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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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February 3, 1995

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**ATS places Southwestern Seminary
on probation until January 1997**

**Baptist Press
2/3/95**

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--The Association of Theological Schools Commission on Accrediting has placed Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary on probation from January 1995 until January 1997, according to President Ken Hemphill.

"It is important to note that probation does not mean a loss of accreditation," said Hemphill, emphasizing Southwestern remains fully accredited in all degree programs.

ATS examination of the seminary, one of six affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, began after trustees fired 16-year President Russell H. Dilday Jr. in March 1994. A fact-finding team representing ATS and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools visited the seminary in May, with a subsequent ATS visit also occurring in November. No SACS action concerning Southwestern has been announced.

According to Daniel O. Aleshire, associate director of the ATS Commission on Accrediting, "The commission is of the opinion that students can receive an accreditable theological education at Southwestern during this period of probation. Both 1994 visiting committee reports have assured the commission that the seminary has a talented faculty skilled in their disciplines and loyal to the seminary, that students are appropriately qualified and motivated to pursue graduate theological education, and that an able and experienced administrative staff supports the work of the newly elected president. It should be understood that Southwestern's accreditation by the Association of Theological Schools continues during this period of probation."

Hemphill, elected by trustees to the Southwestern's presidency last July, added the ATS Commission on Accrediting acknowledged substantial progress has been made and the academic process has continued unhindered at Southwestern.

"Nevertheless, they have decided that a probationary period of two years would strengthen further the academic process at Southwestern.

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"As president, I am disappointed in the decision of ATS to place us on probation. However, if we believe it is in the best interest of confessional and denominational theological education, we can take full advantage of the appeals process," Hemphill stated. "Nevertheless, I would hasten to add that we are going to work as fully and cooperatively as possible with ATS to resolve quickly the issues so that we can further strengthen the work and ministry of one of the finest theological institutions in the world."

According to ATS, probation is intended to provide ample time to correct inadequacies which, in the judgement of the Commission on Accrediting, "may be remedied within a relatively short but specified period of time."

According to the official notification from ATS, the commission voted to place Southwestern on probation because, in its judgement, the seminary's board of trustees failed to exert consistent and disciplined efforts:

- 1) to provide for the regular and ongoing evaluation of the president;
- 2) to ensure that faculty appointment, promotion and tenure decisions carefully correspond to published policies and criteria;
- 3) to attend sensitively to the several constituencies and publics of the seminary, and to discharge its responsibility for the establishment, maintenance and exercise of the institution's integrity and freedom from inappropriate external and internal pressures and destructive interferences or restraints.

The commission will remove probation when the seminary has met, to the satisfaction of the commission, the following criteria:

- 1) The board of trustees demonstrates that it has consistently made decisions about personnel -- both administrative and faculty -- according to its formally adopted criteria and procedures;
- 2) The board demonstrates that it has paid careful attention to its own continuing education and development;
- 3) Faculty and students are able to attest, through some fair and appropriate means, that their freedom of inquiry, within the seminary's confessional boundaries, is assured; and the board has made reasonable efforts to assure a stable institutional environment that supports the ministry of teaching, research and service.

Hemphill said he believes Southwestern adequately answered the concerns raised by the ATS commission, but went on to address the ATS issues, beginning with academic freedom.

"Dr. William Tolar, vice president for academic affairs and provost, consistently underlined the fact that there has not been one documented incident where academic freedom has been violated," Hemphill said. "ATS appears to be responding to fears that academic freedom may be curtailed rather than to any actual cases where academic freedom has been violated. We feel it is inappropriate to base a decision on suspected or possible problems rather than actual ones.

"We believe academic freedom must ensure that every faculty person has the right to investigate fully all matters pertinent to theological education and to expose students to alternative interpretations. But a faculty member may not advocate a position contrary to our confessional statement. This understanding is at the heart of every confessional school. Academic freedom is given appropriate boundaries by our confession of faith. We consistently have assured the faculty that they have no reason to worry about any loss of academic freedom as long as they teach in harmony with the Baptist Faith and Message."

ATS also raised concerns about tenure and promotion being granted, based on established criteria alone, with no ancillary concerns. "Here again, there are no cases where tenure or promotion has been withheld for reasons other than those stated in our own policy manual," Hemphill noted. "ATS appears to be responding to future concerns rather than to present reality."

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The third concern involved the trustees' accountability to all constituencies. "ATS did not question the right and authority of the trustees to terminate the president, but they have questioned the matters of the evaluation of the president and the board's accountability to all constituencies," Hemphill stated. "In response to ATS concerns, a stronger evaluation process is being implemented with a longer retention of the records of evaluations. This is a valuable corrective and will serve to strengthen the relationship between trustees and administration.

"We also are working to open clearer and more productive lines of communication between trustees, faculty and students. One issue of trustee accountability seems to be causing the greatest concern. The bylaws of the trustees indicate that they are primarily accountable to the local church through the decisions made by the duly elected messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention. This accountability to the local church sets Southern Baptists apart from many other schools represented by ATS, but is a critical element of Southern Baptist polity which we believe cannot be compromised. If we do appeal, it will be in an effort to strengthen the case of other denominational schools that have a confessional basis and accountability to a denominational constituency."

Hemphill emphasized whatever decision is reached, "the entire Southwestern community will work together to answer all concerns raised by ATS and strengthen further one of the greatest theological schools in America. The quality teaching and student recruitment will proceed unhindered.

"I am fully convinced in my heart that God intends to rebuild Southwestern in his strength and for his glory," Hemphill said. "Difficult circumstances are the platform on which God demonstrates his supernatural strength. We are excited about the future of Southwestern."

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Nominee's policies similar
to Elders', pro-lifers charge

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
2/3/95

WASHINGTON (BP)--President Bill Clinton apparently has chosen a much less combative medical professional to replace fired Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders, but pro-life leaders charged only his tone is different, not his policies.

Henry Foster, 61, is Clinton's choice as the next surgeon general, the president announced Feb. 2. Foster, an obstetrician/gynecologist and educator at a medical school in Nashville, Tenn., has been honored for his successful efforts against teen pregnancy in Nashville. His program promoted postponement of sexual activity but also distributed condoms, according to news reports. Foster also has performed abortions, a White House official confirmed, according to The Washington Times. He also has been affiliated with a leading abortion rights organization.

While Foster apparently is not as outspoken as Elders, pro-life organizations promised opposition to attempts to approve his nomination in the U.S. Senate.

"While Foster may sound more appealing than Elders, we urge Southern Baptists and the Senate to pay close attention to the policies which he will advocate," said James A. Smith of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission. "As a longtime supporter of Planned Parenthood and as a doctor who performed abortions, there should be no question as to the agenda he will pursue.

"Whether it's Henry Foster or Joycelyn Elders, the advocacy of the failed 'safe-sex' model will mean more heartache, wrecked lives and the extermination of human life for young people, as well as the unborn."

The president "just doesn't seem to get it," said Patrick Mahoney, executive director of the activist Christian Defense Coalition. "He feels that appointing someone with a different temperament than Dr. Elders will excuse their radical and extreme views. The president must realize it was the content of Dr. Elders' policies that caused her problems with the American public, not only her style."

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Foster's nomination is a "test of whether the new Republican-controlled Senate is up to fighting the culture war," said Smith, the CLC's director of government relations. "If Foster is confirmed, it should be regarded as an abject failure of the GOP."

While saying he looked forward to meeting Foster and learning more about his policies, at least one Republican senator voiced concern about the nominee.

"The worst thing the president could do is nominate someone who believes in and champions virtually the same types of programs as (Elders), only less vocally," said Sen. Dan Coats, R.-Ind., in a prepared statement. "It is one thing to be an advocate for a major anti-smoking campaign. It is quite another to be an advocate for an 'Every-Child-Must-Have-a-Condom' campaign."

Clinton said he is "confident that thoughtful conservatives will have the same view of Dr. Foster as Sen. (Bill) Frist does when they have the same opportunity to review his whole record."

Frist was in the oval office for Clinton's announcement. However, Frist's office said Feb. 3 the newly elected Republican and physician from Tennessee has not taken a position on the nomination.

The administration believes "we should have appropriate education policies in schools, that we should encourage abstinence among our young people, that the question of contraception is one that should be resolved at the local level involving all sectors of the local community," Clinton said.

He wants Foster to lead a campaign to stop the epidemic of pregnancies to unmarried women, Clinton said in announcing the nomination. Foster said he believes the program he developed in Nashville can be applied successfully to the entire country.

The "I Have a Future" program, founded by Foster eight years ago, has been successful in reducing teen pregnancies among participants and was recognized as one of the country's "Thousand Points of Light" in 1991 by President George Bush.

The American Medical Association and Louis Sullivan, Bush's secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, endorsed the selection of Foster.

According to The Washington Times, a Clinton administration official said Foster's practice "included a whole range of reproductive activities, including abortion."

Foster was a member of the national board of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America from 1978-81, a PPFA spokesperson said. In 1989, he joined with about 200 others on the National Leadership Committee to Keep Abortion Safe and Legal, a campaign by PPFA. He also has served on the advisory council of the middle Tennessee affiliate of Planned Parenthood, the spokesperson said.

Foster, like Elders an African American, has served as dean of the school of medicine and acting president at Meharry Medical College in Nashville. He is on a one-year sabbatical from Meharry, serving as a visiting scholar at the Association of Academic Health Centers in Washington.

Clinton fired Elders in December after learning she had made comments apparently in support of teaching masturbation. It was the final controversial statement in a stormy 15-month tenure as surgeon general. Before and during her service in the post, Elders outspokenly promoted controversial positions such as the support of abortion rights, condom distribution to teen-agers, providing the contraceptive Norplant to prostitutes and the legalization of drugs.

Despite the controversy even before the vote, the Senate confirmed Elders by a 65-34 vote in September 1993. Coats led the committee opposition in a Democratic-controlled Senate, but Foster must face a Republican majority of 53 senators.

**'Storying:' telling about Jesus
without talking about Jesus**

By Craig Bird

SOKODE, Togo (BP)--Sometimes telling the "old, old story" of Jesus means not even mentioning his name for the first several months.

That concept -- known as "storying" -- is not based on a fear of sharing the Christian faith. It's based on the premise that in some cultures it's best to reveal the saving nature of Jesus Christ the same way God did in the Bible -- by waiting until the New Testament segment of the story.

"Storying" -- now used by missionaries in many areas of the world -- is the systematic introduction of biblical truth into the oral tradition of a people group.

It requires discipline and a staunch faith in the power of the Holy Spirit to interpret God's words. In places where the very mention of the name "Jesus" will likely shut down all communication, the gospel is presented the same way it was to the ancient Jews. After the foundation is laid through months of chronologically telling Old Testament stories, listeners are ready to meet Jesus.

Storying is working well in many places, particularly west Africa. Mission work among the Muslim Kotokoli people in Sokode, Togo, is a good case study.

"It's difficult sometimes not to jump in and talk about the death and resurrection of Jesus, because that's our normal method of evangelism," admits Southern Baptist missionary Patsy Eitelman, the lead "story-er" in Sokode.

"But when you work with Muslims that approach is almost always counterproductive. So we have to be patient and give them God's Word the same way he gave it -- Old Testament first. They accept Abraham and Moses, and they accept a holy God who is creator and judge," explains Eitelman, from Canton, Texas. "So as we tell them stories about people they know about, they listen."

One Togolese Baptist pastor criticized the program, she reported. "It could take a whole year to get to the invitation -- you're just wasting your time," he chided.

The missionary's response:

"If you just go in and share Christ immediately, and they totally reject you, what happens? You've saved some time in sharing the gospel, but you don't have any more contact with that person who has cut you off. Of course we want them all to be saved, but through storying even those who still reject Jesus usually become more tolerant. That makes it easier for converted Kotokolis to remain in their culture and with their families.

"One time in a village some Muslims kept baiting us, trying to get us to say that Jesus was the only way to heaven so they could chase us away. But they also kept asking us if hell is real and how they could make sure they wouldn't go to hell. They stopped harassing us and started listening when I insisted, 'We're trying to tell you how to be sure you don't go to hell. If you'll come listen to our stories you'll learn what God wants you to do.'"

Her husband, Ray, from Fort Worth, Texas, also uses storying extensively. His work focuses on followers of traditional African religion. He covers a region of 8,400 square miles, including 70 Baptist churches, and spends most of his time training pastors. Much of that training involves storying.

"The pastors see the need for storying in their church because so many of their members are non-literate or semi-literate and will never really hear the Word of God except through this oral method," he notes. "Plus it has improved the preaching ability of the pastors and helped them become animated and interesting." The Eitelmans have even found storying effective in discipling new Christians, grounding them in the basic doctrines and equipping them to evangelize family and friends.

Patsy works closely with three Kotokoli Christians (all former Muslims), each with a dynamic testimony of how they were converted and each with a commitment to sharing the gospel through storying:

-- Maliouro Sakibou, pastor of a Baptist church in Sokode, became a Christian as a teen-ager and rapidly led most of his family to faith in Christ. But his efforts to share his faith with other Kotokolis were fruitless, "until we started storying."

-- Asibi Agoro has three children, a husband who beats her for her Christianity and a mother who has tried to stab her for the same reason. She also has a profound trust in the love of Jesus Christ and a desire for others to experience that love.

-- Toubaye Essognina has a lengthy prison record and a fearsome reputation -- formerly for his violent behavior, now as a fearless Christian in the midst of a Muslim people.

The storying team works in different configurations. Patsy meets with groups ranging from one listener to 90. Sometimes she tells the story; sometimes one of the Kotokoli Christians does.

African Christians have numerous advantages over missionaries as "story-ers" since they have language fluency and a deeper grasp of the culture and world view of the local people. All across west Africa the "new" method fits into the popular custom of storytelling, especially in rural areas.

One of Mrs. Eitelman's favorite weekly sessions is with Alfa Mamam, an imam (Muslim spiritual leader) in the village of Sabarinade.

The 57-year-old Muslim is gentle and warm. He has officially given Ray Eitelman a Kotokoli name (Moses) and often interrupts the stories with questions. On a typical day the audience consists of both his wives (the second is the widow of a brother; he assumed responsibility for her according to custom), neighbor women, most of his 12 children and an assortment of neighborhood kids. If a woman starts pounding cassava for the evening meal he motions for her to stop until the story is finished.

He translates some parts to the women and children himself. He has 75 members at his mosque and wants "to build more mosques so more people can learn God's word."

"He's gracious and interested, but if he ever becomes a Christian it will cost him," Mrs. Eitelman comments. "His family gave him to an imam to raise when he was 6 years old. All his history, culture and financial resources are tied up in Islam. But he's listening to God's Word. We'll see what happens when we get to the New Testament."

In the next several years, many Kotokolis will face that same question, because storying, like the Word of God, points toward salvation through Jesus Christ long before his name is mentioned.

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

Inner peace, future joy
keep Asibi telling her story

By Craig Bird

Baptist Press
2/3/95

SOKODE, Togo (BP)--It's not abuse for a Muslim husband to beat his wife for becoming a Christian in Sokode, Togo.

It's not assault if her mother tries to stab her for the same reason.

It's not unheard of for a converted Muslim to revert to Islam under such pressures.

Asibi Agoro fought off her knife-wielding mother and endures occasional beatings from her husband. And she seriously thought of renouncing her faith. But ultimately she couldn't walk away from Jesus Christ -- or stop telling her Muslim family, friends and neighbors about him.

In 1989 Asibi had a thriving business selling lottery tickets. But she noticed her business neighbor, a seamstress with little income, seemed so much more content than she was. The woman told her about Jesus, took her to church and encouraged Asibi's decision to become a Christian.

Asibi's family reacted differently. Her husband hauled her to her relatives, and when she professed her new faith, they all took turns slapping her. She stopped going to church but read a hidden Bible when her husband was absent.

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The beatings continued, and she was forced to drink milk that had been used, as is the custom, to wash off charcoal writings on wooden tablets from Islam's holy book, the Koran.

"I'll drink it, but I won't abandon my faith in Jesus," she insisted.

Asibi went through the ritual of five-times-a-day Muslim prayers, but she prayed to Jesus in her heart. Her husband made her and her children sleep on the bare floor of another room, and he encouraged his other wife to insult and spy on her.

At one point she was so discouraged she went to Southern Baptist missionary Patsy Eitelman and said she was ready to go back to Islam.

Hiding disappointment, but understanding the pressure the young woman was under, the missionary replied: "If Christ hasn't really changed you, it would be better if you did go back -- but if Christ has really saved you, you won't be able to."

Finally Asibi fled to the neighboring west African country of Burkina Faso. But her husband tracked her down and brought her back to Sokode after promising she could practice her new faith without persecution. Her mother attacked her with a machete, but her husband -- for once -- protected her.

A year later he kicked her out just after she was baptized. But nine months later he came to the Eitelmans, and even stood before the church and asked for help in convincing his wife to come home. His second wife had left him, abandoning her two small children, and he apparently wanted Asibi to take care of her co-wife's children.

Since her return, the cruelty has been more emotional than physical. He regularly brings home a girlfriend while Asibi and the children sleep in the next room. Most of her family members still threaten her with death when she greets them in the market. But her mother now welcomes her home, and even listens in on many of the Christian "storying" sessions Asibi has with another young woman.

She regularly shares Christ with the five children -- her three and two from the co-wife who never returned -- and leads several storying groups.

"Her faith has made her life very difficult," Eitelman said. "But she's convinced it has made her eternity very joyful."

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(BP) photo (horizontal) to be mailed Feb. 6 to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press. Outline available on SBCNet News Room.

Church rejoices over
'water leak' notice

By Sarah Zimmerman

Baptist Press
2/3/95

ORANGEBURG, S.C. (BP)--Last summer the Department of Public Utilities assumed New Hope Baptist Church had a water leak. What else would explain the significant increase in water usage and the lush green area near the church building in Orangeburg, S.C.?

The church received a routine notice to check for a possible leak. When pastor Todd Brady showed the notice to the church, members applauded. They knew the building didn't have a leak; they were baptizing more people.

While the church lawn was brown from an unusually dry summer, Brady said the spot where the 500-gallon baptistry drained looked like the Garden of Eden.

The six-year-old church with 200 members is an example of a church that does not let surroundings determine its evangelistic zeal.

New Hope is in Orangeburg County, one of South Carolina's largest in square miles and one of the state's least populated. Yet the church baptized 34 people last year.

Revival began, Brady said, with a study of the Old Testament book of Hosea in which God repeatedly calls people to a right relationship with him. As church members took the lessons personally, "We ended up praying an hour or so and had special called meetings for prayer and worship on Saturday nights.

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"On Wednesday nights we started at 7 (p.m.) and prayed until 8:30 p.m. We never finished the book of Hosea," Brady said. "People here are literally experiencing God."

Church members began to pray for non-Christians by name, Brady said. To undergird their participation in "Here's Hope. Share Jesus Now," the church created an intercessory prayer team of 31 people. Each team member was assigned a specific day of each month to pray for Christians who are witnessing and lost people who will hear the gospel.

Another strategy is home prayer meetings, Brady said. He hosted the first one at his house for the deacons. The deacons, in turn, invited church members to their houses for prayer meetings.

"Here's Hope. Share Jesus Now" is the Southern Baptist effort for Christians to share Christ 60 times in 60 days. At New Hope, "people who have never shared their faith are leading people to the Lord," Brady said. Thirty-five church members committed to make a total of 1,200 witnessing contacts during "Here's Hope."

The church scheduled a "week of fresh encounter" Feb. 5-12 strictly for its members. Revival services which are open to the community are set for March 19-23.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press.

Church size, location do not
limit evangelism effectiveness

By Sarah Zimmerman

Baptist Press
2/3/95

ATLANTA (BP)--Leadership, training and vision influence a church's baptism rates more than its size or location, Southern Baptist Home Mission Board officials say.

Churches with high baptism rates are found in all locations, said Steve Whitten, director of the HMB's program research department. A church's size and location are factors, but they "need not determine a church's evangelistic effectiveness."

A 1991 study of 1,000 churches found those with a large number of baptisms have several common characteristics: a pastor committed to frequent personal witnessing, witness training for lay people of all ages, a variety of evangelistic methods, a vision for growth and a method to identify and visit evangelistic prospects.

In the study, 18 percent of the "high baptism churches" were classified as open country or village. Churches in the high baptism category were those which baptized five or more people per 100 resident members for two consecutive years.

Gary Farley, HMB director of town and country missions, said some keys for evangelism in rural areas are:

- a passion for people without Christ.
- sense of empowerment from God.
- enlarged circle of evangelistic prospects. Some rural churches limit their church field to a three-mile radius of the church, Farley said. Today people will drive 20 to 30 minutes for something they want.

Rural churches also need to look beyond geography for evangelistic prospects, Farley said. Include friendships people make at work.

- worship that fits a significant portion of the population. People living in rural areas are increasingly diverse and will want diverse styles of worship.

- ministry that meets needs. "Don't get into a programmatic rut and do things just because you think you're supposed to. Do things with a sense of purpose, direction and vision," Farley said.

"Many rural churches do well because they find a niche and address a need -- spiritual, social or personal -- that no one else is addressing," Farley said.

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**Covenant pastor advocates use
of media to influence for Christ** By Karen Cannon

ST. LOUIS (BP)--Ron Wilcoxson said he became involved in "Covenant" because "I realize the value and impact media has on our nation as a whole."

Covenant is a special emphasis of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission to call attention to pornography and violence in media and to offer suggestions for how pastors like Wilcoxson and other Christians can curb the negative influence media have on children and young people.

"Part of the reason we're not harvesting more souls for the kingdom is because of the impact the secular media have on the mind-set of America," said Wilcoxson, pastor of First Baptist Church of Affton, St. Louis. "If we're going to make a significant influence for Christ in this country, we must have an impact through media."

The father of four children says he especially is concerned with the impact secular television has on America's children.

"Anyone who cares about children has to be concerned about the messages ridiculing Christian morality that come from television, movies, music and other media," he said. "We have to come to grips with how media influence our children. We not only have to be concerned with overt pornography and violence, but with all the subtle messages of perversion as well."

First Baptist Church of Affton hosted a "Covenant" emphasis Dec. 4 that featured C.C. Risenhoover, assistant to the president of the RTVC, as speaker, with Covenant artist Wayne Meachum providing special music.

Wilcoxson is not a novice when it comes to understanding and using media. He received an undergraduate degree in marketing from Southeast Missouri State University.

"I didn't really plan to use it," he said, laughing. "My real motivation and goal in school was to have a career as a professional golfer. But then God intervened in my life and changed my direction."

He said his salvation experience and call to preach were simultaneous.

"I knew salvation meant going into the ministry," he said, "so I fought God tooth and toenail for a year. I feared that if I slowed down enough for God to catch me ... as if I could outrun him ... he would have to punish me for all the wrong things I had done. So for me salvation was a big surprise. I knew what I needed to do, but didn't know God would love me instead of taking punitive action against me."

Wilcoxson became a pastor his senior year of college. Following graduation he went to Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta, where he received a master of divinity degree with an emphasis in church marketing. While in school he continued as a pastor, then afterward did home missions work, starting churches for an association.

He then returned to Missouri and received his doctorate from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary with an emphasis in advertising.

Wilcoxson's continuing interest in home missions took him to Texas, where he started a new church in Flower Mound jointly sponsored by the Baptist General Convention of Texas and Denton Baptist Association. After two years at the mission church, at age 35 with four children including a newborn, he decided to try the professional golf tour.

"I think I just needed to know before I got too old," he said. "I went to the tour school, played on the junior circuit and in one PGA tour event. After I had lost all I could afford to lose, I joined my wife and kids in Missouri and started working for my father."

"Then I asked my heavenly Father if he was ready for me to go back into the pastorate. He first opened a door near Kansas City, then here at First Baptist Church of Affton."

Wilcoxson, now in this third year at First Baptist, said the church does a lot of radio and television advertising and does not expect immediate response from it.

"It's for the purpose of getting us known and for building awareness of who we are and what we're sharing," he said. "Radio, television and other media are tools we can use for Christ. And I think it is vital that we be aware of what is going on in the secular mind in order to make an impact on what they think.

"I'm not necessarily talking about mass evangelism through media, but you can set the stage for evangelism with media. That's why Covenant is so important."

As a Covenant pastor, Wilcoxson is anxious to share his church advertising and marketing expertise with others. His telephone number is (314) 631-8750.

For information on having a Covenant rally or emphasis, contact the RTVC public relations office, 6350 West Freeway, Fort Worth, TX 76150; (817) 737-4011.

The RTVC's Covenant awards are scheduled to be presented on the evening of May 12 during a live, televised production broadcast on ACTS and FamilyNet, beginning at 8 p.m. Central from the studios of the RTVC in Fort Worth, Texas.

Covenant awards were inaugurated in August 1994 as a way of recognizing television producers, stations and individuals who have made significant contributions to faith and family values in media.

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Cannon is a writer for the RTVC.

FIRST-PERSON

Churches can give counsel, support
in adoptee birth family searches

By Kay Moore

Baptist Press
2/3/95

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--What do you say to a mother you're never met?

An increasing number of Christians are grappling with this issue today as more and more adult adopted individuals are searching for birth family members.

As a person who was adopted in infancy, I joined and even helped lead this parade of adopted persons more than 15 years ago when finding one's birth family was an embryonic, cutting-edge movement in which only a small handful of people were participating.

Today that parade extends around the globe -- and into many Southern Baptist churches as more and more people, such as I, have had positive search and reunion experiences, as cultural attitudes, agency policies and even laws that once kept such searches from occurring are changing.

I began my search into uncharted waters in 1979 with the full blessings of my adoptive parents and church friends who supported and prayed for me, not knowing what the outcome would be. Like the vast majority of people involved in such experiences today, my search did not originate because of family problems but was borne out of a deep curiosity and a desire to complete my own picture of who I was.

As I viewed the tapestry of my life, I could discern the threads of the environment of my loving adopted family, the special community in which I grew up and the affirming church that nurtured me throughout childhood and youth. I could see what effects those influences had on me. But the intersecting threads in the tapestry which I knew existed -- the impact of heredity and genetics -- were obscured.

Unlike today's era of adoptive parents, who often are given volumes of nonidentifying information about their adopted child's birth parents, my parents in the late 1940s and early 1950s received no birth family background. "Just take her home and love her, and that's all she'll ever need," they were told. And "love her" they did, but all the love in the world could not wipe out my overwhelming desire to know such facts as nationality, physical resemblance and medical information. I can't remember a day I wasn't insatiably curious about those matters, and many adopted individuals reared in loving homes echo these same sentiments.

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Although I would affirm anyone who sincerely feels led of the Lord to track down his or her birth family as I did and to do so with the utmost discretion and sensitivity, I quickly state that searching and reuniting is not for everyone, nor should it be. Individuals should never tackle such a major life-altering experience if they feel only lukewarm about it or if they're not willing to take risks. Even the most positive experiences, such as mine, are emotionally heavy pilgrimages -- because as you uncover birth family information, you're adding a whole new layer of facts about yourself onto the you that you already know.

And although vast numbers of adoptive parents today support such searches and many birth mothers by and large do not object to at least some kind of contact, a reunion with one's birth family makes no small dent into people's lives. As one pastor whose wife is adopted put it, "Adult adoptees are adding huge chunks to their personal data base."

For me, as with many adopted individuals, the results were far worth the life alteration. When I met my birth mother, I laid eyes for the first time on an adult who looked like me. Physical similarities were overwhelming, and I found that I hailed from a long birth family line of journalists -- an especially significant fact for me since at age 11 I had surrendered my life to Christian journalism although I knew no one else in that profession.

And, down the years, the relationship has been a rewarding one. When my father passed away almost two years ago, my birth mother and her husband made the trip from their state to Texas to help support my adoptive family in their loss. When my son graduated from high school last year, he was surrounded by his three loving and doting grandmothers -- including my birth mother, who first met him when he was 3 -- to cheer him on.

But as many adopted persons also concur, I discovered that although I located people who were carbon copies of me physically, the folks I look like inside are by and large the adoptive family that reared me and sat by my bedside when I was sick and encouraged me through thick and thin and poured their lives into my upbringing.

With these adoption-related matters such a contemporary issue, what can churches do to help their members who find themselves involved in a search/reunion experience?

- Provide a support system for individuals who may be grappling with questions about whether finding birth family members is right for them. (Some birth parents also are initiating searches today for the adult children they made adoption plans for years ago.) Offer to pray for and check in regularly with people going through this process. Offer to serve as an intermediary if the adopted individual doesn't want to make direct contact, or offer to go with the adopted individual who may be about to make contact or track down some important information. Urge the adopted individual to keep his or her routine simple while adjusting to the new events in his or her life.

- Furnish the names of professional Christian counselors to individuals who may need special insights into their desires and needs to search. Finding and reuniting with one's birth family is far too major a life issue to go through without some kind of professional support.

- Provide church forums for individuals affected by adoption to speak. Help educate your church about awareness of adoption-related topics.

- Avoid treating the subject of searching as though it is some deep, dark secret. Pastors, church leaders and fellow members can ask the adopted person questions such as, "How is your search going?" or "Have you heard from your birthmother lately?"

- Help adopted individuals who discover some painful issues understand that their worth is not based on past events in their lives but on the unconditional love and acceptance of Jesus Christ.

- Support adoption as a viable option for families. Even the smallest agencies today have post-adoptive services that provide a lifetime of helps for members in the adoption triad -- birth families, adoptive parents and adopted individuals.

Moore, of Richmond, Va., is the author of a new Broadman & Holman book, "Gathering the Missing Pieces in an Adopted Life," which provides helps for all parties in adoption. A former reporter for the Houston Chronicle, her story about the search for her own birth family was nominated for a Pulitzer prize by the newspaper.

**Prof, Southeastern community
pray to stir wife from coma**

By Norman Miller

**Baptist Press
2/3/95**

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--Despite his diabetic wife's comatose and brain-dead state, Logan Carson said, "I was sheltered in the time of a great storm like a bird hidden in the cleft of a rock. I knew the storm was raging, but I could not feel its effects."

Carson, professor of theology at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, and his wife, Glenwood, nicknamed "Mizpep," were in New York visiting relatives during the winter holidays when she went to bed feeling sick on Jan. 2. Carson, who was born blind, said, "I was watching the bowl games when I decided to check on Mizpep. I noticed her breathing was shallow and irregular, so I tried to wake her. When I couldn't, I decided to take her to the hospital."

Soon after arriving at Bronx Community Hospital, doctors told Carson his wife's brain, liver and kidneys "showed no activity; she may never wake up. Only one in a hundred come back from something like this." But Carson said, "I thought she might be that one."

"I called Dr. Patterson to get the prayer chain going, and then I rested in the calm God provided," Carson said. "I had spiritual peace and knew God was with me: I didn't guess it; I didn't think it; I KNEW it," he emphasized. "I said, 'Well, Lord, here we go; we're walking together, and you're doing all the work.'"

After nearly two days, Mizpep's vital signs began to improve. She miraculously awakened from the coma when her daughter, Tricia, called to her. Mizpep awoke to tell Tricia, "I'm here, baby."

Subsequent tests showed Mizpep had suffered a heart blockage. She was transferred to a hospital noted for its cardiac care, where she received a defibrillator to help stabilize her heart rate. "The surgery was a success," Carson said. "Mizpep is walking almost two miles a day around the hospital halls."

Mrs. Carson is expected to return to Wake Forest after her month-long hospital stay and a brief time of recuperation at her sister's home in New York. In a telephone interview, Mrs. Carson referred to those who prayed for her: "God knew exactly what to do for me. People in every direction were praying for me, including many of Logan's former and current students."

Carson, who joined Southeastern's faculty last August as the seminary's first professor of African descent, said, "The folks at the seminary have been so kind to me, and I am supremely happy. I now know I belong to a family."

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**Any Christian can backslide,
evangelist Junior Hill says**

By Debbie Moore

**Baptist Press
2/3/95**

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--"Backsliding is something that can happen to any Christian," evangelist Junior Hill of Hartselle, Ala., told students and faculty at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary during the recent annual campus revival.

"Most of the time, when a child of God backslides, he never drops out of church; he never stops giving his tithe; he never really stops reading the Bible; he never falls into overt sin; he never turns his back on his call into ministry," said Hill, first vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1989.

"Backsliding, in the Word of God, is nothing more than when Jesus becomes less than first place in a believer's life. And that is really what has happened to a large segment of our church membership today."

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Even pastors, seminary professors and students can backslide, if "you get so engrossed in the Word of God that you forget the God of the Word," said Hill, who has conducted more than 1,200 revivals across the United States and in many foreign countries.

Christians can know whether they have backslidden if they find any of three "unmistakable symptoms," he said.

The first symptom is being unembarrassed about sin. The devil brings a Christian to this point by distorting the appearance of the sin, debating its acceptability and diverting the Christian's accountability, Hill said.

"The devil takes a monstrous sin that is clearly defined in the Word of God, and he rubs off the rough edges of it until he distorts it. He holds it up to us, and it's not as bad as we thought it was.

"We are debating moral issues today that have been settled thousands of years ago in the Word of God," he said. "What is there to debate about adultery? The Bible says, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery.' What is there to debate about abortion? The Bible says, 'Thou shalt not kill.'

"You can't play with sin. I don't care how insignificant, trivial and minor it may appear to you, if it is large enough for the Holy Spirit to make you aware of it, it's large enough to rob you of God's power if you don't get it right."

Second, the backslidden Christian has an unhappy spirit, Hill said. "While you may not always feel like you're on top of the mountain, there should always be an abiding, sweet peace in your heart in fellowship with the Lord Jesus. If you don't have it, you've backslidden on God," Hill said. "Fellowship with God is nothing more than falling in love with Jesus over again.

"You can get so engrossed in (the Bible) and the study of theological experts that you can lose the thrill of a daily touch with the Lord Jesus," he said. "If all you've got is what you get with your theological studies, you're going to come up cold and empty and miserable without the touch of God's breath on what you've learned."

Third, the backslidden Christian is "uncaring about the lost," Hill said, relating a story from his own recent experience. While shopping for a new car, he was met by a salesman who knew of Hill's ministry. The man said he was having some difficulty in his life and asked if Hill could recommend some books or tapes. Hill, who was thinking about being in a hurry and not really wanting to do any counseling at the moment, said he would get something together for the salesman.

A few weeks went by. The car needed some adjustment, so Hill took it back to the dealership. He encountered the salesman again, who said he still needed some materials and hoped Hill could help him. Hill apologized, told the man about his hectic schedule, then said he would get something for him soon.

A little while later he received a letter from the salesman, who said he was still having troubles and again asked for some helpful materials. Hill put the letter in his "Correspondence to Be Answered" file, then prepared for another revival series at another church.

When he returned, he noticed his correspondence file needed some attention, so he sat down to get some of it out of the way. As he worked through the stack, he noticed that his wife had attached a newspaper clipping to the top of the salesman's letter. It was a death notice.

Hill challenged Christians to look within their hearts, confess the sin that God shows them, spend time with God so they can be filled with joy in their ministry and care enough about those who have not accepted Christ to go out of their way to take the time to meet them with the gospel at their point of need.

"How long has it been since just you and Jesus got off in a quiet place -- without your study Bible, without a sermon outline, without your class notes -- just to have a sweet, quiet, personal talk together?" Hill asked.

"You'll never be any better than what you are in your quiet commitment to Jesus."

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