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**-- BAPTIST PRESS**  
News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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March 9, 1995

95-40

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL  
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WASHINGTON--Analysis: Evangelicals evaluate 'Contract with America.'  
EDITORS' NOTE--The 10 bills of the GOP's "Contract with America."  
WASHINGTON--Analysis: At mid-term, Clinton, evangelicals take measure with different sticks.  
CYPRUS--Baptists launch cradle-to-grave training program in Middle East.  
CYPRUS--Southern Baptists extend United Arab Emirates work; photo.  
PUERTO RICO--Refugee work brings missions to church's door, leader says.  
TENNESSEE--Theologian sees baseball strike as reflection of moral culture.  
FLORIDA--Georgia pastor appointed chief SBC parliamentarian.  
KENTUCKY--Witness training uncovered her lack of a testimony.

**ANALYSIS**

Evangelicals evaluate  
'Contract with America'

By Jennifer Ferranti

Baptist Press  
3/9/95

WASHINGTON (BP)--With the Balanced Budget Amendment's defeat in the Senate by just one vote March 2, evangelicals are speculating about the future of the GOP's "Contract with America."

The Contract, which 367 candidates, mostly Republicans, signed last fall, is an ambitious effort to restructure the role of government now that Republicans control Congress for the first time in 42 years. Its 10 specific pieces of legislation seek to limit government and hold it accountable, promote economic opportunity and individual responsibility for families and businesses, and maintain security at home and abroad.

The Contract's signers promised that within the first 100 days of the new Congress they would bring the 10 measures to a vote under "open" rules allowing unlimited amendments. Of course, they couldn't guarantee passage of each measure, but they certainly did not expect defeat in round one.

The Balanced Budget Amendment was the first and perhaps most critical item in the Contract. Sen. Phil Gramm, R-Texas, called it "the crown jewel" of the effort to slash spending and shrink government. And while Senate Majority Leader Robert Dole, R-Kan., can demand another vote at a later date, the amendment's demise leaves many evangelicals more eager than ever to move past the Contract's economic issues to the moral and social agenda they consider more important.

"There are many of us who think that America's deepest problems are not economic in orientation, they are laden with the debate over values, and the Contract doesn't really get to the heart of that debate," says James A. Smith, director of government relations for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

"When the Contract was put together, they made a calculated decision that those items (moral and social issues) would be controversial and would divide their coalition and perhaps be harmful to the political agenda," Smith explains.

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Daniel Heimbach, associate professor of ethics at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C., and a former Bush administration official, agrees the Contract focuses on economic issues. But that doesn't mean it is without moral and social values, Heimbach says, pointing to a scriptural foundation for many of the Contract's 10 bills.

For example, the Fiscal Responsibility Act, the bill for a balanced budget and line item veto, would prohibit government from spending beyond the resources it has, Heimbach explains. This is an "enduring moral principle" with which even Democrats agree, he says. The problem comes in reaching a consensus about precisely how to put fiscal responsibility into action.

The Taking Back Our Streets Act, which addresses crime, is rooted in the principle of retributive justice, which is a fundamental view throughout Scripture, Heimbach says. "Human beings, regardless of their circumstances, regardless of their environment, regardless of their upbringing, are nevertheless responsible moral agents. ... And where there is an immoral act of a criminal nature, there needs to be punishment, not just simply rehabilitation, not just simply restitution, but punishment of the perpetrator," he asserts.

The Personal Responsibility Act deals with welfare reform, discouraging illegitimacy and teen pregnancy by prohibiting welfare to minor mothers, denying increased aid for additional children while on welfare and imposing strict work requirements for recipients.

"We've created a system that is, in fact, rewarding irresponsible behavior, rewarding immorality," Heimbach states.

Besides, Scripture is clear that parents always have the primary responsibility for their children, Heimbach says. "I see nowhere in Scripture a warrant that government should take the place of parents." Government may help and punish or encourage parents to be more responsible, he says. "But in the final analysis, it's not left in the government's lap; it's left in the parents' lap."

Many evangelicals worry, however, that a cap on welfare benefits could reduce teen pregnancy and illegitimacy at the cost of increased abortions.

The Family Reinforcement Act calls for school vouchers, tax incentives for adoption, stronger child pornography laws and tax credit for elderly dependent care. The American Dream Restoration Act would provide a \$500-per-child tax credit, repeal the marriage tax penalty and eliminate the tax on timely withdrawals from Individual Retirement Accounts (IRAs). Heimbach says both bills are largely a matter of political rather than theological philosophy. But the bills are "prudent because families are the essential social unit of any society, and what you can do to strengthen intact, healthy families is going to help the society overall."

The Common Sense Legal Reform Act would limit the amount of non-economic and punitive damage awards juries can impose in product liability and medical malpractice suits. Heimbach sees a biblical mandate for the bill, calling the expectation that "if you can get it, you ought to have it" immoral and perverted. "The courts have become more of a lottery than a place to obtain justice," he says, offering Isaiah 59 as a reminder of "God's indictment of a legal system that has forgotten what justice is about."

The remaining four bills of the Contract, addressing national security, senior citizens, capital gains and congressional term limits, do not involve an implicit scriptural directive, Heimbach says, but are moral in that they require government to act responsibly, maintain credibility and keep its promises.

The Christian Coalition, which counts 1.5 million members in 1,200 chapters, has committed to spend \$1 million lobbying Congress to pass the Contract. The Contract does not ignore social issues, insists the coalition's executive director, Ralph Reed. "It includes welfare reform; it discourages illegitimacy and encourages work and responsibility ... It includes a tougher crime bill and a tougher anti-pornography bill," he points out.

"Values are important to voters, but values alone are not enough," Reed says. "We know that without specific policies intended to help families -- tax cuts, education vouchers, higher wages, retirement benefits -- appeals to family values will fall on deaf ears. ... While we must continue to address issues like abortion and homosexuality, we must also speak to the pocketbook concerns of middle-class families."

Besides, nothing in the Contract runs counter to conservative thinking, Reed says, noting that some budgetary issues could directly translate into the kind of social change conservative Christians yearn for.

But many evangelicals remember another time, in the early 1980s, when they agreed to temporarily postpone action on social issues to give the Reagan administration a chance to introduce its economic proposals. Later, they found themselves without strong support from the administration.

So, they are eager to get the issues of the culture war on the table while they still have the chance. Since its 1992 convention, they have watched the Republican Party demonstrate an increasing desire to shift away from social issues like abortion, emphasizing instead economic and non-ideological matters, with some Republican leaders now promoting the GOP as "a big tent" with room for varying views.

"It should be obvious that in a time of relative economic prosperity, a revolution of the type that took place on Nov. 8 had to have a more fundamental basis to it than economics," argues Smith, who is not confident that after the first 100 days Republicans will keep their promise to address the conservative Christian agenda.

James Dobson, head of Focus on the Family, based in Colorado Springs, Colo., concurs, saying, "Any plans to address the social and moral issues is conspicuously missing from the Contract."

Dobson is particularly concerned about the abortion issue. "By our count, there are now 224 pro-life members in the House and 45 in the Senate. Nevertheless, when asked if he had any plans to propose new legislation to protect the unborn child, Speaker Newt Gingrich made it clear that his priorities lay elsewhere."

Dobson warns, "We're expecting more from the party in control of Congress than economic and government reform, as important as those changes are at this time."

He says he expects voters to hold the feet of their elected officials to the fire. "I believe increasing numbers of Americans are fed up with the innovations of the liberal elite," he says. "They're sick of the 'dumbing down' of education, attacks on people of faith, confiscatory taxes, assaults on parental rights, crazy court decisions, condom advertisements for kids, outrageous waste in government, self-serving politicians, abortion, euthanasia, welfare giveaways, and more."

Dobson adds, "These are what we call the 'social' issues that, according to polling data, were important to millions of voters in November. I want to assure Speaker Gingrich and Senator Dole that those same citizens who dumped the Democrats are watching to see what will be done with these issues by the Republicans."

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EDITORS' NOTE: The 10 bills of the GOP's "Contract with America" are listed below:

1) The Fiscal Responsibility Act (Balanced Budget Amendment and line item veto): A balanced budget/tax limitation amendment and a legislative line-item veto to restore fiscal responsibility to Congress, requiring it to live under the same budget constraints as families and businesses.

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2) The Taking Back Our Streets Act (crime): An anti-crime package, including stronger truth-in-sentencing, "good faith" exclusionary rule exemptions for police search and seizure without a warrant, effective death penalty provisions, and cuts in social spending from last year's crime bill to fund prison construction and additional law enforcement to keep people secure in their neighborhoods and kids safe in their schools.

3) The Personal Responsibility Act (welfare): To discourage illegitimacy and teen pregnancy by prohibiting welfare to minor mothers and denying increased Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) for additional children while on welfare, cut spending for welfare programs, and enact a tough two-years-and-out provision with work requirements.

4) The Family Responsibility Act (children): Child support enforcement, tax incentives for adoption, strengthening rights of parents in their children's education, stronger child pornography laws and an elderly dependent care tax credit to reinforce the central role of families in American society.

5) The American Dream Restoration Act (middle-class tax cut): A \$500-per-child tax credit, start of a repeal of the marriage tax penalty and creation of American Dream Savings Accounts to provide middle-class tax relief.

6) The National Security Restoration Act (national security): Calls for no U.S. troops under U.N. command and restoration of the essential parts of U.S. national security funding to strengthen national defense and maintain credibility around the world.

7) The Senior Citizens Fairness Act (senior citizens): To raise the Social Security earnings limit which currently forces seniors out of the workforce, repeal 1993 tax hikes on Social Security benefits and provide tax incentives for private long-term care insurance to let older Americans keep more of what they have earned over the years.

8) The Job Creation and Wage Enhancement Act (capital gains): Small business incentives, capital gains cut and indexation, neutral cost recovery, risk assessment/cost-benefit analysis, strengthening the Regulatory Flexibility Act and unfunded mandate reform to create jobs and raise worker wages.

9) The Common Sense Legal Reform Act (legal reforms/product liability): "Loser pays" laws, reasonable limits on punitive damages and reform of product liability laws to stem the endless tide of litigation.

10) The Citizen Legislative Act (congressional term limits): A first-ever vote on term limits to replace career politicians with citizen legislators, with a limit of six years for House members (an alternative plan allows 12 years) and 12 years for senators.

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#### ANALYSIS

At mid-term, Clinton, evangelicals  
take measure with different sticks

By Jennifer Ferranti

Baptist Press  
3/9/95

WASHINGTON (BP)--In a mid-term "report card" distributed by the White House, President Clinton says he has addressed almost every campaign promise to the American people two years ago.

Of Clinton's 162 campaign promises, as listed by the Washington Post on Jan. 20, 1993, the president has taken action on 155, or 96 percent, and has achieved "substantial" or "partial accomplishment" on 123, or 76 percent, reports White House Chief of Staff Leon Panetta in a 36-page summary of Clinton's first two years in office.

The White House also holds up the president's campaign pamphlet, "Putting People First," dated June 22, 1992, as proof of Clinton's success to date. "Of the 59 major policies mentioned in 'Putting People First,' action was taken on 57 (98 percent) of the promises, while there has been substantial or partial accomplishments on 45 (78 percent) of the policies," Panetta states.

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Many conservative Christians don't argue that Clinton has accomplished a great deal, but they contend it is largely nothing to be proud of. Their dissatisfaction contributes to a Clinton presidential approval rating persistently around 43 percent, one of the lowest of any president in recent history.

This, coupled with November's Republican landslide, seems to make it politically difficult to openly support the president these days, even among Democrats -- a trend reported even in The New York Times and other media.

Calls to Democratic leaders like House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt, D-Mo., a Baptist church member, and Rep. Tony Hall, D-Ohio, known as an evangelical on Capitol Hill, confirmed that many in the president's party are unwilling to go on record for him. And Democrats who will back Clinton up are frugal in their praise.

"I think he's had a reasonable record of success," says Rep. Martin Frost, D-Texas, chairman of the Democratic Congressional Committee. He points out "no one is perfect and no president gets everything that he asks for."

"The deficit has come down dramatically," Frost says. And "the economy is in strong shape." Frost also lists the president's successes as the North American Free Trade Agreement; AmeriCorp, a service program to help youth earn money for college; and the Family Medical Leave Act.

On issues most important to evangelicals, however, Clinton often receives a failing grade.

"There is a view by many liberal Christians that Clinton is a very devout Christian, very sincere, and he's doing many things, so how can people be upset with him?" says Daniel Heimbach, associate professor of ethics at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C., and a former Bush administration official.

But, Heimbach argues, "I think we have had some very believable charges" ranging from the president's "personal behavior in terms of sexual morality ... (to) not keeping promises that were explicitly made to the American people."

The net result, Heimbach says, is that Clinton is "viewed as not reliable ... and one who is an advocate for conduct that is ... immoral from a biblical point of view."

"Abortion is the chief example of what's wrong with the Clinton administration," says James A. Smith, director of government relations for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission in Washington. "He is the first pro-abortion president. There has not been an occasion yet where Bill Clinton has said no to the abortion lobby. There is literally a litany here: the Freedom of Choice Act; the Hyde Amendment; the five executive orders his third day in office, which was the 20th anniversary of Roe v. Wade, the symbolism of which was not lost on either side; insisting on putting abortion in health care reform."

Clinton is building a record on abortion "not in the way that he said (during his campaign) in terms of keeping it rare," Heimbach says. And the administration has aggressively promoted abortion on the international level, says Heimbach, a participant at the United Nations International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in September 1994.

Clinton, meanwhile, claims success on the abortion issue. In his mid-term report card, Clinton listed as "substantial accomplishments:" repeal of the Bush administration's rules restricting abortion counseling in clinics receiving federal funds; signing and enforcement of the clinic access law, protecting women seeking abortions and health care workers from anti-abortion protesters; and approval for testing RU-486, the abortion pill, in the United States.

Another evidence of Clinton's "liberal agenda," evangelicals charge, was his announcement of support of homosexuals in the military soon after being sworn into office.

"The Clinton White House has ushered in a time when open acceptance of the homosexual lifestyle is now a given," Smith says. "And I think that is a fundamental change which is going to be difficult to correct."

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Smith says the March on Washington, a gathering of 300,000 homosexual advocates in April 1993, was "the first time in history that homosexual activists were invited to the Oval Office."

In addition to his personal association with the homosexual lobby, Clinton has supported the movement with key appointments, like Assistant Secretary Roberta Achtenberg, chief civil rights enforcement officer at the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Clinton's other appointments have not fared well with evangelicals, ranging from former Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders to Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Smith warns that the justices Clinton is appointing are pushing a "hyper-strict separationist notion" of church and state, which could lead to problems down the line with various religious liberty issues.

And even in matters not involving a moral issue, many evangelicals remain critical of Clinton.

"In terms of international foreign policy, he's come across as being very vacillating, very weak," Heimbach says. Clinton failed to show strong leadership in Bosnia and created an embarrassing situation in Somalia by beginning to use military force when U.S. troops were never sent for that purpose, Heimbach cites as examples.

The result is that "Clinton has come across to both the American people and to countries overseas generally as either being not reliable or not having firm convictions.... He threatens, but doesn't follow-up with any significant action."

On the domestic front, conservative Christians give Clinton credit for some aspects of the \$30 billion Crime Bill passed last year. But it hardly balances their criticism of his handling of fiscal matters.

A central feature of Clinton's campaign was his promise of a middle-class tax cut, Heimbach recounts. "Yet he turned right around and raised taxes and expenses instead."

Heimbach concedes Clinton has taken steps to curb federal spending. "But again, I think he's been disingenuous on this." It was savings only in terms of what Congress could have spent, Heimbach contends.

Health care reform remains perhaps the president's most public failure of all. Says Rep. Ron Lewis, R-Ky., a Baptist minister elected in a special election last year, "The Clinton health care plan was a definite fiasco that no one wanted, and he kept pressing on, and I think that was a devastating political failure for him."

Clearly, in the first two years of his term, with a Democratic majority in both the House and Senate, Clinton did not achieve nearly as much as he should have, Heimbach says. "And so politically, he came across as being led more by Congress than being a leader."

As Republican candidates begin tossing their hats into the ring for 1996, what are Clinton's chances for re-election?

"Zilch," Heimbach says. "I don't think he has any chance at all." A number of conservative Christians voted for Clinton in 1992 expressly because he was Southern Baptist, Heimbach says. But the President has let them down by "espousing a moral agenda that is very contrary to anything they can support. And they're not going to be won back."

But both Heimbach and Smith warn there are many political lifetimes between now and the 1996 election. "Two years from now, who knows what the political landscape will look like?" Smith says.

Two factors which will significantly affect Clinton's re-election bid, they say: his ability to work with the new Republican Congress as it attempts to pass the "Contract with America" and then tackle controversial moral and social issues, and the outcome of the Whitewater investigation, which will cast light on both his presidential and personal character.

**Baptists launch cradle-to-grave  
training program in Middle East By Mike Creswell**

LARNACA, Cyprus (BP)--An ambitious new program providing cradle-to-grav Christian training to believers in the Middle East already has more than 300 students and promises to revolutionize church education in the area, Southern Baptist workers say.

Called the International Institute of Biblical Studies (IIBS), it's not an institute but a new concept in training. Instead of seminary campuses, the program uses a lengthy series of Bible-based materials to begin training new Christians as soon as they have accepted Christ as Savior.

It already functions in 11 Middle Eastern countries, which include some of the world's least-evangelized, hardest-to-reach countries.

A believer who stays in the system ultimately can earn a master of divinity degree, said Southern Baptist representative Mike Edens of Cairo, Egypt, the director. "It's staggering to see what God is doing," said Edens, a native of Guthrie, Okla. "We're developing a whole new concept."

Along with scores of new study books, the approach incorporates traditional Southern Baptist programs such as Survival Kit and MasterLife discipleship training materials. Rather than a campus-based approach, the program encourages believers to gather in groups of four to six people for study. Three phases of materials are directed to new believers, more mature Christians and those preparing for full-time ministry.

Small groups are safer in the volatile Middle Eastern region, where Christians often face intensive persecution, especially converts from Islam. It's risky to depend on a few trained leaders in Middle Eastern churches, because periodically leaders are killed, imprisoned or forced to leave. Equipping rank-and-file members in Christian basics is a high priority. Also, few churches in the Middle East have adult Sunday school programs.

"We're finding that many small groups of believers can last longer than a few large ones," said Hugh Provost, a Southern Baptist worker in Cyprus. "Security concerns prevent development of larger groups. A whole new definition of 'church' is coming out. In some places, a group of three or more unrelated believers is the church now," he said.

But Edens said the program also is an act of faith. "If God does send a harvest of people coming to know him in the next few years, as we have prayed for, we realized we would not be set up to train and disciple them adequately. As God moves, we wanted to be ready," he explained.

Seven years in the making, the system was developed in response to an exhaustive three-year survey of Baptists throughout the Middle East, who asked for a program to train Christians at all levels.

One place the new program works well is Gaza, where the only Baptist church has a dozen people studying, including several non-members, said Dona Fitzgerald, Southern Baptist representative who works with the church. "We're seeing lives transformed. It's really making a difference. We're using the materials as fast as they can be produced," said Fitzgerald, from Bartlesville, Okla.

So far, 55 teachers have been trained to work with the new system. The biggest challenge is to develop materials quickly enough to keep up with fast-moving students, Edens said. Training Middle Eastern Christians to write, edit and produce study materials is a key focus. Already this year the Baptist publishing house in Cyprus has produced for children two new Christian books written and edited by native Arabic speakers.

"When we give a student a teaching book, we ask him not to fill in the blanks, but to make photocopies," Edens said. "After about 10 lessons, he can teach new students and use the book again. That seems surprising, but it's been true in many places. The concept of using church members to train other church members is biblical and well adapted to our ar a."

Lesson requirements are tailored to the educational level of students. "In one place, two university-educated men helped their pastor work through the studies, because the pastor had only a sixth-grade education. "They experienced the body of Christ in ways many of us never will. It became a beautiful expression of the body of Christ working together," Edens said.

Prime movers in getting the training system up and running are Southern Baptist workers Weldon and Joyce Viertel, who helped prepare an initial series of training books. The Viertels, from Albany and Arp, Texas, respectively, produced 22 of the basic study guides. They earlier helped set up similar programs in the Caribbean and the Philippines.

The Viertels will return to the United States later this year for retirement. But they will leave behind a solid legacy of training that will change lives for years to come, Edens said.

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Southern Baptists extend  
United Arab Emirates work

By Mike Creswell

Baptist Press  
3/9/95

LARNACA, Cyprus (BP)--Southern Baptists will launch a new training ministry in the Middle Eastern United Arab Emirates this year to strengthen evangelical presence among many people who have moved there from other countries.

Southern Baptist representatives Del and Ramona Allen have arrived in Dubai, one of seven states of the United Arab Emirates, to set up a program based on the new International Institute of Biblical Studies. That training system already is functioning in 11 Middle Eastern countries.

The Allens, from Wilburton and Sallisaw, Okla., respectively, will join Southern Baptist representatives Don and Ruth Ann Smith, also Oklahomans. Smith, from McLoud, has been pastor of the United Christian Church of Dubai for two years. His wife is from Pond Creek.

"It's been a wide-eyed six weeks," Del Allen said, assessing the early progress of their assignment.

That assignment involves setting up Christian teaching programs across the United Arab Emirates, which include Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Fujairah, Umm al-Qaiwain, Ras al-Khaimah and Ajman.

Although situated in the heart of the Muslim Middle East, about 80 percent of Emirates residents are expatriates. Only about 20 percent are Arab Muslims. Others come from India, Pakistan, Nepal and surrounding nations. About 2,000 families from the United States also live in Dubai.

This diversity shows in the United Christian Church, where 17 nationalities are represented among about 300 people who attend weekly services. Allen estimates there are about 50 Christian congregations across the Emirates that include 3,000 to 4,000 non-Catholic Christians and 60,000 Roman Catholics.

"I've been favorably surprised at the number of evangelical churches in the Emirates," said Allen, who will relate to the Council of Evangelical Churches, a group of about 15 congregations in the area.

Through teaching evangelical Christians to be firmer in their faith, Allen hopes to strengthen their Christian witness in the Emirates and other countries as they return home. Christians are largely unhindered in their ministry except for evangelizing Muslims, he said.

"There's a lot of growth and evangelism among the ethnic congregations," Mrs. Allen added.

The Allens first will set up two teaching centers and begin classes by August. They will provide materials and leadership but use local facilities instead of formal schools with buildings. "Initial response has been great. We've gotten a lot of calls from people wanting to know when we'll start," Allen said. "I'll be shocked if we don't begin with 100 students."

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Before appointment in 1994 for the Dubai assignment, Allen was prison chaplain in the Jackie Brannon Correctional Center in McAlester, Okla., for eight years. Earlier he was pastor in Oklahoma, Hawaii and California. Mrs. Allen was a high school business teacher at Wilburton (Okla.) High School for 16 years.

But Allen got interested in the Middle East during the Gulf War. He was a U.S. Army chaplain for three-and-a-half years and chaplain in the U.S. Army Reserves 22 years before he retired in 1992.

When his reserve unit went on active duty during the war, he spent more than three months in northern Saudi Arabia where his unit established a hospital. That visit capped a long-term interest in overseas Christian service for the Allens.

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

Refugee work brings missions  
to church's door, leader says

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press  
3/9/95

SAN JUAN, P.R. (BP)--Southern Baptist work with refugees brings foreign missions to the church doorsteps, said the Home Mission Board's director of refugee resettlement.

Southern Baptists must not shy away from the task of helping newcomers to America both financially and spiritually, said Bill Fulkerson, addressing state church-starting leadership at the annual meeting of the HMB's extension section's national leadership conference Feb. 23-27 in Puerto Rico.

Refugee resettlement work was made a part of the Southern Baptist Convention's structure in 1962, he said. "The initial Cuban crisis opened the doors of refugee resettlement to Southern Baptists, and opened the door of salvation for many, many refugees."

Today, such work brings foreign missions home to Southern Baptists, he said. "All those people about whom we have studied for so many years are now the people living next door. Are we going to run away from the mission field?"

Worldwide, an estimated 19 million people live outside their homelands fearing persecution, Fulkerson said. "Another 20 million people live within their own countries' borders but cannot live in their homes or villages because of ethnic cleansing."

Fulkerson compared today's refugees with those in the Bible, noting even Jesus was a refugee when his family fled to Egypt. "Aren't we glad that the Egyptian border inspectors did not demand proof of persecution?"

Since ministries to refugees began, nearly 700 Southern Baptist congregations have been started and more than 30,000 refugees have been helped through such work, Fulkerson said. "The growing number of ethnic members and churches are bringing Southern Baptists into the mainstream of 21st century America."

Last year Southern Baptists started 112 churches through their ministries to refugees, he said.

Through refugee resettlement, sponsors are asked to welcome families to the United States by meeting them at the airport, taking them on a tour of the community and helping them settle into a home. Among other things, sponsors are expected to pay rent for the family's housing for three months, help enroll children in school and help the head of the family find a job.

More information about refugee resettlement is available from Baptist associations or state conventions or the HMB refugee resettlement office at (404) 898-7395.

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Theologian sees bas ball strike  
as reflection of moral culture      By Terry Mattingly

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--This is the penitential season of Lent, so Catholic theologian George Weigel has been thinking about sin, sacrifice, confession and forgiveness.

Naturally, this led to meditations on the state of major league baseball.

It's easy to wisecrack that America has been forced to give up baseball for Lent this year. Maybe so, but Weigel is finding it hard to laugh. The president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C., believes the sorry state of the national pastime is evidence that we have lost sight of what it means to play together, work together or even to disagree with each other in a civil manner.

"Major league baseball may be sick unto death," he wrote in a recent column for Catholic newspapers. "And, if I may be permitted a quick segue from the ridiculous to the sublime, the sickness illustrates Pope John Paul II's insistence that free societies and free economies will self-destruct without the discipline provided by a vibrant moral culture. The culture of baseball is corrupt; that is why the pastime is sick."

Baseball is only a game, but it's a highly symbolic game. Few would bother to raise metaphysical questions about a National Football League strike. The recent labor crisis in professional hockey didn't even inspire a theological crisis in Canada.

But it's becoming normal, both in Hollywood and in news reports, to discuss baseball in spiritual terms. Last year, Christianity Today even published a meditation on the meaning of sports under the headline, "Will There Be Baseball in Heaven?" Writers frequently describe the game's statistical tomes as scriptures, the fans as disciples and some stadiums as cultural cathedrals. Thus, the strike must be rooted in sin.

"This has all turned into a clash of egos, hasn't it? ... I think that baseball fans can only pray for the conversion of human hearts," said Weigel. "The people involved in this mess need to realize that they don't own baseball, they don't love people's love of the game. ... I think we can only pray that their hubris will be exorcised during this particular season of Lent."

At this point, Weigel has become an "equal opportunity misanthrope" when it comes to venting his wrath. Leaders on both sides have shown that they have no sympathy for the hopes, dreams and the "basic moral values" of ordinary people, he said.

"Obviously, the owners and the players do not trust each other and, obviously, many of the owners don't even trust each other," said Weigel. "The whole situation has become a kind of pathetic symbol of what's going wrong in this society. Neither side shares a basic sense of what is right or wrong, so they can't communicate. ... They have lost the ability to negotiate to settle their differences. All they care about is power and money."

And so it goes, in many arenas of modern life. For centuries, teachers in the Judeo-Christian tradition have argued that there must be more to work than a quest for money. The ability to find joy and meaning in good work can be seen as a gift from God. The same is true of sports and other forms of play.

While Pope John Paul II hasn't written a commentary on the baseball strike, Weigel noted that the pontiff has made it clear there are spiritual issues at stake in the workplace. One lesson that can be gleaned from Catholic teachings is that, sooner or later, the sour attitudes of the owners and the players may poison their industry.

The millionaires on both sides, said Weigel, "care, first and foremost, about the money. Which, the Holy Father reminds us in the social encyclical 'Centesimus Annus' (The Hundredth Year), is the death of capitalism. If all you care about is the money -- if you don't care about the product, the consumers, the craftsmanship, the conditions of the market and the workplace -- then sooner or later, you're going to wreck the business."

**Georgia pastor appointed  
chief SBC parliamentarian**

ORLANDO, Fla. (BP)--A Georgia pastor who is a certified parliamentarian has been appointed chief parliamentarian for the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in June in Atlanta, according to SBC President Jim Henry.

Lester L. Cooper Jr., pastor of Valley Hill Baptist Church, Riverdale, Ga., was appointed March 2 by Henry. In January, Henry had announced the appointment of a team of six parliamentarians for the Atlanta meeting but did not announce his choice of a chief.

Cooper has served on the Georgia Baptist Convention executive committee in various capacities and has been a parliamentarian for the state convention. He is certified by the American Institute of Parliamentarians and has been president of the Georgia Association of Parliamentarians/Atlanta Unit as well as director of the Georgia Association of Parliamentarians' Educational Institute and chairman of the association's education committee. He is coauthor of "Parliamentary Procedure for the People."

The other parliamentarians named earlier by Henry are John Sullivan, Jacksonville, Fla., executive director of the Florida Baptist Convention; Sanford W. Peterson, Utica, N.Y., a corporate communications consultant firm owner; Jimmy E. Jackson, Huntsville, Ala., pastor of Whitesburg Baptist Church; David N. Matlock, Caddo Parish, La., juvenile judge; and Joe H. Reynolds, Houston, an attorney.

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**Witness training uncovered  
her lack of a testimony**

By Ken Walker

Baptist Press  
3/9/95

SPRINGFIELD, Ky. (BP)--The first spiritual decision recorded during Springfield (Ky.) Baptist Church's "Here's Hope" campaign occurred before anyone had a chance to put their witnessing training into practice.

The convert came from the ranks of the 80 people who turned out for the church's training session, held the first evening of the 60-day campaign initiated by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

Ironically, the woman in her early 20s had been invited by a friend, Joyce Bagwell, a regular visitor to Springfield but not a member at the time.

The two were completing an outline designed to help Christians deliver a short testimony of their faith when the woman suddenly stopped writing.

"I can't lead someone to Christ," she told Bagwell. "I'm lost myself. I've never had a relationship with Jesus Christ."

After learning of the woman's predicament, pastor Ken Graham asked if she could meet with him the next afternoon.

"We had a long discussion and she said she realized she was needing something in her life and it was Jesus," Graham said. "It was really exciting to see that even a workshop can lead people to the Lord."

Also stirring the congregation is the fact that the woman wasn't the only new Christian baptized on a recent Sunday. The three others baptized included a woman who had been raised a Catholic but recently discovered the need for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ; a physician raised in the Hindu religion who attended services at the invitation of his business partner; and the 12-year-old son of a church member.

But the biggest "Here's Hope" event at Springfield Baptist happened during the Super Bowl Jan. 29. Although the church still held evening services that Sunday, it hooked up its video projection system in the fellowship hall for 140 football fans. Teens made up about 65 percent of the crowd.

After seeing an evangelistic video at halftime, 24 people filled out cards indicating they had prayed to receive Jesus Christ as Savior.

"When we have 24 people receiving Christ, we know we're doing the right thing," the pastor said of some who criticized the Super Bowl outreach. "It's exciting. I'm excited for the Lord. God is doing some great things and we're just trying to get the message out."

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