

# (BP)

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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

### NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee  
901 Commerce #750  
Nashville, Tennessee 37203  
(615) 244-2355  
Herb Hollinger, Vice President  
Fax (615) 742-8919  
CompuServe ID# 70420,17

### BUREAUS

ATLANTA Martin King, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 898-7522, CompuServe 70420,250  
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 333 N. Washington, Dallas, Texas 75246-1798, Telephone (214) 828-5232, CompuServe 70420,115  
NASHVILLE Linda Lawson, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300, CompuServe 70420,57  
RICHMOND Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151, CompuServe 70420,72  
WASHINGTON Tom Strode, Chief, 400 North Capitol St., #594, Washington, D.C. 20001, Telephone (202) 638-3223, CompuServe 71173,316

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HMB study: Baptists  
losing ground in South

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press  
3/28/95

ATLANTA (BP)--Southern Baptists are losing the metropolitan South.

That's one conclusion from a report by Charles Chaney, Home Mission Board vice president of extension, or church starting, who urged greater church planting efforts in Southern cities and suburbs.

"There is a massive unfinished task in the South, and it is getting more unfinished every year," wrote Chaney, who compared the number of Southern Baptist churches and their membership with the populations in 1970 and 1993, the latest available figures.

The study found the denomination grew faster than the population outside the South, but Southern Baptists lost strength in their own backyard. And, Chaney wrote, those gains made outside the South are still minimal.

According to the report, the U.S. population grew 27 percent during the years studied, but the number of Southern Baptist churches increased only 13 percent.

In the South, the population grew 42 percent while SBC churches increased only 9 percent. "This represents a serious loss of market share," Chaney wrote. The Southern population to church ratio grew from 2,196 people for every SBC church to 2,876 people.

"We must not get to the place where we think we've got it made, because we are losing strength in the areas where we think we're strongest," Chaney told Baptist Press.

The South still holds the lion's share of both SBC constituted churches (80.4 percent) and resident members (85.5 percent). As a result, the gains made in new work areas often appear more dramatic.

Outside the South, population grew 20 percent and SBC churches grew 32 percent. The ratio of population to Southern Baptist churches decreased 9.3 percent, but there are still 22,196 people for every Southern Baptist church -- a ratio Chaney termed unacceptable. "The job is unfinished outside the South by whatever standard you want to say."

Reducing the ratio outside the South to one church for every 5,000 people (nearly double the Southern ratio) would require 26,000 more churches, he said. "We did not have 26,000 churches until 1945 -- 100 years after the Southern Baptist Convention was organized."

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Southern Baptists currently average 1,119 church starts a year, he noted. Even if all those occurred outside the South, it would take 24 years to reach that ratio of one church per 5,000 people.

Southern states needed 9,632 more churches at the end of 1993 for the number of people for each SBC church to equal the 1970 level. "We have to get far more serious about evangelism and church planting."

One encouraging sign from Chaney's report is a 4 percent reduction in the nationwide ratio of SBC members to population -- from one out of every 25 U.S. residents to one out of every 24. But in the South the ratio grew 10 percent.

Southern Baptists started 1,297 congregations last year, but Chaney wrote the convention's average 1,119 new congregations each year "provides no grounds for boasting."

"Overall our intention is to try to pick up the pace," Chaney said. "What we have been doing may be steady, but it has been slow. The unfinished task is immense."

Chaney recommended a detailed study of communities to identify the best response in each case. Such a study would include current churches' strengths and the presence of other denominations, he said.

Many communities lost ground because they changed ethnically or socio-economically, Chaney said. "The churches that were there are in decline because there are no more people like them to reach and they can't make the transition."

Chaney recommended state conventions begin intervention programs to identify churches and help them refocus on reaching their changing communities. Such work, however, will be slow, he said.

"The truth is that very few churches will accept intervention until they're absolutely on their last leg, and that's tragic."

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EDITORS' NOTE: The eight-page report was mailed to state Baptist newspapers by the Atlanta bureau of Baptist press. A copy of the report with 62-page appendix is available from the bureau by calling (404) 898-7518.

Revival experience extends  
to state evangelism conference

By Bill Webb

Baptist Press  
3/28/95

O'FALLON, Ill. (BP)--An extended service of public confession and repentance climaxed the annual Illinois Evangelism Conference at First Baptist Church, O'Fallon, March 13-14.

What happened was akin to reports of revival coming out of Brownwood, Texas, and the campus of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

The preaching program for the final evening session of the conference was scrapped at midday, clearing the way for Brownwood pastor John Avant to tell the story of spiritual awakening that began at his church -- Coggin Avenue Baptist -- and others, spread to Howard Payne University and then to the seminary and beyond.

State evangelism services director Max Samples set the stage for what might happen when he said at the beginning of the five-hour session:

"Folks, we need a touch from God that cannot be explained other than his movement. What we really need to sense is God moving through this place, that we'll not just be stirred but that God will change us forever."

Well over an hour after Avant began the story, the Texas pastor concluded his accounts of brokenness, confession, repentance and resulting revival: "As I've said everywhere I've gone, 'Do whatever God tells you to do.' James 5:16 is a hard verse. It says, 'Confess your sins one to another that you may be healed.'"

"The microphone is open," he said as he stepped away from the pulpit. "It may be that the key in your life to revival is putting away the pride. Do what God wants you to do. The altar is open."

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Immediately, people began weeping; many knelt at the altar to pray. Others made their way to the platform to confess sin, ask forgiveness and request prayer. Still others clustered in small prayer groups in other parts of the auditorium.

Adults and teens confessed to specific sins of adultery, premarital sexual activity, homosexual behavior and addiction to pornography. Others sought forgiveness for bitterness in personal relationships -- in families and in churches.

A director of missions apologized for criticizing members of the Illinois Baptist State Association staff. A pastor confessed that in more than 20 years of marriage, he had failed to be the spiritual leader of his home. Another committed himself to try to salvage a troubled marriage. All asked for prayer.

The pastor of a church that started nearly 25 years ago when members split from another church said God had convicted him that the two churches needed reconciliation to erase longstanding bitterness. Members of the other church joined him at the microphone and prayed with him.

Two teens from East St. Louis, who came to the conference with church planter James Redmond, told of the hopelessness of life in the impoverished and violent community.

One said 15 people he knew personally were killed in the city during 1994 alone. A death contract had been issued on his own life, he said, but it had later been rescinded.

The young man told of making a profession of faith in a youth camp years earlier and facing overwhelming peer opposition to his new faith when he returned to East St. Louis. He had not been in a church service in years, he said.

His friend echoed his testimony of hopelessness in the inner city. Like his friend, he anticipates joining the armed services to escape the pressures of life in East St. Louis.

Many people in the overwhelmingly white audience wept as they listened to the firsthand account of despair from the two young African Americans.

As each person finished at the microphone, Avant asked others to come forward and pray with them in small groups. While individuals were speaking, groups continued to pray.

Nearly five hours into the session, Avant invited the audience -- many standing around the altar -- to briefly voice matters of confession from the floor. After several did so, a benediction closed the service.

Samples said securing Avant for the conference was a miracle itself. He began trying to contact the pastor just two weeks before the meeting, but Avant already was in great demand to tell the Brownwood story. Besides, he was to join a youth mission team from his church the day after the conference to go to Mexico.

Avant said he began to reconsider when he thought about growing up in St. Louis, just across the Mississippi River from the metro east area where the evangelism conference was being held. He was convinced to come when a student at Samford University in Birmingham, Ala., approached him and asked that he pray for her home state. She was from Illinois.

As it turned out, Avant was able to secure the flight connections necessary to travel with his Mexico mission team.

Participants in the conference learned Avant would speak as they registered. They and the other conference preachers began to anticipate the final service and talked about its possibilities.

Complementing the spirit of revival experienced in the final session, Samples said, were the messages of pastors Frederick Haynes of Dallas and Larry Wynn of Dacula, Ga.; the Home Mission Board's Richard Harris; the music of contemporary Christian artists Charles Billingsley and Roger Murphy; and the drama of Grant and Jennifer Medford.

"There was a feeling of excitement and expectancy," said Samples.

Rwanda-like death, destruction  
building in neighboring Burundi      By Craig Bird

NAIROBI, Kenya (BP)--Burundi is a "slow-burn Rwanda," according to four Southern Baptist missionaries who work in the central African country. But there are crucial differences between the nations.

"When the war turned into slaughter in Rwanda, it was like a wave sweeping over the entire country all at once," missionary Steve Smith said March 27 of the much-publicized genocide there last year. It sent untold thousands fleeing as refugees and resulted in a million-dollar-plus relief effort on behalf of Southern Baptists by the Foreign Mission Board.

Now recent killings in Burundi suggest it may be headed for the same disaster.

Smith, his wife, Tara, and David and Cathy Brandon and their three daughters, all of whom live in Burundi, were in Kenya for their annual mission meeting when the latest round of violence exploded in Bujumbura, Burundi, March 24. It left hundreds dead and sent tens of thousands of refugees surging across the nearby Zaire border.

"Burundi has been having outbreaks of killing in one part of the country and then another since October 1993," Smith said, who lives in Bujumbura, the capital city. "There hasn't been any consistency. We all thought everything was going to break loose in December, then things quieted down for awhile."

Smith, from Orange, Texas, said that since late January it's been unusual if he or his wife, from Fort Worth, Texas, "haven't heard gunfire or heard grenades exploding in our neighborhood."

The Brandons, from Elizabethtown, Ky., work in the northern part of the tiny country in Gitega. They reported that area has been mostly calm. "There have been instances when we've been afraid, but for the most part it's been quiet -- we've been able to get out and do our work." His primary work has been with a development project distributing seed and fertilizer.

Early eyewitness reports on the latest violence estimated 500 people were killed, while official government statements put the figure at "150 at least." Most of the dead and nearly all of the refugees are ethnic Hutus.

Even though Burundi and Rwanda are populated by the same two ethnic groups, the Tutsis and the Hutus, the major difference in the two situations is who holds the power.

For 30 years after independence in Rwanda, the Hutus, who make up nearly 90 percent of the population, controlled the government and army. So when the invading Tutsi-dominated army appeared to be winning the civil war, the Hutus were in position to massacre 500,000 to 1 million Tutsis in a matter of weeks.

In Burundi, the Hutus have only gained political control during the past several years, despite the fact that they represent approximately 80 percent of the country's 6.3 million population. The Tutsis still control the army. Several instances of ethnic cleansing have been blamed on the Tutsis in Burundi, including a systematic slaughter in the early 1970s that left hundreds of thousands of Hutus dead.

"Killings are going on on both sides in Burundi right now," Brandon said. "Hutu militia will attack Tutsis somewhere and the Tutsi military will retaliate. And, of course, the ones who started it get away, and it's mostly the women and children who get killed. It seems like every time there's some progress toward easing things, extremists on one end or the other will stir something up and ruin the chance for peace."

The Brandons said when they left, none of the pastors working with the 78 Baptist churches in the country had been killed, "but every pastor we know had some family member killed in the last month."

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The officers in the Baptist Union of Burundi -- all Hutus -- have been living in Zaire the past several months and going through the red tape and expense of crossing the border twice a day because they don't feel safe living in Bujumbura. One union leader, married to a Tutsi, "can't live anywhere in Bujumbura safely because he's not welcome in Tutsi areas and she's not welcome in Hutu neighborhoods."

The Smiths and Brandons are in Kenya meeting with administrators of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board to plan evangelism efforts for the country.

But they wonder how to budget and request personnel in a situation like this.

In the past year, three other missionary couples have left the Burundi Baptist Mission, two transferring to other countries and the other resigning to return to the United States.

"And we haven't gotten any new personnel in the last two years," Brandon said. "Plus, we go on furlough in July and the Smiths go on furlough in June. We both have been on the field for over four years and need to go home for awhile -- but what happens to our work?"

Ironically, a rapid-response team of Southern Baptist missionaries was due to arrive in Burundi April 6 to do a survey and to plan how best to react to an emergency.

Now the question is not only can they go to Burundi, but will the situation allow the Brandons and Smiths to return when their mission meeting ends?

And will the world have to gear up to respond to another flood of refugees to join those still in exile from neighboring Rwanda?

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Charles Stanley's wife  
r -files for divorce

By David Winfrey

ATLANTA (BP)--The wife of Charles Stanley, pastor of First Baptist Church, Atlanta, and Southern Baptist Convention president, 1985-86, has re-filed for divorce.

According to a complaint filed March 20, Anna J. Stanley is seeking a jury trial for the divorce, alimony, division of their assets and possession of their north Atlanta home.

"There is no reasonable hope of reconciliation despite plaintiff (Mrs. Stanley) having made every effort to effect one," her complaint states.

An April 24 hearing date in Cobb County Superior Court has been set, according to an order by Clerk of Court Jay C. Stephenson.

A statement from Stanley's "accountability team" reports Stanley will continue as senior pastor of First Baptist Church and maintain his responsibilities for IN TOUCH Ministries -- a separate entity that broadcasts Stanley's sermons on television and radio.

"He has the full support of the body of deacons of First Baptist Church and the board of directors for IN TOUCH Ministries," the statement reads.

"It is our observation that he has cooperated fully in the reconciliation process," it also states. "We ask for your earnest prayers on a daily basis for Dr. and Mrs. Stanley and the reconciliation of their marriage."

Mrs. Stanley originally filed for divorce in June 1993. Within three weeks, however, that was withdrawn and a new complaint filed seeking a separate maintenance -- or support payments while the two were separated.

Court documents state the two have been separated since March 1992. On July 4, 1993, Stanley made a statement about the separation from his pulpit, requesting pray r for both he and Mrs. Stanley.

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Boyd Wages, administrator for First Baptist, said the five-member accountability team recommended counselors for the two. "The accountability team functioned according to how the Scriptures outlined in Matthew 18," he said.

Wages added Stanley is still submitting to the team, but Mrs. Stanley stopped doing so in August 1994. "She had been under the guidance of the accountability team until she withdrew herself."

The accountability group's statement noted Stanley made positive remarks to the congregation March 26 regarding reconciliation.

Said Wages: "Between March 20 and March 26 we had some developments that appeared very positive toward the reconciliation and Dr. Stanley made remarks to the congregation."

A story in the Monday, March 27, Atlanta Journal-Constitution quotes Stanley as telling the congregation, "My wife wanted me to convey this message. She and I are working on this marriage. We are not giving up."

Asked if developments had changed since March 26, Wages replied, "Apparently so."

The accountability group's statement repeated Stanley's comments opposing divorce.

"I continue to oppose this action as I have from the beginning," he said. "It is my desire that Anna and I be reconciled, and I have made every effort to cooperate with the accountability team toward that end. I appreciate your prayerful support."

Calls to Mrs. Stanley's attorney for response were not returned.

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**Mississippi journalist chosen  
as Fla. Baptist Witness editor** By Lindsay Bergstrom

**Baptist Press  
3/28/95**

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--In a unanimous vote, members of the Florida Baptist Witness Commission have selected Southern Baptist missionary journalist Michael Chute to be the next editor of the 111-year-old publication.

"The commission is in agreement that earnest and intense prayer works," said chairman Lance W. Anderson, a layman from Ponce DeLeon, "and that we have been led to select this man from among many exceptional nominees and applicants to serve all Florida Baptists as editor of their newsmagazine."

Chute, 44, served 12 years as a Foreign Mission Board overseas correspondent, first in Brazil and then in Hong Kong, where he reported on Southern Baptist missions work in Asia and the Pacific Rim. Presently he is on extended leave from the FMB to complete requirements for his doctorate in mass communications and is assistant professor of journalism at Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee.

The new editor has more than 20 years of award-winning professional experience in denominational journalism. He was managing editor of Missouri's Word and Way from 1978-82 prior to attending Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Mo.

President Jerry Rankin of the SBC Foreign Mission Board, with whom Chute was associated in Asia, offered high praise for the new editor.

"In my relationship with him he has demonstrated unquestionable Christian character and integrity," said Rankin, "and his leadership and people skills would be above average."

"This is received with mixed emotions," he continued. "Michael and his wife (Katherine) have served as missionaries with the FMB for a number of years and we have been anxiously awaiting his return to the field after completing work on his doctoral degree."

Bob Terry, editor of the Missouri Baptist Convention's Word and Way, provided additional perceptions of his former associate.

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"In the years we have known one another, Mike worked to communicate each story as accurately as possible so Baptist readers would have reliable information from which to make decisions," Terry said. "Mike is committed to helping Baptists make decisions by furnishing accurate, fair and trustworthy information.

"Mike's public image is that of a foreign missionary," Terry continued. "He would bring no political baggage with him to the editorship of the Florida Baptist Witness. As a foreign missionary, he would represent that which is the glue of our denomination."

FMB Vice President Samuel M. James provided extensive detail to the Witness Commission concerning the personal qualifications of Chute. In support of the appointment, he stated, "What I appreciated most about Mike Chute was his unwavering commitment to provide the truth, but to do so in a constructive and positive manner.

"In every experience, barring none, Mike demonstrated the highest sense of integrity and character," James said. "There was never a question about his personal life or his professional life as regards his reflection of a genuine Christian life."

Chute received the master of arts degree in communications from Southwest Missouri State University in Springfield, and the bachelor of arts degree in journalism from Oklahoma Baptist University.

While at Midwestern, Chute was a public relations consultant for the seminary. He also previously worked as director of college relations at Southwest Baptist University and as an information specialist for the Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville.

Chute and his wife, the former Katherine Marie Bengé, have two children, Ryan, 15, and Kristen, 11. He is expected to begin his service as editor June 1, upon completion of contractual obligations to his present employer and upon completing final requirements for the doctor of philosophy degree from the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg this May.

Chairman Anderson expressed appreciation for the scope of individual participation by members of the Florida Baptist Witness Commission in personally contacting associates and former associates of nominees and applicants during the seven-month search.

"The commissioners worked as a committee-of-the-whole and personally wrote and telephoned many persons with reason to know the applicants," Anderson said. "Then they faithfully communicated all information to the full board.

"Florida Baptists have continued to receive an excellent Witness during the search process and we are grateful to the staff for the dedicated service rendered since the resignation of Jack E. Brymer in August 1994," he said.

"Brymer resigned in the face of unrelenting organized attempts by a small number of persons to impose censorship of coverage of news about Baptist activities," Anderson continued. "This commission continues its history of support for the editor of the Witness and by its demonstration of unanimity commends to Florida Baptists the new editor, Michael D. Chute."

The Florida Baptist Witness Commission is composed of laymen and pastors elected by messengers to the Florida Baptist State Convention in annual session as an independent agency of the state convention.

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No progress in Zambia  
on Baptist work permits

By Craig Bird

Baptist Press  
3/28/95

LUSAKA, Zambia (BP)--A critical meeting over work permits for Southern Baptist missionaries in Zambia produced little progress toward solving the impasse, with the missionaries subsequently deciding to resume court action.

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Two new things did surface at the March 24 meeting, revealing basic differences between missionaries and the convention over the philosophy of mission financing and the nature of church autonomy.

Besides control over work permits, the convention wants control of the budget and program of the Baptist Mission of Zambia and the authority to tell churches what to do. That fits more in the pattern of a hierarchical form of church government than the Baptist congregational approach.

Following the meeting, missionary Bonita Wilson filed a contempt citation in court on March 28 against Zambia's chief immigration officer on behalf of the Baptist Mission of Zambia.

Wilson, acting administrator for the mission, did so to keep four missionary couples from being expelled while missionaries continue efforts to resolve the dispute between the mission and the convention.

Her action followed yet another decision by the chief immigration officer to disobey a court order to grant work permit extensions for the four missionary couples.

He declined March 27 to allow the couples to stay in the country legally, "until I see that you have a court date" on the contempt case. If the paperwork cannot be processed before March 29, one couple, Ed and Linda Miller of Texas, will drive to Harare, Zimbabwe, to await other developments since their permit expires that day.

Three other couples will have to follow them to Zimbabwe by March 31 or April 1 if extensions are not granted by then. Mike and Lindy Howard, Dwayne and Betty Mitchell and Jim and Thelma Cooke, all from Texas, will have one week in Harare before the one-week long annual Zambia mission meeting begins in Kariba, Zimbabwe.

If the issue is still unresolved in mid-April, the couples will have to look for alternate, if only temporary, working assignments.

A Zambia judge, reminding the parties that he should not be involved in a church matter, ordered the mission and the Baptist Convention of Zambia to meet March 24 at the same time he ordered the chief immigration officer to grant the extensions. The sides asked the head of the Zambia Bible Society to moderate.

"We started out by compromising because the convention executive committee refused to meet with the entire mission, even though those were the conditions set out in the letter calling the meeting," Wilson said. "All 37 missionaries had traveled to Lusaka from all over the country, but we agreed and 30 people left the meeting at the convention's request."

In the following four and a half hours of dialogue, each side ended in "basically the same position" over the issue of work permits. The convention executive committee insists on the right to evaluate missionaries to determine if they should be invited back to Zambia after furloughs and to write cover letters to the immigration office on their decision.

The mission says it should have the same rights as other societies registered with the government and be able to apply for work permits directly to the government without interference from separately registered societies. The mission was registered with the government years before the convention.

After hearing about a reorganization plan prepared by the convention, the mission finally saw it at the March 24 meeting.

"The convention executive committee gave us a copy of the reorganization of Baptist work in Zambia and told the moderator that we (the mission) had approved it, but it was the first time we had ever seen it and we certainly have not agreed to it," Wilson said.

Among other stipulations, the reorganization plan calls for the convention to control all finances and decision-making.

"We cannot, under Foreign Mission Board policies, turn over our entire budget to a convention committee to determine unilaterally how it could be spent," Wilson said.

The issue of autonomy produced starkly contrasting views of the authority structure in a church organization.

"They told us we were wrong about local churches being free to act and that they (the convention executive committee) were the authority over the churches and could tell churches when they can speak and what they can do," Wilson said.

"They said that the fact that we provide the money and other resources does not give us the right of control, but that the control has to be vested in the convention executive committee." The missionaries held to the traditional Baptist stance that the highest authority is the local church which voluntarily associates with other churches and conventions for common goals.

Both groups listed their major concerns to the other and "agreed to continue talking" and "work toward resuming partnership" and the missionaries insisted they were "willing to re-look at the convention-mission structure and consider what could be changed."

After the joint meeting, the mission met for two hours on the night of March 24 and another four hours March 25.

"We didn't start out in total agreement as a mission, but we just kept talking and praying and talking and praying and you could feel the Holy Spirit working," Wilson said.

"In the end we felt we had to file the contempt charge to keep the four couples from having to leave the country before the issue is settled.

"And we also are committed to finding changes in the relational structure that we can accept without violating our biblical convictions on the independence of individual believers and individual churches and without violating Foreign Mission Board policies and sharing them with the convention executive committee.

"If they accept them and will work with us, then we can get back to putting our full time and energies into sharing the gospel with Zambia. If they won't, we'll continue to work with local associations (smaller geographical groupings of churches) or individual churches who want to work with us in doing what we feel God has called us to do in Zambia."

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**BSSB announces new  
quarterly release dates**

**Baptist Press  
3/28/95**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--The Baptist Sunday School Board will change its quarterly release dates for dated periodicals in June 1997 to better meet the needs of the growing number of churches with organizational promotion dates at the beginning of June or the beginning of September.

Originally planned for September 1995, the change was postponed by the BSSB due to production and distribution problems.

"Making the transition in 1997 will give us time to complete improvements we are making in literature production, ordering processes and distribution systems," said BSSB President James T. Draper Jr. "By 1997 we are confident that our processes will be adjusted to the faster pace needed to make our materials more timely and relevant."

The new release dates will carry seasonal designations -- summer (June, July, August), fall (September, October, November), winter (December, January, February) and spring (March, April, May). To make the transition, literature for what would normally be the April-May-June 1997 quarter will be published for a two-month period, April-May, and called the spring issue.

"Our primary motivation for these changes has been to align our curriculum materials with the launch of Sunday school, discipleship training and church music ministries in local churches," said Gene Mims, vice president of the church growth group.

"Research has shown that more and more churches are using a September launch date to correspond with the beginning of the school year. Others are conducting organizational promotion at the end of the school year. This change provides the kind of flexibility churches have been asking for," Mims said.

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Also, Mims noted, messengers to the 1994 Southern Baptist Convention approved a recommendation to change Sunday School Launch Week on the denominational calendar from the last week in September to the first week in September.

While prices for the April-May 1997 issues have not been set, they will reflect the reduction in content and pages, said Roland Maddox, director of the growth support division of the church growth group.

Maddox encouraged church leaders to note the transition on their calendars and plan 1997 budgets with awareness that dated literature orders will be placed five times during the calendar year.

Orders will be due Jan. 17, 1997, for the April-May issues; March 18, 1997, for the summer issues; June 18, 1997, fall; Sept. 18, 1997, winter; and Dec. 18, 1997, spring 1998 issues.

Maddox said more detailed information about pricing and ordering will be provided to churches well ahead of the transition.

"We are glad that we are now able to move forward with these significant changes for us and for our churches," Draper said. "Our continuing desire is to produce materials to assist churches in reaching people for Christ and helping them grow in their faith."

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**B.H. Carroll award recipients  
honored at Southwestern Seminary By Bob Murdaugh**

**Baptist Press  
3/28/95**

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Ralph and Bess Smith of Austin, Texas, and John and Cynthia Thomas of Dallas were honored at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary March 24 as the 1995 B.H. Carroll Award recipients.

The award, presented as part of annual Founders Day activities, is named in memory of B.H. Carroll, who founded Southwestern almost 87 years ago in Waco, Texas. It is the seminary's highest recognition to a person or couple for their efforts in behalf of the seminary.

In thanking the Smiths and Thomases for their support of Southwestern, President Ken Hemphill said, "I can think of no better place where you could touch the world and impact eternity than Southwestern. While our alumni serve throughout the world, you find here at Southwestern a world-class faculty and students with a deep sense of God's call."

Smith, pastor of Austin's Hyde Park Baptist Church more than 35 years, and his wife have been instrumental in the seminary's receipt of several deferred gifts, one of which will result in more than \$6 million. Southwestern honored the Smiths' influence by establishing and naming the Ralph M. and Bess Smith Chair of Preaching. Recently, Smith agreed to serve as national chairman for a faculty assistance endowment fund at Southwestern. Smith is a former member of the seminary's board of trustees who served as its chairman for two years and has been recognized as a distinguished alumnus.

Accepting his and his wife's award, Smith said, "Bess and I are deeply humbled. We only wish we could do infinitely more for the seminary. We are grateful to the Southwestern family for the deposit of joy you have left in our hearts."

The Thomases are life members of Southwestern's Presidents Club, and he also is a member of the Southwestern Council.

The Thomases have donated computer equipment and software that significantly will enhance the seminary's computer operations. They also have been instrumental in securing additional computer equipment from other sources that will benefit the campus.

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Thomas is the president, chief executive officer and founder of International Data Systems Inc. in Dallas. His company is a computer systems developer emphasizing imaging, multi-media and work flow technologies. He also serves as managing director of subsidiary corporations in Bangalore, India, where he has been involved in the ministry of Southern Baptist foreign missionary Rebekah Naylor.

Mrs. Thomas works in the area of Christian counseling. They are members of First Baptist Church of Dallas.

"Only because the Lord has blessed us have we been able to do what we have done for Southwestern Seminary," Mrs. Thomas said.

"Mine and my wife's B.H. Carroll Award is God's affirmation and his giving us some guidance and direction in our lives," Thomas said. "As computers continue to play a major part in the spreading of the gospel of Jesus Christ worldwide, we will continue to be involved in giving to Southwestern Seminary."

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(BP) photos available on SBCNet and upon request from Southwestern Seminary's office of public relations.

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