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94-60

DALLAS -- He agonizes for ministers destitute in retirement; photo.
 WASHINGTON -- Rwandan Baptist leader voices plea for prayer.
 ALABAMA -- Tornado gives congregation lesson in God's providence.
 TENNESSEE -- Bonhoeffer role, humor open new audiences for minister.
 NASHVILLE -- ATS official gives analysis of SBC theological education.
 TEXAS -- 'Rock King' gave a listen, surprised by what he heard.
 NORTH CAROLINA -- Women in Ministry to meet May 5 in Greensboro, N.C.

He agonizes for ministers
 destitute in retirement

By Kirby F. Warnock

Baptist Press
 4/12/94

DALLAS (BP)--In 1979, John Hatfield was a building maintenance employee at the Annuity Board of the Southern Baptist Convention in Dallas. During that time he was in charge of installing the heat and air conditioning in an office the board was establishing for endowment. The responsibility of this new department would be to raise funds for needy Southern Baptist pastors and their widows who had retired with little or no retirement funds.

In the course of constructing that new office, something happened that changed John Hatfield's life and everyone he has come into contact with since.

"As we were building this office, I ran across some information they had out there," Hatfield recounted. "It was about the plight of our retired ministers. I saw how these old people (retired pastors) were struggling and suffering. I just couldn't see why as great an organization as the Southern Baptist Convention would let these old people do without. My heart has been crying ever since."

Hatfield decided to take action. He and his wife talked things over and began contributing \$50 a month to what became the Adopt an Annuitant Program. Administered by the endowment department of the Annuity Board, Adopt an Annuitant sends \$50 a month to needy retirees who for one reason or another left the ministry without an adequate retirement account.

"Most of them (retirees) came from rural churches that barely got by," Hatfield added. "I came from a rural church, and I know that it's hard for the church to set aside any money for their pastor's retirement."

Over the years Hatfield did his part, but he said he felt there was more that could be done. In 1990, he approached his pastor, A.L. Draper at First Baptist Church in Wylie, Texas, and asked that the deacons watch a new videotape produced by the Annuity Board titled "Helping Our Family." Other pressing church business kept the tape on the pastor's desk for a while, but Hatfield persisted. Finally the deacons viewed the tape. Their reaction was immediate. They recommended, and the members agreed, for the church to begin contributing to Adopt an Annuitant.

"John really focused our attention on the plight of these retirees," Draper said. "His effort came from a deep sense of compassion and his appeal is much greater than if it came from me."

Still, Hatfield wasn't satisfied.

"More people would help if they only knew about this," he said. "But they aren't going to know if the churches won't talk it up."

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So he began to write letters. One to every state Baptist newspaper. He started calling Presnall Wood at the Baptist Standard of Texas, pleading with him to notify his readers of the plight of the retired preachers. And he started to donate more than just his money. He began to donate his time and labor.

In 1989, when Hatfield retired from the Annuity Board, he continued to contribute \$50 a month to Adopt an Annuitant out of his retirement check. With his increased free time, he began to go to the homes of elderly Baptist retirees throughout north Texas, performing free electrical and carpentry work. He continues to this day, traveling to their homes in his restored 1963 Chevrolet pickup. Still, he is not satisfied.

"One person can't do it," he said. "We need all of God's people to help. We (Baptists) raise nearly \$200 million a year to send overseas for missions, but we've got old souls in this country struggling to make ends meet. I can't see where \$50 a month will do someone that much good. You can hardly buy medicine for \$50 a month. Why can't all of the Southern Baptists get together and raise a large endowment?"

These are precisely the questions Joe McIntosh hears daily. As vice president of endowment for the Annuity Board, McIntosh works to raise and distribute money to needy retired pastors.

How big is the problem? According to McIntosh, it is sizable.

"As of Feb. 28, 1994, we had 10,069 retirees who received \$200 or less a month. Of that number, 4,583 received less than \$100."

McIntosh has heard from John Hatfield and others who want to know why a person who has worked long and hard in service to the church should be left without any kind of retirement fund. Why can't the Annuity Board do more? Why can't some of the billions in assets be used to help the elderly?

"The Annuity Board is simply the holder of individual accounts," McIntosh explained. "By law, we can't pull money from one individual's account to assist someone else, no matter how great the need."

The endowment department of the board did not even exist until 1979. Since that time it has worked to educate Southern Baptists of the plight of their retired pastors and to raise money for them. It's part of the program assignment adopted for the Annuity Board by the Southern Baptist Convention. Most Baptists are surprised to discover their pastor could labor for years at his church and retire with nothing. Many churches struggle to meet the pastor's monthly salary, with no money left over to contribute to a retirement fund. If the pastor does not set aside some of his own money each month, he could find himself penniless. Compounding the problem is that some pastors choose to opt out of Social Security.

The Annuity Board was begun more than 75 years ago to alleviate this need, but if a church or an individual does not set up an account and contribute to it, there is no money available. The Cooperative Program provides about \$1 million a year for relief, but that does not meet the existing needs. Unless fellow Baptists open their hearts and wallets to send in donations to Adopt an Annuitant, or to the Retired Ministers Support Fund, there will continue to be suffering. The Retired Ministers Support Fund works like an endowment. Adopt an Annuitant is a direct ministry with no administrative cost deduction. Every dollar goes promptly to an annuitant.

The Annuity Board distributes most Cooperative Program relief funds to people who receive no other Annuity Board benefit. But every month, through Adopt an Annuitant, the board sends an extra \$50 to more than 1,350 people whose regular checks are inadequate.

What can you do? First, make sure that your church is contributing to your pastor's retirement account through the Annuity Board. Second, you may send your and your church's contributions to the Adopt An Annuitant Program, c/o The Annuity Board, P.O. Box 2190, Dallas, TX 75221-2190. Finally, call 1-800-262-0511 and request a free copy of the videotape, "Helping Our Family." It shows emotional, moving portraits of real people struggling in their retirement after years of service to Baptist churches.

As for John Hatfield, he reiterated his concern for destitute retired ministers, his voice trembling. "It's just not right. God's people need to wake up. They're asleep."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by the Annuity Board communications department.

Rwandan Baptist leader
voices plea for prayer

Baptist Press
4/12/94

WASHINGTON (BP)--"Urge Baptist brothers and sisters everywhere to pray for Christians in Rwanda. Pray that our people will have courage to confront even death."

Ziherambere pleaded that worldwide Baptists "will pray that the God of miracles will bring peace to Rwanda."

Eleazar Ziherambere, regional secretary of the All-Africa Baptist Fellowship and general secretary of the Baptist Union of Rwanda, spoke the words during a telephone conversation to Tony Cupit, director of evangelism and education for the Baptist World Alliance.

Ziherambere reiterated his belief prayer is the most urgent need at the moment. "As much as we need aid," he said, "there is absolutely no way to receive it."

Cupit reported when he got through to Ziherambere by phone in Butare, Rwanda, he was greeted by the words, "It is as though you have called me out of a tomb. All is desolation here. All is desolation."

Ziherambere said the awful events in the nation's capital of Kigali has brought fear all over Rwanda. People have been ordered to remain in their houses, the market is hardly operating, the banks are closed. Thousands upon thousands have been killed, though Butare itself has so far been spared the worst atrocities occurring elsewhere.

Ziherambere said he suspects Baptist pastors and people in Rwanda have been killed. He has been granted a pass by the military to move around to minister to Baptist people. However, while his wife happens to be in England at the moment, four children are with him in Butare and their safety is a factor in his movements.

There are more than 33,000 Baptist believers in Rwanda and 32,000 in nearby Burundi.

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Tornado gives congregation
lesson in God's providence

By Ken Walker

Baptist Press
4/12/94

CALHOUN COUNTY, Ala. (BP)--The front half of the church is missing, reduced to a pile of bricks, cement and debris in a corner of the parking lot. The baptistery stands exposed to Alabama's spring winds. Services have moved into a double-wide trailer that rests on concrete blocks.

Like their neighbors, the members of Mount Gilead Baptist Church mourn the loss of dozens of lives in the Palm Sunday tornadoes that swept the South.

Yet the 70 people who attended church that morning are rejoicing over surviving the vicious storm that ripped the roof from its moorings and flung the ceiling on the top of the pews.

"If there's any story that stands out, it's the hand of God on the congregation," said David Curvin, chairman of the deacons. "For some reason, he wanted all of us to live. We weren't just lucky. God's mercy was with us."

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"I thought, 'This might be the day I die,'" added Tim Barry, a land surveyor from Anniston. "But it didn't bother me, I felt complete peace."

Afterwards, Calhoun County Sheriff Roy Snead marveled, "How could anyone have gotten out of there without being killed?" But the only serious injuries were a woman who needed surgery on her neck and another requiring five stitches in her head.

A lay preacher, Barry was to deliver the sermon that day since the pastor recently retired. Barry never did. Twenty minutes before the twister struck Piedmont -- claiming 20 lives at Goshen United Methodist Church -- it was wreaking havoc in the countryside 13 miles southwest of town. At Mount Gilead they never heard it coming.

An eight-member children's choir had just finished singing when hail clattered against the windows. Curvin had gone to turn off the sound system, which had sputtered out midway through the choir's songs. When he turned around, he saw the ceiling starting to cave in and screamed, "Get down!"

Barry heard windows popping as he raced down the aisle. Dodging beside his wife and their 3-year-old daughter, the next time he looked up the old wooden ceiling was inches from his face.

"The best place people could have been was under those pews," said Curvin, who knelt in the doorway behind the main auditorium. "If we had time to panic and run, we could have been hurt."

After members crawled out of the rubble and gathered in the parking lot, they realized nobody was missing. Laughter and tears broke out as several exclaimed, "This was a miracle!"

"For people who wonder if there are miracles or if God still does miracles I think we were in one," said Curvin, marveling at eight light fixtures falling but none of the glass breaking. "The Lord was with us."

Barry has made several trips by the church since the storm and said it's still hard to believe it happened. Ironically, his Palm Sunday message was to be on the power of God. When he showed the outline to church member Ray Connell, he remarked, "That sermon was preached in about 10 seconds."

Still, he acknowledged some people question why the Lord spared those at Mount Gilead and not the victims at Goshen, Barry said it confused him, too.

"Each of our lives has a purpose, to glorify God," he said. "And he determines what our lives will be. I don't understand why so many children died up there but I don't have the power in my mind to understand it. You just have to accept it and know that God has power over the universe."

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Walker, a free-lance writer in Louisville, Ky., inspected the damage at Mount Gilead during an Easter week trip to Alabama.

Bonhoeffer role, humor open
new audiences for minister

By Ruth Robinson

Baptist Press
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CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. (BP)--Al Staggs makes people laugh and cry. In the process he also makes them think.

Staggs, a Baptist minister, is both a dramatist and a humorist. He dramatic personification of German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was hanged by the Nazis 49 years ago (April 9, 1945), and his program of humorous impersonations are both increasing in popularity.

"This represents both sides of my view of the Christian life," Staggs said.

"On one hand, we are called to be willing to lay down our lives for our faith. On the other hand, we are called to enjoy the abundant life that God has given us on this earth. And as long as we live, he allows us -- in fact, he makes it possible for us -- to liv life joyfully and happily."

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Staggs cited Norman Cousins, who in his book, "Anatomy of An Illness," was one of the original proponents of the idea that humor is an important ingredient in the healing process, an idea gaining favor with the medical profession. Cousins proved it to himself and wrote the book about his experience of healing from a terminal illness by listening and watching comedy videos.

Last year, stress from trying to serve a pastorate and be a good husband and father as well as respond to requests for his performances, landed Staggs in his doctor's office. He had to make a career decision.

After 24 years in church work, the last 10 as a local church pastor, he chose entertainment. He sees the change in direction as a call to another ministry. It might be seen as putting into practice in his own life his Harvard Divinity School studies under Harvey Cox in applied theology.

At a recent dialogue on the importance of Bonhoeffer in Jewish-Christian relations, a Jewish man said to him, "Young man, you're doing a far more important and broader ministry now than what you were doing before on a local basis."

"That was an affirmation to me," the 47-year-old Texas native said.

Staggs became interested in Bonhoeffer through the influence of Baptist theologian Cox at Harvard. "Bonhoeffer was Cox's favorite theologian," he said, but "relatively few Christians are aware of the meaning of his life."

Bonhoeffer, a promising young German theologian who had studied at Union Theological Seminary in New York, was just beginning a teaching appointment at the University of Berlin when Hitler and his Nazi regime came to power in 1932.

Because of his opposition to Hitler and the German churches' compliance, Bonhoeffer lost his teaching position. He could have become an exile in the United States, where he was offered a teaching position at Union Seminary, but felt a moral and ethical responsibility to remain in Germany.

Although he worked in the German Intelligence Service, Bonhoeffer was among those in Germany who plotted to overthrow Hitler. In 1943, he was arrested by the Gestapo and two years later, five days after his 39th birthday and a month before Germany fell, he was executed at the concentration camp at Flossenburg.

Staggs' play takes place during these final hours before Bonhoeffer's death. It reflects the view of Eberhard Bethge, Bonhoeffer's close friend and biographer, who wrote: "When he was silenced for good at age 39, he began to speak more loudly than ever before."

It was in 1988, while pastor of the First Baptist Church in Portales, N.M., Staggs started memorizing various texts of Bonhoeffer's. He wanted to give a small program at his church "to give people an idea of the profundity and the relevance of Bonhoeffer's words for our times."

Soon he realized "this great martyr could provide us inspiration and direction in the midst of quite a number of complex issues that face Christians today. His words and life guide us and give us some indication of how we may not be conformed to this world as we make ethical decisions."

He also auditioned the play, "A View From the Underside: The Legacy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer," for the 1988 New Mexico Endowment For the Humanities Chautauqua Series. "They selected me as one of their speakers for the entire state of New Mexico. That's what made me realize this possibly had a much wider audience."

That wider audience included a performance at the National Cathedral in Washington at the dedication of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, as well as engagements all over the country.

Staggs' favorite Bonhoeffer quote was the basis around which the play is built. Staggs said Bonhoeffer had learned to view life history and the interpretation of Scripture from what he (Bonhoeffer) termed "the view from below, from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled -- in short, from the perspective of those who suffer."

The other side of the coin, Staggs' humor, stems in many ways from his own life.

"Humor for me has always been a coping mechanism," he said. "It has been rather like a buoy to stabilize me during times of crisis, stress and uncertainty. Like many other humorists, my humor originated in a home where there was unhappiness, uncertainty and insecurity."

In those early days in Arkansas, the family of five children and their parents lived in a house of 800 square feet. Staggs and one of his brothers slept on a screened-in back porch year-round. There was no family car.

"Though not living in abject poverty, nonetheless we were keenly aware we didn't have much. Those are experiences you don't forget. My dad was an alcoholic and my mother ultimately committed suicide. All of that milieu provided the environment that brought about humor as survival for me."

His senior year in high school, Staggs discovered he had a gift for mimicry.

"I could do impressions of Jonathan Winters, Paul Lynd and Jerry Lewis and the list of characters grew as the years went by." He now can do about 50 famous people.

"I just listen to people. I really unconsciously pick up traits and mannerisms and speech patterns."

In addition to his humor performances, he does the Bonhoeffer play alone about 50 times a year. He also is working on two other projects, the Gospel according to Paul and the Sermon on the Mount. His performances are done for churches, banquets, church conferences, civic organizations and business organizations.

There is a video of the Bonhoeffer performance and a demonstration video of the humor program. He can be reached at 3935 Royal Forest Drive, San Antonio, TX 78230, telephone (210) 492-8457.

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Robinson is a free-lance writer in Chattanooga, Tenn.

ATS official gives analysis
of SBC theological education

By Kim Medley

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NASHVILLE (BP)--You don't have to be a seminary professor or student to know Southern Baptist theological education is undergoing tremendous change.

And accrediting agency official and former Southern Baptist Theological Seminary faculty member Daniel O. Aleshire has an idea or two on why changes are occurring.

Aleshire, associate director of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) in the United States and Canada, offers his own analysis of theological education in "Southern Baptist Theological Education," an article printed in the current issue of Baptist History and Heritage, published by the Historical Commission, SBC. The article focuses on schools accredited with ATS.

Aleshire points out several interesting differences between Southern Baptist seminaries and other ATS schools.

-- SBC schools are larger. The smallest SBC seminary is significantly larger in enrollment, budget and size of faculty than the average of all ATS schools.

-- SBC schools receive more denominational funding. While the average ATS institution receives approximately 18 percent of their educational and general budget (E&G) from religious organizations, SBC seminaries receive 50-78 percent of their E&G from the denomination.

-- SBC schools spend less per student. The average expenditure for all ATS schools in the 1992 reporting year was approximately \$16,000 per student. The average for the six SBC seminaries was \$8,543.

-- SBC schools are fewer. Southern Baptists have far fewer seminaries per church member than any other major U.S. denomination.

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Aleshire also underscores 'over the past 25 years ATS and SBC schools have experienced "an increasing number of women attending theological schools and seeking ministry positions;" the average age of students attending theological schools "is much older than the average age twenty-five years ago;" and "students are increasingly inclined to attend a seminary in their immediate geographical area -- regardless of its denominational affiliation -- than to relocate to attend a seminary of their own denomination."

Contrasting the drop in total SBC seminary enrollments of Southern Baptist students each year from 9,595 in 1988 to 8,777 in 1992 with the total enrollment increases of Southern Baptist students in all other ATS seminaries from 830 in 1988 to 1,172 in 1992, Aleshire states, "The data suggests that an increasing number of Southern Baptists are, either for geographical location, denominational controversy, or other reasons, increasingly attending non-SBC funded schools."

Aleshire's analysis of Southern Baptist theological education includes a look back at three time periods: the colonial era to the Civil War, the Civil War to World War II, and World War II to the present.

Aleshire notes, with few exceptions, theological education for Baptist ministers prior to the Civil War was basically dependent on Baptist congregations and self-education. Although some early Baptist ministers such as Richard Furman and Jeremiah Jeter were "aristocratically trained," most did not have access to formal training.

By the early 19th century, Baptist educational societies and individual efforts opened the way for both theological training and liberal arts education by founding such schools as Newton, Rochester, Richmond, Furman and Mercer. As liberal arts education became more prominent, schools like Richmond, Furman and Mercer became colleges. College status provided enhanced sources of funding and the ability to grant baccalaureate degrees.

According to Aleshire, this early period of Baptist theological education still influences the following attitudes about Southern Baptist seminaries today: "(1) a suspicion of the ability of an academic institution to instill or enhance criteria Baptists consider most crucial for their ministers; (2) a tendency to value the learning that comes from intimate participation in a congregation; and (3) a desire for the social recognition and status of higher education degrees."

The two dominant Southern Baptist theological schools between the Civil War and World War II were Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, founded in 1859 out of Furman University, and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, founded in 1907 out of Baylor University.

As Southern and Southwestern introduced advanced training for ministers to Southern Baptists, graduate-level theological education became associated with many leading clergy and expected by prestigious congregations. Aleshire states, despite their unique cultural and educational settings, these two schools provided a homogenous educational experience for Southern Baptist leaders and the Southern Baptist Convention.

The post-World War II era has seen the forming of as many SBC seminaries as it has Presbyterian, Methodist, Episcopal and Lutheran seminaries combined. With the establishment of these new schools, SBC theological education became more geographically, institutionally and culturally diverse.

From 1946 to 1957, the SBC founded or assumed control of four new seminaries -- New Orleans, Golden Gate, Southeastern and Midwestern. Although the SBC has resisted starting any other new seminaries since 1957, a number of other Baptist theological schools have been or are in the process of being formed.

In 1971, Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary was founded, "at least in part, because of concerns over the perceived liberal tendencies in the SBC-funded schools," Aleshire writes. Beeson Divinity School was founded in the late 1980s by an individual who wished to see a theological school at Samford University.

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Perceiving what they judged to be threats to critical theological inquiry in SBC-funded schools, some Southern Baptist groups founded the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond (classes began in 1991). Gardner-Webb University authorized the establishment of a divinity school and enrolled its first class of M.Div. students in 1992. Criswell College also recently started an M.Div. program.

At least three other Baptist-related universities are considering, or have taken actions to start, university-related divinity schools or seminaries: Baylor, Mercer and Wake Forest. If these schools are successful in establishing divinity schools or seminaries, the number of institutions founded primarily to train Southern Baptist ministers will have grown from three prior to World War II to 14 at the end of this century.

Division over what theological curriculum should include, who theological education is for, how matters of faith should be examined (confessional vs. critical inquiry) and whether truth is absolute or bound by culture are all issues that have and will influence Southern Baptist theological education, Aleshire emphasizes.

"The Southern Baptist denominational struggle over the past decade," according to Aleshire, "has had, on the surface, charges of theological liberalism. But one wonders if, at a deeper level, the issues are about confessional constraint and academic freedom ... all wrapped in the language of control, heresy, and struggles over power."

Aleshire concludes by predicting Southern Baptist theological education in the future will be more diverse, more heterogeneous and more regionalized than it has ever been.

For more information about Aleshire's article and other articles in the special issue of Baptist History and Heritage focusing on "Southern Baptist Perspectives on Education," call the Historical Commission, SBC, at 1-800-966-BAPT.

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'Rock King' gave a listen,
surprised by what he heard

By C.C. Risenhoover

Baptist Press
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FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--In 1969 Ed Hoard was a high school senior in the second year of hosting his own rock 'n roll show for a small town radio station in Georgia. Somewhat of a celebrity in his high school, he had visions of someday hosting a similar show for one of the 50,000-watt stations in Atlanta.

Then Hoard got a telephone call and started listening to a radio program that would forever change his life and its direction.

The call came from the pastor of the First Baptist Church, who asked for an appointment in order to have Hoard listen to a 30-minute radio program produced by the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission.

Hoard admits that despite his chest-swelling job, he was lonely and insecure.

"Home was OK," he said. "I got along with the folks all right ... and they were very good people. We weren't very religious, though we did attend Sunday school. But I'd begun to think Sunday school was for goody-goodies. And since I was the 'Rock King,' it wasn't good public relations to be seen in church. After all, I had an image to keep up."

The pastor did not get his interview with Hoard right away, possibly because he suggested on the phone that the youngster might want to commit 30 minutes of his time each week to broadcast the RTVC program.

"I couldn't believe the request," Hoard said. "He wanted me to give up 30 minutes of my precious air time for ... ugh, I could hardly imagine it ... a religious program. I could just hear the comments from my friends at school. 'Look, there goes Ed, the evangelist.' I would've been ruined."

Fortunately, the pastor did not give up. After the 12th call the young DJ reluctantly agreed to listen to the program.

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"I couldn't believe my ears," Hoard said he remembers thinking. "I had expected 'Rock of Ages' and they were playing rock music. The DJ was super and, insult of insults, they were playing records I hadn't even received yet. I was very impressed by the professionalism of the production and was even interested in the 'subtle religious stuff.'"

Hoard made "Powerline" a weekly feature of his show. He said he listened attentively to every program.

"Slowly but surely the Holy Spirit began to speak to my fearful heart," he said. "Only weeks following my first airing of 'Powerline,' a young man who was a strong Christian came to work for our radio station. The Holy Spirit, 'Powerline' and the Christian DJ all ganged up on this defenseless 'Rock King.' It wasn't long before the 'Rock King' trusted the Rock of Ages as King of Kings."

Today Hoard's vision is no longer to be a DJ on a 50,000-watt station. He does have a broadcast each Sunday morning, but it is as pastor of Second Baptist Church of Griffin, Ga.

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Women in Ministry to meet
May 5 in Greensboro, N.C.

Baptist Press
4/12/94

GREENSBORO, N.C. (BP)--The annual worship and meeting of Southern Baptist Women in Ministry is scheduled May 5 in Greensboro, N.C.

The worship, which begins at 10 a.m., will be in Guildford Ballroom F at the Koury Convention Center/Four Seasons Holiday Inn in Greensboro, site of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship general assembly.

Lunch will be available by pre-paid reservation of \$12 after the worship and will be followed by the annual meeting of SBWIM, which is headquartered at 2800 Frankfort Ave., Louisville, KY 40206, phone (502) 896-4425.

Amy Means of Huntington, W.Va., a doctoral candidate at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., will deliver the sermon during the worship. The worship theme will be "A Future Hope: Dwelling in Possibility," based on Jeremiah 29:11.

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