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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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Fla. Baptist budget lowers
funding for SBC causes

Baptist Press
11/22/94

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. (BP)--The Florida Baptist State Convention was characterized by a spirit of cooperation, with only three items causing discussion for 1,668 messengers registered for the 133rd annual meeting, Nov. 14-16.

Also, messengers adopted a Cooperative Program basic budget of \$24,064,477, which is \$421,351 less than the 1994 budget. It will be distributed 50.75 percent for Florida Baptist Convention causes, up from 49.6 percent; 41 percent to Southern Baptist Convention causes, down from 42.2 percent; 5 percent as a priority item for church pastoral aid; and 3.25 percent as a priority item for the church annuity program, both of which remain the same as last year.

A second proposal on a three-year budget plan, which would reduce to 40 percent the SBC Cooperative Program allocation beginning in 1996, passed without comment.

Tropical Storm Gordon put a damper on attendance at the convention's final session. Gordon began pummeling Florida Tuesday night, Nov. 15, and spawned tornadoes which destroyed 500 mobile homes along Florida's east coast, claiming at least three lives. By Wednesday morning fewer than 300 messengers and visitors withstood the 40 m.p.h. winds and torrential rains to attend the final session of the convention, held in Daytona Beach's Ocean Center.

The three major points of discussion included a recommendation from the state board of missions to endorse a semiannual missions offering. "In lieu of" the four now being promoted -- the Maguire State Missions Offering, the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering and a World Hunger Offering -- the state convention would promote two mission emphases a year, with the proceeds divided among the four. The proposal would have allowed the state board of missions to set the statewide goal and determine the percentages to be distributed to each offering based on giving patterns for the past five years.

Criticism of the plan revolved mainly around separating the offerings from the nationally designated weeks of prayer. Currently, the state mission offering, the home mission offering and the foreign mission offering are preceded by a week of prayer to heighten awareness for the needs to be met by each.

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"We have a very mission-minded church," said N.B. Langford, pastor of First Baptist Church, Panama City, who had called for reconsideration of the matter immediately following initial approval by messengers. "Our WMU is very concerned about this." Arguing that separating the week of prayer from the taking of the offering would hurt missions giving, Langford stressed people give when they are spiritually motivated.

Executive Director-Treasurer John Sullivan assured convention participants the board was not doing away with the weeks of prayer but only providing a model some churches could follow if they chose. Emphasizing the autonomy of the local church, Sullivan said, "Every church will have its own decision to make."

When discussion ended, however, messengers voted to send the proposal back to the state board for further study.

More discussion came when the committee on nominations made its report. At that time messengers learned Robert Parker's name had been removed by the committee from the Florida Baptist Witness Commission and replaced with the name of Joe Boatwright, pastor of Aloma Baptist Church, Winter Park. The committee's initial report, printed prior to the meeting, showed Parker being nominated to a second three-year term on the commission. But when the committee met prior to the convention, Boatwright's name was substituted for Parker's.

According to several committee members, Parker was replaced because his church, First Baptist of Markham Woods, Lake Mary, is not currently affiliated with a Florida Baptist association and their Cooperative Program giving for the past year did not meet the committee's standards.

Steve Henderson, pastor of Scott Lake Baptist Church, Lakeland, offered Parker's name again from the floor, but messengers upheld the committee's report.

A revision to the convention's constitution to permit churches outside Florida to affiliate with the state convention was the third item called into question. Tim Locher, messenger from Sheridan Hills Baptist Church, Hollywood, and a trustee of the SBC Foreign Mission Board, expressed concern that allowing churches in other countries to affiliate with the Florida Baptist Convention would create a duplication of services with the FMB.

But Sullivan responded any work with churches in foreign countries would be done in coordination with the FMB. When Larry Weaver, pastor of Parkwood Baptist Church, Jacksonville, and also an FMB trustee, inquired if the response from the FMB had been favorable, Sullivan said it had.

A time of celebration came when messengers learned of the state convention's participation in the successful effort which resulted in the nearly two-to-one vote to defeat casino gambling in Florida. During a report by state board of missions President Randy Crowe, a brief review was made of the anti-casino campaign, and recognition was given to Don Hepburn, director of the public relations division, who gave leadership to that effort.

Another highlight was the recognition of Florida's WMU as they celebrate their centennial year. A new history book, "Faithful Servants," written by Martha Trotter of Pensacola, was introduced and copies were presented to Sullivan and FMB President Jerry Rankin, who spoke following the presentation.

Messengers elected two pastors and two laymen to lead them in the coming year. Ken Whitten, pastor of Idlewild Baptist Church, Tampa, was elected president on a first ballot with two other nominees. Lee McGehee, chief of police and member of First Baptist Church, Ocala, was elected first vice president over another nominee. Luther Beauchamp, attorney and member of First Baptist Church, Chiefland, was the only nominee for second vice president and R. Dale Kinsey, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Clermont, was re-elected to his 11th term as recording secretary.

No resolutions were offered from the convention floor this year, but the committee on resolutions brought five, including:

-- appreciation for Jack E. Brymer, former editor of the Florida Baptist Witness, for his 10 years of service to Florida Baptists.

-- commendation for those groups that helped secure passage of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, as well as President Bill Clinton for signing it into law.

-- support of the ministry effort to the approximately 45,000 Cuban and Haitian refugees detained in Cuba, Panama, Grand Cayman, Bahamas and the United States.

-- appreciation for 100 years of faithful service by Florida's Woman's Missionary Union.

Next year's meeting will be Nov. 13-15 in Tampa.

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Calif. Baptists honor Hogue;
church with woman pastor seated By Mark A. Wyatt

Baptist Press
11/22/94

SAN DIEGO (BP)--California Baptists honored their retiring executive director and welcomed his successor during the 54th annual meeting of California Southern Baptist Convention Nov. 15-16 in San Diego.

In other action, messengers turned back a challenge against seating messengers from a church with a woman pastor and declined to increase the percentage of votes required to refuse seating messengers at future conventions.

C.B. Hogue, executive director-treasurer since 1985, was honored for his decade of service. The recognition ranged from personal tributes presented live and on video, to a reception for Hogue and his wife, Betty.

Hogue will retire as CSBC executive Feb. 28, 1995, at age 67. He plans to write and remain active and has been nominated for a five-year term as a vice president of the Baptist World Alliance beginning later the same year.

Fermin Whittaker, elected Nov. 3 to succeed Hogue beginning Feb. 1, 1995, accompanied by his wife, Carmen, and sons Carlos and Eddie, told the convention, "It's good to be home. I return to California excited at what God is going to do through us."

Whittaker, a former California pastor and language missions worker, currently is a regional coordinator at the Home Mission Board.

In convention business, messengers deleted a \$200 item in brief fashion before otherwise approving a \$12.8 million 1995 state convention budget. That amount had been earmarked for Americans United for Separation of Church and State until Carl Morgan, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church, Woodland, offered a motion to remove Americans United from the CSBC budget.

"That particular organization has continually butted heads with the Christian Life Commission in Washington, particularly in the area of school prayer," Morgan said. "Because we have the CLC already there doing a good job in these issues, it's kind of inconsistent to be supportive of one group on one side of this issue and then have the CLC on the other."

Messengers approved the amended budget by an overwhelming margin on a show of hands.

The 1995 CSBC basic budget approved by messengers is a 1.36 percent increase over the current budget. It includes \$6 million in projected Cooperative Program contributions from California churches, with 28.85 percent is earmarked for Southern Baptist Convention causes, the same percentage for several years.

For the second year in a row, messengers were asked not to seat messengers from a San Francisco church whose pastor is a woman. Ron Wilson, pastor of First Baptist Church, Thousand Oaks, presented the motion against seating messengers from 19th Avenue Baptist Church in San Francisco. Wilson said the church's "practice of having a woman pastor ... is in violation of holy Scripture and the 'Baptist Faith and Message.'"

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The challenge had been expected after controversy at the 1993 convention in Santa Rosa when messengers voted 213-204 not to seat messengers from 19th Avenue. That vote came before any messengers had been seated and the convention later had to reaffirm its decision against receiving messengers from the San Francisco congregation.

Dan Coker, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church, Seaside, and a former 19th Avenue pastor, said he favored seating the messengers "for three reasons that we Baptists have traditionally upheld."

Coker said, "Baptists have always taught and preached priesthood of the believer." He added, "Southern Baptists historically have honored and commissioned both men and women to go out and preach the gospel" and cited Baptist tradition granting "the autonomy of the local church in seeking God's person" to lead the congregation.

Robert Lewis, pastor of Temple Baptist Church, Fairfield, offered a different view. "The Bible strictly prohibits women pastors," he declared. "The autonomy of the local church is not at stake, but the autonomy of our convention is. The priesthood of the believer does not mean the right to interpret the Bible the way you want to fit your personal philosophy. I happen to think we are still people of the Book," he said.

Lewis added he believes most California Southern Baptists "believe the Bible prohibits women pastors."

Exter Hardy, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church, Davis, spoke against the motion. Hardy said regardless of whether women serving as pastors "is not scripturally correct, I see a vote not to seat the messengers as cutting off a part of our body. 19th Avenue Baptist is not against us, they are for us," Hardy said.

Barry Stricker, pastor of Tiburon Baptist Church in Tiburon, also opposed the move not to seat the messengers. "Few convictions in Baptist life have more eternal significance than the independence of the local church," he said. "The question is not about women in ministry, it is about being Baptist and even more it is about being Christian. If we, as a convention, vote not to seat the messengers from 19th Avenue Baptist Church we will invalidate the very reason why we are here," Stricker said.

When a motion to extend time for discussion failed, messengers voted by ballot, defeating the challenge by a margin of 17 votes, 340 in favor of the motion, 357 opposed.

In a related action, messengers killed a proposed constitutional amendment which would have required a two-thirds vote to uphold challenges against seating messengers. Failure of the amendment means a simple majority still is required to uphold a messenger challenge.

Despite this year's outcome, however, the issue of women pastors will remain before California Southern Baptists for at least another year. Messengers approved a motion by Dan Nelson, pastor of First Baptist Church, Camarillo, asking the CSBC executive board to study the issue and present a report at next year's convention.

Nelson also presented a motion to amend Article III Section 2 of the CSBC constitution. Nelson wants to insert language which would disqualify from participating in the state convention churches which "by faith and practice violate the biblical tenets as held in The Baptist Faith and Message." A similar amendment was to have been considered this year, but was withdrawn.

Among four resolutions messengers approved was one declaring "California Southern Baptist Convention does not endorse women as senior pastors" and another pledging "every effort to publicly combat the sin of racism" Both resolutions prompted lengthy debate.

Nelson said he offered the resolution on women senior pastors "to clarify misunderstandings" about the vote on seating messengers from 19th Avenue Baptist Church.

"I'm sure there were some misunderstandings that it was a vote against women in the ministry," Nelson said. "That was never the case. We affirm women in th, ministry."

Nelson not d the convention voted to allow the church's messengers to be seated, but added, "I believe there are a lot of people who voted to seat the messengers who do not support women pastors" because of a Bible passage which says a pastor should be "the husband of one wife."

But limiting use of that passage to deal only with women pastors ignores the matter of "single pastors who are not the husband of one wife, divorced pastors who have divorced their wives and divorced pastors who have married another wife," countered Mark Chamberlin, pastor of Hillview Baptist Church, Union City.

Chamberlin said, "Neither the denomination nor any of its agencies endorse pastors. It does endorse chaplains and other missionaries who happen to be women."

After further discussion, messengers voted and the chair ruled the resolution was approved on a show of hands. A requested ballot vote confirmed that ruling, 266 in favor of the resolution, 125 opposed.

Debate over the resolution on racism centered around a proposed amendment by Rusty Fennell, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church, Long Beach. Fennell wanted to include language declaring California Baptists "confess to the sin of racism" in the past. But others opposed the confession.

"Exactly what is my sin here?" asked Ron Wilson. "If I'm confessing something, I'd like to know what it is I am confessing."

Ray Reed, a resolutions committee member, told messengers the committee had removed the confession from the original resolution Fennell submitted. "The committee felt it would be best," explained Reed, pastor of First Baptist Church, Atwater. "We have problems confessing our own sins, much less the sins of our grandfathers and forefathers."

But Frank Ciprian, pastor of Primera Iglesia Bautista, San Jose, supported including the confession, saying he had experienced racism during 18 years as a pastor in California.

"Sometimes it's very subtle, sometimes it may not be noticed and it's very hard to admit to it," Ciprian said. "I believe it would be a step forward if we did confess to this, and I believe it would be a step backwards if we tried to say it does not exist or never existed."

Messengers, however, rejected adding the confession although the resolution opposing racism eventually was approved on a show of hands.

The 1995 California convention will be Nov. 14-15 in Modesto.

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Samford trustee chairman bemoans
Corts concerns raised at Baylor

Baptist Press
11/22/94

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--The chairman of Samford University's trustees has issued a statement bemoaning the "backlash of denominational politics" involved in the rejection of Samford President Thomas Corts as president of Baylor University.

A. Gerow Hodges, trustee chairman and a retired insurance executive in Birmingham, Ala., said Nov. 22, "What has occurred appears to be a backlash of denominational politics and is grossly unfair to a person of Dr. Corts' professional standing and character."

Hodges' comments were an apparent reference to news reports that Corts was rejected Nov. 18 as successor to retiring Baylor President Herbert Reynolds in part because Corts' brother, Mark, a North Carolina pastor, has been active in the conservative movement in the Southern Baptist Convention.

"As far as we are concerned," Hodges also stated, "Dr. Corts was and is President of Samford University, as before."

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"The finest way friends at Samford, in Birmingham, and Alabama Baptists can support him is to get behind him and Samford with renewed vigor and continue our progress as though this unfortunate incident never occurred," Hodges continued. "I understand that Dr. Cortis was asked to leave the door open to further consideration by Baylor. It would not surprise me if the Baylor folks would come to their senses and make another try at him, but I believe that would be futile."

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Satanic influence debated
after Ala., Ark. trials

By Ken Walker

Baptist Press
11/22/94

HUNTSVILLE, Ala. (BP)--Flying in the face of studies discounting widespread Satanism in the United States, Southern Baptists and others directly touched by such activity say it poses a real threat to the public. Backing their beliefs is the recent conviction of a Satan worshiper for the August 1993 murder of a former Southern Baptist missionary.

Eileen Janeciz is undergoing psychiatric evaluation prior to her sentencing for the killing of Jerry Simon, 52, pastor of Valley Fellowship in Huntsville, Ala. A graduate of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Simon and his wife, Carol, served as Southern Baptist missionaries in Taiwan and Uganda from 1969-77.

A week after Simon was murdered in his office, Janeciz was arrested outside a medical clinic in nearby Decatur, where she allegedly shot a man who had taken his wife to the doctor. She held police at bay for eight hours while carrying a Satanic bible. After her arrest, she flashed a Satanic sign at TV cameras en route to a court appearance.

The assistant district attorney who prosecuted Janeciz traced the defendant's beliefs to the motive for the killing. "She was a Satanic worshiper and he was a preacher, and his church was very active in working with people in that area," said Susan Moquin. She added the jury didn't believe the defense's arguments that Janeciz was insane because of the detailed planning that went into the shooting.

Less than a week after the jury's verdict in late October, however, the National Center for Child Abuse issued a report contradicting reports of widespread Satanism. In an investigation, the center said it had been unable to prove any of 12,000 accusations of sexual abuse of children involving Satanic rituals.

A New York Times story on the study noted, "Although the survey found occasional cases of lone abusers who used ritualistic trappings, it found no substantiated reports of well-organized satanic rings of people who sexually abuse children."

The study reinforced the work of a sociology professor from the State University of New York who calls the idea of a network of Satanists a myth. In his 1993 book, "Satanic Panic," Jeffrey Victor labeled as fiction reports that Satanists have infiltrated various institutions to subvert society, create chaos and spread their beliefs.

"None of these claims are supported by reliable evidence," he wrote. "My research suggests they are baseless and misleading. Moreover, these claims exploit widespread fears, particularly the anxieties people have about their children."

However, just before Janeciz's conviction, reports of Satanism surfaced in other parts of the country. For example, two weeks before the Huntsville trial, a U.S. district judge in Denver ruled a federal prison inmate had a constitutional right to hold Satanic rituals in his cell.

About the same time, a mission pastor near Fort Worth, Texas, had his last contact with a woman who had told him she soon faced a decision of whether to offer up her 20-month-old daughter as a sacrifice to her father's Satanic cult. (See related story.)

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Such stories sound so wild most people dismiss them as rumors. Yet, while there have been exaggerated reports of Satanism, Huntsville policeman Jeff Bennett said such cults are very real. He investigated occult activity in the region for more than seven years before budget cuts led to his transfer to another unit.

Although Janeciz is the first person convicted of a serious crime, Bennett, also a bivocational Baptist pastor, said the "right person" will become a victim one day and then the public will demand widespread investigations. The policeman compared the current situation to reports of child abuse in the 1960s. Back then the problem was only whispered about, he said.

"That is what's happening today with the occult situation everywhere," said Bennett, pastor of First Baptist Church in nearby Taft, Tenn. "It's being whispered about. One of these days when (the public) realizes there is mind manipulation and people using these techniques to gain whatever they want, I believe we'll be able to combat this problem."

A Southern Baptist pastor who led a prayer team that interceded throughout the 10-day trial period also called Satanists a threat in this city of 143,000. Curtis Eason of Huntsville's Antioch Baptist Church said lately his son, a police officer, has tried to convince him to wear a bulletproof vest.

He knows Satanists are around, Eason said, because in the past they have left voodoo dolls in his mailbox and poured a "voodoo cross" -- a three-foot square mixture of salt, flour, herbs and other material -- outside the church doors. In addition, one former cultist told him there were several hundred people involved in Huntsville's Satanic church.

"It's actively going on but people don't want to believe it exists," Eason said. "I know of places out here ... there's one not too far from my home ... where sacrifices are done."

This case wasn't the first murder trial of 1994 where Satanism was linked to a defendant. Damien Echols, Jason Baldwin and Jesse Misskelly were convicted of murder last spring in the 1993 deaths of three young boys in West Memphis, Ark. Echols is now on death row.

Jerry Driver, chief juvenile officer for Crittenden County, testified at the trial about the trio's juvenile records. He said Echols had quit using his given name, Michael, to go by Damien a year before the incident. Echols told a Catholic priest it was in honor of a saint, said Driver, but told friends at school it was because he was a son of Satan.

"It undoubtedly came from the movie, 'The Omen,'" Driver told Baptist Press. "A lot of young kids get ideas from these movies and TV shows. They were self-styled Satanists. They weren't part of an organized group, although (Echols) claimed he was a Wiccan (a group of witches)."

A youth pastor who counseled with Echols a year before the murders also said the teen was open about his beliefs. Rick McKinney of First Baptist Church, Charleston, Ark., was at Second Baptist in West Memphis when Echols attended a revival preached by a former Hell's Angel. After the service someone suggested he needed to counsel with Echols, who always dressed in all-black clothing, including a dark topcoat in winter.

"I got with him in a room off to the side of the sanctuary for an hour and a half," McKinney said. "He was convinced he couldn't go to heaven because he already had committed himself to hell. I tried every verse I knew, every tract. I offered him a Bible but he said he couldn't take it because of what his friends would say."

After the murders, some youth group members told him about "Stonehenge," an area in the country where rituals were held. McKinney decided to visit it himself. At the site he saw bones of dead animals, used condoms and Satanic graffiti, such as:

-- a pentagram, a five-pointed, popular occult symbol.

-- a circle with a V and a line through it, which is a symbol for anarchy and lawlessness.

-- an inverted cross and the "peace sign," which is actually the broken cross of Nero. Both symbolize the defeat of Christ and Christianity, he said.

"It's all over the place," McKinney said. "No community is immune from it."

Y t, the question remains whether these murders are evidence of a widespread threat or are isolated examples of mentally unbalanced individuals. One of Janeciz's lawyers links his client's involvement with Satanism to delusions brought on by mental illness.

Huntsville attorney Fred Simpson pointed out Janeciz had been a Christian prior to her commitment for psychiatric treatment in 1989. He traced her decline to a decision by mental health officials to allow her to quit taking lithium and other drugs that stabilized her condition. He argues she needs treatment rather than prison.

"In my opinion this is a case of mental illness," he said. "I'm not denying that Satanism exists, but in this case and others like it people may think they're Napoleon, Washington, Kennedy, Superman or whatever. She switched from a keen interest in Christianity to Satanism in her delusional thinking."

Regardless of Satanists' true influence, though, the Huntsville woman's attack on Simon has created a major benefit for the Christian community here: greater unity.

Eason said denominational barriers are falling. He has compiled a list of 50 intercessors from various churches, thanks to contacts he made in assembling the trial-based prayer team.

More than 1,500 people attended a community-wide "Concert of Prayer" last summer and plans are under way for another in February.

"There's a positive attitude coming out of this," Eason said. "It's beginning to build courage and strength. It's a real exciting thing. Before the trial, prayer had never been coordinated on an organized basis. It's getting to be an interesting thing. It's one of the most positive things I've ever seen in this city."

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Walker is a free-lance writer in Louisville, Ky.

Last chapter yet to be told
of ministry to teen Satanist

By Ken Walker

Baptist Press
11/22/94

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Glyn Murphy will never forget the telephone call several months ago from a teen-age girl who said her father was a Satanist. She shared stories of murderous rituals and abuse by both her father and his cult group's priest.

It is the type of hard-to-confirm tale that provokes doubts about the authenticity of such accounts. Still, that hot summer day, Murphy participated in the wildest discussion of his life.

"The Bible talks about demons but I've never had experience with demons until that conversation," said Murphy, a graduate of Southwestern Baptist Theological S minary and pastor of Center Point Fellowship, a Baptist mission in Azle, a small town 10 miles west of the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex.

"We talked about getting free and she called (the devil) Natas, Satan spelled backwards. She said she couldn't say his name. This was far out stuff for me." The pastor assured her God was more powerful than Satan, yet she seemed hesitant and fearful.

Finally he asked if he could pray with her. Suddenly, static interrupted him, so loudly he had to quit talking. When it cleared up, Murphy said the devil would do everything he could to keep her away the Lord, including putting static on the line.

Instead of responding to the comment, she said in a frightened voice, "Didn't you hear him? Didn't you hear him screaming?"

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When he asked the girl if she had a demon inside of her, she said, "yes." The pastor asked, "Who are you and what is your name?" Instead of getting an answer, static surged through the line again. When the pastor rebuked the noise, the line cleared and a gruff voice spat, "By what power?"

"By the power of the name of Jesus and the power of his blood, I rebuke you," Murphy said. The line cleared again. He called the girl's name and she began crying. She said she was ready to pray and received Christ as her Savior.

Yet, the battle isn't over. Two months later the young woman agreed to come to the church for a counseling session. She parked in back to avoid being seen; for a long time she refused to come into the office and stood in the doorway. Cigarette burn marks dotted her arms, Murphy recounted. She said they were punishment for touching a Bible.

The pastor encouraged her to seek out a "safe house," a shelter where her anonymity would be protected. But she told of fleeing to one in the Midwest, only to see her father appear one day to take her back home. Murphy said the girl is convinced he has supernatural powers and will be able to find her no matter where she hides.

A chaplain for the local police department, the pastor lost touch with the woman after receiving a troubling call one October night. A policeman phoned at 2 a.m. to relate finding her sitting in her car, covered with blood. A pentagram was carved deeply into her leg.

When he asked who had cut her, she replied she had volunteered for the act and refused to report it or go to the department. Without anyone willing to file a complaint, there was nothing the frustrated policeman could do.

"She has come to one worship service, but she said if she got out (of the cult) they would kill her," the pastor said. "We're praying for her but we don't know what's happened to her. I've never been involved in anything like this. I had heard there was a lot of Satanic activity in this area, but I hadn't dealt with it directly."

A native of College Station, Texas, Murphy knows such groups exist around his state. When he was attending Texas A&M University in the early 1970s, a friend (who thought he should be aware of their existence) invited him to a gathering that turned out to be a group of Satanists.

While clean cut, ordinary-looking students, several told him they were there to participate in Satanic rituals, he said. "I was so shocked I didn't know what to say. I just wanted to get out of there."

Although he left before any rituals occurred, over the years he has encountered several people who said they were involved in Satan worship. The most blatant example occurred last year in a class at Azel High School, where he was working as a substitute teacher.

A 16-year-old boy challenged him about his service as a preacher and told him God was wrong, Murphy said. He told the youth the one he followed was a liar and a deceiver, and asked why he followed someone who wanted to destroy him.

"He said God was the evil one, Satan had the power and that God was going to 'get it' in the end," the pastor recalled. "We had a pretty good discussion. He said when he turned 18 he was going to commit a sacrificial suicide. The other students were pretty shocked."

Most people are when they hear what Murphy encountered, but he believes Christians should prepare for more types of these confrontations in the years to come.

"I think we'll be faced with it in our ministries in the future," he said. "We will be attacked more openly."

Chaplain counsels inmates
to 'go through the pain'

By Clay Renick

PETROS, Tenn. (BP)--Joe Crichton sees a pattern among inmates at Brushy Mountain State Prison in Tennessee. Many are Christians. Some felt called to preach. But their start in crime had a common theme.

They had a personal loss in childhood. Parents divorced or a family member died.

"What they do to get away from the pain is to take drugs," Crichton said. Crime starts from there.

He saw a similar dynamic in his own life. Although raised in a Christian family, Crichton joined a gang and dropped out of high school.

"I became a full-fledged atheist at 20 years old," he said. "I didn't accept ready-made explanations."

He became a Christian at age 9 but later told his mother he did not believe in God. She was praying for one of her sons to become a pastor and died a month later.

Crichton became an alcoholic.

"Anytime you can avoid the pain, you stop the growth," he said. He spent 10 years in the Navy and started dating a Christian. She refused to continue seeing him unless Crichton attended church. He agreed and went to a revival.

The message was on love. Love that endures. And Crichton felt an inner urge.

"Joe," it seemed to say. "This is what I want you to tell my people."

He stopped drinking, got involved in church and married his girlfriend. Later he entered seminary and saw the need to grieve through his mother's death.

"Grief is experiencing the pain," he said. He went home for lunch one day and had a simple prayer: "Rest in peace," he told his mom.

A chaplain's job opened with the Tennessee Corrections Department. Brushy Mountain has 515 inmates. Approximately 230 of them are there until they can be placed in other prisons. But they also have maximum security for violent offenders.

"This is the end of the line," Crichton said. "Inmates call it the tombs."

Crichton's job includes supervision for 270 volunteers, counsel for staff members and direction of the Alcoholic Anonymous groups.

He sometimes gets threatening notes. One inmate said he wanted to kill Crichton because he wouldn't allow X-rated movies at the prison.

"The most fulfilling time I have is when I minister to someone who's had a death in the family," he said.

"They feel totally helpless. The best thing I can do is say, 'Tell me about your mother' -- or the person who died. Silently I'm praying, 'God, I don't know what to do. Tell me what to do next.'"

Those prayers often come with a crisis in their lives.

"If they stopped grieving at 13, you've got a 13-year-old in an adult body," Crichton said.

He struggles to replace the old learning with principles from the Bible. But that can only start after old wounds are opened.

One man was in prison for committing eight armed robberies.

"I found that his father had died," Crichton recounted.

The inmate had been a youth evangelist and believed God had to answer prayer if you prayed the right way. But the man's father had cancer. He prayed for healing, and his dad died anyway. "He got mad at God," Crichton explained, "and began drinking. And from drinking, he went on to drugs."

That led to an armed robbery.

Even in prison the man dreamed about his father.

"Let him go on to be with Jesus," Crichton suggested.

"I could never forget my father," the man answered.

"No, not forget him. Just bury him."

He did in prayer. Later the inmate said he was about to kill himself the day before their conversation on grief.

"Grieving doesn't take that long," Crichton said.

"Maybe if they can get it out in the church, they won't get it out in the street ... and won't have to go to prison."

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Health care blends
evangelism, ministry

By Sarah Zimmerman

Baptist Press
11/22/94

SAN ANTONIO, Texas (BP)--Home missionary and nurse Melanie Boyet offered free health screenings to people living in an Atlanta high-rise housing project.

As she shared Christ while taking their blood pressure, one man suggested she should have been a preacher.

"If I had put a sign in the lobby offering free preacher visits, would you have signed up for one?" Boyet asked.

Such examples of medical care opening doors for evangelism were the focus of a health care ministries conference Nov. 17-19. The conference, the first of its kind, was jointly sponsored by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Speakers challenged participants to follow Jesus' command to "preach the kingdom of God and heal the sick."

When people come to the Shepherd's Clinic of Seventh Avenue Baptist Church, Baltimore, "They're not interested in God. They're interested in feeling better," said administrator Kathy Moss.

Free Bibles are available in the clinic's waiting room, and Moss said most of the patients are at least open to having someone pray with them. Moss said she has learned to tell by the look on someone's face whether he or she is willing to talk about the gospel.

In Columbus, Ohio, the patient information form at a weekly dental clinic asks visitors whether they attend church. A trained volunteer is available in the waiting room to talk to patients about their spiritual health, said Art Bingham, home missionary and pastor/director of the Stowe Baptist Center, site of the clinic.

The two dentists working at the clinic also are Christians who share Christ with the patients. Yet Bingham said leading a person to make a profession of faith can be a slow process requiring many contacts.

The first part of the process may be what Eric Raddatz calls "presence evangelism." Raddatz, coordinator for the Baptist AIDS Partnership of North Carolina, said when he started working at a home for AIDS patients, his first evangelistic step was to get to know the patients, demonstrate his concern for them and earn their trust.

After about two months, he began a Bible study and saw several residents trust Christ as Savior.

Christians must "walk through the world with a caring spirit that will not let us ignore the ill," said Don Anderson director of San Antonio's ecumenical center for religion and health.

"Baptists have prided themselves on their hospital system, but we have bought ourselves out of personal responsibility," Anderson said. "An institution can never substitute for persons. People can be just as lonely and isolated in a Baptist hospital as a county hospital.

"There must be something quantitatively different about Christian health care," Anderson said. "The healing power of Christian caring augments everything science can do for a sick individual. Christian healing is all about loving enough to go out of your way to make a difference to one person."

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Variety of ministries
address health care

By Sarah Zimmerman

SAN ANTONIO, Texas (BP)--Like the options in medical school, health care ministries can be general or specific.

Examples of ministries cited during a three-day health care ministries conference ranged from a foot clinic where feet are washed, toenails are cut and calluses are filed to a health clinic specifically for children.

Additional examples of health care ministries include:

-- Dental clinics. A weekly clinic at Stowe Baptist Center in Columbus, Ohio, offers almost every form of dental care except orthodontics. Two Christian dentists volunteer their time for the Monday night clinics.

When the clinic started 12 years ago, the dental chair was a metal folding chair placed close to a wall so the patient could lean his head back, said Art Bingham, pastor/director of the Stowe Baptist Center.

The clinic has expanded with donations of used equipment, but Bingham said all a church needs to start a dental clinic are a "committed Christian dentist and a place to go."

Nearly 600 people receive their regular dental care through the clinic, Bingham said. The receptionist is a woman who started attending the Baptist center's church after visiting the clinic.

-- Prevention programs. "Seventy percent of all illnesses that cause death can be moderated through diet," said Lillianne Goeders, county extension agent for the Texas Agriculture Extension Service. She urged church leaders to teach and model healthy habits such as eating less fat and more fiber, having regular check-ups and exercising.

Prevention includes sanitation, said Bill Pinson, executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. A clean water supply, adequate housing and a pest-free environment are sanitation issues related to health, he said.

Pinson challenged Christians to address such issues through the political process by running for city council or lobbying for a specific cause.

Providing inoculations against childhood diseases is another form of prevention, Pinson said.

-- Drug abuse prevention, intervention and aftercare. Tobey Pitman, home missionary and director of the Brantley Baptist Center in New Orleans, said churches should teach the dangers of alcohol and drug abuse when children are age 12 or younger. If churches do not address such issues, those who abuse drugs will not come to the church for help, Pitman said.

Another way to address drug abuse is to offer support groups and counseling, Pitman said. Church members could intervene to help someone realize he has a problem and needs help. Members can also offer moral support to someone recovering from an addiction.

Ministries to families of addicts include a safe place to go if the addict becomes abusive, parenting classes and information centers that remind people this life style is not normal.

-- Pre-natal care. A survey of needs in the Waco, Texas, area found while pre-natal care was available, the women who needed it most were not going to the clinics or not following doctors directions.

A new program beginning Dec. 1 will match women needing special attention with a nurse or social worker as a mentor, said Larry Lyon, director of the Baylor University Center for Community Research and Development.

His vision is for church members to be role models who transport pregnant women to pre-natal clinics then help them follow their instructions.

By themselves, "churches will never be a big player in health care," Lyon said. "But churches interacting with health care organizations can make a big difference."

Homework assigned to churches
considering medical ministry By Sarah Zimmerman

SAN ANTONIO, Texas (BP)--Churches can address their community's medical needs in a number of ways, but home missionary Fred Loper recommends doing some homework first.

"A lot of things are easier and cheaper to provide than health care," Loper said during a health care ministries conference Nov. 17-19 in San Antonio. "Count the cost before you get involved."

However, Loper added, "God can do so much even with our simple or misguided efforts if he's in what's going on. This is a spiritual journey, not just for our community but for us, too."

Before beginning a medical ministry, assess the community by gathering facts, not merely opinions, said Loper, a physician. "We need to learn things we think we already know and question all our assumptions."

Representatives from hospitals, health departments, pharmacies, the Salvation Army, bus drivers, policemen, local physicians and clinics can provide information about health needs, he said. Spending time in the community is important for making personal observations and building relationships, he added.

A thorough assessment can be a lengthy process, Loper said. He cited a Baltimore medical ministry that began two years after the church initially considered it.

Churches also should consider how to make their ministries distinctively Christian, Loper said. "Our goal is not just quality health care, but doing quality health care in Jesus' name and power."

For more information on starting a health care ministry contact the Southern Home Mission Board church and community ministries department at 1350 Spring St. NW, Atlanta, GA 30367 or call home missionary Fred Loper at (405) 528-7688.

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CHRISTMAS REFLECTION

It isn't easy to take Christ
out of the Christmas season

By Betty L. Rosian

Baptist Press
11/22/94

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Merry Mas! You know, "Mas," what we would have if we took Christ out of Christmas.

Hordes of people are trying to do this. Right before our eyes, this beautiful, sacred season is being neutralized into an early winter festival.

There is no concern that Christmas will be eliminated entirely. There are too many good things about it. Besides being a necessary boost to the economy each fall, Christmas brings warmth and color at an otherwise chilly and wan time of year. It becomes a reason to put aside negatives and take on altruistic positives. But slowly, insidiously, the emphasis has shifted from the Babe in the manger to the old man in a red suit.

What's more, many Christians choose to put aside the yule traditions, either caught up with the changes or fearing the traditions were founded in paganism.

So let's take a look at what the season would be without Christ.

Merry Mas! Wait a minute. We wouldn't have "Mas" either. The word "Christmas" is derived from the words "Christ's Mass." We'll have to come up with an entirely different term for the occasion. A something-or-other festival. Give me time.

Santa Claus would have to go. The original Saint Nicholas (or Sinter Klass, in Dutch) was a bishop of Myra in Asia Minor in the A.D. 300s. A man of the cloth. A generous one, to be sure. But still a man of the cloth.

The Christmas tree would be eliminated next. Scandinavians introduced the evergreen tree as part of their Christmas festivals. Just as well because trees wouldn't be nearly as festive without lights.

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Lighting a tree was Martin Luther's idea, using lights to represent the glory and beauty of the stars over Bethlehem the night Christ was born. It goes without saying, no more stars. But then, if someone is not looking for Christ, there is no need for them.

Lights in the window? Forget it. The custom comes from the Irish, who leave a candle burning in the window to light the way for the Christ Child on Christmas Eve.

Here's the stinger -- the custom of giving gifts would have to stop. This harks back to the gifts the Wise Men brought to the Christ Child.

Wrapping and secrecy? We can thank Saint Nicholas, famous for his generosity. He often went out at night and clandestinely took presents to the needy. People came to believe that any surprise gift came from Saint Nicholas. But we have already discredited him, so let's move on.

Forget the yule (or Juul) log. This came from the Norse, who, after they became Christians, made the annual burning of a huge oak log an important part of their Christmas ceremonies.

Christmas music began with litanies of the Christian church. As early as the A.D. 100s, the bishop of Rome urged his people to sing in celebration of the birthday of the Lord.

Granted, all Christmas music is not sacred. There are numerous secular songs to fit the occasion, if one thinks that "All I Want for Christmas Is My Two Front Teeth" can match "Silent Night" for bringing meaning to the day or "Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer" can touch the heart like Handel's "Messiah."

We wouldn't have to close down businesses on Dec. 25 to celebrate. This date was chosen in A.D. 354 by Bishop Liberius of Rome. It was not because he thought that had actually been the date of Christ's birth, but more likely because it was the day Romans already were observing the Feast of Saturn, celebrating the birthday of the sun. Christians honor Christ, the Son, as the Light of the World.

Take all of this away, and we're left with just another day on the calendar with no particular significance and no real reason to celebrate.

Still, the world wants Christmas. Overlooking Christ, however, does not manage to remove him from Christmas no matter how hard some try.

Christmas has been turned into a whopping spectacular. If not Christ, what else could possibly warrant this celebration? Certainly not a tired need for mid-winter festivities or a desperate desire to spur the economy.

Perhaps, while we can still remember what it's all about, we should bow in reverence and consider the message of the Charles Wesley carol, preserved through the centuries:

"Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see.

Hail th' incarnate Deity."

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Rosian is a free-lance writer living in Johnstown, Pa. This article first appeared in the December issue of Home Life magazine. Copyright 1994. All rights reserved. Used by permission of the author.

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