

# (BP)

## BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee  
901 Commerce #7  
Nashville, Tennessee 372  
(615) 244-23  
Herb Hollinger, Vice President  
Fax (615) 742-89  
CompuServe ID# 70420

### BUREAUS

ATLANTA Martin King, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 898-7522  
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 333 N. Washington, Dallas, Texas 75246-1798, Telephone (214) 828-5232  
NASHVILLE 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300  
RICHMOND Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va., 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151  
WASHINGTON Tom Strode, Chief, 400 North Capitol St., #594, Washington, D.C. 20001, Telephone (202) 638-3223

March 16, 1994

94-46

NEW ORLEANS -- After 22 years, happy ending for rape victim and daughter; photo.  
MISSOURI -- Midwestern alumnus Pete Nicholls keeps faith despite AIDS battle; photo.  
NORTH CAROLINA -- SEBTS celebrates endowment; trustees OK curriculum changes.  
CHICAGO -- Pro-abortion protest fizzles against anti-abortion church.  
TENNESSEE -- World Changers schedules training for crew chiefs.  
MISSISSIPPI -- Mississippi College taps S. Dakota's Howell W. Todd.  
NASHVILLE -- Baby-boomer-styled churches attempt 'innovative' witness,  
NASHVILLE -- Don't break traditional mold, just modify it some, they say.  
KENTUCKY -- Black churches expanding ministries of empowerment.  
TENNESSEE -- Church's departure from SBC affirmed by Tennessee court.  
TENNESSEE -- Takeover ruling sends warning to all SBC churches, DOM says.

After 22 years, happy ending  
for rape victim and daughter

By Debbie Moore

Baptist Press  
3/16/94

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--She was just sitting at home one morning when the phone rang. "Hello, you've never met me, but you're my mother," she heard a young woman's voice say.

After 22 years of wondering about what she calls "the missing piece" in her life, Lee Ezell was suddenly reunited with a daughter she had long ago given up for adoption.

A victim of child abuse, rape and a resulting pregnancy, Ezell is now an award-winning author, popular speaker and self-declared humor therapist from Newport Beach, Calif. She recently told her story during a chapel service and "L rd, Change Me ..." women's rally on the campus of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Speaking as "a fellow struggler in this thing of trying to learn how to interpret God in the things that happen to us day by day," Ezell said she grew up in Philadelphia's inner city. She was raised in a home where domestic violence visits by the police were a normal occurrence. Her alcoholic parents constantly reminded her she was not loved and not wanted.

In 1963, at age 18, she left home to seek a new life in San Francisco. She got a job as a secretary; a salesman took advantage of her naivety, raped her, and she became pregnant.

A friend talked to her about having an abortion. "She would have taken me somewhere," Ezell said. "Her cousin had gone to Tijuana. She told me it wasn't too bad."

Although she was young in her faith, having recently become a Christian through a Billy Graham crusade, Ezell said she knew according to what the Bible said abortion was not the answer to her problem.

"The things of God were very new to me," she said. "In those days when I was hysterically crying most of the day, wondering what in the world I would do, I was flipping through the Scriptures trying to find some word from God, and I found those beautiful verses ... in Psalm 139.

--more--

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

"Abortion is too permanent an answer to a temporary problem," Ezell said.

Determined now to find a way to go full term with the pregnancy, she went to Los Angeles where she found first a church and then a Christian couple who took her in and provided for her prenatal care.

Like any birth mother, she said she wanted the best for her child. She decided that with her circumstances adoption was the best choice. She requested only one thing: for the adoptive couple to be Christians.

Ezell said she wants all adoptees to know they were not rejected. "They were loved," she said. "Their birth mother did not take the easy way out."

She gave birth to a baby girl in a Los Angeles county hospital. She never saw or held her. "Truly, to me she was the biggest missing piece of my life so far," Ezell said. "Records were sealed in California. I knew that was a closed chapter. I cried in the hospital. I said to myself, 'Well, you're going to have plenty of other children.'"

However, she had no way of knowing at the time that child would be the only child she would ever give birth to.

Ten years later she married Harold Ezell, who had two daughters; they were not able to have any children of their own.

Ironically, she adopted his two children as her own in the same Los Angeles county adoptions courtroom where she signed the papers to give away her daughter. She said she could not help but wonder who sat there to receive her child.

"I wondered what they looked like, where she is now, like any birth mother," Ezell said. "Mother's Day would go by and Christmas and birthdays, and I would wonder and think, 'She's 2 now, ... she's 5 now. ..."

"But becoming an adoptive mom and being on both sides of the issue, I never did feel it was right to search for her."

The daughter she gave up for adoption did not feel that way, however.

Raised in a Christian home and now living in northern Michigan, Julie Makimaa had a desire to meet her birth mother and tell her what a difference God could make in her life. Through an agency that helps adopted children find their birth parents, she was able to get the phone number of the woman who took Ezell in when she was pregnant. She received the 22-year-old number only a few weeks before the telephone would be disconnected and the woman would move into a retirement home.

Then came the anxious, yet amazing, telephone conversation.

"This was such an unreal phone call to me! This voice on the end of the phone was very methodically telling me, 'I thought you'd like to know you're a grandmother, two grandchildren!"

"And then, even sweeter, ... that child tried to do what she'd always dreamed she'd be able to do. She tried to lead me to Jesus on the telephone. I let her keep going because I wanted to see if she was any good!"

They set a date to meet each other. "Through the door of a hotel room walked a girl who looked strikingly like me," Ezell said. A picture of the two captured the exuberant look in the same dark, captivating Irish eyes, the same big welcoming smile, the same dark wavy hair, the same patrician nose and square chin.

The first thing Makimaa's husband said to Ezell was, "Thank you for not aborting Julie. I don't know what my life would be like without her and my children."

From this reunion Ezell wrote her award-winning book, "The Missing Piece," published by Harvest House. "I had truly resolved my problem, and the missing piece of my past had been filled with the peace of God," she said. "So what did it mean now that he was revealing that missing piece?"

When Ezell's book was released in 1986, the two mothers of the adopted daughter held a press conference on Mother's Day. "We feel like we're just a little bigger family," Ezell said. "We talked about how God can put together the pieces in life ... and make sense out of nonsense," Ezell said. "And after that we had such a groundswell of interest of media."

--more--

Since then they have appeared together on many talk shows, both Christian and secular, such as "Focus on the Family," "The 700 Club," "Sally Jess Raphael," "Geraldo" and "Donahue."

"It was such a thrill to sit next to my daughter on the Phil Donahue show and hear her say, 'Yes, I am the result of rape, but I'm so glad I didn't get the death penalty for my father's crime,'" Ezell said.

She and her newly found daughter want their lives and experience "to stand as an example of the right to life," Ezell said, "and of the positive value that reuniting adopted children with a natural parent or parents can have."

"Children born out of sexual assault do not inherit evil genes," she said.

"It doesn't matter how you begin but what you become in life."

--30--

(BP) photo available from New Orleans Seminary's office of public relations.

Midwestern alumnus Pete Nicholls  
keeps faith despite AIDS battle By Brenda Sanders

Baptist Press  
3/16/94

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--How does it feel to be told you have AIDS?

"My first impulse was to deny that this could happen to me. I thought, 'This only happens to other people, people who live very different lifestyles, people who live in San Francisco or New York. This can't happen to me.'"

How does it feel to be the pastor of a small-town church and be told you have AIDS?

"I remember praying, 'Lord, I've got a family, a church. If you love me, you won't make me go through this.'"

Peter Nicholls, an alumnus of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, knows how such questions feel. Two and a half years ago, he received the diagnosis: "You have AIDS."

At that time, he was pastor of the nondenominational Community Church of Pilot Grove, Mo. One year later, he resigned the pastorate to devote the rest of his life to public speaking for AIDS awareness and to minister to AIDS patients.

Because his immune system has collapsed, Nicholls suffers frequent illnesses and has been hospitalized repeatedly for pneumocystis pneumonia and even for an HIV-induced blindness. More than once, he has been near death.

"I'm one of the few people still walking around who have a T-4 count of zero," Nicholls said.

The "T-4 helper cells" are key blood cells that detect invading viruses and set the human immune system in motion to destroy them. The AIDS-causing virus, HIV, selectively destroys T-4 cells.

"I've been told that anyone with a T-4 count under 50 has a survival rate of a year to a year and a half," Nicholls said. "My count has been at zero for more than a year already."

There are good days and bad days, Nicholls said. He devotes many of his "good days" to continued service to the God who called him into ministry as a youth.

Recently, Nicholls, who received Midwestern's master of divinity degree in 1988 and master of religious education degree in 1990, returned to the Kansas City, Mo., campus and addressed students, faculty and staff during a chapel service. He told them of his journey through what he calls the "maze of HIV" and urged them to reach out in Christian love to persons who suffer from the disease that has been called "modern-day leprosy."

In May 1991, Nicholls became concerned about a rash on his skin that wouldn't heal and seemed to be spreading. He saw a dermatologist, then an internist, and both were baffled.

"I was tested for every type of disease you could imagine," Nicholls recalled. "All the tests came back negative, yet I kept feeling worse and getting weaker."

Finally, the internist asked Nicholls an unthinkable question: "Is there anything you've done that could have put you into contact with HIV?"

--more--

Nicholls responded, "Yes."

In 1983-84, just before he enrolled as a student at Midwestern Seminary, Nicholls worked in a health care facility where his responsibilities included cleaning up blood spills and hospital waste materials.

The AIDS epidemic was only beginning in the early 1980s. It was not yet routine for health care workers to take special precautions to protect themselves against HIV infection.

Sometimes, Nicholls said, he handled sharp objects in the health center. He remembered working with nicks and cuts on his hands and without protective gloves.

"Some of the blood I handled must have been infected," Nicholls acknowledged.

His internist arranged for Nicholls to be tested for HIV. The test results came back positive.

Nicholls said he could not believe the results and asked to be tested again. As he drove to the testing facility to receive the results of his second HIV test, he began to bargain with God.

"I started praying," he said, "'Lord, please make this test negative. I have a wife and three little kids. I have a ministry. I spent years in school, training to be a pastor for you. You can't let this happen to me, after all I've done for you.'"

Then, Nicholls said, "In my fear and anger, it was as if God's gentle voice broke through to me and said, 'Wait a minute, Pete. This isn't your church; it's my church. You haven't done anything; I died for you.'"

In that moment, Nicholls said, he so strongly felt God's presence with him he was able to truly put his life -- and death -- in God's hands.

"I decided I would not let Satan use this situation to cause me to be bitter or to feel sorry for myself," Nicholls said. "I promised God that if the second test results were positive, I would be loyal to him to the day I die."

The results were positive and Nicholls determined to keep his promise.

First, he told his wife and children, his closest friends and his church.

His wife, Rosemary, has been a source of strength to him, Nicholls said. "I've been blessed with a wife who loves me, who's been sticking by me. She's a miracle in my life. She's so upbeat."

Nicholls keeps reminding his children -- Pete, 12, Sarah, 9, and Andrew, 7 -- how much he loves them and how much God loves them, even as he grows more weak and ill from the effects of a disease that ultimately will take him from them.

"How do you tell your kids that you're going to die, and that Jesus loves them, at the same time?" he reflected.

And how does a pastor tell his congregation he has AIDS? Nicholls said it wasn't easy.

"I was afraid of how the congregation would react," he recounted. But on Sunday, he told them, then moved to the back of the sanctuary and prayed the benediction.

Afterward, "Everybody came back to me and shook my hand, hugged me and kissed me and said, 'We love you.'"

Nicholls said the entire Pilot Grove community has been supportive and accepting of him and his family since the news of his illness became common knowledge. Residents in the town of under 800 people have thrown a community dinner to raise money for Nicholls' expenses and have treated his children with warmth and love.

"Nobody has responded in fear toward me or my family," he said. "We know God has blessed us in this way because we put our trust in him."

In July 1992, Nicholls resigned his pastorate and focused his energies on a twofold ministry: helping AIDS patients through the "maze of HIV" and speaking to church groups about AIDS awareness.

He has conceived an organization called "AIDS Focus Ministries of Missouri" which he hopes to develop as a resource service to help HIV-positive patients deal with complications of the disease.

"The information on AIDS changes daily," he said. "It's hard to assimilate it all by yourself. People need help finding the answers to questions like, Where do you go to get an HIV test? Once you've been diagnosed, where do you go to get AZT for treatment? (AZT is the anti-viral drug that slows the process of the AIDS virus.) How do you qualify for government aid to pay for your medication?"

Nicholls encourages church members to become better educated about AIDS and how they can minister to AIDS patients. He urges Christians not to view AIDS as a "political" disease.

"I think too many people in this country are polarized over this disease because a vocal minority in the gay community have politicized AIDS-related issues," he said.

"Without compromising their theological or moral beliefs, Christians can undermine the efforts of a few people who want to use this disease to make a political statement," he continued. "Christians can offer a redemptive ministry to people who are really in need and might be receptive to the gospel message now, more than at any other time in their lives."

Nicholls added, "I don't think one's politics should have anything to do with one's ability to minister to people."

He said he is often asked, "Do you think this disease is God's judgment on a fallen nation?" His response: "Not at all. I think that's a very bad theological approach to take."

Nicholls said, "For one thing, it is no longer just a homosexual disease; it's also a heterosexual disease. When you consider that many people have contracted AIDS through blood transfusions or by working in health care facilities, where is the wrath of God in that? Or when you think of how many people die of cancer every year, how can one disease be God's judgment on us and another disease not?"

He continued, "We need to be very careful with the theology of suffering and the theology of a fallen world and how we mesh that together. If we view God as a person up there with a club ready to strike us whenever we do something wrong, it takes away the grace aspect that exists in one's personal relationship with Jesus Christ."

Nicholls said he was thankful to have learned about the theology of suffering during his years as a student at Midwestern. "Now that I'm going through this experience, I think I most appreciate developing this theology in a caring seminary community," he noted.

"I still have moments of terror," Nicholls admitted, "but in those moments, I remember that I am God's child and my life is under his sovereignty. Knowing that alleviates an incredible amount of fear and gives me a feeling of rest."

Nicholls continued, "Spiritually, I have prepared myself to die. I know God will take care of my wife and my kids when I'm gone. I have come to terms with this illness, with my life and death. I can say with complete freedom, 'God is so good to me.'"

--30--

(BP) photo available from the Midwestern Seminary office of public relations.

SEBTS celebrates endowment;  
trustees OK curriculum changes By Norman Miller

Baptist Press  
3/16/94

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary trustees, during their annual spring meeting, March 14-15, voted to establish a professorial chair of evangelism, approved curriculum changes adopted by the seminary's faculty and formed a committee to study the feasibility of offering undergraduate courses at the seminary.

Board chairman Ned Mathews, pastor of Parkwood Baptist Church in Charlotte, N.C., read a letter from the donors whose gift will sustain the chair of evangelism. The donors, who wish to remain anonymous, expressed gratitude for Southeastern's evangelistic emphasis and commitment to the authority of Scripture.

--more--

A paragraph in the letter asked Southeastern President Paige Patterson to "continue to keep the school solidly on the inerrant Word of God" and expressed confidence Patterson always would emphasize "the priority of winning souls to Christ."

Trustees voted to establish the chair in response to the \$1 million commitment and in honor of Southern Baptist evangelist Bailey Smith.

Smith responded to the action in a telephone interview: "While I am extremely elated for this high honor, what excites me most is the number of persons who will be won to our Savior through the vital education this endowment will provide. Evangelism reflects my heart for the world, and I'm deeply thrilled about having a small part in the training and ministry of those students whom I pray God will us in bringing revival to our world."

Patterson said additional chairs are planned, and he asked trustees to "pray that God will put it in the hearts of the people" to donate to this effort. Patterson also said he hoped to announce the endowment of more chairs in the near future.

Trustees in a unanimous vote accepted faculty-approved changes to Southeastern's current master of divinity degree program. In his report to trustees and during subsequent discussion, Patterson said the curriculum revision will "have a stronger emphasis upon the biblical languages of Greek and Hebrew, should more adequately equip God's ministers for the pastorate and for church growth and will reflect a return to classical theological education."

Patterson said the new curriculum would be available to students as early as the fall 1994 semester.

The trustee board's executive committee recommended the nomination of three trustees and three Southeastern faculty members to an ad hoc committee which would study the possibility of offering upper-level undergraduate courses at the seminary.

"What we envision is a curriculum which would offer up to 70 hours toward the completion of a B.A. in biblical and theological studies," Patterson said. "Students will complete the history, math and science courses normally required for an undergraduate degree at an accredited institution. Then they could finish their junior and senior years in a program of study designed to prepare them for the intensity of theological study at the graduate level."

Nominees to the committee were approved unanimously. The study group is expected to bring its findings to the fall 1994 trustee meeting, Oct. 10-11.

The executive committee also recommended the formation of a board of visitors. Members of this board would serve at the pleasure of the trustees for an indefinite term, assisting in several areas, including financial development, student recruitment, public relations and the general fulfillment of Southeastern's statement of purpose.

In other actions, trustees:

- received as information Patterson's comments about an announcement expected from the Association of Theological Schools, one of Southeastern's accrediting agencies. He said he was "hopeful about the outcome of the report" but said ATS will make the official announcement in June;

- formed a committee to study whether Southeastern should continue granting tenure to its professors;

- approved increases in matriculation and housing fees which reflect those currently assessed at the other five SBC seminaries;

- gave a standing ovation and passed a motion recognizing all seminary employees who worked diligently and extensively in responding to SACS recommendations late last year concerning the seminary's 10-year reaffirmation;

- expressed deep gratitude to those who endowed the Bailey Smith Chair of Evangelism; and

- noted the distinguished service of two trustees rotating off the board: Eddie Sellers of Morganton, N.C., and Ollie Key of Augusta, Ga.

**Pro-abortion protest fizzles  
against anti-abortion church**

**By Ferrell Foster**

CHICAGO (BP)--A pro-abortion rally in front of a Chicago Baptist church March 9 resulted in a giant prayer service of Christians opposed to abortion.

A coalition of 10 "pro-choice" groups planned the "night of resistance" rally at the building of Armitage Baptist Church, a congregation actively involved in "pro-life" efforts.

The demonstrators "failed on two fronts," said Charles Lyons, pastor at Armitage, in a telephone interview March 14. They had only about 100 people demonstrate, while about 1,400 people gathered to support the church.

"We had a prayer meeting that literally was awesome," Lyons said. "The protesters were totally blown away. They limped into the night."

The church normally has about 250 people at its Wednesday night service. But on March 9, people from at least 50 other congregations and "numerous cultural and ethnic backgrounds" swelled the Armitage crowd.

About an hour into the pro-choice rally in the streets, "seven giant yellow school buses" from Salem Baptist Church arrived and "disgorged this tidal wave of black Baptists," Lyons said. "And they had just been calling us racist."

"They fell silent" when the Salem Baptist youth choir "got up on the steps and started singing. ... They sang powerfully ... . The protesters just gave up ... . They stood there and listened in silence for about 15 minutes, then they slithered off."

Five network news stations attended a press conference at the church. "We love everybody," Lyons told the media. "We love these people who have come to vent their hatred against us tonight. ... We stand ready to minister to anyone in need."

Two nights before the rally, walls and steps at the church building were painted with pro-choice warnings and symbols, according to a release from the church, which also noted, "Rocks had also been thrown at the building in an attempt to break windows."

The coalition promoting the pro-choice rally included Baklava Autonomist Collective, Emergency Clinic Defense Coalition, The Fight Back Network, National Committee to Free Puerto Rican POWs and Political Prisoners, Puerto Rican Cultural Center, Queer Nation, Refuse & Resist, SisterSerpents, Women's Action Coalition and Worker's Voice.

The rally date marked the eve of the one-year anniversary of the murder of David Gunn, a physician in Florida who performed abortions.

A flyer announcing the rally had been "plastered all over the north side of the city," Lyons said. It was "aimed at the radical community." A letter, milder in tone, was distributed in the neighborhood surrounding the church building.

"They worked our neighbors for five days in an attempt to get them to come out and join them," Lyons said. But the neighbors stayed away.

"God has given us tremendous favor with our neighbors," the pastor stated. Last fall the church provided an alternative school when the public schools were closed due to lack of funds. "We overnight became the big hit in the community. They looked to us for everything ... . Not one of them (the neighbors) came to stand with these people, because they know us and they know we're good people."

Street gangs in the area even told the church it didn't have to "worry about a thing" prior to the rally, Lyons said. "We had to say, 'Please, please, don't come.' And, as a result, the church showed it could resist attack without resorting to violence."

The coalition letter called Armitage Baptist Church a "center for organizing against women and women's abortion rights by planning and participating in clinic attacks. ... The church has provided a base of operations for local and out-of-town anti-abortion groups to attack women's health care clinics in our neighborhoods. These clinics provide a broad spectrum of women's health care that includes abortion.

"We are not against the church in its role as a place of worship and community service," the latter said. "We object to Armitage Baptist Church's role in the harassment of women, abortion providers and clinics."

Lyons responded, "We have expressed love to these people every chance we get . . . Their assessment and interpretation of our activism on the part of helpless babies is unfortunate, misguided and misstated. . . We have engaged in no violence, no harassment."

--30--

**World Changers schedules  
training for crew chiefs**

By Carol Spurlin

Baptist Press  
3/16/94

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--World Changers is calling for volunteers to attend its first-ever training retreat for work project crew chiefs and is adding Charleston, S.C., to its list of 1994 project locations.

World Changers, sponsored by the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission, stresses hands-on missions involvement by participants through involvement in home construction and renovation work on week-long projects. Crew chiefs provide supervision and leadership at each work site.

"World Changers projects wouldn't happen without the work of these volunteer crew chiefs, and as World Changers continues to grow, we will continue to need more of them," said Andy Morris, director of World Changers at the Brotherhood Commission. "All they need is construction experience and a willingness to function as 'servant leaders' with their work crews."

The April 21-23 training retreat will be hosted by the Tennessee Baptist Convention at Camp Carson near Newport, Tenn. Their training will include repairing and re-roofing several camp buildings.

In Charleston, S.C., youth will renovate 20 homes in the city's Rosemount area June 18-25. The Charleston project will bring the number of 1994 work project locations in the United States and Puerto Rico to 22.

To receive information and registration material about any World Changers project or the training retreat, contact World Changers at the Brotherhood Commission, 1548 Poplar Ave., Memphis, TN 38104, or (901) 272-2461.

The cost of the training retreat is \$10 with meals, lodging and training materials provided. The deadline for registration is April 4.

--30--

Spurlin is a World Changers intern at the Brotherhood Commission.

**Mississippi College taps**

S. Dakota's Howell W. Todd By William H. Perkins Jr.

Baptist Press  
3/16/94

CLINTON, Miss. (BP)--Howell Wayne Todd, 50, became the 18th president of 168-year-old Mississippi College in Clinton March 15 after the official announcement on campus by board of trustees chairman Harry Vickery of Greenville.

Since 1989 Todd had been executive director of South Dakota's board of regents governing that state's institutions of higher learning. He emerged from a field of about 75 candidates interested in replacing 25-year President Lewis Nobles, who resigned Aug. 1, 1993, amid allegations of \$3 million missing in contributions to the school.

Todd, the 10th president to serve since the school became affiliated with the Mississippi Baptist Convention in 1850, is a native of Huntingdon, Tenn. He holds a bachelor of science degree in secondary education, mathematics and chemistry from the University of Tennessee-Martin; a master of science degree in mathematics from the University of Mississippi in Oxford; and a doctorate in mathematics education from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Todd said he believes in quality academics in a Christian atmosphere.

--more--

"Returning to Mississippi after 25 years, to lead such an outstanding Christian college, represents an opportunity that for me is exciting, challenging and humbling. I look forward to working with the Mississippi College family to further the Christian mission of this distinguished college," he said.

Vickery reported Todd quickly became the top candidate after trustees narrowed the field to six finalists and brought in faculty representatives to participate in the interview process.

"As soon as you meet him, you'll recognize a dynamic personality -- someone who will reach out and work well with students, educators, our church, alumni and the community," Vickery said.

Todd said in a breakfast meeting March 15 with Baptist officials and college supporters he was raised in a Christian home and accepted Christ at the age of 11.

He credits two people for discipling him: North Oxford Baptist Church former pastor Jim Bain while he was studying at Ole Miss and Nashville's Two Rivers Baptist Church former pastor Jim Henry (now pastor of First Baptist in Orlando) while he served as an Tennessee educational administrator.

He was a deacon, Sunday school teacher and choir president at Two Rivers.

Todd earned \$104,210 per year in his South Dakota job. His salary at MC was not disclosed, but Nobles' salary was \$125,000 when he departed.

The transition to Todd's leadership at the 3,800-student school will begin immediately, college officials said, and he is expected to be on campus full time in early July of this year.

"I have always had an abiding love for colleges and universities and the community of scholars and students where knowledge and values are taught and learned. I have also had a deep love for my church and the key role that local churches play in our society. To be able to serve both here at Mississippi College is an exceptional personal opportunity," Todd said.

--30--

Baby-boomer-styled churches  
attempt 'innovative' witness

By Ken Walker

Baptist Press  
3/16/94

NASHVILLE (BP)--Contemporary music. High-tech, multi-media presentations. Drama. Blue jeans. No altar calls or "Baptist" in the name. Swimming pool baptisms. More people at services than there are members.

What in heaven's name is happening?

The nontraditional -- some prefer the tag "innovative" -- church is changing the body of Christ. And the Southern Baptist Convention. While the influence of this baby-boomer flavored approach is tough to gauge statistically, a new way of soul-winning has come to life.

"The non-traditional church is dominating all church plants," said Jim Whit, pastor of Mecklenburg Community Church in Charlotte, N.C. "Everything from Nazarene to Presbyterian. It's clearly dominating the SBC. It's the most profound movement impacting evangelistic strategies for the '90s."

"It is appealing," agreed Ralph Hodge, contemporary churches leadership specialist for the Baptist Sunday School Board. "It allows the individuality of people to be expressed. In an innovative service there will be nine different ways a message is delivered and nine different filters receiving it."

However, Hodge said it is impossible to gauge the growth in numbers of new, nontraditional, Anglo-based churches. He recently distributed a national survey to more than 1,000 SBC directors of missions to better determine their numbers.

Whatever the figures, innovative churches are doing something right. One of the field's pioneers, Saddleback Valley Community Church in Mission Viejo, Calif., averages Sunday attendance of 8,000 (with only 3,000 members).

That comes 14 years after its humble origins as a seven-member Bible study group led by pastor Rick Warren. In addition, Saddleback has started approximately two dozen missions. More than 13,000 pastors have studied the story of the church, which hosts a five-day church growth conference each summer.

--more--

Warren's 1980 move to Mission Viejo, midway between Los Angeles and San Diego, illustrates the innovative church's belief in targeting a market. Praying for God to show him a place where he could invest his whole life, the Lord directed him to one of the nation's fastest-growing areas.

Once there he used an old-fashioned SBC tool, the door-to-door survey. But it contained a new-fashioned twist, trying to discover why the unchurched didn't attend services. Their four primary objections:

- Sermons are boring.
- Church members are unfriendly.
- The church is more interested in money than people.
- A lack of quality child care.

Warren set out to meet those objections, noting, "People didn't seem to have problems with Jesus, but they did have problems with the organized church."

So did White. He served in two different pastorates before spending two years as a BSSB consultant for preaching and worship. That work became the basis of his book, "Opening The Front Door." It hit the market just after Mecklenburg's first service in a Hilton hotel.

"I spent two years crisscrossing the U.S., interacting with thousands of pastors," he said. "It became very clear that how to grow a church is no big secret. But being able to do it is tricky."

The underpinning for Mecklenburg's growth is its focus on unchurched, unsaved people. From a handful in October 1992, attendance is nearing the 500 mark.

More than 50 percent are converts, White said; another 40 percent are prodigals or others who had stopping going to church for various reasons.

This contrasts to most churches, which White said grow through transfers. Namely, newcomers to the community or those dissatisfied elsewhere.

"Most churches, whether they're conscious of it or not, have chosen to go after the non-churched believer, the Christian who doesn't have a church home," he said.

"Our fundamental mission statement is reaching the non-churched, non-believer. We want to turn the irreligious -- the people who don't give a rip about Jesus -- into fully devoted followers of Christ."

White designed a 10-step strategy for Mecklenburg. The first is to build relationships with non-believers. Most Christians don't do that, he said, even treating the lost like the enemy.

The second step is for believers to look for an opportunity in that relationship to share faith in Christ and what he means to their life. That leads to the third step, the church's "seeker" service on Sunday mornings.

It includes everything from coffee and juice at the door, casual dress, a children's ministry and telling guests to not feel obligated to give during the offering.

Among the remaining steps are baptism, "mentor" relationships between converts and mature Christians and small Bible study groups which meet at various times during the week.

White said the church also stresses getting people to discover their spiritual gifts. Because of abuses in charismatic circles, most SBC churches ignore this area, he said, which he compares to "throwing out the baby with the bath water."

The practice that would surprise most Baptists is a call for decisions that does not include walking forward at the end of the service. White said the altar call is actually a recent phenomenon in church history, originating with evangelist Charles Finney in the 19th century.

"Public profession is not the same as an altar call," he remarked.

"Biblically it was baptism, an outward sign of an inward change. We think we're going back to tradition. To be baptized at Mecklenburg you have to share a testimony, either verbally or in written form."

However, not all nontraditional churches have scrapped the altar call. The Fellowship of Las Colinas in suburban Dallas used it to add 758 to its rolls during the past year.

That swelled its numbers past the 2,500 mark, more than triple the size of its mother church, First Baptist of Irving, which birthed the new congregation in March 1990.

Pastor Ed Young Jr., said the mission dropped Baptist from its name when it became a church because surveys showed resistance to all denominational labels, whether Baptist, Methodist or Episcopalian.

It's one of the ground-breaking moves that characterize the nontraditional church. Las Colinas's services incorporates others that would shock some, from electronic guitars to "man on the street" videos, a la David Letterman.

But Young pointed out that while the methods may be different the message is still the same: Jesus saves.

"Baby boomers and busters don't have the same product loyalty as past generations," he said. "But we are a very biblically based outreach. We want to win the lost."

A former Florida State basketball player and Houston Astros chaplain, Young said his work with athletes was a strong motivation for starting the Fellowship. He wanted to bring young sports and business professionals to church without the "culture shock" of a traditional, hymns-piano-and-organ service.

That doesn't mean he thinks every congregation should try to transform itself into a 30-ish-style assembly. "We still learn a lot from them and they can learn from this new wave of thought. Church should be fun and exciting. If you teach and lead, and let the Bible speak, action will follow."

There is support in high places for the unusual approach. SBC President Ed Young Sr., pastor of Houston's Second Baptist Church, was a recent speaker at the Fellowship of Las Colinas.

"He's our biggest fan," said his son. "He loves what God is doing here. He always told my brothers and me, 'Be yourself.' That's one of my focuses in preaching. God made us unique, and don't try to imitate someone else."

--30--

Walker is a free-lance writer in Louisville, Ky.

Don't break traditional mold,  
just modify it some, they say

By Ken Walker

Baptist Press  
3/16/94

NASHVILLE (BP)--If innovative churches represent the "wave of the future," does that mean the thousands of traditional Southern Baptist congregations should scrap their approach?

Church growth officials say no. However, they believe some modifications, such as adding some contemporary music or Saturday night services, may be worth considering.

But don't take a traditional church and make a wholesale change to innovative approaches, said Ken Westbrook, director of church growth for the Florida Baptist Convention. "It causes a lot of conflict."

Yet there are churches where changes are occurring, such as First Baptist of Naples, Fla. In recent months it added Saturday night services and other innovations, according to Ralph Hodge at the Baptist Sunday School Board.

Second Baptist of Houston is another, Hodge said, though if you asked members there what type of church it is, most would say, "Traditional."

This dichotomy illustrates another problem with trying to define nontraditional churches, officials said: The methods don't always fit into neat categories.

"Innovative churches are a growing trend in Florida," observed Leon White of the state's church extension department. "We're still trying to identify what that means, though."

--more--

Interestingly, in Florida the fastest-growing SBC church segment is not innovative, but Haitian. The latter is the leading group of the ethnic congregations which accounted for nearly half of the state's 101 church starts in 1993. Another 12 were African American, while of the 40 Anglo churches, 15 (or 38 percent) were nontraditional.

Regardless of style, Westbrook said growing churches incorporate six key principles: Bible study, worship, evangelism, building a strong sense of community, maintaining a high sense of purpose and having a strong vision of who they ought to be and where God wants them.

"The focus is what's important," Hodge added. "Any church that's growing in this day and time is innovative in some way. Second Baptist is innovative, blending in new things to draw young people without alienating people who have been there for years. It will be the model for SBC churches in the future."

--30--

Black churches expanding  
ministries of empowerment

By Pat Cole

Baptist Press  
3/16/94

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--In the midst of acute social problems and a growing black middle class, African American churches are broadening their focus.

The powerful preaching, vibrant worship and effective action ministries that for years have characterized black churches remain at the hub of many congregations, said T. Vaughn Walker, associate professor of black church studies at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

Yet growing African American churches are now expanding their Christian education programs, providing job training and emphasizing their African heritage, noted Walker, who is also pastor of Louisville's First Gethesemane Baptist Church. "Their ministry is holistic," Walker said. They break traditional boundaries, and you usually find very strong social ministries."

Black churches typically span the economic spectrum and members tend to stay with the same church as their economic circumstances improve, Walker said.

"Unlike the trend in white churches, when people unite with an African American church they tend to stay with that church even if they leave the neighborhood."

Walker said this mixing of economic classes is helpful to disadvantaged black youth who need models who can show them how to break out of their cycle of poverty. However, most African Americans are moving into the middle class by virtue of two-income households rather than a high-paying job from a single breadwinner, Walker stressed. This fact, he said, heightens the importance of day care and after-school programs in black churches.

At Christian Fellowship Baptist Church in College Park, Ga., a congregation full of smartly dressed, highly educated people is evidence that the black middle class is growing in that community. The Atlanta suburb, once predominantly white, is now nearly 60 percent black.

Born two years ago in a schism, the church has grown from 200 members to nearly 900. At the heart of the church's growth is an array of ministries represented by more than 40 multi-colored, handmade banners which line the atrium at the church's entrance.

Congregational participation has been a key for the church's rapid growth, said pastor Emmanuel McCall. "The word has gotten around that at Christian Fellowship you can be involved," said McCall, a Southern Seminary alumnus and a visiting professor of black church studies at the school for more than 20 years. The church sponsors various social ministries, missions organizations and educational programs as well as innovative drama, art and music ministries.

--more--

While most members at Christian Fellowship are middle class, others in the congregation are less affluent. With problems such as poverty, violence and drugs still plaguing black Americans, McCall said he is concerned that the church minister to the entire community. "If the church doesn't do something about it, who will?" he asked. "It is more than a social ministries process. It is presenting the saving grace of Jesus Christ."

Through the years, African American church leaders have distinguished themselves as advocates for social change. Although churches still enlist government support to fight injustice and poverty, they are increasingly finding other ways to help communities empower themselves economically, Walker said.

At Canaan Missionary Baptist Church in Louisville, the congregation has formed a nonprofit corporation for the "expressed purpose of bringing economic development to the African American community," said pastor Walter Malone, a 1982 Southern graduate.

One of the corporation's first projects is computer literacy classes taught free of charge to church members and others. "We are not waiting for city government to give us a future or change our community," Malone said. "We are going to change the community ourselves. It's what we call black self-determination."

In addition to ministries of empowerment, advocacy and social action, Canaan also has a powerful evangelistic thrust. "Jesus had a double 'e' ministry," said Malone. "He preached both emancipation and evangelization."

Under Malone's leadership, Canaan was constituted a decade ago with only a handful of members. Now that congregation's membership is over 1,000 and it recently moved into a new \$1.2 million facility.

"There may be economic shortages, but I tell people there is no sinner shortage," Malone said. "The only question is who will love people enough to go out after them and tell them about Christ."

Churches like Canaan and Mt. Olive Baptist Church in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., place a strong emphasis on African heritage, particularly in their children's and youth ministries.

"It's a two-pronged approach," said Mt. Olive pastor Mack King Carter, a 1976 Southern graduate. "We're teaching faith and culture."

Since the Vietnam War, drug abuse has skyrocketed in the African American community, Carter said. The drug culture, pervading racism and easy access to guns have "caused havoc among African American youth," he said.

That's why Mt. Olive invests much time and energy in its youth and children's ministry, Carter said. "We're trying to instill principles of love and self-love in these young people."

In order for African Americans to improve their plight, black churches must awaken the white community to the lingering problem of racism, Carter said. "The only thing that the Supreme Court or legislature can do is to regulate public action. Only the church, as a spiritual organization, can deal with attitudes," he emphasized, adding structural racism, not just personal racism, must be addressed.

For the African American church to remain a viable entity, its future depends on its ability to change, Walker said. Many smaller churches are in a "survival mode" because they have not adapted to changing needs, he said.

"One of my greatest hopes is that we will continue in the openness to change and empowerment mode," Walker said. Refusal to adjust to the needs of the times, he warned, could relegate the African American church to irrelevancy.

Church's departure from SBC  
affirmed by Tennessee court By Wm. Fletcher Allen

KINGSTON, Tenn. (BP)--In a Feb. 18 ruling in Roane County (Tennessee) Chancery Court, a minority membership of Clax Gap Baptist Church lost in its move to keep the church within the Southern Baptist fold.

Court Chancellor Frank V. Williams III ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, involving a majority group and pastor Gary Hensley, who had persuaded members to withdraw relationship from the Southern Baptist Convention. The church, in Harriman, Tenn., now is "independent," having cut all Southern Baptist ties, including contributing to the Cooperative Program.

Williams ruled after hearing extensive evidence that church actions do not, as a matter of law, constitute "a radical departure from established and distinctive practices and beliefs." He ruled on the basis of a 1957 Tennessee Appeals Court case, Beard vs. Francis, where that was the decisive factor.

The ruling resulted in some confusion, but also sounded a warning, according to William Bargiol, director of missions for the local Big Emory Baptist Association. "If the new direction of the church is so radical that the minority group has to leave in order to practice as the church was planned," he said, "that's about as radical as it could be." He also predicted the same thing could happen elsewhere if churches don't take precautions.

"It's a sad, sad story," said Tom Pridgen, a former church trustee. "I haven't been voted out, reprimanded or ousted, but the church is gone." Pridgen served as trustee chairman and said he and others had once been friends with Hensley.

Pridgen said he and his wife are deeply hurt by what has happened and they think the court made the wrong decision.

He said there may be an appeal, but the minority group has no solid plans yet for another church.

Hensley and some church trustees had filed suit against the Bank of Roane County to recover funds on deposit to the church's account. The bank alleged there was a dispute within the church with another group demanding the money. The bank filed a complaint against the minority group, and asked the court to decide which group represented the church. Four people from the minority group then filed an intervening petition to join in the demand for control of church money, building and real property. As a result, the plaintiffs and intervenors were contending for control.

In his ruling, the chancellor wrote that evidence showed the church had participated in the Cooperative Program from its founding in 1938 until a vote of the congregation in October 1992. The congregation also was associated with the Big Emory Baptist Association and the Tennessee Baptist Convention. The church has about 135 resident members and contributed \$2,605 to the Cooperative Program in 1992. In 1993, Historical Clax Gap Baptist Church, the minority group, gave \$808.

The ruling came even though the chancellor noted "the intervenors (those who sought to control the church's funds and keep the church's Southern Baptist identity) proved to the satisfaction of the Court that the pastor, Gary Hensley, came to Clax Gap with the understanding that it was a cooperating Southern Baptist Church.

"The pulpit committee," said the ruling, "questioned him specifically about his willingness to support the Cooperative Program and were satisfied that he could and would continue in that relationship." The court said things went well for more than a year "before the pastor and others set their sights on breaking with the traditional participation in Southern Baptist missions."

Evidence showed also, the court said, the church had made progress under Hensley's leadership, with increased attendance, building improvements, sizeable indebtedness paid, and "church funds are flowing directly to independent missionaries."

During the hearing, the pastor testified and "others" objected to what they viewed as high salaries paid to Southern Baptist officials at national and state levels and objected to supporting SBC seminaries. Consequently he believed it better to support independent missionaries. He thus persuaded a majority of members to terminate contributions to the CP.

The intervenors argued this in effect changed Clax Gap Baptist Church from Southern Baptist to independent, and they claimed it to be a "radical departure from established fundamental practices and beliefs" as in the case of Beard vs. Francis in 1957. They also claimed dissenting members had been removed from offices held prior to Hensley's arrival in 1990, and some were disfellowshipped.

Williams said in his ruling that "proof also shows the pastor to be a skilled politician, quietly and systematically building his support from among some of the older members plus the new members who have joined since 1990, about eight of whom are members of his family." His conduct, Williams wrote, "has been calculated to systematically eliminate opposition within the church so as to solidify his control over the people, property, and business of the Clax Gap Baptist Church."

However, the court said the pastor's conduct did not bear on the biblical doctrine he teaches and nothing was shown which would allow the courts to conclude that the doctrine now adhered to by the church deviates from the Baptist Faith and Message "which contains, according to expert testimony of Dr. James Walter Taylor, a general statement of the fundamental tenets of the Baptist faith." Taylor, director of missions for the Knox County Baptist Association, was called to testify specifically on the Baptist Faith and Message. Several others were called, including Ron Herrod, pastor of Central Baptist Church in Oak Ridge.

One of the defining elements of the ruling noted the church is autonomous and is to be controlled by the majority vote of its members. The ruling said termination of Cooperative Program giving and use of independent teaching materials, according to the 1957 Tennessee Court of Appeals test, is not a "radical departure from established fundamental practices and beliefs" so as to deprive the intervenors (minority) of their rights as minority members in and to church property.

The ruling also said "there is no higher earthly authority for this church." The result for the minority is they "either bend to the will of the majority or separate themselves from the congregation, which some have already done."

Williams dismissed the complaint and ruled in favor of pastor Hensley and the majority group which had sided with him on eliminating Cooperative Program giving. Court costs were assigned to the minority group.

--30--

Tak over ruling sends warning  
to all SBC churches, DOM says By Wm. Fletcher Allen

Baptist Press  
3/16/94

KINGSTON, Tenn. (BP)--A court ruling here has authenticated a takeover of a Tennessee Baptist church by a majority group led by an "independent" Baptist pastor.

"I heard an alarm bell go off," said William Bargiol, director of missions for Big Emory Baptist Association.

Bargiol attended the court hearing last fall and the February court ruling concerning the successful majority group "takeover" of the bank account and property of Clax Gap Baptist Church in Harriman, Tenn. The group, led by independent pastor Gary Hensley, cut ties with Southern Baptists and ceased giving through the Cooperative Program.

Bargiol said he believes the ruling sounds a clear warning to all Southern Baptist churches. "We have to be Southern Baptists when we talk and when we write," he said. "There are so many groups under the great Baptist umbrella. We have to make sure this is legally verified in our church documents."

--more--

Bargiol said he believes there is at least one certain way to guard against such takeovers.

Since a majority vote was considered high priority in the ruling by Chancellor Frank V. Williams III, Bargiol said there is one recourse for any church that wants to guarantee remaining Southern Baptist.

"The only legal recourse to prevent this kind of thing from happening is for the church to deed its property to the association or state convention, and have the recipient party to deed it back to the church with a reversion clause," Bargiol said. In action similar to the Clax Gap case, the property and funds would revert to the "parent" group. Then no one could take over the church. Without it, there will be constant danger, he said.

"The February ruling," Bargiol said, "is nothing more than a license to steal for any group that can muster a majority for any purpose they have in mind." He added the court chose to use "Baptist" in a generic sense, as if all Baptist groups are exactly alike. Bargiol said the Baptist umbrella includes a number of different beliefs. He said the court's generic interpretation in effect voided the minority argument that the majority had made a radical departure from established fundamental practices and beliefs.

Typically then, a minority has no relief if a majority is given power by vote to change fundamental practices.

The Clax Gap minority group, which remains Southern Baptist, must either follow the majority or leave the church, according to the Feb. 18 ruling in Rane County Chancery Court in Harriman.

The minority also has to pay court costs. This may inhibit any immediate possibility of their forming another church. There are about 30 members of the minority group and approximately 75 following Hensley.

--30--

BAPTIST PRESS is available on

## CompuServe

To order an SBCNet kit call 1-800-458-2772.  
For more information contact David Haywood  
at 1-800-325-7749, ext. 2895,  
or at CompuServe ID 70007,5000.

HOUSE MAIL

**(BP)**

**BAPTIST PRESS**  
901 Commerce #750  
Nashville, TN 37203

Southern Baptist Library and  
Archives