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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

October 4, 1994

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Texas leaders meet with pastors
concerned over CP recommendation By Toby Druin

Baptist Press
10/4/94

DALLAS (BP)--After hearing the concerns of a group of Texas Baptist pastors Sept. 27, Cecil Ray said he is willing to call together a small group of members of Texas Baptists' Cooperative Missions Giving Study Committee for a dialogue session with representatives of the pastors.

As of Oct. 3, no date had been set for the session, however. Ray, chairman of the committee, said he had written to the 21 other members of the panel to apprise them of the pastors' concerns and his meeting with them, but personal business had kept him from moving further.

About 20 pastors, led by Claude Thomas of First Baptist Church, Euless, met with Ray, chairman of the giving committee, BGCT President Jerold McBride and Texas Baptist Executive Director William M. Pinson Jr. at the Hyatt Hotel at Dallas-Fort Worth Airport Sept. 27.

Thomas said he called the meeting because the pastors wanted to express to Ray and Pinson they do not agree with the recommendations of the giving study committee, which will be presented at the state convention in Amarillo Oct. 31. Those present and a few others who could not come, he said, lead churches which give almost \$9 million annually to the Cooperative Program.

All of them, he noted, agree with the motion that led to the committee, that something be done to enhance missions giving.

"However, we do not agree with the recommendation as stated," Thomas said. "We believe it will not enhance mission giving among all Texas Baptists and are convinced you would want to hear that from us."

The study committee will recommend to the convention that Texas Baptist churches will be considered to be "cooperating" churches if they support the BGCT budget, the BGCT and Southern Baptist Convention budgets or the BGCT budget and give to other worldwide missions and ministries. Such other worldwide missions and ministries could include the Baptist World Alliance or Cooperative Baptist Fellowship or other Baptist entities as the church would determine.

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Heretofore, a "Cooperative Program" gift had to be an unrestricted gift to the BGCT/SBC budgets, although in recent years up to five exclusions have been permitted. Gifts to other Baptist missions and ministries have been considered "designated" gifts.

"Our concern and opposition," Thomas said, "centers in that we don't think the recommendation fulfills the charge (given it by the convention which approved the call for a study).

"We feel that it is a radical departure from what we have popularly and scholastically known the Cooperative Program to be. We believe it will unravel the great st funding mechanism in the history of the church and are concerned that it will dismantle the unified budget of the Texas convention."

Two of the study committee members, John Hatch, pastor of First Baptist Church, Lake Jackson, and Ralph Smith, pastor of Hyde Park Baptist Church, Austin, were among the pastors' group and spoke against the committee recommendation. Both are part of a five-person group of the 22-member committee who have prepared a minority report asking that only gifts to the BGCT and SBC be considered "Cooperative Program."

Hatch said the committee recommendation "radically" changes the structure of what Texas Baptists consider to be the Cooperative Program, ends the partnership with the SBC, adds an undetermined number of "new partners" and will divide support rather than enhance it.

Smith said he believes the committee recommendation, if approved, "will unravel and ultimately destroy the unified budget" of the convention. It says a church can give to any Baptist cause and call it Cooperative Program, he said, noting "whether it has been written down or not, the Cooperative Program has always been a partnership between the local church, the state convention and the Southern Baptist Convention."

A former president of the convention, Smith said were he ruling on the matter he would rule the committee has not done what it was charged to do -- study and recommend ways to enhance cooperative missions giving.

Darrel Rains, pastor of First Baptist Church, Pampa, questioned the timing of the recommendation. "This is a time when we need stability," he said. "I don't want to see our Baptist entities begin to compete."

Kenneth Branam, pastor of Plymouth Park Baptist Church, Irving, said he felt the recommendation would destroy the unity of the convention and local churches. "I question any legislation (proposal) coming down which has the potential for divisiveness," he said.

Mike Dean, pastor of Travis Avenue Baptist Church, Fort Worth, asked consideration be given to bringing the committee back together to consider other options to try to make it a "win/win" situation. If as divisive an issue were coming before his local church, he said, he would move to head it off.

Ray said while the recommendation is perceived as a radical change, it is not. It does not end the partnership with the SBC, nor does it create new ones, he said.

"The Cooperative Program has been an agreement between the state and the SBC," he said. "Our recommendation does not end that.

"It does only one radical thing. Churches have had a choice in the past to participate in the program in the full package or not, but the package belonged to the BGCT and the SBC. This new partnership recognizes the right of the church in the process. It grants the right to the church to say it can make a choice of what it will cooperate in."

Sandy Sandlin of First Baptist Church, Beaumont, questioned changing a program which he said was supported by 94 percent of Texas Baptist churches. Changing for the other 6 percent and calling it fair is inaccurate, he said.

Sandlin appealed to Ray to recall his committee to reconsider the recommendation.

Ray said he was open to a small group dialogu of three to four people from the committee and a like number from the pastors to see if there is "a meeting of the minds."

Ray wrote to the committee following the meeting to apprise them of it but as the Baptist Standard, state Baptist newsjournal, went to press Sept. 30 had not named any committee members to meet with the pastors. Thomas said he had selected Rains, Hatch and Dean and was waiting on another pastor to say he would serve.

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His questions about Armageddon
faded when he received Christ

By Dwayne Hastings

Baptist Press
10/4/94

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--Panic marked his voice, recounted Keith Eitel, of the urgent message on his office answering machine early in September.

Eitel had returned from teaching a morning class at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he is professor of Christian missions, when he found the emergency message.

A young man called Southeastern desperate to find someone on the seminary's Wake Forest, N.C., campus who knew something about the New Age movement. Eitel immediately returned the call and spoke to a 21-year-old man deeply involved in a New Age cult yet suddenly concerned he was in over his head.

"Even though he was lost, he sensed something was wrong," Eitel said. "He had been quickly swept into the group and within a two-week period was feeling completely consumed by it. He had been spiritually searching for answers, but in all the wrong places.

The man wanted to meet right away. "He asked me on the phone if I had ever heard of Armageddon," Eitel said. "He said it was going to happen soon."

The young man headed out to the seminary's campus, over a 15-mile trek, on a little moped. Arriving at Eitel's office, the young man told of a group of people in a rural community near Raleigh, N.C., involved in New Age activities.

He reported rituals of white magic and witchcraft blended with New Age thought and an organization that rewarded loyal followers with incremental knowledge of the group's secrets, Eitel said.

He also told of incantations and sacrifices with fruit and other ceremonies to conjure up spirit powers that would cause good things to happen to people.

In these sessions, the young man felt that spirits would talk to him. They would tell him to do things and demand he be more committed to them. It all had a very strong hold on him, Eitel said.

Eitel wasted little time in opening the Scriptures to him: "I began to ask him the basic evangelistic diagnostic questions. We never got past the first one. When I asked him, 'If you died today, do you know where you would spend eternity?' he simply said, 'No, I sure don't.'"

Eitel continued to explain the gospel and was pleased the young man not only seemed to understand, but was asking questions and interacting with what he was hearing. "When we finished, I asked him if he would like to pray to receive Christ. He said yes he would. So right there in my office, I joined him as he prayed to accept Christ."

The young man is like a lot of people, Eitel said. "He didn't have a basis for assessing what he'd gotten into spiritually. He grew up in a mainline Protestant church, but he had no cognizance of what salvation was.

"He realized biblically he had been lost and that he needed a true spiritual basis to fight against all this stuff. It's strange but he made no more mention of Armageddon. It's like with the truth that he now had, he didn't have to be so worried about the judgment and things like that."

The young man was concerned about his friends still in the group, but Eitel encouraged him "to stay away from the group long enough to really get into a church and get the Scriptures flowing in his thoughts."

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The unfortunate thing, Eitel said, is the young man is probably going to have a hard time finding a church that will accept him. "He's not going to fit into the traditional church. It will take an individual at a church who knows this background and is sensitive to folks who come out of this bondage. Or a church that is simply accepting of persons who come from different walks of life to welcome him in."

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EDITORS' NOTE: The following four stories relate to decisions churches make in relationship to growth and to building.

From ashes to glory,
Tupelo church rebuilds

By Charles Willis

Baptist Press
10/4/94

TUPELO, Miss. (BP)--"People wept," John Armistead recalls. "The newspapers and television stations ran stories telling of the people's memories. And there was a great level of community trauma, with an outpouring of support and sympathy in our town."

The loss was not of a person, but of a place where countless people had invested their lives, accepted Christ, been baptized, married their sweethearts and said farewell to their dead.

When the sanctuary of Calvary Baptist Church of Tupelo burned to the ground in the early hours of Dec. 21, 1992, the members could have been defeated, too. But Armistead, pastor of the church for 15 years, said shock and grieving was followed by determination and a series of constructive actions.

Today, a new sanctuary and education building are emerging where a disaster of undetermined origin caused treasured windows to burst, bricks to crumble and support beams to crash almost three years ago, leaving a shell of smoldering ruins. The members now look toward completion of their new building in the summer of 1995, because of some deliberate steps that took place after the fire.

The afternoon following the loss, the church's deacons met and elected a chairman of building and planning. Within a week, a slate of people to represent all segments of the church had been chosen for the committee. Concurrently, a long-range planning committee began work and a reassessment of the mission and ministry of the church was begun.

Make shift arrangements were the order of the days to come. Only one building, the 10-year-old family life center, had been spared damage, since it had a separate ventilation system. Use of almost all educational space was lost to smoke damage, as were church offices. Buildings had to be gutted to replace dry wall, flooring, carpets and other treatments that could not be rid of smoke odors and stains.

But there was never a question that the congregation would remain downtown.

"We wanted to continue our physical witness to downtown," Armistead recalled, "so we rented the city auditorium while we converted our family life center into worship space. Sunday school classes met all over town for the next few months," and he cited a list of Tupelo churches that offered facilities for ongoing programs and for weddings and other events.

One of the first steps the church took after it had regrouped its committee processes was to contact the Baptist Sunday School Board's church architecture service.

"They gave us guidance to understand what to look for in an architecture firm and planning recommendations," Armistead recounted. "We did surveys to see what our members wanted, and the church architecture staff did initial sketches and cost projections.

"What has evolved as the new sanctuary incorporates much of the thinking and concept drawing ideas they set out for us from the beginning," Armistead said. "They helped give us a range and total cost so we could be prepared to talk to architects instead of listening to architects tell us what we needed. They helped us know what an architectural firm could and should provide us, and they gave us guidance in ratios and rules of thumb regarding educational space."

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The new building's style, which Armistead characterized as Tudor-Gothic, is not a replica of the former 1935 Gothic sanctuary that had been so loved by members. Rather, Armistead said they chose a style that "would remind us of it," while maintaining compatibility with the remaining buildings.

Calvary Baptist Church has always moved cautiously in adding facilities, Armistead said, never wanting "to minimize our giving for the sake of buildings."

The church consistently gives 21 percent of its budget to the Cooperative Program, plus an additional 10 percent to other causes. The family life center was built with considerable thought for the impact it might have on missions giving, he said, but since it came to be a worship center following the fire, he called its existence "providential."

Throughout the fund-raising -- which took two weeks to exceed a \$2.5 million goal without an outside fund-raiser -- and the subsequent influx of actual cash gifts, the missions budget has been maintained and special offering goals, such as the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions, have not had goals reduced.

As a part of their stewardship pattern, Armistead said the congregation chose to build an 800-seat sanctuary and maintain two worship services because the cost of a larger sanctuary was substantially greater. While replacement insurance provided about \$2 million, the added educational space and different worship space in the new facility would require additional funds.

Outside, the new design offers the warm familiarity of the old facility for established members, while the inside blends contemporary and historic elements of art treatments and floor plan.

From the previous "long, rectangular" seating plan of the old building, members have chosen "a return to something old." Some people believe the curved seating, only 11 pews deep, with balconied seating surrounding the main floor, to be a contemporary idea. Armistead observes that very old church buildings on the East Coast of the U.S. have similar radial seating plans.

"The plan brings everyone in as close as possible to maximize communication and the preached word."

While Armistead agrees no one wants to experience such a loss, he can look back on the experience and see where "the Lord was real gracious to us."

"We've healed past the pain of the loss of the sanctuary, and we've had so many young families join that didn't know that building. They are looking forward to the new worship center.

"We are building it to glorify Christ in its beauty. We want it to show that the people who worship here really love the Lord Jesus, just as we don't spare cost on anyone else we love. It has stretched our people. It took some adjustment for some who at first wanted it built back just like it was, but we needed to build for the 21st century."

For congregations considering building for any reason, Armistead offers some advice:

-- "Before a fire can happen, be adequately insured." Calvary Baptist Church had replacement insurance, allowing them to rebuild at minimum additional cost the facility they had had with identical quality.

-- "Bathe the project in prayer. Our initial meeting was for prayer."

-- "Get in touch with the Sunday School Board's church architecture program."

-- "Make changes in the planning stages while they can be made on paper with no big costs involved. Be willing to back up then, before you cannot build it financially."

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(BP) photo (horizontal, black and white) to accompany this story mailed to state Baptist newspapers by the Sunday School Board bureau of Baptist Press. Two photos (one horizontal, black and white, and one vertical, color) are posted in the SBCNet News Room. Cutlines also in SBCNet News Room.

**Greater diversity characterizes
Southern Baptist building design** By Charles Willis

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Casual glances from a moving car are no longer sufficient to identify church buildings as distinctively Southern Baptist due to a variety of changing influences, including architectural and human factors, according to the new director of the denomination's architectural services.

Southern Baptist churches have moved from a limited range of traditional and colonial looks to a wide selection of architectural and functional designs driven by the needs of local congregations, said Davis Byrd, who assumed leadership of church architecture services at the Baptist Sunday School Board in June.

Byrd said he believes some architectural designs, such as colonial-style sanctuaries, came to be associated historically with Southern Baptist churches because of the common denominator of Southern heritage.

Today, he said greater architectural diversity is found "because the geographical spread of the SBC has moved the denomination out of the Deep South heritage, allowing other regional influences to have a greater impact on church design."

And he said he believes there is "an increasing recognition that the buildings of the church make a statement about the church. People may realize a mismatch between what the building says and what the people say about those they are trying to reach. As churches become more outreach driven, they are more concerned with their architectural message. For example, through increasing ethnic diversity in the United States, we are embracing a more diverse group of people than in the past.

"While it has always been true churches made their own architectural decisions," he observed, "people homogeneity equals architectural homogeneity, and cultural diversity equals architectural diversity."

"As churches have become more focused on the people who are, in fact, really the church, they have begun to want the influences to humanize the buildings. If the heart of the church is the gathered people, then it is appropriate that the architecture encompassing those functions be human in reflection of that theology."

He cites as examples radial seating, providing a closer proximity of worshipers to one another and to worship leaders; a larger platform area, making it physically and visually open to the congregation; and fewer barriers, such as railings, uniting the choir with other participants.

"These are more honest interpretations of the gathering of participants in an event, rather than observers of an event," he said.

Diversity in worship also has affected design with consumer-driven elements, such as the introduction of drama sets, orchestras and other features that require additional space.

"More happens today in conducting worship that takes more space than just providing for a choir," he declared. "Rules of thumb about square footage in worship space have to be revised."

Expanding use of multimedia requires provision for screens and projection of images in an attempt to make the worship experience more attuned to today's visually and technologically oriented society.

Additionally, Byrd said "person sensitivity" is expressed outside worship centers in gathering and circulation spaces. Narrow corridors prompt persons to move through quickly, while "spacious and gracious entering, welcoming and circulation space promotes fellowship and chance encounters."

Among some congregations, multiple worship services and Sunday schools are provided, not because of financial considerations, but for effectiveness in reaching people, he observed. Choices in meeting times and worship styles often drive the decision to offer more than one worship or Bible study time.

Intentional growth orientation brings a new awareness of how a facility visually, theologically, psychologically and functionally affects an ever-expanding group of people, Byrd continued.

Government regulations, motivated by safety and environmental concerns or a desire to control the quality of life in a community, often are reflected in state and local requirements that churches use licensed architects in the design of a facility. This can result in changes that do not originate with the congregation. But, he added, the possibility of good exists in eliminating obvious and more glaring errors of the past.

"Architects tend to do what the church wants," Byrd said. "If the church cannot articulate its needs, a good architect often can read between the lines and ask questions that help committees clarify and meet real needs."

And Byrd believes quality is, in the final analysis, more important than style.

"Church facilities need to be at least as good as the houses, office buildings, places of work, schools and shopping centers that make up the community identified as the outreach target. The church should not be the worst building they go in all week."

Above all, Byrd said he believes churches need facilities that "support well the programs that are attracting people."

He advises congregations to provide quality in whatever style is chosen, using appropriate materials aesthetically and functionally. Other factors Byrd said he believes relate to effective facilities are cleanliness, quality lighting, comfortable seating, quality sound equipment, adequate parking and "curb appeal" -- an attractive and inviting outside appearance to passersby.

Using the theme, "From Dream to Dedication," the Sunday School Board's church architecture service now provides full service from needs assessment and early planning through the entire process of construction documents and construction. Fees for services are negotiated on an individual basis.

Byrd, whose background includes the vice presidency of a Louisville, Ky., architectural firm, said today's service offers "not only a broad base of education and experience in church life and architecture, but also the expertise of Sunday School Board leadership in areas of church growth, worship, education and recreation. These additional resources place us in the forefront of planning and designing church buildings and property.

"We tailor our services and approach to the needs of each church, whether serving as consultant and project architect singly or in association with local architectural firms," he continued. "Our goal is to make the expertise of church architecture available to every church so their buildings fully support their unique mission and ministry."

The service has worked with unique situations, including congregations who wish to adapt shopping centers or malls, office-park space, hotels, a synagogue, schools, an auto dealership and a dinner theater to worship or education space. Most recently, a congregation has worked with the department successfully to design a workable plan that incorporates an existing grain elevator into a master plan, saving the cost of demolition and turning the structure to a functional purpose.

Byrd said he believes the church architecture service is uniquely qualified to offer "a lot of experience that helps us evaluate, probe, suggest and guide. We don't force anyone to conform to pre-determined solutions.

"I know of no other gathering of architecture people that has the knowledge and expertise related to Southern Baptist churches that we have. While it is true there are many capable architecture firms that can design church buildings, there are no architecture firms that are better able to assist the church in defining its needs than our service at the board."

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A list of services available from Church Architecture Service is posted in the SBCNet News Room as build.txt.

Relocation decision follows
careful study and research

By Linda Lawson

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--"Spiritual bungee jumping" is how pastor Don Runion characterized feelings associated with his church's decision to relocate, buy property in a growth area of Richmond, Va., and develop facility and ministry plans to match their high potential for growth.

But as Runion reviews the process of prayer, research and planning followed by the members of Mount Vernon Baptist Church, it becomes readily evident their actions have been careful, deliberate and thorough.

With only three acres of land and 16 years of declining Sunday school attendance, the church first considered relocating in 1983, two years after Runion became pastor. Instead, members decided to do what they could to grow where the church was located.

By 1993, while experiencing rapid growth in membership, they had acquired only two more acres. The church was surrounded by automobile dealerships in a largely commercial neighborhood and they were out of parking, worship and educational space.

"Building on this location would have been expensive and futile," Runion said.

The decision to move was preceded by a study process that involved 113 church members or 10 percent of active members.

Steve Allsbrook, director of associational development and church extension for the Baptist General Association of Virginia, was enlisted to provide counsel and demographic information. He regularly works with churches on strategic and growth planning.

One of the first steps taken by Mount Vernon leaders was identifying with pins on a city map where church members lived.

Then they looked at population growth trends and statistics, planned expansion of the highway system, new construction and other demographic data.

They asked questions, including:

- 1) Where is growth in the city going to happen?
- 2) What kinds of people will be living in the high growth area(s)?
- 3) How do the needs of these people match those of our congregation?
- 4) Where do our members live now and where will they live five years from now?

With 150 pages of reports in hand, the church began to focus on an area near the Interstate 295 beltway in close proximity to two interstates located in the heart of major projected population growth for the city.

"I can remember putting our fingers on a place on the map we felt was the prime location," Runion said.

In June 1993, the church voted by a 91 percent margin to purchase 40 acres. They now own 46 acres purchased from four different owners.

For such a major decision as relocation, Runion said the congregation found itself in "surprising unity," as evidenced by the fact that members have lent \$1.5 million the church needed to borrow to purchase the land.

They are now finalizing architectural plans for phase one of their new facility, hoping to relocate in 1996. They anticipate a series of building programs for the next 15 years. In the meantime, they will move to two Sunday schools at their present location in January 1995.

Runion said the whole process of study and decision-making has been accompanied by a "deepening spiritual commitment. We have recognized the challenge is so great we are dependent on him."

Church members feel a sense of excitement about the opportunities before them as well as raised anxieties.

"This requires a real leap of faith and long vision. We have looked not only at what our location will be in five years but also in 100 years," Runion said.

The church also is utilizing demographic data to consider the nature of ministries it should provide at the new location.

"You want to design a program to meet the needs of your community," he said. Ministries also need to be slanted to the socioeconomic level of members and prospects.

In considering the needed size of facilities, Allsbrook has cautioned Runion and church leaders not to dream too small.

"The projected growth for a five-mile radius around the new site accounts for almost all projected growth north of Richmond for the next five years," Allsbrook said.

With a current total membership of 1,700, Runion and leaders participating in a retreat earlier this spring came to believe the church at its new location could become a regional congregation of 3,000, 4,000 members or more.

"I suspect in 10 years this church will be the largest Baptist church in the Richmond area," Allsbrook said. "Everything the church and leaders have done, they have done thoroughly."

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(BP) photo, horizontal, mailed to state Baptist newspapers by the SSB bureau of Baptist Press. The same photo is available in the SBCNet News Room. The cutline is posted in the SBCNet News Room as Va-cut.txt.

Data Consortium members
offer growth planning help

Baptist Press
10/4/94

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Strategic and growth planning assistance such as Steve Allsbrook provided to Mount Vernon Baptist Church in Richmond, Va., is available through several state conventions with consultants participating in the Southern Baptist Data Consortium.

Technology utilizing geo-demographic information and Southern Baptist statistical data is provided by the Baptist Sunday School Board to consortium members who then operate service centers to work with churches, said Earl Nobles, strategic information coordinator in the board's strategic information unit.

"We supply technology to the different users. Our goal is to make the technology available to as many as possible," Nobles said.

In working with churches, consultants can assist churches in developing a profile with information such as population trends; age, income and education of persons living in their community; facts about households and families; and racial and ethnic makeup.

Following are current members of the data consortium: Mickey Crawford, Alabama Baptist State Convention, (205) 288-2460; Tommy Goode, Arkansas Baptist State Convention, (501) 376-4791; Steve Baumgardner, Florida Baptist Convention, (904) 396-2351; Shuford Jones, Baptist Convention of the State of Georgia, (404) 455-0404; Richie Stanley, Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, (404) 898-7680; Douglas Hays, Kentucky Baptist Convention, (502) 245-4101; Don Magee, Louisiana Baptist Convention, (318) 448-3402;

Jimmy Jackson, Baptist Convention of Maryland-Delaware, (410) 290-5290; Verlyn Bergen, Missouri Baptist Convention, (314) 635-7931; Ken Sterling, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, (504) 286-3626; Glenn Adkins, General Board of South Carolina Baptist Convention, (803) 765-0030; Clay Price, Baptist General Convention of Texas, (214) 828-5138; Jere Phillips, Tennessee Baptist Convention, (615) 371-2031;

Steve Allsbrook, Baptist General Association of Virginia, (804) 672-2100; Gary Hearon, Dallas Baptist Association, (214) 324-2803; Larry Rose, Tarrant Baptist Association (Texas), (817) 927-1911; Jim Herrington, Union Baptist Association (Texas), (713) 957-2000; DeLane Ryals, Metro New York Baptist Association, (212) 787-7037.

Nobles said other states will be joining the consortium in coming months. Inquiries should be directed to consortium members.

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Character does count in ministry,
Jack Graham says at Southeastern By Dwayne Hastings

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--Character does count, Jack Graham told students at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.

Graham, pastor of the 13,000-member Prestonwood Baptist Church, Dallas, pointed to the high dropout rate among ministers as one indication that some in church leadership are not fully surrendered to the Lord.

"I am concerned we are sending our students from our universities, colleges and seminaries that are well-trained but are not spiritually prepared for ministry," Graham contended in a mid-September visit to the campus.

He said it may be that some get in a survival mode and don't have the strength of character to persevere. Graham continued, "Perhaps they get in some kind of success syndrome, with all the accolades and with all the applause, and they don't have the character built within them to stand against the temptations of the world."

Graham called on those aspiring to the ministry to "work on your character." Saying no one should be afraid to be totally surrendered to the will of God, Graham added, "Some people think if they give it all up to God it will make them some sort of religious freak.

"Some may fear if they make a full surrender to God, he may send them to 'Pago-Pago' as a missionary. It will be a lot better to be in 'Pago-Pago,' wherever that is, than to be in the safest place in America out of God's will."

Graham said if a person surrenders to God, "the full person God intended you to be will come forth."

In and out of the ministry, some folks just barely get by, Graham said. "So many people are just trying to make it to the next meeting, just living to get to Friday, trying to hang on, moving from one crisis to another. Living in a survival mode is not living in God's will."

Yet neither is falling back on your success a necessary indication of God's will, Graham said. "Many who are financially successful, who have the three-car garage and the pool out back, are still miserably unfulfilled," he said.

A person can be successful by every standard of the world, yet still harbor that sneaking suspicion that something is not right. And their family crumbles around them, Graham said. "You can even build a successful church without God. There are many who have done it," he said.

"Yet there is a character flaw within them and that is why we see so many failures within the church and so many people bailing out after apparent success. Success alone can never satisfy."

There is a danger, Graham suggested, in looking to the world for the design to "build" the church. He said the current emphasis on "marketing the church" can, if not handled properly, hamper the gospel message.

When the church begins asking people what message they want to hear, it runs the risk of distorting Scripture, Graham said. "I have never read in the Scriptures that we are to market the message of the church -- I read that we should be about the churching of the market, taking Jesus Christ to the market," he said.

Graham said the proliferation of "seeker-sensitive services" in churches concerns him. He admitted, "I agree we ought to do everything we can to communicate the message of Christ, but my Bible says no one seeks after God. We need to be sure we are concentrating on being Spirit-sensitive."

He said there is only one level of living that will bring fulfillment to people. Moving from simply surviving day to day or relying on successes alone to understanding his or her significance in God's eyes will bring satisfaction, Graham said.

"God has called us not just to take up space on this planet and not just to breath his air -- but to hear his call and to r spond to his purpose -- that is the will of God." To know what you are doing is making a diff renc for the cause of J sus Christ is a wonderful thing, Graham said.

Graham: God has no Plan B
for the Christian life

By Dwayne Hastings

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--There is no such thing as a second-rate Christian living out Plan B, according to Jack Graham, pastor of Prestonwood Baptist Church, Dallas. Graham, speaking at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in mid-September, noted there are some people who believe God will simply accommodate whatever track they chose to follow in life.

"I believe my God is bigger than any errant decision I might make," Graham said. "I don't see anywhere in the Bible where God has anything but a Plan A for my life. When I step out of bounds, that is out of the perfect will of God, I am grateful I serve a God who is able to steer me back into his fellowship and back to the center of his will."

Graham pointed out both Moses and Jonah tried Plan B: one spent 40 years trying to work out his plan; the other was baptized in the sea in the belly of a fish. "God still got them back on track and on his Plan A," said Graham.

"When we surrender ourselves completely to him and give an unconditional yes to him, he will knock down every obstacle so that we can accomplish his will."

Graham stressed God has a plan for each person's life and wants everyone to know the plan. He noted there is often confusion in determining the will of God.

He said the will of God is not simply fate, the thought that whatever will be will be. "The Christian faith does not propose we are puppets in the hand of a powerful god. The will of God is never stagnant. It is always dynamic," Graham said.

Some people look to their emotions to discover the will of God, Graham said. "They're just looking for that 'healing feeling' or that 'ocean of emotion' that is just going to cover them and somehow include a message from God."

Feelings, suggested Graham, all too often come from the wrong sources: "from taking too much medicine or eating a bad burrito." He said if a person lives by feelings, he or she will end up frustrated, because feelings do not determine the will of God.

The key to know the will of God is fellowship with God, Graham said. "The will of God is found through walking with him, keeping a friendship with the Lord Jesus Christ, staying in step with the Spirit day by day."

The will of God is not as much vocational or locational as it is relational, Graham said. "We experience the fellowship by making a full surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ and staying plugged into the Spirit-filled life."

Believers must use their "sanctified imagination" to analyze information and determine the right move to make according to God's will, Graham said. "God gave every believer a brain, but it is not just a brain," related Graham. "We have the mind of Christ, a renewed mind."

Graham said believers must avoid "panic plunges" into the Scriptures in search of what is next: "A consistent, deliberate, concentrated study of the Word of God will aid us in seeing things from God's perspective."

The Holy Spirit will lead you in God's will. "This is not the flippant 'God told me to do this,'" said Graham, "this is the inner voice that is marked by deep-seated conviction and a conformity to God's will."

People spend too much time speeding through the proverbial "yellow light," Graham said. "Many of us run through the will of God like we do those caution lights, thinking the yellow means 'gun it and go.' The light really means slow down."

To know the will of God, "we better just stay still, pray and wait on God. In insistent, consistent prayer, God speaks to us and we should listen to that inner voice," said Graham.

He noted when Christians come to know what the will of God is, they should be bold, for God is able to do exceedingly above anyone's requests in prayer. "Don't play it safe," admonished Graham, "you can be assured God calls specific people to strategic places for significant purposes."

**Southeastern students share
church planting experiences**

By Chele Caughron

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--When Chad and Chandra Childress set out to plant a church in New Jersey this past summer, they knew it would not be easy.

But they didn't know just how difficult it would be. They didn't know they would have to beg township officials for permits to meet in public buildings for Bible studies. They didn't know they would actually have doors slammed in their faces. And they didn't know they would even receive some hate mail.

The Childresses were among six Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary students and their families who went into four states this past summer to try to start new churches as part of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's Praxis program, a practicum in church planting.

Southeastern students and faculty also went overseas to share the gospel in Brazil, China, El Salvador, Israel, Romania and Trinidad.

The students shared about their experiences on Sept. 21-22 during worship services in the seminary's Binkley Chapel.

Childress quoted from one anonymous letter.

"We object to your uninvited handouts of religious literature. Maybe they do this in North Carolina, but not in Plainsboro. You should be aware, for reality's sake, that humanity's greatest need is not to know God but to know how to reason."

The letter went on to urge Childress to reject Jesus, the Bible and the church, saying life is to be enjoyed because heaven is only an imagined concept.

"I tell you what, that letter out there encouraged us," Childress said, "because I know, in the midst of persecution, God is faithful."

After a few weeks, a Bible study began in a public library. Three people came the first night, more the next night and soon a church was begun, Childress said.

"They continued to bring people," he said. "It was just neat to see how God originated a group."

Anthony Conner and Brandon Waters worked in a rural, semi-resort area in Florida. As a means of sharing the gospel, they conducted interest surveys, started a children's club and even witnessed to hitchhikers they picked up on the way to the beach.

"This was probably the hardest summer of my life but also the best summer," Conner said. "What God told me is that evangelism is a lifestyle. A Christian is every part of you. That's the purpose of church planting: It's not just to build up numbers, to build a new congregation; it's to go out and show people that they can have a relationship with Jesus Christ."

On their last Sunday in Florida, 32 people from the 200-home community attended a worship service, Conner said.

"With that, we were able to leave our sponsoring church a list of people who were excited and willing to work towards building a local congregation," Conner said.

When Sam and Myra Goins arrived in Williamsburg, Va., the sponsoring church told them it would be a miracle if they found any interest in starting a new church.

They knocked on door after door in eight neighborhoods and found minimal response. Then a man, who had been outside washing his car, approached them to see what it was they were doing. When they told him they were trying to find people interested in starting a new church, he eagerly accepted the opportunity.

"God is at work in people's lives," Goins said. "God had already been there before we got there drawing that man to himself."

At the summer's end, three established churches agreed to sponsor a new church start, Goins said.

"This past summer is a summer that changed our focus," Goins said. "We're headed to plant a church. Wherever God would lead us, we are willing. Home missions -- God's at work in America, too, and he needs us today."

**Minnesota-Wisconsin proposal
would drop 'Southern' from name**

ROCHESTER, Minn. (BP)--The Minnesota-Wisconsin Southern Baptist Convention will drop the "Southern" from its name if a study committee recommendation is approved during the annual meeting in Bloomington, Minn., Oct. 27-29.

The committee, chaired by Gerald Palmer, a former Home Mission Board executive now serving as interim director of missions for the Northwoods, Minn., association and a Minnesota native, gave several reasons for suggesting the change.

"The inclusion of the title 'Southern' in a state organization may be a significant factor to people of strong Southern Baptist relationships. In the northern part of the United States, it might be a liability," the committee stated in a report to the state convention's executive board.

Other reasons given were:

-- The indigenous factor, emphasizing "the importance of the convention being able to identify with the people of the two-state area and be a name with which the people indigenous to the area would be comfortable."

-- Identification in denominational relationships: "... the inclusion of the name 'Southern' in conjunction with the name Baptist in the two-state convention can be interpreted as forming a subsidiary relationship and/or a dependent relationship with the Southern Baptist Convention."

The committee recommendation points out the "MWSBC is moving into a new era of planning and programming with a special emphasis on broadening our appeal and outreach to all the people in the two states."

In making the recommendation, the committee noted the new name, the "Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention," is not used by other Baptist bodies in the two-state area and reaffirms "our present cooperative relationship to the Southern Baptist Convention.

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Williams resigns in Minn./Wis.;
Lesch to return as paper editor

Baptist Press
10/4/94

ROCHESTER, Minn. (BP)--David Williams, evangelism/stewardship director for the Minnesota-Wisconsin Southern Baptist Convention, has resigned to become pastor of First Baptist Church, Flower Mound, Texas. He had served with the Minnesota-Wisconsin convention since Jan. 1 of this year. An additional responsibility had been as editor of the state Baptist monthly paper, The Minnesota-Wisconsin Southern Baptist.

Williams, 44, began his service with the Texas congregation Sept. 12. He had been a member of the church earlier, while a staff member of the Denton (Texas) Baptist Association.

Clint Henry, chairman of the evangelism/stewardship/communications subcommittee of the Minnesota-Wisconsin executive board, said Williams had been "an impact person during his time at MWSBC."

Commenting to the executive board on his resignation, Williams said, "In parting, let me say that I'm sorry I have to leave so soon, and I'll try to come back sometime when I can stay longer."

Gomer R. Lesch, 71, of Nashville, Tenn., has agreed to serve as interim editor of the Minnesota-Wisconsin Southern Baptist on a volunteer basis. He worked in the same capacity in 1993 and has agreed to serve through 1995, with evaluation at that time, according to Executive Director William C. Tinsley.

Lesch will do most of the work from his home in Nashville, where he held public relations and communications positions with the Baptist Sunday School Board before his retirement in 1988.

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