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-- BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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Earthquake makes Japanese face
spiritual issues, missionary says By Mark Kelly

Baptist Press
1/23/95

KOBE, Japan (BP)--The earthquake that devastated Kobe, Japan, in the early morning hours of Jan. 17 jolted people awake to spiritual as well as physical realities, according to a Southern Baptist missionary assigned to the area.

Elaborate earthquake precautions gave Japanese city dwellers a false sense of security, and affluent lifestyles distracted them with material possessions. But 20 seconds of predawn terror shattered those illusions and left hundreds of thousands with only the clothes on their backs.

"Most people in Japan have no interest in spiritual things. They're completely wrapped up in their humanistic goals for themselves," said Kobe-based Southern Baptist missionary Ron Reynolds in a telephone interview.

Reynolds, of Ft. Pierce, Fla., was among thousands driven from their homes by the earthquake, which measured 7.2 on the Richter scale. It has left more than 5,000 people dead and up to 300,000 people homeless.

"Sometimes it takes something like this to wake people up," he said. "You can't help but be thankful you're alive and realize material things mean nothing. I hope this will help Japanese people realize that what we have in our hand is not as important as what God can give us in our heart."

Reynolds starts churches in the Kobe area. He and his family joined as many as 10,000 people evacuated to the Canadian Academy, a large boarding school for children of missionaries and other foreigners. In the midst of chaos, they found open doors for ministry and witness.

To begin with, his neighbors realized that -- unlike many foreigners -- the Reynoldses weren't taking the first boat or helicopter out of the area, he said. That told people the missionary family is part of the community and committed to helping wherever they can.

"This is an opportunity to express our faith and our love and concern for families," he said. "We've come to know some of them much, much better because of this. We'll have a chance to share the gospel with many of them."

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SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
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Reynolds' language skills proved helpful as evacuees began arriving at the boarding school, where staff members dealing with the crowds spoke no Japanese. His two daughters helped care for an invalid man who had been brought to the area. With needs on every hand, the whole family has stayed busy helping out where they can.

The Reynoldses were one of 14 Southern Baptist missionary families in the quake area. All were reported safe and unhurt.

In the hours immediately following the quake, missionaries Mike Brooks and Danny Hinson joined rescue crews digging survivors out of the rubble and taking them to hospitals. Missionary Charles Barham, pastor of an English-language church in Kobe, reportedly was searching for missing church members whose homes had collapsed during the quake.

Living through the earthquake helped missionary Jamea Crum appreciate even more the protection of God and the prayers of Southern Baptists.

Crum and her children were with several other missionary families in a quadruplex when the earthquake struck. While their homes were intact, the experience was terrifying and the city around them was devastated, she said.

"We got out and drove around some and realized how God's hand had protected us," said Crum, of Springfield, Mo.

"We couldn't believe what we were seeing. Houses were down to the ground, and people were standing around in parking lots. They were carrying bodies out on doors. Wires were hanging down. Fires were burning everywhere. It was just a horrible sight.

"We realize everyone back in the States is praying for us. We know God protected us," she said. "If the earthquake had come an hour later, our children would have been on trains to school and we would have been in cars. God protected us just by the time it hit.

"We know God is in control. He knows we're here and he loves us."

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Contributions for Baptist disaster relief efforts in Japan may be sent to the human needs office, Foreign Mission Board, P.O. Box 6767, Richmond, VA 23230. The office's toll-free number is 1-800-866-FMB1.

New Russian religion legislation
lacks anti-evangelical punch

By Marty Croll

Baptist Press
1/23/95

MOSCOW (BP)--A few vocal legislators are still working to limit non-Orthodox religious activity in Russia, but their latest attempts lack the punch of earlier days.

Winds of change appear to have carried Moscow too far into freedom to allow even politically astute lawmakers to pass laws openly opposing Russian evangelicals.

Still, a proposed new law spells out restrictions that would limit foreign religious influence. And it leaves gray areas concerning how Russians can worship within legal guidelines, according to Moscow religious liberty experts.

The latest religious legislation would require foreign religious workers to show an official invitation from Russian counterparts. It also would require them to meet certain accreditation standards. And it could affect some who travel to Russia from the West on tourist visas and engage in religious work.

A select committee of the Russian Parliament's lower house, the Duma, recently sent a draft of the new bill to President Boris Yeltsin's legal staff.

When Yeltsin will take action on the proposed measure is unclear, but Duma member Vitaly Savitsky told Baptist Press in mid-January it probably would be at least another month. The government is preoccupied with its military action in the breakaway southern republic of Chechnya.

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Religious liberty experts in Moscow say the law specifically seeks to curtail the activity of Western evangelicals who developed campaigns to teach Christian values in public schools after atheism, along with communism, started losing popularity several years ago.

The experts report little real interest in the law, however -- except from a small group of extremists hoping to pass it through Parliament without attracting attention.

Earlier proposed religious legislation drew the ire of evangelicals worldwide two years ago. Russian Orthodox and communist-fascist lawmakers teamed up behind the scenes to draft it, then used an all-out media campaign to raise support for it. Many top Orthodox leaders publicly supported it. Even Patriarch Alexei II wrote a letter backing restrictions. The letter was read on the floor of Parliament just before lawmakers voted in favor of them.

But Yeltsin refused to sign the bill twice. It died as its most fervent supporters lost power when Yeltsin disbanded Parliament in September 1993 and squelched an armed coup against him.

Legislators favoring more freedoms have formed a sort of coalition during the past year to stand against communists and fascists also elected to Parliament. The latest version of the law was developed in a more open process than before, allowing input from evangelicals who were previously shut out.

Still, all members of the committee that framed the law favor it except for Gleb Yakunin. Yakunin is a former Orthodox priest defrocked by Patriarch Alexei after he opposed restrictions the first time and then refused to vacate his Duma seat.

Yakunin, an evangelical, continues to fight for true freedom in a culture that has never known what individual liberty means. The other committee members either want foreigners restricted or consider it "politically correct" to support that idea, according to Russian evangelicals.

This time around, Alexei and other top Orthodox leaders have taken no public position on the legislation.

Russia's expansive size and cultural diversity -- coupled with a weak central government -- promise to allow human rights abuses and religious persecution in many regions to continue for some time, regardless of national legislation.

How regional authorities interpret any national law depends on local autonomy from place to place.

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**Embattled Chechen people have
long history short on gospel**

By Erich Bridges

**Baptist Press
1/23/95**

GROZNY, Chechnya (BP)--The Russian flag finally flies over what's left of the presidential palace in Grozny, the bombed-out capital of breakaway Chechnya.

The fiercely independent Chechen people, pounded for weeks by Russian rockets, may not win the current conflict -- despite the heavy casualties they have inflicted on Russian forces determined to crush their independence bid. Guerrilla war in the mountains also may ultimately fail.

History, however, indicates the Chechens -- who have long resisted Russian domination and who suffered greatly under dictator Josef Stalin's tyranny -- will never completely succumb to outside rule. And their struggle threatens to inflame other Muslim peoples in the region of the Caucasus Mountains, a hard lesson Czarist Russia learned through decades of war in the 1800s.

But the Chechens also may never hear and respond to gospel of Jesus Christ -- unless Christians reach out to them. Only 30 Christians were known to be living among about 1 million Chechens last year.

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The Chechens are predominantly Muslim -- of the Sunni branch of Islam. Ancient ruins of churches hint that some Chechens became Christians more than 1,100 years ago. But Islam came to the region in the 1500s, and Christianity had disappeared from the area by the end of the next century.

Russian imperial conquest of the Caucasus in the 19th century was followed by Soviet communist rule in the 20th. In his genocidal campaign to rule the Soviet empire by dividing and terrorizing whole peoples, Stalin deported the entire Chechen population to Soviet Central Asia during World War II. The same fate befell their Muslim ethnic brethren, the Ingush people.

More than 200,000 people died during the merciless forced move. The communists also attempted to eradicate Chechen culture and Islam in the area, closing all mosques and other religious buildings.

But the oppression only increased the religious fervor of many Chechens, who are among the most devout Muslims of the former Soviet Union.

The Chechens eventually were allowed to return home, and the Checheno-Ingush republic was reinstated in 1957 after Stalin's death. Two Muslim mosques reopened in 1978, and rising nationalism strengthened Islam even more. In 1991, the Chechens declared their independence from Russia, which rejected the declaration. Russian President Boris Yeltsin eventually responded by starting the current conflict.

In this violent, unstable environment live 1 million or more Chechen men, women and children. They have no established churches and no Bible in their own language, although translation is in progress. Portions of the New Testament have been translated into Chechen.

The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board published a free prayer guide for the Chechen people last year (call toll-free 1-800-866-FMB1) and actively seeks ways to help evangelize them.

After the prayer guide was published and committed Southern Baptists "prayer warriors" began praying for the Chechens, their situation began appearing on the front pages of newspapers around the world. The same pattern has developed with numerous other unevangelized people groups most Americans had never heard of.

"It's almost uncanny," admitted Terri Willis of the FMB international prayer strategy office -- "unless you believe in the power of prayer."

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(BP) graphic illustration (vertical) mailed to state Baptist newspapers Jan. 20 by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press. Graphic and outline available on SBCNet News Room.

**Missionary shot while driving
along Guatemalan highway**

By Mary E. Speidel

**Baptist Press
1/23/95**

QUETZALTENANGO, Guatemala (BP)--Southern Baptist missionary Keith Stamps is recovering from gunshot wounds sustained Jan. 20 in an attempted highway robbery in Guatemala.

Stamps, 38, was treated in a hospital in Quetzaltenango and released Jan. 22.

A missionary to Guatemala since 1986, Stamps was shot in the right arm and shoulder while returning from teaching at a Baptist church in San Pedro, about an hour's drive from his home in Quetzaltenango. The injuries caused some nerve loss in two fingers on his right hand.

Stamps was driving alone at night on an isolated stretch of road when someone tried to flag him down from the roadside. He kept driving. Suddenly, a man stepped onto the road's shoulder, raised a shotgun and fired point-blank through the window on the passenger's side.

Stamps managed to maintain control and keep driving for about six miles until he reached the next town. Local rescue officials gave him first aid and drove him in his vehicle to the hospital in Quetzaltenango, where he underwent further treatment.

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A heavy leather jacket Stamps was wearing absorbed part of the impact of the shotgun blast. "Without the protection of the coat, the injury would have been much worse," reported Don Doyle, Southern Baptist missionary administrator in Guatemala.

"He's sore The back of his arm looks kind of like hamburger meat," added missionary Roger Grossmann after visiting Stamps Jan. 23. "There's no bone damage, no major arterial damage and, as far as they can tell, no major nerve damage. But we won't know until he gets better and starts using his arm."

To avoid further nerve damage, physicians have not yet removed the shotgun pellets lodged in Stamps' shoulder and arm.

"Keith had nothing but praise for the way the Guatemalans responded to his needs," said Joe Bruce in a telephone interview after visiting Stamps at the hospital. Bruce, who directs mission work in Central America for the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, lives in Guatemala City.

Stamps apparently wasn't targeted as a missionary or as a North American in the violence.

"It evidently was an attempted highway robbery," Bruce said. "Keith felt like he just happened to wrong place at the wrong time."

That's not a new experience for Stamps, who grew up on the mission field as the son of Stanley and Glenna Stamps, veteran Southern Baptist missionaries to Central America.

Last year on Good Friday his vehicle was pelted with stones when he drove into Tajumulco, where he and his wife, Penny, had lived earlier with their two children. She is the daughter Ray and Betty Turner, retired Southern Baptist missionaries to Latin America. At the time of the attack, several Missouri Baptist volunteers and Stamps' son were with him. No one was harmed.

Earlier, Stamps was falsely accused in a Guatemalan publication of stealing Guatemalan children. The incident occurred about the time a North American woman was nearly beaten to death in a Holy Week procession near Coban, Guatemala.

That attack, and assaults on two other Americans, stemmed from rumors in Guatemala that North Americans steal children for body parts for organ transplants. The unfounded rumors have circulated in the area for years, particularly among Guatemala's indigenous people.

But Bruce stressed he feels the latest attack against Stamps was not related to anti-North American sentiment.

Since the stoning last year, he said, "things have been fairly calm here. Missionaries have been about their business as usual with no problems until this. We feel like it's one of those isolated things."

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(BP) photo (mugshot) mailed Jan. 23 to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press. Outline available on SBCNet News Room.

Downtown Nashville church voices
opposition to alcohol at arena By Lonnie Wilkey

Baptist Press
1/23/95

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Members of First Baptist Church in downtown Nashville, Tenn., are letting city and state officials know they oppose the sale of alcohol at the new arena being built within a stone's throw of the church.

The arena, now amounting to a large hole in the ground, is within 85 feet of the Nashville church which celebrates its 175th anniversary this year. The church has been at its present site since 1886. The arena is 15 feet too close to the church to qualify for a beer permit. Metro law requires businesses to be 100 feet (closest point to closest point) from a church or school to sell beer.

According to a report in the Nashville Banner, the city is petitioning the state legislature to make an exception for the arena.

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Approximately 250 church members unanimously approved a resolution during a Jan. 18 business meeting opposing "any change in law which would allow the sale or use of alcohol at the arena. We urge members of the state legislature to vote against this change."

The church's action was taken to clarify its position and to "clean up what had been misconstrued" through local media reports, according to Jimmy Dunn, minister of administration at the church.

Earlier comments by pastor Dan Francis had been misinterpreted by some members of the local media to mean the church was not against or had not taken a position on the sale of alcohol at the downtown arena.

That was not the case, Dunn said. "The church's position and the pastor's position have been the same," he said.

When contacted by the Baptist and Reflector, Francis said the issue revolved around the discovery of the law. There was not a change in either the church's or the arena's position, he said, noting each knew where the other stood.

Francis told local media the church supported the concept of the arena and the revitalization of downtown Nashville.

"That was taken out of context to make it sound like we supported the use and abuse of alcohol," Francis said.

"Once we were taken out of context, we proceeded to get out the word of who we are and what we stand for," he added.

The resolution noted the church has "learned that the Nashville arena under construction adjacent to the church property is not in compliance with an ordinance requiring a 100-foot distance from church property to allow the sale of alcohol."

"A bill has been introduced in the Tennessee legislature to change the law in this one situation to allow alcohol sales anywhere on the arena property. We want to clearly state our position in this matter."

The resolution noted the recent death of a young woman and her unborn child at the hands of a drunk driver just "two blocks from our doorstep."

"Our mission is to proclaim and live the Good News of the living Christ, who offers freedom from the tyranny of alcohol. Any change in law which would promote the wider use of this addictive substance is inconsistent with our witness," the resolution stated.

Dunn said the resolution was discussed and supported by the deacon body Jan. 15 before being presented to the church Jan. 18.

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**Air Force general's new mission:
leading Va. Baptists' academy**

By Michael Clingenpeel

**Baptist Press
1/23/95**

FORK UNION, Va. (BP)--When Lieutenant General John E. Jackson Jr. talks, people listen.

With good reason. Until six months ago Jackson commanded thousands of men and directed the movement of billions of dollars of military equipment to locations throughout the world. Air Force One, military equipment movements to the Persian Gulf and government relief efforts in Haiti and Rwanda awaited his orders. He was a man with a mission, and was accustomed to having his orders obeyed.

That has not changed. When he talks, people still listen, and obey. But the mission is different.

Last August Lt. Gen. John Jackson became President Jackson, headmaster at Fork Union Military Academy, a 650-student academy in the rolling piedmont of central Virginia. Now his mission is educational and spiritual.

But a year ago no one would have guessed, least of all Jackson, that he would become president at Fork Union. He never applied for the position, and when he arrived at the rural campus last January, it was his first glimpse of the school. "I met with the executive search committee. I liked what they had in mind for the school and what I saw in the school."

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But it was the 200-person faculty and staff that sold him on the idea of leaving the life of a three-star general and moving to his current post. "They are wonderful people who have a genuine love and care about these kids. They came here and never want to leave."

When he was offered the job on Easter weekend, he accepted it as a call from God. "Barb and I feel it's a calling. We felt like the Lord wants us to be here." A week later his wife, Barbara, reaffirmed his feelings. "I feel like you have trained all your life to do this one thing," she said.

Jackson's training has been rigorous. In his 32 years with the U.S. Air Force, Jackson had 17 assignments. He flew 398 combat missions in Vietnam. Among his many awards and decorations are the Distinguished Flying Cross, a Bronze Star and the Vietnamese Air Medal of Honor. Over the past decade he has commanded a flying training wing, served as director of Air Force personnel programs and commanded the Air Mobility Command's 15th Air Force.

During those years he managed to earn a master's degree in business and personnel management.

Jackson admits he misses flying the KC-10, the military's version of a DC-10, and the "operation tempo of the command" at Scott Air Force Base in Elgin, Ill., the final command in an Air Force career that spanned 32 years.

But the fifth cousin of Confederate General Stonewall Jackson says he is thrilled with his new duties leading the faculty, staff and cadet corps at the 96-year-old academy founded and supported by the Baptist General Association of Virginia.

He is making an impact on the cadets already, according to R.L. Pulliam, the school's vice president and a 38-year employee: "He has gotten to know cadets and is teaching a class in the middle school. I walk across the campus with him and it is amazing how many he can call by their first name. They have a healthy respect for him."

But it is Fork Union's spiritual mission that Jackson says especially excites him. Cadets attend mandatory chapel twice a week and must be in church on Sundays. "Where else can you have 636 boys who hear the Word of God each week in chapel?" beams Jackson. Thirty-one denominations are represented among the student body, one-fourth of which is Baptist.

Jackson needs little prodding to talk about his Christian commitment. When stationed at the Pentagon several years ago, the West Virginia native attended the Flag Officers Fellowship, a weekly Bible study for admirals and generals from all branches of the military. There he learned about the Jesus film project, an effort to produce a film about the story of Jesus' life and translate it into every language used by a million or more people.

"The Jesus film project is near and dear to my heart," says Jackson, who remains active in fund-raising to support the project. He attended the premiere of the film in Moscow and Mongolia. In Moscow the premiere was held the same night Ted Turner and Jane Fonda premiered "Gone With the Wind." "The Lord outdrew it," adds Jackson, with satisfaction.

Pulliam confirms Jackson's impact on the spiritual life of the school and community: "He's added a new dimension to our spiritual outlook. He's spoken in chapel a number of times, gotten involved in our local church and rarely misses a meeting. People in the community respect him as much as we do here at the academy. Recently he talked at a local church about the Jesus film and community people gave him high praise for his presentation."

He and his wife are no strangers to Virginia Baptists, having been members of Columbia Baptist Church in Falls Church on three occasions while stationed at the Pentagon.

Jackson says his principal goal at Fork Union is "to make a great school even better." His specific goals include improving Fork Union's infrastructure and increasing the use of computers among students. "I would like to see every boy issued a laptop on the first day, and when he leaves he will take it with him."

He also wants some students to catch his love of flying. Fork Union began a flying school in 1993, and seven students have earned their wings. The former flight instructor says he would like to be involved as a flight instructor "if I can find my civilian license," he quips.

These goals take money, and Jackson is realistic about his mission as a fundraiser. "We need to increase our endowment. An endowment permits you to bring boys here who couldn't be here otherwise."

Most of all, the new president wants Virginia Baptists to see what he sees in Fork Union. "I wish all Virginia Baptists realized the mission this school provides and the niche this school fills. I don't know anywhere else they can help this many kids."

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**Kenneth Winters' sense of call
helps fuel Campbellsville growth** By Marc C. Whitt

**Baptist Press
1/23/95**

CAMPBELLSVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Seven years ago when Kenneth W. Winters became president of Campbellsville (Ky.) College, he was greeted by a boarded-up gym, two empty residence halls and a declining student population.

Today, Campbellsville College has become one of the fastest-growing Baptist colleges in the Southern Baptist Convention.

During Winters' years as president of the Kentucky Baptist Convention-affiliated institution, its enrollment has soared 91 percent to a present enrollment of 1,260 students, posting growth each of the last 15 semesters.

The list of successes continues. Faculty holding doctoral and terminal degrees has grown from 42 percent to nearly 70 percent. The college's second phase of its capital campaign exceeded its \$5.3 million goal three months before its scheduled conclusion. Facilities, computer labs and grounds have been upgraded and improved. A new men's residence hall and a recent gift of \$300,000 from the James Graham Brown Foundation of Louisville, Ky., to assist with a new science and academic center, both scheduled to open this fall, evidence Campbellsville's continued efforts to prepare for the next century.

"When the search committee from Campbellsville called me, they said my name had come up as a candidate for the presidency," recounted Winters, who had been at Murray (Ky.) State University 23 years, 11 as dean of the college of industry and technology. "They asked me if I would be interested. I had never been to the city of Campbellsville or to Campbellsville College in my life."

Other institutions also had expressed interest in Winters as their president during that same period, but Winters said it was God's guidance and direction which led him to Campbellsville.

One of the first things he did in his presidency was to determine the student market for the college and their potential interests.

From that analysis, new athletic programs such as women's volleyball, men's and women's cross country, men's soccer and men's and women's swimming and an 80-member Tiger Marching Band have attracted students to Campbellsville.

"We had a junior-Olympic size swimming pool without a swim team. We had space for a soccer field without a team," Winters recalled. "Since then, we've added those sports and much more."

"Anytime we can add these specialty programs for our students, it shows we have their best interests at heart," he explained.

The reason for Campbellsville's growth is simple, said Winters. "We are booming because our students are satisfied customers. Satisfied students make the best admissions counselors any institution could have, especially when they go home during the holidays or for spring break. They share their positive experiences with their friends back home."

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Winters also saw a vital need for improved community relations. "After evaluating the community and the college, we determined to establish stronger partnerships. We've made an attempt to purchase our goods and services from the local community. We wanted to become more actively involved in the local chamber of commerce (for which Winters served as president) and other civic organizations. The college promotes community use of its facilities such as for banquets and business trade shows."

Campbellsville's success recently has been noted by such media as The Lexington (Ky.) Herald-Leader in its feature story titled, "Campbellsville College's Course of Change," and by Success Stories, a national television show on business, which named the college one of the five most successful corporations in the Lexington market area.

William Marshall, executive secretary/treasurer of the Kentucky Baptist Convention, said, "Kentucky Baptist Convention leaders have recognized the creative leadership of Dr. Kenneth Winters which has brought about campus development with new facilities, remodeled buildings, upgraded sports programs and expanded academic offerings.

"The student population has been dramatically attracted to Campbellsville College," Marshall said, "resulting in a twofold increase in enrollment. Ken Winters has put the college on the educational map of places students want to be."

Although the college community, alumni and denomination give Winters much of the credit for Campbellsville's 180-degree turnaround, Winters himself said the glory and praise should be God's.

"Sometimes I have to pinch myself to make sure what we're experiencing is real. I come to work each day expecting the Lord to open another door, another opportunity for us. And to my joy, he does!

"As a Baptist college president, I feel a tremendous calling as a denominational leader and servant," he said. "Prayer and hard work are very much a part of my daily life both as a president and as a husband and father.

"We are truly experiencing great things at Campbellsville College. The future for us looks even brighter as new opportunities arise."

One of those recent opportunities was the chance to provide the baccalaureate program in Christian ministries for Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's Boyce Bible School. The program, a first of its kind among Baptist colleges and seminaries, is designed for Boyce students who complete their associate's degree and who wish to continue their studies on the Louisville campus. Others, such as spouses of seminary students, also may enter the degree program.

Another cutting-edge program is the school's master of arts in education degree, considered to be the first of its kind created specifically to meet the mandates of the 1990 Kentucky Education Reform Act.

Winters said he finds Campbellsville's commitment to academic excellence and approach to a Christian values-based education fulfilling. "I believe Americans are looking to send their sons and daughters to colleges and universities that stand for something. Fortunately, Campbellsville College is one of those Christian institutions which sees itself as a beacon that sheds an academic and spiritual light on the lives of its students.

"We have a wholesome, family atmosphere here," he said. "When an outside firm recently surveyed students on the one word they would use to describe the school, 14 out of 17 said, 'family.'"

That pleased Winters, who says he wants students to realize he and all the college staff are on their side.

"Like family, we're a team, sensitive to the needs of each student, always asking one question before any other: 'What will serve the best interests of our students?' Isn't that what family is all about?"

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Whitt is director of public relations and marketing at Campbellsville College. Mark Wingfield of Kentucky Baptists' Western Recorder newsjournal contributed to this story. (BP) photo of Winters available upon request from the Campbellsville's office of public relations and marketing.

**Blackaby draws difference between
commitment to, presence of Christ By Bob Murdaugh**

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Henry Blackaby, director of prayer and spiritual awakening for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, reminded students at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary of the impossibility having hearts committed to Christ -- but nobody seeing the evidence of his presence in their lives.

God's eternal purpose for his people -- "to place Christ in them" -- is a practical reality, Blackaby proclaimed in three chapel messages the week of Jan. 16 at the Fort Worth, Texas, seminary, where three of his children, Norman, Melvin and Carrie, along with nephew Robert Blackaby and his wife, Susan, are enrolled at the seminary.

"When God created you, he created you for the most intimate, personal fellowship with him," Blackaby said. "His life becomes your life and everybody can see in your life and through your life the real, dynamic presence of the Lord."

Blackaby is author of the highly popular Bible study series, "Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God." He acknowledged the heart of a person determines all the other issues of life. "If I'm not seeing in my life or through my life what God says he intended, the problem is not with God, but with me."

The minister and everyone around him will know when his life is a demonstration of God's presence, Blackaby said. "I'll tell when it's gone from your mind to your heart: the next financial crisis you face, when you, your family and your church watch to see whether you turn to him with confident expectation that the full measure of the promise of God is going to be implemented in your life."

Blackaby claimed Americans aren't coming to Christ quickly because they aren't encountering the full measure of his presence in the lives of his people. "We've got to return to him, not with a theological affirmation in our minds, but with a recognition that whenever that truth begins to get ahold of your heart, it will change everything in your life."

Teaching from Colossians 1:24-29, Blackaby exhorted ministers-in-training to never try to minister without pain. "If it starts to hurt when you try to take the people of God from where they are to where they ought to be, don't run. Don't say, 'I don't deserve this.' The Lord didn't (deserve pain) either, and Paul didn't either."

God is not an idle, passive presence, Blackaby said, but an active presence. "Every promise he's ever made is yes in Christ. Everything he's ever said he continues to be that way, and it makes your life an awesome presence."

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(BP) photo available by PressLink

CORRECTION: In (BP) story titled, "WMU announces changes, additions to staff," dated 1/20/95, please make a correction in the 10th paragraph to say Law served "Johns Creek Baptist Church" not "St. Johns Creek Baptist Church."

Thanks,
Baptist Press

(BP)

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