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Annuity Board offers states
\$35 million over 5 years

By Toby Druin

Baptist Press
3/2/94

DALLAS (BP)--The Southern Baptist Annuity Board is offering state conventions \$35 million over the next five years if they will approve changes in the Church Annuity Plan, the basic retirement program the board administers for the convention's 38,000 churches.

Outlining the proposal to Annuity Board trustees during their Feb. 28-March 1 meeting in Dallas, W. Gordon Hobgood Jr., executive vice president and chief operating officer, said if the changes are approved by the various state conventions, the Annuity Board will fund the states' entire protection section -- the amount the states provide to encourage ministers' participation and which pays for supplemental disability protection and survivor benefits.

The bill for that is \$7 million annually. The Annuity Board will pay it for the next five years, if the states approve the changes.

The state conventions will be asked to consider the changes this fall. If all approve, the changes will go into effect Jan. 1, Hobgood said.

Under the proposed amendments, states would determine requirements for coverage of non-ministerial employees. The current provision is that all employees of a church using the Church Annuity Plan automatically are covered as of Jan. 1, 1998.

The changes would provide for withdrawals of funds from the plan regardless of a participant's age if he or she discontinues service. Currently, if a person has \$20,000 or more in the retirement plan, it cannot be withdrawn until the person is 55.

Another change would permit participants to borrow from their retirement accounts, although the amount has not been determined.

Participants in the old Plan A program would be permitted to receive a reduced retirement benefit at age 55, regardless of whether h or she had terminated service with all churches and associations, which is the current provision.

Other changes will bring the Church Annuity Plan into conformity with standard provisions of other plans, simplify and clarify it and conform to administrative practice, a summary stated.

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"We are proposing it because we are able to do it and because of the ease in administration that it will provide," Hobgood said. "It is very difficult now to have people understand the difference between the church plan and other corporate plans.

"We are trying to make the Church Annuity Plan more understandable so the people can feel better about it and about us."

In other business, the trustees were told Annuity Board assets had risen to almost \$4.5 billion through Jan. 31 and were growing at the rate of \$1.4 million daily. Treasurer Harold Richardson reported total contributions to retirement accounts were \$223 million in 1993 and \$140 million in retirement benefits were paid. The total number of people covered in the adopt-an-annuitant program, providing supplemental retirement benefits, is now 1,506.

Richardson noted beginning in October all funds received by the Annuity Board through the Cooperative Program -- \$1,080,000 -- will go to relief.

Elected as new trustee chairman was Richard C. Scott, dean of the Hancamer School of Business at Baylor University, and as vice chairman, S.A. Adkins, pastor of Forest (Miss.) Baptist Church.

Both President Paul W. Powell and trustee Chairman William A. Willis spent much of their reporting time explaining the discussions concerning the Annuity Board during the meeting of the SBC Executive Committee in Nashville, Feb. 21-22.

Because of questions raised by some state foundations, the board will seek a change in its program statement to permit it to manage additional funds, Willis said.

Powell noted funds are not those from wills or estates, but those from institutions who can profit from the leverage available through the Annuity Board's \$4.5 billion in assets and the favorable position that amount provides.

Another question was raised, they noted, about the board's providing retirement plans for agencies outside the SBC.

In addition to its church and SBC/state convention institutional plans, the Annuity Board also administers plans for Criswell College, Mid-America Baptist Seminary and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, but will not expand to other institutions outside the SBC at the Executive Committee's request. The Executive Committee currently is studying what to do about future relations with the CBF, and the Annuity Board will abide by whatever "bounds" it establishes, Willis said.

Willis noted that during a discussion in an Executive Committee subcommittee about the board's Cooperative Program allocation a list of the salaries of the top administrators of the Annuity Board was distributed by one of the Executive Committee members.

Willis said he told the Executive Committee members distribution of the list was contrary to Annuity Board trustee action. Many of the Executive Committee members apologized to him for the member's impropriety, Willis said.

Powell, in turn, said if an Annuity Board trustee had provided the list it was an example of "very poor trusteeship."

H and Willis also spoke to questions asked again by Executive Committee members about the board's position on abortion relative to its investment policy. At one point in the Executive Committee meeting it was proposed that the board's Cooperative Program allocation be made dependent on a tougher stand against abortion. That was dropped, however, when Powell explained the board's policy against investing in companies that are publicly perceived as providing services or products that aid, support or promote abortion.

Powell told the Annuity Board trustees "the water hits the wheel at the point of our investing in companies that make contributions to Planned Parenthood."

The Annuity Board invests retirement funds in 750-1,000 companies, many with complex holdings, he said, and it is almost impossible to determine if some are contributing to Planned Parenthood or other objectionable causes. Many, he explained, establish separate charitable foundations which make such contributions.

Powell said he personally was opposed to abortion and had personally called the offices of Planned Parenthood to ask about the sources of their support, but was told they would not reveal them.

The Annuity Board has a stated policy against investing funds in companies that are publicly perceived as providing services or support for abortion, he noted, but added the board "walks a fine line of Christian concern and fiduciary responsibility" to manage retirement funds in the best interest of its participants.

He said some consideration has been given to establishing a "sin free" fund where people could designate their money to be invested, but which would earn considerably less interest than the other funds. Such a fund would require \$10 million to establish, he noted.

In his report to the board, Powell said trust is the greatest asset of the board, not its almost \$4.5 billion in financial assets or its \$1.4 million daily growth rate.

"The people of the Southern Baptist Convention trust us," he said. The board has a stewardship to protect that trust, he added.

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Southern Baptists have chance
to impact families, Land says

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
3/2/94

OKLAHOMA CITY (BP)--Southern Baptists have a special opportunity and responsibility to impact American families, Richard Land said in the opening session of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission's 27th annual seminar.

Southern Baptists' forebears have made this possible, the CLC executive director said Feb. 28 at the three-day seminar titled, "The Family in Crisis: Biblical Models and Answers" at First Southern Baptist Church in Del City, Okla.

Land cited an article by Benjamin Hooks, former director of the NAACP, who said in a Washington newspaper the solution to the violent U.S. society "may well lie in a recovery of family values of a Southern Baptist morality, especially the conventional nuclear family with gainfully employed parents."

"Now, I'm grateful that (he) would, in his mind, immediately identify the traditional nuclear family with gainfully employed parents, witnessing to the traditional values of Judeo-Christian morality, with Southern Baptists," Land said.

"Now that is a spiritual and moral capital that we should seek to redeem with interest," he said. "It is also an awesome responsibility to continue to bear faithfully that witness and to do so in ways that will make a difference in our society."

Such factors as sexual immorality, divorce and "pagan parental behavior" are a part of the country's family crisis, Land said.

"The family has almost ceased to function in a nurturing, moralizing way in major segments" of the society, he said.

"We must not only reawaken intact families, revive intact families," Land said, "we must reconstruct within our churches and within our communities of believers a truly biblical understanding of the family as God meant for it to function."

The task requires not only proper beliefs and words, but proper actions and motivations, he said.

"We need greater application of family practice, not just family theory," Land said. "Let's live a life that will make our message to be prophetic because the integrity of our life is pure."

"There is a way back from this moral abyss, but it is only found in God's Word and God's institution of families."

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**Speakers offer counsel
on affair-proof marriages**

By Dana Williamson

OKLAHOMA CITY (BP)--All couples marry with the intention of being happy, said Barbara O'Chester. Meanwhile, her husband, Harold, pastor of Great Hills Baptist Church in Austin, Texas, said the breakdown of Christian families because of infidelity is rising faster than we think.

The O'Chesters spoke on "How to Build an Affair-Proof Marriage" at the opening session of the "Family in Crisis" conference, sponsored by the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission at First Southern Baptist Church in Del City.

"God made us with needs," said Mrs. O'Chester, who leads a women's retreat ministry in the SBC. "Affairs normally come when those needs aren't met."

She said statistics tell us how many marriages are ending but do not tell us how many marriages are drifting apart.

"After the honeymoon, the husband gets really busy at work, and the wife finds something to occupy her time. Mothering takes over. Then when the children leave for college, we realize there is no relationship anymore," Mrs. O'Chester said.

Stressing "if you don't like the direction your marriage is taking, you can change its course," Mrs. O'Chester said there are six kinds of intimacy that need to be developed in a marriage.

One is recreational intimacy. "You need to be doing something together just for fun."

Emotional intimacy, she said, is easier for women than for men. "It is difficult for men to share emotions. Ask God to show you the emotional needs of your husband."

A third kind of intimacy is social, she said. "You need mutual friends."

Mrs. O'Chester cautioned wives not to be spiritually conceited. "In spiritual intimacy, the husband is the spiritual leader. He does not need another Holy Spirit."

Intellectual intimacy should keep us from getting into ruts, she said. "Knowledge is exploding around us. Be able to talk about current issues."

Possibly the greatest need a man has, Mrs. O'Chester said, is physical intimacy. "Don't fall into a rut in this area either," she cautioned.

Noting today's complex culture, Mrs. O'Chester said, "After a man had been out plowing behind his mule all day, his wife looked pretty good to him. Today, however, a man sees beautiful women in the work world, and then comes home to someone who perhaps has not taken care of herself.

"Sometimes a man's self-esteem is wrapped up in his wife," she said. "A man wants an attractive wife. Do the best you can with what you have. Accentuate the positive and, if you can't eliminate the negative, cover it up."

Mrs. O'Chester said a man needs love and esteem from his wife. "Choose to do things that show love. Spoil your husband, and not your children. Don't try to control your husband. He doesn't need another mother."

O'Chester, who has been pastor at Great Hills 23 years, said the road to immorality involves a four-step process.

First, he said, is a reasoning process which begins in the mind. "When you begin to fantasize in your mind, it's the beginning of an affair. You are the only person who can filter your mind. The only sin God tells you to run from is sexual sin."

The reasoning process leads to a relief process or emotional attachment, he said. "Next reality sets in and what was in your mind and emotions moves to the flesh. And finally comes rationalization. Intercourse is always marred by guilt. We rationalize by saying, 'We are only human.'

"It's true, we are only human, but we're also spiritual. We don't have enough Christian leaders standing up today and saying sexual immorality among Christians is not trivial -- it is devastating."

People today, O'Chester said, are asking why immorality is wrong. "God says, 'Thou shall not commit adultery.' That's why it's wrong. God forbids it."

**Decline in youth baptisms
to be focus of YouthReach**

By Sarah Zimmerman

ATLANTA (BP)--To reverse a decline in youth baptisms, Southern Baptists are asked to participate in a strategy called "YouthReach."

Churches received brochures and a commitment form about YouthReach in January, said Dean Finley, Home Mission Board youth evangelism specialist. Churches that return the commitment form will receive a packet of ideas for youth evangelism projects. The ideas include tips on how to make existing programs more evangelistic and how to use special events.

The first YouthReach was held in 1991 in response to the decline in youth baptisms, Finley said. That year, 89,595 youth baptisms were reported.

Last year, 80,438 youth were baptized, compared to 85,473 in 1992. The last two years, youth baptisms accounted for 23 percent of Southern Baptists' baptisms.

Youth baptisms in the Southern Baptist Convention peaked at 137,667 in 1972 when they accounted for 33 percent of all baptisms. Youth baptisms dropped until 1987 when they reached a 20-year low of 79,000.

The 1972 peak in youth baptisms can be attributed, in part, to the baby boom generation reaching its teen years. But baptisms have not kept pace with the youth population that has been increasing since 1989.

This year's YouthReach will culminate with a September celebration service in local churches. The service can include baptisms of youth who have recently made professions of faith and recognition of youth who were baptized earlier in the year, Finley said.

YouthReach activities are planned for 1997 and 2000.

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**BJC joins brief opposing
school in Jewish village**

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
3/2/94

WASHINGTON (BP)--The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs has joined in a brief asking the U.S. Supreme Court to rule a public school for disabled children in the village of an orthodox Jewish sect is a violation of the separation of church and state.

The recent filing of the brief again places the BJC, the Southern Baptist Convention's former church-state representative, and the Christian Life Commission, the SBC agency now handling religious liberty issues, on opposite sides in a case involving the First Amendment's clause concerning establishment of religion.

The case, Board of Education of the Kiryas Joel School District v. Grumet, involves the New York legislature's establishment of a school district for physically, mentally and emotionally impaired children in an Orange County municipality in which only Satmar Hasidic Jews live. The lower courts have ruled the school is a violation of the establishment clause.

The brief, filed Feb. 23 by the National Education Association and the National Coalition for Public Education and Religious Liberty (National PEARL), which includes the BJC, says the law gives "governmental power to a community that functions as a religious establishment" and was adopted "with the unconstitutional purpose of creating a school district to educate only Hasidic children."

"The Satmars' beliefs are and should be fully protected by the First Amendment," the brief says. "But the same First Amendment that protects the Satmars' choice also prohibits them from creating a religious establishment that operates a public school district."

The village discriminates "against those who do not adhere to the views of the prevailing establishment," the brief says. It also says the school district not only is for Hasidic children in the village but Hasidic children from other parts of the county.

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The CLC filed a brief in January asking the Supreme Court to use the Kiryas Joel case to replace the Lemon test, the court's standard in establishment clause cases, with a test providing for accommodation of religious expression without establishing religion. It is the third time in four years the CLC has called for a new test.

The brief filed by the BJC and the other groups did not directly defend Lemon. The BJC has regularly defended the Lemon test as an appropriate establishment clause standard.

The New York Court of Appeals ruled the legislature's action primarily advanced religion, thereby violating the second prong of the Lemon test. The Lemon test, which was established in the 1971 Lemon v. Kurtzman opinion, requires a government activity to pass a three-part standard. In order to avoid being a violation of church-state separation, Lemon says an activity must: 1) Have a secular purpose; 2) not primarily advance or inhibit religion, and 3) not foster excessive entanglement with religion.

The CLC brief criticized Lemon for requiring secular purposes and permitting only secular results. The brief recommends a test which the CLC says would promote neutrality by upholding government action which accommodates independent religious choices rather than provides preferential treatment for a religious practice.

In addition to the BJC, members of National PEARL signing onto the brief included the American Humanist Association, American Jewish Congress, National Parent Teachers Association and Unitarian/Universalist Association.

Among other organizations filing briefs opposed to the school district were the National Council of Churches; Presbyterian Church USA; People for the American Way; Americans United for Separation of Church and State; American Civil Liberties Union; National School Boards Association, and national and state teachers unions.

In addition to the CLC, others filing briefs siding with the school district included The Rutherford Institute, American Center for Law and Justice, Christian Legal Society, National Association of Evangelicals, Family Research Council, United States Catholic Conference, Knights of Columbus and Agudath Israel.

The residents of Kiryas Joel village, which became a municipality in 1977, practice cultural separation from the rest of society. The village has separate private schools for non-disabled boys and girls. The public school's superintendent is not Hasidic, though the school board's seven members are Hasidic Jews. The teachers, who are all from outside the village, are religiously diverse and teach only secular subjects.

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National Prayer Conference
rescheduled for June 1995

Baptist Press
3/2/94

NASHVILLE (BP)--The National Prayer Conference scheduled for June 9-10 in Orlando, Fla., has been rescheduled to precede the 1995 Atlanta convention, according to Garry Insko, chairman of the SBC Bold Mission Thrust Planning Team.

Information regarding the program and location of the June 15-16, 1995, conference will be made later this year by Jimmy Crowe, Baptist Sunday School Board retiree who will serve as coordinator for the event.

Three members of the Bold Mission Prayer Thrust Planning Team are retiring during 1994: Minette Drumwright, Foreign Mission Board; T.W. Hunt, Baptist Sunday School Board; and Mickey Martin, Woman's Missionary Union. Avery Willis has moved from the Sunday School Board to the Foreign Mission Board and the role of Henry Blackaby has expanded beyond the Home Mission Board, his sole employer since 1988, to also assisting the Foreign Mission Board and the Sunday School Board.

In light of this restructuring and the many pre-convention events related to the 1994 Orlando convention, Insko said attention is shifting to a major prayer event preceding Southern Baptist's sesquicentennial year convention in Atlanta and launching the last five years of Bold Mission Thrust.

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**20-year-old faces challenge
of Estonian children's work**

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (BP)--When Kristiina Krabi started work as an assistant at the Estonian Baptist Union about 18 months ago, she never dreamed that within a year she would be directing children's work for evangelical churches throughout the former Soviet republic.

Krabi, who has been a Christian only five years, came to the Baptist union "just to be of service," she said. But when her supervisor resigned to return to seminary, the mantle of children's work secretary fell upon the willing, but nervous 20-year-old.

"When my boss left, I knew I was in trouble," Krabi said. "I was used to getting orders. Now I was the one having to give orders."

During the years of Soviet domination of Estonia, adults were allowed to worship in Baptist churches, but training of children and youth was severely restricted.

"The few courageous women who taught children in Sunday school had to use the same material that came from Child Evangelism Fellowship more than 20 years ago," Krabi said.

Today churches in the Estonian Union, which includes Baptists and other free-church evangelicals, number about 7,000 children in Sunday school.

"During the Soviet time, practically all of the children in Sunday school were from Christian homes. Now two-thirds are not from Christian homes," Krabi said. "We must start from the beginning in teaching them."

Several months ago, Jackie Evans Faughn, Girls in Action/Mission Friends consultant for Woman's Missionary Union of Texas, went to Estonia to help Krabi work toward the development of new children's curriculum for the Baptist Union.

The Baptist General Convention of Texas is involved in a partnership missions relationship with the Estonian Baptist Union.

In recent days, Krabi has gained further insights about children's work and curriculum development by visiting with faculty at Dallas Baptist University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, touring several Texas Baptist churches and attending Mission FriendsFest in San Antonio, a statewide conference for leaders in preschool missions education.

Krabi said her goal for Estonian Baptist children's work is three-fold: to create new curriculum, to develop a new generation of dedicated leaders and to organize training for Sunday school teachers. But she acknowledges change comes slowly.

"Even though we are now free, the Soviet time has marked us. Many Estonians have immigrated to other countries. Many died in Siberia. Many came back to our country after 25 years in prison," she told participants at Mission FriendsFest.

Churches in Estonia enjoy a degree of freedom today that was unimaginable 10 years ago, she noted. But with that freedom comes a responsibility to change, grow and be responsive to God's leadership.

"We are glad God has brought change to our country," she said. "But change is still needed, and there are so many more things we can do."

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FIRST-PERSON

**Prof says Cambridge, England,
marked by evangelical strength**

By Robert Benne

**Baptist Press
3/2/94**

CAMBRIDGE, England (BP)--Cambridge is an unlikely hotbed of evangelical strength -- unlikely because of its domination by a great secular university as well as because of its high-tech economic base. Great doses of modern education and spiritual renewal seem an unlikely combination.

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But the city has at least a dozen flourishing evangelical and charismatic churches. In the past year, my third sabbatical year there since 1978, I observed four churches -- Eden Baptist, St. Andrew's Street Baptist, the Round Church and Holy Trinity. The last two are Anglican. Each of these churches is very attractive to students of Cambridge University; literally thousands of students worship at these churches during the academic term. They are rapidly gaining members from among the permanent population of Cambridge as well.

Expository biblical preaching would be part of a composite portrait of these churches. They not only have Bibles available to every participant, but most insist strongly that you bring your own so that you can underline and make notes. The expositions last from 30 to 40 minutes and no one even sighs. Whole biblical books are taken up over a period of weeks; complete narratives are worked through. The preaching is not flamboyant. Indeed, preachers go out of their way to diminish themselves in relation to the text. There is very little personal testimony, virtually no reliance on "my story." My biggest surprise was to see how intellectually sharp and non-emotional such preaching was. It appeals to the mind as much as the heart.

The Bible has great authority for the preacher and hearer alike. The preaching imparts clear and rather detailed guides for Christian faith and life. Roy Clements, the head minister and preacher of the Eden Baptist Chapel (which has two "daughter" congregations), is perhaps the most inspirational of an abundance of fine preachers. The preachers convey a sense of confidence in and zeal for the Scripture. Few psychologize the message; even fewer indulge in social science. They seem actually to believe that hungry spirits are fed by the Christian proclamation. This is in dramatic contrast to the mostly liberal clerics who offer their "Thought for the Day" on Radio Four, the morning news program listened to by millions of British. These preachers invariably engage in second-rate political commentary on some contentious issue such as entry into the European Community, about which the Christian faith has little directly to say.

The traditional tendency of evangelicals to be concerned only with the "life of the spirit" is definitely countered by these churches. St. Andrew's Street Baptist operates a restaurant with wholesome food at low cost (a store with evangelical books is under the same roof), a job center and a shelter for the homeless. Another church operates a food pantry and soup kitchen. Since all are in central Cambridge, all are attuned to the needs of the poor in a serious economic downturn. Many are involved in ministries of mercy to those affected by the war in the former Yugoslavia.

These churches have networks of pastoral care for those within the church. One of our newly made friends, who was traumatically widowed at an early age, found the support system of the Round Church utterly indispensable. Several of the churches operate counseling centers. All have organized ministries to the elderly, which make up a high proportion of the church membership.

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Benne is Jordan-Trexler professor of religion at Roanoke College in Salem, Va. Copyright 1993 Christian Century Foundation. Reprinted by permission from the Oct. 27, 1993, issue of The Christian Century.

Popular musician balances
world travel, family life

By Rich Reasoner

Baptist Press
3/2/94

MARIETTA, Ga. (BP)--Most people don't enjoy doing the laundry or cleaning up after breakfast. But Babbie Mason -- contemporary Christian singer, songwriter, wife and mother -- thinks it's fun.

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Mason makes approximately 150 concert appearances worldwide each year and has written countless popular songs for herself and other Christian artists. With the recent release of "Standing In the Gap For You," Mason has completed 10 of her own albums. Among her popular songs: "The Only Hope," "God Has Another Plan" and "Each One Reach One." She has received various honors, including the Coca-Cola Music Award for Gospel Artist of the Year, and has performed with the Billy Graham team, including the crusade in Japan in January.

In recent weeks, however, she also has found time to do things in life that make her happy besides songwriting and performing in front of thousands of people. Now, on "regular" mornings she gets up and fixes breakfast for her son, Chaz, puts in a load of laundry and does 20 minutes on the exercise machine. "I'm getting a kick out of doing laundry" she says.

Family is important to Mason and her husband, Charles, who are members of Eastside Baptist Church in Marietta, Ga. In fact, her ministry involves her whole family. Her husband is also her business manager and is the sound and lighting crew at each concert. Her son often travels with the family for performances, has "cameo" appearances on stage with Mason and is always her biggest fan.

"In one way (my career) has forced us to be flexible," Mason said. "We really needed routine. You know, cooking chicken, matching socks, going to Wal-Mart kind of stuff. That's what I'm craving for now."

Her busy music career started when she was only 6 years old. Her family owned an old upright piano that was so big they couldn't get it into their Michigan house. "I played that piano in the garage in the dead of winter," Babbie recounted. "The kids in the neighborhood would come by and we'd sing and play. Then the neighbors started coming over!"

Mason's parents realized by that time she had a gift for music; she was only "playing by ear" and they decided to let her have formal training on the piano.

After three years of lessons her father, then pastor of Lilly Springs Baptist Church in Jackson, Mich., asked her to play in the church to fill a vacancy. "I can't remember if I was nervous or not," Mason said, but she went on to serve her father's church as pianist and choir director nearly 20 years.

It was in Jackson in the late 1970s she met her husband, Charles. He was coaching the baseball team her little brother was playing for. He also was working on a project that was bringing concerts to the local community center and he wanted to meet Babbie's mother to arrange a performance. It was her brother who really introduced them.

"My brother said, 'No man, you need to talk to my sister, not my mom!'" Babbie said. Eventually the business relationship turned into a romance.

After marriage, Babbie and Charles moved to Atlanta. The day after they arrived they turned on the television and saw Roswell Street Baptist Church's services. Charles said, "Tomorrow, we are going to go down to that church and see about getting you to sing in their church." She did sing at the church, but her career did not quite jump off the ground at that point.

Mason taught music at a local middle high school and found other ways to perform and express her love for music. When they moved to Atlanta they could not afford to move the grand piano her father's church had given her, which was hard for Mason because "playing the piano, for me, is like eating."

When she had time, she would frequently go to the piano/organ store at a local mall to "try out" all the instruments. "Finally they began to recognize me ... and offered me a job teaching the piano," she said.

Little by little the doors that would eventually lead to a performance career began to open. Mason said she believes at this point in her career it was her faith in God that developed her ministry.

"That has been the motto of our ministry. The Lord has always allowed one thing to lead to another," Mason said. The Masons have never had a booking agent and now they don't even have to make phone calls to book a performance. Mason said she believes "if you do what you are called to do, the Lord will do the rest."

For those unfamiliar with Mason's music, it is a blend of styles she herself hesitates to categorize. It ranges from strong evangelical hits such as "Each One Reach One" to worshipful songs like "In All of His Glory" to lighthearted jazz/gospel songs.

"I hesitate to categorize my music," she said. "When I sing I look out into the audience and I see people of all races and all ages. I would consider my music bridge-building because it bridges gaps between denominations and races. It fits a lot of formats. It's inspirational, it has ballads, the contemporary stuff and the pop stuff."

Although Mason is experiencing much success, she said she tries not to lose focus of her mission. "The industry is becoming so market-oriented that I think we are losing our mission. I try not to get wrapped up in comparing myself to others," she said.

No. 1 hits on the Christian music charts are not the reason she sings, she added. "The music I produce is to minister to people, to encourage them and lead them to the Lord." Her latest hit, for example, "Standing In the Gap," is a song that "let's people know I'm praying for them."

Mason's favorite personal performance happened recently in Mississippi. "My mom and dad are from Mississippi and they have told me stories about growing up in the south. Unbelievable stories," said Mason, "like the ones you see on documentaries about growing up poor and being the object of racism."

She was invited to sing at a "white" Southern Baptist church. While performing she looked out into the congregation and realized white and black people were worshipping together.

"That just elated me," Mason exclaimed. "I said to myself, 'This is God and this is the church. This is what the body really looks like.' In spite of history and in spite of circumstances we were worshipping together."

Although her ministry takes her around the country and the world, she still has time to attend Eastside Baptist. She doesn't sing in the choir because her schedule does not always permit her to practice with them.

She also finds time to make a difference in her own community. On a regular basis, she visits youth detention centers, jails, prisons and teen crisis pregnancy centers.

Ministry is far more than just a 90-minute concert, Mason said, noting she seeks to practice what she sings. She desires, as she put it, "to make a great commotion over the Great Commission."

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Reasoner is a writer for The Christian Index, Georgia Baptists' newsjournal. (BP) photo available upon request from the Index.

Church's marketplace ministry
aids nurses, teachers, others

By Orville Scott

Baptist Press
3/2/94

DALLAS (BP)--Extending its ministry into the marketplace drew such an overwhelming response that Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas had to turn away 40 nurses seeking to enroll in "The Spirituality of Nursing" seminar in February.

The seminar, attended by 60 nurses and student nurses last year, drew 165 applicants this year. Unfortunately, facilities were available for only 125, said Brian Burton, Wilshire's minister to single and married adults.

The nursing seminar is one of Wilshire's ministries patterned after the example of Jesus who conducted much of his ministry in the marketplace, in homes and by the seashore, said Burton.

Last fall, the church of 2,000 resident members enrolled 43 school teachers in a "New Teachers Support Group" led by Wilshire member Karen Rogers, principal at Lakewood Elementary School in Dallas. The ministry which ran for the first six weeks of the fall semester, will be offered again this fall.

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The year before, scores of unemployed professionals attended Wilshire's support-group ministry for unemployed accountants and attorneys.

Most of those participating in the support groups and the nursing seminar are not members of Wilshire.

"Real ministry isn't self-serving," said Burton. "For example, the nursing seminar may not do anything to increase Wilshire's membership. But it will equip health professionals from many churches to effectively reach out and touch hurting people with God's healing love. That's what we believe ministry is all about."

Burton said Wilshire is making long-range plans for the next seven years. "We hope to expand our marketplace ministries to a whole array of vocationally related seminars and support groups in our constantly changing and growing metroplex.

"We are taking inventory of lay people God has placed in our church and will extend ministries out to the community through them."

The nursing seminar was taught by Wilshire member Linda Garner, associate professor at Baylor University School of Nursing in Dallas and former director of nursing at Bangalore (India) Baptist Hospital. It was co-sponsored by Baylor University Medical Center and the Texas Baptist Nursing Fellowship.

Seminar participants learned to interpret and evaluate spiritual needs and how to conduct spiritual care assessment of patients, Burton said.

"They also gained insight into the impact of their bedside manner in meeting patients' physical and spiritual needs, and they increased their skills in providing care to those for whom recovery from illness has led to distorted images of God, others and themselves."

Since the original seminar, Garner has taught "The Spirituality of Nursing" at four Dallas-area hospitals.

A participant in the seminar at Wilshire said, "It has helped me both on my job and in my daily living. I'm eager for another one like it."

"A number of nurses said they appreciated the spiritual emphasis in the seminar because, in their training, they had never had an emphasis on caring for the whole patient," Garner said.

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CORRECTION: In (BP) story titled "Churches 'missing the bus' if not reaching single parents," dated 2/25/94, please change the name of the man quoted in the second paragraph to John Sisson.

Thanks,
Baptist Press

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