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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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CBF holding \$200,000
sent for SBC agencies

By Martin King

Baptist Press
9/12/94

ATLANTA (BP)--The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is holding nearly \$200,000 designated for Southern Baptist Convention agencies but cannot forward the money after a vote at the SBC in June prohibiting SBC agencies from receiving CBF funds.

Cecil Sherman, CBF coordinator, told members of the organization's coordinating council Sept. 10 that he sent a letter July 8 to the churches which had sent the funds "asking for instructions on how they want us to deal with the money. We will return it to them or redirect it to a place we can deliver it." A second letter will be sent in a few weeks and a third in December, according to Sherman.

But, he noted, "... monies which are not redesignated by the end of the year will be placed in the CBF global missions offering."

The CBF is a 3-year-old group of moderate Southern Baptists critical of SBC leadership. The council, which conducts business between the organization's annual general assembly, also approved affiliation with 14 state and regional groups, changed dates and locations for future general assemblies and added eight missionaries during its Sept. 8-10 regular meeting.

A recommendation to establish criteria and a process for recognition of CBF-affiliated state and regional organizations was approved after lengthy discussion. The proposal establishes "some kind of quality control for use of the CBF name" and how groups "formalize their desire to have an official connection with the CBF."

Those criteria require an affiliated group to have documents which "represent explicit relationship to national CBF, agrees with CBF purposes and actively supports CBF cause."

The council approved 14 groups; however, council members from several organizations expressed surprise at not being included in the approval. "I feel like a step-child," said Pat Cates, representative from North Carolina which along with groups from Texas and the Mid-Atlantic and Western states were not approved. Council leadership explained those groups had either not yet met the criteria or had not submitted the appropriate documents for review.

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The council changed the site and dates for the 1995 CBF general assembly, the dates for the '96 meeting and suspended previously approved sites for 1997-1999. The 1995 assembly scheduled for May 4-6 in Austin, Texas, was changed due to anticipated overcrowding from the Texas legislative session meeting at the same time. The assembly will be held July 20-22, 1995, at the Tarrant County Convention Center in Fort Worth, Texas.

The 1996 assembly will be held in Richmond, Va., as previously scheduled; however, the dates will be either June 27-29 or Aug. 1-3 depending on availability of meeting and hotel space.

The council also approved criteria for selection of future assembly sites including availability of 1,000-1,500 sleeping rooms and seating for 8,000-10,000 for general sessions. The 1994 general assembly in Greensboro, N.C., registered 4,300 people and an estimated 6,000 attended the keynote session.

The site selection task force also is examining "other models including the possibility of regional meetings every other year or every third year in lieu of the national general assembly and the use of college campuses as regional or national sites."

A commissioning service Wednesday evening brings to 52 the number of CBF-supported missionaries. Those commissioned were Rusty and Kerry Brock, Louisville, Ky.; Craig and Meeryung Hall, Killeen, Texas; Donald and Clara McNeely, both Texas natives; and Ralph and Tammy Stocks, Greensboro, N.C.

The Halls are assigned to Asia, the McNeely's to Eastern Europe, the Stocks to the Gypsy people group and the Brocks to a two-year assignment to the 1996 Atlanta Olympics.

Council members held lengthy discussions regarding a proposed budget and a proposed mission statement but finalized neither.

Although a 1995-96 budget "target" for 1995-96 was approved, "that figure and the target allocations could change considerably before they are presented to the general assembly," according to David Wilkinson, CBF director of communications. The proposed budget total of \$9.15 million is 26 percent more than the approved budget for the first six months of 1995.

Proposed allocations for '95-'96 call for doubling the theological education budget, increasing allocations for the general assembly 43 percent, and cutting allocations for the Baptist World Alliance 76 percent.

Sixty percent of the target budget would be allocated for global missions, 17 percent for theological education, 12 percent for administration, communication and the general assembly and 3 percent for the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs. Committees and ministry groups will bring final budget recommendations to the February 1995 coordinating council meeting.

A fourth working draft of a three-page CBF mission statement was "too general ... abstract ... leaves out our relationship to God ... and contains no scripture references," according to council members. Discussion centered on whether the draft document was appropriate for "the person in the pew" or was primarily for council itself. An additional draft will be presented at the next council meeting, with plans to provide a final recommendation to the 1995 general assembly.

The council also approved minor bylaw changes and contracts with the SBC Annuity Board for handling CBF annuity plans.

Carolyn Crumpler in her first report as CBF moderator said she is "proud to be moderator of the CBF ... proud of CBF courage and commitment to this new thing." She shared a demographic breakdown of the coordinating council to show diversity of its membership. Crumpler said 44 percent of the 79 council members are female, 44 percent are clergy and 14 percent are female clergy.

Sherman reported that 1,275 churches have sent funds to CBF in 1994, however, only "500-600 appear to be church support" with the remainder designated gifts passed through the local church. Sherman said he estimates "five to six thousand churches appear open to our message and we need to get to them with our message."

Sherman also proposed the CBF study the need for reorganization. "Our present organization was put into place at the time of our birth and we need to consider some changes," he said. "We take from churches now but give very little back. ... (Reorganization) could mean we would have fewer but larger ministry groups and that the budget would be re-formed ... we need to bring some order to the house."

In committee reports the council's theological education committee reported giving \$83,000 in scholarships to 64 students at 22 schools and made a one-time grant to Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, Va., to pay a secretary and purchase a computer.

The ministry with ministers committee reported it is studying establishment of a registry and referral system for ministers seeking churches and places of service.

The global missions committee reported the goal for the CBF special missions offering for 1994-95 will be \$2.8 million. The group also appointed a subcommittee to study establishment of new CBF churches and is working with the Woman's Missionary Union in publishing and distributing CBF missionary prayer cards similar to baseball trading cards.

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David Winfrey and Sarah Zimmerman contributed to this story.

Sherman seeks to clarify
scope of CBF purposes

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press
9/12/94

ATLANTA (BP)--In addition to funding missionaries and seminaries, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship should help churches grow and remain healthy, CBF Coordinator Cecil Sherman told other leaders at a recent administrative committee meeting.

Sherman outlined his vision for this group of Southern Baptist moderates dissatisfied with the SBC's current leadership. He called his outline "the first conceptual arrangement of this house that I've half-way liked."

"I've had a hard time trying to figure out what I'm supposed to be doing other than going and visiting other churches," he said. "This is an idea. Now let's begin arguing about it."

As a resource for congregational health and growth, the CBF would offer assistance in five areas where moderate churches need help, Sherman said.

"Most of the moderate churches I go to aren't doing all that well," he said. "Most of them are in various degrees of struggle."

Those five areas are conflict management, leadership, religious education, care for pastors in need of counseling and evangelism.

"Too many moderate pastors can give you a full story on how not to do evangelism," he said. "The only problem is they don't do any evangelism."

"We need to encourage these people to do everything a pastor's supposed to do, and one of those things is evangelism."

Sherman suggested the CBF could subsidize conferences, speakers and resources for congregational health and growth with about 10 percent of the CBF's budget.

The three other purposes Sherman outlined for the CBF are:

-- General operations and the annual meeting. This would cost about 10 percent of the CBF's budget, he said.

-- A missions sending system. "Sometimes when I've been pressed, I've said this is what we are," Sherman said. "It's not the answer. It's part of the answer." About 60 percent of the CBF's budget should be spent on this, he said.

-- A caretaker for Baptist principles. This would be about 20 percent of the group's budget and include funding for theological education and such groups as the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, he said.

"The idea is Baptist principles," he said. "A lot of people can live with a theology that is quite near fundamentalism who cannot live with a polity that is not Baptist."

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While explaining this view to the CBF theological education ministry group, Sherman recommended that committee fund students and seminaries that have a view of Baptist polity similar to the Fellowships'.

"When you give a scholarship, is there any prospect they're going to come out a Baptist by our view of what a Baptist is?"

Sherman said this outline was not a reaction to some Southern Baptists who have labeled the CBF a fledgling denomination.

"By no reasonable definition are we a denomination," he said. "Here we are giving money to schools and we don't own any of them and we don't control any of them.

"We're clarifying what we want to be about and that's what we're working on," he said. "We can't justify our reason for being by former sins forever. We must justify our reason for being by what we do."

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Missionary muscle man
Orvil Reid dies at 86

By Marty Croll

Baptist Press
9/12/94

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Orvil W. Reid, 86, who dramatically used his physical strength to gain a hearing for the gospel as a Southern Baptist missionary in Mexico, died Sept. 9 in Fort Worth, Texas.

Reid discovered the spiritual potential in his muscles shortly after arriving in Mexico in 1938. Looking for a way to reach Mexicans, he noticed they would pay to watch circus strongmen.

"When I saw crowds in Mexico turn out to watch circus entertainers do feats of strength, I knew that if I developed my body I could use it to the glory of God," he said.

He began by demonstrating simple feats. But later he allowed people to drive automobiles over him, pull ropes and towels tight around his neck, and smash stones and split wood blocks on his stomach -- all while he recited poetry, sang and quipped.

"If you have more brawn than brain, you must use what you have," he jokingly told his wife Alma, one day.

During his 38-year career in Mexico, Reid was a preacher, author, printer and athlete. He gave physical demonstrations in 20 countries on four continents. He wrote six books in English and four in Spanish. He was a church starter and advisor to Mexican Baptists.

Reid was a widower when he met Alma Ervin of Linden, Tenn. They married in 1943 and, after she was appointed a missionary, they served together until their retirement from the Foreign Mission Board in 1976. Eventually both of their children died -- one of a brain tumor at age 15 and the other in a boating accident at age 31.

In 1964 the Reids toured 20 countries in the Middle East and Europe, speaking and giving demonstrations in churches, schools and military camps.

Just before their retirement, Reid -- at age 68 -- planned and completed a "Run for Life" for 550 miles from the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board in Atlanta to the Foreign Mission Board in Richmond, Va.

"I would crawl from New York City to Los Angeles on my knees, if I knew one person would come to know Christ," he said.

His goal was to raise \$60,000 for world hunger relief and lead 1,000 people to embrace Jesus Christ as Lord. During the run he led services and gave demonstrations of strength at 38 churches, 18 schools, 10 prisons, eight rallies and three children's homes. Twenty-one times participants drove vans over his stomach.

The campaign led 341 people to faith in Jesus; nearly 19,000 heard the gospel.

Reid's message to his audience was always that they could give up vices such as cigarette smoking and drinking alcohol to maintain physical health. He believed physical fitness is a spiritual matter.

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"How much you believe in your body's physical fitness means how much you believe God owns you," he once said.

After retiring, the Reids continued to travel. He gave demonstrations for a time and they jogged daily together for several years. He lifted weights almost until the day he died. They lived in a house within walking distance of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth and attended classes there, also.

Reid was born in 1908 in a log cabin near Stigler, Okla., the oldest of four children of a tenant farmer. He often interrupted his schooling to help his family.

He received the bachelor of arts degree from Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee, and was a graduate of Southwestern seminary.

He is survived by his wife, a brother, a sister and two grandchildren.

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(BP) photos (square 8x8 and mugshot) mailed Sept. 12 by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press. Cutline available on SBCNet Newsroom.

Merritt: God is not
our heavenly mother

By Dwayne Hastings

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WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--It is time to settle once and for all the question of feminizing the gospel, according to James Merritt, pastor of First Baptist Church, Snellville, Ga., and president of the 1995 Southern Baptist Pastor's Conference. Merritt, speaking in chapel services at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., said, "God is not our heavenly mother!"

Merritt, who holds doctorate and master's degrees from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., stated, "This whole matter of feminizing God, feminizing Jesus and scrubbing the Scriptures clean of so-called male bias is not an issue of feminism or chauvinism. The real issue is inspiration and revelation.

"There is an attempt today by radical feminists, pseudo-scholars and liberal theologians to neuter God," Merritt stated, noting, "... we are made in God's image, God is not made in our image.

"We don't tell God who he is; he tells us who he is. He has revealed himself as our Father. Jesus did not say God was like a father. He said God is our Father."

Pointing to the Lord's model prayer in Matthew 6, Merritt said, "Jesus began by emphasizing God as our personal father. The two words that open the prayer, 'Our Father,' tell us volumes about our relationship to God. It is an intentional relationship.

"The Bible refers to God as 'he.' It is in a personal way, not in a sexual way," said Merritt. Noting that some, displeased with the masculine references to God, have said if God is male, then male is god. Merritt responded such reasoning was absurd.

Jesus introduced a radically different concept of God to the people of his day. Merritt remarked that the Old Testament contains no references to God as a personal father. He said, "The three greatest men in the Old Testament, Moses, Abraham and David, never called God 'Father' in a personal way. A reverent Jew would never call God 'Father.'"

Yet the word abba that Jesus used for father was even more intimate than the normal term for father, Merritt said. He noted the word is more often translated, "papa" or "daddy."

Merritt indicated Jesus was saying when coming to God in prayer, "You're not coming as a slave comes to his master; you're not coming as a subject would come to a king; you come as a son does to his father."

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He suggested much of contemporary theology goes beyond the notion of God as a personal father and is centered on an "excessive familiarity" with God. "God is our Father," Merritt said. "He is not our pop. God is our friend, but he is not our buddy. God is the one who sits upon the throne of the universe; he is not the man upstairs."

Merritt noted many have forgotten just how powerful a God Christians serve: "We live in a society that treats God as some kind of cosmic bellhop, a celestial teddy bear that winks at sin. We live in a world where big Hollywood stars and rich, powerful politicians think they run their own lives, that they can do whatever they want."

Merritt dismissed that mind-set, saying, "No one on the planet Earth does what he pleases. He does what God allows him to do. Only God does what he pleases. God is a perfect force. He is a powerful force."

He said there is a lot of misguided thinking that claims God is the Father of all and that all people are his children. "There is no such thing as the universal fatherhood of God," stated Merritt.

"I want to make it as plain as I know how to make it to every so-called theologian and philosopher: You cannot know God as Father unless you know Jesus Christ as Lord.

"If you want a successful ministry," Merritt proclaimed, "Don't base it on baptisms, buildings or budgets. Base it on glorifying the name of God: The God who scooped out the oceans, heaped up the mountains and hurled the stars up in the heavens and put the planets in orbit."

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**African Baptists help
Rwandese refugees**

By Wendy Ryan

Baptist Press
9/12/94

WASHINGTON (BP)--While Baptists around the world have responded generously to the need of Rwandese refugees, Baptists in Zaire, Kenya and Burundi are doing just as much to help, and perhaps, at a greater personal cost.

"Baptist churches in Zaire have not had services for a month because they are full of Rwandese refugees they are serving," says Paul Montacute, director of Baptist World Aid. Montacute returned Sept. 2, from a visit to Kenya and refugee camps in Zaire.

"For example, Baptist churches in Goma, Zaire are much poorer because of their sacrifice," Montacute said.

"We have given up our churches and schools," said Mauke Mathe, "we have given medicines. No radio or television have mentioned this. All the pictures showed what the Westerners are doing. Zairians were even shelled and some died from cholera."

Mathe is the legal representative of the Baptist Community of Kivu, Zaire and one of several Baptist leaders from Zaire, Rwanda, Burundi, and Kenya with whom Montacute met.

"Churches and homes were flung open to take in refugees as Christian families took up to 20 people per family," said Lyn Lusi, a Zairian schoolteacher. "Food and water were shared and rich Zairians cut down their fruit and floral trees for the refugees to use as firewood," said her husband Joe Lusi, a Zairian doctor.

"Before the international help arrived, it was the churches who did most of the work in Goma and Bukavu," said Joe Lusi.

The Kivu Baptists gave more than \$15,000 to transport refugees; changed their guest house to an orphanage and during a program for children called "Operation Moses," Hutu women carried Tutsi babies out of Rwanda to save them from being slaughtered.

"I told them church is more than singing and clapping for a few hours on Sunday, it is about serving in his name," said Joe Lusi.

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The Lusis themselves, members of Nairobi Baptist Church, have been helping in Goma, Zaire and in Rwanda. In fact, Joe gained a spot of publicity as the doctor to whom American singer Harry Belafonte sang when Belafonte visited Rwandese refugees in Goma on behalf of the United Nations.

Joe Lusi saw firsthand in Rwanda the horror of the war.

On his recent visit to Rwanda he operated for five hours in the Kigali hospital on a Tutsi who had been macheted across the forehead. Later, when he asked the nurses how the man was doing, he discovered that other nurses had pulled out his tubes and allowed him to die because he was a Hutu.

Montacute heard many stories of Baptists who had suffered because they put their faith above their tribe. He also heard one as yet unconfirmed report of a massacre in a Baptist church.

One Tutsi Baptist pastor in Rwanda was killed because he took in a Hutu pastor.

All of the Baptist pastors Montacute met had lost relatives in the war and in the camps. The president of the Baptist Union of Rwanda, Francois Havugimana, lost his son to cholera in the camp at Goma.

But while they are suffering, Baptist pastors are ministering in the camps.

There are 29 Baptist pastors in the camp in Bukavu visited by Montacute and Ziherambere, Rwandese Baptist leader and BWA Africa regional secretary who told Montacute there are 20,000 of the 40,000 Rwandese Baptists in Bukavu.

Montacute discussed with the African leaders how BWAid can help to provide assistance to pastors, and help them join with other ministers in serving the refugees.

More than ever, Baptist pastors and people long for reconciliation, Montacute said.

"The problem needs prayer," says Joe Lusi.

"The church must keep preaching reconciliation," says Mathe. "The chaplains in the camps have an important role to play."

And so do Hutu and Tutsi Baptist leaders.

While in Kenya, Montacute and Ziherambere spoke at an All Africa Baptist Youth meeting. When Ziherambere finished, Evelyn Zimulinda, the secretary of the Baptist Women's Union of Africa, asked to speak.

"While I am seen as a Tanzanian living in Nairobi, I am in fact a Rwandese Tutsi," she said. She fled Rwanda with her family in 1959.

Quoting from the Bible, Esther 4:14, Zimulinda told Ziherambere he was their leader "for a time as this."

Montacute says, "standing with her arm around Ziherambere she asked if anyone present could tell they were from different tribes."

"She declared they were brother and sister," said Montacute, "a son and daughter of Rwanda and they now needed to work together to defeat the work of the devil in Rwanda."

"She said it was up to Tutsi and Hutu Christians to work together," and quoted Psalm 108:13, "with God we shall gain the victory and He will trample down our enemies."

"As she asked someone to pray for them both," Montacute said, "she turned with tears in her eyes to Ziherambere and asked, "Eleazar, do you love me."

"I do love you my sister," Ziherambere replied. "I love you my brother," said Zimulinda.

"There was audible sobbing around the room," said Montacute as someone prayed for them. "There was not a dry eye, including mine."

Rwandese refugee situation
could get worse, says leader

By Wendy Ryan

WASHINGTON (BP)--If Rwandese refugees do not go home, international aid agencies leave and heavy rains fall on deforested hillsides now crammed with refugees, then "we have a worse situation unfolding," says Paul Montacute, director of Baptist World (Alliance) Aid.

Fresh from an Aug. 23-Sept. 2 visit to Kenya and refugee camps in Zaire, Montacute says Baptist leaders are fearful about the next month. "More than ever Baptists will need to stand beside their brothers and sisters in Rwanda, Zaire and others who are helping," says Montacute.

While the new government of Rwanda urges refugees to come home, Montacute said Baptist pastors were skeptical this would happen any time soon. They also fear international aid agencies will leave or shift operations to Rwanda and they and other ministers will be left to care for refugees.

Montacute praised the Baptists whose churches had given sacrificially to help refugees, and said Rwandese pastors, themselves refugees, were leaders in distributing aid and ministering in the camps.

Montacute visited one of the refugee camps at Bukavu, Zaire. Normally, the city of Bukavu has 250,000 people. It now has over one million.

On the way to Bukavu, Montacute said the pilot of the plane circled so they could see another refugee camp at Ngara, Zaire.

"It was moving to watch the response of the Zairians and the Rwandese in the plane," Montacute said.

"We could see the enormous expanse of blue and white tents clustered in neat lines in villages and swarms of people milling around, emphasizing this was home to almost half a million Rwandese. How could such a mass of humanity live in such conditions I thought."

Once the plane landed in Bukavu, "we passed three or four different refugee camps," said Montacute. "It would be impossible to estimate the number of people there. The whole area was just a sea of people. Near the lake, the hills had been stripped of every kind of vegetation and tents had been dug in the steep slopes."

"What will happen when the rains come any day now?"

Montacute said it is now reported that refugees are swamping the city of Bukavu and refusing to go to the camps, and one Baptist leader told him he believes more than three million people, many more than reported, have been registered in the camps at Goma.

Travelling with Eleazar Ziherambere, BWA regional secretary for Africa, and himself a Rwandese refugee, Montacute visited a Baptist church near Bukavu that is housing refugees.

"We met as many refugees as we could," said Montacute, "and another 600 were expected."

"The \$1.5 million in aid the Baptist World Alliance pledged for Rwanda will certainly be needed," Montacute said.

Montacute also heard how the 300,000 pounds of medical supplies and the food sent to Goma/Bukavu have helped Baptists.

The medical supplies were sent through BWAid by Baptists from North America, Australia, Canada, Denmark and Europe.

The Baptist Community of Kivu, Zaire has a clinic now full of sick and wounded refugees in Goma, since an emergency hospital was closed. They were promised food and medicines that did not come. "It is good to think that the shipment of medicines from BWAid and MAP was for this hospital," Montacute said.

Each of the African leaders described needs for food and medicine which BWAid could help supply. In one very sad moment, the youth director from the Baptist Union of Rwanda could not give his report once he heard that members of his family may have been killed in a reported massacre in a Baptist church in Burundi.

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Apart from the physical needs, the African Baptist leaders asked the BWA to help in the reconciliation needed in Rwanda by taking a joint international team there to check on safety and security and evaluate the condition of Baptist buildings.

Montacute says the pastors from Zaire and Burundi have four goals: to relocate pastors and provide assistance to them; manage a refugee camp and help Baptists from Zaire and Burundi who are caring for refugees.

These African leaders see Ziherambere as their leader said Montacute. "I saw the ways Rwandese greeted Ziherambere wherever he went and I saw how much they needed him as their leader," he said.

With help from the BWA, Ziherambere has now relocated in Nairobi, Kenya, where the office of the All-Africa Baptist Fellowship, one of six regional fellowships of the BWA, has been established

Donations towards BWAid work in responding to this crisis may be sent to: BWA, 6733 Curran Street, McLean, VA 22101, USA.

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Christian columnist provocative
at the University of Florida

By Jon Walker

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GAINESVILLE, Fla. (BP)--It all started with a letter to the editor of the Alligator, the student newspaper at the University of Florida.

UF student Ami Neiberger and some of her friends were offended by a cartoon the paper printed which depicted a pro-life advocate using grenades to kill doctors who performed abortions. They collectively wrote the Alligator, stating the cartoon showed the media's ignorance of the pro-life movement.

The next day an editor from the Alligator invited Neiberger to begin writing an every-other-week column that would look at issues from a Christian perspective. It was an ironic request considering the college paper went independent from the UF administration two decades ago during a fight over the right to print local abortion clinic phone numbers.

Neiberger, a graduate student in history with no previous experience in journalism, saw the opportunity to write for the Alligator as "completely and utterly by the grace of God." Over the past year, she has written on such diversified topics as abortion, Christian apologetics, abstinence, discrimination and the physical abuse of women. She said she has shared the gospel five times in her column.

"... I have been attempting to lift the veil of our world a little bit, so that you, the campus, could catch a glimpse of why (Christians) say what we say and who we really are," Neiberger wrote in one column aimed at fighting Christian stereotypes.

At the Gainesville, Fla., school known for its party atmosphere and diverse morality, Neiberger's columns have sparked some controversy. Those writing letters to the editor have accused Neiberger of preaching sermons and promoting propaganda, calling her a "God-fearing history buff," "far right," and accusing her of trying to shove the gospel down the throats of the Alligator readers. Even some Christians have been upset with some of the columns because, according to Neiberger, she did not write what they thought she should write.

Current Alligator editor Jon Glass said Neiberger gets more feedback than most of the paper's other columnists.

"Some readers think she pushes the Christian view too much, but we give her the opportunity to do that," Glass said, adding that the paper wanted to diversify its opinions page beyond the typical last-night-I-went-drinking-styled columns and to focus on more serious social issues.

"We don't sit there and say, 'We have a feminist, let's get an anti-feminist; or we have a Christian, now we need a Satanist,'" Glass said. "The people who approach us who are intelligent and well-versed have an opportunity to be columnists."

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Neiberger said she believes her columns have helped generate more debate about Christianity and religion than she has ever seen on the UF campus.

"I feel like this is what God wants me to do," Neiberger said. "He opened the door and left it wide open. I'm going to write what God wants me to; if I get slammed for that, then I get slammed."

Eddie Gilley, college minister at Gainesville's Westside Baptist Church, where Neiberger is a member, said she "puts up with a lot of flak. She doesn't get paid for this, and she has stayed with it when other people might have caved in," Gilley said.

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Three central Texas pastors total
150-plus years in same three churches

Baptist Press
9/12/94

By Ken Camp

WACO, Texas (BP)--In a denomination where a pastor's average length of service at a church is about three years, three central Texas pastors in Waco Baptist Association have a combined tenure of more than 150 years at their three churches.

On the last Sunday in October, 92-year-old H.F. Barnes will celebrate his 50th anniversary as pastor of Waco's New Hope Baptist Church.

The following week, 85-year-old W. Gardiner Ellis will mark 57 years as pastor of Leroy Baptist Church, north of Waco.

And Napoleon Weaver -- the seventy-something-year-old "youngster" of the trio -- is in his 48th year as pastor of Good Samaritan Baptist Church, Waco.

"I love just being with these men in their churches. I learn so much from them," said Paul W. Stripling, director of missions, Waco Baptist Association. "When I'm with them, I watch every move they make."

The three pastors have flourished in their longterm pastorates for two reasons, according to Stripling -- they have firm convictions and they have strong relationships with their church members.

Preaching which reflects firm convictions is not necessarily going to please church members, however, according to Ellis.

"In too many of our churches, we've gone from warm-hearted, tabernacle-type preaching to nap time," he said, lamenting that members have grown comfortable and complacent and have lost their passion for seeing souls saved.

"Our churches are looking for entertainment, not the gospel. People just want sad stories and good jokes."

But church members will listen if preachers earn their respect by loving them and being pastor to the flock, Ellis maintained. He advises young pastors to "be where the people are when they need you," ministering at the important times in life and building relationships.

"Before the emergency vehicles roll up to a house, you ought to already be there," he said. "If you get a call at midnight and you can't get up and go without mumbling, you might as well turn your ordination papers back in."

For Ellis, that means being on call for two congregations. During nearly 50 of the 57 years he has served Leroy Baptist Church, he simultaneously has served as pastor of nearby Birome Baptist Church in Hill Baptist Association.

"I have two churches, but I only have one wife," Ellis said. "Be sure you keep that straight."

Remaining at smaller membership churches instead of moving to a bigger congregation has allowed him the liberty to do the kind of hands-on, involved ministry that he enjoys, Ellis said.

"I love small churches. When it comes to my members, I can call their dogs' names," he said. "I like the personal touch."

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For Barnes, relationships at New Hope Baptist Church initially were established in the mid-1930s with the grandparents of many of his current members. In addition to 50 uninterrupted years at New Hope Church, he previously served as pastor there for seven and a half years before a two-year stint at a church in neighboring Hill Association.

Barnes, who works four days a week as a bailiff in addition to fulfilling his duties as pastor, has been preaching 78 years. Borrowing "Climbing Fool's Hill," a sermon by Texas Baptist stalwart J.B. Gambrell, Ellis preached his first message at age 14 to a Sunbeam Band.

"I've seen a lot of improvements," he said, reflecting on his years at New Hope. "I can remember when the only cooling we had was fanning newspapers or palmleaf fans, and the only heat we had in winter was from a coal stove that sometimes worked and sometimes didn't."

Weaver likewise has seen many changes during his tenure at Good Samaritan Baptist Church. When he helped to organize the church nearly five decades ago, it was the first Black church to enter Waco Association since the post-Civil War Reconstruction era.

Today, 13 of the 93 churches in Waco Association are predominantly Black. Weaver has been instrumental in building bridges between African-American and Anglo churches, Stripling said.

Weaver attributes his long stay at Good Samaritan Church in part to a common sense approach to personal relations with members.

"I don't buddy-buddy anybody," he said. "I don't let members buy me gifts. And I don't borrow or loan money to members."

Perhaps the greatest challenge for a longtime pastor is "staying fresh" in preaching, the Waco ministers generally agreed.

"My wife says they're all the same sermon. I just holler in different places," Ellis quipped.

But on a more serious note, he joined Barnes and Weaver in stressing the importance of prayer and serious Bible study, adding, "You can stay fresh because the Bible is fresh."

Weaver said his common practice is to select a familiar Bible story on Monday, and then study and reflect on it throughout the week.

"How do you stay fresh?" Barnes said. "Study, study, study."

"If you want a fresh drink of water, you don't keep sipping from the same cup. You go back to the spring."

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