

**(BP)**

**SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL  
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES  
Historical Commission, SBC  
Nashville, Tennessee  
-- BAPTIST PRESS  
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

December 7, 1994

94-198

EGYPT--Assemblies pastor arrested for trying to convert Muslims.  
TENNESSEE--Cuban couple celebrates gift of freedom this season; photo.  
DALLAS--Church facing tithing lawsuit encouraged by Clinton stance.  
DELAWARE--Maryland/Delaware Baptists maintain giving channel to SBC.  
KENTUCKY--2 school systems clear Wednesdays, Sundays.  
TENNESSEE--First-Person: At age 7, Tyler begins his journey of faith.

**Assemblies pastor arrested  
for trying to convert Muslims**

**Baptist Press  
12/7/94**

CAIRO, Egypt (BP)--Assemblies of God pastor William Gayyid is being held in prison, accused of trying to convert Muslims to the Christian faith, according to church leaders in the Middle East.

Gayyid, said to be about 50 years old, was arrested in late November as he prayed with three Muslim women who had come for prayer after a morning worship service at his church in the Wiley area of Greater Cairo. Police at first released him after the Muslim women told police he was a godly man who had not tried to convert them. But they re-arrested him about half an hour later.

Gayyid is being held in Tora Prison in Cairo, described by Christians who have been held there as "a hellhole," where torture, starvation and other rough treatment are common. Gayyid is being held in the worst of two wings in the prison, according to his lawyer who visited him the week of Dec. 5. The lawyer told church leaders that Gayyid's condition is "not good," but provided no further details.

Former prisoners say often eight men are forced to sleep together in a 6-foot-square room and are given stagnant water to drink. The prison does not feed prisoners and relatives and friends are required to provide food.

Assemblies of God leaders in the United States, England and Sweden, and as far away as Australia and Korea, have called for Christians around the world to pray for Gayyid. "In the end it will be prayer as much as any legal maneuvering, that gets him out," said one leader.

Egyptian laws against sedition allow authorities to arrest any person for any reason and hold him for 45 days without communication with the outside world, according to Assemblies of God leaders in Cyprus. The detention period may be automatically renewed for another 45 days. During this three-month period, charges do not have to be filed nor anyone informed of the prisoner's whereabouts.

Church leaders do not know if charges have been filed against the pastor. In Gayyid's case, his son is being allowed to take clothes and food to his father every other day but has not been allowed to see him. Church leaders say this supports their fears that Gayyid is being mistreated.

--more--

Emergency sedition laws have been used by government leaders in the past against the proselytizing or conversion of Muslims by Christians. Charges that could be filed against Gayyid include the vague one of using women to further his cause, open to wide interpretation by authorities. He also could be charged with preaching to Muslims in his church -- not illegal if Muslims voluntarily entered. Other charges could include doing magic to heal and deliver people or gathering money in the name of religion for personal gain.

Gayyid has served almost 30 years as pastor in the Wiley area. Church leaders said he is widely respected in the Muslim community for his ministry of healing and deliverance from evil spirits.

--30--

Cuban couple celebrates  
gift of freedom this season

By Peter Kung

Baptist Press  
12/7/94

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--For Christmas this year, a Baptist Sunday School Board employee and his wife, both Cuban refugees, are celebrating the unique gift of freedom.

Omar Fernandez, resource production manager in the BSSB multicultural leadership department, saw his wife, Aurelia, for the first time in nearly four years this summer when she moved from Havana to Nashville, Tenn.

That's how long it took the Cuban government to finally grant Aurelia Fernandez a permanent exit visa. Fernandez, an archaeologist and anthropologist, defected to the United States in 1991. Since then, he said he and Aurelia -- or Yeya as he calls her -- agreed to pray for her freedom at the same time every Christmas season.

The Fernandezes plan to celebrate their first Christmas together in freedom with former fellow members of International Community Church in Albuquerque, N.M., a Southern Baptist church where Fernandez was pastor when he first defected to the United States.

"They prayed for my wife's freedom for four years, and they have never met her yet. So we are going there so she can meet them and they can meet her," he said.

Fernandez was on a temporary work visa for the University of New Mexico when he asked for political asylum just four days after arriving in the United States. This will be the first Christmas he and his wife have celebrated together in complete freedom since 1959 when the Christian holiday was banned in Cuba.

"On that year, Christmas stopped being a holiday," Fernandez said, "and became a normal workday." Christians would be reported to the government if they were found celebrating Christmas.

"The Cuban government is not friendly with Christians celebrating Christmas. We would be reported as having ideological problems."

However, the Fernandezes continued to celebrate Christmas in secret, he said.

"We would put up a small tree -- less than 2 feet tall and any kind we could find. We would decorate it with silver balls rolled from chocolate wrappings."

The Fernandezes would then paint pine cones in different colors for their tree. On the night of Christmas, the family would gather around the dinner table, sing Christmas carols and pray together.

"We might not have had enough food to put on the table, but celebrating Christmas was more important than eating," he said.

His wife has not wasted any time with her newfound freedom in Christianity, Fernandez said. Just after her arrival in July, she and Fernandez started a Bible study group in their small apartment where 12 made professions of faith. Since then, Fernandez and Yeya have moved to LaVergne, Tenn., where they attend First Baptist Church, Smyrna. There, they have started a Hispanic Sunday school class. "Yeya now considers this area her home since it is the first place she came to in the United States," Fernandez said.

It is also the first place she has lived in complete freedom since the Cuban government took it away 35 years ago, he added.

--more--

Yeya spends her days practicing English and thinking of their family who remain in Cuba. The Fernandezes' son, daughter, grandson, and granddaughter are still in Cuba, as is Fernandez's mother and Yeya's sister and brother.

This Christmas Fernandez and Yeya are offering a special prayer for their family's release from Cuba.

"We are praying for a miracle for their freedom," he said.

--30--

Kung is manager of the multiethnic church growth section in the BSSB multicultural leadership department. (BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by the BSSB bureau of Baptist Press. The photo and a cutline also are posted in the SBCNet News Room.

Church facing tithing lawsuit  
encouraged by Clinton stance

By Ken Camp

Baptist Press  
12/7/94

DALLAS (BP)--When the Justice Department reversed course in mid-September, no longer siding with creditors in a bankruptcy-related tithing case against a church, it was more than a small article in the back of the morning paper to members of Cedar Bayou Baptist Church, Baytown, Texas. It was a ray of hope.

In June, Cedar Bayou Baptist Church was notified it was being sued by a Houston construction company to recoup tithes given by a member who had declared bankruptcy.

The church member was one of three men who had set up an air conditioning service department for the construction company in the mid-1970s. In 1990, nearly five years after the trio had left the company, their former employer filed suit contending the construction company had overpaid them \$20,000 each. An additional \$30,000 was added to the suit for equipment purchased through the company.

After a jury ruled in favor of the construction company, one of the men -- a longtime member of Cedar Bayou church -- declared bankruptcy. Although the construction company initially contested discharge of the bankruptcy, the parties directly involved eventually reached a settlement and the bankruptcy was concluded.

But this summer, the construction company filed suit against Cedar Bayou church. The suit declared the former company employee had given more than \$30,000 to the church between July 1, 1986, and Oct. 14, 1992, "without receiving a reasonably equivalent value in exchange for the transfer."

Although a motion to dismiss the suit filed by Cedar Bayou was granted on procedural grounds, the church feared the plaintiff would try to correct the procedural defects in a refiled lawsuit.

But actions by President Clinton Sept. 15 "took the steam out of the opposing attorney," according to Richard Steel, Cedar Bayou's pastor. In a Minnesota case, Clinton stopped a Justice Department lawyer from arguing in federal court that creditors have the right to seize money given to a church by someone headed for bankruptcy.

The case involved a couple who had given \$13,450 to Crystal Evangelical Free Church in New Hope, Minn., in the year before they declared bankruptcy. The couple's creditors had tried to obtain from the church their donations under a legal provision that prohibits people who are going bankrupt from hiding their assets.

The Justice Department in March had filed a brief supporting the creditors. But shortly before an attorney from the department was scheduled to make his argument to the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals in St. Louis, Clinton ordered Attorney General Janet Reno to reverse direction.

When the case proceeded, the bankruptcy trustee argued alone against the church. The court has not rendered its decision yet.

The case had been seen as a major test of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, signed by Clinton in 1993. The act was designed to protect religious liberty by requiring the government to show "compelling interest" before interfering in religious practices.

--more--

Friend-of-the-court briefs siding with Crystal Evangelical Free Church had been filed by a number of religious groups including the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs and the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

Forcing a church to relinquish tithes given in good faith amounts to an attempt to "undo an act of worship" that is protected by the First Amendment and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, according to Melissa Rogers, BJC associate general counsel.

"These are acts of worship, not simply financial transactions," Rogers said.

A ruling against Crystal could open churches to lawsuits by creditors seeking the forfeiture of tithe money, according to Michael Whitehead, CLC general counsel.

"Budgeting by churches becomes nearly impossible if creditors can raid today's offering plate for bad debts of a church member years ago," Whitehead said.

Steel wrote a letter to Clinton about his church's case, and Whitehead mentioned it to Joel Klein, White House counsel.

"The president is aware that Crystal creates risks for many churches like Cedar Bayou," Whitehead said. He noted the CLC is urging the Justice Department to re-enter a bankruptcy-related tithing case, arguing on the side of the church and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act rather than just withdrawing.

Both the Clinton administration and Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, a lead co-sponsor of RFRA, have indicated if the court rules against Crystal Evangelical Free Church, legislation will be introduced to revise the bankruptcy laws to shield tithes given in good faith.

In the weeks since the Justice Department's about-face, Cedar Bayou has been "in a holding pattern," Steel said.

"We've just been waiting to see what they (the Houston construction firm and its lawyers) would do next," he said.

The church initially was told by its attorneys they "had won a skirmish, but not the war." But Steel noted the plaintiffs have appeared less eager to pursue the suit after the Justice Department reversal in the Crystal Evangelical Free Church case.

Unlike the Minnesota case in which creditors were trying to seize tithes given in the year prior to the filing of bankruptcy, the Houston construction company was attempting to gain \$30,000 plus interest in tithes given over more than six years.

"If there ever was a frivolous lawsuit, it would seem to be this one. It was just dumb," Steel said. His church is considering whether to take action to try reclaiming its own legal expenses, but he doubts they will file suit.

However, if the construction company renews its efforts to seize tithes given to the church, Cedar Bayou is ready to fight. In a statement issued by the church earlier during the dispute, members emphasized the real issue is religious liberty, not bankruptcy.

"If a court can declare that a church member does not receive any 'reasonable equivalent value' for his gifts to his church, the court is defining how one can practice his religious faith and oversteps its dominion in the realm of that relationship between church and state," the statement read.

"We cannot capitulate; we must not surrender to the state our freedom to practice our religion and support it with our tithes."

--30--

Maryland/Delaware Baptists  
maintain giving channel to SBC By Ronald K. Chaney

Baptist Press  
12/7/94

NEWARK, Del. (BP)--Messengers to the 1994 annual meeting of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware refused to revisit changing the constitution to broaden giving channels and affirmed the idea of a \$4 million development campaign but not its procedures.

Messengers also ended legal ties between the Baptist Home and the convention and passed nine resolutions including one on racism during Nov. 14-15 sessions at Ogletown Baptist Church, Newark, Del.

--more--

Dallas Bumgarner, pastor of Elvaton Baptist Church, Glen Burnie, Md., received 53 percent of the vote to become the new BCM/D president, defeating Waldorf pastor Wayne Kempson.

Unopposed for election were Lloyd King, pastor of First Baptist Church, Crisfield, Md., as first vice president and B.J. Ferguson, pastor of Severn (Md.) Baptist Church, as second vice president.

Messengers turned down a chance to revisit a constitutional issue that had stirred controversy in recent years -- removing the Cooperative Program as a requirement of convention membership. Messengers turned down attempts to change the constitution concerning the Cooperative Program at both the 1991 and 1992 meetings.

During the Monday afternoon business session, Lamar Wadsworth, pastor of Woolford Memorial Baptist Church, Baltimore, moved that the convention appoint a committee to explore amending the BCM/D constitution "to recognize the right of churches that choose to support missions through channels other than the Southern Baptist Convention to do so without jeopardizing their right of full participation in the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware."

Wadsworth also moved that the convention's general mission board change the constitution to eliminate language "that creates or suggests a connectional relationship between the BCM/D and the Southern Baptist Convention or makes support of the Cooperative Program ... a requirement for full participation."

Wadsworth was asked to submit the motion to the recording secretaries because of its length and complexity. The motion later was printed and distributed to messengers so they would understand what it said.

On Tuesday morning convention President Otis Doherty, pastor of Ogletown Baptist Church, noted the motion asked the president to appoint a committee to review the constitution but "there is already a committee with that responsibility ... . Therefore we will commend this motion to that committee for consideration." However, Frank Helms of White Marsh Baptist Church, Baltimore, moved that the motion be discussed on the floor. "This motion was brought to this convention and I believe it's only fair that this convention be allowed to discuss it," he said, "so that this matter might be resolved."

Richard Peoples then moved "that consideration of this motion be postponed indefinitely." Peoples, pastor of First Baptist Church, Dundalk, Md., said he believed the convention "has been one characterized by a wonderful spirit of unity, of fellowship, ... to work together for the future." Peoples also said the general mission board already had settled the matter. "I do not believe that it would further that sense of unity, of togetherness, of fellowship that we have so carefully built and rejoice in here to consider that motion at this time," Peoples finished as clapping broke out.

The motion to postpone discussion passed.

In other business, messengers affirmed a \$4 million development campaign while approving a substitute motion that refers the procedures for the campaign back to the general mission board. The original motion, coming from the board, proposed to provide "\$250,000 to \$300,000 annually for starting new work and strengthening churches" by raising "\$4 million that will be invested for growth and earnings."

Some messengers questioned whether the money could be used immediately or whether the convention had to wait for interest income to accrue. Messengers also questioned whether the money would go to both "new work" and "strengthening churches" or simply to "new work." Other messengers asked what exactly "strengthening churches" meant.

Koch offered the substitute motion, saying, "I am in favor of raising the money, but I think there is more homework we need to do."

BCM/D Executive Director-Treasurer Charles Barnes agreed. "We need further clarification," he said. "We want the money; we're just not clear on the process."

Nine resolutions acquired convention approval including statements on racism, evangelism and church growth, gambling, True Love Waits campaign for sexual abstinence until marriage, the use of alcohol, on partnership missions and affirmation of the new direction of the convention's newspaper, Baptist Life. The statement on racism was the only resolution that hit a snag during discussion.

Bob Lilly, pastor of Catonsville (Md.) Baptist Church, moved to postpone the resolution indefinitely. He said he was sympathetic because he is against racism but he felt the "wording of the resolution is divisive."

Others asked what impression the convention would give to outsiders if the resolution came to the floor but did not get voted on.

The resolution passed with overwhelming support. However, a few messengers did sound out when Doherty asked for votes against it.

In other financial matters, messengers approved a 1995 operating budget of \$4,263,866. Of this, 59 percent remains in the two-state convention and 41 percent will be sent to the Southern Baptist Convention executive committee for distribution to the Foreign and Home Mission boards, as well as other SBC agencies and institutions. The percentage split remains unchanged.

Messengers voted to cut official ties between the convention and the Baptist Home. The document presented to messengers, which severs legal bonds with the home, received no questioning from messengers and gained approval on a voice vote. Baptist Home will now exist as an independent Baptist institution with a self-perpetuating board of trustees, 51 percent of whom will come from Baptist churches. The home had requested independent status in order to pursue development of a new facility. Current BCM/D constitution and bylaws restrict agencies and institutions in financial matters.

The convention also voted to amend the constitution and bylaws to delete any references to Baptist Home and to change all references to the former name of the newsjournal, Baptist True Union, to the new name Baptist Life.

This year's convention saw fewer messengers than in the recent past. Only 472 messengers registered compared to 509 in 1993 and 987 in 1992.

Next year's meeting will be held at the Sheraton in Towson, Md., Nov. 13-14.

--30--

2 school systems clear  
Wednesdays, Sundays

By Marv Knox

Baptist Press  
12/7/94

SALEM, Ky. (BP)--Ohio River Baptist Association in Kentucky has reclaimed Wednesday evenings and Sundays from school activities.

The association, comprised of 40 churches in Crittenden and Livingston counties, asked the schools to "re-establish policies which would not create a conflict with the long-established worship times of local churches."

The superintendents of schools in the two counties -- Dennis Lacy in Crittenden and Lee Jones in Livingston -- have told school administrators not to schedule activities after 5 p.m. on Wednesdays and before 2 p.m. and after 5 p.m. on Sundays, reported John East, the association's director of missions. If unavoidable conflicts arise, students who must miss school activities to attend church are not to be punished or reprimanded.

The campaign began as a concern of Danny Belcher, pastor of Lake City Baptist Church, Grand Rivers.

Belcher had seen young people miss church to attend school functions. And this year the situation hit home, as his youngest daughter, Danielle, planned to play middle school basketball.

Students shouldn't have to choose between church and school activities, he decided. So he proposed that Ohio River association ask the local schools to steer clear of regular church times.

Despite predictions of futility, the association created a committee to contact the school superintendents.

"We were told, 'You're not going to get anything on this,'" reported Darrell Clarke, pastor of Marion Baptist Church, Marion, and committee chairman. But the response has been overwhelmingly positive, he said.

A key to success was a respectful approach to the schools, Belcher and Clarke said.

--more--

"We didn't get belligerent; we just talked things out," said Belcher, who noted the Livingston County school system has many Christian teachers who don't want to compete with churches.

"We didn't want to be critical," Clarke added. "We just wanted to express our feelings and respectfully ask them to help maintain a longstanding policy of not conflicting with church times."

Ohio River association is trying to be a resource for other associations, he added, offering to share information and copies of letters sent to school superintendents. The association may be contacted at Box 9, Salem, KY 42078.

--30--

#### FIRST-PERSON

At age 7, Tyler begins  
his journey of faith

By Polly House

Baptist Press  
12/7/94

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Probably one of the first prayers a Christian couple utters after finding out they are going to have a baby is, "Lord, let this child grow up to be a Christian."

For my husband, Sam, and me, this prayer has just been answered in our 7-and-a-half-year-old son, Tyler.

Tyler was born talking. Well, not exactly, but he did talk before he could walk. At a year old, he was talking in sentences! Here was this precious little baby, crawling on the floor, reaching up to us and demanding, "Pick me up!"

As Tyler has grown, he has constantly asked questions. He has the most insatiable curiosity about life. A big part of his life has been church and Sunday school, so questions about God and Jesus have come along just like questions about why we can't eat bugs and why trucks are bigger than cars.

Tyler's Sunday school teachers at Crieveewood Baptist Church in Nashville where we are members have been so good. They have reinforced what Tyler is taught at home. Tyler has learned about the Bible and what Jesus wants him to do. He has memorized Scriptures and learned the importance of being kind.

Sam and I knew Tyler was beginning to have the stirrings of the heart about accepting Christ, but we didn't know just when it would happen. He was talking about such things as knowing about God, but not having him in his heart. He was beginning the process.

One morning Tyler came into the kitchen and said, "Mom, I just had a vision from God. He told me he had something special for me to do for the world."

I said, "Really. Was it like a dream?"

"No, Mom, it wasn't a dream. I was awake," he said.

"How do you know it was God?" I asked.

He looked at me with that look that only children can give their parents -- the one that says, How could you have ever grown up being that stupid? -- and answered, "Mom, when God tells you something, you know it."

We talked about what his "vision" might mean. Maybe it was about being a missionary. Tyler said, "That might be so, because a missionary can be anything and be anywhere and right now, God hadn't told me anything specific." Then, he said, "You have to be a Christian before you can be a missionary, don't you?"

I told him, yes, it generally worked that way.

Well, he admitted, that would be a problem, because he wasn't a Christian yet. I told him he was only 7 and had time to decide about that.

We tried to answer his questions when he would ask, being careful not to put words in his mouth. When he accepted Christ, we wanted to know for sure that it was because he had had a personal experience with Jesus, not just because he was mimicking the words he'd heard us say.

One day, Tyler and I were in a local department store and he said, "Mom, I'm not a Christian. I go to church and all that, but that's not what makes you a Christian, is it?" I told him he was right. As important as church is, church isn't what makes you a Christian.

--more--

He said, "Then, how do I get to be one?"

I told him this was such an important subject that we would talk as soon as we got home. The department store was not really a place to discuss it!

That evening Tyler and Sam talked for about half an hour. They read Scriptures, talked about why Jesus died, what that meant to us and what Tyler could do about it.

Tyler came running into his room where his 5-year-old brother Travis and I were reading. Tyler had the biggest grin on his face I had seen in a long time and proudly announced, "Mom, Travis, I'm a Christian!"

I hugged him and told him how proud I was of him for making such an important decision. He told me he was proud of himself! Then he announced, "I need to call Grandpa and Aunt Neve. They will be so glad to hear that I'm a Christian!" After he called them, Sam told Tyler that he had just given his testimony. To this Tyler responded, "Hey, Travis, did you hear that -- I have a testimony!"

Everything was so exciting to Tyler that night. Travis, on the other hand, was a little jealous about all the attention his brother was getting. He boldly announced, "I don't have to be a Christian ... I'm only 5!"

When it was time for Tyler to make his public profession of faith at church, he was a little nervous, but proudly walked forward on his own. Fellow church members greeted him, told him how proud they were of him and told him they would be praying for him.

Sam went with Tyler to talk about his decision with our pastor, Joel Snider. Joel was very kind, very "pastor-ish" to Tyler and told him, "Tyler, my prayer for you is that as you grow bigger physically, your faith will grow bigger too."

Tyler looked straight at him and asked, "How big does faith get?"

Joel told him. "Faith gets as big as your heart."

Tyler put his two hands together to form a large fist and said, "Well, if my heart is about this size, that doesn't look like very much faith!"

At this point Joel, keeping a straight face, said, "Well, Tyler, if your faith can get that big, it will be big enough."

When it came time for Tyler to be baptized, I asked him if he would like for his dad to be the one to baptize him. Tyler looked at me and said, "Can he do that?"

I told him, "Yes, Tyler, your daddy is an ordained minister and at our church, the pastor says it's OK for someone else who is ordained to do baptisms."

But Tyler said, "No, Mom, I mean, does he know how?"

After assuring him that, yes, Sam did "know how" to baptize someone, he was delighted to know he and his dad would have that special memory.

So, Sam baptized Tyler. Travis and I watched proudly from the floor of the sanctuary.

Now, Sam and I have a new prayer for Tyler. We pray that he will grow in his faith, learn from God's Word and go on into his life knowing that he is loved.

--30--

Polly House is an editorial assistant at Baptist Press. Sam House coordinates products and events relating to "Experiencing God" and "Fresh Encounter" at the Baptist Sunday School Board.

**(BP)**

**BAPTIST PRESS**  
901 Commerce #750  
Nashville, TN 37234

F  
I  
R  
S  
T  
  
C  
L  
A  
S  
S

Southern Baptist Library  
and Archives