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95-19

RUSSIA--Missionaries give invitation and everyone present responds.
SOUTH CAROLINA--Raceway ministries take church to the fans; photo.
FLORIDA--Commentary: Southern Baptists' inclusiveness births a new day of progress.
ALABAMA--Be careful about church growth, Rogers tells fellow pastors.
ALABAMA--Churches can grow too large, Bisagno tells conferees.
KENTUCKY--Church redoubles its Lottie Moon offering.
CALIFORNIA--Crews: God doesn't give 'scolding lectures.'
WISCONSIN--Preacher's 5-year-old son makes a promising ministerial visit.

Missionaries give invitation
and everyone present responds

By Mark Wingfield

Baptist Press
2/2/95

YELETS, Russia (BP)--The generous gift of a Kentucky church not only purchased a building for a small Russian Baptist congregation but opened the door for 80 people in a nearby village to become Christians.

Missionaries Larry Lindsey and Norman Lytle traveled to Yelets Baptist Church Jan. 28 to deliver the bulk of a \$14,000 gift from members of Binghamtown Baptist Church in Middlesboro, Ky. The money purchased a building for the 25-member congregation.

Lindsey said a woman from a village about 18 miles away heard the missionaries were coming and asked if they could come to her village and tell the people about Jesus. This elderly woman apparently was the only Christian in her entire village, he said.

No churches of any kind exist in the village. And the tiny Baptist church in Yelets is the only evangelical church in that city of 140,000.

At the woman's request, Lindsey and Lytle went to the village the afternoon of Jan. 28, after a morning celebration service at Yelets Baptist Church. They took with them several members of the Yelets church and Russian missionary Vladimir Boyev, who served as translator.

Eighty people gathered in a cultural hall to hear the missionaries. Some of the Baptists from Yelets sang, and both Lindsey and Lytle preached. The service lasted more than two hours in the unheated hall.

At the conclusion, the translator asked all who wished to profess faith in Jesus Christ as Savior to come forward.

"Everyone in the cultural hall came forward, including the director of the cultural hall," Lindsey explained. All 80 people present said they wanted to become Christians.

Astonished, the missionaries asked the people if they had misunderstood the call to come forward. The people replied they understood perfectly and all wanted to become Christians, Lindsey said.

Lindsey said the event demonstrated to him "how great God is and how powerful the Holy Spirit is."

"I could only sit back and thank the Lord for letting me in on this event," he said.

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At the conclusion of the service, the one woman in the village who had been a believer invited all the new believers to begin a weekly Bible study in her apartment, Lindsey said. Some of the Baptists from the Yelets church offered to help them organize.

As incredible as that Saturday afternoon's events proved to be, the day also brought other cause for rejoicing, Lindsey said.

At the Yelets celebration service, the couple who was selling the building to the church professed their faith in Jesus Christ. Also, two teenagers came to the church that day and asked for someone to teach them how to pray. After counseling, they also became Christians, Lindsey reported.

The fact the two Kentucky missionaries were at the Yelets church on this particular day is a miracle within itself, added Benton Williams, partnership missions director with the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

The KBC currently has a partnership with Russian Baptists in which Kentuckians are helping build churches, support missionaries and generally strengthen the work of Baptists in Russia. Both Lindsey and Lytle work with the Kentucky partnership under appointment of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

Last fall, after reading about partnership opportunities in the Western Recorder, newsjournal for Kentucky Baptists, leaders of Binghamtown Baptist Church invited Williams to speak to them on a Sunday morning.

Williams challenged the congregation to go as volunteers through the partnership. The pastor, W.B. Bingham, challenged members to give money to purchase a building for the Yelets church.

The offering that day alone totaled more than \$10,000, Williams said. Another \$4,000 came in later.

That's a significant boost to the struggling congregation in the Russian city, which was cleansed of all believers during the Stalinist era. Believers were either killed or sent to Siberia.

One Christian woman from Yelets survived the exile in Siberia and returned to Yelets after the fall of communism, Lindsey said. That woman, now 93, began Yelets Baptist Church, which now has 25 members and has started its first mission with 80 potential members.

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Raceway ministries take
church to the fans

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press
2/2/95

DARLINGTON, S.C. (BP)--When Joyce Maggard works in the pits, she fines the other crew members 25 cents for swearing.

The former first-grade teacher says that's just one way she distinguishes herself and her Christian witness while working in the stressful arena of stock-car racing.

"When there's a high pressure situation, you have to react differently," says Maggard, of St. Augustine, Fla. She and husband Gary represented one of a dozen ministries at the annual Fellowship of Raceway Ministries meeting in January.

Non-Christian racers and mechanics "are worrying about the perfection of the car, and that's their sole focus in life," she says. "They have a lot more on their shoulders because they haven't made the biggest decision that they have to make."

Started four years ago, the Fellowship of Raceway Ministries offers information and encouragement for ministers to the racing community. Some members are former racers. "I understand these folks and I relate to them," says Jack Stewart, who held two world records for drag racing when he retired.

Stewart now lives in Hartsville, S.C., and helps the Welsh Neck Baptist Association staff a hospitality trailer during two annual NASCAR races at Darlington International Raceway.

Other Fellowship members initially opposed the idea.

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"I fought this thing tooth and nail," admits Wayne Tuttle, director of missions in Rockingham, N.C., which started a ministry 12 years ago.

"I didn't want to bless 'them heathens' who ought to be in church on Sunday," says Tuttle, who was a pastor at the time. "But the association wanted to do it, so I said, 'OK, I'll go with it.'"

He saw firsthand its potential to reach the unchurched when his minister of music returned from the track on the first Sunday morning of the new ministry.

After the worship service, the music minister told the congregation he had just led a 67-year-old racing fan and his son to the Lord. "That sort of mad me like raceway ministry," Tuttle adds.

Ed Quattlebaum shakes his head in disbelief at the changes in attitudes since he started the first ministry during the mid-1970s at Darlington.

"It's really just amazing to see how God took something that was very small when we started and has expanded it all over our nation," he says. "You can see that this is the Lord's work."

Quattlebaum says he initially faced skepticism from the racing community and criticism from Christians who didn't understand his motive.

"They said, 'We haven't got any business down there with those drunks,'" he says. "I said to them, 'Jesus didn't come to heal people who were well but the people who were sick.'"

Meanwhile, track officials were "almost belligerent," he adds. "You could understand in a sense when you understand the Baptist church had fought the racetrack so hard to keep them from racing on Sunday."

In the past 20 years, raceway ministries have established a good track record, he says. "They've seen our credibility of being there on a continual basis and that we're not going to cram anything down people's throats."

In addition to hosting a Sunday morning worship service, the Darlington ministry offers cold water, hot coffee and caring ears to the fans who flood in during race week. Volunteers give fans tracts with track information as well as the gospel and testimonies from Christian racers.

Darlington Raceway public relations director Russell Branham, said he appreciates having a group of people at the track who care about the fans. "And these people do. It doesn't matter who they are or where they come from," he said. "They've got somebody here that they can talk to."

Of the 16 racetracks that host NASCAR Winston Cup racing, 13 have ministries similar to Darlington's, says Frank Stark, a Mission Service Corps volunteer with the Home Mission Board and chaplain to the Automobile Racing Club of America.

Raceway ministries range from work at NASCAR and shorter tracks to Maggard's work as a crew member. Others, like Stark, follow racers from town to town as a chaplain for the circuit. In all, the various ministries resulted in at least 42 professions of faith last year, Stark says.

Six years ago, former racer and former pastor Mike Weddle hosted a conference that led to where he is today: chaplain to the "World of Outlaws" sprint car division and a NASCAR late model division.

While leading a conference on witnessing, Weddle asked people to list their lost friends. Unable to name five himself, he got back into racing as an opportunity to witness more. "I was spending all my time inside the church with Christian folks."

Talking with racers, "we just go from my love for racing to my love for the Lord," says Weddle, of Independence, Mo. Persistence is a key, he adds.

"At the racetrack, you're not always met with open arms. But eventually they're going to need you," he says. "When the time comes that they do need a minister, they will think of us."

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(BP) photo, horizontal, of Joyce Maggard looking at a wrecked car at the Darlington track's museum available upon request from the Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press. Call (404) 898-7518.

COMMENTARY

**Southern Baptists' inclusiveness
births a new day of progress**

By Sid Smith

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--It is a new day for the Southern Baptist Convention. The last quarter century has brought revolutionary changes to the nation's largest non-Catholic denomination. Southern Baptists have grown to become the most racially, ethnically inclusive denomination in America, according to denominational demographers. Unlike days past when monoracialism tended to characterize the agenda of Southern Baptists, a new day of progress has dawned in the SBC.

This new day is characterized by rays of hope that equality will be realized in the denomination. These rays of hope are witnessed in a number of significant changes.

During the past 25 years, more than 1,600 Southern Baptist churches have been born in the African-American community. This nation-wide proliferation of predominately African-American churches in the SBC is one of the great unextolled movements in contemporary church history.

Twenty-five years of progress has brought inclusion of African Americans in leadership circles in significant areas of convention life. Respected, involved blacks have earned selection to leadership positions in the SBC in such areas as serving on national boards of SBC agencies, on the Executive Committee and as second-vice president of the SBC.

Southern Baptist agencies lead all denominations in establishing programs dedicated to providing leadership for churches ministering in the African-American community. Leading these programs are African-American Southern Baptists with great expertise in their areas. Some of the most talented African-American church leaders serving any denomination today are found utilizing their gifts through our Southern Baptist agencies.

In fact, Southern Baptists employ more full-time black professionals in denominational service than any other denomination.

Many states have been very receptive to African-American leadership in top-elected positions. At least 10 blacks have been elected president of their state conventions. One state convention has elected a non-Anglo to serve as executive director. Most states now have -- or are in the process of developing -- black-designed strategic programs of inclusiveness focusing on the needs of churches responding to the challenge of the African-American community.

Southern Baptist associations also are responding to the challenge of inclusiveness with the black community. Many associations have elected an African-American to serve as moderator. Two associations have elected a director of missions from the black community. Associations have discovered these black leaders serve with distinction.

Southern Baptist churches are becoming more racially inclusive in the composition of their membership. Thousands of churches in the convention have a variety of racial-ethnic groups, including blacks, among the members of their congregations. A few predominately non-black Southern Baptist churches have more than 1,000 African-American members in their congregations. The movement toward inclusiveness have made such strides that it is no longer possible to identify Southern Baptists by the color of their skin.

A number of predominately non-black Southern Baptist churches have called African-Americans as pastors. These black pastors of multi-racial churches have proven to be such effective leaders that they have contributed to the development of a trend of success under their growing pastorates in the Southern Baptist Convention.

Clearly, there is a different Southern Baptist Convention. The old model is being replaced by a better paradigm for a more effective future.

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Sid Smith is director of the African-American Ministries, Florida Baptist Convention.

**Be careful about church growth,
Rogers tells fellow pastors**

By Keith Hinson

HUNTSVILLE, Ala. (BP)--Not every strategy for growing a church is scriptural, according to Adrian Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church, Cordova, Tenn.

Speaking during the Jan. 23-24 meeting of the Alabama Baptist Evangelism Conference, Rogers discussed three "church-growth philosophies."

-- The first philosophy is "power evangelism" touted by John Wimber of the Vineyard movement, based in California.

"They're saying, if you will show miracles and have an open demonstration of God's power, then you'll reach multitudes," Rogers told the crowd, which was estimated at about 2,000 conferees by an Alabama Baptist official.

Referring the group to 1 Corinthians 1, Rogers said, "I want you to see power evangelism. It's in verse 22. Look at it: 'For the Jews require a sign' -- demand a sign -- that's literally what the word says. ... 'Come down from the Cross, and we'll believe. Give us a sign from heaven that we might know.'

"With us today, there are the miracle mongers -- those who require a sign and require miracles. Now I'm not opposed to miracles. I thank God for miracles. I believe in a God of miracles. I would never deny miracles. But I will never demand a miracle.

"Don't ever demand a miracle We have a generation like that today -- and they call that 'power evangelism,'" said Rogers, a past president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Rogers noted Jesus' words in Matthew 12:39: "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign."

John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit "from his mother's womb," Rogers said, yet "the Bible says John did no miracles -- not one. But the Bible says many believed on Jesus because of the testimony of John. Oh, man, that's what I want."

-- The second philosophy Rogers described is "the Willow Creek model."

According to this philosophy, Rogers said, "What you need to do is to take the average guy, the average Joe, the average Jane off the street, bring them in and say something to them relevant -- something they can understand, something that meets their need. Jettison the church jargon, and you will reach people."

But turning again to 1 Corinthians 1:21, Rogers said, "The Greeks seek after wisdom -- that's 'felt needs.'"

Rogers acknowledged that both church-growth philosophies "work to a degree, but neither of them is new. They are as old as Corinth."

-- The third philosophy of church growth is "Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God," Rogers said, again quoting from 1 Corinthians 1.

"The very things that these two schools of church growth are looking for are found in the Lord Jesus Christ. I mean, he is the power of God, and he is the wisdom of God," said Rogers.

"You're not missing power, you're not missing wisdom when you preach Christ. You're finding power, you're finding wisdom when you preach the Lord Jesus Christ," Rogers said.

The salvation provided by Christ is an "ego slayer," Rogers said. "Most of the people in America are egomaniacs, strutting to hell, thinking they're too good to be damned... .

"Do you know what's happening in our preaching today?" Rogers asked. "We're standing up -- wittingly or unwittingly -- standing behind the pulpit and saying something like this, 'Are you unhappy? Are you confused? Are you dissatisfied? Then come to Jesus.' That makes God your servant."

But the "great human dilemma is not what sin does to me but (that) sin is an affront to a holy God and deserves God's wrath. The Cross shows man's total unworthiness, and it shows man's complete inability... . There's nothing you can do but trust Christ," Rogers said.

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In another sermon, Rogers preached on the Old Testament story of a plague of snakes among the Israelites. God provided a remedy, which was a brass serpent raised up on a pole, Rogers noted, and any snake-bitten person could look upon the brass serpent and be healed.

The remedy was available to anyone who would look -- or, in the words of Numbers 21:8, "every one that is bitten," Rogers said.

"That's the reason I cannot go all the way with these boys who have gone so far with Calvinism," Rogers said. "They have the idea that some can be saved and some cannot be saved.

"Pardon me if I offend you, dear friend, but I want you to know that I believe that Christ is the propitiation for our sins -- and not for our sins only, but for the sins of the whole world. And the Lord is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance -- and whosoever will may come," Rogers said.

"You say, 'Well, I believe, they're elected.' Well, they may be, but I like to nominate them -- and I'll tell you something else: You'd be surprised how many more get elected in a red hot, evangelistic service," Rogers said.

Some Calvinists and other Christian thinkers are critical of what they call "easy believism."

"Be careful. What do you want? A hard believism?" Rogers asked. "I don't believe in cheap grace, and I don't believe in playing games, but, friend, the gospel of Jesus Christ is gloriously simple, and therefore it is simply glorious... . The common people heard Jesus gladly; it was easy."

In another message, Rogers told the group, "There are thirsty people all around. If you don't believe that people are thirsty to know Jesus Christ, I'm going to tell you it says something very bad about you."

Rogers told the group to "forget the skeptics and the scorners and come to the skeptics and tell them of Jesus. ... There's never been a better day to preach the gospel than now."

Concerning skeptics, Rogers advised the conferees to not "spend too much time arguing with these people. There will always be someone on your church field who will want to argue theology with you, want you to try to prove God, and bring their rationalism and all of this to it.

"Tell them the Word of God, declare what God has done, and go your way. The cure for skepticism is time.

"Jess Moody says, 'Old atheists never die. They just go to hell.' But when they get to hell, they'll not be atheists there any more," Rogers said.

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Churches can grow too large,
Bisagno tells conferees

By Keith Hinson

Baptist Press
2/2/95

HUNTSVILLE, Ala. (BP)--Is it possible for a church to grow too large in membership? Definitely yes, according to John Bisagno, pastor of First Baptist Church, Houston.

Speaking during the Jan. 23-24 meeting of the Alabama Baptist Evangelism Conference, Bisagno described his church as one "that for several years in Houston has been trying to give itself away... . I give two invitations every Sunday: one is join the church, and one is leave the church to go out into mission work."

In the past seven or eight years, about 450 members of First Baptist have left the church to help start mission churches and to help revitalize existing inner-city churches, Bisagno told the group, which was estimated at about 2,000 conferees by an Alabama Baptist official.

The attendance at First Baptist has been "flat internally" during that time, Bisagno said, as the church continues to run about 4,000 in Sunday school and 5,000 in morning worship.

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But when attendance is counted at the 40 missions that have been nurtured by people who used to attend First Baptist, "you've got up to 7,000 folks in Sunday school," Bisagno said. "Now we don't get credit for that. Nobody sees that. They're not in our building. But who cares? The kingdom of God is built. Souls are saved. Christ is glorified."

Bisagno wasn't always so interested in inviting people to leave his church to do local mission work, but he said three events in "1987 or 1988 within a space of 3-4 months" changed his perspective:

-- The first was his attendance at an annual meeting of pastors of 40-50 of the largest churches in the Southern Baptist Convention. Each year, Bisagno said, a few of the pastors are asked to propose a topic for discussion by the entire group.

Bisagno's question to the group was this: "In light of the fact of growing building costs, complex schedules, limited space, running people through more and more services, our inability to effectively witness as we would like to on limited space with a lot of people and a short amount of time on a limited budget on a Sunday, does a growing church ever have to face the fact and deal with the question, 'How big is big enough? Does that point ever come?'"

The unanimous answer of the pastors was yes. "I want to tell you that I was surprised," Bisagno said. "All of them unanimously agreed ... there does come a time that you can really only say grace over about so many folks, and many of us felt that we were about there."

In the wake of the meeting, Bisagno said he continued to ponder the issue. "I struggled with the question in my own heart," he recalled. "How do I reconcile that with the Great Commission, that we must endlessly win more and yet realistically only minister to so many people in one spot at one time?"

-- The second key event that helped change Bisagno's thinking was a visit from the pastor of a small Baptist church located about three miles from First Baptist.

Bisagno said the pastor told him, "Long before your church ever moved here, we had died. In the '50s, we used to run 500-600 in Sunday school. We have beautiful facilities. They are paid for, and we have about 35 people. Most of them are old, ... and there are people around us by the thousands -- ethnics. We love them, we love missions, but we don't know where to start or what to do... . Can you help?"

-- The third key event that got Bisagno's attention was a visit from another fellow pastor who for six years had been chairman of the inner-city committee of the Union Baptist Association in Houston.

According to Bisagno, the pastor told him the committee had been trying "to develop a strategy for what to do about our declining churches in the inner city. ... All we've done is talk, and nothing happens, and I'm one of those pastors, and our hearts are about to break."

The pastor showed him a slide show entitled "What Do You Do with Grandma?", which compared declining, older churches to aging relatives, Bisagno recalled.

"The idea is that when Grandma gets so old, do you care for her at home? Do you just let her die? Do you put her in a nursing home? What do you do with aging people and aging churches?" Bisagno said.

The pastor told Bisagno something that startled him: "In our city of 450-500 Southern Baptist churches, the largest association in the convention, ... we have identified 125 churches that are dying, that will not last 24 months... . Some of them won't last 24 days."

Bisagno said, "He began to show me the pictures, and there were churches boarded up, 'For Sale' signs, grass growing up, beautiful churches, paid for, and worth millions of dollars."

The three events caused Bisagno to reflect on how he had been careful to support foreign missions but had neglected missions opportunities in his own city.

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"I said to God, 'I will never again stumble over mission opportunities on my own doorstep,' ... and I began to think about that and to weep, and God got my heart," Bisagno said. "So God said to me, 'Megachurch, it is time for you to give priority to the others.' I went to my church on a Sunday morning and told them what God had led me to do."

In the years since, First Baptist has provided a broad range of help to once-dying churches, such as money, ministerial staff, volunteer workers, maintenance and landscape services, church repairs, and assistance in outreach, Bisagno said.

"It is imperative, I believe, that one thing in this world must be more important to you than the growth in your church, and that is the growth in the kingdom of God," Bisagno told the conferees. "I have to tell you without question, it has been the most exhilarating, thrilling, satisfying, pleasurable, God-blessed ministry of my entire 43 years in full-time Christian service."

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**Church redoubles its
Lottie Moon offering**

**Baptist Press
2/2/95**

RUSSELL SPRINGS, Ky. (BP)--First Baptist Church, Russell Springs, Ky., doubled its Lottie Moon Christmas Offering goal last year, and then members nearly doubled that goal with their actual gifts.

The offering goal members thought would be a challenge was surpassed by 80 percent.

The 1994 offering goal was \$5,000 -- twice the 1993 goal of \$2,500. Actual receipts for the 1994 offering totalled \$9,001.

Church secretary Brenda Aaron credited the influence of interim Pastor John Wilson as one factor in the unusually large offering. Wilson and his wife, Marge, have served as volunteer missionaries in Namibia, Transkei, Swaziland and Somalia.

"The Wilsons' sharing of their experiences in the field has personalized foreign missions for the church family and brought a sense of immediacy to the need for sharing the message of salvation with the world," Aaron said.

The whopping gift to Lottie Moon does not come in isolation, however.

Also in 1994, the Russell Springs church gave \$2,500 to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for home missions and \$1,500 to the Eliza Broadus Offering for state missions. That's in addition to \$20,000 -- 12 percent of undesignated receipts -- given through the Cooperative Program unified budget to the Kentucky Baptist Convention and Southern Baptist Convention.

The church also is participating in the KBC's Russia partnership, donating \$8,000 to Alexandrov Baptist Church near Moscow for installation of a heating system.

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**Crews: God doesn't give
'scolding lectures'**

By Cameron Crabtree

**Baptist Press
2/2/95**

MILL VALLEY, Calif. (BP)--God doesn't give "scolding lectures" to those who ask for his help in difficult times, said the president of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary.

William O. Crews spoke Feb. 1 at the opening chapel of the seminary's spring semester.

Pointing to the first chapter in the New Testament book of James, the seminary leader said there are four basic steps to handling tough times.

-- Agree with God that trials have a godly purpose.

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"You'll never deal with anything in your life until you start right there," Crews declared. "There is nothing in your life that doesn't pass through the hands of God, and he uses it for his purposes."

Crews noted God makes people strong by allowing them to be tested.

"You don't have to understand God or the test," he said. "But you must know that God is trying to grow us up -- to help us become like Jesus Christ."

-- Pray and ask for God's help.

"None of us have what it takes to live life the right way," Crews said. "God will answer and respond to anyone who will ask for wisdom.

"God will never ever make you feel silly or make you feel bad when you ask for his guidance and direction in the tough times," he added.

-- Have complete faith in God's ability to lead you through difficulties.

"God is the rock upon which we can stand," he said. "If you can know that you don't have to understand much else when the tough times come."

During one of the "darkest hours" in his own life, Crews drew comfort from a passage in Proverbs 20 that states, "... God is directing our steps."

"If you can affirm that God is in charge of your life, you don't have to have explanations of the things that happen along the way," Crews said. "The day will come when the knowledge that God is working out his purposes is all you have."

-- Keep your eyes fixed on the goal that is ahead.

"Don't look around you, look up," Crews urged. "Most of us have a tendency to look at others when trials come. James says the best thing to do is look up, to the one who is at the end of the way."

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**Preacher's 5-year-old son makes
a promising ministerial visit** By Gomer R. Lesch

**Baptist Press
2/2/95**

BELOIT, Wis. (BP)--Nadine Christman recently joined Victory Baptist Church in Beloit, Wis., and received a visit from her pastor, Randy Wandell and his two children, five-year-old Joshua and three-year-old Rachel.

Christman said she has seen enough negative stories about the younger generation to delight in the incident that took place at the close of the visit. She had related to the youngsters by showing them pictures of her four-and five-year-old great-grandchildren, suggesting the boy doesn't eat very well, declaring "I hate carrots. I hate beans!"

Pastor Wandell asked Joshua if he wanted to pray before they left. "He immediately came over, took my hand and started to pray," said Christman. "Dear Lord," (a pause to whisper to his father "what's her name?") "please bless her, and keep her well so she can come to church, and bless all the people so they can come to church, and Lord, please help him eat his carrots and beans. Amen."

"I don't know any other five-year-old who can pray before a stranger," said Christman, "let alone be sensitive to her worry over her little great-grandchild. Looks like this might be a little preacher in training!"

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