

# (BP)

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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

### NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee  
901 Commerce #750  
Nashville, Tennessee 37203  
(615) 244-2355  
Herb Hollinger, Vice President  
Fax (615) 742-8919  
CompuServe ID# 70420,17

### BUREAUS

ATLANTA Martin King, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 898-7522, CompuServe 70420,250  
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 333 N. Washington, Dallas, Texas 75246-1798, Telephone (214) 828-5232, CompuServe 70420,115  
NASHVILLE Linda Lawson, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300, CompuServe 70420,57  
RICHMOND Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151, CompuServe 70420,72  
WASHINGTON Tom Strode, Chief, 400 North Capitol St., #594, Washington, D.C. 20001, Telephone (202) 638-3223, CompuServe 71173,316

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

Christians reluctant to reach muslims, leaders say By David Winfrey

Baptist Press  
6/30/94

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Saleim Kahleh isn't sure he ever met a Christian while growing up around Washington D.C., even though he attended Boy Scout meetings in a local church.

"At least I didn't know they were Christian by the way they lived," said Kahleh, who was born in America to Palestinian parents.

While he was open about his faith as a Muslim, Kahleh said he never was invited to church or heard a Christian witness in what he believed to be "a Christian nation."

Like Kahleh, most Muslims are neglected by Christian mission efforts, said George Braswell, professor of missions and world religions at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

"The church has ignored Islam much of the time. It has waged war against Islam some of the time," Braswell told those at a Southern Baptist awareness conference on Muslims, June 24-25.

"Less often has the church engaged Islam seriously in Christian understanding and witness and evangelism and outreach," he said. Just 3 percent of Christian missionaries work among Muslim people groups, which comprise 20 percent of the world's population, he said.

More than 140 denominational leaders met to learn and share their experiences with Muslims at the two-day conference, co-sponsored by the Home and Foreign mission Boards. Organizers said they hope the conference results in greater awareness among all Southern Baptists.

Christians must recognize the challenge of Islam and prioritize its resources to confront a religion that is highly missionary, mobile and sometimes militaristic, Braswell said.

Too often, Christians accept society's stereotypes of Islam as violent and primitive, said Charles Kimball, professor of religion at Furman University.

Equating terrorism with Islam is like equating Christianity with the violence in Northern Ireland, Bosnia or the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas, Kimball said.

"Would that give you a very accurate image of Christianity?" he asked. "Most Americans still know very little about the world's second largest religious community."

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Worldwide, between 800 million and 1 billion people are Muslim, according to estimates by the Home Mission Board's interfaith witness department. In America, that figure is between 4 million and 6 million and growing.

"There are going to be places in the United States very soon, if not already, where Ramadan (the Muslim season of prayer and fasting) will impact public schools," said Kimball. Within a decade, Islam could pass Judaism as America's second largest religion, he added.

Born in the Middle East during the 7th century A.D., Islam grew rapidly in its first 100 years, westward to Spain and eastward to China. Said Braswell: "The Christian church at the time barely knew what hit them."

Today, more than 950 mosques are in the United States, and as many as 40 percent of the international students here adhere to Islam, he said.

While Muslims previously came to America for a better life, that has changed in the past 10 years, said home missionary Charlie Hanna, a former Muslim. "They are not here for economic reasons or for education. They are coming to evangelize, to make you all Muslim."

And while Southern Baptists have traditionally been a rural denomination, Islam is a predominately urban religion, said Robert Douglas, executive director of the Zwermer Institute for Muslim Studies, which trains Christians to evangelize Muslim areas.

Despite the challenge of Islam, "We can reach Muslims with the message of Christ," said Sunday School Board President Jimmy Draper.

"The heart of the Muslim longs for a satisfaction that it cannot find in Islamic faith," said Draper who said Christians should build bridges for dialogue and opportunities to share their beliefs.

That has been the strategy of pastor Rochelle Davis in Detroit. Davis' church is 10 blocks from one of the largest mosques in a city with one of the country's largest Muslim populations.

Davis said he recently allowed a Muslim vendor unable to reach his mosque to use the church sanctuary for one of his five daily prayers. Afterwards, Davis had an hour-long conversation with the man, telling his testimony and giving the Muslim a marked New Testament.

"We are developing relationships, and in those relationships we believe that God is going to open up their hearts to accept Jesus Christ," he said.

Kahleh developed such relationships during his freshman year in college. "Many of my friends were strong Christians and they were just loving me and praying for me," he said. Several hundred Christians were praying for Kahleh by name before he accepted Christ, he said.

Christians must show daily evidence of their faith to reach Muslims, he said. "The ones who wanted me to become a Christian didn't have to preach to me. When Jesus was real to someone, part of their walk and part of their talk, it made a difference."

"Speak openly about your faith," added David King, a former missionary to Lebanon. "If you don't, they think there's something wrong with your religion, or you'd be speaking about it."

A major obstacle in society is the Muslim view of America as a Christian nation, King said. "The main reason why Muslims reject Christianity is because of the low moral standards of our nation.

"They say to us, 'Look, whenever you stop killing your infant children by abortion, whenever your women cover their bodies so they are not rape bait, whenever you live a holy life, come and talk.'"

Personal experiences are better than theological contests when witnessing, Kahleh said. "That's your testimony. People can't deny that or debate that," he said.

Hanna said he hopes Southern Baptists will get serious about reaching Muslims. "It is not easy to reach the Muslim, but it doesn't mean it's impossible. We believe in a God who can do everything if we will trust him and believe in him."

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(BP) photo of Saleim Kahleh (horizontal) mailed to state Baptist newspaper editors by the Home Mission Board, Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press. Cutlines are in the SBCNet newsroom.

Muslims not impossible  
to reach, convert says

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press  
6/30/94

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--A former Muslim wants Christians to know that followers of Islam are not a lost cause.

"Muslims can and do convert," said Timothy Abraham, an Egyptian who is now coordinator of the Islamic Studies Center at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Abraham, who is also a student at the seminary, is writing a book about his conversion to train other people to witness to Muslims. He translates materials from Arabic to English and records a show for a Christian radio station in Lebanon.

"The greatest thing that can change a Muslim's heart is love," said Abraham, who was introduced to Christianity through a Pennsylvania pen pal.

Raised in the agricultural region of Egypt, Timothy said he taught in his mosque as a teenager and hoped one day to preach Islam worldwide, "as the Qur'an told us," before visiting his pen pal and experiencing Christianity firsthand.

He intended to use the encounter to become a stronger Muslim, planning to throw away the Christian materials he had accumulated. "But the Lord would not let go of me."

"Islam would not provide an answer for my struggle to understand how can I be assured of going to heaven," he said. "I said, 'God, show me the truth, and the truth you will lead me to, I will serve all my life, whatever the cost may be.'"

After coming to the conclusion that the Bible was the truth and Jesus had died for his sins, Abraham became a Christian. "But it was hard for me to take Islam out of my heart."

He credits a dream in which he said Jesus talked to him with confirming his beliefs and allowing him to profess Christianity to others in Egypt.

"I don't base my doctrine or theology on a dream," he added. "That dream was nothing more than a form of encounter in which God chose to confirm and corroborate my mental conclusion."

His stand was costly. "I was beaten outside the mosque where I had preached Islam so strongly," he said, adding that he was also jailed.

"That night was the most peaceful night I have ever had in all my life, because in jail I could see Jesus comforting me," he said. "I said to myself, 'I would rather be in prison and have Jesus with me than be in the world and not have him at all.'"

He credits Southeastern's President Paige Patterson with helping secure a visa to leave Egypt and now calls Patterson "my spiritual father."

He has also had little contact with his family in Egypt. "When I became a Christian, they disowned me," he said. "But I wanted to show them practical Christian love, and when they get ugly I become nice."

In America, Abraham has acquired a taste for country music. "I enjoy grits and eggs in the morning," he said, adding that some classmates call him "Bubba" Abraham. "My friends in the dorm are my family now."

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(Editors' note: The following may be used as a sidebar or for text boxes to accompany stories on the Muslim Awareness Conference.)

What does  
Islam teach?

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ATLANTA (BP)--Muslims have six essential beliefs:

- The unity of God. One creed simply states, "There is no god but God." Muslims reject the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. States the Qur'an: "God is unique. God is the source. He has not fathered anything. Nor is He fathered, and there is nothing comparable to Him."
- The divine decree. Allah is the absolute Sovereign who through the power of his will created all that exists, good and bad. His decrees are unchangeable.
- Angels. Similar to Christian beliefs about angels, Muslims view them as divine messengers and guardians of heaven and people. Gabriel is believed to be the instrument for bringing the Qur'an from God to Mohammed.
- The revealed books. Muslims believe the great messengers of God -- Moses, David, Jesus and Mohammed -- translated the respective books that were dictated to them -- the Torah, the Psalms, the Gospel (singular) and the Qur'an. All except the Qur'an are dismissed as not offering a sure text.
- The prophets. There have been about 125,000 of these special messengers of Allah, but the Qur'an mentions only 25. The most prominent are Adam, Noah, Moses, Jesus and Mohammed.

Prophets, believed to be infallible and without sin, are sent to particular people. Jesus, for example, was sent only to the children of Israel. The only exception is Mohammed, who is believed to have a universal mission.

Muslims generally believe Jesus did not die on the cross. Some believe that Allah took Jesus from the cross and substituted in his place Judas Iscariot or someone else who was made to look like Jesus.

-- The last things. The Islamic view of the end times includes a judgement by Allah of each human's actions. Good Muslims want their good works to outweigh their wicked actions at the last judgement.

The only mortal sins for most Muslim theologians is "shirk," the crime of setting other gods alongside Allah.

(Source: Home Mission Board interfaith witness department.)

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Prayer strategy adopted  
to reach Muslims in '95

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press  
6/30/94

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--1995 will be a year of prayer for Muslim people, according to a prayer strategy unveiled during a Southern Baptist awareness conference on Islam.

"Prayer as a missions strategy is the most crucial work any Christian can do," said Minnette Drumwright, former director of the Foreign Mission Board's international prayer strategy office. "Every Christian can impact the world for Christ in every nation through prayer."

The strategy includes:

- A prayer booklet to promote the emphasis.
- A video for participating Southern Baptists.
- At least two "prayer pilgrimages" to Muslim areas in the world and one pilgrimage to a Muslim population center in America.
- A prayer site in an Islamic area for Christians to pray for Muslims.

The strategy follows a similar 30-day emphasis this used year during the Muslim season of prayer and fasting called Ramadan. During that time, missionaries reported heightened receptivity to learning about Jesus, said Jerry Rankin, president of the Foreign Mission Board.

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Drumwright said that while God's power makes the difference, "our prayers release his work."

"God has done so much in the little bit of praying we have done. How much more will he do if all of our people in all the churches are a part of this?" she asked. "Prayer is the only missions strategy that can reach into every nation."

Plans call for the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem to be a site for people touring the Holy Lands to pray for Muslims, she said. Prayer guides and other information will be provided to leaders of Southern Baptist tourists, she said.

Organizers considered establishing an office for prayer in the area, she said, but "an official place might create some negative reactions from some Muslim people."

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South Carolina Baptist paper  
celebrates 125th birthday

By Herb Hollinger

Baptist Press  
6/30/94

GREENVILLE, S.C. (BP)--One of Southern Baptists' oldest state papers -- and one of the largest -- celebrated its 125th birthday June 30 with a special 40-page edition in color.

South Carolina's Baptist Courier published an anniversary commemorative issue with stories about the paper's history and about other institutions of the state convention.

"South Carolina Baptists deserved a good paper in 1869, and they got it," John E. Roberts, editor and manager for more than 28 years, said. "They deserve a good paper today, and they have it. The Baptist Courier has been a good publication for most of its 125 years."

Like many of the older state convention-related papers, the Baptist Courier began life as a private publication in 1869. For 30 years prior, South Carolina Baptists read Baptist papers from neighboring states, Roberts wrote in an anniversary issue editorial. In 1920 the paper was purchased by the South Carolina Baptist Convention and became an agency of the convention with a separate board of trustees.

"From its first issue the 'Working Christian' (which shortly changed its name to the Baptist Courier) declared itself 'For, by and about South Carolina Baptists.' It still clings to this motto," Roberts, who holds the longest tenure of the paper's nine editors, wrote.

Roberts said South Carolina Baptist responded "quickly and enthusiastically" to the new paper. Suggestions and requests poured in just as quickly.

"Some readers wanted more devotional reading. Some wanted articles on theology. Some wanted only 'good' news reported, never anything 'bad.' Some wanted to dialogue back and forth with other readers in a running debate through public letters. All were heard, but the early editors wisely held the publication to its first purpose," Roberts said.

That purpose -- and the suggestions -- Roberts said have not changed "hardly at all in 125 years."

"The Baptist Courier today is first and primarily a news publication. Its role is not promotional. It seeks to inform, to educate, to enlighten; and in so doing, to inspire. To withhold bad news or avoid controversial events would violate its reason for being," Roberts said.

Roberts said the paper has faced two "critical junctures during the latter two-thirds of its existence."

One came in 1920 when it changed from private ownership and the second covered a 20-year period following World War II "which historians are now calling the era of information explosion."

Television and radio became the average family's primary source of news, Roberts said. At the same time there was a rapid escalation in the number of newspaper and magazines bidding for reading time.

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"The Baptist Courier had to sharpen its news coverage and meet a need or quickly lose its place on the reading table. Its steady rise in circulation says South Carolina Baptists continue to want it."

The paper's future is bright but challenging, Roberts said, and it will have a secure place in the life of S.C. Baptists "as long as it reports the news accurately, professionally, objectively, fairly. And as long as it remains 'For, by and about South Carolina Baptists.'"

The anniversary issue has two photos on the front page, one as a pastor might have looked in 1869 and another appearing in 1994 attire. David Hayes, pastor of Gowensville Baptist Church dressed in the attire of 1869 which included a black frock coat, white ruffled shirt and string tie, plus a parson's hat.

The Gowensville church was organized in 1820. Hayes appears in front of the building with horses and a buggy.

Appearing as the 1994 preacher, Edward M. Carney stands by the new and modern building of Riverland Hills Baptist Church, Columbia, where he is pastor.

The Baptist Courier ranks fourth, 109,000, in circulation among the 39 state Baptist papers although the number of Southern Baptists in the state ranks eighth in state convention church membership.

The paper has a seven-member staff and publishes 45 times a year.

Southern Baptists actually have given birth to, or adopted, 190 Baptist papers, but had to bury or absorb 151 of them, according to Don Kirkland, Baptist Courier associate editor who wrote a synopsis of the history of state Baptist papers. Circulation of all the papers is about 1.4 million, ranging from the Texas Baptist Standard, 234,000, to the Dakota Connection, paper of the Dakota (North and South) Baptist Convention, with about 1,600 subscribers.

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Golden Gate prof calls for  
pulpit authenticity, creativity By Cameron Crabtree

Baptist Press  
6/30/94

MILL VALLEY, Calif. (BP)--Pastors must share their spiritual journeys in candid, creative ways to preach effectively today, said author and preacher Craig Skinner.

"Pulpit authenticity is the primary requirement for the communication of God's truth," said Skinner, professor of preaching at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif. Although it may be hard to define, every congregation recognizes its presence or its absence, he added.

"In its essence, good preaching is witness and testimony to the journey the pastor has taken and which he is now inviting the congregation to share," Skinner said. The Australian-born preacher-theologian shared the struggles of his own spiritual journey during his last chapel service before he retires at the seminary.

The television age and increasing diversity in churches, added Skinner, stimulates demand for variety and high emotional impact in communication. Sermons will take on more imaginative forms than in the past, he predicted.

"The art of effective biblical preaching today will center on the involvement of congregations with problems or life stresses and motivating them to go to the scripture to find answers," he said. "Thus, the sermon will enlist partners rather than creating dependents who blandly accept everything the pulpit shovels at them."

Preachers, stressed Skinner, must "face the problem with such angst that congregants are hungry to understand the relevance of the biblical portion for this aspect of their lives." They "work with the pastor" as he develops the sermon, often "discovering the points" before he makes them.

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"The pastor is not a monologist," Skinner emphasized. "Some brave preachers gather selected members during the week before the sermon, summarize the sermon with them, add the input they give as to how it fits into their specific life situations, then, after the sermon has been delivered, gathers them again and asks, 'How did our sermon go?' This becomes a living dialogue rather than a post mortem."

Skinner, author of "The Teaching Ministry of the Pulpit" and several other books, suggested several questions pastors could ask in planning their preaching: What does the Bible tell me are common human needs? What needs are characteristic of the ages and stages of life? What results can be obtained from an anonymous survey of the congregation? When should a sermon address certain subjects?

When Jesus left the disciples, Skinner pointed out, he could have given them one last "crash course in theology." Instead, he told them about the "comforting Holy Spirit, which was the immediate need."

Skinner noted Jesus spoke also to verbalized needs. "Many preachers never know what the needs of their congregations are, simply because they never ask them nor listen when they are told."

Skinner offered several other practical suggestions:

-- Pay attention to sermon titles. "Any sermon which begins with How To ... will always grab attention."

-- Don't use the scripture passage immediately. "In the first five minutes you must secure the congregation's attention. Do your scripture reading before the choir or somewhere else, but leave the Bible closed until you have stirred their interest, then look to the passage for the answers and find them together."

-- Be attuned to a congregation's cultural context. "Unless the good content shared from many of our Southern Baptist pulpits is seasoned and shaped so as to be palatable for today's needs, many contemporary congregations will not hear God's word as well as they should. Too many sermons today are 'verse by verse' approaches where preachers seek to exhaust the meaning of a biblical portion through a kind of 'inchworm exegesis'."

-- Be creative. "Today's listeners respond best to creative sermon contexts, innovative introductory strategies and applied learning dynamics which enlist them as active partners in the discovery of biblical truth, rather than remain as passive listeners expected to give loyal assent to all they hear."

A former pastor in Chicago and Atlanta, and a professor at Golden Gate Seminary since 1982, Skinner has retired to Atlanta, where he works through the church-minister relations department of the Georgia Baptist Convention.

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Adventure Week gives  
VBS a different look

By Ferrell Foster

Baptist Press  
6/30/94

CHATHAM, Ill. (BP)--Chatham Baptist Church held Vacation Bible School in June, but there was no procession of marching kids at the beginning of each day's activities, nor were there flags or pledges.

What they had was a homemade rain forest with inflated tropical birds in the auditorium and a bunch of excited kids exploring natural wonders in various rooms. They called it Adventure Week.

Adventure Week is an event designed and sold by the Baptist Sunday School Board. But Chatham didn't follow the board's script. AW was designed to be a "complement" to Vacation Bible School in Southern Baptist churches, said Mancil Ezell, director of BSSB's church services department. The material was not intended to replace traditional VBS.

But at Chatham it did, and those involved loved it.

"It was excellent," said Jerry Weber, minister of education and youth at Chatham. "From the opening celebration to the closing celebration there was a unity to it, a flow."

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The theme was "Exploring God's Earth," and "the children who came really grasped the concept that this is God's creation and it's our responsibility to take care of it," Weber said.

The adjectives "exciting" and "fun" surfaced often in interviews with various AW leaders at the church.

Chatham didn't follow the Sunday School Board's script for use of AW, but it was a BSSB promotional mailing that actually led the church in that direction.

Last December, Weber received a colorful brochure stating, "What if all you needed for your VBS this year came in one box and was a cinch to use?"

It was a brochure intended for non-Southern Baptist churches, but it landed in a number of Southern Baptist churches anyway. And Chatham was one of them.

"Adventure Week was designed for two markets," said BSSB's Ezell. It was to be a complement to VBS in Southern Baptist churches, not a replacement. It was to be used to help churches provide an all-day VBS program, or as a second summer activity, or even as a summer-long program.

Second, AW was designed as a VBS product for the "trade market," where the Sunday School Board competes more vigorously with other publishers for VBS sales.

A mailing intended for the trade market is what landed in the mailbox at Chatham Baptist Church in central Illinois.

The brochure describes Adventure Week as a "brand new concept in Vacation Bible School -- the perfect blend of fast-paced, interactive learning with the easiest teaching demands you can imagine. It's games, crafts, drama, and lots more Bible-based activities, designed to challenge and thrill the imaginations of your 3-year-olds through 6th-graders."

And thus the Adventure Week boom began. As of late June, the Sunday School Board had sold more than 2,000 units of the \$150 kits, Ezell said. And "way over 50 percent" of those were to Southern Baptist churches. It is not known how SBC churches used the material.

"We are absolutely ecstatic" about Adventure Week's reception, Ezell stated.

He attributed AW's popularity to the "innovative" and "child-centered" aspects of the product. Also, "it affirms new workers who have no experience," he said. "It do sn't require a given educational level," and "it takes very little advance preparation."

Lincoln Avenue Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Ill., also used Adventure Week as its VBS. "I think it's super," said associate pastor Rich Ratts. "Everything was activity oriented. The learning was by doing rather than by sitting and listening."

Adventure Week was designed by BSSB's recreation staff, which is under Ezell's leadership. Regular VBS material comes out of the board's Sunday school staff.

Sue Raley, manager of BSSB's Vacation Bible School and special projects section for preschoolers and children, was responsible for this year's regular preschool VBS materials, titled, "Trail of Treasures."

"It pains me when a Southern Baptist church uses Adventure Week instead of Vacation Bible School," Raley said. AW is "very strong in recreation and weak in Bible study ... Its purpose is not Bible study. Its purpose is recreation."

Chatham's Weber said Adventure Week "emphasizes biblical concepts more than biblical content." The theme was "very biblical," and "it's something (children) will remember for a long time, as opposed to simple facts and figures."

Larry Richmond, state Sunday school consultant in Illinois, described Adventure Week as a day camp. "I think it's fine as far as day camp goes," he said. "It's obviously meeting needs in some of the churches throughout Illinois, ... but the Bible study emphasis in it is very weak compared to regular Vacation Bible School literature."

Richmond said a day camp should be called a day camp, not Vacation Bible School.

But Chatham was looking for something different for VBS.



Jan Doughty, a preschool leader at the church, said she and other preschool teachers planned to "write our own curriculum" this year because of dissatisfaction with BSSB materials in recent years. She described it as "the same every year."

Adventure Week provided an alternative, and Doughty sang its praises.

BSSB's Raley said this year's VBS materials, "Trail of Treasures," were the result of a four-year redesign effort. "We changed a lot of things," she said. Changes included a redesigned worship service, the addition of crafts, a promotional theme, a theme song, contemporary arrangements of the music and repackaged leader materials.

Second Baptist Church in Marion, Ill., used Trail of Treasures, and associate pastor Dave Elledge was impressed. The material was "definitely" a "step up from what it was a few years back." He said the Bible study did not seem to be as "thorough as what I like to see in VBS."

At Chatham, Weber said early this year the church obtained the materials for both Adventure Week and Trail of Treasures. "We took both materials and gave them to four of our teachers . . . . All four of them chose Adventure Week."

At this point it is not known how many Southern Baptist churches went with Adventure Week as their VBS material. BSSB's Raley said sales of "Trail of Treasures" have been very good, with 17 of 40 publication titles going into reprint. As for Adventure Week's effect on sales, she said, "I'm sure it's cut in. I don't think it's cut in significantly."

Each year, Vacation Bible School is a major contributor to baptisms in Southern Baptist churches. But Richmond said he "would not expect a large number of professions of faith" from churches using Adventure Week.

And an ecology theme might not seem the best approach for seeking to lead children to faith in Christ, but both Chatham and Lincoln Avenue churches were able to communicate evangelistic messages.

On the last day in Chatham, Weber said they talked about "eternal ecology" and "how our lives can be polluted by sin" and only Jesus can make a life clean.

At Lincoln Avenue, a teacher developed her own way to communicate the need to follow Christ, Ratts said. Vicki Huff used two plastic men, one standing on rock and the other on sand, in a demonstration of soil erosion to show how the man standing on the rock was left standing, while the man on the sand was washed away. Jesus said a person who hears his words and puts them into practice is "like a wise man who built his house on the rock." (Matthew 7:24 NIV)

Lincoln Avenue also distributed "power band" bracelets, which illustrate God's provision of salvation, to the children, said Gam Eshbaugh, coordinator of deaf ministries. The meaning of the bands was then reviewed with parents on Friday night.

Chatham and Lincoln Avenue leaders spoken to were unaware of any professions of faith being made during the week.

Weber said Chatham does not have a public invitation, but rather encourages children to talk with their teachers. Usually the professions of faith there come in the weeks following VBS.

At Marion Second, where Trail of Treasures was used, 24 children "came forward," Elledge said.

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Adventure Week gets praise  
from children, church leaders

By Charles Willis

Baptist Press  
6/30/94

FRANKLIN, Tenn. (BP)--"Oh, Mamma! I didn't want it to be over" was one girl's assessment of Adventure Week after a morning of summer fun at First Baptist Church of Franklin, Tenn.

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And for the 728 children and leaders at the church who tried the Baptist Sunday School Board-produced, recreation-based event June 20-24, the sadness of coming to the end of a new experience is tempered by the positive memories of a true adventure.

For the children, the adventure came through the theme, "Exploring God's Earth," a blend of Bible stories, games, crafts, music, drama and a video for child-centered learning. Adventure Week is designed for children three years old through sixth grade.

The leaders said they found adventure in a new approach to teaching Bible truths in an off-school program that lends itself to creative room decorations and enthusiasm that builds day by day among the participants.

Rachel Jones, children's ministry coordinator at the church, said Adventure Week was selected "because of the creativity, and we really wanted to reach unchurched children, while giving something to our own children that would be different, and still give all of them the Christian message."

And Dixie Inman, associate children's ministry coordinator, agreed that leaders wanted something that "would hook them in on the first day, and make them want to return. The very first impression is important," she observed.

The large turnout came as the result of distributing 1,000 door hangers, buying newspaper ads, getting a news story in the local newspaper and taking fliers to doctors' offices, day-care centers, children's clothing stores and the local library.

An "Adventure Week Bus" circulated through three neighborhoods every morning to pick up children who are unchurched or attend other congregations, and a local day-care center brought approximately 25 children each day.

Inman, who rode the bus, said the children "just ran to the bus every morning."

And in decision services offered for third-, fourth- and fifth-grade children at the end of the week, 39 decisions to accept Christ were recorded.

Preschool ministry coordinator Carol Pratt said she found the curriculum to be "very active for preschoolers. It has lot of things to choose from, and the preschoolers love it. They like the decorations. The days have just passed so quickly."

Christy Elrod, a preschool teacher, agreed that none of her students asked, "Is it time to go yet?"

"The curriculum has been so good," she observed. "This year it all went together."

John Garner, project director at the Sunday School Board for Adventure Week, said early summer evaluations from church leaders around the United States have been positive.

"Adventure Week was the breath of fresh air our church needed," wrote Stacia Arredondo of First Baptist Church in Iowa Park, Texas. "Workers and children were excited about it and looked forward to coming each day."

Abby Stallings of Bethany Baptist Church in Huntsville, Ala., agreed that all who were involved with the event "loves this concept! The kids loved it; the teachers loved it! We can't wait until next year!"

More specific feedback came from Cindy Durrance of First Baptist Church in Tishomingo, Okla., who observed "children learn more when they are having fun. There were a lot of good learning activities throughout each book. They seemed to enjoy everything."

Jimmy McFatter, minister of education at First Baptist Church in Armory, Miss., declared Adventure Week at his church "explosively successful." He said children who could not be persuaded to come to other similar events "... were up before their parents getting ready. They begged us to do it again the next week. The opening and closing celebrations were wild with energy."

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Garner said Adventure Week is designed to provide biblically based materials for non-Southern churches. However, he said the materials are suitable for use in Southern Baptist churches that want resources for activities beyond Vacation Bible School, such as a school spring break or other off-school events sponsored by churches.

In contrast to "Trail of Treasures," the 1994 VBS materials produced for Southern Baptist churches by the Sunday School Board's Bible teaching-reaching division, Adventure Week materials do not reference Southern Baptist causes or entities. However, VBS materials span the entire age range, preschool through adults.

Both "Trail of Treasures" and Adventure Week materials may be ordered through the board's toll-free order number, 1-800-458-2772 and through Baptist Book Stores and Lifeway Christian Stores.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by the Sunday School Board bureau of Baptist Press.

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CORRECTION:

In the June 29 issue of Baptist Press, the story "Think you've got car problems? Ask missionaries in Africa," please DELETE the following phrase in the third paragraph, second sentence: "... because of skyrocketing insurance rates..."

Thanks  
Baptist Press

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