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Dec mber 5, 1994

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**Modern-day Philip takes gospel  
to the ends of the earth**

**By Dwayne Hastings**

**Baptist Press  
12/5/94**

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--George Reichter (not his real name) harbored no thoughts of serving on the mission field. Entering seminary, he had convinced him lf God was calling him to a church pastorate. Committed to his own desire and determined to avoid hearing a call to missions, Reichter refused to go to chapel at seminary on the days when foreign missionaries were speaking.

Today Reichter and his family serve with the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board in an area of the African continent where he works among a people group that had, prior to his arrival, shown no indication of ever having heard the gospel, and where the sharing of the Christian faith is restricted and oppressed.

In 1983, following his surrender to God's call to fulltime foreign missions, Reichter was dispatched to Tanzania as a career missionary with the FMB. Six years later, he was reassigned through the FMB's Cooperative Services International to three North Africa countries, where he still serves. Due to the political and religious environment of the area, Reichter cannot disclose his specific mission field.

"Even in the most remote part of the world, in a land area the size of the state of New Mexico that holds 1.5 million tribespeople, I have found, one-by-one, folks who will believe in Christ," Reichter said. Speaking during chapel at S utheastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C. Nov. 29, he said w ne d only look to the Book of Acts for a picture of one who had a heart for the lost who were in their day similarly isolated from the rest of the world.

"Philip was prepared for whatever God would bring him," Reichter said. "The 8th chapter of Acts reveals that a great revival occurred as Philip preached. God working through him brought forth a tremendous harvest among the Samaritans, a disfavored people among the Jews."

These were the nearby reachable people of that day said Reichter, noting Philip continued to preach Jesus: the gospel message eventually reaching to the most rem te part of the ancient world.

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"Aswan on the Nile river was the last outpost of the Roman Empire. Yet God had a strategy to reach beyond that human barrier, he led Philip to a roadside encounter with the second most important person in the Ethiopian kingdom, a court official who was responsible for the oversight of the royal treasury."

Reichter said scripture reveals when God commanded, Philip promptly obeyed. "An angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, 'Arise and go' and he went. Philip was one who took on the hard cases -- reaching out to the Samaritans, the Ethiopian, and finally, the Philistines."

In his work in North Africa, Reichter said he had been amazed to see how God was working among the people. Reichter's ministry includes water projects and food distribution among the nomadic people.

"We provide these basic needs in the name of Christ," he said, taking care of the people's physical needs during the day and feeding their spiritual needs by evangelism during the night.

While the work is difficult and decisions for Christ come only in a trickle, Reichter knows God is working in his midst: "There was a tribesman working with us on the water project who said he went to the mosque day after day and nothing really happened in his heart."

Hearing the prayers that Reichter and a FMB journeyman uttered, the man told Reichter he wanted to pray the way they did. "It was some time later," Reichter said, "this man came back to me and said it was as if he put all his problems in a little bag and lifted them up to Jesus and he took them."

There are not many who are willing to go to the ends of the earth said Reichter. "Yet I believe scripture's account of Philip represents what modern missions is all about, going out to people groups that do not appear to be receptive to the gospel; but who, like this tribesman, have deep within them an aching need to hear about Jesus."

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California church raises \$23.5 million on weekend for building

Baptist Press  
12/5/94

LAKE FOREST, Calif. (BP)--Members of Saddleback Valley Community Church, Laguna Hills, Calif. raised \$23.5 million in cash and commitments on one weekend to build a worship center, Sunday school buildings, and a youth center.

"In the most materialistic county in America, you have been part of a miracle of generosity," founding pastor Rick Warren told the Orange County congregation after announcing the results of a special "Time To Build" offering received the weekend of Nov.19-20.

With an average Sunday attendance of nearly 9,000, Saddleback has attracted national attention as one of the 20 largest churches in America -- without owning a building. Worshipers currently meet in four services held in a cavernous tent while four simultaneous Sunday schools are taught in portable classrooms.

Before moving to its 74 acre site in 1992, the church met in 57 locations during its 15-year history, including high school gyms, recreational buildings and community centers.

"We've been far more interested in building people, than in building buildings. So we put it off as long as we could," said Warren. "Most churches build too soon, so they end up building too small."

Warren began Saddleback church in his home with one family in 1980, after graduating from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and moving to southern California.

The church was recently honored for being the fastest growing church in the history of the Southern Baptist Convention according to research by Elmer Towns, dean of Liberty University, Lynchburg, Va.

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Church leaders had set a goal of \$9 million for the six-week campaign. But on Nov. 19 and 20 members gave \$2.4 million in cash and pledged to contribute \$21.1 million more over the next three years. The cash offering is believed to be the largest ever for any church. The congregation's children gave over one ton of coins, totaling about \$12,000.

Church officials said exceeding the goal enables them to speed up building plans and avoid debt. But Warren, who eschewed fund-raising gimmicks and consultants, said the offering's greatest legacy will be spiritual growth. "This was really a miracle of sacrifice, commitment, and character, not a miracle of fund-raising," he said.

Instead of using traditional fund-raising approaches, Warren designed a campaign to teach six character qualities: faith, hope, love, sacrifice, commitment, and generosity. "The total focus was on raising disciples, not raising funds," said associate pastor Tom Holladay. Saddleback intends to make the materials available to other churches.

Hundreds of members wrote letters telling of miracles that occurred when they pledged more than they thought they could afford on faith, only to receive an unexpected promotion or cash windfall. Others told of significant sacrifices.

There was the unemployed woman who committed to give \$7 a week, the family that gave their life savings, the man who sold his television set so he could give an offering, and a wealthy couple who decided to give \$1 million to equal such sacrifices.

"We gave not out of guilt or pressure, but because our lives have been changed by this church, and now we want to help others," member Jerry Duer said.

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The Orange County Register contributed to this report.

Kentucky, Indiana churches  
unite to save marriages

By Marv Knox

Baptist Press  
12/5/94

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Churches from across the denominational spectrum have banded together to save marriages in the Louisville, Ky.-Southern Indiana area.

Ministers representing at least 14 Christian faith groups met at Walnut Street Baptist Church in Louisville Nov. 29 to sign new "Recommended Guidelines for Marriages in Kentuckiana." The guidelines will shape participating churches' policies regarding weddings as well as their programs for strengthening existing marriages.

Adoption of the guidelines makes Louisville/Southern Indiana the largest metropolitan region in the nation to implement a community marriage policy, said Mike McManus, a syndicated columnist whose "Marriage Savers" book promotes such a policy.

"You can create a new day for marriage and divorce in Louisville," McManus urged about 80 ministers and denominational leaders who attended the ceremony. "If you want to get married in a church in Louisville, it ought to be more difficult than standing before a justice of the peace.

"You can be a beacon on a hill to others. ... You can push the divorce rate in half in five years."

"Our churches possess a distinct opportunity to nurture and educate those contemplating marriage," added Jude Weisenbeck, director of the Archdiocese of Louisville's office of ecumenism.

"Because nearly 75 percent of all weddings are conducted by clergy, we believe our churches and ministers are singularly positioned to equip couples to deal with the emotional, social, interpersonal and economic stress that can harm marriage and family life."

The drive for community marriage guidelines in Louisville began when Gary and Sherry Hendricks, members of Shively Baptist Church in Louisville and regional directors of Baptist Marriage Encounter, read "Marriage Savers."

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They were inspired by McManus' reports of how marriage policies had helped reduce the divorce rates in several communities across the country. So they enlisted the Kentuckiana Interfaith Community, the area's ecumenical agency, to help form the Kentuckiana Marriage Task Force in 1993.

The task force, now called Marriage Covenant Partners, spent a year developing guidelines suitable for congregations spanning the doctrinal and racial spectrums of Greater Louisville.

The task force's ability to span those spectrums is significant and vital to the success of the guidelines, said John Lepper, director of family ministry for the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

"An important element of this effort is that pastors across denominational lines are joining in their efforts to help couples prior to their wedding ceremonies and throughout their marriages," Lepper stressed. "This proves we don't have to set aside doctrines to lift up the value of marriage."

The Kentuckiana guidelines state:

-- "We encourage the practice of sexual abstinence outside of the marriage covenant."

-- "We encourage a minimum of four months of marriage preparation. This time begins with the initial premarital appointment and continues until the wedding date. ..."

-- "We encourage clergy and/or mentoring couples to develop follow-up contacts with newly married couples approximately six and 12 months after the wedding."

-- "We encourage all married couples to attend programs designed to enrich and strengthen marriages."

-- "We encourage married couples experiencing serious difficulties in their relationship to seek sources of help."

-- "We encourage clergy to exercise a leadership role in helping couples bond for life by participating in and promoting programs to enrich marriage and family life; preaching sermons on the theology of marriage; modeling healthy relationships; cooperating with the clergy of different denominations during interchurch preparation (and) ... to foster continued ministry to interchurch couples."

The guidelines can cut the divorce rate and improve marriages by touching several critical areas of marital relationships, McManus said.

First, the mandatory premarital counseling and a four-month waiting period will provide help for strengthening new marriages and even prevent doomed marriages from taking place, he noted.

The guideline booklet, which includes 10 pages of resource lists, suggests premarital counseling include a test to help engaged couples compare their ideas about important marital issues. Every engagement broken by the outcome of such a test is a doomed marriage saved, McManus insisted.

The guideline booklet also suggests an engaged/newly married couple be assigned to a "mentor couple," a wife-husband team with a healthy marriage and training to help other couples develop strong marital traits.

And the booklet urges married couples in participating churches to take advantage of a variety of programs that strengthen and salvage marriages.

Together, the overlapping guidelines will create a community "environment" conducive to healthy marriages, promised McManus, who met with 250 people in Owensboro the next day.

That environment is extremely important for the entire region, claimed host Pastor Bob Long of Walnut Street Church. "You can measure the health and vitality of a society, in part, by the health of its marriages," he said.

The KBC's Lepper agreed. "If ministers are serious about helping their communities, then it is worth their time and effort to save marriages," he said.

Lepper compared the potential impact of the marriage-guideline movement to the results of True Love Waits. The sexual abstinence program aimed at teens "has swept the nation and the world," he noted. "Likewise, pastors can take these marriage guidelines and lead their communities to save marriages."

Copies of the Kentuckiana marriage guidelines are available from Lepper's office, at the Kentucky Baptist Convention, Box 43433, Louisville, Ky. 40253, phone (502) 245-4101. In addition, "Marriage Savers" materials are available from the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

The good-natured discussion that went into the formation of the marriage guidelines will serve the church community well as it begins the harder process of implementing them, predicted Gregory Wingenbach, executive director of the Kentuckiana Interfaith Community.

"This has been a wonderful effort," he said, "but now the real work begins."

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SBC vice president pleads  
'launch, let down' nets

By Sarah Zimmerman

Baptist Press  
12/5/94

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Southern Baptists need to "launch out and let down their nets," the convention's second vice president told 200 evangelism and mission leaders from across the nation.

Gary Frost, pastor of Rising Star Baptist Church in Youngstown, Ohio, based his message to state convention and Home Mission Board leaders on the example of Jesus in Luke 5.

As crowds gathered to hear Jesus preach, he got into a boat where he addressed them. Then he told Peter to launch into deep water and let down the nets even though he had fished all night and caught nothing. When he obeyed Christ, Peter was overwhelmed with fish.

As the disciples had to leave the shoreline to catch fish, Southern Baptists must leave their comfort zones and get involved with hurting people, Frost said. "We're experts at touting society's evils, but they need a demonstration that someone actually cares. We have to demonstrate compassion and challenge people to be responsible."

Other lessons for Southern Baptists from that passage, Frost said, are:

-- Christ is concerned about the spiritual hunger of the multitudes. People today are spiritually hungry, Frost said, but they are "drinking from the wrong fountains" such as cults and psychic connections.

-- Jesus initiated the contact with the fishermen. Likewise, God initiates salvation and ministry, Frost said. "I'm thankful ministry is not based on my charisma, my energy or my strength."

-- At the point of exasperation from running out of energy and desperation from running out of strategies, God speaks. Frost noted the future disciples were professional fishermen who had worked all night and caught nothing. They were tired and frustrated when Jesus gave them a successful plan for catching fish.

-- Christ's commands require obedience, even if they don't make sense. "Peter and company obeyed even though they did not understand. It's OK to share your frustration with the directive, but you've got to come to a point where you say 'nevertheless, I'll obey.'"

-- When the fish were caught, they were not separated by type, and Southern Baptists should not let ethnic differences keep them from sharing the gospel, said Frost, an African-American. "The bottom line is not ethnicity but lostness. If you're green or blue or yellow, you're a sinner if you don't know Jesus."

-- Pulling in all the fish caught that day required help from other fishermen. Southern Baptists should cooperate with other Christians to reach their communities for Christ, Frost said. "The kingdom of God is larger than your church, your association, your state convention, and the Southern Baptist Convention," he said. "One of the greatest evils today is division in the body of Christ."

-- Just as Peter confessed his sinfulness, Frost said "when God reveals himself, we're exposed to our unworthiness. No one struts when a miracle occurs."

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**Presnall Wood sets retirement  
from Texas Baptist Standard**

DALLAS (BP)--Presnall H. Wood, editor of the Baptist Standard since July 1977, announced to the paper's board of directors Dec. 2 he will retire Dec. 31, 1995.

"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding," Wood quoted Proverbs 3:5-6 in his resignation statement. "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

That scripture, he said, has played an important part in his life and that of his family, was instrumental in his coming as editor and was "important now" in announcing his intention to retire.

"Any such announcement in Baptist life today prompts questions centering on why, why now and what are we going to do," Wood said.

"Why? Because we believe it to be the will of God. There has been nothing but full support from the directors, and when my intention of retirement was made to them they asked that I reconsider and continue.

"Why now? At the close of 1995 I will be only 16 months away from age 65, which the policy manual of the Standard says is the age of normal retirement. For many years I have felt age 63 should be the time for my retirement. It is transition time in Baptist life, and it is time for transition at the Baptist Standard.

"What are we going to do? My wife, Joyce, and I will continue to live in Dallas. Retirement will afford additional time for family, personal interests and other ministries. Texas Baptists have been kind through the years to give me opportunities to supply preach and speak on special church occasions such as anniversaries and dedications. If such opportunities are presented in the future, they will be prayerfully considered.

"Joyce and I are so thankful to Texas Baptists and for the Baptist Standard board of directors, and I ask all Texas Baptists to join us in prayer for the directors as they seek God's will for the next editor of the Standard.

"I look forward to serving through 1995, and I urge all Texas Baptists to join me in supporting the Baptist Standard."

Wood was pastor of Park Place Baptist Church, Houston, and a member of the board of directors of the Standard when he was elected editor, succeeding John J. Hurt, who had been editor from 1966-77. Wood has served a longer tenure as editor than any of his predecessors. The previous longest tenure was by F.M. McConnell who was editor from 1928-44.

W. H. "Bill" Brian Jr. of Amarillo, chairman of the Standard directors, said the directors accepted the retirement notice "with deep regret."

"We are most grateful to Dr. Wood for agreeing to serve until the end of 1995. This kind of generous spirit and devotion to duty has marked Dr. Wood's tenure as editor.

"When I think of Presnall H. Wood, I think of integrity, reliance on the Lord, love for people, good humor and a calm resolve to tell the truth to Texas Baptists -- and trust the Lord.

"A real sense of 'family' exists among the Standard staff and board of directors. We are exceedingly glad for Dr. and Mrs. Wood that as they venture into retirement -- no doubt continuing to be active in Baptist life -- they will have the precious memory that Dr. Wood permitted himself to be used of God in the service of Texas Baptists as editor of the Baptist Standard."

Brian noted the editor is elected by the directors of the Standard and said he would appoint an editor search committee before the end of 1994 to begin work in early 1995.

**MBTS presidential search committee  
sponsors campus listening session**

By Brenda J. Sanders

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--Trustees composing a seven-member presidential search committee for Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary sponsored a "listening session" at the institution's Kansas City campus Dec. 2.

Current students, faculty, administrative staff and representatives of the seminary's alumni met with the trustee group throughout the day, and were encouraged to dialogue with search committee members concerning the selection of Midwestern's next president.

Trustee chairman Lewis Adkison of Colorado Springs, Colo., also serves as chairman of the presidential search committee. He said the listening session was an effort to open the lines of communication with a number of seminary constituencies.

"This input was extremely helpful to the search committee and demonstrated to us a positive interest in developing a profile for Midwestern's next president," Adkison said. "Some of the qualifications that were repeated by the various constituencies included seeking a president who will be a strong leader, who is spiritually mature and who is evangelistic."

The search committee elected trustee Dennis Wood of Tempe, Ariz., to serve as vice chairman of the group and Richard Proctor of Wynne, Ark., to serve as clerk.

Other search committee members include: Tim Harvey of Byron, Ga.; Tony Mattia of Wamego, Kan.; Ronnie Rogers of Hot Springs, Ark.; and Stoney Shaw of St. Louis.

Adkison said an announcement soon will be forthcoming concerning the procedure for submitting nominations for seminary president to the search committee.

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**SWBTS to award 43 doctoral  
degrees in fall graduation**

Baptist Press  
12/5/94

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Forty-three doctoral degrees are expected to be awarded at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's fall 1994 commencement, the highest number of doctorates ever for a fall graduation at the seminary, according to Rebecca Morton, registrar and director of enrollment services.

This semester's total number of doctorates will be 24 higher than the number conferred at fall 1993 graduation.

Fall 1994 commencement will begin at 10 a.m. Dec. 16 in the sanctuary of Travis Avenue Baptist Church, Fort Worth. In his first graduation as Southwestern's president, Ken Hemphill is expected to confer 414 diplomas to 359 students, with 47 graduates each receiving two degrees. The number of diploma/graduates is expected to be 20 students and the number of masters level graduates is expected to be 296 students. Twenty-one of the prospective graduates are international students, Morton said.

Seven married couples are expected to graduate.

In addition to Southwestern's prospective graduates, 10 graduates of the Seminary Extension program in Nashville, Tenn., are expected to receive certificates during the ceremony.

Keynote speaker for fall graduation will be Jerry Rankin, president of the SBC Foreign Mission Board. Prayers will be led by David Kirkpatrick, professor of theology at Southwestern, and William E. Young, a childhood education and family consultant at the Baptist Sunday School Board. Music will be led by Scotty Gray, acting dean of the Southwestern School of Church Music. Albert Travis, professor of organ, will be organist. The soloist will be Dale Wilbur, who will also receive the master of music degree.

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**BWA Rwanda Fund gets boost from  
African American Baptist groups**      **By Wendy Ryan**

WASHINGTON (BP)--Three of the largest African American Baptist denominations, the National Baptist Convention USA Inc., the Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Convention USA and the Progressive National Baptist Convention Inc. representing 10 million Baptists, gave \$112,000 for Rwandan relief to Baptist World Aid, the relief and development arm of the Baptist World Alliance, and promised another \$50,000.

The three African-American Baptist groups are member bodies of the Baptist World Alliance, the global organization of Baptists with more than 39 million baptized believers and a community of 100,000 million worshippers.

As they gave the money in a special presentation at BWA headquarters Nov. 30, the African American Baptist leaders pointed out African American Baptists already had given more than \$90,000 for Rwandan relief through other agencies.

The African American Baptist response was coordinated by John O. Peterson, vice-president of the BWA and senior minister of Alfred Street Baptist Church, Alexandria, Va., affiliated with the National Baptist Convention, the largest African American Baptist denomination in the United States.

To date, BWAid has received approximately \$750,000 for Rwandan relief.

"We have been touched by the plight of our Rwandan brothers and sisters," said Norman Smith, chairman of the executive board of the Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Convention, who presented a check to Denton Lotz, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, and Paul Montacute, director of Baptist World Aid.

"What I present represents a united effort of Lott Carey's 650,000 members," Smith said. Lott Carey already has given \$25,000 through another organization.

Charles Walker, chairman of the Foreign Mission Board of the National Baptist Convention Inc., presented a check of \$50,000 on behalf of the NBC.

"Since 1882, the NBC has historically and traditionally shown its support for Africa," said Walker citing the \$1.2 million the NBC gave for Ethiopian aid as one recent example.

"We want to bridge the gap between hurting people and a healing Savior," said Ronald K. Hill, director of the Baptist Global Mission Bureau of the Progressive National Baptist Convention Inc., who presented a check for \$10,000.

Hill said the PNBC already has given \$65,000 through other agencies to Rwanda which it has adopted as a "special field of labor."

"We are delighted to see the tremendous contribution of African American Baptists," said Lotz, who received the leaders and thanked them on behalf of the BWA. "When tragedy strikes, we all belong together."

"Your contributions will be marked in a special way by your brothers and sisters in Rwanda," said Montacute.

Eleazar Ziherambere, Rwandan refugee and Africa regional director of the BWA, now in Nairobi, Kenya, praised the African American leaders for their gifts in a faxed message for the ceremony.

"While the Western media has showed how Western people are helping, it failed to show what Zairians, Burundese and Tanzanians have done," Ziherambere said. "We heard so much of what Americans did, especially Caucasian Americans, but we never heard about what African-Americans did. I will be a faithful interpreter of your love to our people in tragedy."



**Two church growth  
conferences cancelled**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Two Great Commission 95 church growth conferences planned by the Baptist Sunday School Board for Feb. 20-23 and March 20-23, 1995, in San Diego and Atlanta have been cancelled due to low registration and budget adjustments.

Mike Miller, director of the church leadership services division, said registration for neither conference had reached 100 as of Nov. 30 and a registration of 500 was needed to offer the variety of conferences planned related to church size and growth need. Even with 500 registrants, the conferences would have included a sizable financial investment by the board.

He said content of the conferences had been based on the 1.5.4 concept of church growth outlined in the book, Kingdom Principles for Church Growth by Gene Mims, vice president of the church growth group.

"Other conferences will emphasize 1.5.4 over the next two years," Miller said. "In addition, both 1.5.4 and church growth in general will be the focus of resources for churches."

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CORRECTION: In (BP) story titled "D.C. Baptists voice repentance for racism dated 11/30/94, please change the dollar amount in the third paragraph, second sentence to read:

An operating budget of \$996,424 was adopted for 1995. Of this total, \$450,000, is expected to come from DC convention churches.

Thanks,  
Baptist Press

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**(BP)**

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