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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
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TENNESSEE -- SBC Cooperative Program gifts in June: 4 percent above 1993.
COLOMBIA -- Missionaries face danger during Colombia relief trip.
WASHINGTON -- Critics call abortion decision damaging to free speech.
SEYCHELLES -- 'Jonah' road sign pointed coach to the Seychelles.
ALABAMA -- WMU to change to new quarter dates in 1996.
TEXAS -- Hispanic Texas Baptists focus on youth, future.
GEORGIA -- 'Casey's story' shows children effective ministers to peers.
NASHVILLE -- Preparation key to ease fear of making visits, Piland says.

SBC Cooperative Program gifts
in June: 4 percent above 1993

Baptist Press
7/1/94

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptist Convention Cooperative Program receipts for June were up 4.34 percent above the previous year which kept total CP receipts for the year at more than 3 percent above 1993, according to Morris H. Chapman, president and chief executive officer of the SBC Executive Committee.

"This report of Southern Baptist response to the challenge of the Great Commission, our denominational heartbeat, is truly great! The Cooperative Program future is bright," responded Chapman.

"I thank and commend Southern Baptists for giving at a level that is turning Cooperative Program mission support from decline to growth. The needs of our world challenge us to continue to grow both in giving and in the effective use of that which is given," Chapman said.

The June total was \$10,886,499 compared to June 1993 of \$10,433,816 or an increase of \$452,682. For the nine months of the fiscal year, total CP receipts stand at \$106,599,758 compared to the same period the previous fiscal year of \$103,343,727.

The year-to-date totals for CP stand at 3.15 percent above the previous year-to-date totals, or \$3,256,031 increase.

The SBC 1993-94 budget also has been surpassed for the nine months: required for this period is \$103,676,051 but the \$106,599,758 is nearly \$3 million or 2.82 percent above the budget.

Designated gifts for the year, \$119,209,105, stand at 1.32 percent (\$1,552,457) ahead of last year although the June 1994 total of \$11,770,875 was 5.26 percent below June 1993 of \$12,423,898.

The Cooperative Program is Southern Baptists' method of supporting missions and ministry efforts of state and regional conventions and the Southern Baptist Convention. Designated contributions include the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions, the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for home missions, world hunger and other special gifts.

State and regional conventions retain a percentage of Cooperative Program contributions they receive from the churches to support work in their areas and send the remaining funds to the Executive Committee for national and international ministries. The percentage of distribution is at the discretion of each state or regional convention.

**Missionaries face danger
during Colombia relief trip By Mary E. Speidel**

ESCALARETA, Colombia (BP)--She wondered why she went.

"We had that very real sense that this might not be a trip we would come back from," said Southern Baptist missionary Betsy Kammerdiener in Colombia.

Kammerdiener, from Energy, Ill. and other Baptist relief workers knew the risks of travel over rugged mountain roads in Colombia's Cauca state. Under normal circumstances the trip meant risking possible encounters with Colombian guerrillas active in the region.

Now, it also meant the threat of encountering aftershocks and landslides triggered by a June 6 earthquake in the area.

"You have to weigh the difference between your fears and concern for personal safety -- which we're not idiots about -- and the very real need," said Kammerdiener, a seminary professor, wife and mother of two preschoolers.

The Baptists wanted to meet medical needs among survivors of an earthquake and avalanches that devastated more than a dozen villages near the Paez River. Kammerdiener went to help register patients and dispense medicine. Other team members included Foreign Mission Board missionaries Sandra Gustin, a physician from San Antonio, Texas, and Rodney Coleman, a church planter from Hereford, Texas, and two Colombians -- a physician and a former Red Cross worker.

The relief workers planned to treat refugees expected to be evacuated to the towns of Pitayo and Jambalo, where quake damage was less severe. But when the Baptists arrived, local officials said the refugees hadn't come. The team could best be used, they advised, at a camp closer to the disaster zone.

The trip to the camp was "very grueling," Kammerdiener said. They had to stop occasionally to remove boulders guerrillas reportedly had placed in the roads as barricades.

Besides that, the road was "constantly changing" because of instability caused by the quake, she added.

"I thought, 'What am I doing, leaving my preschoolers and going out here? As we were bouncing around -- we got bruised and thrown all over the (vehicle) -- I thought, 'Lord why do you have me here?'"

She found out after they arrived at the refugee camp.

When missionary physician Gustin entered the camp's clinic, medical workers were typing a list of needed medicines. It would take a week for the drugs to be shipped in over the unstable roads.

The list matched exactly the medicines Baptists had brought with them. The drugs were purchased with Southern Baptist disaster relief funds provided by the Foreign Mission Board.

"It was just amazing They desperately needed that medication," said Kammerdiener.

But even more amazing was another request from Colombian doctors working at the camp.

"They were not asking, they were begging us for Bibles," she said. "They were saying, 'You're Baptists, don't you have a Bible?'"

The Baptists had brought copies of the Gospel of John, but they didn't have full Bibles to distribute. (Several other Baptist relief teams earlier had given away Bibles and tracts in another part of the disaster zone. They also provided food and temporary shelter materials for quake victims.)

"All I have to read are medical journals," said one doctor at the camp. "I've never read the Bible before. I need to read the Bible now."

Gustin and Kammerdiener responded by giving their personal Bibles to the doctors. They promised another Baptist team would bring more, along with more medical supplies. A second team traveled to the camp several days later.

At the camp Kammerdiener saw refugees arriving by evacuation helicopters every 15 minutes. From several indigenous tribes in the region, they were being forced to leave their ancestral land because of unsafe living conditions.

"The people would just shamble off the helicopter with a bag over their arms," she recounted. "They didn't want to leave their land. That was all they had. ... You could see the tragedy on their faces."

Looking back on the trip, Kammerdiener observed: "The Lord showed me that what he needs and what I think he needs are not always the same thing. If he wants me in a place it really doesn't matter whether I understand what's going on or not. It's really that he has me there for his purpose. And it's not always so much what I can do, it's maybe what I can be and what I can sense."

Throughout the trip "I was quite concerned for our lives. I thought, 'this is one of the craziest things I have ever done,' she admitted. "Yet it was exactly where I was supposed to be."

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Critics call abortion decision
damaging to freedom of speech By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
7/1/94

WASHINGTON (BP)--The U.S. Supreme Court handed the pro-choice movement a partial victory on its last day of the term, but it was enough to prompt critics to rail against the decision as an attack on the First Amendment right of free speech.

In the final opinion announced from the bench during the 1993-94 session, the high court ruled some portions of an injunction limiting pro-life protests were illegal but a 36-foot buffer zone around an abortion clinic's entrances and driveway was constitutional. The approved part of the injunction prohibits pro-life advocates from doing even sidewalk counseling or picketing inside the zone.

Critics on and off the court immediately criticized the ruling.

In a lengthy, passionate dissent read from the bench, Associate Justice Antonin Scalia said the "damage (the ruling) does to the First Amendment is, in my mind, considerable."

The court has "left lying about a dangerous, loaded weapon" to use against free speech, Scalia said.

Matt Staver, attorney for the pro-life activists bringing the suit, said outside the court building, "What the Supreme Court did today in part of this injunction is turn parts of our streets and sidewalks into a type of Tiananmen Square, where courts can enter the public sector and become like the tanks that entered Tiananmen Square to crush dissident voices on a traditional public sidewalk.

"If any street, sidewalk, any public forum in this country is off limits for peaceful, expressive activity, then all of our streets and sidewalks are in jeopardy.

"The First Amendment is the heart and soul of a free society," Staver said. "Today the Supreme Court betrayed part of the liberty of expression that is guaranteed to us" by the First Amendment.

The Madsen v. Women's Health Center case originated in Melbourne, Fla., where a state court issued a second injunction in early 1993 against pro-life activists targeting an abortion clinic, its owner and employees. The Florida Supreme Court upheld the injunction.

The U.S. Supreme Court, however, struck down some parts of the injunction: (1) A 300-foot no-approach zone around the clinic which requires pro-lifers to receive consent before talking to people going to the clinic; (2) a 300-foot zone of protection around the residences of clinic staff, and (3) a ban on all signs.

In addition to upholding the 36-foot buffer zone, the court also okayed a limitation on noise outside the clinic.

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The high court upheld both restrictions "because they burden no more speech than necessary to eliminate the unlawful conduct targeted by the state court's injunction," said Chief Justice William Rehnquist in the majority opinion. The other provisions were reversed because they "sweep more broadly than necessary to accomplish the permissible goals of the injunction."

The 36-foot buffer zone "is a means of protecting unfettered ingress to and egress from the clinic. . . .," Rehnquist wrote. "The state court seems to have had few other options to protect access given the narrow confines around the clinic."

The Florida Supreme Court said the injunction protects several government interests, including protecting a woman's right to seek pregnancy services and ensuring public safety and order, Rehnquist wrote. "We agree with the Supreme Court of Florida that the combination of these governmental interests is quit sufficient to justify an appropriately tailored injunction to protect them," he wrote.

"For the sake of law and order, peace and quiet, the court was willing to gag pro-life persons from standing, speaking or praying on a public sidewalk, while permitting pro-abortion activists to speak freely within the same 36-foot zone in front of the abortion clinic," said Michael Whitehead, general counsel of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

"The court casually admits that they have created 'speech-free' zones on public property, a traditional public forum," Whitehead said. "And they admit that only one side of a political protest can be targeted by an injunction, if some members of the movement have broken laws or prior court orders. This endangers all social protest movements."

The Christian Life Commission joined on a friend-of-the-court brief by the Christian Legal Society supporting the pro-lifers.

Though it was not a complete victory, abortion advocates rejoiced in the opinion.

"It is extremely important that this case has been handed down, and it establishes that a woman doesn't have to walk a gauntlet in order to exercise her right to abortion," Eleanor Smeal, president of the Feminist Majority Foundation, told reporters afterward. "It also shows that clearly the government has an interest in protecting access to the right to choose. Without access there is no choice."

Outside the court building, one pro-life leader said activists would not back down in the face of the decision.

"Pro-life activists will not allow the Supreme Court to tell us where we can express our First Amendment rights," said Pat Mahoney, a spokesman for Operation Rescue. "Will this be challenged in the streets? The answer to that is 'Yes.'"

Joining Rehnquist in the majority were associate justices Harry Blackmun, John Paul Stevens, Sandra Day O'Connor, David Souter and Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Stevens wrote a concurring opinion in which he disagreed with striking down the 300-foot no-approach zone around the clinic.

Anthony Kennedy and Clarence Thomas signed on to Scalia's dissenting opinion. The dissenters agreed with the majority in reversing parts of the injunction but also would have struck down the other portions.

It was the final day on the court for Blackmun, who is retiring after 23 years. Blackmun is best known for authoring the 1973 Roe v. Wade opinion, which legalized abortion. Rehnquist was one of the two justices who dissented in Roe. Rehnquist and Scalia consistently have opposed abortion rights in their decisions on the high court.

'Jonah' road sign pointed
coach to the Seychelles

By Craig Bird

VICTORIA, Seychelles (BP)--Dennis Rivers didn't want to be a Jonah, but he wound up in the middle of the ocean anyway.

His wife, Jody, didn't want to leave Texas, but she wound up right beside her husband.

The couple just completed a two-year stint in the Seychelles -- a tropical paradise so remote that its tourism slogan is "Unique by a thousand miles" -- as International Service Corps volunteers with the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

How they got from Henderson, Texas, to a tiny island in the Indian Ocean off the east coast of Africa is a story of signs and wonders. God sent the signs, and the Riverses sometimes wonder what they got themselves into.

In late 1991 Dennis attended a "Rec Lab" sponsored by Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in New Braunfels, Texas. While there he learned of the need for a basketball coach to work in the Seychelles. But he thought he was through coaching after a career that included three high school state championships. He also was happily settled into his job as minister of recreation at First Baptist Church in Henderson.

"We had gone 11 straight months with at least one profession of faith in every service and we were happy where we were," he remembered.

But as the miles rolled by on the five-hour drive home from the recreation conference, he found himself arguing with God, listing reasons he couldn't and shouldn't contact the Foreign Mission Board about the coaching position.

"I'm not a very emotional person but there I was driving down the road and crying," he said.

Then came THE SIGN -- literally. Just outside the small town of Hutto a road sign loomed into his vision. "Jonah" it said, with an arrow pointing left.

He had never noticed the sign before on numerous trips down that road -- or even heard of the small community named after the Old Testament prophet. The tears stopped, along with the arguments.

"OK, Lord," he prayed. "I don't want to end up in the belly of a whale, so I guess I'm going to the Seychelles. But, you're going to have convince Jody too."

Jody didn't turn down the idea flat when he sprang it on her. But she "didn't exactly run get the suitcase and start packing either," her husband reported.

As they talked, however, she said she "felt the Holy Spirit telling me not to say 'no' so that Dennis could make the decision free from pressure. I never actually felt a distinct, direct call to the Seychelles but rather a very clear call to be submissive to God's will."

She did have two pragmatic questions: 1. Do they have hurricanes there? and 2. Do they sunbathe topless? "If both answers had been yes I would have had a tough time coming," she admitted. "But at least we didn't have to worry about hurricanes."

The couple also found tremendous support from First Baptist in Henderson. The church voted to give them a two-year leave of absence and continue paying for their insurance and retirement. More than 1,000 people attended the worship service where they shared their testimonies and call.

So in the summer of 1992 the Riverses, with 6-year-old son Kirkland in tow, flew more than 12,000 miles into the middle of the Indian Ocean to begin the volunteer mission assignment.

Dennis went to work in the Seychelles' government ministry of sports, working with both the men's and women's national basketball teams and developing curriculum to teach sports in the small nation's schools. Jody went to work learning to function in a different culture and home schooling Kirkland.

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They both went to work building relationships. A Bible study for athletes and national coaches attracted a small but intensely interested group. She got involved in a women's Bible study in the expatriate community. Both also worked in the Grace Fellowship, a small evangelical congregation, where she led a children's Sunday school class and a Kids' Bible Club.

The athletes' and coaches' commitment to Bible study deeply impressed them.

"They just don't miss," Dennis said. "They are more faithful to their individual study and quiet time than I am -- even those who haven't made professions of faith. They are serious about wanting to know God."

That's not the general attitude of the 60,000 people who live on the small island of Mahe (part of the Seychelles chain), mostly in the capital of Victoria.

"This is a land of independent people who don't make friendships easily," Jody explained. "Maybe it's the history built on transient seamen or the almost completely secular value system, but they don't trust anyone, not just outsiders but even other 'Seychellois.' If a person has one close friend that's about all you can hope for."

Yet through their friendship and witness, the Riverses built numerous deep relationships:

-- One of the national coaches and his live-in girlfriend of many years (marriage is rare because of the culture and the high price of traditional Catholic wedding ceremonies) became the most loyal participants in the athletes' Bible study. They also spent many evenings with the Riverses.

-- A Yugoslavian woman borrowed a Bible to read "as a novel" but encountered the loving and disturbing power of the Holy Spirit.

-- Three members of the women's national team, returning from a Bible study at the Rivers' home, missed a curve on the mountainous road. The car flipped twice and landed upside down 30 feet below. But "by a miracle and the grace of God," no one was seriously hurt. All three used the incident to tell others about God's protection and the presence of his guardian angels.

-- A streetwise American named Steve Gray, who also worked for the government sports ministry, had resisted Dennis' effort to share the gospel with him. But after a personal crisis he sought out the volunteer and asked deep questions. Later he accepted Christ as Savior. "I was concerned about his sincerity because he has a bit of the con man in him, but I think this is for real," Dennis said. "He's met the Savior."

It wasn't a two-year vacation for the Southern Baptist family. They caught island fever, for one thing. Even spectacular beaches and unceasing sunshine get monotonous after awhile on an island you can drive around in 45 minutes. Homesickness also came, despite regular phone calls and packages from Texas.

They also were robbed several times. The most serious incident happened when they were not home. The national weightlifting coach, a Chinese man named Ma Jianping, was housesitting for them. He was stabbed three times by robbers and almost bled to death.

The family is returning to Henderson, where Dennis will resume his church recreation job and assume the task of missions minister. They look forward to fishing on east Texas lakes, following the Texas Rangers and the Dallas Cowboys in person, watching Kirkland resume his sports activities and rekindling friendships.

But they'll miss the friendships in the Seychelles, and the 24 months they spent strengthening the evangelical Christian witness in a remote and little-known country.

And when they pray, another "road sign from God" will loom in their minds. It will say "Seychelles." And the arrow will point to their hearts.

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(BP) photos (two vertical) mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press. Cutline available on SBCNet Newsroom.

**WMU to change to new
quarter dates in 1996**

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union will change its quarterly release dates for missions education curriculum in the fall of 1996.

Beginning September 1996, WMU literature will be released September-November, December-February, March-May and June-August.

The change is in keeping with recent decisions made by the Southern Baptist Convention inter-agency council and messengers to the June meeting of the SBC.

"Church leaders have been telling us for some time that a September curriculum release date would be helpful to them," said Joyce Mitchell, WMU associate executive director. "We are glad that we can be responsive to those requests."

The Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission will join WMU in moving to the new schedule in 1996. However, some Baptist Sunday School Board programs will move to new quarter dates beginning September 1995.

WMU leaders felt it would be easier to implement the changes in 1996 rather than in 1995 because of major changes already scheduled for the organization in 1995. Beginning in 1995 the Baptist Women and Baptist Young Women organizations will be replaced with a new adult organization, Women on Mission. A new magazine for adults, Missions Mosaic, will also be introduced in the fall of 1995.

Mitchell cited two primary reasons WMU chose to implement the new quarter release dates in 1996:

-- curriculum -- "WMU has already enlisted and trained writers for the magazines to be released with cover dates of October 1994-September 1995," she said. Also, planning material for WMU directors has already been released based on the October-September year.

-- training -- Training for WMU leaders began this past spring on state and associational levels for the 1994-95 church year, Mitchell said.

By scheduling the change in 1996, WMU magazine subscribers should see a smooth transition to the new quarter release dates, Mitchell said. "This will give us time to adequately communicate the changes with our subscribers and ensure that their needs will be met."

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**Hispanic Texas Baptists
focus on youth, future**

By Ken Camp

**Baptist Press
7/1/94**

SAN ANTONIO, Texas (BP)--Messengers to the Mexican Baptist Convention of Texas looked toward the 21st century with an emphasis on "Our Youth, Our Future," elected new officers and celebrated their heritage on the 30th anniversary of unification with the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

About 2,000 messengers and visitors attended the convention, June 27-29 at Castle Hills First Baptist Church, San Antonio, Texas.

"The youth of today provide the hope of tomorrow. Our youth are our future," said William M. Pinson Jr., executive director, BGCT.

Children have the right to be "born safely and healthy, brought up carefully and prayerfully, and launched into the world confidently and joyfully," Pinson said.

"It takes all of us working together to see that the children and youth of today become what they can be for all our tomorrows," he said.

Texas Attorney General Dan Morales echoed the same theme, telling Hispanic Baptists that "a generation of children angry at life" must be given hope rooted in love and faith.

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Morales, introduced as "the highest-ranking evangelical Hispanic in Texas government," said the juvenile justice system needs to be reformed to demand personal responsibility both of children and their parents, educational opportunities for disadvantaged youth should be expanded, and basic human needs must be met.

But while government can address the symptoms, Morales said, churches and families can provide the cure for troubled youth by offering foundational values and role models.

"We are examples to our children. We can show them it is not necessary for them to choose gangs and drugs and violence. We can show them how to choose faith and love and the Lord," he said. "If we abandon our youth, we abandon our hope for the future."

Convention-goers also heard from a panel of eight Hispanic Baptist youth who asked their elders to provide them with positive examples, offer them ministry opportunities and communicate with them honestly.

The Mexican Baptist Convention of Texas approved resolutions opposing the legalization of casinos in Texas, citing the problem of violence in society including family violence, and recognizing the importance of today's youth to the future of Hispanic Baptist work in Texas.

Messengers approved a "Proclamation of Unification" presented by the convention's Archives and History Commission commemorating the 30th anniversary of the unification agreement between the Mexican Baptist Convention of Texas and the BGCT.

In the proclamation, Hispanic Texas Baptists pledged to "continue working together to achieve the Vision 2000 goals including at least 40,000 baptisms and at least 600 new congregations by the year 2000 with the ultimate purpose of reaching all people, without regard to color, race or language, for the glorious Kingdom of God."

Noting the three decades of progress experienced since the unification agreement, Jerold McBride, president of the BGCT and pastor of First Baptist Church, San Angelo, Texas, said Christian unity depends upon behavior that is compatible with the believer's high calling and that is humble, gentle, patient, magnanimous and peaceable.

"Few church splits can be traced to bad theology. Most can be traced to bad behavior," McBride said. "And what is true of a church is true of a denomination."

McBride encouraged Hispanic Texas Baptists to be aware of the ongoing work of the BGCT Cooperative Giving Study Committee and their recommendations that will be considered at the state convention in Amarillo, Oct. 31-Nov. 1.

"If we can cooperate with our Catholic friends with whom we disagree on nearly every major doctrine ... surely we can find a way to cooperate with one another with whom we agree on nearly every jot and tittle of doctrine, differing only in our methods of giving," he said.

About 40 Hispanic Texas Baptists attended an update on cooperative missions giving options, held June 28 at Castle Hills First Baptist Church.

The meeting, sponsored by Texas Baptists Committed, was held to provide Hispanic Texas Baptist leaders with information about decisions regarding cooperative missions giving that will be considered at the annual BGCT meeting in Amarillo, according to Houston pastor Rudy Sanchez, who just completed his second term as president of the Mexican Baptist Convention of Texas.

A 22-member Cooperative Missions Giving Study Committee was created following action taken at the 1993 BGCT in Dallas. The committee will have no final recommendations until its last meeting on July 29, according to committee member Billy Ray Parmer, pastor of First Baptist Church, Valley Mills, Texas.

However, Parmer said he favors a plan allowing churches to choose how the non-Texas Baptist portion of their undesignated gifts should be distributed and still counting the gifts as "Cooperative Program."

Farmer, co-chairman of Texas Baptists Committed, requested prayer both for the study committee and for convention action in Amarillo regarding redefined cooperative missions giving, saying, "I believe it to be the most important decision Texas Baptists will make in this century."

Bill Bruster, western coordinator for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, introduced his organization as one avenue to consider for giving to worldwide missions causes.

"The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship wants you to be a partner," he said, distributing copies of proposals approved at the 1994 CBF assembly calling for broadened racial and ethnic representation within the Fellowship.

Currently, only 11 predominantly Hispanic churches west of the Mississippi contribute to CBF causes, Bruster noted.

Denying that the Fellowship desires complete separation from its Southern Baptist roots, Bruster said the CBF "wants to build a denomination within the denomination."

Messengers elected Rolando Lopez, pastor of Iglesia Bautista Emmanuel, McAllen, Texas, as president over Mateo Rendon, pastor of Primera Iglesia Bautista, Corpus Christi, Texas.

Other officers elected at the convention were: first vice president, Ramiro Pena Jr., pastor of Iglesia Bautista Cristo el Rey, Waco, Texas; second vice president, Roger Pequeno, Trinity Baptist Church, Houston; and secretary, Victor Lopez, pastor of Iglesia Bautista Buena Voluntad, San Antonio.

Also elected were: pastors' conference president, Theodomiros Cisneros, pastor of Templo Jerusalem, Victoria, Texas; ministers' wives conference president, Berta Diaz, Theo Avenue Baptist Church, San Antonio; youth convocation president, Ed Lopez, Iglesia Bautista Nueva Vida, Garland, Texas; and Hispanic Baptist Men's president, Manuel Galindo, Primera Iglesia Bautista, Harlingen, Texas.

New officers of Hispanic Woman's Missionary Union are: president, Mamie Romero, Iglesia Bautista El Mesias, Corpus Christi, Texas; vice president, Yolanda Garcia, Iglesia Bautista Alfa y Omega, Plainview, Texas; and secretary, Sylvia Villareal, Primera Iglesia Bautista, Dallas.

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'Casey's story' shows children
effective ministers to peers By Chip Alford

Baptist Press
7/1/94

STOCKBRIDGE, Ga. (BP)--On the nightstand beside her bed, Erica Williams keeps her children's devotional guide opened to a page with a photo of Casey Ottalagano.

It's the first thing the sixth grader sees when she wakes up in the morning and the last thing she notices before going to bed at night. She leaves the photo in sight as a reminder to pray for the 12-year-old New Jersey boy.

"He's been on my heart a lot," Williams, a member of the sixth grade Sunday school class at First Baptist Church in Stockbridge, Ga., said. "I can't seem to stop thinking about him. I pray for him every night."

After reading about him in "Bible Express," a daily worship guide for children published by the Baptist Sunday School Board, Erica and her classmates decided to reach out to Casey, a bright, inquisitive boy from Bridgewater, N.J., who enjoys playing video games, working on his computer and studying French with his private tutor. He likes to build things with Legos, too, and he dreams about becoming an architect.

Casey is also a survivor. He's beaten leukemia twice, undergoing two bone marrow transplants and the accompanying rounds of radiation and chemotherapy. Though he's been in remission for five years now, the heavy dosage of chemicals has badly damaged his lungs, making a double lung transplant necessary for his survival.

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Once an active boy, today he needs a constant supply of oxygen through tubing attached to his nostrils and is weakened by a simple walk down the hall. He's losing weight, too, so his mother, Kathy, sometimes makes him fat- and calorie-laden milk shakes.

"Doctors are amazed Casey is alive," Kathy said. "They can't understand it. Very few people make it through two bone marrow transplants. It's really a miracle. We're praying he will make it through this, too."

Casey was only four years old when he was first diagnosed with leukemia. He had his first bone marrow transplant in 1988. Doctors harvested his own marrow, cleaned it and then transplanted back into his body. Six months later, the leukemia reoccurred.

He had his second transplant only a year later. This time the marrow was donated by his younger brother, Dustin, who was only five years old.

"At first, the doctors didn't want to do the second transplant," Kathy remembered. "They said there was only a five percent chance he would survive. But we wouldn't leave until they did it. And even though his lungs were damaged by the chemotherapy, we still know we did the right thing. He wouldn't be here today without that transplant."

Casey has been on a waiting list for an organ donor for almost two years now. When organs become available, the transplant will be performed at Pittsburgh Children's Hospital in Pennsylvania.

"That's the hardest part about this," Mark, Casey's father, admitted. "Basically, you're waiting for another kid to die."

Casey's parents wear beepers that will sound when the hospital has suitable organs in hand. After the beeper goes off, Casey will have four hours to make it to the hospital and undergo the transplant. He and his parents will be driven by police escort to a local airport and then flown by air ambulance to Pittsburgh.

"It's a little scary, but we're ready," Kathy said.

Casey's story has touched many people, including members of his home church, Bridgewater Baptist. Mary Lois Sanders, one of his former Sunday school teachers, wrote the short article about Casey which appeared in the February 1994 edition of "Bible Express."

That's the book Erica keeps on her nightstand and the one which introduced the Stockbridge Sunday school class to Casey.

"When we saw his picture in Bible Express, we just fell in love with him," Betty Phillips, a teacher's assistant for the class, said. "We wanted to do something special for him and his little brother, too. Both of them must be really brave to have faced what they've been through."

The Stockbridge class members wrote personal cards to both Casey and Dustin and also made colorful banners with their handprints stamped on front, a sign of their Sunday school teacher's "hands-on" approach to ministry. They also signed their names and included a notice they are praying for both boys. Now draped on walls near the front stairway, the banners are the first thing visitors to Ottalagano's home are likely to notice.

Several cards from the Stockbridge kids also are displayed in the Ottalagano's home, including one from Justin Taylor who apparently shares Casey's interest in baseball, if not his love of the New York Yankees.

"Casey, We're thinking of you," he wrote inside a card decorated with a drawing of a baseball player. "Oh yeah, by the way -- Braves rule!"

Notes and encouragement from family and friends do help, Kathy said, adding a prayer request about Casey posted on SBCNet (the Southern Baptist data communications network) also resulted in several letters and cards, as well as a video from a children's Sunday school class in Oregon.

When asked how it felt to know that children around the country were praying for him, Casey, appreciative but a little shy about all the attention, answered simply: "I guess it's good to know."

Judy Latham, editor of "Bible Express," said it is also good to know that children are finding unique ways to reach out to one another.

"One of the things we try to do through Bible Express' is provide opportunities for children to be involved in ministry to their peers, to let them know that they can be ministers, too," she said. "Whether it is listening to a friend, praying for a classmate, or trying to be a peacemaker at home or at school, they can help in ways adults sometimes can't.

"We want to give them a handle on how to apply the Bible to their everyday lives, and one way they can do that is by reaching out to others in need."

Considering all they've been through and what lies ahead, the Ottalaganos' positive attitude seems nothing short of inspirational. They remain hopeful and pray either for the healing of Casey's damaged lungs or a successful organ transplant.

Either way, it would be another miracle for Casey.

--30--

(Editor's note: According to the June 1994 edition of Guideposts magazine, more than 30,000 adults and children are on the national waiting list for transplants and one out of four will not receive the organ they need in time. Many people do not realize that children can be donors, too. For more information about organ donation, write to The Living Bank, P.O. Box 6725, Houston, TX 77265. Anyone interested in sending cards or letters of encouragement to Casey and his family can write to them at the following address: 14 Brighton Ave., Bridgewater, NJ 08807.)

(BP photos (horizontal) mailed to state Baptist newspapers by the Baptist Sunday School Board bureau of Baptist Press.) Cutlines are posted in the SBCNet news room under filename casey.txt.

Preparation key to ease fear
of making visits, Piland says

By Chip Alford

Baptist Press
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NASHVILLE (BP)--Harry Piland has been knocking on doors since he was 11 years old. But even today, making personal visits causes him a certain degree of discomfort.

"There is a natural hesitancy among most people when it comes to visitation," Piland, former director of the Baptist among Sunday School Board's Bible teaching-reaching division, said. "We don't like to feel embarrassed and we worry about being rejected or getting into situations which we don't know how to handle.

"Things seem even worse today because there is so much fear out there. Many people are afraid to open their doors to strangers."

Even so, Piland said people today crave personal attention more than ever before.

"There is such a need for intimacy and relationships. People are lonely. They need fellowship. They need to know that people care. Making personal visits is one way to show that you do," Piland, now associate pastor/minister of education at First Baptist Church of Dallas, said.

Some awkwardness on personal visits may be unavoidable, but Piland said preparing in advance is a definite key to success. That is why he and BSSB editor Ron Brown compiled the new Convention Press book, "Going ... One on One: A Comprehensive Guide for Making Personal Visits."

"This book seeks to help people overcome their fear about visitation. It covers much more than just 'knock on the door' evangelistic visits," he said.

More than 30 types of contacts are discussed, including visiting people in the workplace, the sick at home and in the hospital, the terminally ill, prisoners, chronic absentees, newcomers, the recently divorced, the mentally handicapped, teens in trouble, the unemployed, new Christians and many others.

"We decided on the topics which most needed to be addressed and then looked for the best prepared people to write about them. It's really a teaching tool," he said, adding both teaching procedures for group study and personal learning activities for individual study are included.

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Also featured are "ScriptureSearch," brief Bible case studies that support the ministry of the different types of personal visits; administrative helps for those responsible for visitation ministries; and a list of visitation-related resources.

More than 60 Southern Baptist pastors, church staff members, seminary professors, denominational leaders, chaplains and laypersons contributed articles to the publication. Piland himself is a contributor to the book. Not surprisingly, his chapter deals with "Personal Visitation and the Sunday School."

"I think Sunday school is a great place to begin because most of your resident church members are members of Sunday school," Piland said. "Your Sunday school classes have an in-place organization for visitation. Teachers, reaching, caring, fellowship and prayer leaders all are in areas that relate to personal visitation. Visiting and getting to know members, visitors and prospects helps you achieve intimacy and grow together as a group."

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