New Testament teaches the church is composed of baptized believers. "One temptation of some persons who follow popular church growth models is to redefine the church so that it may not fit the clear teachings of the New Testament."

Mohler pledged Southern Seminary will be committed to church growth that is rooted in deep theological convictions. "I am determined to see Southern Seminary assume leadership, especially through the Billy Graham School of Missions Evangelism and Church Growth, in developing authentic models of church growth based on solid biblical and theological foundations," he said.

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Church growth teacher warns  
against 'cloning' mega-churches

By Pat Cole

Baptist Press  
2/18/94

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Attempts to "clone" mega-churches often have produced more congregational frustration than church growth, according to a Southern Baptist church growth professor.

"A lot of pastors have tried to clone Willow Creek and have failed miserably," said Mark Terry, associate professor of evangelism and church growth at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. Those pastors, he noted, usually have failed to take into account the differences between the situation of their congregation and the setting of churches like the huge Willow Creek Community Church in suburban Chicago.

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"A lot of pastors are crashing and burning," Terry said. "They go to a conference and get all excited and come back and think, 'In six months I'm going to transform a 150-year-old church into a mega-church.' Then in six months the pastor is gone."

There is no single church growth method that will fit all churches, said Terry, advising that strategies must be focused to suit both congregations and communities.

John Dever, Southern's William Walker Brookes professor of church and community, suggested churches intent on growing should become acquainted with their communities by examining census data and doing surveys.

"If you get to know the people -- their characteristics and their needs -- then you can do a better job of reaching out to them and bringing them into the church," Dever said. Churches can then ask how they can use the membership's gifts to reach their communities, he said.

Church-based support groups and counseling ministries are ways churches are responding to needs in their communities, Terry said. "This is a way they can reach out and meet people in the community who are outside the membership. If a counseling ministry or support group is connected with a church, it has a built-in trust factor and the cost is usually either nothing or minimal."

Some churches plan their ministries to reach particular demographic groups, said Dever. He noted many of the newer mega-churches, like Willow Creek and Saddleback Community Church in southern California, have focused their efforts on upwardly mobile baby boomers.

Baby boomers, people born between 1946-64, form a "demographic balloon," Terry said, adding they total about one-third of the U.S. population.

Many unchurched baby boomers are beginning to sense deep spiritual longings as well as a desire to raise their children within the moral teachings of the church, Dever said. "They have found much of their lifestyle not to be very gratifying and they are searching for something else. Many of them take a journey approach to their search. Their journey is a continuous one, constantly looking, constantly searching for answers."

Baby boomers also bring a "consumer mentality" to church, Terry said. "With baby boomers you have considerably more of the mentality that I have got a right to choose, and rather than tradition dictating to me, I'm going to choose what seems right to me and feels right to me."

Although Terry and Dever agree the church growth movement will give increased attention to building traditional churches, both emphasized planting new churches has proven to be thus far the more effective way to reach unchurched people.

"Almost all churches that are growing rapidly are new," Dever said. "It is difficult for an old church to take off and have a growth spiral, but it is not impossible. There are all kinds of examples of that happening. Yet, as statistical probability goes, newer churches grow more rapidly."

It's harder for people to make friends in older churches, Dever said. "People like to have primary groups, close personal relationships, but in an older church these groups are already filled and are not usually open to new people. However, in a new church the group is not formed and new people coming in can form the group."

About 75 percent of new churches in the U.S. were planted by churches that are less than seven years old, Terry said. "New growth produces new growth as a rule."

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'Experiencing God' boosting  
church discipleship stats

Baptist Press  
2/18/94

NASHVILLE (BP)--Contemporary Christian resources that enlighten both spiritually and emotionally are responsible for the increase in discipleship training enrollment in churches, a leader in the field said.

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Discipleship training enrollment/participation in churches showed an increase of 4.59 percent for 1993, according to figures released by the Baptist Sunday School Board's strategic information and planning unit. The increase of 102,069 brought the total enrollment to 2,328,082, statistics show. That figure beats the 1992 increase of 1.1 percent or 23,486.

Roy Edgemon, director of the BSSB discipleship and family development division, said he believes the involvement of churches in using "Experiencing God" and LIFE resources is a major factor in the increase.

"We are seeing an 'Experiencing God' phenomenon in churches across the country," said Edgemon who reported over 245,000 units of the "Experiencing God" course were used in churches in 1993. That's a 115 percent increase over 1992, he said.

Currently, more than 1,500 copies of "Experiencing God" and 1,000 of the course's youth edition are being shipped each day to churches, according to Edgemon.

"It is obvious that the Holy Spirit is moving and working in the lives of individuals and churches in an unusual way," Edgemon said.

Another reason for the increase in enrollment is the intensive launch of support group courses that speak to the hurting lives of Christians, Edgemon said.

These courses address dysfunctions ranging from codependency and alcoholism to sexual abuse and overeating, he said.

"We have learned a large number of persons in churches have deep emotional scars and hurts," Edgemon said. "But they have not had a supportive group or atmosphere where these scars and hurts could be dealt with. Consequently no healing could take place.

"Now these persons are being helped through LIFE courses and they are coming to our churches," he added.

Two other factors in the increase, Edgemon said, are an increasing interest by pastors in equipping their members in discipleship and hard work by state convention discipleship training directors to inform and train church leaders.

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Severe burns, amputation  
fail to derail volunteer

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press  
2/18/94

EL DORADO, Ark. (BP)--After a life-threatening accident in 1982 forced John McAlister into retirement, the Southern Baptist layman knew he could still work if allowed to do so at his own pace.

That pace serves him and countless Southern Baptist ministries well as he and wife Katsy have volunteered for more than 20 mission trips during the past 12 years.

A second serious accident in 1992 -- ending in amputation of a leg below the knee -- did not dampen the couple's enthusiasm for volunteer missions. "I have a good accident every 10 years," McAlister said jokingly. "In 2002, I'm going to go to bed and stay in all year."

From witnessing in Las Vegas to disaster relief work after Hurricane Hugo in South Carolina, the McAlisters have traveled across America and to other countries volunteering in missions.

In 1982, he was loading a tractor onto a truck when the tractor fell onto him, dousing him with gasoline and then igniting.

"I didn't think I could get out from under the tractor until it caught fire," he said, adding it took about a year to recover. "I'm over 60 percent grafted skin."

The incident took some of his stamina, but not his skills or desire to work, so he offered to be the handyman at his church, First Baptist of El Dorado. It was from that work that he learned of other needs at the association, state convention and nationally.

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"It's all a matter of education," he said. "When people find out the needs are there, then you want to do them."

The McAlisters recently completed a two-year assignment with the Wyoming Southern Baptist Convention -- he as state volunteer coordinator and she as state Woman's Missionary Union director.

It was there, while installing molding at the top of an 18-foot church foyer, that McAlister had his second accident, falling from the ladder and suffering a compound fracture of his left leg. Infection forced doctors to amputate the leg below the knee, he said.

He called the latest injury "disheartening," but the two stayed in Wyoming until their assignment was complete. "I'm doing fine now. I'm climbing ladders again and I've already been up on roofs."

He said the volunteer work gives him the satisfaction of knowing he is pleasing God.

"You get pleasure from being obedient," he said. "When you get old and you try to do what your heavenly Father wants you to do, and you feel like you have, it gives you a joy."

Mrs. McAlister said one of her greatest pleasures was helping the Wyoming convention reach last year's state missions goal. It was the first time in the convention's 10-year history, as the 90 congregations raised almost \$22,000.

Now, she regularly speaks in churches encouraging others to volunteer in missions. "We've just always been interested in missions. Once you learn, you have a concern, and when you have a concern you want to do something about it."

"We've thoroughly enjoyed everything we've done," McAlister added.

"Everywhere I've gone, I can think of a particular experience that was fun to do."

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